

In the city of Agra in India lies the Taj Mahal, one of the most famous buildings in the architectural world. Taj Mahal means “Crown Palace” and is in fact the most well preserved and architecturally beautiful tomb in the world. It was described by English poet, Sir Edwin Arnold, as “Not a piece of architecture, as other buildings are, but the proud passions of an emperor’s love wrought in living stones.” It was built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1631 in memory of his second wife who died while giving birth to their 14th child. He built it as a tribute to his love for her.

The Taj Mahal is one of many amazing palaces built by kings and emperors throughout the ages. It seems that when kings have fought their battles and established their kingdoms, one of their first impulses is to build a palace. The same was true of King David of Israel.

Last week, we saw that David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem to establish it as his new capital city. The Ark’s presence meant that Jerusalem would be the new religious and political capital of David’s kingdom. Today’s passage uses the word “house” seven times, and understanding the passage depends on the word play involving the different meanings of “house.” **In the first place**, it means “palace,” when the passage speaks of the home that David built for himself. **In the second place**, it means “temple” when speaking of the “house” that David wants to build for God. **And in the third place**, it means “dynasty,” when God speaks of the “house” that God will build for David. So, pay close attention as we move through this passage.

David had defeated his enemies and turned his attention to building his own “house of cedar.” It must have been a magnificent structure worthy of the greatest king of Israel. But after David had completed his own palace, he says to the prophet Nathan, “*Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent*” (v. 2). David was the kind of man who compared his own house of luxury with the paltry status of the Tabernacle of God, a tent which held the Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God.

David’s response proves the true nature of David’s faith, and shows us that one of the first impulses of a person of faith is *stewardship*. All through the Bible we find people who have been blessed by God, and almost always their first response is to make an offering, build an altar, or give a tithe to God. David did what many of us should do. He compared his house to God’s house, and discovered that God’s house paled in comparison. So he shares with the prophet Nathan his desire to build a temple for God. Nathan becomes a very important man of God during David’s reign. In verse three Nathan initially approved of this action. He says, “*Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.*” But Nathan spoke too quickly.

That same night God spoke to Nathan to correct him. God said, “*Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says, ‘Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’*”

God cannot be bound to a single place. God’s presence cannot be confined or captured. God is everywhere. There is a story about a church that once was vandalized. Early on a Sunday morning, the

members of the congregation entered into the sanctuary, only to see their pastor standing in the middle of a complete mess. Criminals had broken in the night before. They shattered the stained glass windows, and overturned the pews. Up in front of the sanctuary, above the altar, they spray-painted three words in bright red: “God is nowhere!”

The members of the congregation were shocked and shaken. But the pastor urged them to stay and worship as they had planned. He told them to look at those three words above the altar again: “God is nowhere!” For some, it might have seemed that was exactly the case that morning. “Where was God when the criminals were desecrating this house of worship? God is nowhere.” But then, the pastor told the members to look at that sentence above the altar in a different way. He told them to divide the last word of that sentence between the w and the h. “You see,” he said, “When you divide that word “nowhere” between the w and the h, you get two different words. The sentence changes and we are reminded of God’s promise to us.” When the members looked at that spray-painted sentence once again with that change, it no longer said, “God is nowhere.” It said, **“God is now here.”** In their anxiety, the members started to recall Jesus’ promise: *“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Far from being nowhere, God is always here. God doesn’t need a house. We may need one for our worship, but God doesn’t need a house. And as this passage unfolds, God accepts the idea that humans will need to build a temple, yet God points out that David is not the one to do that. As we all know, Solomon is the one to build the Temple. **Then God tells David that instead of David building God a house, God will make David a house.** Verse 11 and 13 say, *“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

Notice that there had never been a dynasty, a succession of rulers who were members of the same family. This was a new idea for Israel, but now God promises a succession of rulers forever. Someone from David’s family would rule over Israel in perpetuity. The people of Israel sometimes do right things, and they sometimes do wrong things. Sometimes God blessed the people of Israel in the Old Testament; sometimes he punished them.

Today we’re acquainted with the news stories involving Israel, especially the animosity between Israel and the Palestinians. Even though they are still God’s chosen, we cannot assume from the Bible that Israel is always right. For Christians, this passage is tied to the fact that Jesus was of the house and lineage of David. Christians understand Jesus as the direct fulfillment of God’s promise. We believe the “house” of David is carried on in the person of Jesus, and that means the true descendants of Abraham and of David’s kingdom are the followers of Jesus Christ. In my mind, from Scripture that is crystal clear. The real Israel today is the body of Jesus Christ. God does not always bless the nation that is Israel, just as God does not always bless us. However, the promise of David’s dynasty is fulfilled in the Church! Christians are the heirs of Abraham, the true Israel, under the reign of the forever descendant of David, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, a few things about the way the word “house” is used in this passage. We have seen that it begins with discussion of David’s house (a palace), goes on to speak of God’s house (a temple), and finally deals with David’s future house (a dynasty). But I want to show you that the Bible picks up that theme elsewhere and speaks of a house for us too.

1 Peter 2:4-5 speaks of Christians becoming a house, *“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

The church is a house that exists independently from any particular building, [including this one that is so important to many of us]. The church is a house of faith which is part of a larger, universal house of faith. In John 14, Jesus speaks of a house prepared in heaven for each of us. He says, *“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”* (The King James Version says, “mansions.” I think “rooms” or “houses” are a fair translation). *“I go to prepare a place (a house) for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

The Christian rock group *Audio Adrenaline* became famous with their hit song, “Big House.” We used to sing it all the time on Workcamp trips. Here are some of the words: Come and go with me/ To my Father’s house/ Come and go with me/ To my Father’s house/ It’s a big big house/ With lots and lots of room...”

That’s the house, according to Nathan’s prophetic words, that will endure forever. It’s a big big house! Amen.