

The God Who Outgives

It was shortly after 9/11 that a few authors, who professed to be atheists, began writing popular books in defence of their atheism. Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris were known as the Four Horsemen, who went out and debated and wrote books and tried to convince the general public that religion is what leads people to fly planes into buildings, religion brings division and superstition and pain.

One of their favourite attacks on religion, and on Christianity in particular, was that the God of the Bible seemed to be a narcissist. That is, He was apparently obsessed with himself, and needed and demanded praise. He was, in the words of Richard Dawkins, “jealous and proud of it, megalomaniacal”. In fact, another atheist, C. S. Lewis, also stumbled over this idea. He said it made him think a man demanding assurance of his goodness or intelligence or greatness, or of a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who have never met him or heard of him.

In fact, it's not a bad objection, if you read the Bible in a shallow, superficial way. But if you do so, you will come away with the god of every religion: some kind of superhuman being, who craves our attention, and needs our service, and demands our obedience. And so you have the contradiction of all man-made religions: a god who is supposedly self-sufficient, and yet also seems to be needy. A god who apparently has all power, but is also very frustrated by our not meeting his needs. When you imagine a god like this, it is hard, if not impossible, to enjoy him, admire him, or love him, because he is really just one more obligation you must meet, one more demand on your time.

Fortunately, the good news is that the God of the Bible is nothing like this. The Bible does not describe God as needy, or frustrated. Instead, God is self-sufficient, and that means all that He needs to be infinitely happy is contained in Himself. He doesn't need anything. The Bible teaches a God who created the world out of the overflow of love, as a gift from Father to Son and Son to Father. And critically for us, the Bible teaches that God never stands in our debt, demanding we give, benefiting from our service. Instead, God always takes the place of the Giver, of the Source, of the Fount. Humans, whether they realise it or not, are always in the place of recipients, receiving strength, and blessing, and joy.

But realising it is the difference between mere man-made religion, and a life-giving relationship with the true God. In fact, it is the difference between what the Bible calls *works*, which is our actions to earn merit with God, and *grace*, which is God's action to give us merit. In the system of works, we still get to retain the credit, and God must stand with us on the platform as a co-recipient of glory. In the system of grace, God gets all the glory, and we get all the benefit.

One of the clearest places in all Scripture to see this is in the life of David in 2 Samuel 7. This chapter is one of the most important chapters in the Bible, because it is the moment when God makes one of His covenants in Scripture. God made a covenant with Abraham, which bound an ethnic group together. He then made a covenant with Israel through Moses which bound that ethnic group as a religious group: a holy nation to God. But it is in this chapter that we read of the vital Davidic covenant, which binds a royal house together.

As we study this, we will see that though David wanted to bless God and serve God, God turned the tables on David, and retained the position of ultimate Blessor. We'll see the God of the Bible never stands in man's debt. He is always overflowing with giving, with generosity, with kindness, for those with the humility to receive it.

And as you we do this, ask, does the God you believe in stand in your debt? Is He needy? Or is He the free, overflowing God of grace we'll see? Do you live in a relationship of grace, or in the barter

relationship of religion? As we study this account, look out for three major movements: David's Gift to God, God's Gift to David, and then David's Response to God.

I. David's Gift to God

2 Samuel 7:1 Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around, ² that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains." ³ Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that *is* in your heart, for the LORD *is* with you."

The scene in 2 Samuel 7 is one of kingly rest. David has conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital city. Hiram of Tyre had sent him masons and carpenters, and built him a home for a king, a house of delightful furnishings, stone carvings, elegantly shaped wood, a home fit for a king. He then brought the centre of Israel's worship – the Ark of the Covenant – into Jerusalem. For a time, there are no wars – no civil wars, and no enemies outside of Israel. David has time to think. And David's godly heart does not swell with pride at living in luxury. Instead, David begins to feel a pang of guilt.

We can imagine him thinking, "Here I am, surrounded by cedar wood and carvings and tapestries and beauty. I have a throne here with majesty, underneath these beautiful surroundings. But not far from here is the Throne of God, sitting outdoors under a tent. The Mercy Seat, where God's Shekinah glory would come and dwell between the two golden cherubim, is under animal skins while I sit in ease and luxury."

David feels this is a disparity, an unfitting imbalance. How can the king of Israel live in better circumstances than the king of the universe?

