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**Resolution – A Series on David 1 – 2 Samuel 7:1-11**

Ministers looking for a call to a church complete a sort of resume, which some years ago was called a dossier. In those ancient days, the dossier included a crucial section called “Introductory Statement.” It was the first thing – often the only thing – search committees would read. It was supposed to be just a few lines long: hard to tell much about yourself in so short a format.

Still, some succeeded: a friend once shared an introductory statement he’d found, written by the pastor of what we called a “tall steeple” church. It read: “I know God, and I know men.” That was it.

A very arrogant statement, would you agree? Knowing how people behave is a gift some have, others cultivate, some never figure out; knowing God as well as that minister’s statement implies is simply impossible, because no human can know the whole mind of God. We know that God is love, that God cares deeply about the relationship that each of us has with God; but *knowing* God? That’s the lesson of today’s Scripture.

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This is a great story. It's vitally important to us as Christians, as we'll see later; it's also vitally important to Judaism, because it sets up the perpetual dynasty of David.

And it's also vitally important to us today, because it helps us – if not understand, then at least gain some insight about how God's ways.

This event took place soon after David consolidated his rule after the death of Israel's first king, Saul. David's settled; internal affairs are relatively calm; so he began to reflect on his relative comfort and security after decades of uncertainty and uprootedness. He is, despite his flaws, a man deeply devoted to the God who did so much for him.

So, when the Ark of the Covenant (yes, the same Ark as the in "Raiders of the Lost Ark") is brought to Jerusalem, David decides to build a permanent home for God. The ark is where the tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept, and the earthly nexus of the glory of God, so it has gone with the people of Israel everywhere, until its capture at the hands of the Philistines. But now, since Israel is settled, its King now in a palace, shouldn't the God who did all this have a nice place, too?

Point one: not even mighty prophets know all God's mind. Nathan the prophet, the leading advisor on God to David, at first agrees with David's resolution to give God a home. But what seems like a good idea at the time isn't what God has planned, and Nathan has to reverse

himself the very next day. Even Nathan discovers he doesn't "know God" as well as he thought!

Point two: All of us have heard or said, "Just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you *should* do it." That's clearly God's message to David. Yes, David, you are God's anointed; yes, you're in charge of the earthly people of God: but you are not God – you don't bestow favors on God.

Sometimes, even our best, prayerful actions simply don't fit into God's evolving plan. Remember the Crystal Cathedral – how many millions of people were touched and led to Christ and fuller, richer lives by Robert Schuller's ministry? No longer, at least not as it was.

Sure, there's human reasons why things went so wrong; but Schuller's original motive, glorifying God and making introductions to him for people who'd never darken the door of an ordinary church, giving people hope and building their faith, was inspired.

That such efforts sometimes fail is a puzzle as old as humanity. Why is one thing successful while another, equally devout, isn't? Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices, humbly and in faith; yet one was more acceptable to God, and we don't know why.

Everyone who's ever been associated with a community of faith knows of plans and projects and offerings to God's service that simply

went nowhere, despite fervent prayer; honest, faithful motives and actions; great enthusiasm; and the fundamental desire to please God.

Third: we just don't know what precisely God intends, let alone the details. One preacher I knew had a particular pet peeve: divine intervention in trivial matters. You never, ever said in his hearing that God had led you to find a parking spot. "God is not in the business of finding you and me a place to park our cars," he'd fume. He had a point. Think of the person who, surviving a tragedy that's claimed the lives of others, says that they've been "blessed." Were those who died *not* blessed? Did God somehow favor some and not the others?

Questions like this fall into a category of theology called "theodicy." Why does a loving, all-powerful God seem to permit evil?

Now, I am not one of those who see God as a cosmic cop, a divine policeman waiting for us to slip up and be damned. But I recall more than once in my life, particularly as a teenager and young adult, praying that God wouldn't take something out of my life because I loved it so much. And many times I've tried to do what seemed clearly to glorify God, only to have it fail.

So even when you expect the best from God, as I do, and believe that I see it, there are times when my faith – maybe yours, too – is put to the test. It just seems that God isn't holding up his end of the bargain.

We can only, like David, do our best to do what seems best - God is the one who brings blessing to it.

A pastor I know and respect greatly was confronted early in her ministry by the sudden death of a child in her congregation. She spent hours with the parents, assuring them of God's love for them and their child, and that God did not will their child's death.

About a year later, the father made an appointment to see her. After they'd got past the chit-chat and catching-up, he said, "I came to see you because of what you did for us after our daughter's death. You walked with us; you poured your heart out to us, you showed us God's love in everything you did. But I have to tell you, the only thing you could have said that could have been worse than "God willed that your child had to die" was to tell us that God didn't – because if that's true, then God is not in charge, and our baby's death was for nothing."

I promised I'd make some sense out of this story from the life of David, how he was all set to do something good and thoughtful, that would honor God – but God wouldn't let him do it.

Why? God intended something greater yet, beyond David's wildest imagination. Instead of letting him build a temple for God to call his own, God instead made David a promise: that one of his sons would build it, and that his line would last forever. A far greater gift than

David had planned to offer his God – but one that David would never see, one he could only take comfort in anticipation of its fulfillment.

Many have thought a lot about this in the years since all this took place. Cyprian, one of the early church's great leaders, was one of those who made the connection in God's promise to David not to Solomon, who actually built the first temple, but to another: Jesus, the son of David twenty-eight generations later, who said he himself was the temple, one that would be destroyed and raised in three days – the crucifixion and resurrection – and that the temple building would be destroyed until “not one brick shall stand upon another.”

So what does that say to you and me today, as we seek to live lives faithful to the same God that established David's line, that came to us in person as Jesus? Something incredibly simple, yet eternally profound: “God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year: God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near; nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.” Or as Paul said, “whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's – if we live, we live to God; if we die, we die to God.”

While pain and suffering prevail, while we bask in ease and comfort, God is with us; working out the grand plan that we live out every day as we follow him, “work[ing] together for good for those who

love God, who are called according to his purpose.” So, too, with all our plans as God’s people here at Valley Presbyterian Church. It’s been said that “man proposes, God disposes;” we can do many things, and do them well. But it is God who knows us, and where we are going. May our work as individuals and as a congregation find favor in the sight of the One that we serve.