

Message notes.

Part one: - The Messy Family

We start today by looking at the family of Jacob. The marriage to Leah and Rachael – who was in the wrong; - Jacob for knowing that the older daughter had to marry first? Laban for tricking Jacob? These are questions that will never have a full answer. We know that the cultural expectations were different, although I re-call in some of the costume dramas we watch there was always pressure for the older female sibling to marry first to avoid becoming an old maid! There was also love involved in the episode with Jacob and this would cause issues later on.

One result of this messy start to married life were the children; - can we name all those children?

- 1) Reuben was Jacob's firstborn. He was the son of Leah, Jacob's first wife.
- 2) Simeon was next, and he was also a son of Leah.
- 3) Levi was the third of Jacob and Leah's children.
- 4) Judah was the next.
- 5) Dan was born to Jacob by Bilhah, his wife Rachel's handmaid. It was common practice in that day for a barren wife to give her servant to her husband to bear children in her name.
- 6) Naphtali was the next child, also through Bilhah.
- 7) Gad was number seven. He was the child of Jacob and Zilpah, the handmaid of Leah.
- 8) Asher was next. He was the second son of Zilpah.
- 9) Issachar was another son granted to Leah.
- 10) Zebulun was the next child, Leah's sixth.
- 11) Dinah was Jacob's only daughter, and her mother was Leah.
- 12) Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son and twelfth child, born to Rachel.
- 13) Benjamin was Jacob's last child, his twelfth son, and Rachel's second son.

We would speak of blended families and other terms, yet it feels messy.

God worked through this family, the twelve tribes or the genealogy of Jesus.

There are two main ideas to take from this, firstly that God works through human lives and secondly that no matter the human mess God can be found there. Sometimes in church life we want everything to be nice, tidy and clean; we don't always want/appreciate the mess coming into the life of the church. Yet if a person cannot bring their mess into the church, where can they bring it? We must take seriously the mission of the church that Jesus has handed on to us - Luke 4:14-30

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

We seek to be Spirit filled people and bring good news to all, both spiritually and practically. Surely then we are called to accept the mess of people and walk with it.

Many of us have families that are messy in varying degrees, maybe not as many competing siblings as Jacob, but favourites, envy, the golden child etc., are still with us – but God can work through us in all these situations.

Part two: - Romans 8

There are many themes in our readings, I want us to briefly look at prayer and using this in navigating the mess of life. Last week I was traveling by train from Abergavenny to Worksop via Stockport and Sheffield. I had navigated the booking system to get the best deal and I am a seasoned train traveller. My lift by car to Abergavenny suggested we go to Hereford (the next stop) as they needed to shop there. Road traffic was horrible, I arrived at Hereford with 2 minutes left, off with luggage dashing into the station, saw a transport for Wales train across the way, up the staircase, across and down, straight into the train – needed oxygen by that stage. - off it goes in the wrong direction. So back to Abergavenny, more stairways and rushing, get new ticket and then on the right train going the right way (Manchester Piccadilly), a little bit behind, but getting more and more behind, then terminates at Wilmslow – the one just before Stockport, five carriages get off to catch the next three carriage going north. That day I did a lot of navigating platforms and train and exercising my prayer life.

The people receiving the letter from Paul were facing mess, persecution and trouble and Paul remind them and us that we have prayer and the Spirit to aid us through. We are called to be Spirit filled every day and bring our faith into every part of our lives, not just the 'holy' bits. Over recent months we have deliberately focused on prayer of praise near the beginning of our service. Whether we use said prayers or extemporary, there is a discipline in focusing on one theme.

Please note the verse 26 speaks about being in our weakness. Paul did not set himself on a pedestal as an example of spiritual strength. Rather, he included himself with us as one who was weak. Perhaps a main reason that we do not pray as frequently or as fervently as we should is that we do not recognize how weak we really are. If we knew ourselves to be weak, we would constantly be coming to the Lord and crying out for His strength.

We tend to look at the spiritual giants in the Bible and think, "Wow, they were strong!" Look at Elijah! What a guy! He called down fire on his sacrifice and then slaughtered 400 prophets of Baal. Twice he called down fire to consume a commander and fifty armed men who were sent to arrest him. Don't mess with Elijah! And yet James (5:17) tells us, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed" Elijah was weak, just like we are. But he prayed to the God who is strong.

Or, consider Moses. Or, look at the Lord Jesus Himself. He alone lived a sinless life on this wicked earth. He boldly confronted the religious leaders without fearing their threats. He overturned their money tables and pronounced woes on their hypocrisy. If anyone seemed to be strong, it was Jesus. And yet He said (John 5:19), "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing." He often slipped away to the wilderness for prayer (Luke 5:16). In His humanity, Jesus knew that He must depend on the Father for all things. He is a model for us of praying at all times and for all things (Luke 18:1). Our weakness should cause us to cry out to God in prayer.

Hudson Taylor said (source unknown), "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them." We fail to pray because we think that we're strong enough to handle life without God. It's encouraging here in Romans 8:26 that God doesn't confront us or condemn us for being weak. Rather, He sends His Spirit to help us in our weakness. However, we must be open to accepting the Spirit.

So, the challenge today is to be aware of the mess we live in, no matter the trimmings – but we have been sent the Spirit to aid us in our prayer life to live as God would want to. Prayer is the foundation of our Christian lives, as we remember from holiday club and the difference between building on the sandy land or the rock.