

David #7 • Messiah

In the previous talk we looked at the theme of temple, one of the ways God, uncreated, non-material and eternal, used to allow humans, created, material and finite, to meet with him, and him to meet with us.

We saw how David made plans to build a temple for God in Jerusalem, and how his son Solomon implemented its construction.

And we looked at how Jesus is the ultimate way that God has revealed himself to humanity, and how one of the ways that Jesus described himself was as a living embodiment of God's temple.

And now, as followers of Jesus, our bodies are God's temples, a place where God dwells, as well as being a part of a larger temple, the Church, consisting of all the followers of Jesus.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are in God and God dwells in us, as individuals and as a Jesus-following community.

And the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives empowers us to live the kind of lives God created us for, and to share the good news of God's love with people who don't yet know him.

Today we're going to look at the theme of Messiah, and how David came to be associated with it by the Old and New Testament authors.

We touched on this when we looked at David's kingship.

The word 'Messiah' comes from the Hebrew word 'Mashah', meaning 'to anoint,' which becomes 'Mashiah' – 'anointed one', 'Messiah.'

And in Greek, it is 'Christos', from where we get the word 'Christ.' When you 'christ'-en a child, or a ship, you are anointing it, giving it your blessing and asking for God's blessing on it.

In the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons were anointed with oil at the establishment of Israel's priesthood.

Saul and David were anointed before they became kings of Israel.

Elisha was anointed by Elijah to indicate that he would be his successor.

And Jesus's baptism by John sees Jesus being anointed by God the Holy Spirit, as God the Father announces his approval of Jesus, God the Son, as his representative on earth.

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But let's rewind to David.

As we've seen in previous talks, David, despite his many faults, came to be seen as Israel's greatest king.

And God made a special covenant with David, promising him that...

*Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me;
your throne shall be established for ever.*

2 Samuel 7:16

However, over the following centuries, Israel persistently ignored their side of the covenant and the warnings of the prophets, resulting in God eventually withdrawing his presence and protection from Israel.

And 400 years later, in the 6th century B.C., a Babylonian army conquered and pillaged Jerusalem, destroying the temple, killing many of its inhabitants, and force-marching those they thought would be useful into exile in Babylon.

A number of Psalms were written during the Babylonian exile, including Psalm 137 with its familiar opening line,

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

Psalms 137:1

This Psalm found new life when it was put to music by the Jamaican reggae group The Melodians in 1970, before being brutally murdered by Boney M in 1978.

But let's rewind to the Old Testament...

Another exilic psalm is Psalm 89. It opens on a positive note...

*I will sing of the LORD's great love for ever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
through all generations.*

*I will declare that your love stands firm for ever,
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.*

Psalm 89:1-2

And then, as often happens in the Psalms, the writer goes on to 'remind' God of the covenant promises he made to David.

*You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
"I will establish your line for ever
and make your throne firm through all generations."*

Psalm 89:3-4

The Psalmist is paraphrasing God's promises recorded in 2 Samuel 7:16, promises that God would maintain the line of David forever. And yet Jerusalem has been captured by the Babylonians, and the temple lies in ruins.

The psalm continues with line after line of praise to God, acknowledging his faithfulness and his control over everything in heaven and on earth.

It then returns to reminding God of the promises he made about David.

*Once you spoke in a vision,
to your faithful people you said:
'I have bestowed strength on a warrior;
I have raised up a young man from among the people.
I have found David my servant;
with my sacred oil I have anointed him.
My hand will sustain him;
surely my arm will strengthen him.*

*The enemy will not get the better of him;
the wicked will not oppress him.'*

Psalm 89:19-22

Bonus points if you noticed the mention of David being 'anointed' (christ-ened, messiah-ed).

The Psalmist continues along similar lines, before acknowledging that God's covenant included warnings that he would punish Israel if they broke their side of the covenant, then once again reminds God that, despite this, he had promised to continue David's kingly line.

'If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness – and I will not lie to David – that his line will continue for ever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established for ever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.'

Psalm 89:30-37

After this, we get to the main reason this psalm was written.

The Psalmist has got a bone to pick with God...

But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. You have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust.

You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins. All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbours. You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

Psalm 89:38-42

and...

*Lord, where is your former great love,
which in your faithfulness you swore to David?
Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked,
how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations,
the taunts with which your enemies, Lord, have mocked,
with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.*

Psalm 89:49-51

Extra bonus points if you noticed both instances of the word ‘anointed’.
And extra, extra bonus points if you see the way the psalm is
foreshadowing how the messiah is someone who is taunted and mocked.
The Psalmist, a stranger in a strange land, pours out his sadness and
distress to God.

This is a man, almost certainly someone who has remained faithful to
God’s laws, who has seen all his hopes and dreams destroyed.

His misery is so great that he wonders if God’s love and faithfulness has
been withdrawn from him, and from Israel, forever.

But David’s line did (just!) survive the Babylonian exile. (*1 Chronicles 3*)
And God continued to speak to Israel through his prophets, who spoke
of an ‘anointed one’ (christ-ened one, a messiah, a christ) who would
emerge from the line of David.

One of the greatest of those prophets was Isaiah.

Isaiah’s ministry began before the Babylonian exile.

Isaiah chapter 6 records how he receives an overpowering vision from
God in the year that King Uzziah (a distant descendant of David) dies.

In the vision Isaiah sees God in heaven, being worshipped by powerful,
angelic creatures.

God then asks the well known question...

“Who shall I send? And who will go for us?”

to which Isaiah, although bewildered and terrified, answers...

