

## **The Grace and Faithfulness of God in Sending Jesus Christ**

Matthew 1:1-17

Key Verse: 1:1 "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Merry Christmas! I have a question for you: "Have you ever been disappointed by someone who didn't keep the promise?" When someone doesn't keep the promise, we don't trust them. We don't want to see them or speak to them. Then how about God? God made promises, and though it was really hard, God kept them all. Our God is faithful. God never breaks His promises. So why do we need to know about God's faithfulness, especially at Christmas time? What difference does it make in our practical lives? Let's think about God's faithfulness in 3 parts: through God's promises to David and Abraham; through God's grace to 4 women; and through the times of the kings and the deportation to Babylon.

First, Jesus is God's promised Messiah in the line of David and Abraham.

Look at verse 1. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." This is the record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The whole Bible starts with "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" declaring that God is the author of history and the Creator of all things. The New Testament begins with the statement "the book of genealogy of Jesus Christ." It declares that this is the story of Jesus and Jesus is the main figure of the New Testament. To know who Jesus is, the first step is to know him through his genealogy and God's fulfillment of His promises.

Who is Jesus? He is called "Jesus Christ." The name "Jesus" means Savior. We are all under the power of sin and death. No one is free from this matter. We need a savior and Jesus is the one who can save us and give us true healing. The word "Christ" is "Messiah" in Hebrew and means "the anointed one." Christ is the one who is anointed by God, the Holy Spirit as King, Priest and Prophet (Mt 3:16). He is Immanuel—God with us.

This Jesus Christ is described as the son of David and the son of Abraham. "The son of David" means that Jesus is the kingly Messiah promised from David's royal line (2 Sam 7:12-16). It reveals how Jesus fulfills God's promise to David. Who was David? David was the youngest son and a shepherd boy. He was famous for killing a giant, Goliath, with a slingshot. He went on to become a great fighter and a shepherd king of Israel. He really had a heart to love God and to love his people. He loved God so much, and all the other kings after him were compared to him. He's described as "a man after God's own heart." God promised that He would raise up David's offspring after him and establish his kingdom. This kingdom should be made sure forever before Him (2 Sa 7:12-16). It was a promise to send Christ, the King of Israel. Jesus Christ is the one, the son of David who would establish God's kingdom with righteousness and peace forever.

The next phrase is “the son of Abraham.” Matthew not only connected Jesus to David, but to Abraham. Abraham was known as the father of faith and is the first one mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy. Jesus is the Seed of Abraham in whom all nations would be blessed. God called 75 years old Abraham with a great vision to make him a father of a great nation and source of blessing. (Gen 12:2) God did not simply mean that He would make Abraham the father of the Jewish nation only by providing a miracle son. God called Abraham to be the "father of faith" to anyone who shares the faith of him (Ro 4:16). God trained him to hold onto His promises despite the impossibilities he faced. God promised to make him a source of blessing to the whole world. It meant God would send the promised Savior through him (Ge3:15; Gal 3:14). God fulfilled His promise with him and made him into a great nation and source of blessing by sending Jesus Christ through his line.

The birth of Jesus Christ was not random. His birth was the fulfillment of the promises of God to send Christ in the line of David and Abraham. God never forgot His promises. God is a God of promise and God of fulfillment. He never fails to fulfill what He promises.

Second, God who is full of grace and mercy.

Look at verses 2-6. In this period, from Abraham to king David, 4 women are specially mentioned and they reveal God’s grace and mercy. They show how God can take unexpected people by His grace and use them in great ways. Let’s briefly review their life stories.

The first one is Tamar. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. Judah had three sons. Judah’s first son, the husband of Tamar, died. According to the custom, Judah gave his second son to Tamar to succeed the family line. But he also died. Judah promised to give his third son to her. But he did not keep his promise out of fear of losing his last son. Tamar knew it. One day she dressed as a prostitute, slept with her father-in-law Judah and conceived twin sons, Perez and Zerah. It was not for her sexual desire but to keep the family line for her dead husband. This was regarded as an act of faith and Judah even declared that Tamar was more righteous than himself. (Gen 38) It is a weird story, but it was before the law was given to Moses. God included her twin sons in the genealogy of Jesus, along with her. This Gentile woman, Tamar, was included only by the grace and mercy of God.

