

Title: The beginning, again
Text: Matthew 1.1-17
Theme: The long-awaited King
Occasion: Christmas Sunday 2012 AM sermon
Series: Matthew #1
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus Christ is the promised King from of old.
Aim: I aim to call my people to hardcore faith in God, who demonstrated that everything in this world was in preparation for the coming of Christ, just as everything now is in preparation for his return.

Read Text:

JR Tolkein's, Lord of the Rings books, were made into movies several years ago that thrilled audiences all over the world. However, the story of that classic tale started with a book called, The Hobbit, which has just now been made into a movie and released into theaters. While there were some who read the books, many did not. Therefore, those who watched the Lord of the Rings trilogy without reading "The Hobbit" were at a disadvantage because they did not have the needed background for the story to make sense.

That same problem affects (in my opinion) the vast majority of people that I know who have read or have attempted to read the Bible. Many people pick the parts of the Bible that they want to read, treating it more like a topical index for devotional or spiritual thoughts instead of the grand narrative that it is. Add to that our own cultural snobbery that assumes that our days are the best days, and that feeds a decidedly dour view of the OT. After all that is really old stuff for the Jews, and we are the church, therefore the NT is all that we really need. So, if someone who has never read the Bible before, asks you about how to read the Bible, and where to start, some of you may suggest that they start in the NT. But, if you do, and they begin with Matthew, then the first thing they read is a genealogy and some of you are thinking, why on earth would you begin the story with a genealogy. Seriously, does this not seem like the most boring way in the world to begin a story? So, instead of capturing your imagination or arresting your emotions, Matthew sounds like an historical geek, working on a PhD thesis for the Smithsonian. If you tell your friend to start reading in Matthew, you may find yourself apologizing for the way it begins and assuring your friend that it sort of starts slow, but it gets better.

We only think like this, if we do not understand the OT and think that we can just open up God's story and start reading anywhere we want, presuming that we are going to understand it. That is why we read these opening lines and are tempted to respond with, "Oh great, a genealogy" instead of responding with amazement, awe, excitement and anticipation. So, you are wondering now, aren't you? What on earth would ever cause you to get jazzed up about a genealogy?

Here is what you need to inform your whole being as you open up Matthew's gospel and begin to read.

1) **Matthew wrote his gospel in view of Genesis.** (biblos geneoseos)

Matthew opens his account of the earthly life of Christ with a single statement that introduces and summarizes these opening 17 verses. As we will see, he organizes the earthly line of Christ around the exile, David and Abraham, both of whom he mentions in this opening verse. He also refers to Christ as Jesus Christ, a name/title that is not used of Christ very much in the gospels. The name Jesus, as we find out later (1.21) speaks of him as Savior, and Christ is the name for “Anointed One” or “Messiah.” Obviously, the names of Christ are very important, but there is more here. Matthew begins his account with the two words, biblos geneoseos, translated as, “the book of the genealogy”. Biblos is the Greek word for book. (explain) Geneoseos (Genesis) speaks of genealogy. When we think of Genesis, we think “beginning”, that is, we think in terms of a starting point. But the very term “genesis” means more than that. Every beginning has a connection. Everything fits together in some way. Nothing just happens by chance. There is no random with God. So, here is the book, the written record of the genealogical account of Jesus Christ, so that you can see how he fits so perfectly into the story line that God has established for this earth. You will see that he is both Son of David (which connects him to the kings – point 2) and the Son of Abraham, which, not only connects him directly to Genesis, but it makes it very clear that Matthew’s opening 2 words are intended to take us all the way back to the book of Genesis itself. So, when Matthew begins his book about Christ, he makes it clear that Christ did not just arrive out of nowhere. His life, his purpose, his mission is rooted in the very story of creation. Our existence and our story is forever linked with him.

When we read the book of Genesis, we tend to think of current debates that we are engaged in and exposed to. We know the controversy about creation vs. evolution, and the debates about the authenticity of the flood. We are unabashedly believers in creation as a direct consequence of the Word of God. We believe that Genesis 1 and 2 are poetic in structure, but, this genre does not make Adam and Eve figurative or symbolic beings who simply represent a tradition, or a tribal story that was constructed over time in an effort to give its people a sense of history. We believe that God actually made a literal man that he (God) named Adam and a literal woman that Adam named as Eve and that they were the first two living human beings on the earth. We know that we are viewed, ironically as intellectual Neanderthals for this view, but we really do not care, how we are viewed. We know that this is debated and argued and we find ourselves in the middle of this discussion all of the time. Therefore, when we read Genesis, we think in terms of these arguments and discussions and that colors the way that we read Genesis. But, Moses did not write Genesis primarily to frame a scientific argument for creationism. He wrote Genesis as a series of genealogical accounts to tell us the history of God’s people on this earth. Israel was being formed as a nation. She had been slaves in pagan, idol-worshipping Egypt for multiple generations. Her recent history would have a profound impact on her national identity. So, God directed Moses to write down an account of her history, so that she would see that Egypt did not define her. Her roots

