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The Lord's sure covenant with David. Paul confidently awaits his deliverance.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 7. Now when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you. But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, Go and tell my servant David, Thus says the Lord, Would you build me a house to dwell in? 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 for my dwelling.

In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar? 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 prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, 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 to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of man, with the stripes of the sons of men. But my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all the vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God. You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord God. And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God.

Because of your promise and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name, and doing for them great and awesome things, by driving out before your people whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods. And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God.

And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. And your name will be magnified forever, saying, The Lord of hosts is God over Israel, and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, I will build you a house.

Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now, therefore, may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you.

For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever. After a few chapters packed with action, in 2 Samuel chapter 7 the narrative slows down and focuses upon words and conversation. We've observed the victory house building pattern.

David has defeated the Jebusites in Jerusalem and established his household and kingdom there. He has also defeated the Philistines and brought up the ark from Kiriath-Jerim to Jerusalem. However, the ark is still in a tent, as it has been since Sinai, rather than in a proper house.

The bringing in of the ark to Jerusalem was a sign of the deliverance of the Exodus nearing its completion. The building of a permanent structure for the ark, and God's presence with his people dwelling in safety and security in the land, would be the crowning of God's deliverance of his people, something anticipated in the Song of Moses at the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 15 verse 17. David declares his intent to build a house to Nathan the prophet.

One of the things that the building of the house would do would be to address the dysfunctional character of Israel's worship after the battle of Aphek, after which there was no single central sanctuary, as had been mandated in Deuteronomy chapter 12 verses 5-14. He will rejoice you and your households in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes.

For you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you, your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.

Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that the Lord will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you. Now that there is finally rest on all sides from enemies, David understandably thinks that the time has come to establish a fitting central sanctuary, no longer a moveable tent, but an enduring house.

This would end the situation of everyone worshipping in different altars in different locations, a situation that was ripe for divergence of worship from the divine pattern into localised cults.

One of the great tasks of the king was to ensure that orthodox worship was established and maintained. We should note the use of the expression that Moses uses to describe the situation of non-uniform and non-centralised worship. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes.

A similar expression is repeated on several occasions at the end of the book of Judges, especially in the context of abuses of worship. There it is connected to the condition of having no king. In his desire to establish the true form of worship that God prescribed in Deuteronomy 12, David is taking his responsibilities very seriously.

We should remember that David was, according to Deuteronomy 17, expected to write out his own copy of the book of the law and to reflect upon it. Nathan initially gives David encouragement in his desire. However, that night the Lord spoke to Nathan, telling him that David would not be the one to build his house.

In 1 Chronicles 28, verse 3, David declares, However, this is not the reason given in this passage. Rather, God had not called for a house to be built at this point. His presence had moved about in the tabernacle and the tent of David, but he had never rebuked his people for not building him a house, nor commanded them to do so.

He would call for a temple to be built when the time was right. While David had wanted to give to the Lord by building him a house, the Lord responds by recalling the ways in which he had blessed David to that point, in taking him from the pasture and the flock to the throne and delivering him from all of his enemies. Like God once promised Abraham, he would make David's name great.

He would also secure Israel's place so that they can dwell in peace and security, protected from the violence of their neighbours and enjoying a sort of Sabbath rest in the land, the work over. In giving these promises to David, God is more clearly specifying the shape that the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises would take. They would be realised chiefly through the house of David.

In the verses that follow, David and his house are brought into a closer relationship with the Lord. While David wanted to build the Lord a house, the Lord is going to build David's house, establishing his dynasty and kingdom for generations to come. The offspring of David, coming from his own body, would be raised up after his death.

There is an implicit resurrection occurring here, one that helps us to understand Peter's use of the testimony of David on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, 25-32. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried,

and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Behind David's words that Peter quotes here, is the promise of God that the line of David would be raised up, and that the grave would not finally swallow it. The Lord promises that the most immediate descendant of David, Solomon, would build a house for his name.

He also promises to enter into a closer relationship with David's son. David's son would be adopted by the Lord as his son. Saul had been established as king by the Lord, but he had never been the son of God in such a sense.

Israel as a nation was spoken of as the firstborn son of the Lord in Exodus chapter 4 verse 22, but now the language is being used of a particular person, not just of a corporate sonship. The Lord is here making a covenant that greatly elevates David and his son in their relationship with the Lord. As the son of God, David's son would represent the Lord to the people in a stronger way.

