

“The Long Way Home When God’s Promise is Delayed”

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1 Samuel 16: 1-13

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Have you ever felt that God has laid a promise on your life that hasn’t been fulfilled yet? Have you ever seen something in yourself that no one else sees? Have you ever decided to make a significant life change — but no one else quite buys it? Or maybe you’ve seen something in someone else — and they don’t see it yet.

Already and not yet. That is a Christian concept that we see at a big picture level and in each one of our lives. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been set free, sins forgiven and given new life ... and yet life struggles remain. We have a taste and a promise, but the fulfillment of the promise is not complete until later.

In our Old Testament story, God tells the Prophet Samuel to go out and anoint a new king. Prophets hear God’s voice clearly. (Every Christian can hear God’s voice or learn to hear God’s voice, but a Prophet hears *really clearly!*) Samuel knows he’s to anoint one of Jesse’s sons, but he doesn’t know which one yet. When he gets there, he assumes it’s Jesse’s oldest son. He’s got the qualifications: tall, dark and handsome, a warrior, a leader ... but apparently, he wasn’t God’s pick. Neither was the next son, nor the next.

You get the feeling as Samuel goes down the line that we are going lower and lower not just in age but in quality. You get the feeling that when David is sent for from the sheep pasture that we are now working with the runt of the litter. But God sees something that no one else sees, and Samuel, the prophet, hears the voice of God, and knows that this is the one. David is anointed. Here is the new king. The only problem is that the only ones who seem to know this are Samuel, David and God. It’s a bit awkward, really.



My brother just posted a video to Facebook. It was a memory from a few years ago of my daughter Maisie canoeing with Josh up on the lake at Gracefield camp.

<https://www.facebook.com/joshua.bennett.980315/videos/10155710427245720/>

Maisie is singing away while she paddles, and then she

notices that the canoe has stopped moving. She turns around and asks Josh why, and Josh says it's because he stopped paddling. Then she starts paddling and singing again. It's a delightful little video of Maisie.

During prayer time on a recent Thursday morning at the church, Lynn McCaw invited us to do a 'Hearing God' exercise. She had us ask God 'What do you like about me?' Then she invited us to listen. When I listened, that video popped into my mind. I felt that God was saying that in the same way I delight in that video -- that I delight in seeing Maisie -- that God delights in me. God delights in me just as I am. Not because I am a great paddle-master, but just because of who I am. You see, I often think that God loves me because of all I 'do' which drives me to do more and try harder. But like Maisie in the video, it turns out that I'm not really the one who is making the canoe move. I think I am, but I'm not.

God loves you before you've done anything. God loves you *for you*. That never changes. At the same time, God loves us so much he wants to see us grow into what he created us to be. God sees in us what no one else does.

God loved David and chose David to be king before David had done anything. That's important to remember. However, though David is anointed and blessed by God, he has a long road ahead of him. From the time that David is anointed until the time that he is actually made king of Israel is a very long time — probably about 15 years in between those two times. Not only is it a long time, but the journey to becoming who he was is far from straightforward. *Already and not yet*. David is king in God's eyes, but he is not yet king in the eyes of the world.

In between the time he is anointed and the time that everyone else sees in David what God sees in him, David goes through hell and back. It starts off pretty well: David gets a lot of glory when he takes on and defeats the giant Goliath. King Saul is impressed, and David begins to serve him. David leads a few military campaigns where he is victorious. But then King Saul starts to get jealous and nervous about David. Interestingly, I think at a subconscious level Saul begins to see in David what God sees in David, and he doesn't like it. There isn't room for two at the top of the castle. Saul was king of the castle and that made David the dirty rascal! Though David had done nothing but support Saul, Saul begins to threaten to murder David.

David runs away to escape King Saul, and starts hiding out in caves. He looks like, and probably feels like, a total failure. He is a very, very long way away from being the king he was anointed to be. I bet he started to

wonder and doubt the promise. I would. Have you ever been in that place where you start to doubt you'll ever get out? Have you ever felt like a failure? If you've never ever felt like a failure, my guess is you're either under the age of 10 or you've played life pretty safe. You haven't taken too many risks.

We are always going to have limitations; we are always going to have stumbling blocks and stuff that happens to us that we have no control over. Life can be brutal. God does not cause the bad things that happen in life, but if you let God, he will take the bad and transform it into good. One of the things God does most often is to allow these times of struggle to shape you and make you stronger.

Back to Maisie in the canoe. God delights in that child paddling away and loves her exactly as she is, but that doesn't mean he doesn't want her to grow and become a paddle master. You don't become a paddle master by buying a fancy life jacket and shiny paddle and boat. You become a paddle master by canoeing and putting in hours on the lake, facing the cold, the heat, the waves and the blackflies. There are no short cuts. It was the same with David.

