

DAVID: The Promise of New Reign and Regime Forever

Theme: Jesus came to establish a subversive kingdom marked by servant love by conquering heart through grace.

Texts: II Samuel 7:1-16; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 9:23-24; Matthew 28:18-20

This morning we come to the last of four installments on the theme of "Promises to Keep." We have observed that God's relationship with us takes the shape of a binding commitment that the Bible calls covenant. Fortunately the Lord is not some tyrant king subduing an enemy and turning us into servile subjects. The Scripture is clear that it is *hesed* that motivates and marks God's covenant. *Hesed* is a technical word used to describe God's covenant love. This is captured in the familiar words at the close of the beloved twenty-third Psalm, "Surely goodness and love [*hesed*] will follow me (better even "pursue me") all the days of my life." (Psalm 23:6) God's covenant love is steadfast and faithful.

In the first message of this series, I said that this love is like that of a mother for the fruit of her womb. As troublesome and difficult as a child can become, there appears to be an unbreakable bond between mother and child. The prophet Hosea portrays the mother-heart of God, when he takes us into the very human feelings God has for wandering Israel.

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms;
But they did not realize it was I who healed them."

The Lord contemplates severing the relationship with His people and turning them over to judgment.

But then the mother's love kicks in.

"How can I give you up, Ephraim, how can I hand you over Israel...
My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.
For I am God and not man—the Holy One among you." (Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9)

When my wife and I decided to get engaged to be married, to put it mildly, this was not a pleasing thought to her parents. The problem? In case you cannot tell, I am not Chinese, and my wife is. After we were married, for the first three years Lily's father would have nothing to do with us. We would walk in the front door of their home, and he would walk out the back door. Even though during our engagement Lily's mother claimed that our getting married would be the death of her, her motherly instincts kicked in. She would secretly sneak groceries and cash to us on the side out of the sight of her husband. She could

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not stand to break off the relationship. "How can I give you up?" was certainly her refrain as well.

Just so, God the covenant maker keeps after us in his steadfast love. With Abraham the Lord provided an heir, and through him came the Hebrew people. With Moses, these people were formed into a nation. When the people strayed away from the covenant embodied in the Ten Commandments, the Lord raised up prophets, such as Jeremiah to call them back to that from which they departed.

The fitting place to conclude this series is God's covenant with King David. For the Lord promised that David's kingdom would last forever. As soon as we mention a kingdom forever our minds should go directly to the One who is considered both the son of David, and David's king, none other than the king of kings and the lord of Lords, Jesus Himself. We will see how the promise to David is fulfilled in Jesus. But I am getting ahead of myself. The Lord promised to David, **"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."** (II Samuel 7:16)

Throughout Israel's history the reign of King David was viewed as the time when Israel had reached its zenith in power and glory. Under David the borders of Israel stretched south to a weakened Egypt; to the north inclusive of modern day Lebanon and Syria, and to the east toward Mesopotamia. David's story came with all the lore of a man favored by the God of Israel. His reputation as a warrior who trusted in God, of course, began with the story of David and Goliath. The youngest son of Jesse, the shepherd boy, faces down the giant who has sent shudders of fear into Saul and the Israelite army. Goliath calls across the chasm separating the army of the Philistines and the Israelites. He dares someone to come out and fight him. When David was sent by his father, Jesse, to take provisions to his three brothers serving in Saul's army, he could not stomach hearing the name of Yahweh maligned by this Philistine pagan. Shunning the usual military garb, David laughingly armed only with a leather sling shot fells the giant with a single stone embedded in his forehead. Thus begins a legend.

After the death of Saul, David is recognized as king, but must consolidate his power among the loosely connected tribes of Israel. Perhaps the greatest strategic achievement of David's reign was to move the capital of Israel from Hebron in the south to Jerusalem in the center. For the next 33 of his 40-year reign, David would bring together the northern and southern tribes like no one had done before. In order to weld together political and religious power, the Ark of the Covenant in great fanfare is brought to Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant represented the very presence of God among the people for in this small gilded, acacia wood box, were the stone tablets of the Ten

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Commandments, considered God's covenant with Israel. Jerusalem, as we know, has been a center of controversy and conflict ever since, right up to this day.