In this, David had exactly the opposite kind of heart to the people who returned from exile in Babylon hundreds of years later. After the Temple had been destroyed and they had spent 70 years in Babylon, they and their children were back in the land, with a royal decree to rebuild the Temple. But some opposition and some setbacks led some of the people to say, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built." (Hag. 1:2) The prophet Haggai went to them with God's response: "⁴ *Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?*" (Hag. 1:4)

Here were people who had taken care of themselves, built their own houses and happily lived in great circumstances, but could never see when it was time to commit time and money to building the Temple. Those hearts were carnal, self-serving, selfish, always putting self ahead of God's name.

But David was different. David has been blessed by God and feels that it should not be the case that he is so blessed and God's Ark is in relative poverty. He wants to build a Temple, an equivalent palace for God.

On top of that, he has a practical problem. There were thousands of Levites who were responsible for the Tabernacle. Twenty-four thousand to help the priests, four thousand as musicians and singers, four thousand as guards and watchmen. Many thousands had originally been responsible for carrying the items of the Tabernacle, but that was not needed anymore, as the Ark had a permanent home, so David had to find new positions of service for them. On a practical level, something had to be done for these thousands of Levites who were now congregating in Jerusalem. Also, there was the confusion that there were two tabernacles at this time, one up in Nob, run by Zadok the priest, and another run by Abiathar the priest. He needs to unify and centralise the priesthood and bring Israel's worship into a state that is decent and in order. A central Temple in

Jerusalem will solve all this.

So he calls for Nathan the prophet. This is the first time we read of Nathan; he will turn out to be one of the bravest prophets in Scripture, and one of the dearest friends David ever had. He and the prophet Gad seemed to have worked together all through David's reign.

David tells Nathan what he is feeling. And Nathan, being of a kindred spirit, also sees the good in what David desires. He advises him to begin his preparations.

It is an example to follow: to seek symmetry between what you seek for yourself, and what you seek for the honour of God. In the New Testament, Paul is going to make the sad remark ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:21)

Most treat the things of God as an afterthought to their own success, their own prosperity, their own health and life and wellbeing. It is the sign of maturity that you long to see God's people, God's church, God's reputation do as well or better than your own.

Well, we would think that when we dream big for God that God will simply bless our plans, and just sign at the bottom. But David has a lesson to learn about God which is all at once humbling and disappointing for David, but also overwhelmingly gracious and joy-giving. He has to learn that his God will never be the beneficiary of our goodness, never the mere recipient of our ideas. He will retain the position of infinitely self-sufficient God.

II. God's Gift to David

⁴ But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, ⁵ "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? ⁶ "For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. ⁷ "Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

Nathan had responded to David based upon a sense of normal, spiritual wisdom: David desires to honour God, and he should proceed. But Nathan didn't know what God's specific plans were both for the building of the Temple and for blessing David himself. And so, in the middle of the night, God speaks to Nathan directly, according to the office of prophet that he held.

This was the message to David: Are you going to build a house for Me? Is this a need that I have? Have I ever, in all the years I've dwelt amongst Israelites, complained about not having a house?

Now the answer to those questions is *no*. But we might misunderstand why God is saying this. He is not rebuking David as if David has done something wrong. In fact, many years later, Solomon is going to report something which God said to David later on. ¹⁸ "But the LORD said to my father David, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a temple for My name, you did well that it was in your heart.

¹⁹ 'Nevertheless you shall not build the temple, but your son who will come from your body, he shall build the temple for My name.' (1 Ki. 8:18-19)

You did well that it was in your heart. God says, I see and commend your intentions. I know what you mean, and it is a good thing. But it is not what I mean to do. God does bless our heartfelt intentions: ¹² For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have. (2 Cor. 8:12)

But the lesson that David does need to learn is that even when it looks like God's work is needy, God Himself is not needy. He tells Israel in Psalm 50: ¹² "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the

world *is* Mine, and all its fullness. (Ps. 50:12)

¹⁰ For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills.

¹¹ I know all the birds of the mountains, *And* the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine. (Ps. 50:10-11)

In other words, I own it all already. You are not giving me something I lack. Your sacrifices are not benefiting Me – they are for your sake.

The moment we slip into thinking that God is the beneficiary, the recipient of our goodness, we are failing to see grace.

So notice what is going to happen here. God is going to turn the tables completely. David has wanted to do something for God. But now God is going to tell David what He has done for David and Israel, and what He will still do for David and Israel. God is not going to be the recipient and David the giver; no, God will be the giver, and David the recipient.

⁸ "Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. ⁹ "And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who *are* on the earth.

