

It's Fall. It's football season. Everyone's back in school. And we live on the peninsula so there is no snow or ice in the forecast. All is good. This is an exciting day for us. This is our first Sunday of our second 50 years as a church. We are beginning the next 50 years with a new sermon series called The Unlikely Kingdom. It is a verse by verse study through the gospel of Matthew, the very first book of the New Testament.

The gospel according to Matthew is perhaps the most important single book in the New Testament. We have before us the fullest most systematic account of the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of the founder of Christianity, Jesus the Messiah.

Who wrote Matthew? Actually, Matthew didn't sign his name at the end, nor did he specifically identify himself as the writer in the gospel. But most scholars, especially those in that first century of the church, believe it was written by a man named Matthew who was also called Levi.

As we are about to look at Jesus' family tree, Matthew had an interesting family of his own. We learn from Mark chapter 3 that Matthew is the son of Alphaeus. We know there was another apostle named James son of Alphaeus. Matthew and this James had the same father, so they were brothers. It's likely that Matthew's brother James, before he followed Christ, was a zealot, a patriot who was pushing to overthrow his fellow Jews from Roman oppression even if it meant resorting to violence. But his brother Matthew was totally different. Matthew was a tax collector. He actually worked for the Romans. He drew his paycheck from the local governor Herod Antipas. And that made Matthew an enemy, a sell-out to his own Jewish people. Matthew's job was to collect taxes from his people and give the money to Rome. And it was widely known that tax collectors were notorious for skimming off the top before they submitted their receipts to the bosses.

Two brothers—a collector of taxes and a freedom fighter—both from the same family. Only Jesus could bring this kind of family together. Only Jesus could reconcile two brothers divided like this and he did just that. Matthew was from the Jewish tribe of Levi. That meant he had an understanding of his Jewish roots and history and the Old Testament scriptures and prophecy about the coming messiah. We can see this in his writing. He uses more Old Testament in his gospel than any other gospel writer. Luke tells us that Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple, and Matthew left his job as a tax collector and followed Jesus. He

even threw a party for Jesus and invited all his friends to come and meet this Jesus who had changed his life.

Although we don't know one hundred percent, it's very likely—and most conservative scholars and the early Christian fathers believed—that Matthew's gospel was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD. Matthew got his material for his gospel because he was a Jew who knew the OT, he was a companion of Jesus, and likely he drew from other reliable sources and from Mark's gospel that was written earlier.

The Purpose of the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew wrote his gospel to his fellow Jews and to Gentiles as well. And the purpose of his Gospel is to present Jesus—the promised Jewish Messiah, the culmination of God's salvation story, who inaugurates an unlikely kingdom for all. Matthew wanted his Jewish audience to know that Jesus is the promised messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and to King David, that Jesus is the rightful heir over the throne of Israel. And Matthew wants his Gentile audience to know that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and that it was to be through Abraham's descendants that all nations on the earth would be blessed.

The first way Matthew presents Jesus is through a detailed genealogy that included 42 of Jesus's ancestors by name. Why a genealogy? Because Matthew knew that in order to make a case to his Jewish readers, they needed to see Jesus's arrival within the grand scheme of God's plan. Remember what Pilate asked Jesus during the trial? *Where are you from?* This genealogy answers that question.

It's interesting for us to consider that genealogical research has become very popular with Americans in the past 10-15 years. There is a mindset so many of us have that we don't really know who we are. And we are searching to find out. We know in our hearts that we are more than where we live and what we have achieved. There is a hunger for us to find out if we have deeper connections in the whole scheme of things. A swab of DNA mailed off to a genealogy company has become big business.

When I think of where I come from, I go back to a little village in Northern Italy where an Austrian family who are my cousins still own a bakery. My grandmother on my mother's side was nine years old when she crossed the Atlantic and went through Ellis Island and eventually to Chicago and eventually to Kansas City, Missouri. I think of my father's side who came from Scotland and married my grandmother on my father's side in Kansas City,

Kansas. And I loved hearing stories about my grandmas. They were Harvey Girls, bookkeepers, and one of my favorites is one of my grandmothers was a dancer and had a job as The Spider Lady in a traveling circus.

My dad was the first to go to college and he was an engineer in the golden age of space travel. But there were also knots in my family tree. My grandfather was a chemist but he also enjoyed making home brew and that truly ruined his life and his life with my dad and grandmother.

My wife's family came from Norway and became farmers in the great northern plains. Julie's mom had 12 brothers and sisters all born at home. And Julie's dad, whose family came from France, but also had a grandmother who was a native American, survived the Trail of Tears forced march to a reservation.

In our family, we have soldiers, scientists, writers, business owners, psychologists, farmers, truck drivers, teachers and welders. And we also have plenty of knots in our family tree, as you have in yours as well.

And you want to know something that may surprise some of you? The genealogy of Jesus Christ is a who's who of the OT. But he also had some tough knots in his family tree as well. Let's look at verse 1 as we begin.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

The Greek word for genealogy is the same word we get Genesis from in the Old Testament. It's a word for beginnings. And reading this would make any Jew do a double take—the first creation and now, in Jesus, the new creation. In other words, the original creation that was damaged, flawed and broken is being restored and transformed in and through the Messiah Jesus.

