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The Genesis of Redemption

Matthew 1:1-17

Beloved in Christ,

You have all heard the story of the birth of Christ many times I am sure. We are familiar with the story of the virgin Mary who is pregnant of the Holy Ghost, there is no room in the inn so she labours in a cattle stall, as the cry of new life rings out in the night a multitude of angels sing out “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” (Lk. 2:14), the shepherds are directed to the place that the saviour lay in swaddling clothes, and they worship him. It is the greatest story ever told.

This is often thought as the start of the second testament of the revelation of Christ. Yet the first note in the gospel song is not the account of the miraculous birth of Jesus but the genesis the Christ. Lest you charge me with heresy, by using the word genesis I do not mean to say that Christ is a created being. I am simply using the very words of Matthew!

You don’t need to be a Greek scholar to understand Matthew’s words in verse 1. Βίβλος (Bible/book) γενέσεως (Genesis) Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (of Jesus Christ). Literally, the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ.

You of course know the book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. In this book is recorded the sovereign Lord’s providential work in bringing forth out of nothing the cosmos, the earth, and all therein. Likewise the first book of the New Testament details the sovereign Lord’s providential work to bring forth, out of nothing, redemption by way of our saviour and mediator the Lord Jesus Christ.

To put it into perspective, Matthew places the genealogy at the forefront of his gospel because you will not fully understand the gospel without understanding the bigger picture. Matthew Henry says, “This is not an endless genealogy or a needless genealogy; it is like a pedigree given in evidence, to prove a title, and make out a claim.”

Theme: *The claim being made is that the child born in Bethlehem is the Christ (v.1). The anointed prophet, priest, and king (HC. 31). The promised saviour and deliverer, the Son of Abraham the Son of David.*

Headings;

1. The Promise of Salvation (vv. 2-6)
2. The Promise of Hope (vv. 6-10)
3. The Promise of Redemption (vv. 11-16)

Point 1: The Promise of Salvation (vv.2-6).

“Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers” (v. 2).

Matthew’s first point in his genealogy is to demonstrate that Jesus is the biological descendant of Abraham. Why Abraham? We see throughout the scriptures that to be a descendant of Abraham is a point of pride (Lk. 16:19-31; Jn. 8:39). But what is it that is significant about being part of Abraham as opposed to Daniel? Caleb or Joshua? Why not Moses? You might answer that God made a covenant (meaning: promise/bond) with Abraham! This is true, but of course not uncommon for he has made covenant with Noah, Moses, David, and even you at your baptism. What makes the Abrahamic covenant unique is that God coupled it with a promise.

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

God pronounces six blessings upon the patriarch, yet the sixth is the crown of them all. Of course we all want blessing. The word blessing is a common word. It’s a very common term around this time of year to speak of the blessing of family, health, and prosperity. Yet to be Biblically blessed is to be given divine favour. Thus, to rephrase God’s promise to Abraham, “In you all the families of the shall receive divine favour”. How is it that a man dead for 5000 years can be a blessing to all the families of the world, including mine?

The apostle Paul gives us divine commentary on this passage in Galatians 3;

*“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel** to Abraham beforehand, saying, “**In you all the nations shall be blessed.**” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (vv. 8-9).*

Paul, illumined by the Holy Spirit, teaches us that the blessing God gave to Abraham was the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you what the good news is not. The good news is not that this world was created by a bang and has no purpose. The good news is not that there is a god but he is so high and lofty that we can't know him. The good news is not that you have to work your way to heaven on a celestial ladder. The good news proclaimed to Abraham thousands of years ago was the gospel of salvation in the Christ to come.

1.1 - Meek and lowly

And so this wonderful promise needed to be manifest in creation. Often times during this Christmas season you will hear that Jesus came meek and lowly. I had always assumed this was referring to his human nature, yet if we look at the genealogy of Christ we see that the meek and lowly nature of the incarnation is also demonstrated in the family line of Christ.

Notice how God brings about this promise, he uses the meek and lowly characters of Bible history. "*Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers*" (v. 2). God chose Abram when he was a pagan idol maker with no family and no land. God chose the younger Isaac over the elder Ishmael. God chose Jacob not Esau, Judah not his twelve brothers. If you go through every one of these stories the most striking note is how God works out his sovereign plan perfectly even when the evil one works against him violently. Abram married his wife to foreign kings twice to preserve his life. Jacob is a deceiver. Isaac was born to a 100 year old mother. Judah the youngest of twelve. Though everything seemed to work against the Messiah coming from this family tree, God prevailed through them.

