

Who Do You Think You Are? (3): Bathsheba

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 December 2023

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that all of your word is breathed out by you, and that it is useful for us to correct and teach and train in righteousness.

Our Father, we thank you that all your word speaks of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we need him. And so we pray, Lord, that you would speak so that we would hear of the gospel of Jesus today.

Lord, lead us to him, and help us in our hearts to claim him as our own, for we pray in his name. Amen. Well, I wonder if our Advent series is making you feel Christmassy yet.

Some of us went in the week to see the Messiah at the music hall. It was wonderful. But I noticed that, weirdly, Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba didn't make it into the score.

The places that we've turned back to in our Bibles the last few Sunday mornings are hardly the passages we would choose, right, in the run-up to Christmas. Today is no exception.

[1 : 14] But God's ways are not our ways. I hope, if nothing else, that we have seen something of that the last few weeks as we've looked back into Jesus' family history, that his choices would not be our choices.

If we got to write the story, this would be a family in another league, wouldn't it? It would be the heroes of the faith and the giants of church history, and we would certainly keep the skeletons double locked in the closet.

In short, we would choose a family that we could never be part of. But God chose some of the nastiest pieces of work, some of the very worst and most shocking chapters in history to weave into the family that would lead to the birth of his son.

In short, God chose a family that me and you would be perfectly at home in. And I hope that we are very, very, very thankful for having seen that.

If you still need convincing, our episode today should help. The keen among you will notice we've actually skipped over an important name in Matthew's genealogy, Ruth.

[2 : 34] We have had to squeeze our series slightly, but if you want to catch up on Ruth, we actually did an Advent series going through the whole book just a couple of years ago.

So if you want, you can go and catch up on Ruth's four sermons for the price of one. Because this morning, we're fast-forwarding through history and the genealogy to David, the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

If we were in any doubt at all that Matthew wanted us to go digging back through these names, the fact that he calls this woman Uriah's wife is a pretty obvious invitation.

Her name is clearly Bathsheba, but as ever, Matthew's not interested in the airbrushed version of history. He's showing us where the bodies are buried, and he wants us to go and dig them up.

So let's do some digging and see in our first point how it is that Uriah's wife came to give birth to David's son.

[3 : 43] A point we'll call the tailspin. It starts much like any other week in a king's life. It's springtime, the time of year when people don't freeze outside, the time of year, therefore, that kings go out to war.

And David, by now, is king over God's people. We've zoomed through about 300 years of history. I can't catch you up on all of it. But what we need to know is that David is the guy that God has chosen to put over his kingdom.

David is the start of a new royal dynasty that God promised would rule over his kingdom forever. So David and his sons would be God's kings.

So King David sends the army out into battle, and they fight. But, verse 1, David remained in Jerusalem. Now, it's not much, but it is the first loose screw that should snag our attention on our

way through this chapter.

Because it's the time when kings go off to war, but the king has stayed at home. Now, that's nothing you say. We're not even out of verse 1 yet. But if David had gone to war as he should, well, how the story could have been so different?

[5 : 06] I mean, what is he doing in verse 2? He appears to have crawled out of bed sometime in the evening and gone for a wander around on his roof.

For a king, he's living a pretty carefree life, isn't he? While his servants slog their guts out on the battlefield for him. What is he doing?

Pottering around the roof of his palace. Again, it's strange, you say, but it seems harmless. But I have to say, it's hard to believe that he didn't go up to the roof knowing what he stood a chance of seeing.

See, the city was built on a hill, and the palace was at the top. So, from the roof of the palace, what would you see looking down but a sea of roofs?

And in a small house, the flat roof was the natural place to go for a wash, and the evening was the natural time to do it.

[6 : 11] You know, if you put yourself in the position to see things that you shouldn't be seeing, you shouldn't be surprised when you see them.

Now, it's possible he's just in the wrong place at the wrong time, right? But he's also bored, tired, at a bit of a loose end. In short, he is perfectly positioned to see what he shouldn't see.

And behold, from the roof he saw a woman bathing. And the writer observes, the woman was very beautiful.

Notice it's not David's comment, it's the writer's comment. God has made a beautiful world with very beautiful things and very beautiful people in it.

The Bible calls Bathsheba a very beautiful woman. I trust, therefore, that she was, and that there's nothing wrong in recognizing that. The problem is not beauty, nor is it recognizing beauty.

[7 : 22] It's what we do with beauty when we see it. Getting close to beautiful people that we should not be getting close to. Seeing more of beautiful people than we have a right to see.

Today, David would not have needed to get out of bed to see more than he should have seen. But even if we're not going out searching for it, we have all at different points in life, haven't we, come across people who we know that we should not take notice of or be interested in, but who it is hard to tear our eyes off of.

