

Matthew: Why It Is So Critical

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Matthew

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Bible Text: Matthew 1:1
Preached On: Sunday, January 9, 2022

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This evening, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew 1, typically a pretty easy place to find in our Bible, it's the beginning of the New Testament and if your Bible is like my Bible, there's a blank page between Malachi and Matthew just to help us out a little bit.

But before we get into the gospel of Matthew, allow me to take this opportunity this evening to share with you one of the many reasons why I love Sunday nights. When we gather as a body of believers, you know, we gather in a lot of different places and different times for a lot of different reasons, and don't get me wrong, I love Sunday morning, I love when we gather and there's lots of people, I love the music and the grandeur there, and I love all the fellowship in the hallway, but when it comes to the time in the services where we open up the word of God, one of the things that we must all realize is that on Sunday morning there is the entire scope of humanity not just in this room but watching online. There are those who have been believers just for a few weeks and months. There are those that are seasoned in their faith and have been faithful for decades. There are those that are only here out of obligation to fulfill to somebody who they care of and they're just simply occupying a seat. There are those that are here for myriads of reasons. But one of the reasons that I love Sunday night is because I think, now this is just me speaking, I think it's the hardest time to come to church. You say, "Why is that?" Because on Wednesday night you've been at work, we have a meal, it's a lot of fun and festivity, but Sunday night we've all gotten out of that Sunday afternoon nap and we're tired and we're a little bit groggy, and so when you come on Sunday night, typically, not all the time but typically you're pretty serious about studying the word of God, you're interested in studying the word of God, because on Sunday nights there are so many more excuses that we could make than any other time period of the week, and the reason that I share that as we go into the book of Matthew is I want to begin this evening a journey through the book of Matthew that I can honestly tell you I have no idea how long it's going to last. But that's the beautiful thing about Sunday night.

When we gather on Sunday night, it's so much different than any other time period and so when we come and focus on the word of God on Sunday evenings for the foreseeable future, I want to invite you to study a book of the Bible that is so critical to our lives, and I will make you a promise: no matter how long this study lasts on Sunday evenings, if

you will hang in there with me whether you're here in person or watching online, by the time we get done with the book of Matthew, you will have learned the entire scripture. There are 66 books in your Bible and it is the book of Matthew that I believe testifies, shares with us, and communicates as much or if not more truth about scripture in totality than any other place in the Bible. So I'm inviting you not just to a study of the book of Matthew but to a study of the totality of scripture.

Tonight, we're going to begin in chapter 1, verse 1, and I don't want you to panic that we're going to go one verse per night for this study because there's a lot of verses in the book of Matthew. But the first verse of Matthew sets the stage and it answers the question for us tonight: why is studying the book of Matthew so critical? Why is it so important? Why should it be an effort in our lives that we're willing to invest a great deal of our time?

The very first verse says,

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Now this is important for multiple reasons but allow me to address the obvious. Look to the page to the left of Matthew 1. My Bible is a blank page. Yours may or not be based on the way in which it is printed, as study Bibles and such, but I would say I can see some of your Bibles, there's blank pages there and that's important. That blank page represents 430 years, 430 years that the Lord has said nothing to his people. In fact, if you turn back two pages, you'll find the book of Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, the last of the 39 books of the Bible. In fact, the last chapter, chapter 4 of Malachi, strategically deals with three personalities. We have the prophecies concerning Elijah, Moses and whom we know as John the Baptist and obviously the Messiah Jesus Christ. All of those characters play principal parts in the gospel story both in the first and the second coming. Yet there is that blank page and the Lord said for 430 years, "I will not speak."

So when he does open his mouth, I think what he says is pretty important, and oftentimes when you've waited a long time for somebody to speak, those dramatic pauses that we hear in a public presentation or maybe somebody has drawn silent for some period, when they finally speak, we listen. Now most of you this evening are of age to understand this analogy, those of you that are not of age, eventually you can ask somebody. Do you remember the old commercial when E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen? And that financial brokerage firm, the idea was, we don't speak often but when we do, it's worth listening to. And thus we come to Matthew 1.

Now think about it, it's been 430 years, silence when it comes to scripture, and the first thing that's written, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Now I'm going to go ahead and confess on behalf of all of us, I was thinking something more exciting would come. I'm thinking something a little more colorful or maybe a little more energetic, but that's about as mundane and blah as you can

get. After 430 years, the Lord's communication is, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," yet we're going to discover tonight that is actually the most important thing that God could have said after 430 years.

