

Presence

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[0 : 00] Please keep 2 Samuel 7 open in front of you. I'm going to pray for us. We're going to get stuck into the next installment in our series. Father God, we thank and praise you for bringing us here tonight.

We thank you for your word in which you reveal yourself to us. Lord, I ask that you would give us open ears and open hearts to hear you speak. Keep us from picking the bits that we want and ignoring the bits that are hard to hear.

But rather, God, may we hear your voice clearly. May you shape us and change us by your spirit as a result of what we look at tonight. Lord, may we grasp more fully the incredible blessing and privilege it is that you are with us tonight.

Amen. Something I've discovered as I work with people of all different ages is that universally humans have an ability. It may be better described as a disability, but it is the art of selective hearing.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are. It doesn't matter if you're a guy or a girl. We can all do this amazingly well when it suits us. I remember a few years ago in a previous ministry situation that I was in, I was chatting to a young guy who was having some relational difficulties with his girlfriend.

[1 : 13] And they had had a very serious chat about their relationship. And he came to me and he was chatting about how things were. And he relayed to me a little bit about how the conversation had gone.

And he'd said, you know, it was great. She told me that she still really cared about me. And she told me that, you know, she really respected me. And she told me that, you know, she really admired my faith.

And she told me that she just wanted to have a break to make sure that we could both be in a good place with God. And for him, he was sure that what she meant was, we'll just have a break for a little while, get ourselves back on track.

And because she still cares about me, we'll be together again soon. It wasn't until about a week and a half later when she had another boyfriend that it became apparent that he had misheard some of the phrasing in the conversation.

I'm not sure how you can take break up any other way, but he had managed to hear a short break until we get back together. But it's interesting that when we want to hear something, we often hear exactly what we want to hear.

[2 : 19] It reminds me when I was younger receiving school reports. There was kind of a refrain in all of my school reports growing up that when something like, Sam has great potential if he would apply himself.

And I would get these school reports. This was in the day when they gave them to you at school, foolishly trusting that you would hand them straight to your parents. And I would get them and I would open it up and I would walk away feeling fantastic, thinking, my teachers love me, look how much potential they think I have.

I'm going to take over the world with all this potential. But for some reason, my mum read my reports really differently and I could never understand why she was so frustrated with me each time I brought a report card home and I would have to deal with some sort of punishment when I'm sitting there thinking, am I being punished for my potential?

But apparently there was something else in there. And we often do this. Maybe you're one of those people who only hears the positive when someone's talking to you. They'll be letting you know something about maybe how you look and they'll go, you know, that shirt looks really good compared to your pants and you just hear my shirt looks good and you're floating for the rest of the

day.

But maybe you're at the other end and you just hear the negative. You could hear 15 compliments but then just that one thing about, what's that on your face? And that's all you're thinking about for the next couple of days.

[3 : 35] And it's interesting how we all do it in a whole bunch of different situations but we're never aware of it at the time. We pick out the thing that we want to hear and that's the thing that is ringing in our ears.

But the problem comes when we start to do that when we come to God. When we open the Bible and we read His commands and we read His promises and we read Him speaking to us and we just pick out the bits that we want to hear.

We pick out the things that are kind of easy to hear. We pick out the things that are encouraging or affirming and we take what we want but we miss the main point. We actually don't hear what it is that God is trying to teach us.

And in a series like this, we're trying to wade through the whole Bible. That is a pretty significant undertaking. We're trying to understand how the kingdom of God is unfolding, how God is establishing His kingdom.

And if we come into this sort of a series with our selective hearing, we're in great danger of actually misinterpreting the whole Bible.

[4 : 40] It's really important that we come and we are ready to hear whatever it is that God has to say as He gradually reveals His plan for building His kingdom. Because we began with Adam in the Garden of Eden and this amazing potential, the spectacular failure of Genesis 3 and then the rescue mission began.

We saw the promises to Abraham. There was a fairly frustrating pattern of sin through Genesis. Last week we got to Moses and God shows up spectacularly at Mount Sinai.

