

## **Introduction**

What is your favorite book of the Bible? For some of us it would be hard to say. But most of us probably do find a particular book of the Bible to stand out to us personally. It would not surprise me if a significant number of you would say "the Gospel according to John" or "Paul's epistle to the Romans" or perhaps "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." And yet through the years, not a few have felt a special appreciation for "the Gospel according to Matthew."

A number of outstanding features characterize this important work of the Holy Spirit through the pen of a former tax collector. James Montgomery Boice exclaims, "What an extraordinary book Matthew is! It is the first of the gospels, the longest, the most Jewish, the most evangelistic, and, in many ways, the most compelling." (9) Matthew "makes frequent references to the Old Testament, more than the other gospel writers. The book contains at least forty quotations from the Old Testament." Boice also draws attention to the fact that Matthew contains more interaction between Jesus and the Jewish authorities as well as the strongest indictments against Jewish unbelief. Interestingly, Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the word church. His message is very Jewish, but still he shows a strong interest in the Gentiles. He presents to the Jews Jesus, the true King, but he also indicates Jesus is the savior for the nations.

This morning we are embarking on an exciting study, for we are beginning a study of the Gospel according to Matthew. We may pause a time or two along the way just to take a breath and keep it fresh. But Lord willing we will persist until we arrive at the Great Commission of Jesus at the very end. This morning we start with the bloodline of the king.

[Read Text and Pray]

As mundane as all these names might sound, it would be possible to spend a lot of time here. I am resisting the temptation. In my younger years as a pastor, my grandparents visited us there in Batesville, Arkansas and were

with us over a Sunday. I was preaching what I came to, and in one of the services, that meant dealing with a genealogy, I don't remember exactly where. What I do remember is that after the sermon my grandmother had a personal word of advice: maybe I should skip the "begats" next time.

I am not going to skip over this genealogy at the beginning of Matthew. It is too important. And yet I want to avoid being overly tedious in a sermon, and I want you to get the main message of this text. So my plan this morning is to set before you several important points in the text that should assist you in grasping its importance and distinction in the Bible, and then preach to you the central message communicated through this genealogical record of the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ.

I want you to see first that Matthew's introductory family tree of Jesus is

### **I. A Suitable Opening to the Entire New Testament**

A. There had been a long period of silence from heaven. The latest prophet to speak in the Old Testament was Malachi. It had been over 400 years of prophetic silence. The prophets had spoken of the coming one, but it had been so long. And though much had been said, there remained much that was not understood.

B. Matthew's target audience was the Jews. He wanted them to recognize that the one who fulfilled God's great promises had now arrived. So he announces it from the beginning. And the genealogy serves as a kind of recapitulation of Old Testament history to that point. One of the details that Matthew himself wants the readers to notice is that he divided up Jewish history into three sets consisting of 14 generations each. Now we might look at what he has done and think his goal was to provide evidence for the validity of his claim that Jesus is Messiah. However, this would not be accurate. It is clear to students of the word now and students of the word then that Matthew did not include every single generation in his genealogy. He was selective. The number 14 (twice the perfect number 7) is used more by him to express the completeness of each of these historic divisions.

C. He is stressing the movement or flow of the history from Abraham to Jesus. There are three definitive periods in that span: Abraham to David, David to the deportation (the exile in Babylon), and the deportation to

Matthew's present which was the arrival of the Messiah. It is a historical sequence which reflects initial optimism at the promise of God to Abraham. But that optimism was followed by a long period of captivity after which Israel was set free. Then there was the conquest of the promised land which culminated in David's valiant domination of the land. God then promised David that his kingdom and throne would be established forever. The succeeding period was dark, as wicked king followed wicked king. And the people went after idols. God called his people back to him, but for the most part they resisted. God left and the people went into captivity. They were deported to Babylon. There the darkness and sadness were interrupted by the opportunity to return to Jerusalem. They rebuilt the temple and the city of Jerusalem, but they were under the rule of others. Still they are waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. They wait for Messiah.

And Matthew emerges on the scene with this good news. He sets before them Jesus the Messiah, the son of David and the son of Abraham! And he points from Abraham to David to deportation to Jesus in order to say, "Jesus has now come in fulfillment of the promises given so long ago. Jesus is the realization of the hopes that we almost forgot."