So a couple of things about the book of Matthew tonight just to get us started. Here in verse 1, the first thing is this: the place that it is in your Bible or the place that it has in scripture, and I don't just mean the 40th book of the Bible but the place that it has. Notice how it begins, "The book," very different than your other gospels. Think about the gospel of Mark, it begins, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Think about the beginning of the gospel of Luke, "O Theophilus, that which I communicated in days past from that which he began until his appearing," the timeframe of whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about the beginning of the gospel of John where it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In fact, that's kind of exciting, the gospel is good news, we're going to get the storyline from Luke and John's going to take us literally into the utter stratosphere of theology, and it begins by, "The book."

This is important for several reasons. 1. It classifies Matthew with a very important distinction. If you have the ability tonight, let me encourage you to turn back in your Old Testament to the book of Joshua 1. Let me set the stage here. The Israelites haven't been waiting 430 years but they've been waiting for 40. They've been wanting to go into the Promised Land. I mean, this is the place where Caleb and the spies came back and gave the report of the grapes the size of melons, and people the size of giants. And after 40 years and a generation dying out, they finally get the opportunity and there in Joshua 1, the Lord tells them to be of courage, do not be dismayed the Lord's going to go with you everywhere you go. I want you to notice what verse 8 says, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." When the Israelites are about to go into the Promised Land, the thing the Lord tells them to do is to make sure that the book of the law is not only heeded to, is not only given as direction, but they meditate on it day and night. It is the key to their success.

Think about the famous battle of Jericho. Can you imagine if the Israelites had not done it exactly as God told them to? He said on a certain day, walk this many times, on other days, walk a different amount of times. "Do as I've said." But the book of the law, that's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, oftentimes in the Old Testament even in the New Testament, it's called the books of or the book of Moses, the book of the law. This is important because when that phraseology is used, "The book," it would always take a Jewish person back to the Promised Land. It would always take them back to Moses. It would always take them back to God's promises that just like when they went into the Promised Land and did it every which way God told them, as we are now entering what we know as the New Testament, it's going to have the same distinction in their life. We do not have the privilege or the opportunity to make up the rules as we go or change them to better suit our culture, our leanings, our feelings, etc. Whenever the Israelites decided to do it their own way instead of God's way, it never worked out when

they went to the Promised Land. And yet the same can be said for Matthew. It begins with, "The book," that allusion, that distinctiveness would have been so similar in the ears of those hearing this as it would have been ages ago when they went into the Promised Land.

The other aspect about it being called "The book" is its description. I already shared with you it begins very differently. Mark starts with, the gospel of Luke starts with a chronology, John starts literally in the stratosphere of theology, but when I say its angle compared to others, allow me to share with you an illustration that I think is very important on an evening such as tonight in regards to one of the gospels, shall we say, as a descriptor compared to the others. Anytime you're reading through the gospel accounts and you're reading in Matthew a story that is also shared in Mark, or maybe is not contained in John, there is always this thought and usually it's typically written in the academic community of questioning the integrity of scripture, questioning the fidelity of scripture. Why does Matthew tell us there were two men healed of their blindness but Mark only tells us of Bartimaeus, just as a simple example.

One of the great illustrations that I think is important for us to note tonight is this. Imagine, if you will, and I hate to use this illustration but it's just the best one, imagine that there was a car wreck, an accident. Now for the sake of our illustration, no life is going to be lost, everybody is okay. But that accident takes place at an intersection and that you are on one of the four corners of the intersection, and there's another individual on the other four corners. Based simply by where you're standing, you will have a completely different view of the accident than the other three. If the cars are headed directly toward you, you will have a completely different view than the person on the opposite corner etc.

But let's even take that and extrapolate it more, not only would we have a different physical view but think about who the Lord inspired to give us these gospel accounts. Matthew, we know him as a tax collector. He was an accountant. He was a modern-day CPA. He was very much into numbers and ledgers. He wanted to make sure and he would tell us precisely probably the speed that the cars were traveling, the direction they were traveling, and exactly how many passengers were in each vehicle. That's what Matthew would share with us. Mark, most likely according to chapter 15 of the gospel, was a young man, maybe an older teenager, young adult. We know that he was single and in his gospel it's very fluid, it's very quick and he changes stories and he doesn't give a whole lot of details. Most likely, a lot of adjectives and sounds would have come from his description about how loud it was and the crash and parts flying and such. Then there's Luke. According to Colossians 4, Luke is the beloved physician. He wouldn't have cared about the damage to the car but he could have probably shared with us the specific injuries of all parties, and probably even given a diagnosis of what would happen when they got to the hospital. And then there's John. John's the one who sees the big picture and probably would give an account saying, "Well, you know, if that car had been just traveling 5 miles per hour slower, he would have never collided with that car." Somewhat speculative but more big picture.

