

28 April 2024

# THE KINGDOM OF HOPE—A KING'S HEART

## 1. INTRO

- A. Good morning, my name is Tom and I'm one of the leaders here. If you've not been with us before, we're midway through a short series of talks exploring the idea of the Kingdom of God throughout the Bible. Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, or sometimes he calls it the Kingdom of Heaven, throughout the Gospels, the biographies that contain his teachings. We're using the working definition of the Kingdom being: God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, in God's plan, and in God's timing.
- B. We've been tracing this idea from the very start of the Bible, through the history of God's interaction with his people. I started us off a few weeks back, looking at how the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and how their choice to determine for themselves what was right and wrong led to a fracture in the relationship between God and humanity. Then Matt looked at the giving of God's Law in Exodus, and saw the connection between the King's will and his ability to bring about his plan. Last week, Pat looked at the time toward the end of the period of the Judges, temporary political rulers over Israel. During this time, the people wanted a King, like the other nations had. But they weren't willing to submit themselves to God's plan and God's timing. Pat also touched on the importance of God's king being a servant, rather than just a strong military leader.
- C. This morning, we're going to expand on that idea as we look at the idea of what the heart of a king should be, and we're going to look at one of the most important figures in the history of Israel. King David was probably Israel's most celebrated king. He saw unprecedented growth in the geographical area of the Kingdom, he marched the people into the capital, Jerusalem, and he laid the foundations for the Temple, a fixed place for God's people to worship, a place for God to dwell among his people. David was described as 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Sam 13:14), so it would seem that he's a good place to start, right? We'll see...
- D. First, though, I'd like to ask a question: How well do I know my own heart? How honest am I about what goes on deep down in my own self?
- E. As we work our way through an abbreviated study of the ups and downs of David's life and reign, it can be easy to point fingers, to be tempted to 'cancel' him...I've been

tempted to cancel him several times in the past week for what that's worth! I want to approach David like we might approach anybody else in the Bible, critically and carefully, bearing in mind that while there are always things which we can learn when exploring the life of an individual in the Bible, with the exception of Jesus all of them will have sinned and fallen short in some way. I want you to particularly keep the question of 'How well do I know my own heart?' in mind as we move forward.

## 2. THE 'SHEPHERD KING'

- A. Patrick left off with the Israelites getting their wish, they get their first king, a man named Saul. If we were to look to a proverbial Ancient Near Eastern checklist of 'good king material', Saul would definitely fit the bill. He's a head taller than everyone else. He's got military leadership experience. He's been anointed by the prophet Samuel. And as king, he prevails over some significant military victories over Israel's enemies in the region.
- B. But Saul's reign is problematic. He doesn't listen to the prophets, he cares more about his own agenda than God's, and this leads to friction between him and Samuel. This comes to a head when Saul goes against God's instructions and refuses to kill a rival king. 1 Samuel 16 begins with God speaking to Samuel, and we hear that God has rejected Saul as king over Israel. Lorna is going to come and read this passage for us.
- C. 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

<sup>2</sup> But Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me."

The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate."

<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

<sup>5</sup> Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." <sup>9</sup> Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> Jesse had seven of his sons

pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.”

<sup>11</sup>So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

<sup>12</sup>So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

<sup>13</sup>So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

- D. Thanks Lorna. We see that God wants Samuel to anoint someone else, a son of Jesse in Bethlehem. Did you catch the part about Jesse bringing his six older sons out in front of Samuel? They must have been strong, intimidating-looking guys, because Samuel thinks to himself that surely one of these sons will be king. But then there is the line that will be familiar to some of you: ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’ (1 Samuel 16:7) Keep this in mind as we carry on.

### 3. THE SHEPHERD WARRIOR

- A. If the wider world knows anything about David, it’s probably from this sculpture by Michelangelo. He gets a few things wrong—David doesn’t look particularly Jewish, and he’s got what I’d call ‘Scottish person in February’ complexion—but nevertheless, this sculpture captures David at one of the pivotal stories in Israelite history, the battle in the Valley of Elah, the slaying of the giant warrior, Goliath. The armies agree to single-combat battle.
- i. This particular aspect might seem a bit out of place to us today. I doubt that there are any places in the Ukraine war where the Ukrainian and Russian troops are going to pick one fighter to represent them, with the rest of the respective armies standing around and watching. But it’s much more normal in ancient literature, like the fight between Achilles and Hector, either in Homer’s *Illiad* or the Brad Pitt film version. I’ll let you guess which one I’m more familiar with...
- B. This is one of those stories in the Bible that almost plays out like a movie. You can see Goliath standing in front of the Philistine army, taunting the Israelites, shouting them, ‘I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.’ (1 Samuel 17:10) Saul, who has to some extent built his reputation on his height and his military ability, is afraid. He’s not just afraid, the passage says that he’s ‘dismayed and terrified’. Looking at the outward appearance, Saul should be the man for the hour, but he’s quaking in his boots.

