



MONDAY 19 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: Psalm 2 & Psalm 89

Plug In...

The Old Testament was first organised in three broad sections: The Torah (or Book of Moses), the Prophets, and The Writings (also known by its first book 'Psalms'). While we have the same 39 individual books in our English Old Testament they are arranged differently. The Hebrew order is more helpful in plotting the promise of the Messiah. Jesus was familiar with this breakdown and claimed he was its promised Messiah (see: Luke 24:25-27, 44).

The Writings portion of the Old Testament opens with Psalms and contains books like Proverbs, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles. The individual psalms were written at different times, but collected and viewed as one book during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (the exile and afterwards). The Jews during the time of exile and post had no king. The book of Psalms – and therefore the entire section, The Writings – functioned to remind them in their situation of God's promise to bring a kingdom through the Messiah-King. The Writings, particularly through the Psalms, give a portrait of the Messiah through modelling David. The psalms say, this is what you know of the great king David, but you know also he was flawed, so look out for someone *like* David's greatness, but only greater.

Psalm 89 wrestles with ground-level reality. The current kings post David had been abysmal so there was no current king on the throne (the “if” clause of 2 Samuel 7:14 had been enacted). Yet, God had promised an offspring of David to rule forever. Now more than ever, the people’s trust in God is tested. Their faith needs to kick in for it looks completely different to David’s day.

Chew It Over...

We have beautiful promises of the Messiah from the Torah and the Prophets. The Psalms get brutally honest with us. It looks different, but God has promised – where are you at? So, we have a choice. The book of Psalms opened with an end-time picture of the Messiah *installed* (Psalm 2), however on the ground (in exile), even today, it doesn’t look that way (e.g., Psalm 89). Heck, many today want to remove any ‘Christ’ (Messiah) reference from our public Christmas Carols – we too seem a long way from the manifestation of a Messiah installed. So, do we trust God’s word that what He says comes to pass? Or do we rely only on our eyes and what we see and sense?

This psalm is written after David is dead! Yet it affirms an eternal covenant with David. Given that, where does the psalmist land as he brings God’s promise face-to-face with life as he experiences it? How does the psalmist teach us and builds our faith as we wait for the complete manifestation of Psalm 2?

Prayer Suggestion

If things look completely different to God’s word this Christmas, ask God to increase your faith. If things are tough, appeal to God’s covenant love with David’s offspring Jesus. Ask that the Lord helps you to remember he is dealing with the world via this covenant.



TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: Psalm 16

Plug In...

There are many psalms that depict David's extreme suffering before God vindicates him. The actual life-threatening issue for David is hard to pinpoint. Nevertheless, David is confident that should his suffering and opposition take him to the point of death (v.10), he is at rest in the surety of the promises and that those promises mean he will not be abandoned to the grave.

Chew It Over...

Remember, the whole book of the Psalms collect songs about David and Israel's experience into one place, to be read as one unit of thought. It was read by people who have no king, are in exile, they've possibly returned from exile but there is no monarchy. One could read this book, then read the newspaper headlines and conclude the Davidic covenant had been terminated. Or they could read the newspaper headlines then the psalms and conclude the vindicated 'David' mentioned must be a coming future one – for even David, who died, must have got this for he wrote Psalm 16

Our headlines today can be powerful too. But the headlines are distorted. They proclaim not only that there is no universal king, but there will be no such king. We've seen Jesus die and rise again. Yet we are in a similar situation to the exiles. Jesus has promised to come again, but it seems right now there is no monarchy.

Notice how this psalm ends by headlining that God's presence is with the person to whom He has made known the path of life (v.11). Verse 9 says keep your eye on the promise given to David. The promise is so sure that it constitutes the very presence of God. God is present by His word. Jesus said the same to his disciples as they embarked on waiting for Jesus to return (Matthew 28:20). Jesus said this after his vindication. God in His wisdom takes us through a similar path to generate faith, so that we might experience God as our refuge (Psalm 16:1).

Prayer Suggestion

This week pray the words of this psalm as you struggle. Praise God that you will never go as low as Jesus had too, for as your Messiah he went to the lowest point on our behalf (it all started with humbling himself to become a baby human), and was vindicated so that we will be raised up to stand with him.



WEDNESDAY 21 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: Psalm 110, 132, 144, 145

Plug In...

