

1. The Life of David – An Introduction (Matthew 1:1-16)

Today we start a new sermon series – The Life of David. For those of us who were at DMPC pre-covid you may remember that we did a sermon series on the Life of Samuel. Samuel and David are key characters in the Old Testament.

It's worth repeating some of what I said in the introduction to the Life of Samuel in regard to the Old Testament and context.

1. The Old Testament

'Going Old Testament' in modern, common parlance means something like this... getting angry, getting even and brutally wiping the floor with a rival. In the urban dictionary, synonyms for 'going Old Testament' are....*giving someone a whooping, a kicking, a beat down*. Maybe you've heard the phrase being used in sport or political debate? I have.

Over the centuries the church has been troubled by aspects of the Old Testament because there are troubling parts that are hard to know what to do with. One response is to cut/air brush them out of the Christian Canon. In Church History, 2nd Century Marcion of Sinope stands out. He like many who have come after him suggest that the Hebrew Bible should be rejected because (the thinking goes), *the 'wrathful, exclusive' God of the Old Testament is not that same as the 'all-loving, all-forgiving, inclusive' God of the New Testament*.

However, there is a problem with that. For Jesus the Old Testament scriptures *were* the scriptures. This might be obvious but it's worth saying...Jesus does not quote from the New Testament. When Jesus says **you have heard it said...**, he is quoting from the Old Testament, from the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number, Deuteronomy, from the historical narratives, from the books of law, the books of wisdom, the Psalms and the Prophets.

And in Matthew chapter 5 verse 17 Jesus is recorded making this incredible claim...**17 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

For us to take in the enlivening goodness of God we need both the Old and New Testament. Both rely on the other so that God's enlivening goodness, holiness and faithfulness is fully revealed and we see what Jesus is actually the fulfilment of!

When Jesus says *I am the bread of life, I am the water of life*, He's not talking about table service at restaurant and offering a nice accompaniment. He is talking about life and death and how he saved His people from starvation and dehydration in desert after the historical event of the Exodus from Egypt. He is talking about how he can lead us out of death into new life now!

Without the Old Testament the richness, colour, depth, and multidimensional aspects of the Gospel are diminished, the divine story is redacted, and God is sanitised. Without the Old Testament it is much easier to make god in my image and for him to fit in with me and my tribes' cultural values and preferences and ways and the present spirit of the age.

The God of the Old Testament chooses, works in and through and covenants with particular people (e.g. Abraham, Moses, David). He begins with a particular people group. God does so not because they are particularly good or righteous but because He is. In the book of Acts, Jesus is revealed to be the God whose arms open wide to people of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. There is an unfolding element to God's salvation plan. We don't just immediately arrive at Jesus.

2. In David's day

When it comes to conversation and life, context is so important. The same goes for reading the Bible. As we come to the Bible and the Old Testament it's important that we recognise that 3000 years and 3000 miles separate us from David. We are not products of the Late Bronze age. We do not live hand to mouth, dependent on the food we grow, with our wellbeing tied to the harvest. We do not live within a tribal system where neighbouring clans attack, invade, raid, loot, plunder and pillage and there are to-the-death blood feuds. In David's day there was no national governance or structures or shared values with neighbouring communities or nations. Not only was there no U.N., there was no national health service or welfare system. Life was much shorter and harder and much more about survival and survival of the fittest. Thinking about the Viking raids in the 8th to 11th Century or the Scottish Clan skirmishes, battles and massacres of the 13th – 18th century may help us to understand more what life was like in David's day?

We come to the Life of David and the Old and New Testament with the views, values and assumptions of those who inhabit the W.E.I.R.D.E.R. world. By W.E.I.R.D.E.R. I mean...W - western, E - educated, I - industrialised, R - rich, D - democratic, E - Ex-Christian (which is not the same as ex-Christ), R – romantic.

