

The Coming King: Advent Messages in Matthew

A Genealogy of Hope (Matthew 1:1-17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on December 1, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ **Has God stopped working in my life?** That's a haunting question and one that many of us have had to ask ourselves from time to time. It's an unsettling feeling – to think that God may have abandoned you. Now, of course, you don't always feel that way. I'm sure you can all recall seasons in life where you experienced significant spiritual growth. Where you had a clear sense of God's active presence in your life. It was a spiritual summer of the soul.
 - But, we all know, summer never lasts forever. And it's no different in our spiritual lives. Winter always comes around. We all face seasons of the soul where your heart feels cold; where little spiritual fruit grows; where you constantly struggle with sin and failure. These are seasons marked by unending disappointment in your marriage, your family, your career, and especially your relationship with God.
 - That's when you start to wonder if he has abandoned you; if he has grown tired of your failure and flaws; if he has stopped working in your life.

- ❖ **Just as winter season has arrived, I realize many of you have arrived this morning in a spiritual winter of the soul.** With that in mind, I want to bring a word of hope that I pray will bring some warmth to your soul.
 - Now I'm sure, for others, right now it feels like a spiritual summer. You're seeing God move in your life and answer prayers. But you still need to hear a message like this – you need to prepare yourself – because you can be sure that a spiritual winter is coming. It happens to us all.
 - **So with a goal to comfort some and prepare others, I want to turn our attention to the Christmas story found in the first chapter of Matthew.** This morning's passage was written to answer the question I raised. When Matthew wrote his Gospel, the big question on the minds of first-century Jews in his day was similar to ours, "Has God stopped working among us?"

- ❖ That was a real fear for the Israelites. **Theirs was a history of repeated failure.** Whether wandering in the wilderness or settled in the Promised Land, Israel repeatedly failed to trust and obey God and was constantly tempted by idols.
 - **So eventually, God threw them out of the land and exiled them in Babylon.** After 70 years they were allowed to return home, but even then they were still under foreign rule. Gone were the glory days when King David sat on the throne.
 - **And not too long after their return, God stopped sending prophets.** In other words, he stopped speaking to them. Over 400 years went by without a word from the Lord. Over 400 years passed between the close of the OT and the introduction of John the Baptist in the Gospels.
 - So, after all those years of darkness and silence, you can imagine what the Israelites were thinking to themselves: "Perhaps we've rebelled one too many times. Perhaps God has given up on us. Perhaps he's no longer working among us."

- ❖ **But in response to those doubts, Matthew wrote his Gospel and started it off with a message of hope.** Now most Christmas sermons out of Matthew chapter 1 begin in v18, *“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.”* but this morning I want us to consider the first 17 verses. That genealogy of Christ.
- ❖ **What I want to demonstrate is that – in structuring Jesus’s lineage the way he did – Matthew was trying to give us less genealogy and more theology.** His intent was to offer a message of hope to a discouraged and desperate people. A message that can be summarized like this: **Have hope since God never stops working in the lives of his people.**
 - I want to show you how every name in this genealogy serves the purpose of communicating that message. **My hope is for you to leave here comforted and strengthen in your faith, even if you’re in the dead of a spiritual winter.**

The Structure of Matthew’s Genealogy

- ❖ **But before we unpack that message of hope, let’s consider the unique way in which Matthew structured his genealogy.** I think it’ll help you see this as more than a boring list of biblical names. It will help you see the deeper message being communicated. So let’s start with that introductory sentence in v1. *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”*
- ❖ Here, Matthew assigns Jesus three titles. **First, he calls Jesus “the Christ.”** Remember, Christ is *not* his last name. It’s the Greek word for Messiah, meaning the Anointed or the Chosen. So Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the Messiah, the Chosen One of Israel.
 - **But what was he chosen to do?** Remember, at this point, it’s been well over 400 years since Israel had a king on the throne. But during those years of exile and foreign occupation, the prophets spoke of a Messiah – an anointed king that God would raise up to reclaim the throne of Israel and to re-establish the kingdom. And they were to expect this Messiah to come from the line of Israel’s greatest ruler, King David.
- ❖ **That’s why the second title is “the son of David.”** It was believed that this chosen son would fulfill God’s promise to David when he said that, *“your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”* (2 Sam 7:16) But all of David’s sons failed as kings, and since the Babylonian exile, his throne has been empty. So in Jesus’s day, people were still waiting for God to fulfill this promise to David.
 - **Now the third title is “the son of Abraham.”** That’s because another expectation of the Messiah was that he would be of Jewish descent. So Matthew must show that Jesus is a son of Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews.
- ❖ **So in vv2-16, Matthew takes these three titles and creates a pattern around them.** And this is summarized in v17, *“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.”* **So Jesus’s family line can be broken down into a pattern of three succeeding eras, each with 14 generations.**

