

Nothing ever succeeded. Nothing he did lasted. He thought being a riverboat man was his calling, until the money ran dry. He thought being a blacksmith and owning a store would be a worthy life passion, until he went bankrupt. He thought being a dutiful politician would be his stamp of service, until he lost again, and again, and again. The man who originated American Thanksgiving often found himself in his early life questioning God's providence, confused as to why everything he prayed for and longed to accomplish received a swift and soundless "no." Maybe you and Abraham Lincoln have more in common than the five dollar bill in your pocket. You've asked God time and again for a want or need and your request seems to fall on deaf divine ears. Thanksgiving is designed for rejoicing over answered prayers, yet how often we find ourselves pondering those "no-answered" prayers. What does it mean to be "Thankful for No?"

King David experienced this question firsthand. After years of stress' white-knuckle grip on him, David could let out a fearless breath. Ever since he was called out of the pasture, and anointed with oil, David knew little of security. Caves were his home more than his house. His former mentor had become his most hate-filled enemy. His tears had stained his armor as he heard the news of his best friend's death in the line of duty. His nation endured a civil war. Division and murder were all around him. But there was a spark in this darkness. The Lord had delivered him. The Lord had never abandoned him. Today, we find David finally established on the throne of all Israel. He reflects on God's diligent, personal protection and care. He dances before the Lord because he can't contain his joy. This joy culminates into a prayer, a request, "God, you have done everything for me, let me build you a temple! A worthy place for worship!" How could God say no? Could there be a more godly request!

You know how God answers? That very same day, David asks to do this, God says...no. In fact, he not only says "no," he completely turns the tables on David. He says, "**I myself will make a house for you.**" God will build a house, a royal line, for David! Not to sound like a toll-free commercial, but just wait there's more! The Lord details the most profound gift that this house will produce: the Messiah. The one whose throne God would "**establish...forever.**" It is this divine answer that is swirling in David's heart and mind as we approach him tonight in our text, "**sitting in the Lord's presence.**" How would David respond? This temple likely was David's most passionate ambition. This temple was perhaps the only way he thought he could possibly show God just how thankful he was! Would he feel angry or disappointed that God turned down his request and then "one-upped" him? How would you have felt?

When God has said "no" to me, thankfulness is often the furthest attitude from my heart. Is this the case for you too? Thankful for "no" when a grandfather dies after battling cancer, after all my prayers? Thankfulness when God doesn't immediately remove the constant struggle with addiction and temptation? Gratitude when we don't get that job promotion or raise that would have really helped the family? Thanksgiving when our prayers for my family to heal are left seemingly like an echo with no response? When God says "no," how the devil and our sinful flesh set their eyes on eroding the trust and value we place in the Lord. They desire to alter our perception so that we lash out at God or become disappointed in how he guides our lives. Our enemies don't want us to be thankful for "no," but rather critical of God and the love we need from Him. Is this how David would respond to his "no-answered" prayer?

He responds with a simple question, **“Who am I?”** He doesn’t quip back to God, *“Who do you think you are?!”* God’s “no” led him to self-analyze. Who am I that you would even listen to my request, Lord? **“What is my family, that you have brought me this far?”** I know what I’ve done, where I’ve been, I didn’t deserve any of your concern and yet you cared for me! This care David received was entirely selfless on the Lord’s part, solely for his well-being. As David recounted the past, whatever feelings of animosity he had toward his Lord were quickly dispersed. As he walked through his memories, the whole picture once so clouded, became stunningly clear. God knew what he was doing. He could be thankful for “no.” Ask yourself the same question David did, “Who am I?”

When you and I start to feel Satan’s tug toward forming doubts of God’s handling of our lives, we would be wise to self-analyze in the way David did. When we turn the pages of our past, a tapestry starts to be weaved. When you think back on those distant “no-answered” prayers, you realize something. If God would’ve said yes to this, then this amazing thing wouldn’t have happened! And if God would have granted this request, then she, or he would have never been a part of my life! If God listened to me, I wouldn’t have the relationship I have with Him now. All of sudden, connections are made, and you sit before the Lord like David in awe! We can be thankful for “no” because we see how God always works for our good! Even when we think there is no better option than what we are praying for, God knows and will do what is best for you, even at the risk of our frustration with him! Solely, from his selfless love, he brings us near to him. Who am I that God would love me! Who am I that he would look out for me! It’s when we discover this truth from our past, that we can look boldly into the future.

