

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 1:1-17

Key Verse: 1:1

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Today we begin the study of Matthew’s gospel. For the first three centuries after Christ’s resurrection, Matthew’s gospel was the most popular and widely referenced. It was written by Matthew, a direct disciple of Jesus. Like the other gospels, it tells the story of Jesus. And as each gospel has its own special emphasis, Matthew’s does too. Matthew stresses that Jesus is the King promised by God. We see this from the beginning as he relates the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It is the genealogy of a king, the King, the Christ of God. Through this genealogy we can learn how God works, who Jesus is, and how to be blessed ones who participate in God’s history.

First, Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (1).

Look at verse 1. “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” This is the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born some 2,000 years ago; he came into the world and lived in real time. The gospels are the story of Jesus’ life and work. The name “Jesus” means Savior. Matthew 1:21 says, “..he will save his people from their sins.” Jesus came to solve the sin problem, the real problem of mankind. Matthew knew personally how Jesus saved people from their sins. Matthew had been Levi the tax collector. In those days, tax collectors were equated with “public sinners” because they were willing to do anything for money. In our time, they might be compared to drug dealers. Levi never intended to become such a wretched person. He wanted to be a good man. But something in him made him do what he did not want to do, and, finally, he became one whom he did not want to become. Though he was miserable in his inner man, he maintained a cool exterior. But Jesus saw through his facade. Jesus knew the agony of his soul. Jesus wanted to save him from his sins and give him a new hope. So Jesus called him, saying, “Follow me.” Then Levi got up and left everything and followed Jesus. Jesus changed him from a petty, selfish man into one of the most great and sacrificial men in history. Matthew loved to tell the story of Jesus. Matthew introduces the Savior Jesus to each one of us. May we accept Jesus in our hearts.

The name “Christ,” means “the anointed one of God.” In the Old Testament, God anointed people whom he had called. The anointing was symbolized by pouring oil on the head (1Sa 16:13). But the real anointing was done by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God gave power, wisdom, and all that was necessary to do the work of God. Kings, prophets and priests were all anointed to be used especially by God. It was a great privilege to be chosen and anointed by God; very few received this favor. Among those chosen few, there would be one unique anointed one, called the “Christ.” It referred to the coming king who would fulfill the great promises of God to David and to Abraham. He is Jesus Christ. This is why Matthew calls Jesus the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Let’s think for a moment about how Jesus fulfills God’s promise to David. Actually, David lived about 1,000 years before Jesus. It was a formative period in Israel’s history when the nation was moving from the time of judges to the rule of kings. David was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, and he was a shepherd boy. David took care of his father’s sheep with all his heart, and sometimes he risked his life to rescue them from lions and bears. God noticed David’s shepherd’s heart. When God needed someone to be king of Israel, he chose David. God instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint him with oil. Then the Holy Spirit came upon David in power. David’s life was marked by his love for God and his shepherd heart for God’s people. Once, a fierce enemy giant named Goliath, who was nine feet tall, began to blaspheme God’s name and to intimidate God’s people. All Israel was trembling in fear. But David was different. David’s heart burned with holy anger. He decided to go out and fight Goliath and destroy him at the risk of his life. In truth, David had the assurance of victory in his heart before fighting. He saw with the eyes of faith that the enemy of God would be destroyed and God’s name would be glorified through it. By faith, David attacked the enemy Goliath with all his strength. Then God gave him complete victory. David’s life was characterized by love for God that was burning and life-giving.

David was also a shepherd for his people. After his victory over Goliath, David entered the service of King Saul. David was a great blessing to the kingdom. But Saul became jealous of him. Demons channeled into Saul through his jealousy, and drove him to try to kill David. David had to run here and there for his life, a political criminal. Most people would try to save themselves in that situation. But David feared God. David accepted God’s sovereignty over his life and future. David had two chances to kill Saul, but he refrained, believing that Saul was

God's anointed. David accepted his hard situation as God's divine training and best love for him. In the midst of hardship, David thanked God and wrote many songs of praise to God. They became the Psalms. When David had God in his heart, he was free to think about God's people and to shepherd them. One time, about four hundred men came to David with all kinds of problems. In modern terms, they had excessive credit card debts, poor school study records, and big marriage problems. They were burdensome, not honorable. But David accepted them. David cared for them and put hope in them to be useful men. Later each of them became a key member of David's kingdom who helped him rule with righteousness and justice.