So Matthew in this text recapitulates God's history with the Jews and points the reader now forward to see the birth, life, death, and resurrection of this one who is Messiah. Like a bolt of lightning splitting the night sky, Matthew's announcement and genealogy of Jesus opens the door to the New Testament. You can see why it found its place at the head of the NT canon. The Jew Paul opened and closed his letter to the Romans, which takes its place as first among the epistles, by saying much the same thing as Matthew. In Romans 1 Paul says he was set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh. And in Romans 16, Paul closes referring to the news of Jesus as the revealing of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but now has been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations.

What has been long anticipated and yet not known with clarity is that Jesus is the one of whom the promises were speaking. It is he!

Next I want you to see that Matthew's introductory family tree of Jesus is

## **II. A Preview of His Overall Purpose**

A. Matthew announces Jesus as the Messiah and presents first evidence in the form of his bloodline, his ancestry, his family tree. Matthew calls the record the "book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ."

I need to make sure that you understand that Christ is not a name. It is a title. It is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. So this is the way Matthew begins. Jesus is the Messiah.

Messiah means anointed one. It refers to one who is set apart to a special task. In the OT, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. Jesus fulfills each of these three roles. And the role of King is of particular emphasis as reflected in Psalm 2. The psalm depicts the rulers of the world setting themselves against the Lord and his Anointed. But the Lord laughs at them, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion." The Lord identifies him as his son. This is the king the Lord promised David would rule forever on his throne.

B. And Matthew sticks with this purpose as he moves forward from this point. One of the high points in Matthew's gospel is the confession by Peter. Jesus asks the disciples who do men say that I am? And then he says, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." You are the Messiah, the son of the living God. And Jesus exclaims, "Blessed are you Simon-Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. And on this rock I will build my church."

C. Matthew connects the Messiah-ship of Jesus with the fact that in his humanity he descends from both David and Abraham. God made covenant promises to both David and Abraham. And Matthew is asserting that Jesus fulfills those promises as Messiah.

1. To David the Lord covenanted that he would raise up his offspring and establish the throne of his kingdom forever. The Lord had said, "I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son."

2. To Abraham the Lord covenanted that he would make of him a great nation and in his offspring all the nations would be blessed.

Jesus is the son of David, the promise of a king to come from him who would also be a son to the Lord and whose kingdom would never cease. He also is the offspring of Abraham through whom as Messiah people from every tribe and tongue would be blessed. It is through his saving work on the cross.

Matthew's introductory family tree of Jesus is

### **III. Noticeably Different from the One in Luke**

A. In case you did not know, there is a second genealogical record of Jesus in the New Testament. It is a part of the detailed and carefully documented gospel according to Luke. However, there is a noticeable difference between the genealogy we find in the gospel of Luke and the one we find here in Matthew. For one thing Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam. That is really not a big deal. What is more striking and perhaps a little perplexing for many is that the ancestral route from David to Jesus is different. Matthew traces the royal line from David to Solomon. Meanwhile Luke traces Jesus' line from King David through his son Nathan who like Solomon is also a son of Bathsheba, but it is a different line.

B. My purpose in mentioning the difference is not to raise doubts but to address realities. Those who come to the Bible looking for reasons to disbelieve might seize on this difference and say, "See, the Bible is untrustworthy!" Others who come to the Bible, believing it to be true, notice this difference and become perplexed. Is this a reason to disbelieve the trustworthiness of the Bible? The answer is "no, absolutely not."

C. Two possible explanations have been set forth by scholars. Some suggest the possibility that Matthew followed the line of succession to the throne to which Joseph became the next heir and that Luke followed the actual line to Joseph. Another suggestion is that Matthew followed the line

through Joseph, and Luke followed the line from David to Mary. This possibility is appealing to me because Matthew's birth focus is on Joseph. He recounts Joseph's intent to divorce Mary quietly and the angel's visit to Joseph to give him assurance in regard to the surprising pregnancy. Meanwhile, Luke's birth narrative is concerned largely with Mary's experiences and the visit of the angel to Mary. At any rate we have two realistic possibilities that remove any reason for alarm as we consider the two genealogies. The two writers traced the lineage in differing but legitimate ways and they both affirm Jesus to be a descendant of King David.

Finally, Matthew's introductory family tree of Jesus is

#### **IV. A Bold Proclamation that God Keeps His Promises**

Matthew's primary point in this announcement, from the initial stroke of his stylus, was to convincingly set forth to his readers that the advent of Jesus the Messiah marks the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God. God keeps his promises. Nothing will keep him from it. And neither the when or the who can stand between him and keeping his word.