A few psalms to read today (try to carve out time to indulge yourself with them). This is the final look at how the Messiah outlines the shape of the book of Psalms. Psalm 110 is called a 'royal-psalm'. It was spoken out loud to each king of Judah at the time of their crowning (coronation). It then functioned throughout their reign as a mirror asking them, how do you look? This is the ideal, how do you stack up? The individual kings, even the great king David himself, failed against the ideal. Given that reality, what does one make of the promises David received from God (2 Samuel 7)?

In the middle of this tension psalms like Psalm 132 push people to look forward to God installing His king. The psalms, like Psalm 132, become prophetic. Such a psalm is not only read in a context where lack of an ideal king is apparent, but the context is lack of an actual king. Even lack of a temple. Even lack of a Zion (the centre point of the Promised Land). Psalm 132 keeps calling people to faith in that context. God has sworn an oath that He will place one of David's descendants on the throne.

Psalms 144-145 many see as the end of the book of Psalms proper, with the final group of four a big finale of praise. Psalm 144 strikes the note of the LORD's anointed king, "his servant David" being delivered from the sword and for David's people the conditions of the

kingdom of peace and prosperity come. Psalm 145 proclaim that God is king and people who have noticed His mighty acts and take Him as Lord will be protected (Psalm 145:4-6, 20).

Chew It Over...

Most of us agree Christmas has been hijacked. Sometimes Christmas is hijacked by us as Christians, we focus on all the wrong things. It is not that we shouldn't have fun and enjoy, it is just that we miss the war going on in the middle of Christmas. The world is at war with God and that manifests in all sorts of ways: nearly every year at this time Christians at holy sites get attacked; there are wars within families; people at war with loneliness; the bright lights of Christmas trees can blind us to the dark side of Christmas. Notice how the birth narratives of Jesus involve a war. Notice how the subsequent stories involve Satan attacking Jesus. The book of Psalms speaks into the heart of this war announcing that God's kingdom will win the war through the installation of His King.

Resolve to listen closely to people's language this Christmas. There are always cue-words that indicate where they are feeling the war. You have the antidote to their troubles. You know the resolution to the story. Be praying that you can deliver this joy. Many people will sing "Joy to the World" because it is the 'done' thing at Christmas time. We can plug them into the words, their source. Psalm 98 is where the carol comes from. It can only truly be sung if one sees it is true because of God's promised Messiah.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord to slow your heart down so you might hear the cries of people this Christmas, then stop and talk with them.



THURSDAY 22 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: Ezra 1:1-6 & Nehemiah 9:5-37

Plug In...

One way of looking at the structure of the Old Testament is that there is a story played and then paused for commentary on that story. The story, which starts in the *Torah* (Genesis – Deuteronomy) and continues into the *Former Prophets* (Joshua to 2 Kings), is one continuous story without stop. The pause button gets pressed at the beginning of the *Latter Prophets* (from Isaiah onwards). The *Latter Prophets* and most of *The Writings* give commentary. The commentary is on what has gone wrong with Israel and highlights God's promise, calling this Israel to trust in it. It does that by providing a picture of what the Messiah will look like when he comes (e.g., like David depicted in the Psalms; full of wisdom like the one who understands everything in the world displayed in Proverbs; one engaged in the deepest relationship with his people such as the love expressed in Song of Songs). These last few books of *The Writings* include Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah is where the play button gets pressed again. The story resumes showing God releasing the Jews from Babylon to return to the Land where the Messiah would reign from. It is interpreted a sign that God has not abandoned His promise. The Jews still possess the promise and the line of David now can branch out from the Promised Land.

The opening words of Ezra 1 show what happens on the geo-political stage is by the authority and control of God moving rulers hearts. Ezra and Nehemiah spend their time teaching the people to repent, to obey God, to not shrink back when they experience

opposition. Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 9 shows that this return to the Land must be phase one of the promise given in 2 Samuel 7 eventuating. Psalm 2 will soon be a reality.

Chew It Over...

