

“NEW BEGINNINGS: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD” (I Chronicles 17:16-20)

11.3.19

INTRODUCTION

We’re not going to be looking at a “big question” today; instead, we’re going to be celebrating a big event, so the full title of the message today is “New Beginnings: Looking Back, Moving Forward” — so let’s begin.

Anybody know what the numbers “146” and “21” have in common? One hundred forty-six (146) days — that’s the amount of time from Monday, June 10, when a city water pipe burst, to today, November 3. Just a day short of 21 weeks.

That makes today pretty special. And as such, I decided that we really couldn’t treat today like a normal day, so we’ll be doing some different things in the message this morning — starting with looking at a couple of Scriptures as we celebrate our first Sunday “back home.” First, we’re going to look at a prayer from the life of King David — and the really amazing lessons that we can take as we move forward in our ministries here in Redwood Falls.

Now, before we get into the text, let’s look at the context to help set this all up. David is the king of all Israel and, by the time we get to this particular text, he’s been the king for quite a while. He really wants to show his love for God and all that God had done for him throughout his life. And one way he wants to do that is by building a temple to house the altar of the Lord. It bothered him, as he said earlier in this chapter, that he was *“living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent”* — *David, I Chronicles 17:1b*. Nathan, a prophet God had raised up to minister to David, initially supported David’s idea; his immediate response was: *“Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you”* — *Nathan, I Chronicles 17:2b*. However, God intervened, telling Nathan to tell David that, no, David was not to be the one to build a temple for him. And then God told Nathan to tell David something else: *“I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor (King Saul). I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever”* — *God speaking, I Chronicles 17:11b-14*. It was upon hearing those words that David spoke the prayer that we will read now.

TEXT

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, my God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You, Lord God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men. What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, Lord. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises. There is no one like you, Lord, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears” — *I Chronicles 17:16-20*.

We’re going to look at three phrases in this section of David’s prayer:

Who am I? Those three simple words simply pour out a message of grace, God’s grace — that is to say, his “undeserved favor.” David was acknowledging that God, simply by means of his love and grace, had poured blessings on David that he knew he could have never earned. In fact, that

“pouring of blessing” is not just a record of the past, but a promise for the future, that God will continue pouring blessing on David and his family — today and tomorrow. Those words speak it so well: “Who am I.”

Certainly the apostle Paul understood that. In the first chapter of his first letter to Timothy, Paul confessed: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy to that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life — Paul, I Timothy 1:15b-16.* You can just feel Paul looking back on what his life was, and what his life became, and asking David’s question: “Who am I?”

You, Lord God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men. As David continues to revel in God’s grace, he rejoices in what that means: that the God of the whole universe, who creates and maintains simply by the power of his word, who created everything that was and everything that will be, the God of that power and majesty has out of his grace poured the blessing of his power and his designs on David, making him rightly feel like “the most exalted of men,” for he has been on the receiving end of God’s goodness and mercy. He is God’s chosen recipient of amazing blessing. How can that not make him feel like the greatest guy in the world?

You know your servant, Lord. Wow! Think about this (as David was): God knew David inside and out — as he knows us. He knew every mountaintop — as he knows us. He knew every valley — as he knows us. He knew every one of David’s capabilities — as he knows us. He knew every one of David’s disabilities — as he knows us. He knew every time David “done good” — as he knows us. And he knew every time David face-planted — as he knows us. Keep in mind, too, that this prayer of acknowledgment of all God has done is following David’s whole fall with Bathsheba, which involved adultery, conspiracy and murder. David’s own family, not to mention the entire nation of Israel, had suffered as a result. And in the face of all that history, which nobody knows better than God, he had still poured grace and power and blessing on David. All of this literally made David speechless — *“What more can David say?” — David, I Chronicles 17:18a.*

APPLICATION

Now, as we celebrate all these things we’ve talked about, one place that God led me to was Psalm 139. In that psalm, David is considering just the wonders of how God made him, and one of the things he says is: *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well — David, Psalm 139:14.* Just as with our human bodies, God has shown the same creative wonder in creating this church body as well. Consider these things (by a show of hands):

- 1) How many of you have never worshiped with us in this building before today?
- 2) How many of you have been members of the church of another denomination?
- 3) How many of you were born in Redwood Falls? How many of you were born at least 50 miles away? 100 miles away? 200 miles away? 500 miles away? 1,000 miles away or more?
- 4) How many of you have lived or spent time in foreign countries?
- 5) How many of you enjoy working with your hands (making things)? Working on cars?
- 6) How many of you enjoy arts and crafts?
- 7) How many of you enjoy playing musical instruments?