- C. Enter David, who Samuel had anointed a few chapters earlier. He's a skinny, teenaged shepherd, and his dad sends him to the battlefield to bring a care package of food for his older brothers. He goes to the front lines to catch up with his brothers, and bring news back to their father, and there's word going around that Saul is wanting to hire someone to come in and fight Goliath. He's offering not only money and tax exemptions, but also a betrothal to his daughter. But that's not what draws David in...David takes *personal* offense to the way Goliath describes Israel.
- i. Note something really important here: **This isn't an example of patriotism on David's part. Rather, he sees Goliath's taunts as blasphemy against God himself.** That's why he's offended. That's why he says 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of God?'
- D. David is eventually brought before Saul, and says that he will fight Goliath. Saul's not convinced, and then David tells him about how as a shepherd he defended his sheep from both a lion and a bear, but again, he's not saying that he's got transferrable skills in defeating giant, hairy beasts, look what he says in verse 37: 'The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.'
- i. David's confidence isn't in his own aim with a slingshot, though it does appear that he's got pretty amazing aim. His confidence rests solely in God. He doesn't bother putting on Saul's gigantic body armour, he's a shepherd, not a warrior. And so this teenager, the least likely soldier, steps up to face Goliath.
  - ii. Goliath, who's been trash-talking the Israelites for awhile now, just laughs at the idea of them sending David to fight him. David's reply is telling, listen carefully to what he says:
    1. You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. <sup>47</sup> All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands. (1 Samuel 17:45-47)
      - a. *Do you see what's going on here? **David isn't speaking out of a sense of teenaged bravado. His confidence isn't ultimately in his aim, it's in God's deliverance.***
  - iii. The story is famous, we know the ending. David strikes Goliath with a blow in the forehead, kills him, and beheads him. The Israelites go on to a secure victory. It's an important pivot point in the Israelites settling in the land that God promised to give them. Things seem pretty good so far, right?

- E. At this point, I want to highlight a general principle when we're looking at David's life: When he's aligning himself to the principles of God's Kingdom, of God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, in God's plan, and in God's timing, things tend to go well, he usually finds victory. The writer of 1 Samuel actually spells this out, it says 'In everything he [that is, David] did he had great success, because the Lord was with him.' In terms of our focus today, David's heart is looking pretty good so far. But we also need to see what happens when he isn't thinking in terms of God's rule.

#### 4. THE ANTI-SHEPHERD

- A. The balance of 1 Samuel tells us a story of struggle as Saul grows increasingly jealous of David's success and popularity, and David gains a reputation as a competent military leader. 1 Samuel ends with Saul's forces beaten by the Philistines, one of their perpetual enemies in the book. Wounded in battle and not wanting to experience what would lie in store for him at the hands of his enemies, Saul commits suicide, and the Philistines desecrate his body as a final insult to the rival king.
- B. This creates a vacuum in leadership, and David campaigns against Saul's family for leadership over the Israelites. David eventually becomes king over all Israel, but it comes only after a significant amount of violence and spilled blood.
  - i. As king, David begins to unite the various tribal factions of Israel under a common banner. He brings the Ark of the Covenant out of hiding and back to Jerusalem. God reveals to David that he will build a permanent place of worship, a temple, unlike the intentionally-mobile tabernacle, where God's presence could permanently dwell among his people. This all sounds pretty good, right?
- C. We don't have time this morning to unpack how each part of David's life fits into this paradigm, so I'm going to zero in on a situation that seems to be a bit of a turning point in how 2 Samuel presents and evaluates David. You can see the narrator is trying to raise our suspicion in verse one. 'At the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army.' (2 Sam 11:1)
  - i. We're not told why David didn't go out with his army, but given what follows this seems to be the narrator signalling that something is not right in David's heart.
- D. David, at home when he should be with his troops, steps out onto his roof terrace and sees a woman bathing. He finds her very beautiful, and sends some of his workers to find out who she is. His private investigators return and tell him that 'she is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' (2 Sam 11:3) Here's another point where the narrator is making sure we're following—Bathsheba is someone's daughter, and she's someone's wife. David should be leaving her alone. Instead, he tells his messengers to bring her back to the palace, and he has sex with

her. The next verse gives us the only actual words spoken by Bathsheba: 'I am pregnant'.

