

Matthew 1:1-17
(Psalm 89:19-52; Hebrews 11:13-16, 39-40)
“Disappointment with God: Broken Promises”

Introduction

Twice in the past twenty-five years – once in 1990 and again in 2004 – we spent the four Sundays of Advent looking at Jesus’ genealogy as recorded in Matthew’s gospel, finding comfort and hope in this roll call of broken people whom God used to bring redemption to the world. Since it has been over a decade, I thought it would be good again this year to return to this passage, and note once again God’s delight in using the most broken people and seemingly foolish things of life to redeem us, to shame the wise and cast down the powerful, and exalt his name in the salvation of his people.

We read this list of names, and if we’ve any memory of the stories of the people named as Jesus’ ancestors, we are tempted to think, “What good is there in this? What can possibly come from so much brokenness and misery?” The answer is found in verse sixteen, “of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ.” All history is, in a sense, to be found here: a tale of heroes and cowards, of virgins and whores, all here in Jesus’ family tree. It all makes so little sense except for the words, “of whom Jesus was born.” Apart from that, Abraham is a madman, David a lusty, lyrical despot, and history a tale of broken promises and shattered dreams.

Why do I speak of broken promises? Where do I find that in our text? In verse one, Jesus is called, “the son of David, the son of Abraham.” When you think of those great heroes of the Old Covenant, what do you remember? Do you think only of Abraham’s incredible faith and of David’s mighty victories in battle? Or do you remember their dark nights of the soul, wondering what had become of God’s promises to them, whether they could keep trusting God to fulfill all that he had promised them?

These magisterial figures were flesh and blood like you and me, and they struggled with those long and painful passages of life where God seemed distant and inscrutable, when their lives seemed about to end without ever having seen the fulfillment of what was promised. And so it was for their descendents. Down through the ages, God’s people have found themselves in desperate places where they cried out with the psalmist, “How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?” (Psalm 89:46).

Perhaps as you enter this Advent season, you find yourself in such a place. If not, and if you have much life still to live, such times will likely find you. In fact, if God still has much to teach you about trusting him, this is the school where he probably will take you, because it is the place where we receive our most powerful lessons in radical trust.

In the life of faith, we learn to walk by faith and not by sight, which means that we believe what God has promised, and place our hope and confidence in his doing what he has promised, even in the times that we cannot see how he can possibly bring it to pass, especially in the times that we are tempted to believe that he has forgotten his promises and removed his love from us.

Body

1. Consider Abraham's disappointment with God:

Remember Abraham's twenty-five years of waiting for God to fulfill what must have seemed less and less likely a promise: namely, the promise of an heir who would give Abraham descendants as numerous as "the stars in the sky and the sand on the sea shore," and a descendant through whom all people would be blessed.

And even at the time that Matthew wrote this gospel, what could be said of the promise to be a blessing to the nations? Abraham's descendants were a conquered people, minor players on the world scene, ruled by a puppet king who answered to Rome. The great promises made to Abraham must have seemed a tragic joke – except for this: "of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

2. Consider David's disappointment with God:

Remember David's long and painful wait from the time of his anointing by Samuel until he was made king, and then the tragic warfare within his own family, the murders and machinations among his own children over who would follow him as king. How could he see the Messiah coming from such a massively and dangerously dysfunctional family?

And in the days that Matthew wrote his gospel, what was left of David's throne, a throne that God had promised would endure forever? It must have seemed a tragic joke – except for this: "of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

Because they did not see the fulfillment of God's promises, they were at times tempted to be disappointed with God, to see his promises as broken because they had not yet been fulfilled.

3. Consider your disappointment with God:

At what place in your life today are you disappointed with God? Where are you inclined to see his promises to you as broken because they have not yet

been fulfilled in your life, at least not in the way that you expected them to be fulfilled?

Hasn't he, for example, promised his people love, joy and peace? What of those who come this morning with broken hearts because you have not known love, but rather rejection and betrayal? What of those who come this morning filled with sadness and weary of being sad. If "the joy of the Lord is our strength," when will we know the joy that makes one strong? And what of those who come longing for the peace, the all-encompassing shalom, that God's Word promises to God's people? Today, we have brothers and sisters in Christ living at the very epicenter of terrorism, others who suffer domestic violence, still others who can't make it to the school bus without being bullied. Where is the promised "peace that passes human understanding"? How have you been disappointed with God?

Conclusion

In the Advent seasons of our lives, those times of brokenness and pain, when we stand looking and longing for God to show up and redeem our lives, make sense of our pain, and bring us the love, joy and peace for which we long, God reminds us that in the end, we wait for his salvation to be completed in the his re-creation of the cosmos, "the new heavens and new earth," for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who appeared once in humility to take upon himself our brokenness and sin, and then to triumph in his death and resurrection over everything that would separate us from the love of God, and who has promised to come again in glory to heal our brokenness, to wipe away our tears and make all things new.

Until then, the testimony of his people down through the ages is that he will show us enough grace to let us know that he is at work in our lives and that we can trust him, but will leave us with enough longing that we will never mistake this present age – however blessed we may be with love, joy and peace – for the age to come. In our brokenness, we will find hope, and learn to wait, not for what might come, but for him who is coming – for Jesus who will always be there at the right time.

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