

A Puzzling Question

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[0 : 0 0] A man is looking at a photo and he says, looking at the photo, brothers and sisters have I none, but that man's father is my father's son.

Whose photo is he looking at? Well, that riddle, which seems fairly plain to me, was actually an ongoing cause of debate in our family over, it seems to me, many years.

Quite frequently at the dinner table that conversation would come up and we'd all argue about whose photo it is. Brothers and sisters have I none, that man's father is my father's son.

That is, he's looking at a photo of his son. My father, I think it was, used to always get that wrong and would say that he's looking at a photo of himself. Or it might have been my mother who always got it wrong, but you can see the debate went on and on over the years, periodically for some reason that riddle came up. Brothers and sisters have I none, but that man's father is my father's son. That is, I'm looking at a photo of my son. Well, I don't have one, so it's not me, but you get the point. Now, I've wanted to solve the riddle so that you don't spend the rest of the sermon trying to solve the riddle in your head. Over the last four weeks, we've seen that Jesus has been asked all sorts of tricky questions. Mostly questions designed deliberately to trap him, to test him, to get him to say something that would expose his treason or expose his error or heresy, to expose his opposition, to give more reason for the Jewish leaders to bring about his arrest or trial or ultimately his death. That was certainly the case with the second question we looked at three weeks ago, I guess, in chapter 12 verse 13. They sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him, a deliberate, deceptive, in fact diabolical test to trap Jesus in order to bring about opposition, trial and ultimately his death. Remember those questions. Going back into chapter 11, the first one that gave rise to the parable of the wicked tenants was, by what authority do you do these things? And then the second question, again a deliberate trap, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? And then the question from the Sadducees to try and trap him, the man who had, or the man who died and his brother died and the woman who kept marrying each of the brothers as was part of the old custom of the Old Testament, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? And then last week, maybe not so overtly a trick question, but which is the greatest commandment? And we know that each time Jesus answered and his answers in effect silenced them. And so at the end of last week's passage, at the end of verse 34, after that no one dared to ask him any questions. That is their attempts to trap him have failed and they are silenced by his answers to them. So now Jesus poses a question to them, as we saw Matt do at the beginning of the service and in contrast to Kristen asking the questions the last few weeks. And Jesus' question is not just a fun question, a fun riddle, though it's a little bit like the riddle of whose photo is the man looking at when he says, brothers and sisters have I none, but that man's father's my father's son. Jesus is not trying to trap them or trick them or play fun with them. He's trying to trap them or play fun with them. He's trying to expand their understanding on a very important issue that is really to do with himself. It hinges on the Messiah being called the Son of David. That's the issue. The title Son of David was probably only first used for describing the Messiah to come, only perhaps 50 to 80 years before Jesus spoke these words in his last week of life.

We've already heard that title used by blind Bartimaeus in chapter 11, rather at the end of chapter 10, a passage I preached on in the morning a few weeks ago. The blind man Bartimaeus on the outskirts of Jericho shouts out, Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus in reply to his persistent cries, Son of David, have mercy on me, gives him his sight. Apart from that, nowhere in Mark is Jesus called Son of David and getting close to it are the crowds as Jesus comes into Jerusalem at the beginning of chapter 11, just a day or two or so before tonight's passage was spoken. There the crowds shout out, Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David. But nowhere else apart from Bartimaeus in Mark's gospel is Jesus called Son of David and nowhere in the Old Testament is the expression Son of David used to describe the Messiah.

[5 : 51] The first written evidence is found in a Jewish apocryphal writing called the Psalms of Solomon. That's not part of the Bible and that piece of writing comes from about the middle of the first century BC. Before that there's no evidence of that title Son of David being used to describe the Messiah.

Now why is the issue Son of David there? David was the second king of Israel. He became king in about 1000 BC, maybe even close to being exactly 1000 BC, some scholars would say.

David had been the king succeeding Saul, a bad king, a disobedient king and you can read about Saul becoming king in 1 Samuel and the contest leading to David becoming king through the rest of 1 Samuel to the beginning of 2 Samuel. David after reigning as king for seven years in the city of Hebron in the tribal area of Judah from which tribe David was, conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital and the capital of the whole nation after, as I say, seven years of his reign and from there he reigned for another 33 years or thereabouts. In order to, or as part of his reign in general, but in order to secure that as his capital he defeated enemies, the Jebusites who lived in what David renamed Jerusalem as well as conquering other nations round about and establishing the borders of Israel for the first time really secure since the days of Joshua and establishing Jerusalem as the capital of a united nation. So David was a great king. He wrote many Psalms, he was generally devout, he trusted in God though he sinned at times, in many times and he wanted to build the temple in Jerusalem.