Those of us who inhabit the WEIRDER world are shocked and react and are able to critique the brutality of the Old Testament because the air we currently breathe and the water we have swum in for centuries is saturated with Judeo-Christian values and Jesus' teaching. For example, that each person has inherent dignity and value and worth (because they are made in the image of God) is a unique world view. This view is not 'self-evident' nor is it universally held around the world. The same goes for ideas and ideals that the meek are the ones who inherit the earth, peace makers are blessed and the weak shouldn't be trampled on.

If you are interested in a deeper dive in this, Glen Scrivener's book *The Air We Breathe* is a really good read. Here's a quote...*In this fascinating book, Glen Scrivener takes readers on a journey to discover how the teachings of Jesus not only turned the ancient world upside down, but continue to underpin the way we think of life, worth, and meaning. Far from being a relic from the past, the distinctive ideas of Christianity, such as freedom, kindness, progress and equality, are a crucial part of the air that we breathe. As author Glen Scrivener says in his introduction: "The extraordinary impact of Christianity is seen in the fact that we don't notice it".* Historian and Podcaster of the *Rest is History* Tom Holland in his excellent book *Dominion* says something similar. Interestingly, Tom Holland does not profess to be a Christian.

Many people in the rest of the world are not shocked in the same way as we are when they read the Old Testament, because...subsistence farming, a hand to mouth existence, raiding, pillaging, warring factions, a lack of social cohesion and a lack of national well-being structures, systems and institutions and unjust governance is their lived experience.

There are two books of Samuel telling one continuous story in our Bible. The stories when first written, were written on scrolls. These scrolls needed to be of a certain size and shape that they could be held, and the text needed to be big enough to read in public. It seems that it is for this reason that the story was split between two scrolls giving us 1st Samuel and 2nd Samuel.

Samuel 1 and 2 tracks the story of God's people after the Exodus from Egypt, after the wanderings in the wilderness and after the law is given at Mount Sinai and covenant promises to God were made.

Samuel finds God's people, the Israelites, in the Promised Land failing spectacularly in keeping the covenant promises and following in God's ways. As the book of Judges shows, the people descend into a spiral of disobedience and moral failure, with generation after generation and judge after judge getting worse and worse.

At no point does God condone any of the gross moral failure, in fact God grants his people their wish and allows them to experience, for a season, what life without Him is like. In doing so we find a God who neither condones sin nor turns his back on His people or His promises. Judges is a grim book that leaves the nation of Israel and the reader at the bottom of a pit of despair looking up for a way out the depths and depravity and darkness. The book of Judges leaves us longing for the light of God and looking for a new line of godly leaders.

It's an incredible cliff hanger. *Bum bum bum!* What will God do? How will he respond? 1st and 2nd Samuel details ancient Israel's remarkable transformation.

Professor of the Old Testament Walter Brueggemann writes, *Judges witnesses to an amorphous and unstable tribal mode of life, easily open to religious idolatry, syncretism [that's when all kinds of religions are mixed together and become a mishmash religion] , and political and military barbarism. By contrast 1 Kings attests to a centralised political power that pursued an economic monopoly and claimed theological legitimacy for the new institution of monarchy. The monarchy, which centralised power and claimed divine legitimacy fostered oppressive social relations. The books of Samuel occupy the transition point between these two social and political systems. (p1)*

The Bible, the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel takes political, economic, social and technological pressures seriously as well as spiritual ones. What we find as we read is that the Bible critiques national social and political systems, tribal and familial dynamics as well as the individual human heart.

There were all kinds of dynamics at play in Samuel's day as there are in our day.

There are pressures from within the nation of Israel from tribal tensions and friction. There are pressures and conflicts from without in the form of the Philistines. But that is not all that is going. In the midst of powerful forces and personalities and complex interactions there is...God and He is at work. Professor Brueggemann helpfully warns of two temptations and errors when reading the historical narratives of the Old Testament.