Why is that critical? Because when it comes to Matthew, Matthew is going to give us a perspective of Jesus that is very much against the grain of us pig-eating Gentiles. Think about how chapter 1 begins, a genealogy. If you were to go to a movie this evening, or go home and watch a movie, and the first four minutes of the movie were nothing but somebody reciting that So-and-so gave birth to So-and-so and that's how it started, you would change very quickly. This is not important to us. This is not exciting to us. But you understand that when it comes to the history of the Old Testament, it doesn't matter necessarily who you are but who you came from because if you can't trace yourself back to David, and if you can't trace yourself back to Abraham, it doesn't count. And yet here we have this genealogy that Mark doesn't include, Luke doesn't include, John doesn't include, but is so strategic.

Then there's the depiction. This is something that's very important to me when it comes to the gospel of Matthew. I will share with you tonight, I believe that Matthew opens up the whole Bible. If you can get Matthew, you can get it all. Now I know, I've heard this question asked to me about 100 times and I'll go and share with you my answer. Somebody comes to me and says, "I know somebody who's not a believer. They're curious about the faith. They're interested in the faith. Where would you have them read in the Bible?" I typically begin in the gospel of John. It's a big picture of God's love for us, his concern for us, his redemption of us. If someone comes to me and says, "I'm a new believer and I want to know, I want to be more grounded in my faith." I typically lead them to Romans. We typically call Romans the Master's thesis of Christianity. It's just kind of we are doctrinally. I rarely, if ever, tell anybody who's either curious about the faith or new to the faith to go to Matthew because it is the gospel of Matthew that requires more biblical understanding to understand than any other book in the Bible.

Allow me to explore this. The book of Genesis, this is the guide to the Bible. You've heard the analogy before, if you're headed a certain direction and you get off one degree at the very beginning, you're going to be way off by the time you get to where you'd hoped to be. The book of Genesis which begins, "In the beginning," it doesn't just state that just to be religiously trite, it's stating, "This is the beginning of time. This is the beginning of the story."

You know, we like to discuss the book of Genesis ad nauseum, particularly the first 11 chapters, not just about what it says but what it does not say, and many people don't realize that every major biblical doctrine in the Bible, every doctrine, is found in Genesis 1 through 11. And there is a phrase we use that you may or may not be familiar with, it's called the law of first mention. What that simply means is this, that the first time that something is mentioned in the Bible, the first time that something is spoken of in the Bible, it more likely than not sets the tone and the path for all other opportunities when we use that word, that phrase, or we discuss that topic.

Think about what we know in scripture just from the first two chapters. We have theology proper, God's existence, that he always has been and always will be, was not formulated, created or made by any outside party. We know the doctrine of humanity, we did not come through a series of accidental processes but at the spoken word of God.

How about the doctrine of sin? The third chapter in the Bible lays out how we found ourselves into this mess. And how about the doctrine of soteriology? It's the doctrine of salvation, how we're saved. In chapter 3, verse 15 of Genesis, it says that the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent. The very first mention of a Messiah comes in the 15th verse of the third chapter. Why is that important? Because Genesis is our guide to all of scripture as far as our doctrinal approaches.

Then there's Revelation, now you and I both know when it comes to Revelation, you get three or four people together, you've got at least 17-18 different opinions, and why is that so? Is it because that we somehow have biblical ignorance, whatever it may be? Allow me to share with you, I think the reason that so many people struggle in Revelation, the book of Revelation only has 22 chapters but it has over 250 either quotations or references to the Old Testament. Most people can't understand Revelation because they don't know the Old Testament. It's not that we can't understand what God is saying, it's we can't grasp that everything written in Revelation is the fulfillment of that which was prophesied in the Old Testament.

So if Genesis is our guide to the entirety of the Bible, 39 books of which are in the Old Testament, and Revelation is our understanding or our guide to the Old Testament, who do we have in the middle? Matthew. Matthew is our bridge and therein lies the great struggle because it's in the New Testament but we oftentimes read it through the lens of being a born again Christian without realizing that this is the bridge, this is taking us out of the old covenant into the new covenant. This is that bridge taking all those doctrines from the book of Genesis yet the fulfillment of Revelation and bringing them to the forefront and to the middle.

