

Sermon: Shepherd King: David & Jesus

Silvia Purdie, Sunday 5 August 2018, Cashmere Presbyterian Church

Bible Readings

2 Samuel 12:1-10, 13 (Nathan confronts King David)

Luke 1:67-79 (The Song of Zechariah)

One of the gems in our scripture is a mighty prayer of praise and prophecy by the father of John the Baptist, here in Luke 1. Remember how Zechariah was a priest and had a vision from God in the temple, right in the holy of holies, a promise of a son in his old age, and he had struggled to get his head around the idea and so the Angel Gabriel struck him dumb for all 9 months of the pregnancy ... and now the baby is born and after 9 months of silence these incredible words of praise and prophecy burst out of him ... maybe it was his own kind of gestation.

Zechariah's declaration is not so much of hope in future salvation as a declaration that salvation has come, God is acting, right now, right here. And how amazing as a brand new father to be given from God a very specific vision about his own son, John, and his key role in bringing in God's salvation.

Zechariah did not live to see it. He was an old man. He did not hear Jesus announce the Kingdom of God. He did not see his son baptizing in the River Jordan, but he KNEW it was coming, it was happening –

"The bright dawn of salvation rises on us! Heaven is shining on all those who live in the dark shadow of death, guiding our steps into the path of peace."

A central part of Zechariah's vision of the coming salvation is that it was a continuity with the reign of King David: He declares that God has **raised up salvation for us in the house of his servant David** (verse 69)

And this idea is echoed in several other places in both Old and New Testaments, the promise that the coming Messiah would be from the House of David hence born in Bethlehem, the ancestral home of David.

Two of the Gospels trace Jesus' ancestry back to King David, though in different ways, so probably through both his mother Mary's family tree and his adopted father Joseph.

Paul several times describes Jesus as a descendant of David and right through into Revelations which names Jesus as the Lion of Judah, the Root of David.

And in any Christian book you read about King David you will find a chapter on the points of connection between David and Jesus, and how important it is in understanding who Jesus was to understand who David was.

Here are some of the key linkages between David and Jesus:

They were born exactly one millennia apart (if you're interested in numbers)

They were both born in Bethlehem

They were both born a bit scandalous – Jesus for his birth out of wedlock, and David because his grandmother was a Moabite (remember Ruth, that was David's grandma) David was famous for being victorious in battle, Jesus for gaining the ultimate victory over death itself

They were both famous for the 'gift of the gab' – David as a poet and singer, Jesus as a story-teller

They were both great team leaders, and invested in people around them. David united the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus appointed 12 disciples, symbolically reuniting the 12 tribes.

But most of all, most of all, both David and Jesus knew God. They were men of God. They walked with God.

As Eugene Peterson tries to explain why he finds the story of David to be so important for understanding Jesus, what matters most to him is that

"There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that God can't and doesn't use to work his salvation and holiness into our lives."

For Peterson it's the REALNESS of David that matters most:

"The David story presents us not with a polished ideal to which we aspire but with a rough-edged actuality in which we see humanity being formed by a God presence. We see David coming alive before God, aware of God, responsive to God. We're never more alive than when we're dealing with God. David deals with God. David's importance isn't in his morality or his military prowess but in his experience of and witness to God. Every event in his life was a confrontation with God." (*Leap Over a Wall*, p5)

And this finds expression in the mixed-metaphor of Shepherd-King.

Both David and Jesus were Shepherd Kings. Jesus is, as our kids song says, Jesus is our Shepherd King.

We at Cashmere have our souls shaped by sitting here week by week and looking at this image. The Good Shepherd. Until we can almost tangibly feel the hands of Jesus tucked around us, his arm around us carrying us, the relief of that little lamb at being found and being held.

We see that shepherd crook and we know it as a staff of power, like David's weapon protecting his sheep from wolves, like David's royal staff of kingship, which becomes in our mind's eye also the cross of Jesus that he carries for our salvation.

Jesus never, as far as we know, worked as a shepherd, but he often told stories of shepherding, so he must have been friends with shepherd boys, spent an occasional night out with them, watched closely as they gathered the sheep into the fold.

We are good friends with a sheep farmer up in the Hawkes Bay and our boys spent many happy hours during summer holidays watching him work, clambering around the pens and wool shed, delighted when Pete gave them rides on his quad bike and got them opening and shutting gates, pretending they were being helpful.

Anyone in this room ever shorn a sheep, or helped out a bit?

Silly things, sheep. Not the most flattering of metaphors really. For us, I mean, the church, his followers. Do we really have to be like sheep?? Yeah thanks Jesus.

David, of course, really was a shepherd. He knew his sheep and his sheep knew him. He learned his courage and his battle skills defending them. He learned his poetry and his music whiling away the night hours watching them.

His most famous poem we are shortly going to hear and sing: Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He leads me along right paths. I fear no evil, for Thou art with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

The great shepherd psalm. And even when David was all powerful, with no evil to fear except that of his own making, he never forgot his shepherd instincts.

And so, on his worst day, when he had acted out of lust and selfish greed and coldly arranged for a good man to be murdered and a good woman to be acquired ... on his worst day, a prophet gathered his courage close and came to him and told him a story about a man and a sheep. Actually, about two men, one who had lots of sheep, but who stole and killed the other man's little beloved pet lamb that slept in his arms at night.

The story was a parable. The prophet was Nathan.

The fascinating thing is that David had not lost his shepherd's heart. He responded immediately and passionately to the injustice of the story. "the man had no pity!" David cried. Punish him! Make him pay!

And Nathan responds with four of the most simple but devastating words in scripture:

You are the man.

Suddenly David sees himself through the eyes of God, both judged to the core but also given grace.

"I have sinned against the Lord" said David, and Nathan replied to David:

"The Lord has taken away your sin. You will not die."

There were still tough consequences – forgiveness does not let us off the hook of facing up to the relational consequences of stuffing up. But God offers grace, over and over. God forgives us, over and over, wiping the slate clean between us and God.

Jesus as Shepherd King is also that little lamb in Nathan's story, killed unjustly.

One of the ancient prayers of the church is

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. Have mercy on us.

Jesus as King of eternity is the Good Shepherd, whose heart is with his sheep and the Lamb of God, dying that we might live.

Jesus inherits the throne of David, and the everlasting covenant that God made with David, as Anne described so well when she preached a couple of weeks ago.

But Jesus chose a very different throne to what David built for himself. Jesus chose the cross. Jesus established a very different kingdom to what David achieved; a kingdom of ordinary people, of all races in all places, a kingdom of love and acceptance, of deep justice and hope. We are part of this kingdom, and we follow our Shepherd King.

Offering, with Song on video:

The Lord is my Shepherd, written & performed by Stuart Townend