

The Key of David

2 Samuel 7

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A number of months ago I read a review of Gian-Carlo Menotti's opera, *The Labyrinth*. I have never seen the opera performed and am not sure of the details of the plot, but I gathered from the review that it is the story of a newly-wed couple and some of the events which took place on their wedding day. It describes their trek through an old hotel as they walk down corridor after corridor trying to find their room. They finally find the bridal suite, only to discover that the groom has lost the key. At the end of the opera the groom is nailed in a coffin (I guess his bride nailed him in there!), and when he awakens in the after-life he discovers that he has the key in his hand.

I think you can understand what this existentialist writer is saying that so much of human experience is like this. We start out in life, as young couples do on their wedding day, with so much joy and expectation and excitement and hopefulness, but we discover along the way things which inhibit us and frustrate us. And to our consternation we discover that we've lost the key.

There is a key which opens up life, a key to all of the mysteries of life which enables us to stand in the face of adversity and to be stable and strong no matter what happens to us. It is called in Scripture "the key of David", among other things. In the book of Revelation there is a symbolic account of Jesus' walking among the churches in Asia Minor. And in connection with one particular church, the church of Philadelphia, he is described as one who has in his hand the key of David. It is clear from the context that the key of David is the key to everything. It is the key to power and authority and constancy and endurance in the face of adversity. So we want to discover this morning what the key of David is.

To do so let's turn to the seventh chapter of 2 Samuel. This morning we are concluding our studies of David. As I indicated some weeks ago, David's life falls into three distinct eras. During one part of his life he was in the court of Saul, serving there as an armor bearer and musician. The second period was his exile, when he was forced to flee from Saul's court. He spent some twelve to fifteen years being pursued by Saul, and part of the time dwelt with the Philistines down in Ziklag. The final period of his life is his reign. 2 Samuel is preeminently the book of David's reign. It begins with his being anointed king over the southern tribe of Judah and reigning at Hebron. It concludes some forty years later with David a venerable seventy-year-old monarch, reigning over a united Israel. So the book is essentially the account of David's forty years of rule.

The opening chapters of 2 Samuel indicate that the transfer of leadership from Saul to David was not accomplished easily or peacefully. There was a great deal of strife between the two families. The northern tribes would not recognize David's leadership, probably because he had allied himself with the Philistines during the time of his exile, and so they distrusted him. They appointed in his stead Ishbosheth, the son of Saul. He was part of Saul's dynasty and therefore, they felt, was equipped to reign. He reigned for two years as king over the northern tribes at Mahanaim, east of the Jordan, but he was a very weak king, and he grew weaker as David grew stronger. Civil war soon broke out, and it was a period of great unrest.

The opening chapters of 2 Samuel record some of the political intrigues which eventually brought Ishbosheth's reign to an end and resulted in David's being anointed king over all Israel. That event occurs in chapter 5. Chapters 5 through 10 chronicle for us a number of events in David's attempts to consolidate his kingdom. He began by moving his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was rich in meaning and heritage for the Jewish people. It was the site where Abraham had offered up his son Isaac, and the place where Melchizedek reigned as priest/king. Melchizedek is pictured throughout Scripture as a type, a foreview, of the Messiah, who rules "after the order of Melchizedek". David said that Jerusalem was the place God had chosen. It wasn't even David's choice to move the capital there; it was the place where God desired to write his name. So David's first step was to bring the capital from Hebron to Jerusalem.

If you like swashbuckling tales of valor and excitement, the capture of Jerusalem is one. You can read the account on your own. Jerusalem was occupied during this time by the Jebusites, a Canaanite people. The city was called Jebus, after the inhabitants, and was virtually an impregnable fortress. The Benjaminites, who had been given that part of the land as their inheritance, had never been able to oust the inhabitants of Jebus. So right in the middle of their inheritance was this citadel they never could break into. When David went to take the city, the inhabitants of Jebus stood on the wall and taunted him, saying, "David, the lame and the blind can defend this fortress!" That is how impregnable it was. And David said to his armies, "The lame and the blind are hated by my soul. If a man would take them he must go up by way of the *tsinnuwr* [the Hebrew word for hook]."

For centuries no one knew what David was talking about. The King James Version translates it "the gutter", because it is akin to a Hebrew word for "waterspout". Only recently some archeologists, digging under the city of David, discovered a vertical water shaft which led through solid rock from the ancient citadel of the Jebusites down to a spring. They were thus able to maintain themselves under siege, for they couldn't be cut off from their water supply. They only had to drop a bucket down the "hook", or

send a man down there, and they always had water. David evidently knew of this shaft, and he sent Joab with some of his men up through this dark and dangerous vertical tunnel. They broke out into the Jebusites' capital and overwhelmed them. And David established his reign in that city. It is an amazing tale.