But David told him, no not you, your son, for you've got blood on your hands from defeating the enemies in the land and securing the borders. But most significantly of all, it was to David, already king, that God made a significant promise. David had said, it's not good that we live in houses but God lives still in a tent in the tabernacle which was the portable temple in effect that had been constructed in the time of Moses 400 years before David and had been the sort of movable temple location of God that David brought into Jerusalem when he conquered Jerusalem. David said, I think I should build a temple, a house for God. And God said, no not you but your son but to you I will promise to build your house. Not a house of stone, a temple but a house as in a dynasty. That is that David's son would be king after him and David's son's son and so on. You see Saul had been the first king but was not a dynastic king. He was succeeded by a complete non-relative, by David. But God is promising to David that he would have a permanent, indeed eternal, dynasty to reign over the people of God or the people of Israel. And through the story of 2 Samuel and then the books of Kings, we discover that in fact God keeps that promise through all that time. With one exception of a woman, queen mother who took over the throne after killing off many of the Davidic line but unbeknownst to her one was spared. The line of David is unbroken through the next 400 years or so to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 by the Babylonians. Yes, the kingdom divided in two after Solomon died and in the north they didn't have a descendant of David ever but in the south they did. And everyone, as I said, without one exception of a queen mother who was a pretty nasty piece of work, it was a descendant of David. Until the line stopped in effect. When Jerusalem fell, the temple was destroyed. The king was taken off to Babylon into exile where he was kept alive and the end of two kings shows that he's alive in exile. But the capital city, the land is now a Babylonian province. Through that period of the kings, there was a growth and because of that promise which you'll find in 2 Samuel 7 that David would have always a king on his line on the throne of Israel, there was a high expectation of someone, a great king to come. Because after David and after Solomon, his son, the fortunes of Israel ebbed and flowed. They were strong for a bit but many of the kings were bad. Their borders were reduced. They disobeyed God. There was idolatry and heresy and so on.

And so during that time, there was a growing expectation of a great king descended from David who will reign over the people of God. We see it, for example, in the prophet Isaiah, where Isaiah promises that from the shoot of Jesse, that's the name of David's father, will come in effect a great king. Isaiah chapter 11 begins that way. And then when the people of Israel were taken off into exile in the 6th century BC and the line of David seems not to keep going by way of kings because there is no king in effect when Babylon's reigning, then at the time of the exile, the expectation of a great king of David's line to come was notched, lifted up a notch.

[11:28] So, for example, Jeremiah looks forward to a great king in David's line who will come to restore the fortunes of the people of God. And moreover, the prophet Ezekiel, when he chastises or God through him chastises the bad leaders of the people in Ezekiel 34 who've been shepherds betraying the people, he looks forward to a great shepherd king to come, David. Well, one in the line of David to come to restore the people from exile and bring them back to the land and back to their good fortunes under God, obedient and faithful. When the exile ended, there was no Davidic king on the throne.

In fact, there wasn't a king after the king at the time of Nebuchadnezzar who was taken off into exile. There was a governor, but Judah or Judea as it was later called, Jerusalem, though a temple rebuilt, there was no king. It was a province of Babylon or then province of Persia, then a province of Greece and in 63 BC the Roman general Pompey conquered Greece in effect, including Palestine and so Judea became a province of Rome. And we know that at the time of Jesus as we've seen in these passages in the Gospels that Rome deposed in effect the Jewish or semi-Jewish son of Herod the Great in Jerusalem and put their own governor there in 6 AD because Herod's son was even worse than Herod the Great and so that's why at the time of Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem there's a Roman prefect or procurator called at that time Pontius Pilate, no friend of the Jews. The point of all that history lesson is to say that the expectation of one in the line of David to come is a continuous thread through the Old Testament from David onwards. It begins at that promise in 2 Samuel 7 and the expectations are increased when the people of Israel are suffering enmity and being overrun by enemy powers, Babylon and then subsequently Persia, Greece and Rome and that expectation was heightened at the time of Jesus when a Roman governor was placed over Judea which included Jerusalem as its capital city.