He gives His people the law and everything feels like it's moving in a good direction. But the problem that we're going to discover tonight is that Israel has been listening to God but just listening for the things that they want to hear.

So Israel has some pretty exciting promises to hold on to. God has promised Abraham blessing. God has promised Abraham land. God has promised Abraham he will be a great nation.

God has promised Abraham that he will be famous. And so there is this national pride and identity that they are all looking forward to. But the problem is that's all they're hearing.

[5 : 52] They're hearing we're going to get some land. At the moment we're wandering around but we are going to have our own country. God's going to kick people out so we get some space for our own. And it's not just going to be any land. It's going to be land flowing with milk and honey.

It's going to be fantastic. We're going to be a great nation. People are going to look up to us. People are going to fear us. God's going to give us stuff. We're going to get blessings. But can you see that all of a sudden Israel has become driven by what they can see in all the nations around them.

We want to have land better than that nation. We want to have an army more powerful than that nation. We want to be respected more than that nation. In fact they even wanted a king better than the other nations.

But they've misunderstood that the point of the kingdom of God the point of the covenant the point of the promises is for God to restore what was broken in Genesis chapter 3.

That's his whole agenda through all of scripture. That is what the kingdom is. The kingdom is the fix of the fall. In fact the promise in Genesis chapter 12 that God makes to Abraham in one sense is kind of obvious for us to look at.

[7 : 06] The blessing that he's promising them is himself. The blessing isn't that they will be a nation that they will be famous. Those are some things that God's going to do but the blessing that God is promising is he's going to give them himself.

That was what was there in Eden and that is God's agenda God's desire that he would be able to dwell with his people again. Eden was this amazing picture where God walked in the garden and spoke with Adam and Eve and his agenda is to restore that relationship where he will dwell with his people.

And so we come to 2 Samuel 7. We have skipped a significant part of the Old Testament and I encourage you to address it in your own time but in the interest of recapping for our sake let's just try and understand where we've come to.

So there's a fair bit of travelling going on. Last week Israel was at Mount Sinai in the desert. God was establishing them he gave them the law he told them you're headed to Canaan that's the land I'm giving you and then for the next fair while they wandered around kind of stuffing up. God would say do this they'd do something slightly different. God would say go to this place they'd go to a slightly different place. God would say it's ready they'd say no it's not and they would just keep spinning the wheels and never actually getting to the place where they wanted to but finally just before our passage tonight Israel has moved into the land there's been some pretty spectacular battles you know the walls of Jericho have fallen down and now God has cleared house.

[8 : 35] This land of Canaan is suddenly free from all the people who used to own it who used to live there and God has given it to his people Israel just like he promised. And there's a really interesting verse right at the beginning of chapter 7 have a look after the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him.

See things seem to be progressing really well considering all the rubbish that's been happening so far in our series now Israel is in the land that God promised.

Now they have rest from the enemies around them they have been at war for generations and it says here they have rest. God has been blessing them David is a king he's living in a palace they're not moving around in tents anymore everything seems to be advancing really fantastically and the most important bit the bit that started with our sermon last week with Moses is that God is with them.

God is present with his people. He's turned up and he is living in their community in the form of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark is basically a big box that they carried around which had the commandments in it and a few other bits and pieces and that was symbolic that God is living with his people and that box was put inside a tent which was an inner room inside another room inside another whole bunch of curtains in the tabernacle but that was where God lived in that box in that room inside those tents of the tabernacle.

So God was with them but he was limited. It's not like they could just wander up and have a chat whenever they wanted. The bits that we skipped over all of Leviticus is just all of the laws that God requires the sacrifices that he requires so that people could interact with him.

[10 : 20] I mean he's there so it's like we're moving in a good direction but surely this isn't what God promised. Surely this isn't the pinnacle. Surely this isn't what we've been looking forward to because even though God is there this is nothing like what it was like before the fall.

It's not even close. God is still limited to this box. These people aren't free to just come and approach him.

There is a priestly system between him and them. There is a sacrificial system between him and them. There is a limit to how much of God's presence they can actually take.

