

## God's Game of Thrones *Shepherd to King* 2 Samuel 7:1-14a Rev. Brian

King David is reigning in a time of peace and prosperity in Israel and he has moved into a beautiful home for himself. So now David considers that he should make a "House" for the ark of God – the symbol of God's presence. Initially Nathan, the prophet who has guided David in his dealings with God, says to go ahead – saying, "the Lord is with David." But then in the night God speaks to Nathan saying please tell David, "Thanks, but no thanks." God suggests that David is getting ahead of himself because God has chosen to move about in the tent. God has never asked for a "House" from those who have led Israel in the past.

I think God is reminding David that God – the King is in charge, not the Prince who God has set over Israel. God's current project is not to have a temple built, but rather to raise David up and to give him a "house" which is not a building, but literally a dynasty and the promise of a child who will rule after him who will have the wisdom to built God's Temple. It is important for David to remember that his job is to take care of the people of Israel. And also to remember that God can take care of God's self. And God reminds David about this by reminding us all that God called David literally from shepherding in the fields.

There are two aspects to this. First, shepherding is a humble profession in Israel. In fact, even in Jesus' time the shepherds are thought of as rough, rootin-tootin cowboys of sort - not known to be sticklers for rules, and not upset when a few of your sheep, get mixed up with theirs... So in this sense, God puts David in his place, reminding him from where he comes. The second aspect, however, is of God's positive use of the word, "shepherd". We see it when God mentions the former leaders of Israel as the shepherds of the people. This is the shepherd image that eventually becomes the basis for Jesus' saying that he is "the Good Shepherd."

And to make sure we understand the positive nature of being a shepherd, the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm assures David and Jesus that God is the greatest shepherd of all. The psalm must have given them comfort and guidance. Some of us are very familiar with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. But we must be careful with words we think we know, because we can miss their significance if we do not look at them closely now and then. So what do the familiar words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm tell us? First, God is our maker and our provider. When we say “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” we acknowledge this. God makes us rest in green pastures beside still waters – providing safety and nourishment. God has created this vast world full of food and water and air for us. This would be enough to praise God, but it does not stop there. God not only provides for our physical needs, but our psychological and spiritual. God restores our souls –providing rest and relief from fear. God even leads us to paths of righteousness, God shows us the right way to go, not because God wants it, but because it is the best path for us to find wholeness and joy. But God knows sometimes we get lost, we go off on our own way. Yet, even when we find ourselves on dangerous paths - trapped in a craggy rock because we chose unwisely, God will redirect us. According to the website *Revive*, The shepherd’s staff was used to hold the sheep during shearing and for gentle correction or re-directing. The hook at the top end of the staff was fit around the neck or head of the sheep to re-route them. At the bottom end of the staff was a spoon-shaped “shovel”. If the sheep wandered a bit from the herd, the shepherd would scoop up a bit of mud or dirt and flick it at the sheep that had drifted to catch its attention; “hey the rest of the group is over here, there is safety within the herd.” I think God uses that one on me a lot... And Psalm 23 shows us that even when we travel that foggy mysterious path toward death, God; though not stopping the end of our physical life, uses a rod to keep us safe. The Shepherd’s Rod resembled a walking stick but was a weapon or tool to

provide safety. So even when we cannot be redirected, God makes sure our journey is safe.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm has assured us God will provide and guide and keep us safe, even when we go astray... surely this is enough to give God great praise, but the Psalmist is not done. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over." God prepares a feast for us, even when we are surrounded by enemies. And God anoints us, declaring us God's chosen ones, God's children. God is not satisfied with just giving us what we need, but delights in showering us with blessings. Our cups are so full they are spilling all over the place, and are still being filled by God. I thought of this recently when I found a Bruce Springsteen CD I hadn't heard in a while. On his song *Better Days* he reminds us how easy it is to forget God is blessing us abundantly and get lost in self-pity- "It's sad funny ending to find yourself pretending - A rich man in a poor man's shirt. Every fool's got a reason for feelin' sorry for himself and turning his heart to stone." But Springsteen says we should not get caught cup waiting for some mythic tomorrow of better day to come, but to realize that, "These are better days!" That today is a day of great blessing from God.

Surely now the Psalmist has plumbed the depths of God's love for us... but no. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm goes on to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Assurance that even if we take the wrong path and God has to continually use the staff to guide us back to the right path. God will keep giving us good gifts and mercy, forgiving us our sins. Grace and mercy so full and rich, that we are assured with the Psalmist that we "will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This last phrase as translated in the familiar King James Version seems to refer to heaven - An image picked up by Jesus in the Gospel of John.. "In my Father's house are many rooms," Jesus says. But we should be aware that modern translations have the phrase more accurately as "I will dwell in the House of the Lord my whole life long." Part of the

reason for this is they are aware that the idea of living with God after this life is foreign to Judaism at David's time, but it comes later in the development of some parts of Judaism, and picked up by the early Christians. The modern translation does not have to diminish a more heavenly view of that final phrase. Our faith is a living thing, constantly growing and changing. As such, older works are often, in fact, always re-interpreted for our current time. So no matter which way we read, they both assure us that God is going to bless us and protect us in God's own house. We are a member of God's family.

The Biblical view of a King as Shepherd reminds us that God calls us as God's people on earth , And especially those who lead the people to follow God's example of providing for the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of our brothers and sisters to the point of overflowing abundance; God asks us to provide guidance and safety; and calls us to treat all the people with mercy and grace. To live our lives treating each other as if we all live in the same house guided by our Loving Parent . AMEN

## 2 Samuel 7:1-14

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; 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: Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 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?" 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 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; 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 live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers 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 ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth 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 a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.