

2 Samuel 5:1-10 — One nation under God

Anthony Smith, All Saints, Hurworth
7 July 2024, 10.30am

Pray. Father, we recognise that many people didn't listen to your Son Jesus or to his messengers. Help us to listen to you now, and help me to be faithful in what I say. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Destined to rule, but forced to watch from a distance.

Watching, as the person in charge makes a mess of things.

Waiting for this moment.

Years of preparation. Painful, frustrating years.

But now his time has come.

The rebels in the north had wanted independence.

But now they want to unite themselves with the kingdom in the south.

He enters triumphantly into his new home, his new place of rule.

The kingdom is united. Change is in the air.

National renewal is on the agenda.

Looking at the passage

I'm talking, of course, about King David.

And the kingdom is the kingdom of Israel.

We've been whizzing through the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel, looking at key individuals in the history of Israel, and some key events in their lives.

In the passage we looked at last week, the old king, Saul, had died, and David was lamenting his death.

That was chapter 1 of 2 Samuel.

And a few things happened between that chapter and today's passage, from chapter 5.

David's own tribe, the tribe of Judah, quickly made David king.

But the northern tribes have been at war with David, for seven-and-a-half years.

The northern commander, Abner, has been murdered, against David's wishes.

And, also against David's wishes, Saul's son Ish-Bosheth has also been murdered.

The northern tribes follow some advice Abner gave them before he died, and they come to David, and invite him to be king of all of Israel.

Now, it's at this point that we read about Jerusalem.

Up to this point, Jerusalem has been a city of the Canaanite tribe known as the Jebusites.

And Jerusalem was known as Jebus (hence, Jebusites).

When Joshua led the people into the Promised Land, there were various cities that they couldn't conquer.

And Jebus was one of them.

The people were waiting for a new and better Joshua to arise, who would bring God's promises to fulfilment.

We're not told why David chose to attack the Jebusites at this point, but he did.

And the Jebusites were quite scornful of him.

The city was so strong and well fortified, that all they needed to do was to put some blind and lame people on the walls, and they could just throw things over the edge and fight off any enemy.

But David conquered the city.

The city relied on water coming from a spring outside the city.

And that seems to have been its point of vulnerability.

(A bit like Babylon, when it was conquered by the Persians.)

The reading talks about the 'water shaft': maybe David sent some of his men in that way?

So it seems that the 'blind and the lame' were no match for David.

It seems there was a strange saying in Israel: 'The blind and the lame will not enter the palace'.

And it says that David hated 'the lame and the blind'.

What's that all about?

It doesn't mean that David hated disabled people.

Later on we encounter someone called Mephibosheth.

Mephibosheth was a son of Jonathan.

And Mephibosheth was lame: he couldn't walk.

And David showed great kindness to Mephibosheth.

Maybe 'lame and blind' became a nickname for the Jebusites?

We don't know for sure, but I don't think it needs to worry us too much.

I want to briefly ask three questions, and they are questions you could ask of any passage in the Bible.

What does this show us about God?

How does this point us to Jesus?

And, What different should this make in our lives?

First,

1 What does this show us about God?

We could draw all sorts of human lessons from this passage.

We could look at David's patience, his wisdom, his courage.

But God is the main character here.

And we see God in his promise, and in his presence.

God's promise is there in verse 2 (READ).

And God's promise has been a feature throughout the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

Sometimes the only thing we have to cling onto is God's promise.

For David, there were times when everything was falling apart around him.

And he just had to hold on to God, and to God's promises.

And that's true for us too.

Sometimes we have to cling on to what we know about God from the past, and to what God promises for the future.

The kind of things we remind ourselves of week by week in the Creed.

But now God's promises are being fulfilled.

David is becoming king.

And then we see God's presence. Verse 10 (READ).

Jesus said he appointed us so that we might 'bear fruit—fruit that will last'.

If our lives are going to be fruitful, if we're really going to labour for God's kingdom and God's glory, then we need God to be with us.

There's no point setting out to achieve something without giving attention to God.

And that means praying, and listening to God.

It's very easy, even in church life, to just get on with something, without praying or listening to God.

A lot of what I do as a vicar, I can try to do without praying, and without listening to God.

But if I do that, I can't expect it to be worthwhile in God's sight.

Particularly next week, we'll see that God's presence at the heart of the nation is what makes the difference.

And if as a nation, we want to see real transformation, we need God to be with us.

And that means praying for an outpouring of God's Spirit.

And it means listening to what God says.

And as a church, locally and nationally, we can have all sorts of ideas and strategies, but if God isn't with us, then it will all come to nothing.

But if God is with us, we have nothing to fear.

God's promise, and God's presence.

That's what this shows us about God, the first thing.

Second,

2 How does this point us to Jesus?

Jesus was descended from David, the 'Son of David'.

And Jesus does a similar thing to David.

He unites the kingdom, and he changes the kingdom.

After the death of Saul, the kingdom was divided.

But under David, the tribes were brought together.

They became 'one nation under God'.

In the Old Testament, God's activity on earth was focused on one particular nation, the kingdom of Israel.

And the Gentiles, the non-Jews, were on the outside.

But with the coming of Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are brought together.

And God's people becomes all the followers of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, whether those followers are Jewish or Gentile by background.

Jesus breaks down that dividing wall of hostility, and brings all things together under himself.

And we should expect that to continue today.

We live in a world with lots of divisions.

What divisions are there in Hurworth or Darlington, or in this country, or our world?

We should expect to see those divisions broken down through Jesus.

Jesus unites the kingdom.

And Jesus changes the kingdom.

One of the key movements in 1 and 2 Samuel is the movement from Shiloh to Jerusalem.

And that's the change that we see here, as Jerusalem becomes the new capital of the kingdom.

And when Jesus comes, God's centre of operations moves again.

In fact, it moves to Jesus himself.

God's work is no longer restricted to one particular place on earth.

But Jesus has gone into heaven, and he has poured out the Holy Spirit on his people.

And since that time, God's work on earth has been much more dynamic.

The worldwide church grows and develops in different places at different times.

And the church isn't limited to one culture or one language.

The church expresses itself in different ways in different contexts.

But it always remains rooted in Jesus and rooted in God's word in the Bible.

And we should expect to see new things happening in our day.

In many ways, the church is declining in the west.

There are pockets of growth within that.

But in other parts of the world, the church is growing rapidly.

We're part of the Church of England, and the Church of England is part of a family of churches known as Anglicanism.

And the Anglican churches in many parts of the world are growing enormously.

It's been said that the average Anglican is a woman in her 30s living in sub-Saharan Africa.

The church keeps on growing, and keeps on changing.

Jesus unites the kingdom, and Jesus changes the kingdom.

That's how this passage points us to Jesus.

Finally, and much more briefly,

3 What difference should this make in our lives?

It's easy to become bogged down in whatever's going on in our own lives.

Or it's easy to become fixated by politics, or football, or even by the General Synod of the Church of England, which is meeting this weekend.

But as we look at these events from around 3000 years ago, from a distant land, it reminds us that God and God's purposes are bigger than our own perspectives.

God was faithful to his promises then, and God will continue to be faithful to his promises into the future.

Let's make sure God is at the centre of our lives.

Conclusion

Pray.