

“Jesus’ Family”
Matthew 1:1-25 - February 28, 2021
Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA
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Before we read the passage this evening, I would like to give an introduction, so we have a context for what I’ll be preaching through next.

What is next?

While I was preaching through the book of James, I noted that James’ teaching was deeply connected to the Sermon on the Mount. As I preached each section of James’ letter, I found myself turning again and again to Matthew 5-7. I wanted to get a peek inside of James’ thinking. As I sought to grasp a better sense of his love for Jesus’ sermon, my love for it grew as well, as did my love for the book of Matthew.

So, having completed James, I would like to now turn to preaching through the book of Matthew section by section. Since it is a larger book of twenty-eight chapters, my initial goal is, Lord willing, to preach through Matthew’s first seven chapters with some topical sermons here and there, and see where we go from there.

What do we know about Matthew? I will only comment on a few things about Matthew’s background this evening, and will draw more of who he is and what this book is about as we continue through this series.

Matthew is a book that in just one chapter – and a genealogy no less – has made a deep impression on me already. Matthew, who we may affectionally or accidentally call “Matt” or “Levi” from time to time, makes every word count.

While there isn’t absolute certainty about who Matthew was, it was widely accepted in the days of the early church that the author of this book was the same Matthew who was also known as Levi, the tax collector and disciple of Jesus. [Mt. 9.9]

Matthew was a follower of Jesus, a convinced Jewish Christian. His Jewish culture is seen throughout the Gospel as he repeatedly emphasizes the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the person of Jesus. Matthew does not feel the need to go into detail explaining Jewish rituals because both he and his audience were Jews. (Compare Matthew 15:-19 with Mark 7:1-13.) [Morris, 3]

As we dig deeper into this book, we will discover that Matthew knows his OT. While Mark quotes the OT 31 times, Luke 26 times and John only 16 times, Matthew brings the OT Scriptures into his letter 61 times. This data is important to us because it shows us what is important to Matthew.

Matthew is deeply concerned with highlighting God’s divine purposes by showing the connection between God’s inspired OT prophets and their fulfillment in the life and teaching of Jesus. [Morris, 3]

Before we turn to tonight's portion of God's word, I will note a couple more things. Our passage this evening is not only difficult to read, but also difficult to listen to. It is a genealogy, mostly full of impossible-to-pronounce names. But as I explained in my introduction, Matthew wastes no words. Matthew has placed them here at the beginning of his book because they are deeply important.

Matthew is a storyteller. He is the sort of person who wants to show you what he means, rather than tell you. I can identify with that. And I love the way Matthew tells stories to communicate deep truths.

And so what we have here is not just a family tree. It is so much more. This is the genealogy of Jesus, and Matthew *includes and excludes* certain people very intentionally.

See, Matthew's concern here is not to create an exact ancestry or timeline, family by family. He is showing a family line, but he is also teaching theology through the people he is highlighting.

Now, I will admit that sometimes, when I speak about the Protestant Reformation, I will jump from Martin Luther to John Calvin without acknowledging the many other significant people involved. Now, in no way am I trying to say that these two figures were the only significant contributors. I doubt anyone would accuse me of trying to twist history or misguide the students if I didn't mention every single person involved in the Reformation. Nor would anyone assume that I am trying to be sneaky by not giving you the full list. It is common to summarize and present information to demonstrate a point.

In a similar way, no one would ever accuse Matthew of trying to fudge the genealogies. After all, he was a tax collector. He kept records and data for a living. He would also not be foolish enough to try to pull "a fast one" on the religious leaders and churchmen of his day. He wouldn't make a mistake on something this important. He knew better.

He is no different than Ezra, who does not even include his own father in his genealogy! (Ezra 7:1-5 compared with 1 Chron. 6:3-15!) [Morris, 22]

So, as we turn to this genealogy, we will see that Matthew is, in fact, truthfully representing Jesus' genealogy, *and also* drawing attention to (and omitting) certain figures to highlight specifically important pieces of Jesus' genealogy. With this introduction, let's turn now to the reading of God's word. And as you follow along, take special note of some of the names present in this reading.

Matthew 1:1-25:

Matt. 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matt. 1:2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and

Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Matt. 1:12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Matt. 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

Matt. 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel."

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Let's pray together.

Some of you know that our landlord decided to sell the house we were renting, and we had to move suddenly into a temporary smaller space. We went from a house to a 900 sq. foot two-bedroom apartment. We are thankful to the Lord for his provision – we really like the place.

But in the process, something discouraging that I noted about myself – and actually our whole family – is that moving into a smaller space than we are used to can be somewhat of a stressful event.

My wife and I caught ourselves snapping and being unkind to each other... and to the children. Our three kids were suddenly bunking together in one room and were feeling a little closer than they wanted to be, and we found ourselves having to break up more arguments.

And to add insult to injury, even our two little dogs started having all-out vicious dog fights. I mean, scary vicious fights.

Every time we felt like we were better, we'd snap at each other again.

