Matthew's Begats

Pastor Jonathan Minter - November 29, 2026 - Matthew 1:1-17

INTRO: Good morning church! We're here on that strange Sunday after Thanksgiving. It is barely Christmas time. We just decorated the house yesterday. Got a little scare from the Macy's Santa. Because everyone knows that the Christmas season doesn't officially start until he shows up at the end of the Thanksgiving Day parade. And with it being delayed, I was a little concerned that Christmas was going to be delayed too, but we put in an official request and they said it was, in fact, okay to celebrate on time this year.

Speaking of Christmas… **[Christmas Big Day Vision Talk]**

The rhythm of holiday seasons can be very helpful to us spiritually. It seems like that is part of God's creation, too. We get seasons so we can get into a rhythm. What is the purpose of this Sunday? This barely Christmas-time, but not quite fully Christmas-time? End of November, not quite December.

Need: Well, what do you do when you can't make sense of your past and you can't see clearly where you are going in the future?

You are looking back at what got you to this place in life and it's hard to make sense of it, isn't it? What's the difference between shame and regret? How are you supposed to feel when you look back at hardship, at mistakes, at places where you just didn't measure up, but at the same time you know you wouldn't be where you are without those mistakes? **Is it possible to be grateful for your mistakes?**

You look forward to the future and you've got anything but a clear picture of where you are going. **Maybe you are a little gun-shy because you are starting to trust yourself less and less.** But it has to be true that God has good things in store for you, right? But what do those things look like? And how do you get from here to there?

Trans: It is exactly into this kind of ambiguous present that God became flesh. Matthew starts his gospel not with the Christmas story, but with the genealogy of Jesus. Why? It can be tempting to skim these lists of names because on the first read, it looks really boring and uninteresting. But we're going to sit with this list of names this morning and see if Matthew was trying to communicate something to us bigger than just a list of names.

BODY: Matthew, through his genealogy of Jesus, prepared his readers to recognize that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. We can recognize that God fulfills all his promises to his people through Jesus. How can we recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of all of God's promises? Matthew's genealogy calls us to 3 responses to Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises:

Read text: Matthew 1:1-17 (ESV) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

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17 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.

HOW TO RESPOND TO JESUS AS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES:

1. Trust God's purpose <u>despite your weakness</u>.

EXP: (1-6a) How do we get 3 points out of a genealogy? First, we look at how Matthew organized it. He gave us the summary in verse 1.

(v 1) "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"

Do you see it? Jesus, the Messiah. Son of David. Son of Abraham.

Christos (G5547) - this is not Jesus' last name, this is his title, his place in history. This Greek word equates to the Hebrew word Messiah. You know the one all of Jews were waiting for. Matthew doesn't bury the lead. He could have stopped his gospel right there. This is the book of Jesus, the Messiah! Mic drop. In fact, what we are going to learn today is that all of the gospel of Matthew is covered right here in this genealogy, and all that you need to know of Christianity, humanity, God, and how things got to be the way they are and what God is planning to do about it is right here in this genealogy.

Son of David - David, the King. That's Jesus' second title here.

Son of Abraham - Abraham, the father of many nations, the one out of whom all nations would be blessed.

There they are, the 3 sections of Jesus' genealogy. Then look at the end. He gives us some of his math. 14 generations from Abraham to David (he's the son of Abraham). 14 generations from David to the exile (he's the son of David). 14 generations from the exile to the the Christ (he's the Messiah)

So this is how we are organizing today's sermon, just like Matthew did. Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham. And then he works out those titles in reverse order. He starts at the end - son of Abraham. And that's where we will start.

What was God's promise to Abraham?

Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV) "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**."

Matthew starts his gospel, his announcement of the Good News by saying that Jesus is THE Son of Abraham. Read Genesis 12:2-3 and put Jesus' name there and you'll get what Matthew was saying. "*I will make of Jesus a great nation, and I will bless him and make his name great…and in Jesus all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

We might think of genealogies as a cold, historical, scientific record of biological facts. But that's not Matthew's purpose.

We included the scripture for today in chart form so you can see how it is laid out in more structured form. Perhaps you picked up on some of this while I was reading this out loud. But this is an example of the Bible as meditation literature. Sometimes you don't get the point in your first reading of it. It requires you to sit with it, and on your 10th time through or 50th time, you start to notice things you didn't notice before.