The first temptation is for the scholarly community to read the story in a rational/reductionist way. Brueggemann explains, *“Our ‘Enlightenment’ modes of interpretation tend to disregard and explain away the direct or hidden governance of God in the transition. We have a penchant to reduce the transformation to political-technological-economic-factor. The narrative sets itself to reject such rational reductionism...if we try to reconstruct the transformation of Israel without serious reference to God. To God’s words, deeds and purposes we will have constructed...[a story that is not Israel’s story] (First and Second Samuel, p3).*

The second temptation and error is for the religious community to read the story in an excessively pious way that is... *“to overlook the tension of factions, the reality of power, the seduction of sex, the temptation to alliances, the ignobility of motivations, and the reliance on brutality. In our desire to make this story idyllic or edifying we may not notice the ‘realism’ that violates our pious propensity... [These]...are there in the text. They are candidly acknowledged...This is indeed unlaundered history. (p. 32)*

This is really important.

It is possible to read 1 and 2 Samuel in such a way that...

- ...idolises David and Israel
- ...turns a blind eye to their misdemeanours
- ...justifies their despicable actions
- ...depicts David and Israel as faultless instruments carrying out God’s good purposes
- ...finds fault only in those Philistines, that evil, those enemies out there

But what we find as we read the books of Samuel is, and this is worth saying again, the Bible critiques not just...

- ...their social and political systems but ours,
- ...their destructive tribalism but ours
- ...their dysfunctional family dynamics but ours
- ...what’s wrong in their hearts but what’s wrong in ours.

This brings us back to...

3. The Genealogy in Matthew.

1 This is the genealogy^[a] of Jesus the Messiah^[b] the son of David, the son of Abraham:

I'm not going to read all of the Genealogy again. I want to make 3 points from...

- i) v1&v17
- ii) v5-6
- iii) v16 & 17

i) **v1 This is the genealogy^[a] of Jesus the Messiah^[b] the son of David, the son of Abraham:**

Gospel writer Matthew, also known as Levi (the former tax collector) who Jesus called to be a disciple, connects Jesus with David and Abraham. In doing so Matthew is saying...*all that has gone before...all that God has revealed...all that God has said and promised...his choosing...his calling...his covenanting...his rescuing...everything has been building up to and comes together in the person of Jesus. He is the greater Abraham, he is the Greater Moses, he is the greater David, he is the true, supreme, ultimate and divine prophet, priest and king.*

Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:20 says affirms this saying...**In Christ, all of God's promises find their yes and amen.** Quick check! A) some promises? B) Most promises or c) All promises. The answer is all! This is well worth pondering.

When Matthew writes ¹⁷ **Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.** he is saying *every age and stage is about Jesus and him being the ultimate chosen and anointed rescuer. God's unfolding salvation plan comes in the person of Jesus so that you can be enfolded in Him. Even in exile, even when things are looking their worst God is not absent, he is somehow making a way.*

- ii) v5-6 ⁵ **Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,**

When it comes to sharing our own stories or our family story, we tend to be very selective. When being asked about our life, there will be parts we are desperate to get in and elements we are desperate don't come out. This is because we are bothered about our social standing. It's also because, central to humanity is the desire to be valued and accepted and the fear of being rubbished, shunned and shamed. That's why we so often we run, hide and pretend or deny, lie and cover-up what we've done or what has been done to us.

That's why a friend who *truly* knows us and still truly loves us is priceless. A friend who has experienced us at our best and worst and still loves us and is passionately committed to us is life giving. If that's true on a human level, how much more when it comes to God.

In Matthew's Jesus' genealogy we get the warts and all family story, not just the presentable, glossy, Christmas letter, Facebook, snapchat, sook in your cheeks, pouty face, highlights version.

Jesus' family tree is littered with people who are famous and infamous, glorious and inglorious. Their best of the best and worst of the worst stories and choices are not airbrushed out because they are real humans rooted in the real world. In verses 5-6 we read that Jesus' family includes...Rahab, Ruth and Uriah's wife.