- ❖ The **first 14 generations** saw God's awesome work in the lives of Father Abraham to King David, establishing a mighty nation. The **second 14** starts with Israel's Golden Age but quickly deteriorates. The kingdom plummets downward from Solomon to the Babylonian exile. And the **last 14** is often called Israel's Dark Ages. This is a period of obscurity – a period of dark silence in Israel's history.
 - Now what do all three eras have in common? **All three were days marked by great disappointment yet days filled with greater mercy.** Each 14 demonstrates that God is always present and working out his eternal purposes in the lives of his people, even when it's not apparent, even in the darkest, obscurest days of our lives.

Have Hope ... Even Though We Are Flawed

- ❖ Let's consider how each set of 14 supports this main point – how they give hope to God's people. In the first set of 14 generations, in vv2-6, the message is this: **Have hope since God never stops working in the lives of his people even though we are flawed.**
 - All of us are flawed in one way or another. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That means we've fallen short in our duty to both *love* and *reflect* his glory. None of us love God's glory, as we should, and none of us reflect his glory, as we should. We have failed to obey in thought, word, and deed. We are flawed people.
- ❖ But even so, here in Jesus's genealogy, it's apparent that God never stops working in the flawed. The genealogy contains the names of great saints like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. **But we mustn't forget that these were flawed men with flawed lives.** Read their stories and you'll discover that some were chronic liars, some were unfaithful husbands, most were poor fathers, one frequented prostitutes, and one conspired to kill a man.
 - **If you think about it, the OT is surprisingly candid in the way it presents the patriarchs.** You'd think a holy book would try to paint the founders of the faith in the best light possible. But no, the Bible makes no pretense in how it portrays these men – warts and all. **Apparently, God does not restrict his mercy to only those who have it all together. He deals mercifully with flawed individuals.**
- ❖ **Another strong proof that Matthew was intentionally highlighting God's mercy for the flawed is the inclusion of four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah.** You have to understand that, in ancient genealogies, women were rarely included. Their names were only added if their inclusion would ensure the purity of the bloodline or enhance its dignity. But these four women do exactly the opposite.
- ❖ **Tamar** was either a Canaanite or an Aramean. She's most famous for dressing up as a prostitute to trick her father-in-law, Judah, to impregnate her with twin sons, Perez and Zerah. **Rahab**, a Canaanite, was the prostitute who hid the spies in the Fall of Jericho. **Ruth** was from Moab, one of Israel's archenemies. And **Bathsheba**, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, was most likely a Hittite herself and is infamous for bearing King David's illegitimate child.

- ❖ So what did these four women have in common? They were all flawed in one way or another. **Three of them would've been considered lewd sinners (in a moral sense), while all of them would've been considered "Gentile sinners" (in an ethnic sense).**
 - Now if Matthew wanted to include reputable women in Jesus's genealogy, he could've used Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, or Leah. These were model matriarchs. **But no, Matthew purposely named four women with flawed lives in order to demonstrate that the mercy of God knows no bounds.**

- ❖ So what can we learn from this first set of 14? **We learn that all the dysfunction in the lives of God's people still do not disqualify them from being included in his family.** In fact, God uses these flawed individuals to be ancestors to the Messiah – to the One who would eventually secure forgiveness for their flaws through his death and resurrection.
 - When the Reformer, Martin Luther, preached on this genealogy, he said God intended for readers to read this and think to themselves, **"Oh, Christ is the kind of person who is not ashamed of sinners – in fact, he even puts them in his family tree!"**

- ❖ **Friends, take that to heart. Christ is not ashamed of sinners.** That means he's not ashamed of you. No matter how ashamed you may feel about your many sin and failures, Christ is more than willing to put you in his family tree.
 - **That's why he was more than willing to be crucified on that Calvary tree.** If you call out to him for forgiveness, he will respond with mercy and kindness. He'll answer your prayers for salvation and give you the right to become a child of God. You'll become a branch on his family tree. That's the good news of the gospel.