The next woman is Rahab. Rahab was a Gentile prostitute. She was living in the wall of Jericho when the Israelites tried to destroy the city. All people’s hearts in the city melted in fear of God who dried up the water of the Red Sea, and destroyed two Gentile kings. Rahab feared God also, but she believed that God had given the land to the Israelites. She believed that the God of Israel is God in heaven and on earth. It made her act differently. By faith she gave a friendly welcome to the spies of Israel. She risked her life to hide them and help them to escape. Humanly speaking, she was a traitor. But God saw her faith and saved her life from judgment. God saved her life from her lifestyle of

prostitution. (Joshua 2:1-21; Heb 11:31). Moreover, God included her in the genealogy of Jesus.

The third woman is Ruth. Ruth was Moabite, another Gentile woman. She was the second daughter-in-law of a Jewish woman named Naomi. Naomi's husband and sons died early. Ruth became a widow. It would be easy for her to leave Naomi and return to her Moabite people. But, she decided to stay with Naomi and follow her back to Israel. She accepted Naomi's people as her own people and Naomi's God as her own God. (Ruth 1:16-17) In the time of crisis, what should we choose? We can make a decision by faith or by our human situation. God blessed Ruth's decision of faith. By the grace of God, she established a family with Boaz and became King David's great-grandmother and was included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

The fourth woman is described as "the wife of Uriah." (6b) Her name was Bathsheba and her husband Uriah was Hittite. Mentioning her exposes David's sins (2 Sam 11) of adultery and murder. David committed adultery with her and planned the death of her husband in battle to cover up his sin. This genealogy did not hide this sin, but exposed it clearly. Though King David was a shepherd king and known as a man after God's own heart, he was a sinner who needed a savior and who needed the forgiveness of his sins. God sent the prophet Nathan for David to repent. David came back to his senses and repented his sin before God sincerely saying "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51). When he repented, God forgave his sins and restored his soul. Only by God's grace and mercy, King David could stand in God's redemptive history.

From a human perspective, these four women do not deserve to be included in the genealogy of Jesus which must be pure and perfect. But it was not. God did not choose them from a human point of view. These Gentile and unlikely women were included because of their faith which pleased God. Matthew himself, who added these women in the book of Jesus' genealogy, really knew the grace of God. He was a former tax collector Levi who was treated as a traitor. But by God's grace, he became one of 12 disciples of Jesus and became St. Matthew. He knew the true meaning of God's word, "...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory" (Matt 12:20). Our past is not important. Whoever we were, our gracious God counts who we are now by our current faith and puts us in the book of life which is the new genealogy of Jesus Christ. God works through faith alone. He is pleased with those who live by faith, not by gender, nationality, or human success. This is our hope and faith in God, who is full of grace and mercy.

Third, God's faithfulness in keeping His promises.

Look at verses 6b-11. This period, from David to the deportation to Babylon, was the time of the kings. During this time, the nation was divided and ended with the tragic event of the deportation to Babylon being punished by God. The six godly kings in the list 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 did what was right in the eyes of God. They honored God and brought back their people to Him. However, the other eight kings

listed were evil. Their influence was greater than the godly kings. The phrase "...did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" kept on repeating. They ignored the word of God and David's example. They became unfaithful to God and fell into idol worship. Among them Manasseh was the worst. He burned his own son as an offering for idol worship. His reign was not short. He reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem (2 Ki 21). How terribly God's people suffered under their evil kings!

It is amazing that God did not punish the evil kings right away but bore with them. It was for the sake of keeping His promise to David. "Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever." (2 King 8:19) God was faithful, even when His people were not faithful.