Let's look at some of the weirdness of his genealogy to see how Matthew is telling us a story.

- (v 3) "Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar…"
    - This is the first woman in the list. Matthew has been laying down a steady beat, and now he breaks it to make us look closer.

    - Tamar was most likely a Canaanite, not from Abraham's family. Whew, no incest in Jesus' family tree. Dodged a bullet, right? Well, If you kept your kids in service today, now would be a great time for a bathroom break. Genesis 38.
    - Judah had three sons. Tamar married the oldest, Er, who was wicked, so God put him to death. That's all we get in the Bible. He was wicked so God put him to death.
    - The custom: if a man died childless, his brother married the widow, and their first son carried on the dead brother's line.
    - So Tamar marries son #2, Onan. He wants the marriage but not the kids, and won't "seal the deal" in the bedroom, shall we say, so God puts him to death too.
    - Son #3, Shelah, is too young to be married, so Judah sends Tamar home to wait for him to grow up, but he's afraid Shelah will die like his brothers (apparently this woman is cursed), so he never follows through with the marriage.
    - So Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute because it turns out Judah has a problem with prostitutes. She sleeps with Judah, her father-in-law and that's where the twins come from.
    - Okay, Matthew, what are you trying to say? Let's keep going.
- (v 5) "Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab…?
    - Okay, another woman! Hmmm, there seems to be a melody Matthew is developing here. It's like the men are the beat of the song. He's establishing the beat, and then by introducing these women, he's introducing the melody. The first woman was a non-Israelite who is part of the line of Jesus through some pretty messy, Jerry Springer-like family drama.
    - Rahab, also a non-Israelite, but actually a prostitute. Hmmmm, interesting melody Matthew. I wonder if there are any other women in this first part of the genealogy that would develop this melody further?
- (v 5) "Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth…"
    - Non-Israelite? Check.
    - Sexual scandal? Check.
    - Now, I'm sorry but I need to throw your reading of the book of Ruth into disarray for a bit. And if you haven't taken your kids to the bathroom yet, well, I warned you and now this one's on you.
    - Ruth was a Moabite. Who were the Moabites? The people of Moab. Moab was one of the sons of Lot, Abraham's nephew, who was born through an incestual relationship between Lot and his daughter. Go read the story in Genesis 19. Yeah, Ruth, the *Moabite.*
    - And in the book of Ruth, that famous story where she goes to Boaz at night to communicate to him that she wanted him to be her kinsman redeemer. Well, the Bible says she "lied down with him" and uncovered his "feet" - both of those are sexually charged euphemistic words that the writer of Ruth is deliberately using to show you how Ruth was risking her reputation by scandal to claim what was rightfully hers, actually very similar to Tamar's actions.
    - And here's the thing about the Biblical stories that are behind those 3 women - in each story, the **outsider woman** shows more faithfulness than the man in the genealogy of the Messiah. They are held up in the narratives as being more righteous and more faithful than the Israelites. And Matthew put a magnifying glass on their stories.

Matthew! What in the world are you trying to say through your "stuffy", boring genealogy of Jesus?!

Here's Matthew's point in this first section: **Jesus is the Son of Abraham**. God was accomplishing and fulfilling his promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all families on the earth and **he wasn't going to let any amount of scandal or culturally defined weakness get in the way of that**.

God isn't surprised by the weakness of humanity and he isn't going to let it derail his plans and purposes.

ARG: It turns out, this is a theme that runs throughout the whole Bible.

> 1 Corinthians 1:27 (ESV) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

> ~~2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.~~

Taking frail, weak, imperfect humans and using them to accomplish his purposes turns out to be a particular expertise of the God we serve.

ILL: This isn't the way we are raised, though, is it? We raise our children to discover their strengths and weaknesses. When they discover a strength, you lean into that - your strengths are what make you unique, what make you who you are. And when you discover a weakness, you want to fix that weakness.

I've got a son in middle school and they are already giving them aptitude tests to see what they are good at so they can start planning the rest of their lives around their strengths.

I have to admit, that's typically the way I approach God too. Okay God, what am I good at? I want to give you that so you can use it. **That's how the Kingdom is going to advance, right?** Has to be! God is going to collect all the strengths of all his people and put those to use to build his church, right?

