

King David

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[0 : 00] Yeah, as advertised today, it's simply a brief meditation on David, who needs no introduction. Of course, David. David, Israel's famous king. Indeed, a person of interest, as the police say this David, and sometimes David probably would have had visits from the police in some cultures.

A gospel famously begins, Matthew's gospel, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ, the son of David.

The letter to the Hebrews, in its passage on faith, chapter 11, can't make too much of this, but he gives, it's interesting to note this, the writer gives David only a passing reference. Verse 32, time would fail me, again says the writer, Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.

Time would fail me if I had to go into all that. So David sometimes just gets a passing reference in scripture. Paul to the Romans, you'll recall, cites a psalm word which he attributes to David, Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Do you remember that famous passage in Paul to the Romans? As forgiven ones, we stand before God. So God preaches the gospel through this David, so says Paul.

[1 : 32] That's an interesting reference to David. David somehow is in the story of Jesus and a David that we may again forget about.

Sometimes I know I go long stretches of my life and I don't give David a passing thought, even though he's a very big player in the Bible. And a David who speaks, again, as Paul reminds us, of forgiveness, free and glorious forgiveness, a great, perhaps the great gospel theme.

So David's an interesting character in the Bible for sure. Today, I want to look at David in a very simple two-part structure.

Nothing too complicated here at all. First off, David in Israel's historical remembering, just in the straightforward sense in which we would think of that. What happened back then with this guy named David?

David in Israel's historical remembering. And then a part two. David in an, excuse the big language, but David in an eschatological remembering.

[2 : 38] Wow. In the morning. What a word. Eschatological, as in roughly the perfect future which God is preparing. David in a perfect future.

David in an eschatological remembering. Or perhaps this is better. David remembered by his God. There's a historical remembering of David.

And in the midst of that, David is remembered by his God. David remembered, that is to say, by our God. Or, sorry to labor this point, but just once more, David as anticipated by our God.

David as anticipated by his God. God remembers, the Bible tells us clearly, God remembers to give us all a future. That's why hope is such a central aspect of the Christian life.

We hope in the fact that God has revealed that he's going to give us, he remembers that he's going to give us a future. Even people like us.

[3 : 47] Even people like David. As scripture is a kind of mirror in which we see ourselves. So, the book of James tells us, the great Søren Kierkegaard, love that passage.

Scripture is a mirror. We look into it and there we see ourselves. So, in seeing David, yes, as you know, we may see ourselves. Or, more profoundly, I'm sure you'll agree, we may see ourselves as God would see us.

So, that is where we're going today. Two-part structure to this little meditation on David with hopefully lots of time for feedback. So, let us begin, as we do, most importantly, in this place at this time with just a brief word of prayer.

Lord, we pray today in the name of great David's greater son. Asking for your blessing on our deliberations today.

May it be for our benefit and for your glory. Amen. Amen. When David is remembered historically, remembered as story, as we would say, where else to begin?

[5 : 11] And this, I'm doubting this is how you first heard about David. Where else to begin? And I know you can anticipate this. But with David and Goliath. Where else?

That's maybe the David story that we all most remember, most easily comes to mind. Perhaps the story that you delighted in as a child.

So many of us as children would have delighted in David and Goliath. So, how well this story is known. Start off with something really easy. Why not, eh? How well this is known.

The Philistines are big-time players in this story, as we all know. They're always showing up in the Bible. A coastal people, apparently, always somehow challenging the inland people, including the strange little Semitic tribe, which came to be led in time by our subject this morning, King David. David, Israel, the Philistines. Philistines. A champion of the Philistines. Hardly need to go over this story. A great champion warrior of the Philistines challenges Israel.

[6 : 17] And the challenge intimidates Israel badly. Then led by King Saul. A difficult person in the life of David, but we won't spend any time today looking at Saul.

Young David famously arrives at the site of battle, bringing food for his brothers, apparently. And as we all know, he takes his slingshot and he downs the giant with a deadly shot, a deadly stone.

Well-known story. It seems impossible, really, this kind of story. Many readers in the modern world would read it and raise their eyebrows to say the least.

Yeah, sure, those are the religious people and their stories. It seems impossible, but with Israel's God, all things are possible. It's kind of one of the obvious messages of such a story.

We, the readers, are already privy, as we read this story, to David as a someone called to a very special drama. We already know that.

[7 : 26] So we're not too surprised that the young guy can go out there and knock over a big giant. Samuel, we know, was summoned to the home of David's father, Jesse.

And after seven sons were considered for kingship, David was called in from the fields. So the writer is telling us that, alas, he had not even been thought, the youngest boy, he had not been thought a real possibility for kingship.

You know, Samuel had been told by Israel's God that Saul was making such a mess out of the kingship that he was going to be replaced. Now Samuel sees the king when the youngest boy is brought in from the fields.

Seers, that's what Samuel was, that's their job, is to see, isn't it? This, yes, the eighth son is chosen. Daniel was the eighth son.

These stories, of course, invite pondering. Or they invite interpretation. Or they invite application.

[8 : 41] Or, perhaps most importantly, they invite wonder. Isn't that perhaps the most important thing? Maybe the most important thing to do as one reads scripture.

Be aware of the wonder of it all. The wonder of it all. History writers in Israel. It goes without saying, would you agree, history writers in Israel are also, at one and the same time, they are wisdom writers.

You don't just write to remember. You write to gain insight and wisdom. I wonder if today's historians think of themselves as wisdom writers.

You might learn something from the past if you ponder it. Or maybe they, no, no, our methods exclude wisdom. Maybe wisdom's a repressed category, in a sense.