A. It is striking as we look at this genealogy that it consists of men and women who are far from ideal and far from perfect. Headlining the list are Abraham and David. Abraham was a nomad who told lies because of fear. And David was a shepherd who rose to be king but who committed adultery with the wife of a Hittite then murdered her husband. And besides that wife, three other women are mentioned. None of them were Jews. One, Tamar, seduced her father-in-law. The second, Rahab, was a prostitute. The third, Ruth, hailed from a people whose family tree commenced with an incestuous relationship.

In the list only a few are known for relative godliness, and relative it was. All have scars and blemishes on their record. The family tree of Jesus is a tree of sinners. But that did not keep God from calling them or using them. This list confirms that God is willing to wade into the messiness of our sinful lives. He is willing and able to bring his purposes to fulfillment even to be associated with imperfect, disobedient, and at times faithless people. God does not take any sin lightly. It is enmity with him. But neither does it keep him from keeping his promise and fulfilling his purpose to save.

In fact, that is why he came. Just down in the next section of the first chapter we hear the angel telling Joseph, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." That's the reason for Messiah. That's the substance of the promise to Abraham and that's the hope of his rule through David. He is assembling to himself a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that they might proclaim the excellencies of him who calls them OUT of darkness into his marvelous light.

The great evidence that Jesus is Messiah is that he died for the sins of his people and then he rose again. His victorious work on the cross and in resurrection is a declaration that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. There are no "good" people in Jesus' family tree and there are no good people in the world, only sinners, men and women who have broken God's law over and over, only sinners who need what Jesus came to provide—forgiveness. You can receive that today if you will just turn from you sin and from yourself and trust in the work of Jesus the Messiah.

B. The men and women in this genealogy strike us, then, but so does Matthew's emphasis on timing. He lays out the divisions of history's progression from the time of Abraham to the advent of Jesus. He sees this fulfillment of God's promises taking place at a strategic point in history. His concise reminder of Israel's history is an admission that the days were dark. Many days and years had passed since these promises were given and those covenants made. Certainly there were those who no longer looked for the fulfillment of these promises. So much time had passed that they just gave up. Furthermore, the days were dark days. Hope was at a low ebb for the Jews. Between God's covenant with Abraham and the present time the rise of the rule of the David was the great bright spot in Israel's timeline. Ever since the days of David there was a downward spiral. The faithlessness of the people had resulted in their deportation. And now, though they had returned to the land, the weight of Roman rule was heavy upon their backs. It may have seemed to many that the sun of hope had set on the promises God made so long ago. At best, for others, God seemed slow about his promises. But Matthew bursts onto the scene with his bold proclamation that God has kept his promises! In his time and according to his plan God is a promise keeping God!

We do well to remember that God works on his own time table and according to his plan. We need to bear in mind that God's timing is not intended to be predictable and expect-able. Much of the time He does not work his brightest works when the day is new but when the sun is about to set and all hope is about to be lost. That's when doubters give up and leave and believers hold on.

God is not working in this sinful world to make things easy-peasy but to demonstrate his power and glory. Where does his glory shine brightest? And when does his power appear strongest? It is when circumstances are the most threatening. Don't give up! Hold on to the Lord God Almighty! Hold on to His promises!

When was Isaac conceived? It was not when Abraham and Sarah were in their youth, all young and ready to raise a family. But it was after all hope was reasonably gone. "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead (since he was about 100 years old) or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb, . . . but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

If I am able to paint masterpieces, would I be demonstrating my ability and skill if I instead did "paint-by-number"? Or if I am able to create a detailed pencil sketch that looks like a photograph, why would I bother with dot-to-dot? If I were able to deadlift 500 lbs., it would not display my ability if I settled to demonstrate my strength by lifting only 40 would it?

God made this world and runs it to display his glory. So he is going to work in such a way to display his power, wisdom, and skill. And isn't that what the people who know their God want to see? God displaying his best and his greatest works? I glorify him like Abraham when I trust him no matter how things look.

But He is God, and no one can compel him to make promises. And if he chooses to make promises to us unworthy as we are, who are we to expect him to fulfill them when and how we think is best? We just need to trust him and hold on!

## **Conclusion**

There is one more great promise for which we wait. Jesus has promised he will come again to receive his people to himself. He went away to prepare a place for us, but he promised, he will come again. When is he coming? Do not expect his return when everybody is looking for him. Keep on looking even when many have given up! He will come. We will light up the sky! He will receive his own to himself. He promised!