

Text: Matthew 1:6b-11

Sunday 6th December 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be true and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I wonder what Christmas films you're looking forward to watching in the coming weeks? Do you have a family tradition of watching a particular film each year? Maybe it's 'Miracle on 34th Street', or 'It's a Wonderful Life', 'Elf', 'Meet me in St Louis' or even 'The Muppets Christmas Carol' – there's so many to choose from! Why don't you put up your favourite in the Live Chat.

In each of these there is a story of fortunes overcome, struggles faced, and battles won. Often the stories we go back to, are those that are stories of change, of freedom, of redemption and a new life, a new future secured.

Last week, we began a new sermon series that will see us through to the end of December, focusing on the first chapter of Matthew's gospel, which **began with these words: 'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham...' (v1) We dug in to some of the names and titles here: Messiah, David and Abraham. We saw that Jesus was the fulfilment of promises made long ago by God and that the initial people listed by Matthew show the welcome of God to one and all, that no one is written off. **In those opening verses**, we saw more of the identity of Jesus...**

as the promised Messiah but also the identity we are to have: followers of Jesus, who are welcomed into the family of God and sent out to invite others to share in this good news as well.

Today we move on to the next portion of the genealogy and as you look over that list – as you take a wide-angle view of who you find there – what do you see? I see story after story filled with dysfunction. In the family line of Jesus there are a lot of skeletons in the cupboard!

Many of the individuals listed here were wicked kings of Israel and Judah, and even going back to last week's portion of the genealogy, we find broken people there as well: Jacob who was a deceiver and thief; Judah who sold his brother into slavery; David who was an adulterer...

and murderer; Tamar who engaged in incest; Rahab who was a prostitute. Time and time again, the individuals listed here are not the folks you would expect to have in the family line of the Messiah; the people here – both this week and last – are flawed, weak-willed, selfish individuals with some seriously shady stories. A real bunch of misfits.

So, what are we to make of this list? What are we meant to see about the family line of Jesus? **Well, first off, I think it shows, once again,** the welcome of God, but this time amidst all of our brokenness. Because not only does the family line of Jesus have a back story, we each have a story as well. In each of our lives, there is brokenness, there is imperfection, and still God calls us home to Himself and He is ready to welcome us.

One author, Brennan Manning, wrote: ‘The heart of Jesus [which is the heart of God] loves us as we are and not as we should be, beyond worthiness and unworthiness, beyond fidelity and infidelity. He loves us...without caution, regret, boundary, limit or breaking point.’

This is the love of God for you and for me. This is the welcome of God extended to you and to me. No matter who you are or what you’ve done, God loves you and is ready to welcome you home into His family. Just look at the list of individuals in the family line of Jesus – and yet God chooses, Jesus chooses, to be born into that particular family line. God knew what was coming, none of their stories took Him by surprise, and yet He still chose to identify with them, to become part of that family line.

Friends, **as another author put it:** ‘the grace of God is...lavish, excessive, outrageous and scandalous. God’s grace is ridiculously inclusive. Apparently God doesn’t care who He loves. He is not very careful about the people He calls His friends or the people He calls [family]...the grace of God is indiscriminate, foolish, impractical, unrealistic, crazy and naïve.’

I also wonder, friends, I wonder what’s in your story– I wonder what you are facing just now, or what you have faced in the past – and whether it has sown a seed of doubt about whether God would ever welcome you home, whether God would ever delight in you and value you? I wonder if there are skeletons in your cupboard, which maybe you keep hidden from others, and maybe even try to keep hidden from God?...

Well you don't need to, and you don't need to doubt – because we see in Jesus the welcome of God and His love of broken people, like you and me.

Friends, this advent season, do you know the welcome of God? Do you know His grace? All of us are broken, all of us are flawed, just like the individuals in the family line of Jesus – all of us are undeserving, we're all on the same level – and yet we are all welcomed home as well. (P)

Nevertheless, the grace of God is not only there to welcome us, but to save us, to redeem us, to restore, even re-story our lives. You see, the people in the family line of Jesus were broken people – like you and me – but they were broken people because of sin, because of a deep darkness and sickness that is in each of us...

Jesus came, not only to reveal the welcome and grace of God, but to do something about our underlying condition. In fact, it's so key to the identity of Jesus that it's part of His name. **Matthew began by saying:**

'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah ...' (v1)

To us, a name is little more than just a word, but in the culture of the time a name carried meaning, and 'Jesus' meant 'the Lord saves' and as we'll see in a few weeks' time the angel **also said to Joseph: '[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' (Mt. 1:21)**

God not only wants to welcome us, He wants to save us, He wants to restore and re-story our lives, in fact He wishes to do this for the whole of creation...

When Matthew says, 'This is the genealogy of Jesus...' the original Greek literally reads: 'This is the book of the genesis of Jesus...' and that would have made the Jewish readers of Matthew's time think about the start of the Old Testament, where God began another 'genesis', the genesis of creation itself. Matthew is trying to tell us that the coming of Jesus is a new beginning, a new creation, a new genesis and that this is for all the nations, for all broken, sinful people. This coming Messiah came to save, to restore, to re-story our lives and the whole of creation. The Apostle Paul would one day say, '...if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!' (2 Cor. 5:17)

Friends, Father God accepts you as you are – back story and all – but now as part of His family, part of the family...

line of Jesus, He wants to re-story your life, weaving a future – your future story – into the great and cosmic story of what He was up to at Christmas: that Jesus, the Messiah, had come to bring about a new creation, starting with the broken people of this world.

Friends, your past, your back story, doesn't need to define who you are or your identity or your value or your future – because Jesus came to save, to restore, to re-story your life and mine. I will never tire of retelling my story, of how God broke into my life at the time when the darkness of my soul had gone too far. And in that moment, I met with the grace and welcome of God – He welcomed me as I was, but since then, He has re-storied my life and I wouldn't trade it for anything in all the world.

Maybe you're wondering: how can I know the welcome and grace of God? How can I let God re-story my life and save me? Well, later in Matthew's gospel, when Jesus began teaching about the kingdom of God, **He said this:**

'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

(Matthew 4:17)

Repent. That's how we let Jesus re-story our lives. It's more than simply saying sorry. To repent, is to have your thinking changed about Jesus that it affects the core of who you are and how you live your life. When you repent truly, you make the choice to follow Jesus – His teaching, His ways, His example – **you seek to follow Him first and before all. Now, you won't get it perfect, because none of us are, we're still broken. But if there is genuine repentance, then there should also be a desire in us...**

to allow Jesus to shape and lead our lives.

Friends, if we want saved, if we want our lives restored and re-storied, such that we know the welcome and grace of God, then it always begins **with humbling ourselves – repenting – and calling out to Him for help. If we do that, then God always responds, He always welcomes home anyone – no matter their story – God welcomes home such a person to be part of His family.**

Brothers and sisters, every season of Advent is a time to remember the greatest of stories – not captured often by Hollywood – and yet, in this story, the story of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, we find a story of struggles faced, and battles won, as story of change, of freedom, of redemption and new life. Because...

in the story of Jesus, in His family line, we see the grace of God extended to broken humanity and the invitation for us all to find ourselves in His family, becoming a new creation and so having our futures re-storied.

I pray that each of us, whether for the first time, or the hundredth time, may we all repent and come into the life that can only be found in Jesus. May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn,

HYMN *MP-631* *Tell out, my soul*