David's second act was to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem from Kiriath-jearim, where it had been for some time, and to establish the priesthood and the worship of the Lord there in Jerusalem. He made Jerusalem not only the political center of his empire but also its spiritual center. Then in chapters 8 and 9 there are descriptions of David's battles. One by one David overwhelmed his enemies until he extended the dimensions of his kingdom to include all the land promised to Abraham - from the river of Egypt up to the Euphrates, and from the Mediterranean across the Jordan. God gave David victory over all his enemies and peace in his kingdom.

Then transpired the event given to us in 2 Samuel 7, a little out of chronological sequence. It actually belongs after chapter 10 when David had been granted rest. Let's read it together:

Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you."

David lived in a very ornate house of cedar which had been built for him by the Phoenicians, and it didn't seem right to him that he should live in an expensive home while the ark of God dwelt in a tent. Now, David knew that God did not dwell in that ark, but David wanted to do something symbolic for God - to build a house which at least would be the equivalent of his own. And Nathan's response was, "David, do what's in your heart; the Lord is with you." Nathan was a prophet in Israel, but this is a classic example of counting on good common sense instead of the word of God, because it was not God's intention for David to build him a house. Nathan was acting on what appeared to be common sense, but he was wrong. This is another of the warnings in Scripture that our desires, no matter how noble they may be, and our hunches, all must be subject to the word of God, which is the final authority. Beginning with verse 4, you have God's word to Nathan, as he reveals to this prophet what his word to David should have been:

But it came about in the same night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?' " "

You see, God's word through Nathan to David was this: "David, I don't want to live in a house; I've never lived in a house. That has never been my intention. From the time when I brought you out of Egypt through the time of the Judges, when one after another ruled, it was never my intention to live in a house. I have [literally] walked among you in a tent." In the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 17 he says, "I have walked among you from tent to tent," i.e., "I have gone from one tent to the next." As one tabernacle began to deteriorate they would build another, and God would dwell there. He was satisfied to live in a tent.

When I was in the service I spent about four months living in a tent, and after that, I can guarantee you, a dry bed and a normal home never looked better! I could never understand after that why anyone would want to live in a tent. But that is where God wants to live. And this is still true today. It is still God's delight to live in tents. In the Old Testament a tent is a symbol of our humanity - our weak, frail, insignificant humanity. It is this that God wants to indwell. He doesn't want a house. He doesn't live in houses; he lives in tents.

When God wanted to manifest his glory in his Son, he manifested it in a tent. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh and [literally] "tented" among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory of God was manifest in a tent. And that is still true today in your life and mine. God doesn't want us to adorn the tent. He is not impressed by its appearance, its attractiveness; nor is he discouraged by its unattractiveness. He just wants room in our tent. Isaiah says,

**Thus says the Lord,
"Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.
Where then is a house you could build for Me?
And where is a place that I may rest?
For My hand made all these things,
Thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord.**

**"But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."**

That is a tent. That is a frail, limited, transient, insignificant tent. But that is where God wants to reveal his glory. And so Nathan said to David, "That is what delights God. He wants to inhabit a tent. He is comfortable there." But that is not all God delights to do. Verses 8 through 16.

"Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel. [Remember that David was a forgotten young man. His family passed over him; the leadership of Israel passed over him. It was God who took him out of the pasture and made him shepherd over the nation of Israel. It wasn't anything that David did.] And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. [David has a great name today because God gave him a great name, not because he tried to be great. When we try to be great, we merely become notorious. But when God makes us great, then our names are truly great.] I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My loving-kindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.' "

Do you see what God is saying to David? "David, I do not want you to build a house for me I will build a house for You see, that is the kind of Lord we have. He is not a harsh, demanding Lord who expects us to build something out of our lives. He is the Lord who wants to give. The Pharisees came to Jesus once and said, "What must we do to work the works of God? How can we pay God back? How can we work the things that God wants us to work?" Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." The only way to work the works of God is to let God work on your behalf, to receive what he has done, to appropriate what he has, to let him pour himself out to you. He wants you to be a tent that he can fill and flood, and in which he can manifest his glory. "David, I will build you a house. I don't want you to build me a house. Heaven is my throne, the earth my footstool. I'm the one who builds houses around here." God was speaking, of course, not literally of a house, but of David's posterity. He was referring first of all to Solomon, who became king after David rested with his fathers. Then he was referring to all the kings of Judah who followed. The dynasty of David's house was never taken from the throne of Judah. There were many dynasties in Israel, the northern kingdom, but the dynasty of David endured for five hundred years. And as Nathan said, "Your sons will be chastened if they rebel, but God will not take away from you the right of your descendants to sit on the throne."

And he never did, because, you see, this promise was not fulfilled entirely in Solomon, nor was it fulfilled in the kings who reigned after Solomon until the captivity. It was fulfilled primarily in Messiah. Three times in this passage God says, "Your throne...and your house...and your kingdom...will endure forever." David's house was his seed, his posterity. His throne was his authority. His kingdom was his sphere of rule, of influence. And God says to David, "That will endure forever." And David realized that could not possibly be fulfilled in any of his earthly descendants; it had to be some unique descendant who would fulfill it. He clearly saw that this was a prophecy of Messiah who would reign eternally over the house of David.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 89, "So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne as the days of heaven."

Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David." What are the "days of heaven"? Eternity. David saw that his son would reign eternally. And when he wrote Psalm 16 he said, "For you will not abandon my soul to hell, nor allow thy Holy One see corruption." As Peter points out in his sermon

recorded in Acts 2, David could not have been referring to himself because "his tomb is with us to this day." David was looking downstream to the One who would come, who would fulfill this prophecy in the ultimate sense, who was Messiah. Peter said that David saw that this would be fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ. David foresaw the resurrection of Messiah! It was only this kind of life which could endure.

There is an amazing statement in David's response to Nathan's words, later on in 2 Samuel 7, in verse 19:

"And yet this was insignificant in Thine eyes, O Lord God, for Thou hast spoken also of the house of Thy servant concerning the distant future."

David saw that this was not going to be fulfilled in the immediate future but in the distant future. And he immediately adds, "And this is the law [to translate literally] with reference to the man, the Adam, i.e., the Messiah, Lord Jehovah." This is translated in the New American Standard Version as: "And this is the custom of man, O Lord God", as if he were addressing himself to God. But the Hebrew simply says, "This is the law with respect to the man, the Lord Jehovah." Many ancient translators, Luther included, rendered the passage this way, as a direct reference to One who would come to fulfill this prophecy. He would be the man, the second Adam, the last man, Messiah, who would reign forever, who would be the Lord Jehovah. David saw that. Peter says he saw the resurrection of Christ, and therefore David knew that he would endure. Nothing would take his throne away from him. He would never lose his sphere of influence, because One would enter his line who would ensure his eternal continuity. The prophets even state that in the millennial kingdom, when Jesus Christ reigns as Messiah over his people, it is David who reigns, because David, in Christ, still reigns over his people.

This is one of many prophecies in the Old Testament about "the seed". In Genesis 3 we are told that the seed of the woman would be the Redeemer. He would come through humanity. In Genesis 12 we are told that the seed would come through Abraham. He would be one of the descendants of Abraham. In Genesis 22 we are told that the seed would come through Jacob, or Israel. He would be a Jew. Then in Genesis 49 we are told that the seed would come through the tribe of Judah. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh [the man of peace] comes." Then in 2 Samuel 7 we are told that the seed would come through the house of David. And Isaiah says that the seed would come through a virgin. So when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin, of the house of David, of the tribe of Judah, of a young woman who was Jewish, of the seed of Abraham, it fulfilled to the letter this promise that "the seed" would come who would rule over the house of Israel forever.

There is not one Jew living today who can trace his lineage back to David. In A.D. 70 Titus destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. The genealogies were destroyed, and no Jew today knows whether or not he is a member of the house of David. But there is One who does, and that is Jesus of Nazareth. So we don't need the genealogical tables. Jesus reigns. He is the king of his people, the king of the Jews. And there is coming a time when he will yet reign over his house, and the throne of David will be established forever. Nothing can shake it. Think of the enemies Israel has had, the pressures they have endured. But David's house still stands.

Do you know that by faith you can enter into the mercies of David? The promise was given not to the Jewish people alone, although it will be fulfilled literally to them in the coming again of Jesus. But it is also fulfilled by faith in our life now. In Isaiah 55, the Lord says,

**"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.
Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that you may live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful [the sure and certain] mercies shown to David."**

Do you know what makes possible "the sure and certain mercies" of David? It is faith. "Come unto me," the Lord said. And when we come to him, either in an initial act of faith or as we continue to draw upon his power, he stands squarely in our line, and he is the one who guarantees the continuance and the stability of our throne, our kingdom. He is the one who gives us authority and power. This is the key of David. This is the key to power and authority. This is the way you can stand firm in the midst of pressure. No matter how distressful things may become, you have the key of David, because by faith you enter into the certain and sure mercies of David.

My greatest desire is to be a stable person - not unteachable and inflexible but one who stands fast, who isn't knocked off-center, who doesn't have his feet pulled out from under him by pressure and circumstances around. We can be, by faith. We can endure, because we have the sure and certain mercies of David. Listen to these words of Isaiah again and apply them to your own heart:

**"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost...."**

You can't buy your way in. God doesn't want what you bring. He is content with a tent.

**"Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that you may live;**

**And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful mercies shown to David."**

Father, how good it is to reflect this morning that you are the one who walks in the midst of your people, and you hold in your hand the key of David, and that we have the same authority, by faith, that David had - that doors can be shut and opened, that we can stand fast with power and authority, no matter what happens. We can reign as kings; our throne will endure, will never be overthrown. We can be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because we possess in our hand the key of David. We pray that we will lay hold by faith of all that we have in Christ, that we will "come to the waters" and eat and drink of him. We are thankful this morning that our throne is secure, and that we have the sure and certain mercies of David. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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