The thought of God being more interested in my weakness than my strengths, I'll have to be honest - as I've been studying for this message, I've just had to sit with that a bit. I'm still processing it to ask God what that looks like for me.

APP: Because here's what we can see from the first 14 generations of Matthew's genealogy: **Your weakness is not an obstacle to God accomplishing his purposes in you. In fact, your weakness may be a prerequisite, a necessary condition for God to accomplish his purposes in you and through you.**

What is in your past that you think disqualifies you from participating in God's plans and purposes? What weakness do you think renders you powerless? Won't you give that to him today? Tell him, *"Lord, okay, I admit. Here is my weakness. I was trying to hide it from myself, from everyone around me and even from you, as silly as that sounds. But I'm going to be like Matthew today and just put it out there and not ask you to work around my weakness, but actually **use my weakness**. Let my weakness be the very place of my strength in you."*

2. Submit to Christ as your rightful King.

EXP: (6b-11) Okay, so the first set of 14 generations was establishing that Jesus is "Son of Abraham." This second set of 14 generations is about Jesus, the "Son of David."

Do you see there in v6 - "**David (the King)**" - Well that's odd. This is the first person with a title in the genealogy, and he's the last as well. In the first point, we looked at God's promise to Abraham and how Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. Well, God promised King David that his throne will be established forever.

> 2 Samuel 7:16 (ESV) "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. **Your throne shall be established forever**."
>
> Again, insert Jesus' name into this to see how he fulfills God's promise to David. *"And Jesus, your house and Jesus, your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Jesus, your throne shall be established forever."*

For King David, the "man after God's own heart," certainly the best King of Israel, Matthew decides to highlight the lowest point in his life, his worst days.

"**David was the father of Solomon, by the wife of Uriah**" - ouch - The 4th woman in the genealogy, and she isn't even mentioned by name, but by the fact that she was already somebody else's wife. Some say David was in love with Bathsheba. No, David was in lust with her. He saw her and wanted to acquire her. He would send for her, get her pregnant, try and cover it up, and then have her husband killed when he realized he couldn't.

What a start to the line of kings that would bring forth the Messiah… **Matthew puts David's greatest failure front and center**.

Okay, maybe Solomon would be the king the Israelites needed! This is my humble opinion, but I think Solomon's legacy is viewed through rose-colored glasses. Solomon was actually the beginning of the end of Israel's kingdom.

You think Solomon, you think, "Wealthiest king ever! Wisest king ever!" Surely evidence of God's blessings to him, right? I don't think so.

You see, kingship wasn't actually God's plan for his people. Kingship was actually a rejection of God as their king. In God's grace, he tells them in Deuteronomy 17, through Moses, "Look, I know the people are going to want a king. They don't need one, but I know their character. At least if they get a King, here are some guardrails for that king to make sure they rule according to my character:

- Don't acquire many horses, and certainly not from Egypt - you know I brought you out of there, don't go back there.
- Don't acquire many wives, they will turn his heart away from me
- Don't acquire excessive silver and gold

And so Solomon, the "wisest King ever" apparently looked at those rules and instead took them as a challenge. He broke every single one of them in spectacular fashion (see **1 Kings 10 & 11**). What we think was a strength of Solomon (his wealth) was actually him breaking God's rules for kings.

God tells Solomon, "I'm going to tear the kingdom from you." So we go from David: "your house and your kingdom will be established forever!" to one generation later, to his son: "I'm tearing the kingdom from you." It only took one generation later (3 kings into the Israelite monarchy) and the kingdom has split into 2 through civil war. Solomon has turned into a Pharoah figure and treated the 12 tribes like his personal slave labor and base of taxation.

Then follow the genealogy down in this middle section of 14 and you just go from bad to worse. Yes, there are some bright spots there of kings who attempted to follow God's laws. Josiah was a bright spot with all his reforms and destroying of idols, reinstituting the passover, cleaning up the temple and all that. But God actually says in 2 Kings that all the good Josiah did wasn't enough to make up for all the evil his grandfather Manasseh did. The kingdom was too far gone into violence, idolatry and oppression..

As we finish out this middle 14, we've gone from David "the King" to, nation destroyed and carried off to Babylon. Well that whole "king" thing didn't end well, did it?