- i. There have been many, many opinions regarding what's going on in this text over the years. A surprising amount of scholarship has tried to make this a case of adultery between two consenting adults. Some have tried to place culpability on Bathsheba herself, asserting that she is deliberately choosing to bathe in sight of David in some ill-conceived attempt to seduce him. Listen to how one writer puts it: 'In the Middle East, men and women are exceptionally modest about exposing their bodies. But in this particular story, Bathsheba waited until her soldier husband was away fighting for Israel. Then she decided to take a bath in front of an open window *facing the palace*. Why should she spend her life with a lowly paid foreigner if she could manage to move in next door with King David? If taking a bath in front of a window was all she had to do—why not give it a try...'<sup>1</sup>
  1. *If this quote makes you uncomfortable, then I'm right there with you, and I want to acknowledge that this interpretation is dangerously close to the sort of victim-blaming that happens to women all around the world today. Moreover I'm not convinced that it stands up to what the biblical text has to say on the matter. I think this is a profoundly unhelpful assessment of what's going on in the passage, for a few reasons. First, he seems to be assuming that Bathsheba is being intentionally provocative, whereas the text only highlights David's deliberate choice to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The narrator is making it perfectly clear that it's David, not Bathsheba in the wrong with things like continually referencing Bathsheba as Uriah's wife. Second, he's neglecting the specific context. The passage tells us that Bathsheba was purifying herself following her monthly uncleanness. This is the way Old Testament authors say that Bathsheba's period had ended and she was cleaning her body as all Israelite women did, so that she could resume life no longer being ceremonially unclean. Finally, we have to recognize the profound imbalance of power between the king and the wife of one of his soldiers.*
  2. *So, observing the text more closely, it makes much more sense to conclude that Bathsheba is not trying to show off her body and entice the king, she's simply trying to purify herself so that she could enter back into everyday life in Jerusalem. Again, we think of her bathing on her roof—that's not actually in the text, you probably got that from Leonard Cohen, but it's not there in the passage. It's most likely that she was either in a community bathing area—these were common, particularly in the culture*

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (London: SPCK, 2008), 41. Italics in the original.

*as ritual cleaning was part of life, or she was in a back garden area of her own home.*

3. *Finally, if we consider David's behaviour in light of the Old Testament Law, there can be no doubt as to his responsibility for his sin. The Old Testament scholar Carmen Imes observes: 'We think of "adultery" as consensual by definition, while the Bible defines it as the responsibility of the male head of the household to keep his hands off his neighbor's wife (Ex. 20:14)...*
  - a. *It's hard to think of another Old Testament story that fits the bill more precisely. Bathsheba is literally David's neighbor's wife, which means she's totally off limits to him.'*<sup>2</sup>
4. *I've wrestled with this passage for the past few weeks, and from where I sit, I don't think there's any room to place culpability on Bathsheba's actions or in her heart. Rather, I think we need to acknowledge that Israel's king, the man after God's own heart, knowingly spied on and sexually assaulted a woman.*

- E. The story continues. Bathsheba is pregnant, and David has a dilemma. He determines the best way to get himself out of trouble would be to recall Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, from the front lines. The idea being that Uriah would stop by his home while he was in Jerusalem, reunite with his wife, and when the baby was born he would assume it was his.
- i. But there's a snag with this plan. If you flip back to 1 Samuel 21:4-5, you can see that David makes a point of saying that 'women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy.' This isn't a sort of 'keep the testosterone count high' plan, there's once again a *cultural* expectation that even at war, the people of Israel would not try to circumvent purity laws. Here in 1 Samuel, David is demonstrating faithfulness to God's law, but by the time of his encounter with Bathsheba he's behaving as if the law didn't exist.
  - ii. Uriah is far more faithful to the law than King David. He won't go home to his wife, because he intends to follow the king's policy. David tries another tactic, and gets him drunk the next night. But even in his intoxication, Uriah demonstrates a faithfulness that puts the sober king to shame.
- F. David then decides that he's getting nowhere with this plan, so he sends Uriah back to the front lines. He tells Joab, his general, to 'Put Uriah out in front where the

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<sup>2</sup> Carmen Joy Imes, 'Blame David, Not Bathsheba. The Prophet Nathan Did' <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/july-web-only/rape-david-bathsheba-adultery-sexual-sin-prophet-nathan.html>

fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.' (2 Sam. 11:14)

- i. Joab complies, and Uriah is killed in battle. Bathsheba is devastated, and following her ceremonial time of mourning, David brings her into his house again and she becomes one of his wives.