Nehemiah was thousands of years after the promise originally given to Abraham. Nehemiah saw that all of history is caught up in God's promise and everything is a move by God to fulfilling that promise. We don't know how much of this little slice of history we will be involved in, but we are to live it in the light of God's promise. How do you know you are doing that? We praise God with the language and titles that Nehemiah used (they become organic to how we conceive and speak of God); we admit our hard-hearts and repent; we daily ask God to bring about the full-effects of His covenant love with Abraham and David – that is, we ask for Jesus to return and that we might remain faithful while we wait. "Come Lord Jesus, Come!" Is that our disposition this Christmas? As we celebrate the coming of Jesus, do we go on to engage him petitioning him for his return?

Prayer Suggestion

Come Lord Jesus, Come!



FRIDAY 23 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: 2 Chronicles 36:15-23

Plug In...

The book of Chronicles (1 & 2 seen as one book originally on two scrolls) is the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament. Despite it being wedged half-way through our English order, if read as the last book it is a fitting recapitulation of the entire Old Testament. Flip through it and you'll see it begins with genealogies that start at Adam and run all the way up to David. Once David arrives on the scene the book turns to narrative. David's life story is told again with focus on the covenant promise God gave him. Ending the Old Testament this way shows that the whole Old Testament is focussed on the promise to David and is about waiting in faith for it to come.

The final words of 2 Chronicles is the decree of King Cyrus announcing that Judah has been released from exile and can go up to their land to build a temple for their God. Cyrus announces this by saying "*The LORD God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth*".

Matthew's Gospel mirrors Chronicles. It starts with genealogies arranged in such a way to showcase David: "Son of David" is placed first before "Son of Abraham". The genealogy is artificially broken up into 14 generations, and the Jews had codes with their numerology and it was well known that the number 14 was code for "David". [If you're interested David spelt in Hebrew is *dwd*; d= 4th

letter in Hebrew alphabet, w = 6th. So, 4+6+4 = 14, code for: *David*.] The whole setup highlights David because of God's promise, then lands on narrating the birth of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus rising from the dead and proclaiming these words: "all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me". Very similar to Cyrus quote at the end of Chronicles.

Matthew writes his gospel extremely conscious of where the Old Testament finishes. Matthew writes his gospel as the next chapter in the Old Testament story. It is the story of the promised Messiah having arrived.

Chew It Over...

Jesus commissioned us to build his church through making disciples, teaching them about Jesus' authority, calling them to obey the Messiah-King of Psalm 2. With the commercialisation of Christmas, the Jesus-in-a-manger scene can be quite gimmicky, rolled out to awaken sweet nostalgia, so we might buy stuff.

The Christmas story of a baby in Bethlehem is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise that all of history has swung around. As Tim Keller has said, "Christmas is both more wondrous and more threatening than we imagine." Make sure your Christmas story doesn't stop at baby Jesus – it needs to show the reality of Psalm 2, a king who will put down all rebellion: "Kiss the Son lest you be destroyed in his wrath".

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God to keep the threat of Christmas alive for you as we bump into people at work, events, with family. May God help us to make our faith explicit in some of these situations this Christmas.



WEEKEND 24-25 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN – The Promise of the Messiah

Read: Luke 2:1-15

Plug In...

Luke highlights many connections with David as he tells the birth of Jesus. The angel says that Jesus is “a saviour” and “the Messiah” (2:11).

The angels in the sky suddenly pronounce the results of the Messiah being born: glory to God and peace on earth.

Chew It Over...

Picture the Old Testament as an accordion. When extended out we see the promise of the Messiah in passages like Balaam’s curse flipped to a blessing (Numbers 24) and Eli’s removal (1 Samuel 2). When the accordion is compressed we still see the big promise flashpoints: Genesis 3:15, Genesis 12, and 2 Samuel 7:8-16. These protrude with clarity – these are God’s promise in high definition focus. The promise was given so that people in sin and exiled from the presence of God could have hope that peace between God and them would be possible again. The angels announce the full results of the Messiah being born, peace on earth because God’s favour rests on them.

Lots of people the world over talk about the Charter for Human Rights – our attempt to have humanity in harmony with one another. Genesis 3:15, Genesis 12, Samuel 7 is the constitution of God's promise-plan to achieve peace for the world. It is through Israel's Messiah, but for the whole of humanity.

Prayer Suggestion

Pray for the many people who will attend church this Sunday, Christmas Day. For many of them it is generic, it is a pattern once a year to appease their family requests, to appease their consciences. Pray that each message in all of our churches across Australia may cause all who attended to know personally the Saviour born in the town of David, the Messiah for all people on earth.