I'd like to say we were finally over that hump, but even the other night, as I was walking the dogs, my shame just overwhelmed me. How can I still struggle with impatience and anger? I had to spend a good portion of that walk praying and repenting over my anger and frustration. And they resurface in moments of stress, or in the moments you would least expect them to.

And of course, I'm referring to somewhat common issues that many of us might face in similar situations, but there are many other types of sins and habits that we find ourselves falling into time and time again. And they can be so frustrating and discouraging and heavy on us.

In Jesus' day, the religious people appeared not to have these sorts of struggles. They held their good deeds and righteousness above others. They looked down on people who showed spiritual weakness. They distanced themselves from "sinners" and those who had failed in life, making sure to have nothing to do with them.

They felt superior to everyone around them as they touted that they were "children of Abraham" – part of the blessed people of the covenant. They gloried in their heritage and in their deeds and seemed untouchable to the common people, holier than everyone around them. This was the context of Matthew's life.

Matthew knew these religious leaders well. He lived in a society and religion that openly shunned him for **who he had been**. Who he was was repeatedly shoved in his face. Shame and guilt would have been a real struggle for him.

But in Matthew's writing, we see that he challenges their perspective. He didn't see things the way they did. Matthew had been comforted by Jesus himself. Jesus was his pastor and teacher! **And Matthew saw in Jesus a graciousness, faithfulness and mercy that was completely different than the message the religious people of his time were communicating.**

And it is that message that shapes Matthew's thought. In this genealogy, Matthew shows us that Jesus is a God of mercy and faithfulness, not of shame and guilt.

And Matthew does that by showing us how God was faithful and merciful with a sinful and broken people.

Now, rather than explain precisely *what* we need to *believe*, as we might expect in Paul's detailed writings, Matthew takes a different approach. He *shows us* what we need to *see*. He connects a lot of the dots for us, so that we can see what is happening. More than telling us what to believe, he wants us to finalize the puzzle and see for ourselves.

So, he begins the puzzle with Abraham.

Abraham was the great patriarch whom everyone wanted to be like. The Pharisees repeatedly argued with Jesus that they were Abraham's children. Abraham was known to all as the father of the faith, with whom God made a covenant.

In Genesis 17 God promises Abraham that his covenant will bless all the nations – that his children will become nations, and that kings will come from his family line.

The problem with the promise, however, was that Abraham had already heard this covenant promise years before this. And he and his wife had waited so long that they were so old they couldn't have kids anymore. In his impatience with God, he bore a child with one of his servants, a move that would bring disgrace on, and havoc in, his family.

Matthew shows that, despite their sin, God still miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah the promised child in their old age – Isaac.

Further down, we read of Isaac's descendant Jacob and his son Judah. Matthew makes a point to show that Judah's twin sons are mentioned here in this list. But what is particularly interesting is that they are mentioned here alongside their mother's name, Tamar.

Now, having a woman's name in a list like this would be somewhat surprising in a genealogy (unless they were positive figures like Sarah, or Rachel or Leah – who are omitted here). But it would be even more surprising to have Gentile women highlighted! And Tamar was a Gentile woman with no positive addition to this family line.

For those who remembered her story, she would bring to memory Judah's unrighteousness. She had disguised herself as a prostitute in order to deceive Judah, her

father-in-law, so he would give her children, since he was failing to provide her with a husband.

Again, Matthew highlights this to show that, despite the failings and troubles up until this juncture, God remained faithful to his covenant people and continued to be patient with them.

Matthew is continuing to paint us an intentional picture.

If we skip down a few names until we get to v. 5, Matthew makes us cringe once again. Here we are reminded of how Boaz enters the family tree. Another woman is mentioned – this time not someone *pretending* to be a wayward woman. This time, it is Rahab, an actual prostitute from the Gentile city of Jericho!

Matthew seems to go out of his way to highlight this fact. For added shock value, after already showing that Boaz was Salmon's son, he just has to go on to include the detail that Boaz was born "by Rahab" – as if to say, "don't forget!" "Remember Rahab? In Jericho? She was the prostitute in this genealogy!"

And on the heels of Rahab, Matthew shows us that her son Boaz goes on to marry Ruth, a Moabite.

Even though we all love the story of Ruth, in Jewish thought, this was another blemish in the family line! For the Moabites were cursed; they could not enter the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. [Deuteronomy 23:3–4]

Ruth was a Moabite marrying into the royal line of the house of Judah!

Then Matthew reminds us that Ruth gives birth to Obed, the father of Jesse who became the father of David the king.

And all of this is already enough. But it is as if Matthew says, "I'm not finished yet!"

Matthew, again, goes out of his way and gets even more ruthless. In the very next sentence, he says, "*and David (the king) was the father of Solomon, **by the wife of Uriah.***"

Ouch.

The great king David, whom everyone loved and admired, is shown for who he really was.

Matthew mentions a fourth woman, but instead of calling her by name as he does with the earlier women in this genealogy, he refers to her as "the wife of Uriah."

This is brutal. We cannot miss the fact that Matthew is doing this on purpose. He is reminding us that King David not only had committed adultery with this woman while she was Uriah's wife, but he had murdered him to try to cover it up.