David, after this reflection, looks ahead and with confidence says, **“And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant!”** The Lord had not only guided him in love during his past, but now David knew that God would continue to guide his family, culminating in the Messiah being his distant grandson!

Now I could be wrong, but I have a pretty solid hunch that God has never personally appeared to any of us and laid out for us such a grand plan for our future...except, such a hunch would be wrong. This very Word is that personal appearance. We can pray with boldness and we can pray doubt-free “thy will be done” because we know our future. We know our future, because we know that messianic future David longed for. The God-man who tells us point-blank **“Your sins are forgiven”** as we heard in our gospel reading. All those sins of anger against God when he says “no” are gone forever! It is this forgiving Savior who is the culmination of the future! The One we look to with a “Last-day” perspective as we await his return with joy! We can thank the Lord for things in our lives that haven’t even happened yet! Thanksgiving not just for the past and present, but the future! The Word tells us that God has our future in his hands. Even when things do not seem like they could ever work out, we know our Savior knows all things. When through faith, the Holy Spirit leads us to realize the boundless goodness of our God, we see his strength in tragedy, and we know peace in uncertainty. It is this realization that directs the new person within us to cry aloud with David, “What more can I say?”

As David uncovers more and more of the implications of God’s blessings for him, he suddenly shifts into the 3rd person, **“What more can David say to you?”** He thinks beyond himself for a minute as

he looks across every aspect of who he is as a person. He sees a person who's made countless mistakes, and he is overwhelmed. Why? **"For you (God) know your servant."** God knew every part of David, even the parts he wished he never would have found out about. I can't help but think of the woman in our Gospel reading. Jesus knew everything that woman did, yet his forgiveness was never in doubt for her. What more can be said? What more can you and I say?

The Lord knows you more deeply than you will ever know yourself. No amount of introspection can even approach God's knowledge of you. As downright scary as it is that you and I can hide nothing from God, there is something even scarier. How could God love me even after all I've done? Let David answer that question for you.

Look at what he realizes next, **"For the sake of your word and according to your will (literally "your heart"), you have done this great thing and made it known to you servant."** God had a scary love for David. He has that same scary love for you and me. Scary not for us, but for all the powers who try to divide us from God. We can be thankful for "no" because God's heart and his Word make known to us our Father's watchful eye. When you find yourself asking, "Why would God bring me to faith? Why would he give me all these gifts? The answer is simple, yet it's so hard for us to grasp. It's his love. His love that may seem hidden for a time, but the Word always makes that love known to you and me. How can this not lead us to shouts of thanksgiving!

How can we not burst our own ear drums by exclaiming with David, **"How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears!"** That very Word you have heard with your own ears cannot help but want to hear more! That new identity in Christ each of you have in faith instinctively joins with the apostle Paul, **"Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!"** We rejoice in the greatness of God! And you know what greatness our Lord longs for us to focus on? Out of all the almighty aspects of our God, you know which one he emphasizes the most? His love for you. His love is where he wants his greatness to be seen. He is your God. A God you can trust even when he says "no." A God whose trustworthiness and love gives you boldness to approach him often and never fear what life throws your way.

I wonder if this was a lesson Jesus, the master teacher, taught Abraham Lincoln. In late October 1863, following the bloody battles of Gettysburg and Chickamauga, the war and its many victims weighed on the President's mind. All his prayers for this bloodshed to end seemed like a "no." It would be expected that God would be left in the dust, not to be trusted. But not for Abe, he said, "Amid the greatest difficulties of my Administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance on God, knowing that all would go well, and that He would decide for the right." Place your reliance on your saving Lord. Be thankful for "no." Jesus knows you. What more can I say? Amen.