If you're keeping an eye open for people like that, if you secretly want to be tempted by physical beauty, well, don't be so surprised if you accidentally, on purpose, stumble upon somebody beautiful enough that they tempt you to sin.

What should David have done? Well, he should have resisted the impulse to go up to his roof at that time of day. But if he had got that far, as soon as he saw an undressed woman who was not his wife, he should have gone back down, prayed to God for a pure heart and clean hands, and found something else to do.

He should not keep glancing over in her direction. He should not go and speak to her. He should not go back to flirt with her. He should not get her number.

[9 : 02] Even now, that could have been it, couldn't it? He could have stopped it, but he didn't, verse 3. What does he do? David sent someone to find out about her, and now the tailspin really picks up speed.

Just notice how quickly it spins out of control, right? A day to himself, a glance in the wrong direction, and suddenly the thing takes off, and it is out of control.

Verse 3, he's told her name and her husband's name. Verse 4, he sends people over to bring that husband's wife home to him. And we're all sitting here thinking, how could he do it?

How could he do it? But let's not pretend that we don't know. When we let our sinful desires run loose, we very, very quickly become capable of doing things that not so long ago we would have thought unthinkable.

We think that we have a handle on our sin, don't we? This far and no further. But just think back.

[10 : 12] Where was your line a year ago? Or five years ago? Or ten years ago? How much ground has sin taken in your life since then?

Give sin an inch and it will take a mile. In the unforgettable words of John Owen, be killing sin or it will be killing you.

David illustrates that for us in a horrible way. Verse 4, David sleeps with her. Verse 5, she gets pregnant. Now there's no turning back.

Either he comes clean or he covers it up, right? But there's no going back. And by now we should know that he chooses to cover it up, doesn't he?

He has it all planned out in his head. Probably a sleepless night's work. But he'll get Uriah Bathsheba's wife back home from the front for a night. He'll pretend he just wants to catch up on how it's all going.

[11:15] Verse 7. But really what he wants most of all is Uriah back in bed with his wife. Verse 8. He even sends a big bunch of roses and a bottle of bubbly after him.

It'll all be okay, he thinks. He'll go home, he'll sleep with his wife, and he will come back thinking the baby is his. Until he finds out that Uriah hasn't gone home.

He slept in the servants' quarters. Imagine the terror. Why didn't you go home? Why didn't you do it, he says. Now just notice the contrast between David and Uriah.

Uriah says, verse 11. The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped out in the open country.

How could I go to my house and eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing.

[12:20] Why does Uriah not go home? Because he knows that he is a man on duty. God's throne and God's people are out slumming it in a field, fighting a war.

Okay, he's home for a night, but how could he in good faith go home and feast and sleep with his wife? He's a soldier on duty.

He will not break his discipline. And crucially, he won't make himself unfit for God. Back then, sex was one of the things that made you unclean to come into God's presence.

That doesn't mean there was anything in itself wrong or evil about it, but simply that afterwards it made you unfit for worship. The solution was simply by evening you needed to go and wash, and then you would be clean again.

But soldiers in wartime, they needed to be fit for God's presence the whole time, because God's throne, the ark of the covenant, went with them onto the battlefield.

[13:31] They fought, they lived in the presence of the living God, and so they had to wait until the war was over, the battle was done, and they were back home off duty with their wives again.

So what Uriah is saying is that he fully intends to keep God's law, even when God's king invites him and tempts him to break it.

The contrast with David couldn't be greater, could it? David has counted himself off duty, and he knowingly breaks God's law rampantly.

Uriah knows he is a man on duty, and he insists on keeping God's law. It's a reminder to us in passing, isn't it, maybe especially coming up to Christmas and New Year, that being on holiday from work doesn't count us off duty from being a Christian.

We can unwind, can't we? But we're never free from loving God and his word. I think time off can be a spiritually vulnerable time for us.

[14:50] We're out of routine, we're at rest. Those things can be good, but that's why it's so vital that we remember that Christmas, first and foremost, is for the worship of Christ, and not for satisfying our own desires.

Uriah insists, as we should, that his life is devoted, body and soul, to God. But that doesn't stop David trying to break his spirit.

The second night, verse 13, David has Uriah around for dinner, and gets him drunk, and sends him home. But he slept again with the servants, and did not go home.

He is a righteous man. But that is what gets him killed. David sends Uriah back to the front with a letter for the general, which says, verse 15, put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest, then pull back from him, and he will be struck down and die.

The strategy has changed, hasn't it? Up to now, David could still have owned up to his sin. David could still have taken the consequences himself. But now he plans something different.