go all the way back to God himself. Therefore, Genesis was organized around a series of these accounts that speak of “the generations” starting with the generations of the heavens and the earth. (2.4)

Genesis 2.4 – “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.”

Fall – The fall affected the heavens and the earth (universe) because it affected the people who were given stewardship, (that is) authority to reign over the earth. So, now we begin to read the story of man, that is the story of Adam (which means “man”), who is the very first man. The story of man is the story of Adam and his story is bad. Every time we listen to the news, we hear of people stealing stuff from the elderly, people getting shot and killed, threats of violence and other tragedies that overwhelm our capacity to even grieve. This is our history.

Genesis 5.1 – “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” (takes us to Noah) The point being – Adam’s line did not do very well.

Chapter 6 begins with an awful indictment upon the earth. (“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6.5) In other words, the generations of Adam made a colossal, stinking mess!! So, God is going to “start over.”

Genesis 6.9 – “These are the generations of Noah.”

Flood

Genesis 10.1 – “These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth.”

Ok, let’s try this again. This listing takes us to the Tower of Babel. Again, the message is clear: Noah’s line did not do very well.

Genesis 11.10 – “These are the generations of Shem.” Shem gets us to Terah and Abram (v.26)

Genesis 11.27 – “Now these are the generations of Terah.”

From this point on, the story begins to change. Sweeping views of history change to personal stories of promise, faith and struggle. Our view is really brought into focus upon one man, and one family. This man is Abraham. Everything up to this point has been hope and failure, followed by hope and failure. Now, there is hope again, but also failure. Abraham is not only the man with whom God makes a covenant, but God gives him a land. God promises that from Abraham, he will make a nation. But, it was not from all of Abraham’s children, only one, Isaac, who was not his firstborn.

Genesis 25.12 – “These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son...”

As opposed to:

Genesis 25.19 – “These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son:” Isaac had 2 sons, twins. One was the child of the promise, who was not his firstborn.

Genesis 36.1 (9) – “These are the generations of Esau”

As opposed to:

Genesis 37.2 – “These are the generations of Jacob.”

Genesis 37 – 50 tells us the story of Jacob and his 12 sons, who are the heads of what will become the 12 tribes of Israel, whose names are mentioned not only in Revelation 7, but whose names are inscribed on the gates of the New Jerusalem as mentioned in Revelation 21. So, this is really a big deal. Which brings me to our 2nd point.

2) **Matthew wrote his gospel in view of the OT.**

Genesis tells the history of God’s people and God’s promise to give them a land and to give them a king. But, at the end of the book, they have neither. The rest of the story of the OT is the story of how they get a land and how they get a king. The high point of the OT is the story of David. He was the founder of a new dynasty. He was the recipient of a covenant with God. He expanded the borders of Israel to the point where Israel was the dominant power of the Ancient Near East. This uneducated band of slaves had risen to world domination. David, was the king, and he died. And the rest of the OT tells us how they lose their land and lose their king and regain their land, but don’t regain their king. Without a king, they will never keep their land. So, here it is. We want a king and we need a king because we do a really lousy job of trying to be a king. Our kingdoms fall. The dominant storyline of the OT is that of God’s unfaithful people. God’s unfaithful people are lead by unfaithful kings. Every king is a disappointment. The good ones were rarely great, and if they were great, they died. The rest were just one disappointment after another. Their stories, their failures, their sins, their wasted chances, their arrogance leaves us worn out from hoping that it will ever get better. And so, we get to the end of the OT and we are wondering if there is any hope left for God’s people. They were taken out of the land and returned. But, even though they returned, they lost their monarchy and yet, they are still a people. They are still together. And they still have these promises from God. When Christ was born, the Jews are at least living in their land, but they are occupied by, and ruled by another kingdom, which has placed Herod (an Idumean) on their throne. He was not even a Jew and he was reigning as their king. What a joke! What an offensive and catastrophic failure! And yet, God had promised over and over that a king would come from David’s line whose throne would never end. So, when Matthew starts with these words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus

Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”, he has just made a claim. This is the One who is the heir to the throne! He makes the claim, boldly and then, in anticipation of those who would say – prove it! He does! He traces the line of Christ, through Joseph, his legal father, back to David, thus demonstrating that Christ has a legal claim to the throne of David. This is very, very important to Matthew. Notice 1.6. “David THE king.” (a title he does not give to any of the other kings in the list) The point is clear. Christ is in the line of David to be the King that David, nor anyone could never be. But the OT does more than promise a king, an “anointed one” – Christ. We need a Savior. We need “Jesus” (1.21).