David and his men fought the enemies of Israel and defeated them on every side. Israel became a united kingdom and entered into a golden age. It was a glorious theocracy where God was honored and there was righteousness and peace. It became a model of the kingdom of God. God called David a man after God's own heart, who did everything God wanted him to do. David served God's purpose in his own generation. God was pleased by David's life of faith and love for God. God promised David that a king would be raised from his line whose kingdom would last forever (2 Sa 7:12-16). It was a promise of the Messiah, the Christ, the King of Israel. The prophet Isaiah understood this promise and said, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this" (Isa 9:6-7). The Israelites looked forward to the coming of the son of David who would rule eternally with righteousness and peace. Jesus is the Christ, the son promised to David.

Look at verse 1 again. Jesus Christ is called "the son of David, the son of Abraham." God's history did not begin with David. It began with Abraham. Abraham was 75 years old when God called him. Abraham's human desire was to have a son and to be a noble father. However, his wife Sarah was barren. This made Abraham fatalistic. It seemed that no matter how hard he worked or what he might accomplish, it would end with his death; he would leave nothing behind. He had no human hope. One day, God said to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:2). Abraham put his faith and hope in God's promise. Abraham obeyed God practically by leaving his country, people, and father's household to go to the land God would show him. Abraham began to honor God as God with material possessions, in human relationships, and through devotion to God in altar building and prayer. But after ten years, Abraham faced a human limitation. He felt that living a holy life with the hope of God was only a losing business. At that moment, God helped him put his whole trust in God and his word of promise. Romans 4:18 describes Abraham like this: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations...." Abraham believed and hoped in God, because he considered God faithful to his promise. Abraham's faith in God's promise pleased God. God blessed Abraham's faith by giving him a son, Isaac, and by making him into a great nation, and ultimately by sending the Christ, Jesus, through his line.

This genealogy is organized around the promises of God to send the Christ. God is a God of promise. God is a God of history. God uses people who have faith in his promises to accomplish his world salvation purpose. Those who make a personal decision to obey God's calling and believe God's promises can participate in this history and be blessed. These days, God calls us to go and make disciples of all nations, and promises to bless those who obey. Missionary Jimmy Lee went to India to obey this command. He has endured many hardships for the last 18 years. But God has blessed his obedience by raising many native shepherds as leaders, and even sending missionaries from India to other nations. God has also blessed his children to believe in Jesus and live under God's blessing. And God has blessed his business as well. May God help each of us to obey God's calling and believe his promise.

Second, God rules history (2-17).

Look at verse 17. "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ." Matthew organized Israel's history into three periods. The first, from Abraham to David, was the period of the patriarchs (2-6a). God helped these patriarchs, beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to pass their faith and blessing from one generation to the next. For example, when God sent burning sulfur from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, it was divine judgment upon those cities. At the same time, it was to educate Abraham's descendants that God is holy and that they must fear him and do what was right. Later God told Abraham to offer his one and only son Isaac, whom he loved, as a burnt offering. Abraham obeyed God. Isaac learned that living by faith in God's promise and blessing is a matter of life and death. Many

second-generation missionaries and shepherds misunderstand their parents' love for God, thinking that their parents don't love them. Imagine how Isaac must have felt to be offered as a burnt offering. But this did not make him crooked. He learned his father's love for God, and how to honor God as God. The patriarchs obeyed God's word absolutely, believed God's promises and lived holy lives. God blessed them by being with them, protecting and prospering them. Ultimately, God blessed them with the hope of heaven (Heb 11:10).

We can learn here the importance of raising one man until he has the unshakable faith of a patriarch. During the last seven months, God has blessed UBF USA/Canada by sending pioneering families to fourteen new campuses: Yale U.; U. Illinois at Urbana Champaign; U. Nebraska at Omaha; U. Hawaii at Manoa; U. Guelph in Ontario, Canada; U. Connecticut at Storrs; Duke U.; U. South Florida at Tampa; U. Washington at Seattle; Montclair State U. in New Jersey; U. Minnesota at Minneapolis; Louisiana State U. in Baton Rouge; U. Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; and from next week there will be an independent Sunday worship service at the U. Chicago. In light of this genealogy, we should pray for each pioneering chapter to raise an ancestor of faith like one of the patriarchs.

In the patriarchal period, three women are mentioned. They are Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. They were all Gentiles. Typically, the Jews did not regard women highly. Moreover, they shunned Gentiles. Yet Matthew includes these three women. It is because they had the faith that pleased God. It teaches us that God works through faith, and he is pleased by those who live by faith, regardless of gender or nationality.