[16:04] Uriah will take the consequences for David's sin. It's a really twisted detail, isn't it? That he makes the man whose wife he's stolen carry his own death sentence back to war to put in the hand of his commander.

And by this point, we're meant to be thinking, is this really God's king on the throne of God's kingdom? Is this really the David whose family Jesus is descended from?

Brothers and sisters, this is the man. And he is a nasty piece of work. His sin is out of control. The general does what he commands.

He puts Uriah where he knows the hardest fighters are. He leaves him to die at their hands, as if he had died in battle. The general sends the report to David.

They clearly had lost far worse than they needed to. But he tells David, the target was eliminated. Uriah is dead. Uriah is dead. Uriah is dead.

[17:16] David gets the message. And this is the cherry on the cake, isn't it? Verse 25. David told the messenger, say this to Joab. Don't let this upset you.

The sword devours one as well as another. They are sickly platitudes, aren't they, from the mouth of the man who plotted this guy's death.

David, by now, must think he's in the clear. Uriah is out of the picture. His problem person is gone. David brings Bathsheba to the palace, marries her. She gives birth to their son.

And that's that. Now, friends, are you happy with the way this ends? Does that satisfy you?

Our skin should be crawling. We should feel sick to our stomach, shouldn't we? Our hearts cry out. When is this going to be fixed? The good guy is dead.

[18:18] The bad guy is on the throne. When is he going to come down? We should be willing, David, to fall from power, shouldn't we? It's corrupt. It's abusive. It's horrible.

It's murderous. But the bad guy is God's king. It's David. Can you take this in? Who is there to do justice if the king is meant to do justice?

Only two people in the whole world know why it is that Uriah died. And one of them is David. But someone else knows why Uriah really died.

The very last line, verse 27, but the thing David had done displeased the Lord. And in a way, our hearts sing, don't they?

There is a sure, a fairer, a better outcome to this story. Justice will be done. The Lord knows. It displeases him. But in another way, our hearts should sink.

[19:24] Because even if we're not tailspinning out of control, or we are, but we haven't crashed yet, it doesn't mean that we never have.

Or never could. Or even that we're not at the beginning of what will end up, a tailspin out of control into unbearable sin.

David shows us how sin starts ever so small. Perhaps we would never imagine taking somebody else's wife or husband to bed, or dispatching, kind of getting rid of somebody who had some dirt on us.

But we're only a careless, off-duty week from plunging into unthinkable sin. We are not in control. We are not in control. And our hearts should sink at the thought that what David does offends God. Because in our hearts, if not in our minds and our bodies, we are not only capable, but guilty of the things that David does.

[20:30] In the new year, we're going to hear from Jesus himself in his most famous sermon, say, I tell you that not only someone who physically kills somebody, but anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

I tell you that not only someone who sleeps with someone they're not married to, but anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Friends, if Jesus could only see your calendar, he would see the version of you that you want him to see. But Jesus sees our hearts, and in our hearts, what he sees is what is on this page. That we have murder and adultery in our hearts.

We are full of anger and full of lust. And it is surely one of the great understatement of the Bible to say that that displeases God. It deserves his eternal wrath and never-ending punishment.

What we do in our hearts and minds with people we find beautiful, and people who get in our way, he cannot tolerate.

[21:51] So if that is where the story ended, well, we and David, we would crash into eternity in flames.

But out of the tailspin comes one final twist. It's our final point this morning, the twist. Now, if you've been here the last couple of Sunday mornings, perhaps you think you know where we're going, but there is a real twist in this tale, because the last two weeks, I've been able to say something like

this.

Well, read on a wee bit, a few pages, maybe, a few lines, and we'll see how God redeems this family. In Genesis, we only had to read to the end of the chapter to see two babies born, one of whom would get us to Jesus.

In Joshua, we only had to read to chapter 6 to see Rahab saved from the flames, and maybe to the next book on to see how her son Boaz marries Ruth and has a son who gets us to Jesus.

But we could read on into the next chapter of 2 Samuel, and what would we see? David is found out, and the baby in Bathsheba's womb doesn't get us to Jesus.

[23 : 08] The baby dies. We could read on to the end of the book, and we could see God's king and kingdom crumble in David's hand, rape, incest, murder, betrayal.

It's not until the next book, one king's, that David's son Solomon takes the throne, and we have hope again for the family of Jesus.

But it's not long until we see his glory days are short-lived. God's kingdom splits down the middle, and both halves tailspin into destruction. How far forward do we have to read from here to see that God redeems his family?

Well, there are signposts along the way, but really we have to keep reading up to Matthew chapter 1 to see any lasting hope for this family.