"*Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram*" (v.3). Perez and Zerah are the twin sons of Judah. If you look at Ruth 4:12 the writer traces the line of David back to Perez. In fact, even some ancient writers use the term "son of Perez" as a messianic term. This is quite shocking when we consider the manner in which Perez and Tamar came about. The conception of these twins was by the deceiving of her father in law (Gen. 38).

Tamar is the first woman mentioned in this genealogy and if you look at every other genealogy women are missing from them. There are four women mentioned here. Tamar, Rehab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. If you know you're Old Testament history you will know that that Rehab was a prostitute; Ruth a Moabitess; and Bathsheba committed adultery with David which then precipitated her husband's murder. Then of course, Mary the mother of Christ (v. 16). Matthew's inclusion of these women is not to emphasize an egalitarian or feminist doctrine, but to show that in a very real sense Jesus has entered into our fallen world. That he came to save sinners, male and female, Jew and Gentile, black and white, slave or free.

Out of Tamar came Perez the one through whom the Messiah would come. "*Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king*" (vv. 4,5). In these two verses 400 years of history are described, it is doubtless there are omissions, the point is that you see God's sovereign hand in bringing forth the Messiah. At the end of verse 5 is recorded the name, *Jesse*. Jesse is the father of King David, yet prior to God choosing of David what was Jesse? Jesse was a shepherd, a poor, backcountry, shepherd. Without even a dream of sniffing the throne of Israel. But God chose him, he chose all of these people, in order to orchestrate his plan of the incarnation and the salvation of our souls.

Application:

1. We can trust in God.
 - a. What Matthew's genealogy demonstrates is that Christ is not a plan B of the failed Old Testament plan of redemption. The New Testament is not a radical shift in the mind of God's salvation plan. God from the beginning has always planned to save sinners by our Lord Jesus Christ! Thus when the angels proclaim "*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*" The peace they proclaim is that the hostile relationship between sinner and holy God is resolved in this babe. In the life, death, and resurrection in Christ we are reconciled to God, washed white as snow in his blood, and made to be not only friends of God but his own very adopted children. Thus, it is in the incarnation and birth of God's Son that many children are adopted into the family of God.
2. If God is willing to use sinful and insignificant characters like Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Tamar, etc., then God is also willing to use you to bring about his sovereign purposes. There is no such thing as a Christian unworthy to be used by God.

Point 2: The Promise of Hope (vv. 6-10).

The second aspect of Matthew's genealogy is concerned with the royal line of the kings of Israel and Judah, that Jesus Christ is *the Son of David*. We notice that of the 15 kings listed that only one is given the designation that is *King David* (v. 6). That is because it

was to David that God made a royal covenant. Just like God's covenant with Abraham God's covenant with David was coupled with a promise.

“Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:11b-13).

Now this promise was given to David, but it was for his son. Of course Solomon would inherit many of these promises. God would advance Solomon to the throne of Israel; God would settle him on the throne; he would employ Solomon in the good work of constructing the temple; and God would adopt Solomon as his very covenant Son (2 Sam. 7:14,15). Yet the gem promise is the eternal throne.

Clearly the throne of Solomon is not eternal. So the author goes through a litany of succeeding kings/thrones. Is *Rehoboam* (v.7) the promised king? Surely not! Under Rehoboam Judah worshiped every false god they could (1 Kings 14:22). *Abijah* (v.7)? No, for he walked in the sins of his father Rehoboam. Now *Asa* and his son *Jehoshaphat* were righteous before the Lord. Asa reigned for 41 (1 Kings 15:9-24) years and Jehoshaphat for 25 years (1 Kings 22:41-47). These were years marked by economic success and peace and prosperity. But folks, 66 years is far from an eternal throne. *Joram* (v.8)? No.

In between Joram and Uzziah there are three generations missing, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. Why were they omitted? Because those three kings were the kings associated with Ahab, Jezebel, and Athaliah the usurper. They are recognized as the three most vile kings in all of Israel. Yet, nonetheless they come from the loins of David.

“Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah” (vv.9,10). I don't need to go through the story of every king listed here for you to understand the picture. Some kings ruled in righteousness and others in wickedness. Yet the hope of the nation of Israel was that there would come one whose throne would remain forever. You can imagine that we every successive king the people of Israel would ask like the disciples, *“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). Who will establish Israel's eternal throne?

2.1 - A Heavenly Throne

Jesus is a physical descendant of King David, yet the throne that he has come to establish is not earthly, temporal, or subject to change but heavenly and eternal. It is a celestial throne which the promises pointed towards. Jesus is the seed of David. *“From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—”* (Acts 13:23). David's house and kingdom have long since come to an end; but the promise of God is that there would come one *“Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever”* (Isa. 9:7).

