

JESUS, OUR SAVIOR KING

Matthew 1:1-25

Key verse 21

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Merry Christmas! There has always been something magical to me about Christmas: the excited suspense leading up to Christmas morning. But I’m not talking just about gifts and trees and events. God made great promises and he took his time in fulfilling all of them: 42 generations to start his salvation work, and we are more than 2000 years in the process of completing it. This is our opportunity to renew the magic of what God did all those years ago, and what he continues to do. What a marvel that God includes us in his wonderful plan! What an indescribable gift he gives us daily in Jesus Christ (2Co 9:15)! What joy and life we experience in following and serving him!

Our Christmas theme is related to worship. Looking over this long list of people in the genealogy and the story of Jesus’ humble birth, I hope to help us continue to answer the question we have been grappling with all week long: Who is Jesus that we should worship him? Not just at Christmas time, but every day of our lives?

I. Jesus is the King who fulfills God’s promises (1-17)

Matthew begins the story of Jesus by recording his genealogy. Do you know your genealogy, and what it says about you? A wise man once told me: “To know yourself, study your father.” But Jesus’ genealogy is different, and offered for a very clear purpose. Verse 1 reads, **“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:”** Matthew wants to show us that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah means Christ, it means “the Anointed.” Such a title was used to speak of prophets, priests and kings in God’s history. While Jesus is all three, Matthew mentions Jesus as the Son of David first, emphasizing his identity as King. His genealogy covers approximately 2000 years of history from Abraham

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to Jesus, names 46 people, and alludes to more than a dozen others. Verse 17 divides the record into 3 areas: **“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.”** In short, these 17 verses are packed with things to learn about Jesus. But today I want to focus on a few things we learn about Jesus’ kingdom through the genealogy.

Notice that David and Abraham are highlighted. They were recipients of God’s promises, fulfilled in Jesus. God promised to Abraham that he would be a great nation and a blessing to the world (Ge 12:2-3), and kings of people would come from him (Ge 17:6). God promised to David that his throne and his kingdom would endure forever before God (2Sa 7:16). Jesus’ coming is the very answer and fulfilment of these promises. Why is this significant? Earlier this year, I promised my wife that if she lost weight I would take her on a honeymoon. She lost 60 lbs, and weighed less than our wedding day. She kept her part, but I had forgotten about my promise, caught up in other things. But God is not like me. God who made promises is faithful, and he never forgot. Instead, he bore with man’s unfaithfulness and weakness to bring about his own good plan in his time. King Jesus’ coming is the fulfilment of a faithful God’s promises.

Did you know that we too are included as recipients of God’s promise? Look at verse 2. **“Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.”** Not all of his physical descendants would be included in the covenant. God chose Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. More than being a physical descendant, faith in God is important. More than our parent’s faith, or church activity, we need to share the faith that Abraham had. Paul explains in Galatians 3:7, **“Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.”** This faith is rooted in believing God’s promise. Abraham believed God’s promise, trusting in God to fulfill his covenant. We too have been given a promise in Jesus Christ to be the children of God (Gal 3:26). Believing in the promise brings a person from death, to life, from darkness to light!

On what basis do we have access to this promise by faith? Since it is not by human distinctions, gender, age, generation, nationality, education, success, etc...

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what is the criteria? Reading about these people, specifically the women Matthew mentions, they were included by the grace of a broad-minded God. Yes, the one-sided grace of God alone, to which we respond by faith alone. Think about Tamar (3) and Rahab (5). Tamar dressed up like a prostitute to sleep with her father-in-law, and Rahab was a prostitute, running a brothel in a pagan city. Yet they both shared faith in God, and God accepted them. Ruth (5) was a Gentile woman who married into a Jewish family that escaped from a famine into Moab. All the men in the family died. Rather than return home, Ruth pledged herself to her mother-in-law Naomi and to God (Ru 1:16). God had commanded that no Moabite or their descendant should ever be among his people (Dt 23:3). But here she is, listed in the genealogy. God isn't legalistic. He broke his own rule, and this woman of faith was included in the genealogy by God's great grace alone.