Just as David had conquered Jerusalem and made it Israelite and established his capital there and conquered the other nations in the land and secured peace and rest around the whole of the promised land, by the time of Jesus there was a strong and increased fervent desire for this Davidic descendant Messiah to come, to get rid of Rome, to re-establish Jerusalem as an Israelite capital, to re-secure the borders of the promised land and to bring about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of David or the kingdom of the descendant of David as the people shouted as Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on that donkey. The word Messiah literally means anointed one and indeed it's a word that most often is used of David himself as he eventually becomes king to succeed Saul. The word Christ is the Greek way of saying anointed one. The names therefore are interchangeable Messiah or Christ. It's looking for the anointed one of God to lead the people of God, a descendant of David. That gets us to tonight's passage. The issue is what sort of Messiah? What sort of anointed one? Jesus asks the question, how can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? Jesus doesn't mean how on earth can they say he's the son of David? He's not a son of David. That's not the point of the question. We might more accurately at least sharpen or translate the intent of the question by saying, what do the scribes mean when they say that the Messiah will be the son of David? Jesus you see is not refuting the idea that the Messiah will be David's son, rather he's questioning what do they mean when they think of the Messiah as David's son? What's the implication for them thinking that the Messiah is David's son?

Now in order to sharpen the question, to show where he's driving at, Jesus goes on in verse 36 to quote from Psalm 110. That was the first reading that Megan read for us tonight. Psalm 110 begins, of David, of David, of David, of David, of David. That is, it's from David, a psalm.

The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. And we might think, well, who's talking to whom here? That's the quote of verse 36, the Lord said to my Lord. Is it somebody talking to himself?

[16 : 46] Well, actually it's a little bit obscured in our New Testament translation because two different words occur in the psalm, both of which get translated into Greek by the word Lord. The first word Lord is the word for God, Yahweh or Jehovah in some translations.

In the Old Testament, that word Lord always comes with capital letters throughout, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. If you flip through to Psalm 110, you'll see it in capitals.

The next time the word Lord occurs, it's not in capitals. It simply is the word Master. Perhaps in some context, owner, but certainly here, Master.

So in effect, it's saying, God, Yahweh said to my Master, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

That is, David's Lord, Master, that is Messiah, is really who he's talking about here, is going to sit at God's right hand in heavenly glory, at the place of honour.

[18 : 00] The place of greatest honour is the right hand seat next to God. Just like we say that somebody is your right hand man usually, meaning sort of indispensable in a place of honour, it's exactly the seat that James and John wanted, to sit at your right or your left in glory.

So it's a statement of great honour about the Lord of David, the Master of David referring to the Messiah. And the point of the opening of the Psalm is that he is in heavenly glory beside God, beside Yahweh in heaven.

That is, he is far greater than any king in Jerusalem. He's not sitting on an earthly throne. He's not a political leader.

He's a heavenly ruler, sitting beside God, as we would say, God the Father in heaven. So Jesus poses the dilemma in verse 37.

David calls him Lord, how can he be his son? Literally, in what sense can he be his son?

[19 : 15] That is, Jesus is not saying he's one or the other. He's challenging the Jewish leaders listening to him to say, you call the Messiah David's son. But what about this passage of scripture that talks about the same Messiah?

Here he's called David's Lord. So what effect does that idea have on you thinking of him as David's son? Now, I need to explain a little bit more to appreciate the dilemma.

The point of Jesus' question rests on the assumption that the son is inferior to the father or ancestor. That is, usually speaking, fathers were greater than sons.

Sons were inferior. Not meaning necessarily in every way, but by way of honour or status, the son would be inferior to the father.

Greater honour to the parent, in particular the father in the Old Testament, than to the child. So how can David call his son, therefore inferior, subordinate to him?

[20 : 19] How can he call his subordinate son his Lord? How can he be both inferior and superior or subordinate and sovereign over him?

How can it both be true, is what Jesus is asking in this question? The Jewish leaders were by and large looking for a political Messiah, somebody like David.

David was the role model. David was the great one for liberating Jerusalem and Judea, for getting rid of the enemies. So it was somebody like David, descended from David, that they wanted to get rid of Rome.

David was the role model and the Messiah would, in a sense, try to live up to David, to some extent. It's clear in the idea of that, that the Messiah would be, to some extent, perhaps inferior to David, the great king.

It's a bit like us when we think about cricketers. When you think about who's the greatest batsman the world's ever seen, everybody, virtually, would say Bradman.

[21 : 34] So much so, that when Viv Richards was at his peak in the 1970s, people said he's the second Bradman. When Tendulkar was at his peak in the last 10 years, people would say, well, he's really the second Bradman.

That is, he's not as good as Bradman. Bradman is the mark by which everybody else gets ranked, so to speak. It's as though, you could almost say, you know, Tendulkar's like a son of Bradman.