However, God was faithful not only to keep His words of blessing, but also words of punishment. When Solomon had finished building the temple of God, God told him that if he walked before God faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness as David his father did, God would establish his royal throne forever as God had promised to David. But if he or his descendants would turn away from God and do not observe God's commands, and if they would go off to serve other gods and worship them, then God would cut off Israel from the land God had given them.(1 Ki 9:4-7)

God punished His people with deportation to Babylon. It was God's punishment on His people for their sins, just as He had promised. They were driven from the promised land and deported to Babylon. They lost all their privileges and became slaves. However, God was with His people despite their rebellion and corruption. The punishment was God's divine love to His beloved children, that they might be humbled and turn back to Him.

Verses 12-16 is from the deportation to Christ. During this period, there were no prophets for 430 years from the last prophet Malachi. It was the darkest time of Israel's history. It seemed that there was no light, no hope, no answer, without seeing God's presence. They felt like they were abandoned by God. However, God never abandoned His people. He disciplined and sanctified them. God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that He would save them and their offspring from the land of captivity. For He was with them to save them. He would not make a full end of them. He would discipline them in just measure. (Jer 30:10-11)

In this time of darkness, the people of Israel remembered the promise of God to send the Messiah, who is Christ. They put their only hope in God and the Messiah who was coming. God humbled His people's hearts while they were waiting and longing for the coming Messiah. "O come o come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear." Finally, when God's time came, our faithful God kept His promise to Abraham and David and sent Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 16 again. "...and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ." Here Joseph was described differently. He was not described as "the father of Jesus" as Matthew described all the others. Instead, he described Joseph as "the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born." By the

Holy Spirit, Jesus was born from Mary who had faith to obey God's will for her life. In Luke 1:35 God's angel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Matthew reveals that though Jesus is from the line of Abraham and David, He is not their physical descendant. Jesus is the Holy One, the Holy Son of God, the Christ. He is Immanuel, God with us. He was a total and perfect fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David.

Our God was faithful and merciful for 42 generations, around 2,000 years. We human beings live less than 100 years. We don't keep our promises. How often have we been disappointed by someone who didn't keep the promise? How many broken families do we have because people don't keep their promises to each other? God's people were useless and unfaithful, but God was faithful and gracious. He was with His people no matter what and kept His promises. This God is our God who is Immanuel "God with us." The birth of Jesus Christ is the good news of great joy for all mankind. In Jesus, even the worst sinners can be a part of God's family if only we put our faith in Him. God's grace and faithfulness are for anyone who believes.

My God has been gracious and faithful to me throughout this year. I have been serving the NEIU ministry for the last 4 years though I don't deserve to serve it. I am a man who likes to be alone and loses energy whenever I talk. However, I decided to serve one more term based on Mary's confession, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" to be used by God and to be a source of blessing.

My life was not easy this year. My company has lost 4 workers since last year but hired only one. So, I had more to do at work. My three children became teenagers but I had no time with them. Our senior missionaries have health issues one after another. I could not visit them as much as I wanted, and I felt sorry. Student ministry seems slow and student leaders will graduate and move on. Whenever I saw tough issues in ministry, I felt it was because of me. It became a heavy burden. Though I made a decision to serve 3 years, I felt I needed to resign and just serve as a member. My decision was swayed by the situation within a year.

But this passage teaches me to see my God, not the situation. God who was faithful for 2,000 years and sent Christ as He promised hasn't left me all alone. He is always with me in times of success and in times of difficulties and trains me to be a source of blessing as He promised. It is not me, but God who works for me. He is the one who gives me strength to carry out His mission by faith. Thank God!

My journey to the Kingdom of God is still in progress. By faith, I am in the new genealogy of Jesus until he comes back. May God help me to finish this spiritual journey strong. This Christmas time, may our gracious and faithful Immanuel God be born into each of our hearts and be with us!