We can't talk about God's grace without mentioning David here. He was chosen by God's grace. Verse 6a reads, **"...and Jesse the father of King David."** He was the youngest of Jesse's sons, just a shepherd boy not even important enough to appear when Samuel visited Jesse's house. But he was the one God chose to be the shepherd of his people. God helped David to learn his mind and heart, to depend on God alone, and to seek God through very difficult times under King Saul and the threat of the Philistines. By God's grace David the shepherd boy went from the stable to the palace. But that isn't the only expression of grace. Look at verse 6b. **"David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife."** Most of us know the story (2Sa 11). After David's kingdom was securely settled, he stayed home while his men went off to war. One evening he got up from his bed and while walking on the roof of his palace he saw a very beautiful woman bathing. Rather than turn away, he wanted to find out more, checking her Facebook profile (in those days it meant sending someone to find out about her). Even though her profile clearly said, "Happily married to the loyal general and godly man Uriah," David still took her and slept with her. She became pregnant, so David tried to cover it up by inviting Uriah to come home from war to sleep with his wife so it would look like his baby. But Uriah was too loyal; he refused to enjoy home comforts while others were risking their lives in battle. So David secretly ordered that Uriah be placed at the front lines to be killed. David took Bathsheba as one of his wives.

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Of all the stories about David, why include this one? To emphasize our need for God's grace. David sought it through repentance. When rebuked by the prophet Nathan David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord (2Sa 12:13)." It was at this time he wrote Psalm 51, which begins, **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin"** (Ps 51:1-2). God called David **"a man after God's own heart"** (Ac 7:46). Jesus was called, "Son of David." Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise and the expression of his love to sinners.

The rest of the genealogy is a list of kings and obscure names during the exile. There are many colorful stories, but generally these are all generations in decline. With Jeconiah the earthly kingdom of David came to an end. They were led into exile to Babylon. What does this teach us about Jesus? During the exile God revealed to Daniel that Jesus' kingdom will never be destroyed, will bring all other kingdoms to an end, and will itself endure forever (Dn 2). Jesus' kingdom is not earthly and temporary, like David's. It is not bound by geography. It does not depend on people. Jesus' kingdom is spiritual and eternal. Jesus is coming again to make this a reality for all people.

The Jews, who should have welcomed him as King, instead rejected him and had him killed. The sign above him read, **"THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (Mt 27:37). They rejected their king, the one God promised. Matthew's audience was well aware of these events. Closing his genealogy, he is asking us: "How should we respond to such a king?" Let's accept Jesus as King and enter his kingdom by faith in his promise of grace to sinners.

II. Jesus is our Savior, who is with us forever (18-25)

Look at verse 18. **"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit."** Jesus' coming into the lives of this family plunged them into great conflict. Although

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Mary may have tried to explain it, Joseph was left with a difficult decision to make.

Verse 19 reads, **“Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet he did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”** Joseph wasn’t a great man in the world; just a carpenter (Mt 13:55). But he didn’t react based on his emotion and anger; he thought about God. He knew God’s word was clear regarding adultery. So he could not marry her. He could have disgraced her and ruined her life. Yet Joseph did not want to expose her to public disgrace. Perhaps he loved her still. Perhaps he just wanted to put the whole thing behind him. Whatever the reason, he struggled with this decision, but was willing to think of God and Mary before himself.

At that moment God intervened in Joseph’s life. Verses 20-21 read, **“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”** This was something Joseph could never have imagined as God’s plan for his life and marriage. He would suffer misunderstandings and hardship. But when the angel called him “son of David,” and he learned of Jesus’ mission, hope and destiny rose in his heart. He chose the hard path of self-denial and obedience. Verses 24-25 read, **“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”** Joseph loved Mary and took care of her and her child. Jesus had brothers and sisters so Joseph and Mary’s marriage was fruitful and blessed. He seems to have died before seeing the fulfilment of Jesus’ life. Yet he made the best decision, and became the human father of the King of kings. All this because he gave up his own idea and by faith chose to follow God’s way. Joseph was not legalistic, but obedient to God’s will. Legalistic people cannot accept or share grace. But those who accept God’s will as God’s grace like Joseph did are living by faith.

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I'd like to go back to the angel's message and Matthew's commentary in verses 20-23, and think about two things we learn about Jesus.

Firstly, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Verse 20b reads, “...**what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**” The doctrine of Jesus' virgin birth is core to our faith. How did God do this? One person simply said, “The Holy Spirit went into Mary and came out as Jesus.” This doctrine teaches us wonderful truths about Jesus. Since Jesus did not have a human father, he didn't inherit the empty way of life of sinful man. His Father is God. Jesus was also born of a woman (Ge 3:15; Gal 4:4), Mary. He grew up in a poor family. He was a big brother, he worked, he ate and slept. He experienced all our human temptations. Son though he was, he humbled himself and became the servant of all (Php 2). He served us not as a king proclaiming laws and dictating action, but as a shepherd, understanding us as lost sheep and caring for us. His very life and teaching testifies that he is not of this world. Yet he is so approachable and humble. Such a truth about Jesus can't be understood reasonably; to know Jesus is God is the work of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:3).