He's Bradman-esque, but he's not as good as Bradman. And that's the sort of view or thinking that the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day had. The Messiah would be the son of David.

He'd be Davidic. He'd be like David. He'd be like the second David, but by implication, not quite as good. David was the role model and as a political ruler, the Messiah would, in a sense, seek to live up to that role model of David.

Jesus now is directing them to David's own Psalm 110 and he's trying to get them to see a reversal of the relationship between David and the Messiah. He's not disputing that the Messiah is physically descended from David, not at all.

[22 : 46] But he's trying to show that yes, physical descent does not mean inferiority. Jesus is actually exploding and expanding their concept of who and what the Messiah was on about, that is, himself.

And he's trying to show in this quote of the psalm that it's not that David is the great one and the Messiah is under him, but rather, in fact, that the Messiah is greater than David himself.

You see, Psalm 110 shows that David is inferior to the Messiah. He calls him Lord. So, Jesus is reversing the relationship.

It's not David greater than Messiah, it's Messiah greater than David. And that's shown or seen by David calling him Lord.

And that's then given, in a sense, evidence by the second bit of the psalm quoted. The Messiah will be exalted to God's right hand in glory. David was never in that seat, but his descendant Messiah will be and all his enemies will be placed under his feet by God.

[23 : 59] That is, it's a place of heavenly honour far greater than David ever attained. And that shows the superiority of the son of David, Messiah, over David himself.

When Jesus quotes this psalm, he's not only challenging their view of the Messiah, he's anticipating his own resurrection from the dead.

A few days later, these words are spoken in the last week of his life. By the Sunday morning, the tomb will be empty, probably after dark Saturday night, Jesus rose, I would say. And then, a few weeks later, traditionally, 40 days after that, Jesus ascended then to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

They're the events that Jesus is anticipating and the New Testament understands that about Jesus. Not only is Jesus anticipating what will happen to him, but it's declared by the New Testament writers.

For example, in that great sermon of Pentecost, the first sermon really that we see after Jesus ascends to heaven and then a few days later sends his spirit. Hear again these words of Peter as he preaches in Acts chapter 2.

[25 : 17] This Jesus God raised up and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him, Jesus, both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Peter is declaring the fulfilment of the prophecy of David in Psalm 110 that in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and what traditionally the theologians call his session, literally sitting at the right hand of God, that prophecy is fulfilled and Jesus is declared both Lord and Messiah.

It's the same point in effect that Paul makes at the beginning of Romans chapter 1. I'm not sure whether those of you at the camp this weekend have noticed this because we've read this passage twice over the weekend at the camp but in Romans chapter 1 verse 3 Paul describing the gospel that he's about to expound in this letter says it's the gospel concerning God's son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now we might think or you probably think now after all of that that this argument is a bit obtuse but it's in fact very important it's far from trivial.

[27 : 08] You see it's not that Jesus comes along to sort of try to live up to the Old Testament heroes or models but rather that the Old Testament heroes and models are shadows or prototypes prototypes of something greater to come.

David the great king is just a shadow or prototype of the greater king to come. The Old Testament temple grand glorious though it was was just a shadow or prototype of the glorious temple to come which is Jesus Christ's resurrected body.

the Old Testament priesthood great though it was was just an a shadow or a prototype of the great priest who is to come.

The Old Testament sacrifices of animals and their shed blood important though they are in Old Testament theology are just shadows or prototypes of the once for all great sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross that is to come.

in the New Testament the land of promise in the Old Testament the land so fought over to this day on earth with Jerusalem its capital the land of Israel Palestine is itself just a shadow a prototype a model of the greater land a heavenly land and inheritance that is to come to God's people in the future.

[28 : 50] that is Jesus you see is showing to these Jewish leaders that the Old Covenant is looking to something bigger and better not to some repeat that may not quite live up to the original.

That's the issue. The Old is pointing to something better and bigger rather than Jesus trying to recapture the glory of the Old.

He surpasses it and the model here is Davidic descent and Lord but in the examples I've just given it works the same way for all sorts of other terminology and models of the Old Testament.

You see what Jesus is saying is that yes I am David's son but I'm great David's greater son not inferior but superior.

You see he's saying in effect that the title son of David is correct but in the end inadequate as a total description of the Messiah.

[29 : 56] The Jewish leaders thought son of David was Messiah and that would bring about a political liberation. Jesus is saying yes I'm son of David but far greater and bigger than you would expect.

See he's saying to them in effect he's implying to them at least I've come to do something greater and bigger than overthrow Rome. That's not my job.

