

Promise Keeper

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31 ESV)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33 ESV)

He Will Save His People

December 24th, 2023

Matthew 1:1-25

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 1.

Now, I've been told that, according to the unwritten rules, you're not supposed to preach about the birth of Jesus until *after* Christmas. But, in my home growing up, we were always allowed to open one present on Christmas Eve. Well, I'm choosing *this* present. And if you have a problem with that, then you're going to have to take it up with my mom.

In all seriousness, I suspect that next Sunday – the 31st – your hearts and minds will have likely moved beyond the manger. So, I am choosing to strike while the iron is hot. Next Sunday we will focus our attention to the second coming – the second *advent* – of Jesus, but today we are going to turn our attention to the little town of Bethlehem where God proved Himself to be the *Promise Keeper*.

Look with me to Matthew 1. We're going to read the whole chapter this morning. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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, ⁶and 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, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And 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, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So 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.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:1-25 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

I suspect that some of you might have preferred that I skip over verses 1-17 where we found one of the Bible’s many *dreaded genealogies*. Isn’t it true that genealogies are often the place where the best intentioned Bible reading plans meet an early demise? Lists upon lists and names upon

names; we find ourselves wondering: “Why is this in here? What purpose could this possibly serve?”

Well, let’s ask that question: What purpose does this genealogy serve? If you have been paying attention over the course of this series, then you are well on your way to identifying that purpose. In this genealogy, Matthew follows a family line that traces back through David all the way to Abraham. Now, why might he do that?

He means for us to see that this child is the CHILD THAT THE WORLD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR! He means for us to recognize that the Old Testament threads of promise – the longings and the expectations and the hopes of the people of God – hopes of an eternal kingdom, a blessing to the nations, and the defeat of our spiritual enemy – are all finding their glorious fulfilment in *this birth!!*

THAT is why Matthew wrote out this genealogy! Because the promises of God are finding their fulfilment right here!

God’s promise in Genesis 3 that a woman would give birth to a son who would crush the serpent’s head is fulfilled here!

God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that through his seed all the nations would be blessed is fulfilled here!

God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that a son in his line would reign as an Eternal King is fulfilled here!

God’s promise in Micah 5 that that King would be born in Bethlehem is fulfilled here!

God’s promise in Isaiah 9 that the darkness would give way to light and that a Divine Son would be given unto us is fulfilled here!

God’s promise in Ezekiel 34 that a Good Shepherd would come to seek and save the lost is fulfilled here!

Now, if we didn't read our Bibles – if we didn't know our Old Testament – then we wouldn't be prepared to recognize all of that. But we *have been* reading our Bibles, and now we *can* SEE and CELEBRATE that our God is a PROMISE KEEPER! We point to the manger and declare:

For all the promises of God find their Yes **in him**. (2 Corinthians 1:20a ESV)

This child is Immanuel – God with us. He is Jesus, and he will save his people from their sins.

This morning, I want to pull up from the manger to consider this grand, overarching story as a whole. Now that we have followed these threads of promise to their conclusion, what have we learned? How should the Christmas story change us?

How Should The Christmas Story Change Us?

First, in light of all that we have seen as we have followed this thread of promise:

1. Let us resolve to grow in patience

Look again at verse 17:

¹⁷So 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**.

That's a long family tree! That's a lot of waiting! And that doesn't even stretch back to the beginning in the garden!

Listen: If we have learned anything from this series it is that God does not operate on our timeline. God is playing the long game.

When Eve first heard the promise, she likely thought that *she* would be the one to give birth to the child who would crush the serpent's head. But her dreams were shattered when her son Cain

crushed *his own brother's* head instead! Eve would not see the fulfilment of the promise in her lifetime. She was forced to wait. So too did everyone else who first heard these promises.

Abraham longed to see how the nations would be blessed through his seed, but he died as a homeless wanderer! A generation after God promised David that his son would reign forever, the Kingdom of Israel broke out in a civil war! The people in Micah and Isaiah's day who heard the promise that a God King would be born in Bethlehem watched in horror as Assyria destroyed all of the northern tribes of Israel. Almost all of the people who first heard the promise in Ezekiel 34 of a coming Shepherd lived and then *died* in captivity in Babylon.