But it is wedding together of his status as warrior-king with his reputation as a man after God's own heart that caused the scattered people of Israel for the next 1000 years to long for a king like David who would restore national pride. The book of Psalms gives us ample insight into David's desire to live a righteous life pleasing to God. This, of course, does not mean that David was free of human foibles. We know all too well the story of David's abuse of his kingly power by forcing himself upon Bethsheba, and then the subsequent cover up of her pregnancy by having her husband, Uriah, put to death while on the battlefield. But what makes David righteous is how he dealt with his sin. Psalms 32 and 51 give us ample evidence of the psychic trauma, otherwise known as guilt, which sapped his strength. This episode concludes when the Lord sends the prophet Nathan, Samuel's successor, to confront David with the evil he has done. Nathan tells David a thinly veiled story of a powerful, rich man who exploits a poor man by taking his lone ewe lamb. David walked into the trap, indignant that someone would do this. Nathan springs the trap, "Thou art the man." Immediately, without equivocation David comes clean, "I have sinned against the Lord."

The people of Israel never felt better about themselves as a nation than when David the righteous—warrior—king secured the borders and brought peace and prosperity to the land. Every subsequent king would be measured against this standard.

The promise of God to David to establish his throne forever is set against the backdrop of embarrassment that God's house is rather shabby in comparison to the house that David dwells in. David says, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." (II Samuel 7:2) The Lord replied through Nathan that he had never asked for a house. He is quite fine living in a tent. He was not looking for opulent surroundings. We could easily say that the enduring image for God's dwelling among his people is not luxury, but humility. In fact, when the apostle John speaks of the coming of Jesus, he says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [literally tented] among us." Jesus did not come with royal fanfare. Hold onto this thought, when we speak of Jesus as king.

The Lord does tell David that it will be through his son Solomon that a temple will be built. "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom." (II Samuel 7:12-13) Solomon's reputation as a man blessed with riches and glory spread throughout the world along with a divine wisdom. "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will

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punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men." (II Samuel 7:14) This refers to the tragic ending of Solomon's life, turning away from the Lord to foreign deities because he loved many women and their gods. I call Solomon the saddest character in the Bible, because He had it all and lost it in the end.

After Solomon, Israel would never be the same. For 1000 years one foreign power after another would dominate. But they held on to the promise, "But my love will never be taken away...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne would be established forever." (II Samuel 7:15-16)

As the concept and hope of a Messiah was fostered from this time right up to the time of Christ, it was believed that one like David would come in the line of David to restore the glory days gone by. Literally the Messiah would bring in the Kingdom of God. Israel's view of history was that it was leading somewhere—it had a destination and a direction. "This age" would suddenly be replaced with "the age to come." This age represented the time of shame and oppression of Gods' chosen people, but the Lord would send a deliverer and upon his arrival "the age to come" would bring in a kingdom that looked a lot like that of David's day. Glory, dignity, honor, and blessing would come because the warrior-righteous-king would bring liberation.

But what happened? God's covenant with David is fulfilled in Jesus. God sent Jesus who did come in the line of David and was declared the king forever. But he didn't look anything like what the people were expecting. Their messiah had been passed through the filter of nationalistic expectations, and for this reason they could not imagine a messiah-king who is put to death, especially by their enemies. In this case hated Rome.

Because of their preconceived notions we might be able to appreciate why they missed their messiah. Have you ever had to meet someone at a public place, and all you had was voice over the phone to conjure up your mental image? A number of years ago when I was living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I went to the airport to meet Dr. Richard Mouw, who at the time was on the faculty of Calvin College and is now president of Fuller Theological Seminary. From the phone voice I had conjured up an image of the man I was looking for when he deplaned. This was pre-9/11 when you could still go straight to the gate to meet your party. I stood nervously at the end of ramp as all the passengers deplaned. I tried to give off the air of one waiting to catch a stranger's eye. All the passengers filed past me. No one fit my mental image of what Dr. Mouw must look like. After it was evident that no one else was coming off that flight, I turned to see a man looking forlorn as if there was no one to greet him. "Dr.

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Mouw?", I inquired. Then I said something I wish I hadn't, "I am sorry I missed you. I was expecting someone quite different." Apparently, he was too.

