

Matthew 1:1-17 - Jesus and God's graciousness

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be reading Matthew 1, 1-17, page 965. This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.

Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nashon. Nashon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.

[1 : 1 6] Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Ammon, Ammon the father of Jeziel, and Jeziel the father of Jeconiah, and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Elisha, Elisha the father of Mathan, Mathan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus, there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah. Some days the reading is harder than the sermon, right?

So thank you to Daisy for doing the reading for us. Let's pray and ask the Lord for his help. Heavenly Father, we are conscious that every part of the Bible is breathed out by you, and it's not just what you have said in the past, but it's what you are saying today to us by your Spirit through these words.

And that's true of a list of names in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, as it's true of some of the deep truths of Romans 6 that we've been looking at this term.

[2 : 5 3] And so we pray with an eagerness that we would listen this morning, and that you might speak to us, encourage us, and help us, and bless us, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, the claim of the Bible is that history is not random.

Time and events aren't just spinning out of control, as they might seem to you or seem to me this week, but rather all things are in God's hands.

All times are in God's hands. God is the Lord and sovereign over all history, the governor over all circumstances. Now, I don't think that's a very surprising claim.

None of you are probably thinking, oh, I didn't really think I'd think to hear that in church. No. I think if someone believes in God, that is basically what they believe about God. They believe that God is in charge, right?

[3 : 50] That he can rule over situations and circumstances. It's why people who claim to not believe in God at all still get angry with God when things don't work out, as they thought they should do.

Because their assumption is that God, if he is there, should be doing something, should be in charge of something. The Bible's claim is richer, then, than just the idea that God is sovereign or in charge.

The Bible's claim is that God rules over all things in a particular kind of way. A way that reflects his character. A character which is exposed to us in a set of promises.

Promises that he has told to us. So, while God is free to do whatever he wants in whatever way he pleases, still God in his freedom has chosen to bind himself to promises.

Promises that reflect who he is. Now, again, that's not that surprising. Unless you think God is some kind of impersonal force out there in the universe that can't really be known at all, then you have to believe that God works in a way which makes him knowable.

[5 : 00] That reflects his character. I think it would be fair to say that Muslims believe that about Allah. Allah has made promises to people. Promises of prosperity and forgiveness for the earnest and the repentant.

And then he is bound to keep those promises. But that's then where the similarities end. Because uniquely in the Bible, we're told that not only is God suffering and in charge of all things, not only are we told that God has bound himself to certain promises in his freedom, but we are told that those promises reflect a characteristic of God, a thing about God that we would not otherwise know.

And that is that God is gracious. His promises are promises of grace. This is what makes this God, the God to whom the world belongs, the God of the Bible, this is what stands him apart from all others, is that his promises are not made to the deserving, but the undeserving.

His promises are not made to the earnest and the religious, but they're made to the rebel and the irreligious. In other words, the God of the Bible and his total freedom ties the outcome of the universe, not to our obedience, but to his generosity and grace.

That is a unique claim. That's a one-in-one of history. That the almighty God bound himself to a promise to save and rescue people from this broken world, not by their merits as credit for their behavior, but by his kindness and his grace.

[6 : 36] And that promise of grace runs all the way through the Bible, from the beginning to the end. And it gets fleshed out at key points. And Matthew starts his book by pointing to the two biggest articulations and expansions of that promise, one to Abraham and the other to David.

Now, we've not got time to say everything that could be said about those two characters of history, but let's just think about Abraham firstly. Abraham, you might know, is called the father of God's people. Abraham is the first to receive the articulation of this promise of grace.

God says to him, I will bless you, he says. I will make you into a great nation that cannot be numbered. I will make your name great, and through you, the world will be blessed.

This, if you like, is the, I will be your God, you will be my people promise of the Bible. And what's remarkable about that promise is there's no if.

There's no if you're good. There's no if you'll keep my rules. There's no if you're earnest enough. There's no if you pray enough. Instead, when the point comes in the Bible for God and Abraham, if you like, to shake hands on the covenant, they do that by cutting animals in half and separating them and walking through them.

