

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

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| <i>Text</i> | Matthew 1:1-17 |
| <i>Reading</i> | Deuteronomy 4:1-14; Galatians 3:10-18, 26-4:7 |
| <i>Theme</i> | Jesus came in fulfilment of Old Testament history as the son of David, the son of Abraham. |
| <i>Purpose</i> | To show Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises regarding a King over all the nations. |

Introduction to the reading: This morning, on this first Sunday of another year, we are beginning a series of sermons on the gospel of Matthew that will take us through to Easter. This period of the church year is known as *Epiphany*, which means an *appearing*. We will focus on the appearing of Jesus in his ministry on earth leading up to his suffering, death and resurrection which we will remember at Easter.

The gospel of Matthew is structured around five main teaching sections: Chapters 5-7, which is the Sermon on the Mount, then chapters 10, 13, 18 and 24.

This is the 40th book of the Bible and is, of course, the first book of the New Testament. It provides an excellent transition from the Old Testament to the New because Matthew, writing to Jews, shows that Jesus was the fulfilment of all of Old Testament history. This is why he begins with a genealogy, a record of the family tree of Jesus.

Read Matthew 1:1-17

When most of us get to the lists of names in the Bible we skip over them. In fact, you might have wondered why on earth we actually read such a long list of names?! What is the point of it? What benefit is there in a genealogy? And why choose a list like this to preach on? Why not just go past all these names and get on with the real story about the birth and ministry of Jesus?

The Jews would not have agreed with such an attitude. And Matthew, writing as a Jew for Jewish readers, began his account of the life of the Lord Jesus in the most natural and interesting way for his people.

The Jews kept careful records of their forefathers and most could trace their ancestry back a long way. These records were maintained by the Sanhedrin and were used to confirm that those who claimed to be Jews had a pure line of descent. Josephus, a famous Jewish historian who served the court in Rome, began his autobiography by listing his genealogy.

Other cultures also valued these records. There was a Bible translator in Papua New Guinea who was translating the New Testament for a tribe who hadn't heard the gospel before. He thought that the beginning of this gospel would not be all that relevant for this tribe, so he started translating at Matthew 1:18, about the birth of Jesus. When he had finished the entire gospel and the tribe had read it all he came back to this genealogy. When the people of the tribe finally read this first part they were a bit annoyed at the translator and asked, "Why didn't you give this to us right at the beginning?! If you had done that the whole story

would have made more sense. We could have seen more clearly where Jesus came from and it would have been easier for us to understand!”

In our culture there is a growing interest in family trees and genealogies. There are adds on TV encouraging you to look up *ancestry* – “*come and find me*”, so you can research your family history.

Matthew did not include all the names that could be mentioned. The phrase “the father of” can also mean “the forefather of” or “the ancestor of”.

Matthew left some names out because he wanted to arrange this record in three sections of 14: Abraham to David, David to the exile, and the exile to the Lord Jesus.

One reason for this was to have a mnemonic, that is, an easy way of remembering this list. This was especially useful at a time when most people did not have a scroll or book or a smartphone to carry with them.

Another reason for this arrangement is that fourteen is a doubling of the number 7 - the number of fullness or perfection. Jesus came into the world at the end of three fourteens, or at the end of six sevens. He came when the time had fully come, wrote the Apostle Paul (Gal 4:4).

We want to note three truths from this genealogy:

1. Jesus came in the purpose of God
2. He came for all the nations
3. He came as the King

1. HE CAME IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD

a. God is in control.

In the mid-nineteenth century there was a terrible famine in Ireland. To keep men occupied the government set men to digging roads, but those roads had no purpose and no destination. A boy saw this and came home to his father one day and said with wonder, “They’re making roads that lead to nowhere!”

We cannot say that about the work of God in history. All that God has done and is doing and will do is leading somewhere - it has a purpose, a goal, a destination.

That is part of the lesson of these genealogies in the Bible: God is at work in history, he is in control, he is in charge. He is guiding all events so that everything happens according to his plan and will, including, and especially, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

b. God is directing all history.

History is His-story, God’s story. This genealogy shows us where Jesus came from – he came from the people of Israel. He had historical roots. He was not an alien visitor who dropped in from outer space with no connection with our world.

It is true that he was the Son of God and that he came from heaven, but he also came from a human ancestry on earth. Christianity is an historical religion. It is rooted in real people who live in specific places. Jesus was born of Mary in a stable in Bethlehem in Judea in Palestine at a certain hour on a particular day. God is in control and he is directing all history.

c. God keeps his promises.

In the early church there was a person called Marcion. He wanted to leave off the Old Testament because he thought that it was unimportant; he wanted to cut off all the connections with the old covenant.

But Marcion was wrong. The Bible is one book in two parts; it tells one story in two phases. It is the story of what God would do, has done, and will do in the person of the Lord Jesus.

This means that everything written in the Old Testament is important for understanding who Jesus is. Matthew was well aware of this when he wrote his gospel. Being a Jew he knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well and he wanted his Jewish readers to see that Jesus was the fulfilment of everything God had said and done since time began. Jesus fulfilled the promises and prophecies of the Scriptures, he fulfilled the law of God, and he fulfilled all the sacrifices and ceremonies carried out in the temple.

All of these were fulfilled in Jesus. They only make sense in him. In him they find their meaning.

Matthew wanted his readers to see this. He quoted from the Old Testament about 50 times, twice as many as any other gospel writer. Again and again he pointed out that Jesus did this or that in order that it might be fulfilled what the prophets had said.