No wisdom here, just, you know, I'm telling you a story. Yes. That might be called a kind of pre-understanding of or regarding how we will read.

[9 : 45] That's important to think. Well, what is this kind of, what's this writer doing? Well, the writers are giving us, again, historical remembering and, at the same time, wisdom. Wisdom about what, we might ask, of course, as we read these strange narratives which are holy scripture.

Regarding the New Testament specifically, but with reference to all of scripture, surely, Tom Wright, you may have heard of Tom Wright.

He gets a mention in this place on occasion. Tom Wright has written that, this is from memory, but I know he says this quite clearly, that the big, biggest question that scripture answers, not answers really, it addresses.

The big, big, big question it addresses is simply this. What is the meaning of the word God? That's the big question that all of scripture presupposes, if you're a serious reader of it, you finally have in your mind, in your heart, in your affections.

Where do I come from? Where am I going? Who gave me this drama that I'm in, in my communities in, my world is in? What does the word God mean when it goes through your mind?

[11:03] When we say it in our liturgies, when we sing it in hymns, when we use it in conversation, what does the word God mean? Israel's rememberers, their rememberers, their historian, their wisdom writers, are thinking about God all the time, we might say.

When they think about David, they're really thinking, if you will, about God. A divine presence is always in David's story.

That's presupposed and emphasized in this remembering. A divine presence is in your story. We are God's visible presence in the world.

When you meet another human, you're meeting God's visible presence in the world. A certain lecturer at Regent, at UBC this past week, kept saying that over and over again.

You are God's visible presence in the world. The way you treat your neighbor is the way you're treating God. The way you treat your enemy is the way you're treating God.

[12:15] Makes you slow down about the way you talk over coffee before a learner's exchange, doesn't it? God is always in the story.

Who is the God dealing with David? Shepherd boy David who kills a giant. He is destined, this one, to be Israel's king.

Just in passing, we've been studying Revelation so much recently. And in that book, there are many beasts, many giants.

They haunt the world all the time, beasts and giants. And they must be confronted in your life, the life of the church, the life of the world. Beasts and terrible presences are always presenting themselves.

David had to confront one when he was a boy and he killed him. He is son, again, number eight. Brought in from the fields. Again, he's just an afterthought.

[13:17] Scripture, when we think of all of Scripture as we read about David and his God, Scripture is interested in the number eight. I don't know much about this topic, so I want to talk about it.

Scripture is very much interested in the number eight.

So just in passing, one and two Peter, the epistles, for instance, just go out of their way. And it's not an accident that these two epistles go out of their way to mention that eight people came off the ark. Each time, eight people came out. He's showing off his Bible knowledge, I guess, the writer, maybe Peter. But it's unlikely that he just decides to show off his Bible knowledge. I know it was eight.

Did you know that? No way. God destroyed the world, you see, in the flood story, regretting that he had created the world. Scripture has that tone sometimes.

It's how do you read such a thought? God regretting that he created the world is sort of a kind of almost a kind of... You've got to read that with some subtlety.

[14:19] But he started the world over again, if you will, with eight people. That's interesting. You see, the God of Israel had created the world in seven days.

The eighth day, there is no eighth day. Eight is an impossibility number in Israel's thinking. Eight is the day of impossibilities. Seven sons, seven days.

Eighth days. That's the way creation works. It's the way God chose David to be the king. Is there the possibility of an eighth day, a day of impossibilities? Well, again, with God, all things are possible.

Even an eighth day. I think, this is a Tom Wright theme, the astonishing fact that the early Christians, all Jews, decided to work on the...

To worship on the day after the Sabbath. They were... We're, in a sense, today on... This is our Sabbath, the eighth day, the impossible day that God has brought about by raising Jesus from the dead.

[15:22] We've entered into the impossibility of a brand new creation in Jesus. With God, all things are possible. Well, there you go. I'll let that pass.

David and Goliath. David, very young in these stories. Very attractive. Very attractive man, apparently, we're told. And this goes out of its way. Very, very handsome to look at.

And he was chosen to be king. So far, so good. This is the very, again, the very attractive David. Thank goodness, this is the David that we teach to kids in the Sunday school.

But even then, I was thinking the other day, the bit about him decapitating Goliath, maybe I'd skip that part. It's a bit disturbing. This kid was really a toughie.

Got him. Just to make sure he was dead, I guess. But, as we all know, there is a very unattractive David in Israel's remembering.

[16:22] There is a very unattractive David. Don't we know it? These historians, these rememberers, I keep trying to say, these wisdom writers, they have their eyes wide open.

Don't they? That's an interesting just fact about Israel. She remembers. There's no fooling around. There's no editing out in the narrative as a whole.

Again, these stories about David we know so well. One of my favorites, I wonder why. Sometimes we don't know why we love what we love.

But I like this story. It's the story of a great woman in Israel's remembering. And her name is up here, down here, number four here, Abigail. Do you remember Abigail?

She's around 1 Samuel 25, I believe. Abigail, this is another aspect of how Israel remembers. It's a sweet and a funny little moment, if I dare call it funny.

[17:33] Abigail, per lady, she was married to a man named Nabal. N-A-B-A-L, Nabal. Which in Hebrews means a foolish man.

Wow. His name is foolish. What do you say about that? It's sort of a whimsicalness in their remembering. Or maybe, alas, his parents, Nabal's parents must have had a bad feeling about this kid.

And they called him foolish. Strange family dynamics in Israel's stories. Oh, wow. They're a strange bunch of people. If you come from a bit of a difficult family, you've got good company in the Old Testament.