It's like Matthew is at Thanksgiving dinner with the whole family, and spends the first part of dinner talking about all of the family's darkest secrets, the stuff everyone knows happened, but we just don't talk about it, you know? And everyone's sweating in awkward silence, you can hear the silverware screeching as people are just quietly eating, and now he starts talking about politics…

But he's communicating something to us through this list of names. In this middle section, what is coming out loud and clear?

- The ends don't justify the means
- God is just as interested in *how* his leaders lead as *what* they are trying to accomplish.

We needed a better king than the ones presented in this middle 14. We needed a righteous king.

ARG: This is the point Matthew is making. Jesus is the true Son of David.

King Jesus is Reigning, but with justice, with righteousness:

Hebrews 1:8 (NLT) But to the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice.

So Matthew invites us to ask two questions.

1. Is Jesus a good King? Yes, he's the only one worthy of following as king.
2. **Is Jesus *your* King?**

Luke 6:46 (ESV) Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?

ILL: We exercise authority in many different places in our lives, and one of those places is on the job. Everyone reports to someone, and everyone has something they are responsible for. You probably (hopefully!) got a job description from your boss - something that tells you what you are supposed to do while you are on the job, and what success looks like. Or if you own the business, you had to write your own job description.

But did you know that you have another job description? You have a **Kingdom job description too**. Something that tells you what success looks like as a follower of King Jesus. Do you know what's on that job description?

Because remember, God is more interested in *how* you get your job done as he is in *what* you get done. God's measures of success for you at your job are different from the world's and probably your boss's. This is what it means to operate "in the name of Jesus" - with his authority and patterned after his way.

APP: Matthew's invitation to us is to stop trusting the way of the world, the way of the kings, but to make Jesus our true, rightful, eternal king. Submit completely to him.

What does that look like?

- Stop looking to worldly and political leaders as your example for how to lead or behave. Look to Jesus.
- Stop looking to worldly and political leaders for the solution to what is wrong with the world and how it is going to be made right. Look to Jesus.
- Stop looking to yourself as your own authority. Look to Jesus.

He's the only one worthy to be your King.

3. Receive Christ's restoration for your failures.

EXP: (12-16) Let's return to Matthew's structure. He tells us plainly that he has organized his genealogy in 3 sections of 14 generations each. We have already covered the first 2 sections.

But things aren't quite as nice and tidy as they appear on the surface:

- Matthew skipped several generations - this further reinforces the idea that Matthew isn't trying to give us a cold historical record of ancestry.
- And he gives this neat 14 x 14 x 14 pattern. But look at this chart. This is an area of debate, and Josh Winslow and I (studying together this past week) tried as hard as we could to make sense of where the 14 generations would be in the final section, and Matthew just doesn't let it add up. There are only 13 generations there. Matthew wasn't bad at math. It's like Matthew was winking when he said "and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations" *(wink wink)*. It's like, "wait a minute, Matthew, did you just wink? Why did you wink?"
- We chose to include Mary as her own generation because of the uniqueness of that story, but there are lots of approaches that have been put forth. Matthew is inviting us to ponder what he might have meant by that.

If we follow Matthew's pattern - the first section says that Jesus is "Son of Abraham", then "Son of David". Those are people. But in this section he is essentially saying Jesus is the son of an event: "Son of Exile"

If section one is the failure of Abraham's sons to bless the nations, and section two is the failure of David's sons to rule God's way, section three is the failure of the post-exile generations to undo the damage.

The Old Testament ends with promise: the temple rebuilt, Jerusalem restored, the exiles are home. Things are going to get better, right? Right?! But the cracks show before the Old Testament even closes. By the time Jesus arrives, has a restored people built a new Jerusalem? Emphatically, no.

Jesus walks into a promised land where:

- **A foreign empire rules**. It's the fourth in a row: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now Rome.
- **The local "king" isn't from David's line**. Herod is an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, Jacob's brother. He's not from one of the 12 tribes.
- **The priesthood has become political**. The high priesthood was bought and sold, and now Herod and Rome appoint and depose high priests at will. The temple Zerubbabel rebuilt was once turned into a temple to Zeus, with pigs sacrificed on the altar. At one point the Jews tried to merge the role of king and priest. And Herod rebuilt it into something magnificent, not because he wanted to worship God, but to score political points and for his own legacy. And there's no record that God's glory ever filled it.