But the crazy thing is this is actually an act of grace on God's part. See back on Mount Sinai when God showed up he shook the mountain there was lightning there was fire there was thunder and the people realise maybe we shouldn't be getting too close to God just yet.

And they're right because they are not worthy of relating to God. The issue that comes out in Genesis 3 where they reject him is still an issue. And so if God just showed up and started living amongst them wandering around saying hello they would just get destroyed.

[11 : 39] The holiness of God the perfection of God would just obliterate the nation if God just turned up and suddenly moved in and acted like everything was fine. So God gives them this limited version of him living with them.

It's a huge blessing because not that long ago they were slaves in a country not their own and had no idea about God's plans for them and now he has shown up and he has arrived and he has said he's with them and he's made promises it feels like we're making significant progress for the kingdom doesn't it?

I mean if you put it through the grid that we've got of people place and rule they're God's people he's chosen them he's living sort of with them. They're in the promised land that is his place it's the place he sent them to and sure the rule thing's never quite perfect but even though we've advanced so far we are still so far away from the picture of the kingdom that we get even just from the promises to Abraham because the kingdom of God is about fixing the fall.

The kingdom of God is about restoring that relationship that God had and wants with his people. The kingdom of God is about God dwelling with his people and it's just not there yet.

Lots of other things are great lots of other things are fantastic but the whole point of the kingdom we're not there yet. It's kind of strange in this passage I find if you look down at verse one again of chapter seven it's almost like Israel is so much enjoying all the things that God's given them and then after it's all arrived David thinks hang on a sec we should get God to come and hang out with us.

[13:26] We've got this fantastic land now he's blessed us with this city we're in charge our enemies are gone and so it says almost like an afterthought in verse two he said to Nathan the prophet here I am living in a palace of cedar while God remains in a tent and Nathan replied to the king whatever you have in mind go ahead and do it for the Lord is with you.

It seems like God is completely happy with everything that's happening so even the prophet Nathan says David do what you want I'm pretty sure you're moving in a good direction I'm pretty sure God's going to be on board with anything that you say but it's like David got all the good stuff and then went hang on a sec God should probably be in here somewhere God should probably have some fancy house and you know the thing is we often do something similar in our own relationship with God we love to get things from God we love the idea of forgiveness sounds fantastic of eternal life we love the idea of comfort and refuge and strength when we're struggling and then we think hang on a sec God's got something to do with this maybe if I start hanging out with him for an hour on Sunday nights that would be appropriate maybe if I could set aside 15 minutes each morning to open the Bible and hang out with him that would make sense because he's given me all this stuff but it comes as this afterthought we think God's agenda is to give us stuff to look after us and Israel has fallen into the exact same trap they're feeling completely content we've got our nation we've got our king we've got our armies we've got our palace we've got peace everything's fantastic but there is still separation between God and his people the main problem is still the main problem they haven't made progress yet the issue in Genesis 1 to 3 is sin the issue is that people are not treating God the way he deserves the issue is that people are choosing to act like they're in charge instead of God being in charge and that is still the issue even though God has been gracious and generous to them and given them so much it's like they've just missed the point it's like they've forgotten what the issue is it's like they've been watching TV and seen a 40 hour famine ad and thought you know what I can do to help those kids I'm going to send over a few brand new Mercedes those are nice cars they'd be pretty happy with those

I think they're good cars they are they go fast they're shiny they smell nice but I don't know how much benefit it's going to be to a kid who's starving Israel has completely forgotten the problem the problem for them has become we need land the problem for them has become we need to be stronger than the people around us but the problem is still we are separated from God the problem is still we are unworthy of relating to God the way that he desires the problem is still that God would be well within his justice to destroy us at any moment they have been distracted by the good things that God has given them and forgotten that the whole agenda is that