Matthew includes such heavyweight names as King David and Father Abraham, but he wants us to know that he doesn't list them to honor them. He lists David and Abraham in order to bring honor to Jesus. The first name in a Jewish genealogy is the most important, and Matthew intentionally puts the descendant Jesus Christ, who is at the end of the genealogy, at the front end as well. So our big idea this morning is: The genealogy of Jesus Christ reveals that Jesus is the promised King of Israel and the promised Messiah for all.

May all of us today as we think about all the billions of people who have studied this gospel over the past 2000 years be touched and changed by the grace and power of God. This genealogy is broken down into three groups of 14 names. It isn't a complete list of every generation, but it's a thorough summary. Each group of 14 represents a marker or an event in the history of Israel.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, (verses 2-4)

The genealogy of our Messiah starts with Abraham. And that means God starts with a promise. After the Tower of Babel fiasco in Genesis 11—when the people built a monument to themselves in order to worship themselves—God scattered them. Then in the very next chapter God appeared to Abraham in a vision in Genesis chapter 12 verses 1-3 and said to Abraham: *"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"*

By referring to Abraham, Matthew is bringing us back to the promise of God's rescue plan for the world. He wants us to see that Jesus is the long awaited son of Abraham who will bring God's blessing on all of humanity.

We go down the list: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sounds like a good root system for a family tree. But they were not perfect. Abraham was willing to have his wife sleep with a king to save his own life. Isaac kind of did the same thing. Jacob was the heel grabber who elevated deception to a work of art. Judah was tricked into sleeping with his daughter-in-law Tamar because he thought she was a prostitute because she acted like one. The family tree continues in verse 5.

Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Rahab is the second woman listed in Jesus's genealogy. First of all, Jews used to thank God that they were not Gentiles or women and here Matthew includes Tamar, and now Rahab. Rahab actually was a prostitute in Jericho and a Gentile who helped the Israelites spy out the land before Joshua attacked the city. If you were creating your genealogy this might be a person you would consider hiding. But in this genealogy of the Savior of the world, Rahab is kept front and center.

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, (v. 5)

Then we have Boaz, father of Obed whose mother was Ruth. She was another outsider, a Moabite, a descendant of Lot. But the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the story of Ruth that she had a god-like loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi. And her god-like loyalty was in a sense a picture of her god-like loyalty to all the Jewish people, and therefore God's loyal love for all his people.

and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, (v. 6)

King David: Now this is the high point of the genealogy. We go from the promise to Abraham that his seed will bless all nations to the avenue of that seed, through the tribe of Judah and then through the throne of King David. Let me read for you God's promise to David. In 2nd Samuel 7:12-13 Nathan says to David who was an old man, *"When your days are over and you rest with*

your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son."

Matthew brings the promise to Abraham and the promise to David together in Jesus Christ. Through David's reign, we see here our first of many glimpses of God's kingdom in Matthew. Jesus, David's descendant, will reign on David's throne over his kingdom forever and ever. Remember the first recorded words Jesus preached to the people? *"Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand."*

We read about David the King, but we can also read about David the adulterer and David the murderer. You see that reference to Uriah's wife? That is a reference to Bathsheba, the woman involved in David's affair and cover-up. By God's grace she and David had another son, who became King Solomon who had 700 wives and 300 concubines. This leads to our second list of 14 names.

Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, (verses 7-8)

This is the only place in Scripture that we see some of these names. The genealogy continues with a bunch of bad kings and only a couple of good ones. If we took the time to study these kings we would see through these kings in this genealogy why Israel was invaded and destroyed and their people exiled to Babylon.

Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. (verses 9-11)

Jeconiah is also called Yehoakim in Scripture. He was a young king and the last king of Judah before the Babylonian captivity. And God makes a promise to him in Jeremiah: *"This is what the Lord says: 'Record (or remember) this man as if he were childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah'"* (Jer. 22:30).

None shall sit on the throne ever again until King Jesus. Why? Because Jesus breaks every curse; Jesus makes everything new. Jesus can redeem everything, even that which is so far from God.

These are the last 14 names and this is the low point. The ancestors of Jesus had scorned and rebelled against God and against his Law and they were exiled. They were deported from what was their own country. Jeremiah describes the people sitting on the banks of the rivers of Babylon weeping over Zion and Jerusalem. They hadn't taken seriously that there would truly be a judgment, but there was. The Bible says there will be a future judgment and that is the horrible news. But that horrible news

makes the Good News of the gospel all the more good for us today. The arrival of Christ is the good news for all the people.

We will read something like this during advent when we celebrate the arrival of Christ. "For unto us a child is born, and this son will bear the punishment that sinners deserve so that we won't face the judgment of Christ for our sins. Instead the sinless Christ himself will die in our place and take the judgment due us." When we look at this genealogy so far, we can see if God is going to preserve his royal line, it isn't going to be because of his people's righteousness; it will be in spite of his people's sinfulness.