What a mess. If Matthew is giving us this genealogy at the Thanksgiving dinner table, it's about this point where people are getting up and leaving in tears because Matthew has ruined dinner!

But let's finish this section with the final woman we meet: Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Finally it makes sense. We've been on a tour of most of the Old Testament, stopping at some of the most scandalous and disappointing stories of the whole Bible, fraught with political intrigue, geopolitics and the very worst impulses of mankind. But now we land - we "touch grass" - we get anchored into a humble, very real event where a young virgin Mary births a child, the long awaited Messiah.

Look at the pattern. Look at the grammar. It is actually in the active voice. Abraham fathered (begat) Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah, and so on… That pattern of a human as the primary actor continues throughout this whole genealogy, and you see clearly what a disaster that has been. Until you get to the end: "Joseph the husband of Mary, *of whom Jesus was born*, who is called Christ." We have a passive voice now. We don't have a human actor anymore. The Messiah was sent **by the Father** to accomplish what mankind could not.

Matthew is telling us the very essence of the Gospel here: in our own strength, in our own power, we just simply don't have what it takes to get ourselves together and be the people God wants us to be to participate in his grand plan to redeem his creation. And the harder we try, it seems like the worse it gets.

ARG: The long-awaited Messiah isn't waiting for us to get ourselves together. That's not why he came. He didn't come to give us another law, another set of rules that we just need to try harder to follow. **Matthew is showing us that humans have a long history of not being able to keep God's law. We didn't need a better explanation of God's law. We needed someone who could keep it for us. We needed a Savior.**

This is precisely the claim of Christianity. We are not made right by our own efforts. **Salvation cannot be earned, it can only be received**. Christ died, was buried, rose from the grave and ascended to the heavens. **Jesus was the primary actor. He earned it, we receive it.**

Galatians 4:4-5 (ESV) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And what do we receive? Simply the forgiveness of sins? Oh that would be enough! But how much more does God love us! That we might receive adoption as sons and daughters of the eternal King, joint heirs to the Kingdom alongside Jesus!

ILL: My youngest is 6, and he can make messes. He's actually very good at that. He's a good cleaner, in general, if we're talking about picking up his room. But if he's made a mess, he's independent, you know, and he wants to clean it himself. The problem is, by the time he's done "cleaning" he has usually made a bigger mess. It would have been much easier for me to just clean it up for him.

We are just like that with God. Instead of trying to clean up our own messes, why don't we let him clean it up for us?

APP: I don't know why you came to church today. There may be someone here and you came out of a sense of deep shame and guilt because of how your life is going and what has led you to the place where you are right now. Let me make this clear. **If you are thinking that coming to church is part of a portfolio that you are going to put together, a resume you want to put together so you can go before God and have the best shot at pleasing him, I want to invite you to rest from that effort.**

Your place as a son or a daughter of the King is not earned by your religious resume, any more than this whole list of generations was able to put together a resume to get things right. Alongside all of humanity, here is Jesus, the Messiah, coming to you, offering you himself as your Messiah. Salvation comes the second we lay down our attempts to be righteous by ourselves and place all our trust in Jesus to make us right with God.

CONCLUSION: The whole Old Testament points toward the One who would fulfill all of God's promises. As you read in the Old Testament, you begin to anticipate this One. You get glimpses and sketches, but not a full, detailed description. You see enough to see the problem and to know that we need a solution outside of ourselves. Enough to see a silhouette form. But then **you turn the page from the Old Testament to the New, and on page 1 of the New Testament, through a list of names, the silhouette figure steps out of the dark and into the light - it's Jesus. Jesus is the Christ.** He is the One, who:

- *Fulfills God's promise to Abraham* to be a blessing to the nations, and works in our weakness to fulfill his purposes in our lives as well.
- *Fulfills God's promise to David* to be the true, rightful, eternal King who rules with justice and righteousness, and he offers to be our true King if we will submit our whole lives to him, and
- *Fulfills God's promise to all of humanity to rescue us from our sin*, to be our Savior, to be our Messiah, if we will just trust him and receive him as the One who was sent to redeem us.

Will you trust him today? Will you receive him? Let's pray.