Before we get to these women and their stories, it's worth pointing out that women being so prominent in an ancient genealogy is remarkable. Part of the reason we might miss this is because male and female equality is now the air we breathe, as it was in the beginning when both male and female were made in the image of God. Back to Rahab, Ruth and Uriah's wife! Who were they, what's their story?

Rahab was a pagan, Canaanite, Jericho dwelling prostitute. You can read about her in the book of Joshua chapters 2 & 6. Part of Rahab's story is that she hides two of God's people who are spying out the land. It's most likely that Rahab lives in a tavern/brothel that's part of the armed fortification and barracks that is Jericho. When we think of Jericho I think it's more accurate thinking of it as a military base rather than a modern day Edinburgh or Glasgow.

In Jesus' genealogy Rahab gets a shout out! She's also praised by the writer of Hebrews who describes her as a hero of the faith (Hebrews 11:31) and who James (Jesus' half-brother) calls righteous! (James 2:25). And Rahab was whose mum?

Rahab is Boaz's mum! Boaz who ends up marrying who? Ruth! Would Boaz have been so open to marrying Ruth if he had another mum? Would Boaz have been so lovely and kind if he didn't have the courageous, compassionate, ex-pagan, ex-prostitute as a mum. Who knows! But it's part of the story. Who is Ruth?

...**Ruth** is a pagan, enemy of God's people, Moabite - worshipper of Chemosh and Baal, who gave up her false gods, turned to Yahweh and ended up marrying Boaz! One of Ruth and Boaz's boys is Obed who had a son called Jesse. Jesse's granny is...Ruth. Jesse has quite a few sons including...? David! So, Ruth's is David's great granny! And Rahab is his great, great granny!

And then in verse 6 we are told

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Uriah's wife was called...Bathsheba whom David took and slept with and made pregnant. And Uriah was one of David's trusted soldiers whom he had killed.

What kind of God would choose or use a family line like this?

What kind of divine saviour comes from stock like this?

One who lives in the real world!

One who compromises neither on holiness nor kindness!

He is the kind of God who...

...cares nothing for reputation and sees through pretence.

...when we gave our very worst gave his very best.

...welcome all kinds and all sorts into his family.

This leads us to verses 16 and 17

iii) ¹⁶ **and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.** ¹⁷ **Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.**

There's lots of scholarly debate about this genealogy and ancient genealogies. For example, not all generations were included in genealogies - sometimes generations were skipped, sometimes redacted versions were used to make it easier to memorise.

Some scholars have argued that this is not a comprehensive list and it is not to be counted or thought of in that way. Some have argued that Matthew framing the genealogy in 3 sets of 14 is more about him making a theological point to the

Jewish audience he was aiming for, rather than a historical one. There's a lot of thought about the names that appear and the names that don't appear and whether people were known by different names which is as true today as it was back then. It is easy to get lost in all of this.

The important point is that this genealogy connects Abraham to David to Jesus through Jospheh and Mary.

One thing I did find interesting was that there are 41 names and 3x14 equals...42 not 41! This can be explained by different ways of counting and how genealogies are read, and which names are repeated. But I wonder if there might be something else going on for money counting, line and ledger Matthew. I wonder if in his counting he deliberately left a name and generation blank – a name and generation yet to be filled/written in – yours/mine/ours! Maybe he's underlining the invitational dimension to this list. Whether that's Matthew's intention or not, the genealogy is a divinely inspired invitation from God. In and through it God is saying...

Would you like to be part of my family? To be counted as a child of God? Do you know you can come warts and all? Come and meet me at the cross where justice and mercy meet...when my arms are open wide to you. I am calling you by name. I am calling you home.

*Glory be to him who loved us,
washed us from each spot and stain;
glory be to him who bought us,
made us kings with him to reign!
Glory, glory to the Lamb that once was slain!*

SONG 7: Glory be to God the Father CH4 110

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