## 5. THE PROPHET'S REBUKE

- A. Are we tempted to think here, 'He got away with it...how can this happen?' Well, at this point, the prophet Nathan comes onto the scene. He critiques David in a very clever way, he refers to David's past life as a shepherd. You can read it in chapter 12, but I'll summarize it quickly here. He describes a poor man who has one small little ewe lamb, who he raised from a baby. It eats his food, drinks from his cup, sleeps next to him in his bed. A rich man in the same town was unprepared to cook one of his own herd for dinner, so he goes out and takes the lamb from the poor man and cooks it for his guests. David is enraged at this, until Nathan points out that this is meant to illustrate what he had done. It is only at this point that David, confronted by the extent of his sin, begins to repent. He acknowledges the horror of his actions, but he also has to live with their result. As does Bathsheba.
- B. I wonder if you've ever had a moment where you've been confronted with sin? It might not be something as drastic as our case this morning, but nevertheless I think each of us have probably had something unpleasant revealed about ourselves.
  - i. Speaking personally, one thing that I never really noticed was selfishness. It took becoming a husband, and particularly becoming a father, to make me realize how much of my time I had dedicated solely to what I wanted to do. Most of us won't have prophets turning up to convict us, but I have to say that my toddler does a pretty good job of revealing my own selfishness to me. I started out by asking how well do you know your own heart? Following on from that I would ask are you allowing God to use other people in your life to show you those areas that need work and/or help?

## 6. A KINGDOM HEART?

- A. Back when we introduced this series, I said that Adam and Eve's sin was not connected to simply eating fruit, but that they determined that they were free to determine what was right and wrong. They put themselves into a position reserved for God alone—to determine with is good and right.
- B. I want to argue that this is also what's at the core of David's moral downfall. While we could see some problematic behaviour earlier on in David's life, for instance in his taking on a number of wives, he's not previously described negatively in the same way...though he already has blurred the lines between what God wants for



him and what he takes for himself. While early on he's depicted as a faithful and courageous follower of God, who inspires those under his care, we also have instances, perhaps chiefly his behaviour toward Bathsheba and Uriah, he demonstrates that he believes that he should be the one to determine right and wrong.

- i. Carmen Imes makes another helpful observation on this very point. She writes that 'the most shocking part of the story comes after the murder of Uriah, when David tells his commander, *Let this matter not be evil in your eyes* (2 Sam. 11:25). David attempts to redefine his own behavior as acceptable. If David had been king of any other ancient Near Eastern kingdom, his actions would have been unremarkable. Kings could do whatever they wanted. But this wasn't any other kingdom; it was Israel. And David's power was not absolute, nor did he make the rules. Yahweh did.'<sup>3</sup>
  1. *I think what's going on here ultimately boils down to the idea that David is no longer satisfied with the role of king, he's taking it upon himself to play God.*
  2. *How often are we likely to do this, even in the privacy of our own minds?*

## 7. THE TRUE SERVANT KING

- A. We've covered a lot of ground in the past few weeks. God's people went from a couple in a garden to a small nation, moving into its own land and attempting to display its own distinct identity. And David in many respects represents the best and worst of this period in Israel's history. There are stories of victory, of heartfelt worship, of justice triumphing. And there are also profound abuses of power, sexual assault, murder, all committed by God's anointed king.
- B. What do we do with this? I think that we need to zoom out and look at the bigger picture of the story off the Bible, where we find the true Servant King, Jesus. Parallels are often drawn between David and Jesus. They're both men who would seem (outwardly at least) to be unlikely leaders. Not the sort who would be first picked to go out and fight a giant. Maybe not even first picked for a football squad. And yet, where David fails to live a life of perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus does. David is, in a sense, not much different to Abraham, Moses, Samson, or any other of the key figures in Israel's history—they're all deeply flawed men. Even at their very best, they only show a poor imitation of what Jesus demonstrates as the Servant King.
  - i. Jesus lived a life of humble service to his Father the King. If you get a moment, read Philippians 2 this afternoon, it talks about Jesus setting aside his glory, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

life that was rightfully his, in obedience to his Father. If you want to see what it looks like to live life according to God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, in God's plan, and in God's timing, you need look no further than Jesus himself. He's actually the only one who embodied God's Kingdom, and put in motion the plan to see the Kingdom of God transform this earth.

## 8. HOW'S YOUR HEART?

- A. I want to come back to the question I asked at the beginning. How's your heart? It's unlikely that any of you have spied on neighbours or arranged for someone's death. But remember what we said, at the heart of this darkness is the tendency for men and women to determine for themselves what is right and wrong. Do you find yourself doing this?
- B. If you're like me, you might find it really difficult to evaluate yourself, to identify areas where you need to change.
  - i. Sometimes it takes having someone else in your life to call you out.
    1. *Life as God's people has never been a solo, lone-wolf operation. We grow best in our faith, in our own walk with God, and in our spiritual maturity, when we're around others who help keep us along. We need friends for this journey, who will walk with us. That looks different for different people. Maybe you've got a monthly chat with Christian friends from university, or a breakfast one to one, or a small group or office prayer group. We need Nathans in our life, to smack us upside the head occasionally. As we close this portion of our morning gathering, I want you to ask yourself 1) How's my heart; and 2) Is there anyone in my life who would call me out?*
    2. *Both are necessary steps if we want to live according to God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, in his plan and in his timing.*