

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good evening.

When is the last time you heard a sermon on one of the genealogy passages?

I suspect that a common tendency is to rush through them, or perhaps even skip these passages entirely. But, when we pause, and instead of hurrying, linger, we will find that there is a richness to genealogies in the Scriptures, and that is what we will find and hear this evening.

It matters immensely to us, of course, who our parents are, who our grandparents are, who are children are, who are grandchildren are — so, in terms of our own genealogies, we care deeply those ancestors and progeny whom we know best. But chances are, if you have looked long enough — or simply been told by your own family at some point — you have someone famous in your genealogy. Perhaps a King of England; perhaps some celebrity; or perhaps you are descended from someone who arrived on the *Mayflower*. There is someone worthy of remark, if we look long enough, or if we look close enough.

And this is — notice! — how Matthew begins his genealogy of Jesus:

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

Matthew begins right away with the most famous, most well known ancestors — David & Abraham. And he finds them so important even, that he organizes the entire genealogy by Abraham and by David — and by one central event in the life of Israel — Israel's exile to Babylon. From Abraham to David; From David to the exile; from the exile to the Christ.

Matthew has selected the most famous names and organized his genealogy to tell the story of Christ. What is Matthew telling us with this genealogy?

Certainly the most famous, most well known, ancestors mentioned are David and Abraham. But if that's all we take from these two names — just that they're famous — then we'll miss the most important bit. The real question is this: *Why are they so famous?*

When we think of David, stories likely quickly come to mind. He defeated Goliath. He avoided being murdered by King Saul. He betrayed his friend Uriah, murdered him, and stole his wife. He was King. All of these stories shape our understanding of who David is. But none of these is quite what Matthew is going for by including him.

Likewise, when we think of Abraham, stories comes to mind. He rescues Lot. He defeats kings and is recognized by the Priest-King Melchizedek. He is childless, then gains a son by bedding his wife's maidservant. At last Sarah bore Isaac. He takes Isaac to the mountain to sacrifice him. All these stories serve to color in the character of who Abraham was. But none of these is quite what Matthew has in mind by including him.

What then? What makes Abraham and David both so extraordinarily famous? What makes them worthy of inclusion as the two central ancestors of Jesus? What makes them so great?

There are plenty of figures throughout history who have defeated kings, who have been the underdog and defeated the stronger, who have rescued family or loved ones, who have betrayed family and have been found to be adulterers and murderers. What distinguishes Abraham and David from all these other figures, all these other men?

What distinguishes Abraham & David is not anything that either of them did, but rather what God did for them. So — what did God do for both Abraham and for David? God made a promise to Abraham, and God

made a promise to David.

Listen to God's promise to Abraham [Abram]:

[2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2–3, ESV)

God promises Abraham — who has no children — that he will be a great nation. Abraham goes on to have Isaac, who has Jacob, who has *twelve* sons. And these sons multiply, and the people of Israel — a great nation — comes to be. But still there is more — “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

How is it that all the families of the earth could be blessed *in Abraham*? Which of his descendants could possibly be important enough, famous enough, good enough to bless all the families of the earth?

Perhaps you are beginning to see the story that Matthew is telling us. God's promise to Abraham remained unfulfilled — in fact, unable to be filled — until one of his descendants came to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. And now, as Matthew is telling us, that descendant of Abraham — the one who will be a blessing to all the families of the earth — has come.

Jesus *will be* a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Let's turn now to God's promise to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12, 16–17, ESV)

As with Abraham, God makes a multi-layered promise to David. In 1st century Jerusalem, this promise was obviously unfulfilled — they were under Roman occupation. There was no king on the throne in Jerusalem, no kingdom was established, and certainly not one that would be “established forever.” Here, again, God's promise is unfulfilled, seemingly unable to be fulfilled.

Who could possibly rise up to destroy the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel? And yet, that is the very point Matthew makes about Jesus. Look all the way to the very last verses in Matthew's Gospel, to what we know as the Great Commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18–20a)

There, Jesus claims *all authority in heaven and on earth* — far more than Herod or Pilate or Caesar — and there Jesus sends his disciples *to make disciples of all nations*.

Matthew shows us that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and God's promise to David. That is the power and the richness of his genealogy.

But of course there is much more. Every single person whose name was mentioned contributed to the fulfilling of God's promise — whether willingly or unwillingly, whether in faith or in faithlessness to God. This genealogy — whose histories we read in the Old Testament — includes the faithful and the unfaithful, both saints and evil ones, for God uses all things and all people to bring about his glory, his promises, his will.

God is not yet finished fulfilling these promises. For our Lord Jesus will return to will judge the world, raise the dead, and bring us into life forevermore. And on that Day, the faithful — yes, those here — will find their names written in a new genealogy — the Book of Life — the genealogy of all the families of the earth blessed by Jesus. For our Lord Jesus is waiting until that Book is full, finished, complete. Amen, come, Lord Jesus.

✠ **All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.**