David was in exile, away from Jerusalem, out hiding from Saul, out in the desert with his faithful militia, his faithful band of warriors.

David always seems to have produced loyalty in people. People loved David. They could love him. He had some leadership charisma about him, apparently.

[18:36] They have offered help, David and his band of warriors out in the desert, some kind of protection, presumably, for this foolish man, Nabal, and his very large flocks.

Nabal apparently was a very wealthy guy. But he had a spread out territory, and there'd be raiders who'd come in and steal sheep or whatever. And so David and his band of warriors were offering protection.

They were good at that kind of thing. They could be scary if you were a criminal doing something nasty near them. So there it is. David's helping out. But Nabal, it turns out, this is why he's called foolish, had been ungrateful about this service provided for him, and quite inhospitable.

Inhospitality in the Old Testament is a crime, almost. To be inhospitable is a great evil. He was not offering David's brigade, his little band of warriors, any chance of participating in a big feast that Nabal was putting on.

And so, if you recall this story, David decides, this is David, you know, this is David. David decides to attack Nabal as the parties are going on.

[19:55] And the story makes this so very clear. He's decided to kill every male belonging to the household of Nabal. No party invitation?

So I'm going to show up and kill everybody. Or at least the boys at the party. Maybe he's going to keep the women and the daughters as slaves or something.

I don't know. No party invitation. I'm going to go kill everybody. David could be, lots of this is just so, hardly needs unpacking, does it?

But it's good to slow down and just say it. Sometimes you just need to say it. David could be an intemperate, vicious thug. Great David's greater son, he's called, that we hear in Scripture.

Great David, a vicious thug. He could be a mass murderer. Just on a whim.

[20:56] It's just there, staring us in the face. A very dangerous man, David. Very dangerous.

But the story takes a happy turn. Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervenes between her stupid rich husband and David, the would-be mass killer.

Per Abigail, she knew what it was to be surrounded by difficult men. A feminist moment in Scripture.

David, he wants to come and show up and kill a lot of people. All the males. Kill them all, he says to his thug friends. Yeah, okay, David.

It's the plan. Abigail sees what's happening. She knows what's about to happen. So she pleads with David.

[21 : 58] She goes out and heroically meets him as he marches towards the party. She pleads with David and offers some kind of a peace offering.

And then Scripture here has one of those miracle moments. Just unstated as a miracle moment. But with God, all things are possible.

David listens to Abigail. He listens. And he is convicted of his foolishness, which matches the foolishness of Nabal, obviously.

And he relents. He says these words. Blessed be the God of Israel. Again, this is David talking to Abigail. Blessed be the God of Israel, who he sent you.

And then he continues. Blessed be your discretion, Abigail. Blessed be your discretion. He goes from this white-hot anger, a considered decision to commit mass murder, to suddenly realizing that, no, this is wrong.

[23 : 14] Abigail had promised David that his God would sling out, as from the hollow of a sling, all your enemies.

Amazing word. David, David, David, don't be a fool, Abigail is telling him. God has a future for you. Think about it.

God is going to take your enemies, like they're in a slingshot, and fling them away from you. What a brilliant thing for Abigail to say to this potential thug murderer, David.

David is learning, evidently, a little bit of application here. It's easy, it's straightforward, and he could do it better than me. David is learning that the anger of man does not bring about the righteous kind of life that God desires, as the book of James says.

The anger of man is bad. Very bad thing. God really discourages anger in the Bible more than we realize.

[24 : 22] I always found it very moving when Ian Proven, an Old Testament scholar, he talks about that story of Cain is a murderer, and he's cursed, he's judged by God.

The evil of Cain is fully acknowledged, but then God puts a mark on Cain, because Cain is going out into the world where he would be in much danger, an alienated man wandering without a home. But God puts a mark on Cain, and Ian Proven's little comment there is very beautiful. I found it very moving. God protects Cain from man's fierce justice.

Man's anger is horrible. It doesn't do justice. God knows how to do judgment and justice. We don't. That's why we're meant never to be God towards one another. We're meant to recognize one another as the presence of God in his creation. We're to honor one another.

[25 : 27] Honor your enemies. Let God deal with the evil that your enemy might want to do to you. Marilyn Robinson emphasized this this week. As Calvin would say, you're always in relationship with others, but God is present in the relationship.

If an enemy wants to hurt you, let God deal with that. You just love your enemy. You defer to the God who is with you in your relationship with your enemies.

Be at peace with all, Paul says. So far as it depends on you, be at peace. Live at peace with everyone. David is a thug, but as we see here, he also proves teachable.

David's a complicated guy. That's interesting, isn't it? Is Abigail's sling reference, just to stay with this one more moment, the rememberers sling your enemies away from you, is that intentional? Who knows? It may be. I'd like to think it is. These are very subtle texts. They invite you to enter into them and think it through.

[26 : 35] Think through what I'm saying in these simple terms. Often the text is remarkably simple. David killed Goliath with a sling. David killed Goliath, but there is another Goliath to be killed.

The other Goliath, he is named David. David. Yeah. Paul says again, put anger to death. David, put that anger in you to death.

You don't serve God with anger. No. One scholar summarized David, summarizing what we've said so far here, one scholar did summarize David as probably in real historical terms, just another tribal thug with an uncontrolled libido.

Which, of course, reminds us of another unattractive story about King David. I thought that was a nice introduction. Her name is on this list too. Another girl.

David had an interesting relationship with women. David and Bathsheba. Another story we know so well. Another bedtime story for the kids. I don't know.

[27 : 46] I'm being silly, aren't I? Bible commentaries. Staying in a humorous mode. Have you ever had Bible commentaries make you laugh? They don't often mean to make you laugh, but I've had those moments.

