

Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel...with a Forever House

2 Samuel 7:8-16 (NIV)

⁸ "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰ 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 ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over 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: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.' "

Christmas is coming, and people are thinking of being home for the holidays. But what is home? Is it where you grew up because your parents live there or because you never moved more than 20 minutes from home? Is home where you are now because you have kids of your own or, as an empty nester, it's expected that your kids and their families come to your house and that makes it home? Is home where the heart is, meaning that it's not so much about a specific geographical location but more about the people you're around, that whenever and wherever you are with your loved ones – physically or virtually – that's home? Maybe home is really a mixture of all these things, and we can adjust our understanding of where home is depending on the context.

King David was finally settled in at home. Although he had grown up in Bethlehem, his home was not with his brothers or with his father Jesse anymore. The prophet Samuel had anointed him to be king over Israel in place of King Saul. After years of evading Saul's murderous attempts and then more years of defeating foreign enemies, David was now "settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him." (2 Samuel 7:1) He was home. And so he thinks it's time for the LORD to have a home as well, a house of cedar instead of that make-shift tent that was currently housing the ark of the covenant, a permanent place to set down roots. He told Nathan the prophet this, and Nathan told David that he should do whatever he has in mind for God.

That night, though, the LORD came to Nathan and gave him a message to convey to David. He started out by basically saying, "Have I ever asked any Israelites since the days of the Exodus from Egypt to build me a permanent house of cedar? No. I've made my home with my people, traveling with them from place to place. That's where my heart is. So, let me tell you what's going to happen next."

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel." (verse 8) I made you a home here by appointing you as king. I placed you here, not your building committee. "I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you." (verse 9a) Your victories and conquests did not happen by your might and your strength. I struck them down. I defeated all of them for you – from Goliath to Saul. "Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth." (verse 9b) You will have a great legacy, but not because of what your military mind or royal decrees accomplish. I will do something for you that will make your name great so that billions of people will know it. "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." (verse 10a) It won't be your defenses, your walls, your fortifications that will make your name great and give your people peace. I am going to make a house, a home, for my people Israel, the ones I formed and fashioned and fought for and defended. I will be their Rock to hold them strong. They will have a home with me, and then they will finally know peace.

We can use some of that peace that comes from having a home because our world has been disturbed, which in turn has disturbed our homes. The conversations are happening right now, "Will you be home for Christmas?" With travel restrictions and quarantines required when going from state to state, can you get home? Do you even want to be in an airport or traveling on the road using random public locations? We're disturbed even thinking about being around other people, including our family members because we're constantly reminded of microscopic dangers that exist that we don't know if we are spreading or not. Our homes have been further disturbed because we have to wear a mask pretty much every where we go from grocery stores to work to restaurants to church. Our homes are disturbed regardless of COVID because people are still getting sick, ending up in ICUs, still dying. This Christmas, our homes are going to be disturbed further because they're a little emptier, one less gift to give or to unwrap, one less Facetime or Zoom call. Our homes are disturbed. We long to be planted and have peace, to have a home like what the LORD promised David.

So, how will this peace be established for David and the Israelites, God's people, so that our homes will no longer be disturbed? "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (verses 12-16)

This house, this home, this kingdom, this belonging with God that will be established forever is coming with Emmanuel. Emmanuel, God with us, drew up the blueprints of a forever home for us to have with him and followed it through on every single detail, cutting no corners, sparing no expense to himself – to be born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. And so he came through Mary and Joseph – descendants of David. With his might and his power, Emmanuel built a home for us all. He carried out the building plan, purchased all the material, constructed it all himself with his own labor as he lived that perfect life under the law and then he crushed the devil with his sacrificial death on the cross. Although he never did wrong, he carried on himself the entire debt of all our sins; he was punished for them fully. By doing so, he removed all our sin so that we would have a home with God without any hindrance, without any debt hanging over our heads needed to be repaid in order to live with him. By doing all this, he shows us that his heart is with us and that makes us home with him, a family firmly planted with him. Because he has suffered for our sins and paid that debt for us, God's love will never be taken away from us. Home is where Christ and his heart is. He is Emmanuel, God with us. And so we are at home with him.

Emmanuel is all about what he does for us to give us the peace of a forever home instead of leaving the burden on us to build. Every descendant of David has lived and died and their rule has ceased – except for one, the one called the Son of God. Emmanuel died but only to rise again. Now he lives and rules forever with nothing that can stop him from keeping his throne established forever.

Emmanuel came the first time to make us a home with God. When he comes again, we will then finally experience the forever home with the LORD that he has prepared for us. All the things that disturb our homes this Christmas or at any time, really, will be no more. We will no longer be disturbed having to wear masks everywhere we go, restricted from our normal social interactions, living in never-ending concern over this microscopic disease. Travel restrictions and quarantines will never happen again. There will be no more ICU beds filling up, no ICU beds period because there will be no more disease or sickness. There will be no more separation or isolation. There will be no more death. When Emmanuel returns, we will get to live with him forever in that home of heaven never to be disturbed again.

To David, God promised a forever home, that God would plant him, secure him, and live with him. It was all based on what he would do for David. God promised and delivered. David's offspring, Jesus, the Emmanuel, made that forever home. In so doing, he has also made us a home with him. Come, oh, Come, Emmanuel to bring us safely to that forever home never to be disturbed again. Amen.