In terms of faith, each of these women was great. By faith, they turned terrible human circumstances into God's abundant blessing. Tamar was an abandoned widow after the consecutive deaths of her two husbands, the sons of Judah. Judah promised to give his third son to her, but reneged. When Judah was emotionally weak after the death of his own wife, Tamar dressed as a prostitute, slept with Judah and conceived. Her act was regarded as an act of faith, unorthodox though it may be. Her act of faith almost cost her life. Yet her action was motivated by wisdom. Then, because God had mercy on her, her life was spared, Judah repented, and God granted twin babies.

Rahab was a prostitute living in the wall of Jericho when the Israelite army was poised to destroy the city to carry out God's judgment. At that moment, Rahab remembered what God had done to the Egyptians when he led Israel out of bondage. She believed God ruled the heavens and the earth and that he would surely fulfill his purpose. She had faith in the Creator God, the God of Israel. So she sided with the people of Israel. She risked her life to hide Israelite spies and she encouraged the Israelite army by telling them how fearful the people of Jericho were. Humanly speaking, she was a traitor. She risked being hated, like Jane Fonda has been hated by Vietnam veterans. But God saw her faith and spared her life and the lives of her family members. Moreover, God included her in the genealogy of Jesus.

Ruth was a Moabitess and the daughter-in-law of Naomi. When Naomi's husband and sons died early, Naomi was left destitute. For Ruth, it was natural to leave Naomi and return to her Moabite people. But Ruth decided to stay with Naomi and followed her back to Israel. Ruth seemed to lose everything. But God blessed Ruth's decision and established her family with Boaz. She became the great-grandmother of King David. By her faith, her sorrowful widow's fate was turned into God's amazing blessing. Tamar, Rahab and Ruth were women of faith. Their faith foreshadowed the faith of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In brief, Mary trusted God when it meant becoming pregnant before marriage in a strict, legalistic society. God used her faith to bring Jesus into the world.

The second period, from David to the exile to Babylon, was the time of the kings. Those mentioned in verses 6b-11 are all kings of Judah. Yet only one of them is called king, that is King David. This emphasizes God's special promise to King David. David is known as the shadow of Jesus Christ. He was the model king by whom all who followed him were measured. The "good" kings were Asa (1Ki 15:11), Jehoshaphat (1Ki 22:43), Uzziah (2 Ki 15:3), Jotham (2 Ki 15:34), Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:3), and Josiah (2 Ki 22:2). They sought to love God and to honor God and to be good shepherds of their people like David was. God blessed them and their people when they did so. The "bad" kings were Solomon (1Ki 11:9-13), Rehoboam, Abijah (1Ki 15:3), Jehoram (2 Ki 8:18), Ahaz (2 Ki 15:34), Manasseh (2Ki 21:2), Amon (2 Ki 21:20), and Jeconiah (2 Ki 24:9). They ignored the word of God and David's example and used their kingship for selfish benefit and pleasure. They fell into idol worship and became instruments of the devil. God's people suffered terribly under their reign. It is amazing that God bore with the evil kings. It was for the sake of keeping his promise to David. God is faithful, even when his people are unfaithful.

In verse 6 Matthew says that David's son Solomon was born through a woman who had been Uriah's wife. This exposes David's terrible sin of adultery and murder. Matthew did not hide this sin, but exposed it clearly. Even King David, the great shepherd and exemplary leader, was a terrible sinner in the sight of God. Because of his sin, his lifetime of service to God could have been nullified. But by God's help, David repented his sin before God with many tears. When he repented, God forgave his sin and restored his soul. Thus, King David could stand in God's redemptive history solely by God's grace. In the final analysis, people are included in God's history only by his grace.

The third period, that from the exile to Babylon to the Christ is often called the "post-exilic" period. The exile to Babylon was precisely God's punishment on his people for their sins. In that time of punishment they were driven from the promised land and sent into Babylon. They lost all their privileges and became slaves. Their human condition became as bad as it could be. Yet, at that very time, they began to remember the promise of God to send the Christ. The hope of God began to burn in their hearts with a brilliance that comes from purity. They began to sing, "O Come, O Come Immanuel!" As a people, they revealed the faith of Abraham, whose hope was only in God, when there was no hope in the world. God sanctifies his people through divine discipline, though it is very costly. In this way, God faithfully carries out his work through undeserving people. I believe that the terrorist attack of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina are God's divine discipline to America, calling us to repent and live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Matthew sees history from God's point of view. God rules history and will accomplish his redemptive purpose without fail. Trends of the world come and go; the people of God vacillate between repentance and hardness, between faithfulness and wickedness. Yet God remains faithful to his promise. At last God kept his promise by sending Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. God's promises are trustworthy. God's word is true. Let's put our trust in God's promises and obey God's calling to participate in his world salvation work in our times.