God wants to be with them that God wants a relationship with them and I wonder if that ever happens to you if you enjoy the good things that God gives us and there are so many good things that God gives us but you let those things distract you from the main game God's main game is that he would know you and you would know him and you would relate as creator and creation the other interesting thing here in 2 Samuel 7 is that even though Israel has stopped looking to what God might do in the future God still has a future agenda he's not even done blessing them yet that's the crazy part I mean did you get it David comes up with this idea which sounds like not a bad idea even if it was an afterthought it sounds like a good idea to want to build a fancy temple for God and how does God respond he says not a bad idea I've got something better for you and he just pours out this incredible blessing have a look down there in chapter 7 again verse 8 now then tell my servant

[18:18] David this is what the Lord Almighty says I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel I have been with you wherever you have gone I have cut off all your enemies from before you now I will make your name great like the names of the greatest men of the earth and I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed wicked people will not oppress them anymore as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders of my people Israel I will also give you rest from all your enemies the Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you now just look carefully at what God has just said in verse 10 he says I

will provide a place for my people they're already living in the land that he promised to give them how does that work isn't this the place that we're looking forward to

God says no I've got something better for you Canaan's great Canaan's got milk and honey Canaan's fertile Canaan is fantastic but I have something better for you in verse 1 we're told that God has already given him rest from his enemies but then again he says I will give you rest from all your enemies he says it's not just about the nations around you there is at least one more enemy that needs to be defeated there is at least one more enemy that stands between my kingdom and you as a people and that is the enemy of death and so he begins to unpack how he will overcome this final enemy there's a promise here of a forever king a king that will sit on the throne forever and that can only happen if death is defeated it's not just a euphemism for somebody who's king for a really long time God is promising someone's going to be in charge forever

God is trying to lift their eyes and say listen the kingdom is not about a nation the kingdom is not about how many people you have how much money you have the kingdom is about a relationship between God and his people you know the reason that God establishes a kingdom is because a kingdom is the sphere in which we relate to God correctly see God establishes a king who rules on his behalf and we are established as subjects who submit who obey who worship it's not a relationship where the king oppresses or takes money from it's a relationship where the king leads and cares for and provides for his people and God's agenda here is that that right relationship of submission and obedience to God would be a forever reality for us the crazy thing is even though Israel has gone so far wrong here God is showing them even more grace this isn't a new plan this is the agenda from Genesis 3 when he promised he was going to crush the head of the serpent when he promised that he was going to bless Israel when he promised that he was going to bless all nations through Israel he was already planning to send a king and what he's doing here is in his grace just revealing a little bit more of his plan just showing them a little bit more of what's in store a little bit more of what he is doing and showing them that the issue that was there in the beginning is still there God and his people have a broken relationship and only when his kingdom arrives will that relationship be finally restored and enjoyed and we turn to a passage like Hebrews chapter 10 and we read this therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience having our bodies washed with pure water let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful

Israel never knew what it was to be confident to approach God they approached with fear and trepidation with sacrifice after sacrifice they approached through the priestly system but for us because of Jesus once for all sacrifice finally the barrier is removed finally the obstacle is dealt with finally the kingdom is established finally God can dwell with his people finally the kingdom is beginning to advance Steve challenged us earlier in the service that when we talk about church we don't mean this building sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that God's presence even since Jesus has died and risen and sits on the throne in heaven we think that God's presence exists in a place or in a time but that's not the promise of God's word that was never God's agenda that we would replace the old box that lived in a tent with a new box that's slightly fancier and has electricity in 1

[24 : 15] Corinthians Paul challenges the Corinthians don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you God has poured out his spirit God himself dwells in those who bear his name we no longer need go to a temple but we ourselves are the temple that means God is with us in any and every situation that means that there is no place to hide from him that means that there is no need to hide from him because we have confidence to draw near to him the kingdom is about a relationship a right relationship between God and his people God's agenda from the start has been that he could dwell with us that he could live with us without barrier and in Jesus that reality has begun we look forward to when it will be an even greater experience of that reality when God will finally remove all sin all opposition to him but even now