Wow! That's funny. You know, they don't mean to be funny. If read at face value, sometimes a Bible commentary can be a bit funny. I found this just the other day. I found it apparently with a straight face, if you will.

The writer of this Bible commentary says, the king had certain rights, but clearly adultery was not one of them. There you go. Just in case you wanted that clarified.

You can't go out and kill everybody at a party, and you can't just have any girl you want, David. You know? It was the spring of the year. You know this story, well, again, so well.

This is very well known about David, alas. And David's army, or part of it, were off doing what?

Well, some kind of conflict on Israel's borders. It was in the spring of the year. Maybe this was a typical thing.

[28 : 46] You had to go out at some time of the year and protect your borders, see what was happening there. And there was some kind of particular enemy that had to be dealt with. Some bad fight was underway, and so Israel's armies are out doing their thing.

David, very pregnant, David, very interestingly, we were just told without comment, he didn't go out with his armies. So the implication is David's taking time off that he shouldn't have done.

And David saw Bathsheba, desired her. We all know this story. He saw Bathsheba, he desired her, and as we say, the rest is history. The pregnancy happens.

He tries to hide by encouraging Bathsheba's husband, once, Uriah, famous Uriah, to sleep with her. But famously, as you recall the story, Uriah considered it disloyal to take such rest and pleasure while his fellow soldiers, Uriah was quite a soldier, while they were off fighting, he wouldn't take such rest.

What a dark story this is. It really is. Uriah, I'd sort of have forgotten this until the other day I was reading about these things.

[30 : 01] We're reminded at the end of, is it 2 Samuel, 1 Samuel, Uriah, we are told, was a member of David's elite inner guard. They were called the 30.

Their numbers varied a little bit here and there, but Uriah was a really elite fighter right at the center of David's life. There was even a guard of three right at the center of David's little band of warriors.

Tom Wright thinks that's why Jesus had Peter, James, and John as his inner elite. It was a symbolic action saying, I'm David again.

Tom Wright, a comment there. There it is. Uriah would gladly, you see, have died for his king. Probably loved David passionately.

He would if he loved his king, David. In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab, his top commander in the field at that time, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

[31 : 08] That's Shakespeare. I wonder if Shakespeare got that idea. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were taking the message to get themselves killed. A nice touch from a murderer. A vicious act.

A vicious. How vicious David could be. Set Uriah, the famous note says, set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him that he may be struck down and die.

2 Samuel 11, 14. A dark moment in Holy Scripture. And again, it simply defies comment. Doesn't it? We have to just, you have to slow down and just think what's going on here.

This is David, Israel's greatest king. It justifies comment. It's vicious. It's a betrayal of unspeakable dimensions.

It is just good old murder. It feels unforgivable. This is vicious behavior. King David. And then, talk about the understatement of Hebrew Scripture.

[32 : 13] You can't have, the understatement is perhaps on purpose because the understatement says, it can't be overstated. I'll just, the statement says, at the end of the story, the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

The writer just says, I won't try and say more. You know, how do you comment on this? The story continues famously and that's where we're going to leave it.

There's vicious, murderer, unfaithful, backstabbing, ugly, despicable David. This is the David, moving right along, I look at the clock again.

This is the David of Israel's historical remembering. There's a lot more. You know, more and more stories in the David. I'll take hours and hours to talk about the amazing people who surround David in Holy Scripture.

So, this is not all remembering, but here are some of the highlights. Happy and vicious. David is shown in this historical remembering as loyal.

[33 : 30] He could be magnanimous. Opportunities to kill his enemies and he refuses. Great acts of sacrifice on his behalf and he pours out what they had done for him as soldiers sometimes in sacrifice to his God and the great act that they had done.

He could be magnanimous sometimes. Extremely magnanimous. Sometimes he could be wise. Sometimes, as we see in the Abigail story, he could be teachable. There are extremes in David. He is a very extreme man. Think about his son Absalom. His son became his enemy after vicious family disputes and ugly actions that are almost unspeakable again.

His son Absalom became his enemy, but he still loved Absalom. What a piece of work is David. He wept when his son Absalom died.

Even though his son Absalom was trying to destroy his kingdom. There it is. David, David. What a piece of work is David as he is remembered by Israel's wisdom writers, Israel's historians.

[34 : 44] But then, much shorter, this other aspect. There's part one. Now part two. As we said earlier, in these texts, in this remembering, David is a David not only remembered by Israel's wisdom writers, but in the midst of that remembering, we find out, as again, we're repeating ourselves, David is a David remembered by God.

This is the underlying, if you will, divine narrative. Israel's wisdom, always about man, is subtle. You remember a famous moment in Israel's worship and her remembering, what is man? That you, God, are, well, why are you mindful of man?

Why are you mindful of us? You, when I consider the heavens, why would you remember us? Why would a God of such infinite power and majesty remember us?

Why would he remember David? Israel's wisdom, again, about man is subtle. When we, moderns, think about the cosmos as the glory of modern science increasingly reveals it to us, we humans appear as a girl last week was saying in one of her lectures, we humans appear as extremely implausible creatures.

[36 : 23] You are very implausible, you know, she wonders. And she stops to take a step back. Think what neuroscience at its best is telling us about ourselves and our time.

Your brain apparently has a left side and a right side. It tells you when to go out and pay your phone bill and it tells you when to wonder about the heavens that surround you at night.

It's a glory. Your brain is the greatest glory the universe has in it as far as we know. The super glories that astronomy reveals, like it's a piece of simplicity compared with what's here.

cultivate your mind. It is part of God's glory in his universe. What is man? Man is great, little lower than the angels.