After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. (verses 12-16)

The genealogy ends with Joseph, David's descendant in the royal line of Judah. He was the husband of Mary, literally "of whom" in the feminine gender in the original language Jesus was born. The point is that Jesus is Joseph's legal son of the royal line of David and not his biological son, which happened through immaculate conception. It wasn't the seed of Joseph, it was the seed of God that impregnated Mary.

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 Messiah. And this is how the birth of Christ came about. (verses 17-18)

So Matthew's job was to reveal Jesus' identity. What did the genealogy reveal? The genealogy reveals Jesus the Messiah's identity.

- Jesus is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David
- Jesus is the Promised King of Israel
- Jesus is the Promised Messiah for All

When I look back at this genealogy I see three stages here that represent our human condition. Maybe you see it too. First, God promises great things to us. Second, we mess up royally, pun certainly intended, and because of our rebellion and disobedience we became enslaved, separated, exiled from God. Third, because of God's mercy and his great love for us he offered us a lifeline. Jesus came out of this messed up family tree and came to earth as the culmination of God's plan to redeem the world. How is that? This genealogy tells us:

- God's plans are fulfilled in ways we would never imagine
- God's plans include events that we would never design
- God's plans include people we would exclude

Let's think about this: Matthew introduces The King. Could we have ever imagined that rightful king of the world would be born in a stable? How would he reign? There is no palace, no

throne. He doesn't come with pomp and glory, he comes as a carpenter in Nazareth. And what does this king wear? Instead of a crown made of gold, he wears a crown made of thorns. Instead of riding in a chariot, he would ride on a donkey.

His mother Mary was a peasant girl living a peaceful life as a young teenager in an obscure village when this angel appears to her and says, "You are favored, a king will be born to you and he will sit on the throne of his Father David." And Mary's response? "*Who am I that God would include me in His plan to save the world?*" And this kingdom would grow and expand not with money or power, but through the preaching the gospel.

The gospel of Matthew begins with the reminder of the promise to Abraham that he will bless the nations. And how does the gospel of Matthew end? It ends in chapter 28, with the promise being fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Messiah, and in the going of the disciples to all nations, and with the Holy Spirit giving power to the preaching of the Gospel. To his rag tag group of disciples he says, "You are the church. All authority has been given to me, so go to all nations.... preach the Gospel.... baptize.... and as you go to all nations they will be blessed."

This plan includes people we wouldn't choose. Only God would include these kinds of knots in his family tree and these kinds of followers to spread his glory. We worship a God who is inclusive. Look at the ethnic diversity, the rich and the poor, the males and females. One commentator I read this week said, "Jesus is the Mixed Race Messiah." We can relate to him.

Remember what the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2, "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*" This Savior is for all the people including any of us right here today who feel very distant from God for whatever reason. This is the Savior for all people including any here today who feel exiled or taken captive because of their sins. How can your situation be fixed? Remember Jesus came to rescue those in exile. Remember the carol, "*O Come, O Come Emmanuel and rescue captive Israel. Those that mourn in lonely exile near, until the Son of God appears.*"

I thank God that he revealed to me a lesson of grace this week. I am the kind of people listed in his genealogy. All my hopes and fears, where will they be met? As the carol says, "All my hopes and fears through all the years are met in the Lord Jesus." I am a person just like any name on this genealogy with the same guilt, same disappointment, same failures, all of it. If God were to allow me to pick the names to be listed in his genealogy, I would feel

compelled to exclude anyone like me. I am as unworthy as any bad boy or girl listed in Matthew 1:1-17. But there is a lesson of grace here for all of us. It's just amazing that God would love me, that God would save me, that God would include me in his family.

We get it so wrong. We think God will accept all good people and reject all bad people. The fact of the matter is that we are all bad people. Some of us are more bad than others, but we are all stuck, all separated from God. The good and the bad from the world's perspective both need a savior. Jesus said, "***For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners***" (Matt 9:13).

God deals with actual people and we should be glad because none of us are ideal people. But God's mercy is greater than all my sin, no matter how big that sin might be. God loves the sinner. He loves the overlooked. He loves the excluded. He loves the marginalized. And God in his mercy uses the mess we have made of our lives to display his good news.

The genealogy of Christ in a real sense doesn't end in verse 17. It continues with an adoption. You and I and everyone who have responded to the most generous invitation have been adopted and added to his family tree to become his family, the church. And if we start by looking at ourselves and others around us in our family, we see that the church God is building is made up of people we wouldn't choose, having experiences we wouldn't want and facing events that we didn't plan.

All of us together facing the loss of loved ones, the challenges of raising children, the fears for our future, the disappointments of our past, and the guilt we carry... all our hopes and fears through all the years are met in Jesus Christ. There are some of us here today that need to ask if we have ever responded to the most generous invitation God makes to us. To receive the invitation from God to add our names to Jesus family tree. Our names are added when we ask the Lord Jesus to be our savior. Have you ever responded to his generous offer to become your Savior? Your friend? Your king? Your peace? Your security? Your forgiveness? Your hope?

That's what this list in Matthew is all about. And he continues to put together a new list, his new family tree to include people like you and me. Broken and messy people, knots like you and me. And there is room for more knots. So put your trust in Jesus today and your name will be added to this list.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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