Indeed that's part of the tension and confrontation in these last days before he's put to death on the cross. You see his enemies are not Rome for all Rome's hostility to the Jews.

The enemies put under his feet by God the Father in fulfilment of Psalm 110 are not Augustus Caesar or Pontius Pilate or even Herod the Great or any of his sons but rather Satan.

Well that's been the true enemy throughout the gospel. When Jesus casts out evil spirits and heals unclean people it's Satan who is his enemy. When Peter declares you're not going to die in chapter 8 get behind me Satan Jesus said that's his enemy and that's the enemy who will be placed under his feet when he arrives in heaven.

[31 : 14] That's the enemy he's come to defeat and he defeats that enemy on the cross a couple of days after these events. Behind Jesus' teaching also lies the issue to these Jewish leaders about the authority of the scriptures.

Their reading of the scriptures is inadequate. They've hinged on in fact a non-biblical expression son of David to draw up their picture of the Messiah but they failed to grasp the whole biblical picture of who the Messiah should be.

It's a warning to us I guess as well not to limit ourselves in the reading of scriptures not to find one text that seems to support what we think but to recognise the diversity the richness the vastness of the scriptures as we try to understand in particular the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well all of that is just three verses Jesus though sharpens the issue when he goes on to teach in the next verses beware of the scribes the very people that Jesus has been talking about in asking this question how can the scribes say and then he says beware of the scribes you see so often these people who place themselves over the scriptures in effect actually end up morally compromised and that's what he exposes in the verses that follow.

Jesus denounces their hypocrisy their pride their vanity their status seeking their pretense of religion their pretense of heartfelt piety they're actually lovers of themselves not lovers of God they're full of self-importance and they're seeking the praise of others see how they're described they like to walk around in long robes and be greeted with respect in the market places to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets they devour widows houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers they will receive the greater condemnation how different they are from the one who came to serve what a contrast they are from the one who was slave of all and how far from the kingdom values of Jesus the servant king are these Jewish leaders you see in a sense the contrast has been made in the chapters leading up to this of Jesus saying I've come to give my life as a ransom for many

[33 : 47] I'm if you want to be greatest you've got to be servant of all the slave of all the first shall be last take up your cross to carry and follow me if you seek to gain your whole life you'll lose your soul they've failed to grasp that and their understanding of the scriptures their limited understanding the scriptures is part of their problem it's a short step from superficial piety which is what he's describing to corruption and verse 40 makes that clear yes 38 and 39 is a sort of false or superficial piety it's really pride but once you've gone that way once your religion becomes just a veneer a surface thing not a heart thing then corruption is the next step and so in verse 40 where they're described as devouring widows houses it might be that they're sponging on widows hospitality the scribes of Jesus day would not officially be paid there are all sorts of corrupt ways in which they could get around that and one of them was by acting in legal ways and probably the idea of devouring widows houses either is that they sponge on their hospitality or perhaps through legal means they try to claim their houses from the estate of their husbands who've died it's probably some form of pre-Nigerian internet scam yet all the time they look pious they say long prayers people look up to them it's deceptive you see it's not always blatant religious leadership is got every room for being deceptive it means that we've got to be very careful those in religious leadership like myself have to be very careful that we are not becoming superficial in our piety and corrupt in our hearts and for all of us to be careful in our detection of religious leadership

Jesus last words are that they will receive the greater condemnation they will not get away with it judgment is coming and Jesus is about to hang on a cross for the judgment of sin and while we look to the cross for our forgiveness and rightly because we've confessed our sins and Jesus takes them there for us at the same time that Jesus hangs on the cross he brings down the condemnation of God against unrepentant sinners they will receive the greater condemnation for being in a place of leadership where they're meant to protect others the vulnerable and weak they've abused their power they ought to have known better their condemnation will be greater the reversals about to happen the Jewish leadership which thinks so much of itself that deceives people in their understanding of the scriptures is superficially only pious is corrupt in its heart is about to be brought down from the greatest seats in the synagogue they'll be brought down in condemnation for the greatest Jesus will act as a slave of all the lowly will be exalted and those who are full of pride and conceit will be brought down and it happens on and through the cross which is about to happen let's pray

Lord God we thank you for your son the Lord Jesus Christ great David's greater son a Messiah greater by far than the Jewish leaders were hoping for or expecting Lord our God prevent us from falling into the same traps of misunderstanding Jesus by dismissing parts of your word perhaps prevent us from superficial faith prevent us from corruption and save us at the last for Jesus sake amen