

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 20 December 2020

Prepare our hearts, O God, to hear your Word and obey your will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38

Today we'll talk about the house of God through the two readings – 2 Samuel 7 and Luke 1. In 2 Samuel 7, we'll see that the house of God will be built not by a human will but by God's. Consequently, in Luke's gospel, we'll see that grace and servant-hood become the foundation of the house of God in the person of Jesus. It will help that we – spiritual bricks who belong to the house of God will be built into the house of God in God's time.

1. The house of God in 2 Samuel 7:1-16

Building the house of God is not by people's will but God's. In 2 Samuel 7:1-16, the meaning of the house unfolds. It is about the establishment of two houses: one is the "house" (i.e., dynasty) of David, whose foundations are God (YHWH¹)'s promises and fidelity. The other is the "house" (i.e., temple) of God, which would eventually be built by David's son, Solomon.

Houses mean permanence, presence and security. For God, building a house for Godhead means that God will no longer dwell in a mobile "Tent and Tabernacle."² For Israel, when they build a house for God, the presence of God would be available in the form of a temple and its accompanying functionaries.¹ But, does God need a temple? Also, will a temple as a permanent building do something for God that the tabernacle (a tent) is failing to do? The tent afforded God mobility. During Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, they were able to pack up the tent and its furnishings and take it with them. The ark - representing the very presence of God, moved at the head of the procession, symbolizing God's leadership of Israel.

Earlier in Exodus 25-31, God gave explicit instructions about the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. God never told Israel to build a permanent dwelling for the ark once they entered the Promised Land, or never suggested that the tabernacle was temporary or inferior. Yet David proposes to do what all self-serving kings in the ancient world do as temple building was an act of great piety for kings in the ancient world.³ As the story unfolds, we see that the question of the temple is not a special interest in this passage. Instead, it is only an opening device with which to reveal what God will do through the house of David from whom the Messiah - David's descendant, will be born as God's ordained house in person.

2. The house of God in Luke 1:26-38

In Matthew 1:26-38, God prepares for the house of God in person through two ways: grace and servanthood. Gabriel greets Mary with the words "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you," and assures her, "You have found favour with God." The Greek verb and noun (*charizomai* and *charis*), here translated "favour," can be translated as "grace." Mary is the object of God's grace since no special merits are found in Mary that make her appropriate as an object of God's grace. Mary is described as a young girl who was engaged to be married. More is said about Joseph (e.g. he is of the house of David) than about Mary. Even in the case of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Luke explains that they are righteous and blameless, that they kept God's commandments and prayed to God.⁴ Yet not a single word describes the virtues or vices of Mary or explains why God might have chosen her. But that is precisely the point: God chooses because God chooses. Mary does not earn or deserve

¹ YHWH is a personal name of God which is first introduced in Genesis 2:4 and is the name by which God is referenced throughout the J narrative. In Genesis 4:26 (in the J story), it is said, "At that time people began to call on the name of YHWH."

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³ 2 Samuel 7:1-2

⁴ Luke 1:6-7, 13

the honour of becoming the mother of Jesus any more than would any other woman. Following Gabriel's announcement, Mary responds to it.

Mary first sees herself as 'the servant of the Lord.' A better translation would be 'slave of the Lord' since the Greek Word (*doulos*) means the involuntary relationship of slavery, not one in which an individual has agreed to service. That is, Mary recognises that she has been selected by God and that God's choosing leaves no room for her own free will. The same is seen in 2 Samuel 7:1- 11 when God labels David his servant, it is not based on the merits of David. Since the term - the servant is usually reserved for the nation Israel, David considers it high honour. Later, Isaiah will point to the Messiah as God's servant.⁵ and this prophecy will apply to Jesus.⁶ In the end, Jesus will tell his disciples that he expects them to be servants too.⁷ Now Mary consents to God's plan: "Let it be with me according to your word" although she cannot fully understand. Later Mary - as the servant of God, interprets events in the Magnificat⁸ and lives as God wills. Grace and servant-hood are working together to be the foundation of the house of God. So what does it mean to us?

3. Being built into the house of God

In our story time, we watched (listened), a story titled *Three little pigs*. The question was, 'what saved the three pigs in the end?' An easy answer may be the brick house saved all of them. And a moral may be that hard work and dedication pay off. As a children's story, the sequence from a house of straw to sticks and then bricks, and the youngest to the oldest show us a few basic principles in morality where the powerful, the wise, and the strong may earn the best of life. But from the biblical perspectives with the theme of the house of God, the story may have to be re-read not to mention the morals. By the time these three little pigs work together to fight against the wolf, they may realise that they need something more than a brick house to defeat the wolf. Simply hiding in the brick house is not safe enough. They have to work together to get rid of the wolf and restore their safety. If so, what makes them stick together and work together from the beginning?

First, they belong to the same house, namely family. They share the same father and mother. They are siblings. Although their building styles are different according to their characters, their origin was the same. Second, when the wolf blows the house of the first little pig in, by instinct, the first pig runs away and hides with the second pig in his sticks house. And the same thing repeats when the wolf blows the second house in. The first and the second pig run away and hide with the third pig - the oldest in his house. Here we see the bond of a family plays an important role when they are in troubles. If so, what saves them in the end? The invisible bond of a family which belongs to the same house saved them. In this bond, we can see the will of God, grace and servant-hood too. That is, no one including pigs can choose which family s/he wants to be born, but God. Family or a household is an earthly model of the house of God, where members are expected to serve one another. The same is working in this house of God, namely church.

In the house of God, two things are happening at the same time. While God is our eternal home, we are letting ourselves as spiritual bricks to be built into the house of God.⁹ In this house, grace and servant-hood are the foundations laid by Christ Jesus. In Advent, we Christians dare to claim that this remembered and coming Jesus carries the promise of David for newness and well-being that are ever-present in the house of God. We, as spiritual bricks, are being built into the house of God in Christ till God completes it. Amen!

⁵ Isaiah 42:1

⁶ Matthew 12:15-18

⁷ Matthew 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43

⁸ Hymn of the virgin Mary in Luke 1:46-55

⁹ 1 Peter 2:5 - like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.