“Here I am. Send me!”

God then gives Isaiah his marching orders, that Isaiah is to take God’s message to a people who will not understand because they do not want to understand.

Isaiah, not surprisingly, asks?

“For how long, Lord?”

God, who has clearly not signed up to any motivational speaking courses, answers...

“Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste.

But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

Isaiah 6:11b-13

God speaks of how destruction is going to come to southern Israel, but that just as the terebinth (I had to look that one up, it’s a tree) and the oak (I knew that one) leave stumps when chopped down, God is going to leave ‘a holy seed’ in the land.

hmm...

Chapters 7-39 record how two kings, Ahaz and Hezekiah, respond to the threat of invasion from surrounding nations.

Isaiah encourages both kings to trust God to protect them, rather than making alliances with idolatrous nations.

At this time in history Israel was experiencing civil war, with the northern tribes fighting the southern tribes. The southern tribes have a king, and their main city is Jerusalem.

In Isaiah chapter 7, Jerusalem is besieged by an army that is an unholy alliance of Israel's northern tribes and a Damaskan king.

The southern tribes of Israel are, not surprisingly, terrified.

God tells Isaiah to tell king Ahaz...

'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid.'

Isaiah 7:4a

Now there's a good slogan for a t-shirt.

Isaiah then tells Ahaz that God has promised that if he puts his trust in God and not in foreign alliances, that Jerusalem will not be invaded. More than that he offers to give Ahaz a sign to confirm that this is really from God.

Sadly, Ahaz has already decided that he doesn't trust God, and he refuses to ask for a sign, using the weak excuse that he doesn't want to 'put God to the test.'

This is the very opposite sin of asking God for signs when you already know what you are meant to do.

Isaiah's response is that God is going to give Ahaz a sign anyway!

Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.'

Isaiah 7:13-16

Extra, extra points for noticing 'house of David'.

And most of us will recognise the 'Immanuel' word.

The sign to Ahaz is that Isaiah's wife (the word 'virgin' can mean 'young woman') will give birth to a child, and that the southern kingdom will be spared, for now.

And, as we know, the prophecy has a future meaning that will be fulfilled in the ultimate son of David, Jesus.

Chapter 11 also talks about the promised messiah, who will be 'a shoot from the stump of Jesse', referring to David's father.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

Isaiah 11:1-4a

Remember the tree stumps/holy seed stuff?

Once again, we see how Isaiah was receiving a vision of the 'perfect David,' the one who would embody God's wisdom, understanding and might. The one who would provide justice to the poor.

When Jesus was baptised, the Spirit of the LORD descended on him, anointing/messiah-ing/christ-ening him with God's approval and power.

The most well known chapter in Isaiah is 53, with its clear portrayal of the 'suffering servant', a 'tender shoot,' a 'root out of dry ground' who makes his life a sin offering for many.

But I'm going to finish today's talk with Isaiah 55:1-3.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Isaiah 55:1-3

800 years later, Jesus fulfilled, lived and taught these words, ushering in God's promised everlasting covenant of faithful love that he promised to David.

Matthew's gospel opens with a genealogy that traces Jesus' ancestry, the first verse reads...

This is an account of the origin of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:1

And the Apostle Paul, in his introduction to Romans, writes...

...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David...

Romans 1:2-3

And we are heirs of all these fulfilled promises.

God's faithful love, his eternal covenant promised to David, is available to anyone through Jesus's life, death, resurrection and ascension.

That doesn't mean that everything will always seem to be OK. The world is anything but perfect. Even in a place as comparatively peaceful and prosperous as Northolt, there is plenty of stuff that doesn't make sense to us.

I remember when I took one of my children to the doctor to be vaccinated. I think it was Brook, but they all look the same at that age.

My mum is old enough to remember when diseases like polio and tuberculosis were still common. Harrow School had a dedicated tuberculosis sanatorium until the 1950s.

So for me, this was a good day, I was enjoying the blessings of advances in medical science that would protect my child from harm.

However, Brook was not aware of this, and he was certainly not expecting to have a stranger stick a needle in his thigh.

And he screamed.

You know, that 'I am going to let the world know what a terrible dad you are' type of scream.

I held him and looked at him and did my best to comfort him.

And he stared at me furiously as if I had tried to kill him, and then screamed some more.

I could not explain to him that what had just happened was for his own good. All I could do was cuddle him until he ran out of energy, or forgot what he was screaming about.

And there are comparisons between this and our relationship with God.

The Psalmist was anxious. He worried that God's promises to David had failed, and he took these concerns to God. God's promises hadn't failed, but the Psalmist couldn't see this.

There are things that happen in our lives that are too complex for us to understand. And when we scream at God, all he can do is hold us and let us know he loves us.

And for some of us, like the Psalmist, the answers won't be provided this side of our resurrection.

Paul wrote to the Philippians...

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

It is so easy for anxiety to overwhelm us. To become so wrapped up in our troubles and worries that we end up pushing God away.

We'll be looking at this in our next talk, but one of the things that made David 'a man after God's own heart' was that, when push came to shove, especially when he realised he had done wrong, David regularly leaned into God rather than pushing him away.

Let's take our failings and anxieties to the promised son of David, Jesus. He will never abandon or let go of you, so don't make the mistake of abandoning him.

And, wrapped in the loving arms of Jesus, son of David, the answer to the prophets' faithful promises, let the peace of God, the understanding-transcending peace of God, guard our hearts and minds minute by minute and day by day.

Amen.