- 8) How many of you enjoy acting?
- 9) How many of you enjoy teaching?
- 10) How many of you enjoy planning things?
- 11) How many of you enjoy history?
- 12) How many of you enjoy reading?
- 13) How many of you enjoy exercising and working out?
- 14) How many of you enjoy taking walks?
- 15) How many of you enjoy spending time with animals?
- 16) How many of you enjoy playing or watching sports?
- 17) How many of you enjoy entertaining (hosting parties)?
- 18) How many of you enjoy learning or doing new things?
- 19) How many of you enjoy volunteering?

Did you see all the differences? Many of us, coming from different places, coming from different denominational backgrounds, all of us having a whole boatload of different interests and abilities — and God has seen fit to bring us all together, to knit us together, into a body that he can use for his purposes, for his name’s sake, for his gospel’s sake, here in Redwood Falls. He must have a really good reason that, for his purposes in Redwood Falls — the town, the county, the area — he wanted us to be his body in this place, at this time. And he does: There are people right around us who desperately need to hear the gospel, who need to know that God loves them, that God desires them to be his children, and that he has provided the means by which that can happen — surrender to his wonderful Son, Jesus Christ.

Many are the times that we have mentioned that Christianity is not a religion — it is a relationship. And we want people to come through our doors here because “Jesus” is spoken here. The Bible is preached and taught here. The truth is presented here — and God has brought us all together to do just that.

So, moving forward, what can we do to ensure that relationship and not religion are the emphasis of this place? A few things:

- 1) Prayer. Prayer is mentioned a ton here because it is so incredibly important; in fact, we will not survive without bathing ourselves and each other in prayer. If this is indeed God’s work being done here, then we need to remember that, as Jesus said so pointedly: ***“[A]part from me you can do nothing” — Jesus Christ, John 15:5b.*** As we look to the future, that needs to begin by seeking God in the present. We have two (2) corporate times of prayer that we all can take advantage of: 8:45 each Sunday morning in the Adult Ed room (just off the library), and then right here in the worship center roughly 10-15 minutes after the morning service. These are terrific opportunities to hold each other up, and to be completely honest and desperate in acknowledging our complete and total need of God to set our path and lead our future.
- 2) Bible study. The Bible is more than simply what we do here; it is our foundation, it is our one-and-only source of truth and doctrine. Our messages come from that; our worship music comes from that. More important, Bible study continually informs us of who God is, who Jesus is, what holy living looks like, and how to prioritize our lives in harmony with what the Bible teaches. Now we all know that there are many demands on our time. Many, many different things cry out to our heads and to our hearts for attention. But the priority of Bible study can be a pretty honest reflection of how important the things of God are compared to the things of the world. No one would think of going without food in our

lives; it is fundamental to keeping us alive. Bible study is no different. It is fundamental to keeping us and our church family spiritually alive.

- 3) Outreach. There is an old saying: “The fish ain’t gonna jump in the boat.” The meaning: We have to initiate reaching out to the unbelievers around us. That begins with relationship, with coming alongside others, meeting them wherever they are. That is another reason for spending time in the Bible — we can read how Jesus did that, how he came alongside people to get them acquainted with him, to get them talking, to begin to have conversations with people that would show them their need of the Savior. That is where discipleship starts — hanging out with people as we introduce them to our lives in Christ. From there can come invitations to Bible studies, invitations to our worship services, invitations to our kids’ ministries such as Sunday School and Bible Blast. The point is that we are here to make a difference, and that starts with allowing people to get close enough to us for them to learn what difference Jesus Christ has made in our lives. That also includes talking about Christ — getting used to talking about Jesus with the same comfort that you would talk about anything else near and dear to your heart. Telling people about your experience with Jesus Christ is critical to outreach. And you know what’s really cool? God will bless those efforts. God will bless with his leading, his words when we need them, his love when we need that. When we’re doing what God wants this body to be doing, the blessings will follow. Obedience to God’s purposes is where the joy for the body is found; that’s where the joy of God’s pleasure is found.
- 4) A couple of questions to continually keep front and center in your hearts: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life? How has your life in Christ changed — become different, become better — in 2019? How have you grown, how have you matured — OR — how have you maybe drifted away? Has God begun to make less difference in your life? Has career taken over? Have family issues taken over? Have financial concerns taken over? Right now, as we celebrate being “back home,” who is Jesus to us? Acquaintance, friend, “for emergencies only?” Or is he Savior, Lord, Master — life itself? We need to know — and, if we keep our personal relationship with Christ front and center in our individual lives, that will naturally move into a passionate concern for our brothers and sisters, for our body, regarding relationship with Christ as well.