Secondly, Jesus saves his people from their sins. Verse 21 reads, “**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**” I read that the name Jesus was popular in those days, because it means “The LORD Saves.” People wanted to find hope in God's Messiah to rescue them from their suffering under oppression from Rome. Jesus' name is the exact description of what he came to do: He came to save. The angel points out that he came to save his people from their sins.

What did the angel mean by “their sins”? Sin is to fall short of the glory of God, to separate from him. God created mankind to be with him, to dwell and enjoy him forever. But through pride, man became self-centered and self-seeking, rejecting God. The consequences of this were terrible: shame, fear, emptiness, loneliness, guilt, anxiety, meaninglessness, pride, etc... God made man to think about and pursue noble, beautiful, excellent things. But due to sin even the best of us fall into temptation, like King David. This wouldn't be so bad if we could just shrug it off. But sin becomes a problem for mankind because being cut off from

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God leaves us like a cut flower in a vase; slowly dying. People try to address this problem in a myriad of ways: Some try to use psychology to move guilt and shame by blaming others. Some people hope to just ignore it, or deal with it. But we cannot. People consumed by sin and its consequences can become violent and unstable. And these are just the temporal consequences of sin that we deal with in our experience on earth. The Bible says there are also eternal consequences at the judgment. As Christian said in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: "Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment; Sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit, I am sure, to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry." We need a Savior. Jesus came to be that Savior. Jesus came to save us from our sins.

How does Jesus save us from our sins? Jesus saves us from our sins by bearing the punishment for sins that we deserved, in order to bring us peace (Isa 53:5). He died on a cross, shedding his blood. In that day a fountain of forgiveness opened to cleanse people from sin and impurity (Zech 13:1). This was not just giving us another chance, since we would just fail again. By dying to what bound us, Jesus has set us free from the standards and expectations of the law to serve him in the new way of the Spirit (Ro 7:6). Through baptism we are united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. This is the work of regeneration, carried out by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). In this way, Jesus is saving us from our sins continually, helping us to grow. God is conforming us to Jesus' glorious image (Ro 8:29). We are now able to draw near to God in Jesus Christ. So near, that he comes to live with us and make his home with us (Jn 14:23). This has been God's desire and plan all along. Look at verses 22-23. **"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')."**

Who is it that calls Jesus "Immanuel"? I was looking through the Bible, trying to find an example, and then it hit me: Matthew called Jesus, "Immanuel." Matthew was a tax collector; a reviled person in his time. Nobody wanted to be with Matthew, but Jesus did. He said to Matthew, "Follow me." Jesus' words liberated Matthew from his bitter selfishness. Jesus saved Matthew from his sin and made him a new creation. By being with Jesus, following Jesus, his money-

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centered, meaningless life was changed to be a blessing to all generations through his gospel. Matthew called Jesus, “Immanuel.”

Those who have believed in Jesus, do you see how Jesus is saving us from our sins through being with us every day? When I was a young kid, I went to Sunday school and was a good child. But when our church divided and we began church hopping, Christianity lost credibility. With no direction in my life, I pursued pleasure. I became a heavy metal musician and drug user, thinking that was the way to be free. When I came to UIC I had a rude wakeup call: I wasn't in charge of my life anymore. My wandering made me a slave to sin. I was lost. I could not save myself from the destructive path I was on. At that time, Jesus called me to follow him through Bible study. In 1997 I heard Jesus' words: **“I Am the Way”** (Jn 14:6). For the first time in my life I realized my problem was a self-centered worldview that ignored Jesus, the Way. His invitation to follow him was the greatest grace to me. By faith I began to follow him. He gave me strength to come out of my bondage to drugs, a destructive relationship and anti-social community. He led me to grow in his shepherd heart, to learn his mind in caring for others. He gave me great joy to study his word, to think about and teach it. Following Jesus has led many ways, some scary, some challenging, others requiring self-denial and work, but always meaningful. I have hope that one day he will complete the work he began in me (Php 1:6), that following Jesus will come to a glorious end when we arrive at the end of the race (2Ti 4:7). Thank you Jesus for being with me! Thank you for saving me from my sins again and again.

We began this message thinking about who Jesus is, that we should worship him. Jesus is God who became man to save sinners. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, and to bring them to eternal life in him. He is worthy of our worship, for he is the King who bought us with his blood, rescued us, and lives in us daily to lead and guide, to help us grow and conform to his image. He is coming again soon to take us to be with him for eternity. Come Lord Jesus, receive our worship today.