

This Sunday's texts:  
Genesis 15:7-18  
Romans 4:1-5  
Matthew 1:1-17

**Stories That Matter**  
**Pastor Joe Hill**  
**January 8, 2023**

The Gospel reading for this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew 1:1-17:

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the Son of David, the son of Abraham: 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, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, 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, 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. 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. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

This is the word of the Lord.

Our sermon series through the gospel of Matthew comes flying out of the gate with a riveting genealogy! Doesn't it? They say that, in public speaking and persuasive writing, if you don't catch people's attention in the first thirty seconds, the first paragraph, you've lost them. Are you guys here with me this morning? I'm not sure if anybody told Matthew, or perhaps someone did. As we look at this passage today that we've read through, it's easy to see a list of names that are

hard to pronounce. Somebody at the early service came up to me after church and said, "You did a good job, but you pronounced one of the names wrong. It's pronounced Samon." Okay, I said, "Touché! You're going to make it into my next sermon and so be careful."

For us, we see a list of names and yet, for the original audience of the Gospel of Matthew, they would have gotten to the end of verse seventeen and been sitting on the edge of their seat. They would have been thinking to themselves "I *need* to know what's next" because the original audience for the Gospel of Matthew, they were a first-century Jewish audience. They were steeped in the stories of the Old Testament. They knew them backward and forward. So as they read through this list of names, it wasn't just names to them. It was a history. It was stories. It was the greatest triumphs and the greatest failures of their people on full display, and at the end of it, the answer to their prayers, their hopes fulfilled. The generations and generations and generations of praying and longing and waiting for deliverance for a king, for a messiah, they were over. Because what they found in this story, born in a backwater town to a poor family and laid in a manger was the son of David, the son of Abraham, the Messiah. As this first audience gathered together, they would hear this Scroll of Matthew read out loud and what they would have heard as it unfolded was the greatest story, the greatest *true* story ever told.

That's the story we're going to be looking at over the next seven weeks, as we journey through this Gospel of Matthew. We're using Matthew as a tour guide, not just through the life of Jesus. We will explore His teachings and His actions, His miracles, the things He did and said, and why they matter then and why they still matter today, but also as a tour guide through this great history of God's faithfulness that reaches back all the way to the beginning. Matthew puts the story of God's faithfulness on full display as he shows us how Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of what God has been up to since the very beginning of creation, working on behalf of His people and through His people to show His love, grace, justice, and mercy.

In today's story, today's genealogy, we see the story begin to unfold. Matthew lays the groundwork for the story of Jesus, the Messiah, by looking back into His lineage in the Old Testament. So as we explore the text today, my hope is that we might see right here today a little bit more of what that original audience of Jesus saw in this text. I have to be honest with you. I'm going to go full Bible Old Testament nerd today, but I think it's going to be worth it.

So let's get into the genealogy of Jesus. It starts with Abraham. In the Old Testament, Abraham is where God begins to set apart a people for Himself, that He would show His love to and that He would accomplish His will through. So God comes to Abraham, who was Abram at the time in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12, He makes a promise. He makes a promise to Abram. He says go to the land that I'm leading you to and here's what I'm going to do. If you want, I'll lead you there. I'll give it to you. I will bless you and I will make you a blessing to others. You will be a nation that outnumbers the stars in the sky. I will bless you and anybody who blesses you, I will bless. If anybody stands against you, if anyone curses you, I will curse them. I will bless you and because of that blessing, the whole world will be blessed through you.<sup>1</sup> When God comes to Abram, He doesn't do so with a list of demands. Abram, do this and do this and do this and then I will love you. Do this and do this and do this and I will bless you. That is not what God does. He says "I will bless you. I will ... I will ... All you need to do is trust Me."

And in Genesis 15, in our text today, God confirms His promise with Abram in dramatic fashion. In Genesis 15:6, the text says "Abram believed God and He credited it to him as righteousness." And what it doesn't say is Abram followed all the rules, lived a perfect life, and God credited that to him as righteousness. No, it says that he trusted in the promise that God made, and because of that, he was righteous, right before God.

This is interesting to me because I've often heard from Christians that they have a hard time with the Old Testament. When they read it, they tend to see Law. They tend to see legalism. Then you go to the New Testament and you see grace and love and it's nice to be there. Then your journey a little bit into the Old Testament and you feel like alright I'm not in my neighborhood anymore. You like the Jesus in the New Testament. He's loving and He's gracious and He's forgiving. You look in the Old Testament and there seems to be a disconnect. They look for grace and all they find is legalism. They look for love and they find judgment. Maybe that's been part of your experience too. One of the things that we hope for as we go through this series in the gospel of Matthew is that the Holy Spirit would open up our hearts and our eyes to see that the good news of the Gospel of God's love and grace can be found on every single page of the Bible.

There's something incredible about the Old Testament that I don't think we always think of or maybe you never even realized it before. God started setting His people apart with this promise to Abram and it was over 400 years before God gave a law. It's more than 400 years later at Mount Sinai that God gives the law,

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<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 12:1-3

but for hundreds of years before that, God's people were the people of a promise. Before He gave His law He gave you His promise.