Furthermore, David's son would also carry the destiny of the kingdom upon his shoulders to a greater degree than previously. He would sum up the people in himself. The king and his people would be blessed or judged on account of his behaviour.

However, the steadfast love of God would not depart from him as it had done from Saul and his house. The Lord would persevere with David's son. The greater degree to which the king represents the people and determines their fate by his behaviour helps us to understand the relevance of this to the ministry of Christ as the son of David.

David's response to all of this is to sit before the Lord and express his thanksgiving. It seems as though David was sitting before the Ark of the Covenant in the tent that he had established for it. Peter Lighthouse suggests that the situation here is similar to that of the Lord's meetings with Moses in the Tent of Meeting prior to the building of the Tabernacle.

Just as Moses was the prophet who established the Tabernacle, David was the prophet who would instruct his son in the building of the Temple. Lighthouse also remarks upon David's posture here. He is seated before the Ark, which the priests never were.

The priests were always on duty. However, David is a son in the house, not a servant waiting upon guests and managing the affairs of the house. David earlier danced before the Ark like a servant.

Now he sits before it like a son. However, David's humility is clear in both instances. David here is humbled by the greatness of the grace that he has received.

He extols the majesty of the Lord, repeatedly addressing him as Lord God or Master Yahweh and declaring his incomparable greatness and the way that he has set Israel apart by placing his name upon them and making a name for himself through their deliverance. David marvels at the fact that God has revealed such incredible purposes for David's house to him and is humbled by the goodness that he has received from the Lord's hand. He asks the Lord to confirm his promise and prays that the Lord would bring about his word.

A question to consider. How can we see, beyond Solomon, Christ as the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant? Philippians 1, verses 12-30 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. In Paul's epistles, the message of what God is doing for and through other Christians in other localities is frequently related as a matter of

importance. It doesn't just matter that God is doing things.

The fact that people are spreading the news and talking about it matters too. This is especially true as such reports are transformed into prayers of thanksgiving, as the word of the success of God's word in various persons and locations returns to him in the form of praise. Paul is often eager to stir up such reports into a godly buzz about what God is accomplishing, so that Christians will become emboldened in their witness, and so that the work of God's word would yield a richer harvest of praise from those whose ears its victories reach.

In the second half of Philippians chapter 1, Paul discusses the way in which the news of his own imprisonment has itself become a means of the gospel's spread. In particular, it had become known throughout the entire imperial guard, and to others of the establishment, that Paul's imprisonment was literally in Christ. Paul's imprisonment wasn't just for Christ, but in Christ, not merely something occurring as a result of Paul's witness for Christ, but a way in which Paul himself was manifestly participating in Christ.

By imprisoning this troublesome Jewish teacher, the Romans set up the conditions for the report of his master, Jesus the Messiah, to be spread throughout the palace guard. The message of Jesus was being spread through the gossip of the soldiers, who presumably saw something different and remarkable about this particular prisoner. And Paul's imprisonment and suffering at their hands was a way in which the fact that his life was lived in his crucified Lord, shone with a brightness that could not be ignored.

All of this created wonderful new opportunities for the gospel message, and illustrated Christ's glorious way of achieving his great victories under the mask of defeats. Who would believe that the imprisonment of one of his leading heralds would be one of the ways in which Jesus would cause the message of his lordship and his gracious forgiveness to penetrate so deeply into the establishment that executed him. But Paul's imprisonment was not only producing fruit among the Roman gods.

His example was emboldening other Christians to bear courageous witness, even in the teeth of the threat of similar imprisonment. The report of Christ's grace to Paul in his imprisonment robbed the threats of the authorities of the fear that they would typically instill. Ironically, some of the people who had been emboldened to speak were doing so out of bad motives, wanting to cause Paul distress or to build little kingdoms for themselves, now that their rival Paul was no longer able to keep them in check.

They weren't preaching a fundamentally false message like the Judaizers, but they were preaching out of bad or mixed motives. However, whatever their intentions, the word of Christ was spreading through them nonetheless. If Christ could make the word of his kingdom spread in the gossip of Roman gods, he could spread it just as effectively through the words of petty and proud preachers.

Just as in the cross itself, the intentions of the enemies of Christ will lead them to become the unwitting ministers of his victory. Not all of the preachers Paul mentioned, however, were of such a character. Some, rather than viewing Paul's imprisonment as their chance to get ahead in a rivalry that they had with him, recognised that Paul had been appointed to imprisonment by the Lord for the service of the gospel itself.

