

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

Good evening.

**LAST WEDNESDAY WE HEARD** that Matthew's genealogy reveals the promise of Jesus.

Matthew organizes his genealogy around two of the most famous men of the Old Testament. Which two men? Abraham & David are among the most famous not because of anything they have done, but because God made promises to them. God promised that Abraham would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God promised that David would have a kingdom forever.

What is Matthew telling us with his genealogy? That Jesus is the fulfiller of both of these promises. He is the king of the everlasting kingdom, and he is the one through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

And Matthew shows us how in 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*.

Jesus fulfills God's promises to Abraham and to David. No one except the king of an everlasting kingdom can claim to have all authority on heaven and earth. No one except the one who sends the apostles to baptizes and make disciples of all nations could be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

There's more to Matthew's genealogy. His genealogy shows the men and women — both faithful and faithless — who become the very ones who bring about the Messiah, the Christ. God was always at work fulfilling his promise, whether it seemed that way or not.

There's still a genealogy that's in progress, that's being written, that's unfinished. That's the genealogy known as the Book of Life. That's the genealogy that includes the full number of the people of God — the names of all those who will have put their hope and faith in Jesus — and the names of you and me.

**THIS EVENING WE HEARD** that there's no arrival of Jesus, no Christ, without the promised messenger to prepare his way.

There is one more promise that has to take place before Jesus can begin to fulfill God's promises. And that's the fact that there has to be a messenger to prepare the way of the Lord. The Advent story and the Christmas story is incomplete without the birth and ministry of John the Baptist. He is — as Jesus tells us — the Elijah who was to come. He is the messenger who prepared the way of the Lord.

*1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."*

Malachi prophesied these words to God's people 430 years before the birth of John and Jesus. For 430 years, God's people waited for the messenger — for the Elijah who was to come — to prepare the way for the Lord. For 430 years, God's people were being prepared for the arrival of John the Baptist.

God's people knew that the Elijah would come because Malachi had prepared them to expect that. And this is exactly how God has always worked — He promises and prepares. There's no fulfillment without preparation.

Same with Amazon. They "fulfill" the promise of packages even overnight. The click of a button, then the package appears. The preparation takes place in the background, at the fulfillment centers & and on the trucks.

The long-expected Jesus was promised immediately after the Fall, in that Garden of old. There, God promised that the seed of the woman would conquer that ancient serpent. From Joseph to Adam — as Luke's genealogy shows us — we see that the ancient promise of redemption is fulfilled in Jesus. There's no promise without fulfillment; there's no fulfillment without preparation.

And so, by the whole of the Old Testament, God prepares his people — and by extension the whole world — for redemption in the Lord Jesus. And that's why Jesus says that "all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John," for now the Promise — the Lord Himself — is at hand. For the Lord — like long ago in the Garden — walks in their midst and speaks to them, face-to-face.

But just as the serpent long ago twisted God's Word to bring death into the world through Eve and through Adam, so, too, satan seeks to destroy the redemption of mankind.

*12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Violence comes to the kingdom of heaven. Where has being the greatest born of women brought John the Baptist? Where has being the very one who prepared the people for the Lord brought John? Straight to prison. His days are numbered. Soon it will will cost him his head.

What will happen to the Christ, the one whose way was prepared by John? What will happen to the very one who came to fulfill God's promises? Jesus will be lifted up on the cross in death.

But against all the men who conspired against John and who plot against Jesus, and against that serpent satan and his demons, violence will not and cannot prevail. For in the glorious unfolding of redemption, God appointed that the violence against his Son be the very thing that ushers in the kingdom of heaven. Rather than violence bringing an end to redemption, the violence against Jesus is the very thing that begins redemption. For Jesus must die in order that Death might die.

And so he did die, and so Death itself has died. We need not fear death for Life himself has conquered it. For as Death dies, Life himself writes the names of those whom he redeems in his Book of Life. And that Book, that genealogy — more than *A Christmas Carol* — tells the story of Advent and of Christmas.

The coming of Jesus means the end of death and the beginning of life — life that no longer has an end. That is the power and authority and glory of our Lord Jesus.

And yet, even so, our Lord Jesus came in the fullness of time, not in the fullness of his glorious power, but in the fullness of his humility. And so, he assigns and allows John the Baptist the great opportunity, mission, and purpose of *preparation*. The mission and ministry of John the Baptist was good & necessary. John *did prepare* the people.

So, too, Jesus, assigns the ministry that he has entrusted to the Church, to this congregation, to those who have been allotted a share of it. He needs none of us; yet he gives us the great opportunity, mission, and purpose, for his delight and for ours. It is his joy to allot a portion of his ministry to us. If I refuse — or if this congregation refuses — to do our allotted share of ministry, he will simply hand it over to another. But why would I—or any of us—refuse to do what is meant to be our duty and delight?

Our ministry — along with the whole Church — is this: to prepare the way for the Lord's return in glory. Like John the Baptist, we are in the business of preparation. To do so, we will need to be disciplined, to be convicted of the truth, to demonstrate courage, to pray for God's will, and to love and worship God. We do not want to squander the treasures and gifts we have been given for anything other than this mission and ministry.

And so, let us prepare those whom we know for our Lord's return in glory, for the genealogy of all the saints, the Book of Life, remains incomplete. There are names that still must be added. Come, Lord Jesus.

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