

# In the Mess

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## AND SO TO BETHLEHEM

Who am I describing?

The story starts in a sheep pasture. His early days are spent mostly in the company of sheep. He spent his time out in the fields talking mainly to sheep rather than people. The pasture in which he spent his early days was near Bethlehem. Bethlehem, a small hamlet on the gentle slopes of pastures. The home of shepherds. Bethlehem – not a famous place, but it was sufficient for those who lived there. There were figs, olives and vines – enough. But God had chosen Bethlehem as the place for his child. And there's the thing...chosen by God!

God had chosen him, anointed him from heaven and set him apart. The prophet spoke and called him. His family heard the call and so did he. He was to be not a shepherd of sheep, but a shepherd of men and women. This boy from Bethlehem would be king of Israel, but there would be some challenges along the way before that could happen. He would meet much opposition. He would have to endure the desert. Leaders would try to kill him. He would be pursued and people would try to stone him. There'd be trouble in his own family, some people would want him to be king, others not.

He would enter Jerusalem as sovereign, but be forced to leave like a fugitive. Eventually he would die a lonely death in the Hebrew capital. But he is far from dead! People still talk about him, argue about him. His words are still discussed, pondered over, celebrated and studied. Society still tries to read his thoughts and understand his actions. Love him or hate him, he doesn't really ever go away.

We are given no real description of how he looked but artists still paint him and sculptors still form statues of him: Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Da Vinci. And there

are so many books about him, probably more than about any other person in history.

Bethlehem's boy. We still, like many others all over the world, gather to reflect on his life. So.... the pasture, the anointing, the childhood call, the lifelong enemies, the wilderness, Jerusalem, Judea, his death, his legacy.

The boy from Bethlehem is of course....

David!

Or Jesus!

Maybe both.

Isn't it interesting to think about how many similarities there are between the life of David and the life of Jesus?

Next question: who might this be about?

- Born to a mother
- Acquainted with physical pain
- Enjoys a good party
- Rejected by friends
- Unfairly accused
- Loves stories
- Reluctantly pays taxes
- Sings
- Turned off by greedy religion
- Feels sorry for the lonely
- Unappreciated by siblings
- Stands up for the underdog
- Kept awake at night by concerns
- Known to doze off in the midst of trips
- Accused of being too rowdy
- Afraid of death

Could that be describing you and me? How about David? How about Jesus? It maybe that we have more in common with David and with Jesus than we think.<sup>1</sup>

I really hope this series on the life of David has been helpful. We tend, I think, to look at characters like David as great Biblical characters vastly different from us, and in one respect that's absolutely true. He lived in a different time and culture and yes, he was a warrior king! Trouble is if we only ever see him that way, we separate ourselves from the very reasons we have his story. When we look at his life, we begin to see that he is more like us than we might at first believe – he's human!

Please don't misunderstand me though: we are not the same as David. But there are many similarities. David was called by God, and so are you! David faced his Goliath, the giant defying the army of the living God putting fear into a nation. You have your Goliath's too ....don't you? Those things that cause you to fear and can dominate your life. David defeated Goliath...and so can you!

David chose to put his faith and trust not in what he could see, but in what he could not see. He chose to trust in the armies of the living God...and so can you. David faced temptations...and so do you. David got in such a rage, he set out to kill a man and he needed Abigail to step in and stand in his way. Sometimes we lose it too and need someone to stop us doing the unthinkable.

David gave into temptation...and sometimes so do we. David had to live with the consequences of what he had done...and so do you. David won some fantastic victories and so do you! David found himself having to run and hide at different times. Aren't there times when you want to do the same? David had times in the desert. Don't you have times like that?

David spent many years waiting for what had been promised. Don't you find yourself having to wait too?

And Jesus.... there are similarities there too aren't there?

Jesus knows what it is to be human...

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<sup>1</sup> This part was inspired by and borrowed from Max Lucado: *"Facing Your Giants,"* Thomas Nelson 2006 p. 175ff

He faced hunger and temptation...  
He had people who disliked him and pursued him...  
He went to the desert and withdrew from the crowds...  
He was ridiculed, ignored, mistreated...  
He faced sorrow and family pressures...  
He faced the reality of death.

But his life was not the same as ours or David's despite the similarities.

He became one of us when he came as a baby in Bethlehem, but Jesus had no Bathsheba collapse, Uriah murder, or any kind of cover up. He never pillaged a village, camped with the enemy or neglected a child. He was never accused of polygamy, adultery or brutality. In fact no-one seemed to be able to accuse Jesus of anything. They tried, but even Pilate said he could find nothing wrong in him. Acts records that Jesus went around doing good (Acts 10v 5). However much people scrutinized him they could find nothing to accuse him of.

Unlike David, me and you, Jesus never missed the mark. But now, friends, here is the point, the powerful wonderful truth this whole series has been driving at! Jesus doesn't distance himself from those who do...from those who miss the mark! He is with us in the mess!

He is with us in everything and through everything. As he was with David, so he is with you and me. David had his highs, magnificent highs, but he had plenty of tragic lows. But God never distanced himself from David. In fact, he did exactly the opposite, he kept his promise to David. God had promised that he would establish David's throne forever! What are the first words we read in the New Testament? "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Mat. 1 v 1) You note it doesn't add a disclaimer: "This connection to David in no way gives approval to, or encourages all of David's behaviour!" God is there in the mess claiming his own and not distancing himself from them. In that way, David's life and your life and mine are the same.

We miss the mark. We blow it, we fail, we could be accused and found guilty of many things. But God, who came to us, into the mess, in Jesus – claims us as his

own. When your name is written in his book of life, when he has your photograph in his heavenly album, there is no footnote next to it: "Oh by the way, I don't approve of most of what Ian does you know, just for the record. Don't think I don't know what he's really like!"

No! He says: "That's Ian – my boy, my son, my own!" God wasn't ashamed of David and he isn't ashamed of you! Just as he came into the world in Bethlehem and chose to walk with us then, so he comes now to walk with you in the mess.

Friends, if you have learnt anything from the story of David, I pray it would be this: God is always at work in the mess, loving, holding, guiding, challenging, and urging us on to reach our full redemptive potential. What began in Bethlehem with a calling and anointing, and what continued in Bethlehem with a calling and anointing.... can continue in your life and mine.

Thank God for David

Thank God for Jesus

Thank God he is with us in the mess.

Amen!

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010 by Rev, Ian Phillips.