Humanity is God's masterpiece. The exceptionalism of man is on the face of philosophy and history in all serious thought.

[37 : 31] Marilyn gets in big trouble with certain thinkers who really think humans are overrated and it would be best if we got rid of a lot of them.

She finds that appalling. Humans are glories. We are implausible creatures. I like that word, implausible. The storytellers of King David must have felt that God's faithful and sure love for David must have felt at times utterly implausible.

Why would God set his love on this man, David? This unlikely one. This eighth son. This impossibility of a king.

This thug. This man who could contemplate mass murder. This adulterer who murdered the husband of the woman. Sending the message to have him killed by the guy who was going to be killed.

How implausible is God's love for David? Absalom, again, we mentioned him. David's son tries to destroy David and his king, but David, you see, hoped for Absalom because David loved Absalom.

[38 : 48] You see, love hopes. If you heard Marilyn last week, she emphasized this so wonderfully. Love hopes. Love hopes.

God is love. God is love. You see, there is a hoped-for David. God is looking past the historical remembering.

God knows what David's like, but David has a hoped-for future in the mind of God. And that's our story, too. God sees my heart.

I don't know why he loves me, but I know he does. There's a divine narrative overlaying my rather meager narrative. This is what Israel's wisdom writers are teaching us.

Love hopes all things. Love believes all things. Interesting, Paul says, love endures all things. It's as if these texts, these texts by these wisdom writers, they're faithful remembers in Israel.

[39 : 54] And they have, these texts, if you will, they have endured much from David. God had to endure David. My king, the mass murderer, the adulterer, the murderer of the woman he stole.

God's love endured for this David. What a God of love we believe in. His love endures even for David.

So these texts, these remembrances are really about God's grace and God's love. God's love endured David, the killer, the vicious thug.

God loved him. God set his love upon him. Two little points to finish as we get up towards the hour. We might ask, I didn't know how to finish this talk.

I wasn't sure where to go with it. There's some suggestions in a great scholar, Walter Brueggemann, gave me some ideas, some other writings about David. Then I went to a lecture on Friday night.

[41 : 03] And the light went off. my head. A brilliant Christian woman spoke. We might ask ourselves, this goes right more to the Christian ethos, more directly I guess, what kind of a culture remembers this way, this subtle remembering that Israel engages in?

Something we take for granted, but this is holy scripture. The Jews saw this as holy scripture as it describes the thug, the murderer, the mass murderer, the one that God has set his love upon.

His love for David is sure, will never fail. What kind of a culture remembers this way? What kind of a culture might be shaped by, or even created by, this kind remembering.

This kind of remembering is living and active in Israel. Jesus, in the synagogue, would have heard about thug, mass murderer, adulterer, David, Israel's ideal king.

Jesus grew up, shaped by, lived inside of these stories. This was his culture, this was his world.

This is the culture into which Jesus was born.

[42 : 28] A remembering place, shaped by this kind of narrative, is the world into which Jesus was born. These are not just idle stories that we tell to entertain ourselves, or be appalled by at a distance.

This is the culture, the narrative culture into which Jesus of Nazareth was born. He lived in this story culture, this whole vast array of Pentateuch and prophets and their historical remembering, the wisdom literature, which highlights David.

There it is. I was privileged, I say Friday, to hear Marilyn Robinson ask a very simple, and I'd never heard it quite put this way, a most profound question.

What kind of a culture, she asks. this seems to be so subtle, but so important. What kind of a culture do we see in the Gospels?

What kind of a culture is presupposed by the church's early, earliest, earliest rememberers of Jesus, the wisdom remembers of Jesus?

[43 : 43] What kind of a culture is presupposed in the Gospels? What issues in the Gospels, in Jesus' conversations with Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, everyone, priests on occasion, as a little boy, 12 years old, in the temple, on the road to Emmaus, discussing Holy Scripture with his relatives on the way to his, when he reveals himself as Israel's Messiah?

What kind of culture do we see in the Gospels? What issues are regarded as enduring there? What was really important in the Israel of Jesus?

And from a very, the answer, it seems, is obvious, at least the lecturer thought it was obvious. She thinks this is a point that we need to see more and more.

If we have eyes to see, we can see what's really important in principle in this culture that Jesus lives in. What's really important from a very, very large body of received divine narrative in this culture, Israel, that is to say, our Lord's own people, they had seen that two things are the most important things to ever think about, and we heard them rehearsed today in the Anglican Liturgy.

The two things that a human life should be most concerned about, this isn't Jesus thinks this, Pharisees think this, in their own funny way, Sadducees may have thought this, priests certainly thought this, this is what was assumed in the synagogue where Jesus received scripture instructions as a little boy, there are two chief passions that one must deal with in life.

[45 : 35] And again, we know this, we rehearse them today in our liturgy. You are to love God passionately. Jesus grew up hearing that over and over again.

Love God with all your heart. You are to love God passionately, and you are to love every other human being you meet along life's way with the same passion.

That was the culture of Israel at its, at its ideal best. This, these are the things we hold on to. To revere, as Marilyn said, quoting Calvin, Edwards, other Puritan writers, to reverence man and to reverence God are really the same thing.

To the extent that you reverence every human being you meet, to that extent you reverence God. If you don't reverence humans, the ones you meet, then you can't claim to reverence God, because that human you meet is God's visible presence in the creation.

Love God with all your heart. soul and mind. And your neighbor, that is anybody you ever meet as yourself. That's why Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Could a Samaritan be my neighbor?