3) **Matthew wrote his gospel in view of you.**

This king who was promised, prophesied and born was God, who came with all of the rights and authority that is inherent in being God. But, he did not come to crush, but to save. He is a king who saves the humble because he is a king who builds his kingdom on truth and grace rather than on raw power, fear and intrigue. Therefore, the story of this king is going to be a story of grace. It was the sheer grace of God that called Abraham out of a meaningless life of idolatry as he lived with hundreds of others in the ancient city of Ur. Grace gives to people what they do not deserve, yet is poured out on those who are humble enough to acknowledge their need and receive it. Matthew tells us as much even in this genealogy. In this account, there are five women mentioned (including Mary). Two of them are suspicious and three of them are an embarrassment, unless of course, you understand grace.

The first one, Tamar is the mother of twins. (1.3) The father of the twins, but not the husband of Tamar, is Judah. When you read the account of Jacob (final section of Genesis), you are immediately introduced to Joseph in Genesis 37. His amazing story basically takes us to the end of the book. But, there are two rather shocking things that happen in this story. For one, the story of Joseph is rudely interrupted by the sordid account of Jacob in chapter 38. His first two boys die because they are so evil. Tamar was married to the first, had relations with the second and was promised to the third, but never given to him. She ends up deceiving Judah, who fathers these twins by her. This is a complete moral train-wreck. Here is a man who does about everything wrong that you can imagine. Besides that, he is not the firstborn, Reuben is. So, why does God include the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 and what on earth is she doing in Matthew’s account? Does your family have embarrassing stories? Are their questions that the grandkids ask around the dinner table that make people choke? This is one of those!

I used to think that the story of Judah (Genesis 38) was there in contrast to Joseph (the 11th son of Jacob) so that we could see what kind of a family he came from, so that we would appreciate Joseph’s character. While I still think that is part of it, I am convinced that the real reason is because of something even greater. Joseph is sold by his brothers into Egypt and is used by God to spare the Egyptians and the surrounding peoples from starvation because of his understanding of the Pharaoh’s dream and his organizational leadership. Many years later when Joseph’s brothers

come to Egypt to buy food, Joseph tests them while he keeps his true identity hidden from them. In response to these tests, Judah rises above his brothers. He confesses his sin and he volunteers to be the one who takes the place of his brothers for punishment. He says I will be the substitute. I will bear the guilt. It is that confession that breaks Joseph's heart and he reveals his identity to his brothers and they end up moving to Egypt.

But, at the end of the book of Genesis; at the end of the account of Jacob, Jacob is dying (chapter 49) and he is blessing his sons. He comes to Judah and says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs." Judah, is the line of kings. Because, when God was picking out a line for the real King, he picked it from one who was not only the most unlikely, but from the one who was willing to die in the place of others. So, now, about 2000 years later, here Matthew is showing us the merging together of these two themes. Here is a king, who comes from a very unlikely source, but who has come to take place of others because that is the only way that we can be saved.

What is Tamar doing here? What is Rahab doing here? What is Ruth doing here? None of these three are of Hebrew blood and the fourth was married to a Hittite. What is a Canaanite prostitute doing in this list? What is a Moabite doing in this list? What is an adulterer doing in this list? The line of Christ is characterized by people who for one reason or another, thought that they did not belong, but were able to find out that God's grace is bigger than any of their sins.

The story of Christ is the story of the 2nd Adam who came to start new a line of humanity.

The story of Christ is the story of the King who came to reign by first of all establishing his kingdom in your heart.

The story of Christ is the story of a Savior who came to die on the cross as the final sacrifice for your sin, so that you could be forgiven fully, and finally forever.

The story of Christ is the story of his people, who thought that they were beyond redemption, slaves without hope, people without a home, lost souls who did not belong, but who, by God's grace have been given a salvation that will never end, a family that is forever and kingdom that will never fall. This is Matthew's gospel. The King has come and is coming again.