God is indwelling those who bear his name by his Holy Spirit right now in Jesus we have confidence to draw near to the God that struck fear into the hearts of Israel God's deep desire has always been to dwell with his people and now he does leave us with one last question knowing that God himself dwells in us how should that shape the way that we live knowing that it's not about when we come

to this building that we meet with God we do meet with God here as we open his word but hearing scripture say that God himself is indwelling us by the Holy Spirit how should that shape the people that we are how should that shape the relationships that we have

I want to suggest three things firstly it should lead to some form of reverence and awe in the way that we use our lives in the way that we use the breath and strength that God has provided we have something to learn from Israel here Israel at least understood that approaching God was something significant they at least understood that there was a cleansing that had to happen and yet for so many of us we take Jesus as an excuse to treat God like he's not that impressive anymore maybe you come to church and think it's time to be serious it's time to be good it's time to dress a certain way it's time to act a certain way but God is dwelling in you every minute of every day so at very least there should be some consistency a couple of years a couple of years

Barack Obama became potentially the most powerful man in the world his government hasn't done him any favours in the last little while and he might have dropped a couple of pegs but at some point he was probably the most powerful man in the world at this particular point in time and I remember watching not long after he'd been officially appointed and his daughters would still play with him in camera I'm sure that it was all set up and it was part of making us understand that he's a family man but it was interesting to watch the freedom they had to hug their dad the freedom they had to muck around with him to poke him to call him dad but can you imagine if one of his cabinets started treating him the same way it would be inappropriate wouldn't it God's presence with us the barrier that has been removed by Jesus the confidence we have to draw near the freedom and forgiveness that we know doesn't change who God is it doesn't change that he spoke the earth into motion it doesn't change that all creation is accountable to him for the life that it lives it doesn't change that he has promised that he will not let the guilty go unpunished and we would do well to refocus our eyes on the God who dwells in us every minute of every day how might that shape the way we treat one another how conscious might that make us to obey

God not just for an hour a week not just for a few minutes a day but in every minute of every second surely God's presence in our lives demands reverence it doesn't deny joy it doesn't deny the confidence we have but it does demand reverence secondly surely it demands thankfulness that the God of the universe has given us the best gift he could possibly give surely drives us to thank him not just in the form of a song that we sing at church on Sunday but every morning to wake up and think God gave me the best thing he had to give he gave me himself surely that drives us to fall on our knees daily almost speechless at the incredible love and generosity and mercy of God lastly surely

[30 : 50] God's presence in us among us demands that we treasure Jesus above all else we have the most valuable thing there is nothing better there is nothing worth holding on to more there is nothing worth desiring more surely God dwelling in us by his Holy Spirit demands that we value him above all else now I know I can't just tell you that he's the most valuable thing and then you just decide to value him that's not how it works I know I can't even convince you that he's the most valuable thing it's a fact I'm not apologizing for it it's a fact but there is a change in our heart that has to happen if we're going to grab hold of the best gift that God has offered us one of my favorite verses in all of scripture is Psalm 34 8 taste and see that the Lord is good if you don't know the goodness of a relationship with the

God who made you if you don't know the unmatched joy and contentment that comes with that alone please just taste and see ask God to remove the barrier ask God to give you a chance to experience his love and forgiveness to experience what it is to have a relationship with him and I guarantee if you taste you will see if you don't know Jesus yet it doesn't matter how many other things you have you're missing out and if you do know Jesus what it looks like to treasure him is to joyfully and willingly deny everything else to joyfully and willingly exclaim Jesus is more than enough to joyfully and willingly put everything else aside that you may seek and serve and love Jesus with everything that you've got let's pray father god we want to acknowledge that so often we get distracted by the things that you have given us out of your incredible goodness and generosity that so often we hear the stuff that we want to hear and we forget that the big issue is sin we forget that you paid the ultimate price so that we could know you we forget that your agenda is you want to dwell with your people you want people to know you to come into a relationship with you lord we forget the privilege that you have called us even though we are unworthy to have a relationship where we call you father where we call you savior god thank you for giving us Jesus even though we

don't deserve it thank you that in him we have confidence that you are good father change our hearts that we might know and desire your goodness above all else that they may taste and see that you are good amen so so ten fall some onde fell season some love our jumped in as instead