[46 : 52] He sure could, said Jesus. If Israel tended to forget that, tried to narrow down neighborliness into maybe just us, which was a temptation for any, any, any group.

Yes. was Israel, this is, this is, this is Marilyn at her most, I think, slightly, her own passion shows through here, but she wants to put this question seriously.

I think she's quite sure how she wants to answer it. She says, was Israel the most compassionate society in the ancient world? She thinks it certainly was. Israel was the most compassionate society in the ancient and she thinks Israel as the, that, that our Lord lived in was probably a much more compassionate society than any most modern societies.

They thought two things. You must love God passionately and you must love your neighbor the same way. That's what Jesus thought. That's what the Pharisees thought.

That's what everybody in Israel, in principle, they were aiming at. That was the arc of their communal life together. That was the arc of their culture. Can you imagine a culture ever surpassing that in principle?

[48 : 10] Let's make love of God and love of neighbor the first thing. That's why the book of Deuteronomy is filled with the admonition, the stranger, the outsider, the alien.

Embrace them, honor them, and give them the dignity that they need to live their lives. The outsider. She wryly said, just in passing, that might have contemporary relevance, but she wouldn't comment on it.

What are we going to do in our culture with outsiders? How about kicking them out? Treating them with fear. They're scary. Scary outsiders.

There's much to be discussed there. There has to be reasonable conversation about political orders. leaders. But Israel thought, love God, love your neighbor.

There it is. Second point to end. David is obviously, I think we can say obviously, he is a type of Israel. Given grace, this is more a Brueggemann thought, as I recall from reading him a while ago.

[49 : 17] David was given grace. He was amazed by grace. And then he spent his life seeking to grasp that grace on behalf of God, doing what God would have him to do.

At times he was transformed. He was in the way of being changed by God's grace. But at other times we see that he catastrophically failed in living the life of grace.

That seems to be David's story. He took hold of the grace of God and at other times he just, he let go of it. He failed in working out its implications.

He was like that. This is a year of remembering and soon we're going to hear from a learned one in our midst, Sheila. She's going to help us to remember Luther.

I thought of Luther as like, what can you finally say about David? Well, how better to see David as always righteous by God's grace.

[50 : 21] Oh, but always a sinner. There's David. The wisdom writers in Israel see David, this chosen one by God's mysterious election.

But always sin at war in David. Always righteous. Always a sinner. That apparently is if you're a good Lutheran or if you're a good Anglican, you sort of believe this.

Have different ways of saying it. Grace saves me, but oh, I have sin to deal with. Always righteous. Always a sinner. But great David's, as we all know, great David's greater son perfected David as he will perfect us.

because God remembers us and he hopes for us. He will perfect us. We are God's remembered one, not our own remembering.

Our own remembering is just something that is ambiguous and strange. But God remembers you under his reign of grace and is going to save you.

[51 : 33] We're going to meet David in heaven, I guess. David perfected by the greater, the greater one named after David, son of David.

It's a strange, wonderful story. This is God's hope for us all. God has a future for us. Hope is a divine metaphysical mystery in the world.

world. That all the philosophical materialism, all the reductionism in the world that's rife in our culture, I cannot deal with.

Hope is a mystery. You are a divine mystery. God means us to hope because he is hoping for us. He's going to bring about our perfection in David's greater son.

Almost 10 o'clock. I'm shutting up now. I'm going to say a word of prayer and then please converse with me about these things with one another. Lord, we thank you for your servant David in all of his complexity and mystery.

[52 : 41] We thank you that you remember him in the mystery of his greater son, Jesus. And you remember us in that greater mystery. And we look forward eagerly for you working out your grace to its fullness in our lives.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Oh, Sheila. I'm daydreaming up here. I can't.

The sky is blue out there. I'm not used to it. Well, our first comment is, wow, Harvey. I mean, you always hit the nail on the head somehow and you haven't disappointed us today.

You know, King David looms so large in our scripture that it's hard to backpedal on that a little bit and look at him as one of the kings of a little tiny kingdom in a little tiny part of the world and a kingdom that didn't last very long.

What did they have? Harvey? Four kings altogether? I'm not good at such. Sorry. You're the historian lady. And David, if you look at the people that surrounded him, people he was fighting, and most of his wars were preemptive wars.

[54 : 03] You realize it. He talks as if he's in the midst of his enemies. Well, yeah, he is because he went out with his sword and, you know, forgot that diplomacy might be a notion.

Anyway, he was trying to establish the kingdom that God had promised way back when. And so when you look at the kind of king he was, which you really described in a totally brutal and honest way to us, he was not different from the kings that he was fighting.

They were all like that. So his peer group would not have expected him not to be head, for instance, Goliath. Some of the other grisly things that he did.

If they had won the battle, they would have done the same to him. I guess that's what I'm saying. So I think when we, when I look at David, I kind of look at, here's a man that God picked with a special purpose in the same way that he picked Abraham.

Abraham said, yes. We don't know how many people God made that offer to. Abraham said, yes. I'll leave the sophistication of earth and I'll go off to goodness knows where.

[55 : 16] And David was another person who was picked. And God had a special purpose for him, which we see unfolding in the New Testament. So some of his sins, shall we call them, since you've outlined them so distinctly, somehow or other have to be accommodated.

I like the idea that God uses people who aren't perfect. And I mean, that gives me some hope, you know, and you some hope. It's nice to know that we can be useful despite our iniquities.

And there is no doubt that he was a great king in Israel. Whether he was a great king in history, I'm not sure. It's hard to find the king of Israel in a footnote in his book.