- ❖ And consider this: **If Christ was willing to include dysfunctional people in *his* family, think about what it means for our own dysfunctional families.** Not everyone is excited to be with family during this holiday season. Some of you dread the obligated family time.
 - Let's face it, our families can be messed up. They're full of weird quirks, silly gossip, bitter rivalries, and old grudges. **Perhaps the spiritual winter going on in your soul has been exasperated by the very dysfunction in your family.**
 - But one look at Jesus's family line strengthens our hope that God has not stopped working in and through our flawed lives and our dysfunctional families. For that we can have hope.

Have Hope ... Even When We Are Under His Judgement

- ❖ So in the middle of v6, we arrive at the first break point in this genealogy. It ends with the establishment of Israel's Golden Age. But now we transition into a decline. In vv7-11, Matthew records the names of the kings of Judah who led the nation into spiritual decline until the Babylonian exile, which was a form of judgment by God. So in this second 14, Matthew's point is this: **Have hope since God never stops working in the lives of his people even when we are under his judgment.**

- ❖ Throughout the Bible, God’s people kept rebelling and disobeying, and he kept responding as a just Judge. But towards his children, God is more than just a just Judge. He’s a good Father who deals sternly with wayward children – yet always out of love and always for their good. **So God’s children can have hope – even if we have to sit under his judgment for a time – because we know his intent is loving and good.**
- ❖ This point becomes clear as we consider this list of kings. **What’s interesting is that Matthew makes a point of including some of Israel’s worst kings.** The best example would be Manasseh, in v10, who was probably the worst.
 - In **2 Kings 21:9**, it says Manasseh did much evil in the eyes of the Lord – more evil than the nations the Lord had kicked out of the land. And in Jeremiah 15, the Lord says he’ll bring judgment specifically because of the evil committed by Manasseh. **Jeremiah 15:4** says, *“And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.”*
- ❖ **So Manasseh is like that crazy uncle no one in the family talks about.** He’s someone you would skip over when explaining your family tree. But here Matthew intentionally includes him. And how do we know it was intentional? **Because we know he skipped some kings in order to keep the number at 14.**
 - Remember, these verses should be read less as historical genealogy and more as a theological message using a genealogy. **So admittedly, this pattern of 3 and 14 is artificial.** We know that Matthew skips three kings in v8 between Jehoram and Uzziah and one king in v11 between Josiah and Jeconiah. But skipping generations was common practice in ancient genealogies and the word *father* could be used in relation to any descendant, not just immediate ones. So we can say Matthew recorded true, accurate words, and still acknowledge that he skipped a few kings on purpose.
- ❖ So if he was going to skip some, why not skip the worst of all? Why not skip Manasseh? It’s a valid question. **But I think Matthew kept him in on purpose to highlight God’s justice in exiling Israel. It was to show that God takes sin seriously.** Any repeated failure to trust and obey God will not be overlooked but punished (Deut 28:49, 64).
 - **But does this punishment, this exile, mean God has given up on his people?** By no means! We read in **Jeremiah 29** of a letter the Lord sends to his people in Babylon. He says they have to sit under his judgment for 70 years, and when the time is over, he will restore. Chapter 29:10 says, *“For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.”*
- ❖ So even in judgment God shows mercy and offers hope to his children. *So what can we learn from this second set of 14?* Consider this: **Perhaps the spiritual winter you’re in has been brought on by your repeated failure to trust and obey God much like the Israelites.** Perhaps it is God’s just judgment over you.

- **Now granted, not every winter of the soul is a direct consequence of sin.** Sometimes God wills such a season for reasons that are beyond us. Job and his story is the best example of that. But, many times, a spiritual winter is our Heavenly Father's response to our failure to trust and obey.
- ❖ **But this is where we need to draw a clear distinction between a penal punishment for sin and fatherly discipline for sin.** They're both forms of divine judgment, but they have two different intents directed at two different groups of people. **You *punish* guilty criminals. But you *discipline* wayward children.**
 - Well, according to the gospel, because of the grace of God and our faith in Christ, we are the children of God. And there's no more penal punishment awaiting us, as Christians, because that penalty was fully paid by our Savior's blood. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). **But even still – even as his condemning judgment against us is satisfied – his fatherly judgment and discipline is still exercised whenever his children go astray.**
- ❖ So what does that mean for Christians who are going through a spiritual winter? **It means you're likely sitting under his fatherly judgment.** You're probably under his fatherly discipline right now. If you look at your life lately and if it's been marked by decline – a decline in your joy, in your peace, in your strength – then these are signs of a spiritual winter.
 - **But if you're a child of God, just remember that this doesn't mean God has stopped working in your life.** In fact, that is precisely what he's doing. He's working *through* discipline. Even under his correction, God is still working for your good out of a fatherly love.
- ❖ So if you find yourself in this situation, what can you do? **First, you can confess to him and repent – if you haven't done so already. And, then, you can wait.** You can accept God's fatherly discipline and patiently wait for him to restore you in due time. **But just realize that that time could take much longer than you think.** That's what God's people – within that last set of 14 generations – that's what they had to learn.