Christ had put him in prison as a means of advancing his kingdom. Recognising the sovereignty of Christ over the intentions of men, and what Christ was accomplishing through the situation, Paul can respond to what would seem to almost any human being as a severe setback, not with despair, but with rejoicing. Rejoicing in prison and in suffering is one of the marks of the early church.

Paul can also rejoice as he is assured that, through the prayers of the Philippians and others, and the work of the Spirit, the situation will yield his deliverance, or salvation. The deliverance that he expects is a divine vindication, and he alludes to Job chapter 13 verses 15-16 here. Though he slay me, I will hope in him, yet I will argue my ways to his face.

This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him. Paul shares this confidence in God, a confidence that will not be shaken by death itself. Paul is looking to his approaching trial, but looking beyond the human court before which he will stand, to a greater court, from which he is awaiting a glorious vindication, a vindication achieved through the petitions of the Philippians and others, and the advocate of the Holy Spirit.

More than anything, he desires Christ to be honoured in his body, in his current physical existence, whether this takes the form of life or death. While most would look at the trial that Paul would soon face with great concern over whether it would yield a death sentence, because Paul is looking beyond it, he can speak about the alternatives of release or execution with a measure of ambivalence. Whatever the human court determines in his case, it is the verdict of the heavenly court that he is awaiting, and he can confidently place himself in the hands of its judge, assured of the salvation that he will bring.

The choice that Paul faces is between life and death. For Paul, living is opportunity to serve and exalt Christ by his labours, to minister to his people, and to extend his kingdom. We might here recall Galatians chapter 2 verse 20.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

On the one hand, being at home in the body, as Paul observes in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 6, involves being away from the Lord. Death would not merely mean a release from Paul's troubles, but would bring a new intimacy and closeness with Christ in the

intermediate state, while awaiting the final resurrection. For Paul's purely personal interest, this would be preferable.

However, Paul believes that Christ still has a purpose for him to serve, in ministering to the Philippians, so that they might grow further in their faith, and have reason to thank and glorify Christ in his release and his visiting of them again. Whatever happens, Paul knows that the progress of the gospel and the glory of Christ is the ultimate end. The one thing Paul is concerned about is that the Philippians conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, whether he is released to minister to them again, or is restrained from visiting them by continued imprisonment or death, Paul desires to hear of their united endurance, bound together by a common struggle for the truth of the gospel.

They should be standing firm in the one spirit, God's Holy Spirit, and united in the one mindset of Christ, fearlessly facing their adversaries and opponents. Such fearless behaviour would actually evidence the truth of the message of judgment and salvation the Philippians proclaimed. The more confidently the Philippians faced persecution, the more that their persecutors would be led to question their own position, suspecting that confidence in the judgment upon the enemies of Christ, of which the Philippian Christians spoke, was the only explanation for such conduct.

The Philippians could draw confidence from the fearlessness of their own number, seeing ordinary men and women displaying a courage in the face of death and persecution that could only be explained by the work of the Spirit, and would, as they had already been by the example of Paul, be emboldened in their own witness and behaviour. All of this would be evidence to them and their opponents that God was at work. One of the ways that the lives of the saints bear witness, both encouraging and convicting us, is through their remarkable conduct that testifies to their recognition of something with the eyes of God, the eyes of faith, that exceeds fleshly perception.

They display virtues and rise to a stature that is astonishing, precisely as they witness something that others don't see. However, even when people don't see what they see, their lives themselves bear witness to the existence of such a reality, as they are clearly living in terms of a greater horizon, one that elicits virtues from them that are both glorious and utterly paradoxical in terms of the immediate horizons that everyone else witnesses. Paul concludes this chapter with a remarkable statement.

For the sake of Christ it had been granted to the Philippians not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. Our very faith is something granted to us by God, who opened our eyes to his truth so that we might respond to him. Apart from God's work of grace towards us in Christ, we would not have any capacity to respond.

Beyond this, however, we have been granted to suffer for Christ's sake, knowing the fellowship of Christ's suffering, and in our suffering for him, rendering some thanksgiving

for the immensity of his suffering for us. In chapter 3 verses 10-11, Paul will speak of sharing his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. A question to consider.

How does Paul's confidence in Christ's power and rule in the spread of the gospel and its work inform his approach to the many adversaries of and obstacles to the gospel? How many examples can you find of these adversaries and obstacles in this chapter, and how do we see the confidence of Paul in the gospel in the face of them?