It really is, you know. So I don't know if you want to comment further on that. But I guess I, when I read it about him, I have to be willing to forgive quite a lot because I knew that God had a greater purpose for him.

Yeah, but it, yeah, the rememberers are fully aware obviously that David needs to be forgiven. And sometimes it would seem to be impossible.

[56 : 35] But the Lord is displeased with David, but then continues on with him in patience. It's hope.

Hope has a kind of magic about it in the Bible. It is, it's non-reductive.

It's the non-reductive view of the other as, I won't mention her again. Yes, at the rear. And then, Alexander, then Colleen.

Okay, a couple comments. Just to respond to Sheila's comment, I, much as despicable David is, it's kind of reassuring that it wasn't based on works, right?

I mean, if we look at him and God can work through him, it's kind of reassuring that we're not too bad either, I guess. The second thing is, I'm struggling with your description of Jesus' time as the most compassionate society.

[57 : 39] Okay, go ahead, go ahead. I mean, we have men dragging a woman into, you know, the street to stone her. We have, you know, lepers cast outside of the city limits.

We have people in the temple stealing from each other. I mean, this to me is not an idyllic, compassionate society, so I'm struggling with the, you know, consent. No, it isn't, okay, okay, I get you.

Yes, but Marilyn, this is her artist self talking. Of course, those great evils are there. She would say they're always in every society because Israel partakes of the mystery of Adam and Eve's rebelling against God.

Israel's filled with rebels against God, but she's the place where God is working out salvation for the world. His little, if we will, his pilot project. And she just is, I think, as an artist, an artist of genius, looking at the text, just wants to discern what is presupposed in these discussions.

But where's the evidence? The evidence is in the stories. What this community is discussing are two things. They're not achieving these things, but they consider this the arc towards which a culture must move.

[58 : 53] What is that? Passionately love God. Passionately love every human he's created because that human is his visible presence in the world.

So what could be a better discussion for any community? That's her point. Anyway, she thinks people would have found Israel.

We have the historical fact that Gentiles sometimes came to synagogue, came to the temple. They were interested. They knew that this law of Moses was different than any other code around them. There was a beauty in Israel that, at its best, drew people to it. Anyway, that's a side point, Alexander. Marilyn Robinson didn't stop and work this out.

This is her. She is a passionate lover of the Old Testament scriptures. She has become so. She thinks European history would have been massively different if we just taken the admonitions of the Old Testament seriously.

[59 : 58] But the church's failure here, the church is still an ongoing piece of work in God's mercy. We have often missed beautiful admonitions of the Old Testament. And if we had heeded them, our story would have been much different and better, she thinks.

Anyway, that's, but that's a big issue and I know I'm just alluding to it and probably unfairly. But, but thanks very much. Thanks for, and Colleen, Colleen will ask me a more gentle question.

Colleen, please. I know it's a controversial state, especially in a modern culture like ours, which is addicted to a progressive narrative. In which we are the heroes.

As Bertrand Russell used to say. Yeah, it's interesting. I never hear a story in which the teller turns out to be the big hero. You can be a bit suspicious. We Western people have long told ourselves that we are the greatest thing that history has yet seen.

Maybe we are. But let's have some doubt on occasion. Maybe after the 20th century, the Holocaust, the gulag, the mass miseries of the 20th century, we might have a little bit of doubt about ourselves.

[61 : 07] Colleen, you had a question. Thank you. I was considering, you know, in light of what you said this morning, you've got, we certainly have a different view of David than some of us have come in to.

And I thank you for that. But I also get back to the incredible gift that is ours through the Psalms. And that David, through everything, through his human fallenness, was relational.

He stayed in contact with God, even through the pain of the whole realization of his singular question. I know you think. He prays it out to God.

It's everything. He doesn't sort of hide it from God. You know, it's like, okay, you know, this is me. I'm wretched. Yeah. My bed is wet with my tears.

Yeah. Yeah. He was aware of some of his statements. Yeah. And instead of hiding, he stays relational with God. Yes. Yes.

[62 : 15] That that is an incredible model for us. Yeah. Thank you. That's, yes, thank you. Yeah. As I think as Brugamontani says, well, the tribal, there's a tribal remembering of David in scripture.

And then there's, there's, there's attempts at seeing David's interiority. And, and they juxtapose very interestingly. Just a further, a further, a point B to, to both of us.

It's, um, Marilyn Romsen makes this point. And I think it's made by scholarship and by Tom Reinders. We have to remember, this came out a couple of weeks ago.

Luther said that, um, the New Testament, like Jesus lies in a manger of the, lies in the manger of the Old Testament. Marilyn, Marilyn would go out of her way to say, remember, Jesus is comprehensible within Israel.

That's where the incarnation happens in Israel. He can speak to that culture and they have some measure of understanding what he's talking about.

[63 : 17] That's because Israel became the kind of place that she was. And that was massively shaped by these kinds of texts. Remembering David, for instance. So Jesus goes out and he's not, they can hear him when he talks about love of God, love of neighbor.

That's in their story. They speak his language, he speaks theirs. Israel makes, this is a quote from, from the lady, I believe. Israel makes Jesus comprehensible.

Jesus shows and reveals the final meaning of Israel. That's the balance, I think. Israel makes Jesus comprehensible.

Jesus fulfills the mystery of Israel. That's the dynamic that the New Testament is all about. Anyway, there you go. Please, sir, sir.

Alejandra's got me thinking about that. So I'm thinking of two stories of the woman talking about the adultery and also the people who were fed by the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath.