Matthew brings David's fall into sin back into the light. Into center focus and reminds all his readers of the king they so admired. The genealogy continues, and we could spend more time explaining all the other details, but we get the idea. Israel's sins and failures just jump off of the page. They aren't a lineage of righteous people. They are a broken and fallen group.

And that is the point that Matthew is making. Even still, despite their many sins, God remained faithful to his covenant promises with his covenant people. He continued to preserve the promises he made to Abraham and to David.

Abraham and his descendants would be blessed, and every nation blessed through them, and God's promise to David, that one of his descendants would remain on the throne forever would be fulfilled.

Even so, the snapshot that Matthew presents us with is grim. He paints it in such a way as to extract the things that everyone would rather forget.

He highlights the Gentiles, the failures of the men and women, the sins of the patriarchs and the years of deportation. We see a broken people, a hurting people, who fall into the same sins over and over again like a vicious cycle.

In this snapshot, we see a picture of a people who don't deserve God's covenant promises. A people who has repeatedly sinned against God and broken the covenant.

And this is what Matthew wants his readers to see.

You see, the Jews had been waiting for salvation from their hardships and oppression. They were waiting for freedom, for a Messiah who was an earthly king like David or a patriarch like Abraham. They kept looking backwards.

But Matthew reminds them that these patriarchs, though chosen by God, and though they were men of God, were still just that. They were men. They were fallen and flawed, and they died.

The solution to Israel's problems is not finding a stronger king who would get them out of their difficult circumstances. As we have seen in this genealogy, every king – even the best – would follow the pattern of the previous kings into sin and disaster. Any Messiah from this lineage would only fail the way all their previous ancestors had already. What hope could they have in someone else? And if we have no hope in someone as great as Abraham or David or Solomon, do we have any hope?

This is exactly what Matthew wants his readers to realize. No man – no matter how great – can do what we need him to do. None can save us. We are hopeless.

Then, in the very next section, Matthew the storyteller basically says, “Now let me tell you a short story. Let me show you something. Do you remember Jesus?”

Let me tell you about the wonderful story of his birth and why this answers all our concerns. Matthew says in v. 18:

Matt. 1:18 “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

“...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, ...that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

Matt. 1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Do you see what Matthew is doing here? First, he shows that no man can save us, then he says that the very man we thought was just a man, was born in a way like no other man! Jesus is **God and man!**

Jesus breaks the vicious cycle because he is not a man like David, or like Abraham. He is the God-man who breaks into this cycle and into this world and into this genealogy to dwell with us and save us from our sins.

You see, everyone knew they needed a Messiah, but what they were forgetting was that that Messiah couldn't be just another fallen human. They needed God to intervene! A sinless God-man. And Jesus' birth into Joseph's house, brings Jesus into the line of the promised Messiah and King. The Messiah who would bless all nations and peoples.

Jesus is Immanuel – God with us. And he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew's genealogy serves to show that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah that we actually needed. He was the savior promised through Abraham and David who would never fail or fall, the savior who would come to bless all the nations – both Jews and Gentiles, both men and women – and who would rule as King on David's throne forever.

Jesus enters this world and enters into a fallen genealogy. He enters into a family line that was overwhelmed with problems and sin. He entered the Israelite family of adulterers and murderers. **And he not only enters that genealogy, but he also enters into our family life too.**

Jesus so loved the world, that he came into **our mess**.

Despite the thousands of ways in which we have failed Jesus over and over again, Jesus sees our broken, fallen, and helpless lives and chooses to dwell with us. He is faithful to his covenant promises even when we are faithless.

This is the good news of the Gospel. God will fulfill his promises to us despite our mess. He will continue to save and love and show his mercy despite our failures, because he loves us.

We all will and have made mistakes. We mess up and feel stupid. We may feel like we haven't done enough in our lives for our kids, or spouses, or families.

We struggle with parenting, with bad habits, with money, or with our relationships. We keep striving to be better, but we keep on failing. Sometimes we just feel like a complete failure, like we cannot change.

We have all experienced that. There is enough guilt and shame to go around and there certainly was a lot of that in this genealogy.

Look again at these Biblical ancestors. The great men and women of faith. Read through the vicious cycle of sin in their lives throughout the generations.

God loves you so much, and cares about you so much, that he included this chapter here, so that you could see for yourself how much God loves you, and all his children, in spite of their failures. So that we can see a picture of his faithfulness throughout the many generations of complete disasters and see that God will be patient with you too. That God is loving, and that God is merciful. This is who he is and always has been. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Jesus comes into our world and silences the guilt and the shame that we are whispering or shouting to ourselves, and he says, "Look at your kings, your greatest ancestors. You, like them, need me.

"That is why I came to save you. To save you from that vicious cycle of sin. To free you from its bondage and to save you."

Jesus came into our family tree to save us and have us rest in him.

This is the beautiful tapestry of grace that Matthew wanted to show us through the history of Israel. He himself, a sinning tax collector, was saved by grace, and you can almost sense the joy he had in his eyes as he brought these names together, by the inspiration of God, to show us the great and merciful love of Jesus for all who trust in him.
Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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