Perhaps you're thinking now: "Well, this is a depressing point!" Well, if *you* feel that way, just imagine how the Jews were feeling in the days before Jesus' birth. Generations upon generations waiting for the fulfilment of a promise that was seemingly never going to be kept. It WAS depressing!

Until God sent His Son and reminded us that He is doing something in the world that stretches *beyond our limited timelines!* There IS hope! There IS light! God is not done! He is working His plan and – even though HIS plan might not fit with the timeline that you prefer – it is a GOOD plan!

Patience is hard – even on a good day. But it can feel downright impossible when suffering is involved. When we are in pain, and we are waiting for reprieve, the delay is almost unbearable.

I suspect that many of you can't wait to say goodbye to 2023. It has been a year of upheaval, and loss and misery. I want you to take a moment to look back on that mess behind you. Can you believe that you came through that? Can you believe that you endured that? It seemed impossible at the time, but God saw you through, didn't He? Not once did He let you go. Brothers and sisters, He is *doing something* even when you cannot see it. Trust Him.

Pastor Paul used to say that God is not like a microwave – He's like a slow cooker. Some of you have slow cookers working at home right now. The best things take time, don't they? Well, God is doing THE BEST THING! Something GLORIOUS is cooking! So, as we consider this Christmas story, let us resolve to grow in patience.

Second, in light of all that we have seen:

2. **Let us resolve to expect more from less**

The barren woman can be the mother of a nation. The shepherd boy can be a king. The little town of Bethlehem can be the place in which the saviour of the world is born. The lowly manger can become a royal throne! As the Apostle Paul explains:

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; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are (1 Corinthians 1:27-28 ESV)

God uses the little things – the lowly things – the forgotten things – to change the world!

Hear that this morning. *Believe* that this morning.

Some of us have spent far too much time looking in the mirror wondering how God could possibly use people like us. We need to stop doing that! Faith doesn't think that way.

Listen: David picked up a small insignificant stone and he flung it into the air and the giant Goliath came down! Now, nobody comes away from that story talking about the stone. Nor should they. The stone was nothing apart from the one who wielded it.

Well, in the same way, you might perceive yourself to be small and insignificant – and you might even be right! Who are you? Who am I? Who are any of us? But as small and insignificant as we are, when we are in the hands of King Jesus we are *weapons for the kingdom of God!*

God saved you for a reason! He placed you in your family and on your street and in your city for a reason! Don't waste your life sitting on the side lines! Offer yourself to God and watch what He does in and through you!

Perhaps you're wondering: "But where could I even start? What does that look like?" That's a great question! We're all about to head into a new year, and many of us will make new

resolutions. Some people hate resolutions but I, for one, think they're wonderfully helpful! In fact, I have some recommendations that I'd love for you to consider. I want to encourage each and every one of you to lean into some small, faithful, acts of obedience as we head into this new year.

Identify one neighbour and pray for them once a week all year long.

Set your alarm back ten minutes and resolve to read two chapters of the Bible a day.

Set a reminder in your phone and resolve to pray together with your spouse for five minutes before bed.

Pick one night of the week and resolve to eat together as a family and to talk about what God is teaching you.

Listen: God uses little steps of faith and obedience to accomplish massive, world-transforming change!

He is in the business of making much from little. So, let us resolve to expect more from less.

Third, in light of all that we have seen:

3. Let us resolve to be grateful

When we look honestly at the world – while there is so much to celebrate – there is also so much to mourn! The older I get, and the more I learn about people, and politics, and the economy, and our history, and – quite honestly – *myself*, the easier it is to succumb to despair. There is SO MUCH that is wrong out there! And there is SO MUCH that is wrong in here! The problem runs deep! What hope is there?

In the same way, Abraham looked at his barren wife, and Isaiah looked at the surrounding Assyrians, and Ezekiel looked at his Babylonian captors, and all of the problems appeared to be UNSOLVABLE! Who could ever set this right?

The angel answers:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.** (Matthew 1:21 ESV)

Don't let your familiarity with this truth prevent you from standing in awe this Christmas: Jesus – the eternal Son of God – came into the world! To SAVE the world!

He didn't need to do that! WE were the ones who made a mess of it! And we made that mess *by rejecting and despising Him!* Humanity DESERVES every bit of the chaos that our sin has caused!