[64 : 24] And in both cases, Jesus shows grace and forgiveness to the woman. Doesn't condemn her. And also teaches his disciples, no, the Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So I'm thinking, how do you interpret that? So maybe you could say that within any culture, people can go awry. So a subculture of Jewish people, i.e. the Pharisees, have gone off in a legalistic direction.

And Jesus corrects that and says, no, no, no, that's not what Judaism is about. Yeah, that's right. Here's a correct understanding. That's right. But the underlying presupposition being, you'll agree, that in that conversation, they have something to converse about because of Israel's story.

They can talk about Sabbath together and how to honor it because they have this story of Israel together. It's interesting that in Matthew's gospel, and maybe it's not a surprise that it's in Matthew's gospel, or maybe Matthew's gospel is understood to be the kind of document it is because this kind of thing is in it.

Excuse my complexity here. Jesus will on occasion say things like, obey what the Pharisees teach, but not what they do because they have inherited the seed of Moses.

[65 : 39] He honors Israel. He sometimes heals people and said, now go to the temple and do what the priests command for this kind of thing. We honor Israel even as it's being fulfilled.

That's the underlying theme there, apparently, in those two instances. Israel is honored by Jesus, and he's fulfilling.

It's as if, I like to, in existentialist terms, what if you met your true identity in another person? Would you like your true identity? What if you didn't? That's our sin.

That's our dividedness. My flesh might not like the true Harvey Guest if God presented him to me. I might say, no, I don't want to be that guy. But God says, but that's who I have created you to be. My flesh would be alienated from my perfected self. So I think that's the dynamic going on. Israel's true identity is in the midst of Israel. Will she recognize him?

[66 : 39] Isn't that, I find that, I find that's what's going on in the Gospels as they remember him, as the early church, all Jews remember him. Sir, please. There's a little bit of context that might help explain David's actions, too.

This conflict between David and Goliath is a, it's a Philistine Anatolian custom of battle, where two battles line up, and your best warriors go out, and they fight each other.

We see this in the Iliad, where Achilles fights Hector. And it's a form of omen casting. Whoever wins the battle, that side wins the war.

Okay? So what you have here in the context is the Philistines putting out their biggest, best warrior, a mercenary who's traveled all over the Mediterranean, who's armed in Anatolian mercenary armor against this shepherd boy.

And shepherd boy prevails. Okay? Of course, now they're all terrified and they run. But the purpose of taking the head is he takes that head and he rides off to Jerusalem.

[68 : 00] Now, Jerusalem at this point in time is in the hands of the Jebusites, who are holed up there. They're the last stronghold of Judah's inheritance.

He puts that head on display to show the Jebusites, you're next. Okay? Because what he's showing is not only am I to have God's blessing, but God's going to prevail here.

So he's trying to put the fear of God in the Jebusites. Oh, yeah. Yes, in blunt historical terms, it's all probably very explicable.

But there's a reason behind it. Oh, sure. It's not just wanted brutality. Yes, but the God of Israel, presumably, and the writers know that this is not the final desire of the God of Israel for humans to ever be like this, is it?

God here is, like Jesus says to the Pharisees, okay, you got a point, guys. You can have divorce.

[69 : 10] But it was not God's intention ever. It's never God's intention to be these wars. There's never... Israel's God's pilot project to bring about a world where every tear is wiped away, where there is no more war, where, as the prophets foresaw, the plowshares would be...

the weapons become plowshares. So God is dealing with David, permissioning a David, but not approving of him, finally. I'm sure. Oh, I think God permissions, but doesn't approve.

He never says, oh, thank goodness, my creation has become a war zone, and I'll cheer for the good guys. He's going to make a world where there is no war.

But the prophet sees... Oh, yeah, that's what... Well, that's what... I don't know how to show up.

That's the eschatological David. Great David's greater son turned the other cheek.

There's also... Okay, okay. Yeah. Okay, anyway, there you go. Big topic. I knew the backup band. Yeah, yeah. The backup band. Which tells me we have time for one more question. Yeah. And so, it's going to be late.

[70 : 15] Okay, I'll just give a comment, and to some extent it's a follow-up on what Colleen said. I mean, the thing that strikes me about David is not that he did really good things and really horrible things, but when he did those really horrible things, he repented.

And I don't know anybody in the Old Testament who repented like David did. In the case of Abigail, he repented before he actually did what he planned to do. In the case of Bathsheba, he did it and repented later.

Yeah. But... That's good. When David says in the Psalms, you don't want rivers of oil or thousands of rams, what you want is a humble and contrite heart, I don't think he's just talking abstract theology there, because my understanding of the sacrificial system and the cities of refuge and all the ways that you can sort of escape punishment is that those were for inadvertent sins.

But when you did something like David did in the case of Bathsheba, there was no provision for forgiveness. Yeah, he has... There has to be... If God doesn't want to humble a contrite heart, he's up to the creek.

If you weren't the king, he would be dead. Yeah. Dave... Well, I'd come back to... I think David is an eighth-day person. He's an impossibility. He's teachable along the way, but there has to be an eighth-day.

[71 : 36] There has to be an impossibility, which is God's forgiving love, which will bring David... He'll bring the story of Israel right down to a baby in Mary's womb. And surprise, here is Israel.

Israel dies for the sins of the world and rises to justify. That was her ultimate goal. Not to be a warrior victor, but to be a victim who rises with healing in his wings.

So the story of Israel takes this massive healing turn in Jesus. And the universal family promised Abraham is now forming. We are a part of it.

And the story has a finish to come, as we're finished today, aren't we? To quote one of Harvey's earlier talks, God's work worthy of discussion.

Thank you, Harvey, so much. Thank you. Thank you all for putting up with me. What a great presentation. What a great talk. Thank you.