

God is holy and powerful. When we realize how his presence is important in our lives, we want to do something for him. We want to build up our praise of the Lord, to show that we are worthy of his presence staying with us. This comes into tension with God being the one who cares for us, who builds us. Consider a child bursting with love for a parent running into the room at six am to jump on the bed and give a hug. It is better for everyone involved if the parent helps the child to know when the hug is appropriate and communicates love.

David first encountered this tension in trying to bring the ark of God, the Lord's presence, into Jerusalem. [Doing it his own way, he failed to honor God. When he listened for how God wanted him to do it, then the Lord was honored.

The ark was now in Jerusalem. David saw the blessings he had received and decided to do something for God. Nothing wrong with wanting to do something for God, but as usual something else creeps in. We start to believe that if we keep serving God or do something special for him we will ensure that we don't lose his love. There is even the sense that God will owe us love if we serve him faithfully. We subtly try different ways to 'keep' God's blessing and presence in our lives.

David was disturbed by the luxury of his cedar house, when God's presence was stuck in a tent. David assumed his house was better than God's. He wanted to build a better house for God. Why does he assume that a building is better? What creeps in is our perspective being more important than God's. For people a building symbolizes stability and permanence. If God's presence is in this place or house, the thinking goes, it would combat the fear people have that God might go away. But who decides what is good for God or where God should be, David, us? No, it is the Lord.

God's presence was not stuck in a tent. The prophet Nathan corrects David's vision of God's will. Through Nathan, God asked David a question. "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" The message continues, "I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

God's presence is mobile. He is not to be kept. God's presence is not just available in a building, like the church building. God's house, his place is among his people. We don't build a place for God. We become together (through Communion, in Jesus Christ) God's place which he builds, so that his name may be honored. It is not what we do that honors him, it is how it can be seen in our lives what the Lord has done for us that honors him.

David wants to honor God, build a house for him. God has a whole other focus. It is not about what we can do for God, but what he does for us. Beginning in verse eight, there is a list of all God has done for David: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you." God has made David who he is. God has sustained David. God has helped David along the way.

God does everything for us. What would your list look of what God has done for you look like? We may not be kings, but who has God made you? We may have wandered in our faith, but how has he sustained you? We may have faced trouble, but how has he helped you in your life? God has cared for us all.

God doesn't stop with what he has done. The Lord make promises of how he will build up David and all his people. "I will make for you a great name ... And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more ... and I will give you rest from all your enemies." God promises to make David who he will be. And God has more than individuals in mind when he is building. God promises to give stability to his people, to give them a place. God promises to be with them along the way.

This doesn't mean there will be no struggles or that bad behavior won't matter. There will still be consequences when David is disobedient or dishonors God. There will still be consequences when the people of Israel go against God. Nehemiah gives illustration to this. That passage even beyond what was read tells of all God did for his people. It shares about the times the people of Israel rebelled against God and faced periods of exile and suffering. Despite this God's presence and care does not depart from his people and from the house of David. Nehemiah 9:31 says, "Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God."

There will still be a price to be paid when we sin, when we rebel against God. However we don't need to take it into our own hands to fix everything. We turn to Jesus Christ who God sent into the world so that we

might be saved through him. God's love is more powerful than our sin. He promises us that as we receive his love by faith in Jesus that he will be with us no matter what.

God promises David and his ancestors that they will be sons and he will be their father forever. In Communion we come and God joins us to David's house, to David's family through Jesus Christ. In Christ we are adopted into God's family. We are now sons and daughters of our Lord. It is God who builds a house for himself, a house made of people of which we are a part. It is God who builds our praise of him.

We hear how God promised and then built David into a house. Our Nehemiah reading remembers how God built up Israel. The message is clear. It is not we who will protect the Lord or contain him or honor him or make sure he is with us by building a house, by doing some thing within that house. It is he who will build us into a house. He promises to make us into a house, a congregation, a building of his people where in every place that we are he will receive praise. Whether in the church or outside of it, let us remember it is not what we do that build's God's kingdom, it is how it can be seen in our lives what the Lord has done for us that builds his kingdom.