God says, I chose you from poverty and peasantry, and I promoted you and appointed you. I have been the power behind your protection and your deliverance, and your victories. I have exalted you so that now David is a name known across the world. David didn't earn this, merit this, deserve this. This came from God's kindness. The only reason David has the means to even think about building a Temple is because God has blessed him.

Now God moves into the future:

¹⁰ "Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, ¹¹ "since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies.

I am going to bless Israel with stability. They will now dwell securely within their own borders without being oppressed or conquered. How? Well, it has already begun under David. A strong, powerful Israelite king will make sure that God's people are safe and secure, and can worship God peacefully. As Zacharias will one day say "Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, (Lk. 1:74)

And now God makes with David a covenant to bless him and his descendants.

Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. ¹² "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. ¹⁵ "But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." ¹⁷ According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

God is making a covenant with David. But notice, God does not require anything from David. This is not a conditional covenant, where David must fulfill certain obligations. This is entirely unconditional, or unilateral. God is going to do this for David.

Look at the promises of this covenant.

First, God is going to build David's house. It is a deliberate play on words. *House* is used in this

chapter to mean different things. First, David is in his house, his palace. Then, he wants to build God a house, the Temple. And here God says, I will build David's house, which means his royal dynasty, the line of David.

Second, God will give the privilege of building the Temple to one of David's sons who assumes the throne. God will minister directly to him as a father, and discipline him if he sins. But this son will not have his throne removed from him.

Now this son refers to Solomon, in one way. Solomon did build the Temple. Solomon did end up disciplined for his idolatry. But Solomon never lost his throne. But as so often happens in prophecy, the near fulfillment is telescoping into a far fulfillment. There is someone standing behind and beyond Solomon, who will also be a son of David. He is also going to build a house for God's name, and His throne will be established forever. And that leads to the third promise of the covenant.

Third, David's dynasty will last forever. The House of David is not going to come to end. There is some way that David's family will have eternal kingship.

Now to give you some examples, the current Queen of England is from the House of Windsor, which has had the throne for just over 110 years, before that it was the House of Hanover for almost 200 years, before that the House of Stuart for 100 years, before that the House of Tudor, The House of Lancaster, the House of Plantagenet. As you can tell, royal dynasties are far from eternal.

But God tells David that the House of David will last forever. The Davidic covenant promises David that from his descendants will be an eternal ruler, who will have an eternal throne. This descendant will have a unique relationship with God. This descendant will have a unique kingdom, an eternal kingdom.

That immediately reminds us of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 7, that the kingdoms of this earth will be replaced by a kingdom not made with human hands, ruled by the Son of Man sent by the Ancient of Days.

And so very early in biblical history, the Hebrews began understanding that the Davidic covenant was promising someone who was both human and God. Isaiah predicted that to us would be born a child and a son given and the government would be upon his shoulder, and his name would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, (Isa. 9:7)

Jer 33:15-21 `In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

In fact, the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea simply refer to this coming ruler as David, because it is understood that this is His surname, His lineage.

So by the time of the New Testament, the favourite title for Messiah is Son of David. But you can imagine some of their perplexity. God gave this covenant to David in around 1003 B.C. It reached its pinnacle of glory under Solomon, but then the kingdom splits into Judah and Israel, which is a diminishment of glory, then then ten northern tribes are taken into captivity in 722 B.C., even less glory, then the tribe of Judah is taken into captivity in 597 B.C., even less glory. Though the descendants of David are alive and well, they are not on a throne ruling. Babylon is ruling them. Then the Persians take over. Then the Greeks are ruling them. Then the Romans are ruling them. And though the Jews have some kings in those years, none are from David's line, and the Jews know that kings like Herod are really illegitimate. You can imagine that some of the Jews might have been pretty despondent over the Davidic covenant coming to pass. Everything seemed to be going away from that and not towards that.

So what happened to the Davidic covenant, and the promise to have a descendant of David ruling forever?

So look at the very first lines of the New Testament:

Matthew 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: (Matt. 1:1)

In Matthew, we find out that Jesus' adopted father Joseph is one of the direct descendants of David through Solomon. As his adopted son, Jesus has all the legal rights to the throne.

But then amazingly, we find out that Jesus has a second line to the throne in Luke 3.