So it begins somewhat anemically, "The book," but there's a whole lot to that statement. And then it mentions David and Abraham. Please tell me you noticed the first obvious problem there, they're not in chronological order. If we were going to do it chronologically in our flesh, it should say the son of Abraham, the son of David, but that's not what it says. It begins the son of David and then it goes to the son of Abraham. Why is it from our appearance backwards? The reason is this: the priority is on Jesus Christ being the Son of David. Let me explore what that means and then we'll talk about the son of Abraham.

David was obviously very distinctive. We know him as, shall we say, the monarch or the king of Israel like none other. And just for simplicity, remember that the whole concept of Israel having kings was frowned upon by the Lord. He told them, "If you do so, you're going to have these consequences." They said, "No worries. We want to be like the world." Remember the first king was head and shoulders above everybody else. Saul was a man of great strength, a man of great, shall we say, physicality, and yet took whom we know as the Israelites wayward. Then there was David. David, if you'll allow me to say, was the runt of the litter. David was the one that when the representative of God, Samuel, came to anoint, even his own dad said, "Surely you can't be talking about him." And in 1 Samuel 16:7, it says that God does not look on the outward appearance but he looks on the heart.

Now real quickly tonight, I want to address an issue. You know, people talk about the Bible says that David is a man after God's own heart, and people struggle with that because David had shortcomings. David had his failures. David had some just abject rebellious moments in his life and people say how can that be a man after God's own heart? Let me address that two ways. 1. When David was confronted with his sin, no matter what it was, he always came clean. He didn't make excuses. He didn't claim, "Well, that's just the way I was raised." He always came clean. If you don't believe me, read Psalm 51.

Secondly, the phrase "after God's own heart" does not necessarily mean that David always sought the Lord but it was at the heart of God for David to be the king. In other words, God wanted David to be the one who nobody else wanted to be the leader that God desired him to be. And here's the description that I want you to hear when it comes to David. Why is David mentioned before Abraham? If you're able to this evening, in 2 Samuel 7, I want to read for you a description of what the Lord says about David as a leader, David and his reign. In verse 12 of 2 Samuel 7, it says, "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels," listen to this, "I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever." It's important to note that when we speak of David in the Old Testament, yes, there's great stories about the defeat of Goliath and all these other things, but the one distinct purpose that the Lord had for his life was that his throne would never cease. In fact, in Psalm 110:1, David himself says that the Messiah will sit upon his throne for all of eternity.

Why is this critical? Why is this important for an understanding of the book of Matthew, particularly David and Abraham being in the order that they are? It's because when we speak of David and Jesus Christ being the son of David, it is a physical description. In other words, when Matthew begins, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David," the priority or the primary focus is not going to be Jesus who loves and serves and redeems, it's not going to be Jesus who has always been and always will be God, though both of those things are true. The focus in Matthew is that the rightful heir to a physical kingdom has arrived.

So what happens in Matthew is that the overwhelming majority of that which is spoken, that which is taught, and that which is communicated, is letting us know the path to the throne that Jesus Christ will one day sit upon, and for you and I, that is very difficult at times because most of our perspective of Jesus is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." And that is a wonderful, incredible passage, but the majority of the Old Testament isn't about his redemption, it's about him coming to reign, and Matthew is the gospel that describes his coming reign.

Now it deals with redemption as well but the priority because David is mentioned, is on his physical reign, which leads to its purpose. The son of Abraham. It is these two individuals and Jesus' connection that are absolutely necessary not only for our

understanding of Matthew but the totality of the New Testament. It begins this priority that David is the one, the physical reign that one day will arrive, and secondly, its purpose as the son of Abraham. What is so distinctive about Abraham? He shows up in Genesis 12. I mentioned earlier Genesis 1 through 11 is kind of that section where all the great doctrines of scripture are laid out, and then we just have the stories that come alongside of them. When we get to chapter 12, there's a man who at the time's name was Abram. He does not become Abraham until Isaac, the son of promise, is born. The Lord comes to him in chapter 12, you know the story, I'm sure you've heard it well, about the famous stars in the sky, "Can you number them? Are you able to? And even though you and Sarah are way past the age of having children, do you believe that God is able?"

But there in Genesis 12, I want you to listen to the twofold commandment or commission that God gives him. 1. "I want you to go to a land that you know not of." Remember he takes his wife and his nephew Lot, they go to a place they've never seen before, in fact, Hebrews 11 says they just went by faith. The second thing, "When you are there, you will establish a nation, a group of people." This is so important the distinction that is made here because what we know as the Abrahamic covenant is twofold, it is involving the land that the people of God would inhabit, and it's also involving the people that would be the genealogy of the Messiah. That is two very distinct things.

