

Text: Matthew 1:12-17

Sunday 13th 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.

What are some of your favourite memories of Christmas?

When you think back over the years, what comes to mind? I remember decorating the tree with mum and dad, as well as Christmas card deliveries with the Scout Post and hiding behind the sofa with one of my sisters for some strange reason that I don't recall. Feel free to share in the Live Chat at home some of your own favourite Christmas memories.

In our Advent series so far, we've seen in the genealogy of Jesus that God welcomes us into His family – He welcomes one and all, indeed, all the nations, for none are written off; no matter our brokenness or personal story, the welcome of God is extended to each of us. And when we accept that welcome, when we choose to repent and find our identity in Jesus, then a journey with God begins, a journey whereby God rewrites our future, and weaves our story into His greater story, and as part of that He sends us out with the good news of Jesus.

But Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is not the only genealogy within the New Testament. In fact, the gospel of Luke contains one as well. Yet, if you compare the two side by side, there are very significant differences because they each miss out people that the other writer...

mentions. The issue is further complicated within Matthew's genealogy, in that there are three sets of fourteen generations, but there's no way that this accounts for the length of time inferred here. **So, what's going on?** Are Matthew and Luke being forgetful? Is Matthew simply glossing over gaps in his memory?

Well, these are not new questions – people have asked them over many generations and commentators have helped us realise that there are two things to bear in mind. Firstly, **when we read today, that** 'Jacob was the father of Joseph...' (v16) we take it very literally, in a biological and genetic kind of way, which creates a problem when we read in Luke's gospel that 'Joseph, [was] the son of Heli...' (4:23). So, is Joseph, Jacob or Heli's son? The answer is – both.

Because in the Greek language that the New Testament was written, the phrase, ‘the father of...’ in Matthew’s gospel, can mean ‘the ancestor of...’ and it was a phrase used of relationships that were not genetic, such as between a rabbi and his disciple.

But something else is going on as well, and what Matthew is recording here is the line of succession to the royal throne, the ‘official’ genealogy. This would not necessarily pass from father to son, but would still remain within the family. Matthew is helping us see the legal claim that Jesus has to the throne, where as the genealogy within Luke, focuses on the physical family line. So, neither Matthew or Luke are having memory problems. Indeed, the individuals listed by Matthew in that final portion, are largely unknown to us,...

there are no records of their lives within the Scriptures, as compared to most of the individuals listed before the exile. Yet, we know that certain cultures of the time, and particularly the Jews, were fastidious in keeping family records and so both Matthew and Luke are drawing upon this to fill in the gaps, so that a record, a memory of the genealogy of Jesus might be known and never lost.

We started this series with the aim of learning more about the identity of Jesus and so more of our identity as people who are in Christ, people who follow Him. So, how does what we now know, aid us? What we do we learn here of the identity of Jesus and of ourselves?

Well, I think our portion of Scripture today is a call to remember, to remember that God has revealed Himself...

in history, that the Christian faith is a historical faith, rooted in real people and real acts of God within history. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church **in Colossae and said: 'The Son is the image of the invisible God...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...' (Colossians 1:15, 19)**

Jesus is more than just a good teacher, or an above average human being; He's even more than simply a legal and physical descendant of Abraham and David. Jesus is, in fact, God in the flesh and such a claim is no mere thing because the claim of Scripture, the claim of the Christian faith, is that Jesus is unique and uniquely qualified to fulfil the promises made to Abraham and to David because He is God in the flesh, appearing in history in Jesus. We are called to remember this and in our remembering to trust.

Because in our day of fake news and relative truth, as well as amidst the struggles of life, there is so much which can undermine our trust in Jesus, there is so much which can undermine the uniqueness of Jesus and make Him seem like a myth or just some wishful thought. But we are to remember, to remember that the God of all creation came in human form, in the person of Jesus, and stepped into history that we might know Him and trust Him, both in this life and for the life to come.

I wonder, friends, do you need to remember this? Is your faith wavering? Has it been undermined this past year? Are you facing a future or a decision, and in the midst of facing it, do you need to remember the truth, the reality, that God stepped into history, through Jesus, so that you could have a relationship with God, today and forever?

Maybe God is calling you to remember, to remember what He done in the past, in Jesus, and so to trust Him now for what lies ahead.

There is also something else we can take away from this portion of the genealogy of Jesus. Not only are we to remember, but God remembers as well. In our passage today, there is, as I said, a list of names which we know very little about – most of these individuals are unknown, largely forgotten, lost in the sands of time. But they are remembered by God. He chose to have these names written down in the Scriptures. These people are not unfamiliar to Him, they are not overlooked by Him. Instead, they are known, they are seen, they are remembered by God.

This is something that also comes across in other parts of the genealogy, for as we saw in earlier weeks, within the family line of Jesus are a number of foreigners and most of them are women. Their names are Rahab, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba, and it's very unusual to see the names of women listed in a genealogy from this period of time. It would have been startling to people of the day, for in both Greek and Jewish culture a woman had no legal rights, yet this is a legal record. What is more, women were often seen more like a thing, than a person, and a Jewish man would thank God each day that he had not been created a slave, a Gentile or a woman – and yet there are four such women listed in the genealogy of Jesus, because God sees, He knows, He remembers.

I wonder, do you need to hear this about God today: that He sees you, He knows you intimately, and He has not, and will never, forget you. In all that you are facing, He has not taken His eye off of you and you haven't slipped His mind.

And what if you, or a loved one, are affected by one of the many conditions that affect memory – either, your memory or theirs? What does it mean that God remembers? Well, in the midst of changes and losses which are so painful, and when it seems that our, or their, sense of self – their identity – as we have known it, is literally vanishing before our eyes, to know that God remembers is to know that He holds the memory of our true self in Him, and so we will never, ever, be forgotten and one day our true selves will be restored.

Brothers and sisters, God sees you, He knows you and He will always, always, remember you. In the midst of whatever you may be facing, you are not forgotten, for you and all this world, are so dear to Him that He came as a babe at Christmas, entering into history, that we might know His welcome into His family, the family of Jesus.

I pray that this season of Advent will not only be a time to recall our fond memories of Christmas, but to remember God and His welcome shown in Jesus, in whom we are called to place our trust, for He is God in the flesh, and He sees you, remembers you and loves you. May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn,

HYMN MP-109 Crown Him with many crowns