This was Israel's problem. Jesus' didn't fit the picture, because they had not read the signals of a different kind of king who was coming. David was the least in the family, a shepherd boy, not likely to be a king. God portrayed himself a one who dwells in a tent, not in opulent surroundings. We know from the prophet Isaiah, that there was a portrait of a suffering servant, who would lay down his life for the sheep. The people of Israel had another picture in mind.

But when we turn to the depiction of Jesus in the New Testament from his birth to his death, he is the one born to be king in the line of David. He clearly fulfills the covenant with David because of the Davidic connections that are stressed. Jesus' birthplace was Bethlehem, known as the city of David, and the place prophesied for the Messiah's birth (Micah 5:2) The announcement by the angel Gabriel to a frightened teenage girl named Mary, says this about the one to be born through her, "The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:32b-33) During Jesus' public ministry a blind beggar named Bartimaeus cries out from the roadside, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." (Mark 10:47) When Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David." (Matt. 21:9) And even at this death on the cross, the placard over his head read, "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26).

Even more importantly the central emphasis of Jesus' ministry is that his presence embodies the kingdom of God and that he came preaching the kingdom of God. We are given in Mark's gospel at the inauguration of Jesus' ministry a summary of his message, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

Jesus' message is, "The time has come." Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*, says simply, "Time's up!" The long awaited Messiah in the line of David is here. In the Greek language, there are two words for time. The one we are familiar with is "chronos" from which we get chronology, or simply the time on the clock. One moment is no different than any other. The second word used here is "kairos". This is opportunity time; time pregnant with meaning. There are moments in time that define the meaning of time. They are the turning points. If I were to say December 7, 1941, we would know that as "the day that will go down in infamy". More recently all we need to say is 9/11. The day that changed everything. This is what Jesus is saying about this arrival. The fullness of time has come with me.

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"The kingdom of God is near." This is the theme of Jesus' ministry that connects with the promise to David of a kingdom that will be forever. One-hundred twenty-two times in the gospels the kingdom of God or heaven is mentioned and 90 of these are on the lips of Jesus. Jesus is saying that with him he is bringing in a new regime that is confronting and supplanting the kingdoms of this world. When Jesus uses the deliciously ambiguous phrase that "the kingdom of God is near", he means that it is present on the one hand, and yet fully to come on the other. Jesus fills this phrase with his own content, because in his first coming he is the servant king who lays down his life on the cross for his people. This is what is so startling to the Jews of his day. Kings don't die, they conquer. This one lays down his life only to take it up again, because his kingdom is not of this world, but is characterized by servant love.

The way into the kingdom is through the door of repentance. **"The kingdom of God is near. Repent."** The presence of the kingdom sets up a choice, a crisis of decision. Which kingdom will you be a part of? One of my favorite musical plays is *Les Miserables*. It is a story of redemption that leads to a crisis of decision. Jean Valjean is a recently released prisoner, who finds refuge in the house of the bishop. In Victor Hugo's real life and his novel, the bishop is the Christ figure. In response to the bishop's generosity, Jean Valjean pays him back by stealing the silver cutlery from the bishopric. Jean Valjean is apprehended by the police and brought back to face his accuser the bishop. Instead of a word of judgment the bishop covers up his misdeed and goes beyond it. **"Yes, but I gave you the candlesticks too...why did you not take them along with the cutlery?...Now go in peace. By the way, my friend, you needn't come through the garden. You can always come and go by the front door."** It was this grace that cracked open Valjean's heart. Victor Hugo beautifully portrays a crisis of decision we call repentance that was set up by the grace of God as displayed by the bishop. **"In opposition to this celestial tenderness he summoned up pride: the fortress of evil in man. He dimly felt the bishop's pardon was the hardest assault, the most formidable attack he had ever sustained; that his hardness of heart would be complete if it resisted this kindness; that if he yielded he would have to renounce the hatred that the acts of other men for many years had filled his soul; that this time, he must conquer or be conquered."**

Repentance is God's wake up call. You must decide. There is no neutral territory. As Moses said to the people, **"I put before you life and death. Choose life."** This is our response to the covenant. There are no half measures. You are either fully in or out. We can't be like the man who wrote to the IRS: **"Gentlemen, Enclosed you will find a check for \$150. I cheated on my income tax return last year and have not been able to sleep ever since. If I still have trouble sleeping I will send you the rest. Sincerely."**

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Repentance means to come clean. Complete honesty. To own up to how our lives have violated what the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ represents. It literally means to change your mind, to correct your thinking and go in a radically different direction in life. Jesus intends to disturb our life.