Sometimes God calls us to take the long cut. We'd all love the short cut. I'm all about the short cut. When I'm driving up Stewart Boulevard I'm always trying to figure out which lane will get me there faster. Sure changing lanes is only saving me 46 seconds, but hey — if it will get me there faster, I'm happy! But often with God, we get the long cut. Look at Joseph (of the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat fame). Early in his life he had a dream that suggested who he was, and at the end he becomes second in command in Egypt, and it turns out those dreams were all prophetic. But wow, did he ever get the long cut! Moses also got the long cut: after murdering an Egyptian he runs away — it's only when he turns 80 that God catches up to him and calls him to lead. So David got it easy with 15 years.

Have any of you found yourself taking the long cut in life? Maybe you're still on it—still on the long road to recovery, still on the long road to forgiveness, still on the long road of transforming your character, still on the long road of illness. Look at the beloved Psalm, The Lord is My Shepherd. It starts with green valleys and ends with a splendid banquet — but in between you get the dark valley of the Shadow of death!

Throughout the long way home, David likely doubted what God saw in him, but I don't think he ever doubted God. He never doubted that God was with him in that dark place. I don't mean he didn't have moments where he was thinking to himself that he was pretty happy tending sheep

and longed to go back there. I'm sure he had those kinds of doubts. We all do. They are natural. Faith is living, and you have good days and lousy days.

C. S Lewis said: "Faith is the art of holding on to things in spite of your changing moods and circumstances." The letter to the Hebrews says: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see." But it's also like a muscle — the more you work it, the more it grows stronger. David worked his faith and he never abandoned God's call.

David is in hiding in a cave near Adullam. It may be one of the lowest times in his life, but then something happens. This is how the Message version puts it in 1 Samuel 22:1-2: "*So David got away and escaped to the Cave of Adullam. When his brothers and others associated with his family heard where he was, they came down and joined him. Not only that, but all who were down on their luck came around—losers and vagrants and misfits of all sorts. David became their leader. There were about four hundred in all.*" All who were down on their luck were drawn to him. Does that remind you of anyone else?

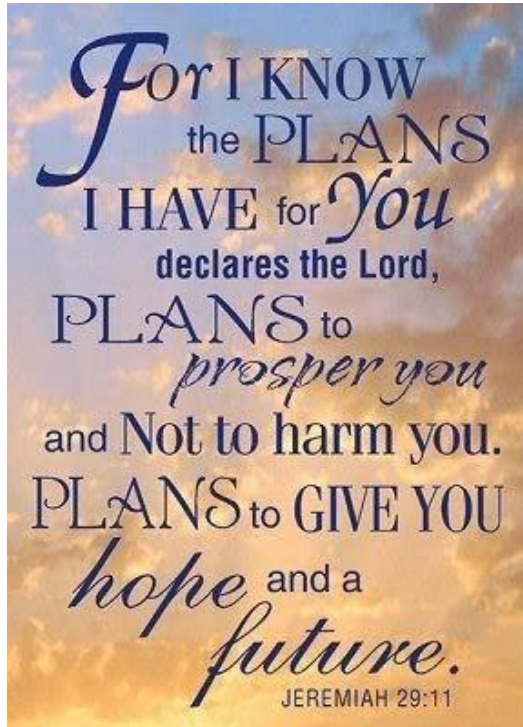
Jesus also attracted people who were on the margins—people who didn't fit in. David attracts these people and like Jesus centuries later he doesn't send them away and say 'you're no good'. Instead he sees something in them. Those who are down on refugees and immigrants (though they are two completely separate groups, those who oppose them tend to lump them together) as being people who will only suck good out of the country instead of seeing the richness they can add to a community and a nation, would do well to put on the glasses David was wearing. Instead of seeing something worthless, he saw something of value. Who knows? Maybe David sympathized. Maybe because God chose him, the youngest and the smallest, David has a heart for those who tend to be overlooked. It's from these men that David builds an army.

It is a trap to think *if only I had more: money, health, resources, staff ... you name it... I could do more and be more. If only I was smarter, had more time, had more breaks, I could succeed.*

Jesus built his church on a few fishermen and a couple other odds and sods. What has God given you to work with?

Feel the fullness of God's love and delight for you right now and in this moment!

Jeremiah 29:11 "*For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.*"



God has a promise and plan for your life, and he has the power to get you there. You just might be on the scenic route. Do not fear. Have faith that you will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Thanks be to God. Amen.