Friends, do we see how desperate the Old Testament is, even at its high points, for a son to be born who is not like his father's?

[24 : 17] For a man to step into the world to redeem this family from disgrace, the Old Testament shows us that it is not as simple as flicking over the page or a new year, a new start.

It won't do it. A thousand years would pass between David and Jesus, pages and pages and pages and pages of our Bibles before God would send his one and only son.

But the wonderful good news is that at the end of that long, long, long wait, God sent his son into this family, this family, to save them from their sins.

There could not be a bigger twist in the story than at the start of the gospel to read, here is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, and then a list of the most scandalous relationships.

And wicked men and unlikely women. If it was us, we would have drawn a line under this whole thing, wouldn't we, and started again with a nice, decent family with no baggage, no history.

[25 : 32] Would you or I have seriously planned from before the beginning of time to do anything with this family? But praise God that he is not us, that before the beginning of time he set his everlasting love on these people, knowing full well and, yes, planning what they would do, but bending it all to the one single purpose that his son would be born to them, to redeem a family like this, to be the man, the king, the savior that none of them had ever been, to be the one that we can never be, to stand in our place as sinless man with a pure heart and clean hands, and yet to pay for our sins in full so that justice would be satisfied.

so that the loose ends would be tied up, so that God's wrath would be exhausted in his one sacrifice. Friends, when we think of Jesus in the manger, the little newborn, we have to think of him with our sins resting on his little shoulders.

that is why he came. The body formed in the womb of the virgin would be nailed to the cross because the kind of family that he came from is the kind of family he came for.

People with anger and rage, people with lustful hearts, people who are haunted by their past, people who have lived their lives as far from God as you can get, people who are as guilty before God as it is possible to be, people who think that there must be no way back for them, people like me and you, people like us.

David got past the point where it was in his power to stop himself, but that does not mean that he was past the point of no return, because in God's grace, he would bring the curse of sin to a complete end in the death of his own son.

[28 : 12] One big reason we celebrate the birth of Jesus is because he went to the cross for every single person who would put their trust in him to be their savior.

he says to you, whoever you are, whatever you have done, wherever you are from, at that point he says, you are my family.

You are my son, my daughter. He takes our sins and we are saved. If that could be true of Judah and Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and David and Bathsheba, friends, let us be in no doubt that it can be true of you.

If your trust is in Jesus, understand that your name is part of that same list that Matthew gives at the start of his gospel because you have become part of that family, his family.

If your trust is not yet in Jesus, I can only think of two reasons why that could be. The first reason is that you could not think your name could possibly be in that list.

[29 : 31] Maybe you actually find it offensive for me to suggest that you could be among such a messed up group of people, but if you think you are too good to belong with people like David, understand that you are saying that you are too good for Jesus because that is the family that he took as his own.

Jesus said, it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

You coming to church but not seeing yourself in this family tree is like going to see your GP and saying, there is nothing wrong with me. How long would you stay in that doctor's office before they showed you the door?

Friends, if we do not know we need saving, Jesus cannot do anything for you. But the second possible reason your trust is not yet in him is that you know full well that your name belongs in that list.

You know that this is your people. You know that your heart is like that, but you don't honestly believe that Jesus could want anything to do with you.

[30 : 47] If that is you, hear him again. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

A doctor wants to see sick people. Jesus wants to see sinners. When he was born, God sent an angel to tell Joseph to call his name Jesus for this reason.

He will save his people from their sins. So if you don't believe that he could or that he would, that's not a humble thing.

You are calling God a liar because God calls his son, the Lord saves. So if God is God, if God is God, then Jesus is the savior for you.

So if you don't yet trust in him to save you, which is it? Are you not good enough for him or is he not good enough for you? Well, let his family teach us otherwise, whoever we are, that there is no one too good for him and there is no one too far gone for him.

[32 : 11] He was born to a family of sinners for a family of sinners, to save a family of sinners from our sins.

Put your trust in him and let's thank him together for his grace. Let's pray together. Our Lord and our God, how we thank you that you came into this world not to be worshipped, praised, and adored, but to serve, to heal, to mend, to save.

Lord, how we praise you that you came into the world a helpless baby and you died on the cross a helpless man. And yet through your servant hearts, through your obedience, you provide a salvation for us that can never be taken away.

And Lord, how we pray that together, each one of us and all together, we might see that you are a savior for us. Born Christ the Lord, Lord, draw us, we pray, to yourself.

Leave us in no doubt that we could come to you. We thank you that you have put these names, these stories in your word to teach us that we are like this, that we need a savior, and that you are the savior for us.

[33 : 52] Lead us, we pray, in Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Amen.