There are times where the Jewish people in the Old Testament kept the genealogy but lost the land, and there are times where they were in the land and they forsook the genealogy, and yet here when we get to the New Testament, in the very first verse he draws us parallel to the book, he makes this reference to David first and he says, "Okay, son of Abraham." Not only is there a priority on the physical reign but the covenant was originally twofold and both are going to be addressed. The description is simply this, that as we walk through the gospel of Matthew, as we set that stage for the New Testament, that we have both the physical covenant of God, the land, and we have the spiritual covenant of God, what we know as the messianic lineage. Both of those are going to be addressed in Matthew and let me implore you in 2 Timothy 2, it says that when we come to study the word of God we should rightly divide the word of God. One of the biggest issues that you and I have when it comes to Matthew is taking these two aspects of the Abrahamic covenant and mashing them into one big conglomerate, or making that which is physical spiritual, or that which is spiritual physical, and yet we have in the very first verse the Lord makes a very important distinction. He says, "He's the son of David but he's also the son of Abraham."

So yes, David was a physical reign and throne and Abraham was a twofold covenant which leads to this last aspect: the depiction of Matthew is that it is unmistakably saturated as a Jewish gospel. Now why is this important? I've been to Israel on multiple occasions. I regularly read and study works from those that have a Jewish background, and as much as I've tried, as much as I've visited, I hate to tell you, I'm just a pig-eating Gentile. I've tried to the best of my ability to see it through the lens of the Jewish expectation. I don't have a family heritage that spent thousands of years waiting on the Messiah, I don't have a family heritage that according to Romans 3 we can go back and they've been studying the scriptures for millennia. I don't have that and most of you don't

either but we cannot escape the fact that we have to come to Matthew as it was written to Jewish people who had been waiting 430 years for a Messiah.

Lest you question its Jewishness of, in 1 Corinthians 1:20, it says that a Jew requires a sign and a Greek seeks wisdom. What that basically means is that until it looks like something only God can do, typically, historically Jewish people aren't going to pay attention. But for you and I as Gentiles, if we can reason it out, logic it out, apologetic it out, we're pretty good to go. If we can think it out, we're good for that. I mean, the day that I got saved it's not because I saw somebody walk on water, I just considered the logical conclusion of my sin, the redemptive love of Jesus Christ. I put 2 and 2 together and said, "I want to go to heaven and not hell." But the Jewish people as a whole, according to scripture, seek out a sign, and yet it's only in the gospel of Matthew 12 where they said, "Jesus, show us a sign." Remember what he said? "As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."

The only place in the gospels where we have Jesus Christ saying, "I am the fulfillment of a sign," is in Matthew and that's critical, that's important because as we walk through this first gospel, we're going to have to put our Old Testament lenses on, we're going to have to put our Jewish lenses on, and it's going to be difficult to shake off the Gentileness, it's going to be difficult to shake off our Westernness, but if we do, then we're going to have the opportunity to learn the Bible like we've never seen it before. We won't just see it through the lens of my personal testimony, we won't just see it through the place where I grew up or the family or the church that I've been a part of, we can see his story as it was written not just for us but for the totality of humanity.

The gospel of Matthew very simply and somewhat noneventfully begins, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." Though not the most exciting statement, it is the most complete statement that we have not only in regards to who Jesus Christ would be and fulfill but on the entirety of scripture. And one promise that I will make you as we traverse this incredible book of the Bible is that we will be in every nook and cranny of the scriptures and what the Lord's going to do is every week he's going to take a little piece of that jigsaw puzzle and he's going to put it in, and then he's going to bring another piece, and when our study is done, we're going to take a step back and we're going to see this beautiful rendition that we may have never seen before.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Tonight, though it may seem somewhat academic and overly historical, it still doesn't change the fact that Jesus Christ came to be the Savior and Redeemer of humanity. And maybe even on a night like this where maybe somewhat limited in person but great online, maybe you're that individual who needs to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Maybe you're that individual who's already a believer who needs to repent of sin and walk the narrow path, or just maybe, maybe you just need to walk away today feeling the security and the love and the blessing of the Lord upon your life. Whatever it is, tonight we want to give an

opportunity, an opportunity to render that decision, an opportunity to render that verdict in one's life.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision for those in need of saving, God, we pray that the Holy Spirit would so convict them that tonight is the night. Lord, for those who are so desperately in need to repent of sin, God, I pray your Holy Spirit will prompt them to do so. For those who need encouragement, God, would you comfort them, for those who are struggling would you convict. O God, tonight would you just work in our lives, may we respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

As you stand with me and Bruce leads us, any and all decisions, we'll be right here at the front.