²³ Now Jesus Himself began *His ministry* at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) *the* son of Joseph, *the son* of Heli, (Lk. 3:23)

Here Joseph is listed as the son of Heli, but this is almost certainly Mary's father, with Joseph as the son-in-law listed as the starting name. Tracing back here, we find Mary was a descendant of David through David's son Nathan. This means Jesus not only has the legal right through his adopted father Joseph, he has the physical right by being an actual descendant of David.

That's why two chapters earlier, when Gabriel appears to Mary, he references the Davidic covenant:

³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Lk. 1:30-33)

The ultimate Davidic ruler is Jesus the Messiah. But what not everyone understood is that the path to the throne would be through a cross. The path to exaltation would be through humiliation. Israel's greatest enemy was not her neighbours. It was her sin, her rebellion against God. The Son of David had to first conquer the enemies of sin, and death, and Satan before dealing with the relatively paltry enemies of political foes. But He did that, and rose and ascended to the right hand of God. And both Old and New Testament affirm that He will return, and return to the very place where this covenant was made, and there rule a final and eternal kingdom, beginning with 1000 years, and then extending into eternity.

Now David couldn't see all this, but he did know that it would be his descendant who would be far more than merely a man. David wrote Psalm 110 which says, **Psalm 110:1** <A Psalm of David.> The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." (Ps. 110:1)

But now, how should David respond to this? God has turned down David's offer, and has replaced it with an offer of His own.

David could be offended. He could get huffy, and say, "Well apparently my ideas are not good enough for God."

He could become depressed and crestfallen that he doesn't get to build the Temple. He could become sulky and sullen and self-pitying, and say, "It's not fair. I fought the battles! I endured the harshness, and my son will get to build the Temple!"

He could become angry, like Cain, that his offering is not what God is going to accept and use.

But all these responses would be human pride. They are the response of a human who hears, God is not going to accept your good works. He is not going to let you decide what is good enough for Him. God is going to turn down your offer of being nice and good and going to church. But, if you'll come empty-handed and open-hearted God will give you what you couldn't earn. He will give you that goodness you tried to earn. He will give you an inheritance you didn't deserve. He will

give, if you will humble yourself, forsake your own works and receive. Let Him be the Giver, and you be the recipient. Many human hearts respond to that with, "What am I, a charity-case? I think I'm pretty good, thank you very much. I don't need rescue or help. I'm happy to work with God, but I'm not some helpless case."

What would have happened had David responded that way? Look instead at how David responded. We'll just read it without comment.

III. David's Gratitude to God

¹⁸ Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: "Who *am* I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? ¹⁹ "And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. *Is* this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?

²⁰ "Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord GOD, know Your servant. ²¹ "For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know *them*.

²² "Therefore You are great, O LORD GOD. For *there is* none like You, nor *is there any* God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ²³ "And who *is* like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name-- and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land-- before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, the nations, and their gods?

²⁴ "For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, LORD, have become their God. ²⁵ "Now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish *it* forever and do as You have said. ²⁶ "So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, 'The LORD of hosts *is* the God over Israel.' And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. ²⁷ "For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed *this* to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. ²⁸ "And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant.

²⁹ "Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken *it*, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever." (2 Sam. 7:1-8:1)

What was David's answer? In two words, "I accept". Like the words at the marriage covenant: "I do".

This is the joy that awaits you, when you come to God, as Jesus said, with the simplicity of a little child. You say, you are the Giver, and always the source. Whatever I give to you is from you. I am like someone putting his cup into the fountain and then pouring it back into the fountain as a token of how full and strong the fountain is. I am not meeting your needs, O God, you are ever meeting mine, for your glory.

You see, when you understand that this is the biblical God, and the biblical gospel, you realise that loving God, worshipping God, serving God is meeting our needs for God's glory. God's legitimate question to us after we have given, or served, or worshipped is this: "Did you enjoy that?" And if we answer "no", the reply would be, "Then you are doing it wrong."

In the biblical economy: God gets all the credit, and you get all the benefit.

Today, God's call to you to be saved, to be converted is not a call to meet His needs. It is a call out of love for you. You will get the benefit. But He will retain to Himself all the honour of being a merciful saving God.

Christian, God's call for you to be holy, to serve Him, to live a Christlike life is not a call to meet His needs. It is a call out of love for you. You will get the benefit of living a joyful, holy, useful life. But He will retain to Himself all the credit of shaping sons and daughter out of rebels.

Contrary to the ignorance of Richard Dawkins, our God is no needy narcissist. He is the God who outgives His givers. Come to Him. Be free of petty religion and small view of Him. Live in the freedom of the God of grace.