It was a stunning promise really. We heard about it in our Old Testament reading in Genesis 15 today. Perhaps you heard that reading today and thought to yourself I'm not sure I get it. This is a bit of an odd story. There are animals and a fire pot. What is going on here? In the culture of the Old Testament times, this is one of the ways that you would make a covenant with someone else. This was mostly done when a covenant or a promise involved the transfer of land from one party to another. Kind of like a promise God made. I'll take you out of the land of your father and lead you into a promised land. The way you would make a covenant like this is you take animals, kill them, and cut them in half, and you'd set them into two rows side by side. The parties who were making a promise, a commitment, a covenant to one another would walk from one side to the other. They would meet in the middle with these pieces on one side and the other of them. They would state the promise they were making. This is what I will do for you. They would state it to one another and right there in the middle of those pieces, they would commit to faithfulness to that promise. The symbolism there is that making this promise cost me something. It cost me this animal and this animal here, but also may I be torn apart like these animals that we stand in between today if I'm not faithful to the promise that we are making. We translate this as "make" a covenant. The Lord made a covenant. Literally in Hebrew, the figure of speech is to "cut" a covenant. Do you see why?

This was not an uncommon thing that we see in our scripture reading today, even if it's not common to us. But there was something uncommon about it. Only one Party walked through the pieces, not two. It was God who passed through the middle of those pieces, as if to say, "Abram, I will not ask you to walk through because I know you will not be faithful to this promise today. You will tell Me that you will do it and then you will fail. So I am not going to demand of you that you be perfect. What I'm going to do is I will pass through those pieces myself and I will say that it doesn't matter if you are perfect or not because the promise does not depend on that. What it depends on is My commitment to be faithful and to love you." That's the promise that God found His people on. That you and I, even today, we would not be perfect.

God's plan was never based on us being perfect. It was always based on God's promise. And that's good news for us. The genealogy of Jesus puts this on full display because what you don't see, as you read through this long list of names, is a spotless lineage of perfect people. What you see is that we have a

God who can draw straight lines with crooked sticks. That's good news for you and me today. God can work in and through a sinner, like me, like us, to work out a perfect plan that is far better than we could. Not because we are worthy, because we're so good, but because He is and He is always faithful to His promise.

That original audience of the Gospel of Matthew would have read this genealogy and they would have seen in the highlights and the lowlights of their history that God is faithful, that He works in and through broken and imperfect people to accomplish a perfect and beautiful plan. They would have seen the heroes of their faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Ruth, even Rahab. They would have seen, even in those heroes, they were broken and sinful and in need of grace and forgiveness. Not one of them was perfect. They would have been tragic figures like Solomon, a king who started with so much faith, so much promise, and devolve into idolatry that split God's people in two. They would have seen names like Jehoram, Ahaz, Manasseh, or Amon and they would have seen a list of kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. And yet, God's perfect plan was not derailed by the imperfection of man.

The genealogy of Jesus teaches us that you can never be so good as to earn the love and the grace of God. Luckily, you don't have to. It also teaches us that you can't be so far gone that God could not redeem your life. Above all, in all of these stories and every single one of them is the story of God's grace, of a God who is loving and faithful, who is always faithful to you. They're stories that point to Jesus because Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of a long history of God's unrelenting and unstoppable grace, that there is a God who never stops pursuing and never stops choosing His people, who never stops loving, never stops working. And He still hasn't, because that story includes you. It includes me, us.

The story doesn't stop at Jesus. Rather through Jesus, that story of God's faithfulness becomes your story. It doesn't matter where your story is taking you. Because Jesus died on the cross, you are forgiven. His story becomes your story. Because Jesus rose from the dead, you can have new life and eternal life through Him.

So you might feel like you're broken, like you're messed up, like you have these things inside that you hide from other people because, if they knew, then how would they love you? How could good happen in your life if people knew what you were really like? I feel like that sometimes. The reassurance of our God is that we don't have to worry because it doesn't and it has never depended on that. That's the amazing thing about the story of God, isn't it? That it's never depended on that. It's the hope that the God who can work through messy, sinful,

imperfect people like us, like those in the genealogy of Jesus, is the same yesterday and today and forever. And that promise that God made back then, *every* promise that God has made, it was good then and it's good for you now.

I want you to hear this word today from 2 Corinthians 1:20. It says this, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him, the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." Amen? The genealogy of Jesus isn't just a list of names. It's a set of stories that God, by His faithfulness and by His grace, is putting together like puzzle pieces to show this world a beautiful picture of a God who loves them with an unfailing, never quitting love. And each one of these stories is a piece of the puzzle. And so is yours.

What we'll see, as we work our way through this series in the gospel of Matthew, is that God's great love for His people, in this love, that these individual stories matter. And so does yours. Because they are stories of God's faithfulness. So their stories, our stories, are stories that matter because they tell the story of God's unrelenting, never-ending, for you, love revealed to us in His son Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the Messiah.

Let's pray. God, we thank You that You choose us, that You make Your promises and they're good and You did so, God unfathomably, You did so knowing that we would fail, and yet You love us without fail. So, Lord, we pray, as we journey through this Gospel of Matthew in these upcoming weeks, that You would open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to see the great love that You have for us and for all people through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.