But God – Being rich in mercy! Abounding in steadfast love! Holding Himself to the promises that He made long ago with a faithless, fickle people! – sent His own Son into the world! Jesus left his heavenly throne, and he clothed his divinity with our humanity, and he came to us!

It is so scandalous that sceptics point at the incarnation and mock us! “That’s ridiculous!” they exclaim. “You expect us to believe that your God entered into the womb of a young woman in the Middle East?! You expect us to believe that the only way for this world to be restored was for God to become a man and then to die on the cross for our sins?! You REALLY believe that!?”

Yes.

It is the most ridiculous, preposterous, unbelievable thing that I've heard in my entire life.

And it is true. And it is good news. And it is what this world needs more than anything.

God saw us in this mess that we had made, and rather than leaving us to suffer the consequences that we deserve, He came down into the mess with us. I use the analogy of a sponge when I talk about Jesus because I can't think of a better way to describe what he did. Like a sponge, Jesus soaked up all the filth of our sin, and then he took it to the cross and paid for it! He needed to be a man to pay the price for man's sins. He needed to be God to settle an infinite debt.

Adam couldn't solve this for us.

Abraham couldn't solve this.

David couldn't solve this.

Solomon couldn't solve this.

By the end of the Old Testament, we are convinced that NO ONE can solve this!

You're not ready to receive God's gift of grace until you come to see that YOU can't solve this!

No one can.

No one – except for Jesus. Only Jesus – only the God man – could save us from our sin.

And that's exactly what he did. Here is a gift – here is a grace – that is absolutely, *scandalously* RIDICULOUS! Here is a love that none of us could ever earn, but that all of us have been offered freely and lavishly.

So, this Christmas, let us resolve to be grateful.

And lastly, in light of all that we have seen:

4. Let us resolve to share this good news

If Jesus had not come to us – if the Son of God had not entered into our mess – than we would be lost and without hope.

But he DID come to us!

One of the things that we should be struck by as we reflect on the incarnation is what a powerful example of missions and evangelism it presents for us!

In order to lift us up, Jesus *condescended down*. In order to lead us out of the dark, *he entered into the dark*. In order to redeem our broken story, *he became part of that broken story*.

Listen: When we truly understand Christmas, it helps us to understand just what it will take to lead lost people back home.

Brothers and sisters, are we willing to bring this good news into dark places? That's what Jesus modelled for us.

We simply CANNOT share this good news if we sit back and wait for the world to come to us. We need to go out into the world! Jesus didn't stand back at a distance! He entered in!

Perhaps you're wondering what that might look like. Well, let's jump back to that new year's resolution list and let me propose two more small steps that might help us to make some progress in sharing this good news.

First, I wonder if you've ever stopped to consider what an amazing mission field is right here in this room! Lost and broken people come to this place, and they listen to the sermons, and they accumulate questions. What an *incredible opportunity* that presents to us! Spiritually hungry people who are open to having gospel conversations are sitting in the same room as you are *every Sunday!* So, what if you did this: What if you set apart just one Sunday a month and resolved to find someone at church to invite to your house for Sunday lunch? Think about how *easy this is!* The people that you meet here are people who have already been prepared to hear the good news! They're already asking questions! The fields are ripe for the harvest! All you have to do is make some chili and free up your calendar! If just FIVE of us made this a priority in the new year, I believe God would use that to draw many lost people to Himself. That's my first challenge.

And second, I want to challenge you to invite a neighbour into your home for dinner. When you're getting your mail at the mailbox and talking about the weather, why not invite them to join you later in the week? A shared meal is often the place where life-long relationships are forged. A shared meal is often the place where walls come down and people are able to be honest.

I'm going to hazard a guess that one of the primary reasons why so many of us find evangelism to be so impossibly difficult is because we're trying to share the good news while simultaneously keeping the people that we're ministering to at *arm's length*.

If Jesus had kept *us* at arm's length, none of us would be here this morning.

But he didn't, did he?

Praise God that he didn't! Praise God that the King came down to us! He is Immanuel – God with us. He has come to save his people from their sins.

This is good news that the world needs to hear. So, GO! Tell it on the mountains – over the hills and *everywhere* – that Jesus Christ is born!

Let's pray together.