This is why his gospel has been placed as the first book of the NT – it connects the old and the new. It is a transition into the New Testament, especially with this opening genealogy linking the Old and New Testaments; this genealogy ties them together.

d. God is in control, he directs all history, he keeps his promises, and **he works through people.**

Matthew lists 40 names, 40 people, 40 individuals. Some were good people, others were wicked; some obeyed God, others disobeyed him.

Most of those listed are men, but some are women, which was unusual for ancient records. But all are listed because God used all of them in his plan and purpose.

The book of Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogies! When we come to those we usually skim read! But all those hundreds of individual names were recorded because each one of those people was important in God's plan; each one had a part to play.

This is something to keep in mind as we enter another year; you and I have a part to play in God's plan, he gives us a task to do, we have something to contribute to this church and to the kingdom of Christ. Are you ready for this? Are you willing to serve? Are you looking for work to do for the Lord Jesus?

Sometimes God works through unlikely people. We see that especially in four of the five women who are mentioned - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.

Tamar was the one who disguised herself as a prostitute and slept with her father in law, Judah (Gen 38). *Rahab* was a prostitute in Jericho (Joshua 2). *Ruth* was from the people of Moab, and *Bethsheba* was the woman with whom David committed adultery.

Most of us would not want these women in our family tree but these are the ancestors of Jesus!

This shows us that God works in surprising ways, and it prepares us for the most surprising event of all, the birth of the Son of God to a virgin, to Mary!

The inclusion of these women also shows us that God can and does use sinful people to fulfil his plans. That is of great encouragement to us. Sometimes we think that we can't do anything right and how could God possibly use us. But this list of names teaches us that God forgives what has happened in the past and that he uses sinful people to do his work in this world. He graciously over-rules our sinful deeds and he uses our stumbling efforts to fulfil his plans and his will.

Jesus came in the purpose of God.

2. He came FOR ALL THE NATIONS

In the opening verse of the New Testament Matthew wrote that Jesus was "the son of Abraham". Abraham lived around 2000 BC. God made a covenant with him and promised to be his God and the God of his descendants after him.

This promise also pointed ahead to Jesus. Paul wrote to the Galatians; "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, 'and to seeds' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed', meaning one person, who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16) Jesus is the son of Abraham because he was the One who was promised, he is the seed, he is *The Descendant* who was promised and who has come.

This was especially important for the Jews because the religious leaders of Jesus' day often questioned Jesus as to where he came from. They called him the "carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:54-58) and one time they said to him, "You are a Samaritan and have a demon." (John 8:48). But this genealogy of Matthew showed that Jesus was the son of Abraham, a descendant of Israel.

God also promised Abraham; "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). This promise also looked ahead to the coming of the Lord Jesus and to this New Testament age.

At the end of this gospel Matthew records the command of Jesus; "Go and make disciples of *all nations*". (Matthew 28:19) The followers of Jesus did not really understand what that meant until the day of Pentecost when the good news about Jesus went out to people from all over the world. Later on Peter and Paul came to

realise that Jesus wanted them to speak about him to the Gentiles, to the non-Jews. The message had to go out to all the nations.

Matthew's genealogy anticipated this far-reaching spread of the gospel. Think again about four of the women mentioned in this list. Tamar was a Canaanite; Rahab also came from Canaan, from the city of Jericho; Ruth was a Moabitess; and Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Already in the ancestry of Jesus there is evidence that God was concerned, not only about Israel, but about all the nations. Representatives of the other people were included in the ancestry of Jesus.

Ever since then Christians have been applying that command of the Lord Jesus and have sought to be witnesses for Jesus in the way they live and act and speak.

Will you remember this in 2016?

Are you seeking to make disciples?

Are you praying for and looking for opportunities to speak about Jesus?

Are you giving to the work of missions and to the Bible League and the Voice of the Martyrs?

Will you be a witness for Jesus through all of this year and for the rest of your life?

Jesus came in the purpose of God, he came as the son of Abraham for all the nations, and

3. JESUS CAME TO BE KING

Matthew not only tells us that Jesus was the son of Abraham, but also the "son of David" (1:1).

These two men are good marker points in OT history, Abraham living around 2000 BC and David around 1000 BC. David lived in the Golden Age of the history of Israel at a time when the kingdom was expanding, Israel was conquering its enemies and the nation was prospering.

God promised David that one of his descendants would always sit on his throne. This was the covenant he made with David (2 Samuel 7), which we sang about in Psalm 132.

That promise was fulfilled in the line of kings that began with Solomon and followed on through the kings of Judah.

But the kingdom of Judah was defeated by the Babylonian armies in 587 BC, the temple was destroyed, and the last king of Judah, King Zedekiah, was taken away into exile.

That is recorded in the last chapter of the second book of Chronicles. In the Jewish arrangement of the Old Testament that is the last book of their Scriptures, so that is how the Jewish account ends, with the end of the temple and the end of the kingship.

The gospel of Matthew is placed at the beginning of the New Testament and it continues the account of God's work in history by announcing the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the true king of Israel. God's work through his people is continued in Jesus, the son of David, the King of his people, who are gathered in the church of Jesus Christ.

Today, as we enter a New Year, the Holy Spirit calls all of us to recognise Jesus as King, to submit to his rule and to bow before his throne.

Genealogies give us a lot of information and this genealogy of Jesus is most important. It shows us that God is at work in all of history, and in our lives; that Jesus came for all the nations including us, and that he came to be your King and mine.

Amen