Application:

1. Government is not the cure all to social ill.
 - a. Idolatry means putting your trust in something other than God. Christians as much as any people can make an idol out of the government. The government is a gift of God to a fallen humanity (Rom. 13). Entrusted with the sword to protect and minister to the nations. They are to be honoured, obeyed, and prayed for by the church (Belgic 35). But we make an idol of the government when we look to them for provisions found in God. Allow me to be so bold to say that the answer to society's problems is not more money from our governments, the answer to the problems of society is the evangelization of the nations and more Christians who act like Christ. The hope of the world is the local church (Col. 1:27).
2. When your political party loses, take heart, Christ still reigns.
 - a. The Kingdom of God is not of this world. Be careful not to identify politics with Christ's rule. His throne is established far above from where Satan and this world can touch it. No matter the sorry state of Canadian politics our Lord is still yet seated and reigning in glory and his kingdom shall increase.

Point 3: The Promise of Redemption (vv.11-15)

“And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob” (vv.12-15).

Family history is often not as neat and tidy as we would like it to be. Unfortunately Israel's throne would not stand forever. Often they would forsake God and his covenant. We must remember that God often said that if Israel would walk contrary to God *then I also will walk contrary to you* (Lev. 26:24). God told them there would be severe punishment if a king led them astray.

“The Lord will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you... “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you” (Deut. 28: 36,-37; 47-48).

God would not be slow to chasten Israel in her sins (2 Sam. 7:14). And the means he would use is exile. *“Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon”* (v.11). Matthew tells us of all of these kings from the Northern and Southern kingdom and Israel's downfall illustrates one truth, God's throne would reign forever, but it wouldn't be through them. Not even David is worthy to sit upon an eternal throne.

Just as sure as God's promise of judgment upon sins is his promise of redemption. Often in the scriptures after God's pronouncement of judgment is followed by his promise of salvation. *“if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land”* (2 Chr. 7:14). This is the glorious first note of the gospel song, the pinnacle of God's redemptive work, that God saves sinners from exile.

Though Israel sinned and was exiled according to God's promise. Though the mighty tree of the Davidic line with a thundering crack fell to the ground (Isa. 10:33-34) and all that remained was the stump/root of Jesse. Although the people of were exiled because of their sins in a foreign land, none of these things nullified the glorious promise of God. *“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his root”* (Isa. 11:1)

Who is this king, to sprout out of nothing to redeem Israel? In one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, as Jesus, ascends into heaven to take his place on the throne of God Jesus is referred to as *the lion of Judah and the root of Jesse*. Our Lord Jesus came as a shoot/small and tender twig, easily broken off but it was he who was victorious over our enemies. This Lord Jesus is he who redeems us from sin, death, and hell.

And as the sound of an infant cries out in the night in Bethlehem, redemption was born for us. *“And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ”* (v. 16) He is called Christ, our anointed prophet, priest, and king.

Application:

1. Matthew tells us Jesus' family tree because without understanding Christ as the fulfillment of the promise of salvation, hope, and redemption the manger scene means nothing. If I can be honest with you? I am not the most festive of persons. Easter, valentine's day, fathers/mother's day I just don't see the point. Yet, it's Christmas that grieves me. I am not here to pick a fight, I believe holidays to be within the purview of Christian liberty, what grieves me is the multitudes of people who will go to church this one time per year, who will put nativities on their lawn, and sing hymns of his birth, who hate Christ. If you choose to celebrate Christmas this year make Christ the chief of your affections. Remember that the reason Jesus was born was for the redemption of his church. He will give up his life to be the blessing to all the nations. You could sit there under the multitude and myriads of angels and watch in utter agonizing glory as they sing. You could see with your very own eyes the wise men coming in and laying their gifts at the feet of the Lord, yet none of these things compare to the splendor and glory of Christ Jesus. The incarnation is worth celebrating because the second member of the Trinity, through whom all things were made for his glory. He wraps himself in human flesh, he condescends to man, is born as a baby, fulfills all the Father has planned for him, gives his life upon the cross, to reconcile us to God. That is Christmas.

Conclusion:

What is clear is that God sovereignly ordered all things in history to bring about the good end of the birth of our saviour. This saviour is the Son of God, the son of Abraham, the Son of David. He took upon himself human flesh, was afflicted and tempted as we are and was crucified on the cross though sinless for our redemption. Jesus does this because he loves the church and through him we are surely blessed.