Finally, Jesus says, **“Repent and believe the good news.”** When we use the term believe today, it is too easy, because we have reduced belief to a truth that we hold as an intellectual tenet. But by “believe” Jesus meant, **“Stake your life on it. Lean into the good news and put your full weight on it.”**

Jesus’ kingdom is not just for us but for all who repent after hearing the good news. This message of the kingdom would then become the universal message for the whole world. After his resurrection, he gave the following marching orders to his disciples, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you...”** (Matthew 28:18-20)

Abraham Kuyper, the former prime minister of the Netherlands, has famously summarized Jesus’ claim to all authority in heaven and on earth with these words, **“There is not a square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’”**

With all the backing of the “cosmocrator” of the universe (to borrow Dale Bruner’s phrase), Jesus wrote the mission statement for the church, every church, **“Go and make disciples.”** The result of the presence of my kingdom will be those who are followers of the king. Who is a disciple? According to Jesus a disciple is one whose identity is submerged in the triune God and who is seeking to obey all that Jesus commanded.

Baptism is first and foremost an identity symbol. It is the New Testament mark of the covenant that we are connected to Jesus and his people. In receiving the sign of baptism we are confessing our faith, that we have put our weight upon Jesus.

Secondly, Jesus says that a disciple is one who is seeking to obey or observe all that He commanded. In the discipleship curriculum I have written entitled *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, I define a disciple as **“one who responds in faith and obedience to the gracious call to follow Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us.”** Discipleship takes a lifetime because it is our lifelong vocation.

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The leadership here at Christ Church, meaning the trustees, elders, and staff have been pondering how we might create in shorthand, a community covenant for what it means to live into being a disciple. All Christian communities of which I am aware that have powerful impact for the kingdom of God are clear about the mission they are on together and the commitment they are asking of those to accomplish that mission.

How do we translate into simple terms what it means to be a disciple here at Christ Church of Oak Brook? In presenting this covenant we are trying to avoid two dangers. It is like driving down a narrow road with a steep ledge on either side. To the left there is the danger of turning a covenant into a new **legalism** that feels like a straight jacket of judgment—either before God or each other. We want to avoid the feeling that there are covenant police who are watching you. Yet on the right side of the road there is the ledge of **license**. Without clear expectations, it becomes anything goes. We all just do what is right in our own eyes. There are no standards. To keep us on the road steering between legalism and license, Jesus called us to **life**—life in Him. He said, “I have come that you might have **life** and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10) He told us how to get to that life, “**He who loses his life for my sake shall find it.**” (Luke 9:24) We truly believe that life is found in following Jesus.

So here is the call to life that we are putting before you as a community covenant.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, responding to and depending upon God’s grace I covenant to...

- Worship** God weekly with my church family
- Grow** into the character of Christ through an intentional journey of discipleship with others
- Serve** others near where I live, work, or volunteer and who God draws near to my heart around the world.

The covenant formula throughout the Scriptures is two-fold:

The Lord as the initiating party in the relationship says, “**I will be your God and you shall be my people.**”

We who have repented are heirs to the promise of being part of God’s forever kingdom which means we have to respond to this promise, “**All that you have said we will do.**” The implication of this commitment is that we will attempt to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us; we will not hold onto anger against a brother or sister in Christ, but as is possible live at peace with all people, etc.

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Next Sunday, we gather for what we are calling a Vision Sunday, which we hope to do a couple of times a year. On this Sunday we will celebrate the life changing love of Jesus Christ as evidenced in testimonies of people's lives. We will also look forward to what we are seeing as the mission God is calling us to live into. Between now and next Sunday, we are asking that you prayerfully consider putting your name on this covenant and making it your own. This decision will be between you and God and whoever you decide to share it with.