Now, as we move forward, our church building is all ready for us. It’s been dried up, cleaned up and refurbished. It feels good to be back.

But why did it happen? This is God’s building, right? So why would he let it get flooded out? When you think about it, it was his water, too. But why make us have to hang out somewhere else for these last almost 21 weeks? What was the point, what might he have been wanting to teach us? I have a few ideas:

- 1) First, doing ministry has not one thing to do with a building. Why? Because the church is not a building — it is the body of Christ, his followers, his believers, his children. That’s what makes a church. Jesus is a foundation not of brick and mortar but of gifts and talents and passion for believers and nonbelievers alike. He is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” as the apostle Peter confessed, and it is that message that forms our foundation — and from that everything else flows. But there is no church outside of Jesus. Buildings that contain other messages, other ideas, other gospels, are simply buildings used by people, just like any other building. The only thing that makes us a church of Jesus Christ is our foundation in Jesus Christ. And look at the ministry from that foundation that

occurred: We continued to grow; people found us even while we were at the RACC. We came together in prayer there — a couple of times each Sunday. We continued Bible studies. We laughed, we tithed, we learned, we worshiped, we supported. Ministry continued because it wasn't based on a building. Our foundation is found wherever Jesus is found — and our church is found whenever and wherever his children meet in his name.

- 2) Second, it was a great object lesson in how quickly things can change. One minute I was returning to my office following my prayer time in the sanctuary. The next minute, I'm calling everyone I can think of because we got water flowing everywhere. While life can change incredibly quickly, literally in the twinkling of an eye, the life founded in the trust we can place in Jesus Christ will be ready for anything that comes our way. It's never about the details of the moment. Instead, it is always about, "God, what do you want me to understand in this moment? God, what are you trying to tell me or teach me in this moment? God, where might you be leading as a result of this moment?" [EXPLAIN THE "HAMMOCK."] If our lives are truly "laying in the hammock," resting in God while he holds the ends, no circumstance can ever leave us in trouble because God is leading; he's in charge, he's "holding the ends" of the hammock. But each circumstance can be another opportunity to learn God better and get to see him clearer and grow closer and stronger in him.
- 3) Third, similar to the second lesson, it was a great object lesson in how tomorrow can look so much different than today. The point? We have only been given today. What are we doing today to tell God's story? What are we doing today to share our testimony, to pray for a brother or sister, to come alongside a struggling sinner, to reach out with the gospel? A bunch of us have just completed a Bible study called "End Times," in which we looked at what the Bible has to say about the last days, when God eventually draws human history to a close. Many people feel that some of those events are imminent. But guess what? I have not been given the next five minutes of life. In length-of-life terms, I have been guaranteed nothing. For all I know, at least regarding my earthly life, I could be living in my "end times," in my "last days." Just because I have today (at least so far) doesn't mean I have tomorrow. James said: *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes — James 4:13-14.* It was Robin Williams in the 1989 movie, "The Dead Poets Society," whose character introduced us to a particular Latin phrase: *Carpe diem* — Seize the day! The idea? Make every moment count. For Christians, that idea should resonate with all of us. Who better than Christians to understand that every moment here can count for an eternal moment in heaven or hell. Seize the day — make every moment extraordinary by making every moment a glory to the Father and to his wonderful Son! Make every moment have something to do with his Kingdom. That's what we're here for.

CONCLUSION

And one final thing: We're back. A whole lot of people have worked a whole lot of hard to make this possible — just like a whole lot of people worked a whole lot of hard to get us into this building in the first place, back in August 2017. [EXPAND: BEING A CUSTODIAN, WHO OUR OPEN DOORS ARE FOR.] You know, one day this building is gonna be gone. If it's true that one day heaven and earth will pass away, I'm almost positive this building's gonna pass

away, too. But you know what can remain into eternity? What went on in this building, what was taught and preached in this building, what was modeled in this building. Who was glorified and worshiped in this building. That will last. This building is great — but it can never matter more than the reason the building exists — for the honor and glory of God, for the extension of his kingdom, that people will come to know the Lord. That's what's important here, because eternity will show what really mattered to the church family known as the Evangelical Free Church of Redwood Falls. Don't lose track of what matters, folks: His name is Jesus. He's what matters. He's all that matters. Let's pray!