Have Hope ... Even When He Seems Absent

- ❖ Here, in v12, we have the second break point in the genealogy. It ends with the dissolution of the kingdom and the Babylonian captivity. And now, we enter into the Dark Ages of Israel's history. The striking thing about the last 14 generations is that all the names are so obscure. You probably never heard of them. Most of them are mentioned only here. But it's in this last 14, this period of obscurity, that Matthew makes an important point: **Have hope since God never stops working in the lives of his people even when he seems absent.**
 - **For those in this 14, God has taken so long to restore, that it now appears as if he has deserted them.** Yes, in 70 years, he did bring them back to the Promised Land. But all his promises to David – like the ones about his throne being established forever – they remained unfulfilled. They had no king nor kingdom. They didn't truly possess their own land. They were constantly under foreign occupation.

- ❖ So, during these Dark Ages, the Israelites wondered if God still plans on keeping his promises? Or has he given up on us? Over 400 years went by without an answer. Over 400 years of silence. **But at the darkest moment in Israel's history – unbeknownst to all – God was working to fulfill his promise to send the long-awaited Messiah.**
- ❖ Notice a glimmer of light in v16. Throughout the entire list Matthew kept the same pattern of “A the father of B” (or literally “A begat B”). But here, in v16, that pattern is finally broken between Joseph and Jesus.
 - **That's because, as the story goes, Joseph did *not* beget Jesus like the rest of the fathers.** Mary begat Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. So here, in v16, Matthew is implying that God is doing something new with this last son.
 - This son is the Messiah. **And according to the pattern of 14, this Messiah came at just the right time (the fullness of time) to conclude the final era.** Though many feared God had forsaken them, all along he was working silently through 400 years of insignificance to keep every one of his promises!
- ❖ So what can we learn from Israel's Dark Ages? **We learn that when God seems most distant and his promises sound most unrealistic, it doesn't mean he has abandoned his children.** Just as when the sky is pitch black and the sun is nowhere to be found, it doesn't mean the sun has abandoned us. It's on the other side. You just can't see it right now. But we all know the sun will rise once more, and there will be light again.
 - **In the same way, God's children can have hope in knowing that when he seems absent – when we're sitting in darkness – we can be sure that God has not abandoned us.** Though, right now, he has never seemed farther from you, God is actually closer than you think. And he's working in all things for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).
- ❖ **Friends, if all of this has been describing you – if you feel like you're being subjected to a spiritual winter of the soul – I urge you to be patient and to wait on God.** Accept his will and trust his wisdom and wait on him to restore.
 - Remember how God spoke to the Israelites, through Jeremiah, telling them to accept their exile in Babylon, even if it meant being without the temple – without his active presence in their lives. They were to wait there until God himself would restore.
- ❖ **I know all of us would prefer if God just gave us a clear timeframe for how long we'll have to endure the silence and darkness.** I think if he just tells me how long it'll be – how long I have to wait – I think I can bear it. Even if it has to be 70 years. I won't live that long. But at least I can tell my children to stay faithful. To wait it out. To count down the years.
 - But, in all likelihood, he won't give you a timeframe. He won't tell you how long this spiritual winter is going to last. **But even still – even if he never tells you how long – you can be confident God's timing is perfect and his judgments are right.**

- ❖ I once heard a preacher say, “**God never seems to come when you want him, but when he gets there, he’s always right on time.**” In other words, even in the darkness, you can count on his sun, his light, to rise in your life at just the right time.
 - **Advent is a season of waiting – waiting on God.** Waiting on him to come. To come and bring hope. To come and fulfill promises. To come and shine light into darkness. **He was faithful to come once, and he’ll be faithful to come again.** That’s the hope we cling to – that’s the hope that keeps us going – this Advent season.