[7 : 51] It was how the ancients sealed a covenant. And the idea was, you know, if I break this covenant, make my body like one of these, right? I am sealing it in blood. And when the point came for God and Abraham to do that, Abraham is fast asleep and doesn't do it.

Because the promise is a gracious promise. God walks through the animals, not Abraham. God shakes on it. God says, I will meet the requirement of generosity and the requirement of obedience, says God.

God. The second character in Matthew's opening verse is David. And similarly, God speaks to David and promises him an eternal throne. Weirdly, this happens for David when David is saying to God that he's going to do something for him.

So David says to God, I'm going to build you a temple. You know, I live in a house, you live in a tent, God. So I'm going to make you a temple. A gesture of his commitment and passion for God.

But God says, no, listen, don't you build me a house. I am going to build you a house, he says. I will do it, says God. I'm going to be your king.

[9 : 01] You will be in my forever kingdom. This is about me doing this for you, not you doing this for me, says God to David. Now, if you look at Matthew chapter 1, verse 1, you'll see then that it starts with this huge, huge claim.

Matthew writes, this is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, son of David, the son of Abraham. Now, at first glance, you might just think, oh, that's just a historical note.

But hopefully now you can see it's much bigger than that. Matthew's point, right from the opening verse of his book, is that the Jesus that you will meet as you read his book, the Jesus that he met, that he is witness to, Jesus is the promised king, the Messiah, the Christ.

He is the king that David was promised, the fulfillment of David's promise, and the fulfillment of Abraham's promise, the name. And Matthew's claim is that this promise of grace, which has run all the way through the scriptures, comes now down to this one man.

One man. The unique man. This claim that God has bound himself to a promise where he saves and rescues is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, son of Abraham, son of David.

[10 : 21] This is the funnel, right? My hope is that you might forget everything else, but you might at least remember that. Can you remember when we got a parachute out in church and we were throwing balls into it and saying weird names?

That is because all of it comes down to this one man. Everything in history, all the great and gracious promises of God are met in Jesus, the Messiah. Abraham, David, and all of those names funnel down to this one man, the man Christ Jesus.

And that man, that man delivers God's gracious promise because he substitutes himself in the place of his people and meets both the holy requirements of the holy God and also the obedience requirements of his people.

And so he is able to keep the promise. We're going to come on to the list of names in a moment, but let's just see whether we've reckoned with this for a moment. Have you really thought about this point that Matthew is making?

You know, this claim that all of history is funneling down to Jesus, the keeper of God's gracious promise. It means that for everybody who went before, all of their hopes and expectations that God would be gracious come down to Jesus.

[11 : 36] I want to kind of labor this for a moment and just try and impress this upon you. Turn, if you can, in your Bibles to Acts chapter 3. It's on page 1085. The words will come up on the screen behind me, but I think it's better to look at them in your Bibles.

Page 1095, Acts chapter 3. Peter here, speaking to a crowd of Jewish people who have seen him heal a lame man. Listen to what he says.

We'll pick it up in verse 19 of chapter 3. He writes this, or he says this, it's written, Listen, repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah who has been appointed for you, even Jesus.

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.

You must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people. Do you see this?

[12 : 43] Peter's claim is extraordinary. Peter's claim is that for everybody who considers themselves part of the Jewish nation, if they don't trust in Christ, they will be cut off from the very thing they think they are a part of.

They'll be cut off from amongst God's people. Peter's claim then is that Jesus is the Messiah, that heaven has received him for a time before he returns. And in that time, in that time of waiting, membership of God's people depends on your response to one man, the man Christ Jesus.

And verse 23, if you don't listen to him, it's not just that things will rumble on as they always have, but you will be cut off from the very people you say you belong to. Access to God's gracious promise through one man, Jesus Christ.

Promises to Abraham and David now exclusively available through Jesus. Now my point is, if that's what it was like for everybody then, how much more is it like for us now?

All of our hopes and expectations that God would be gracious to us. Your hope and expectation that your sins will be forgiven, that you will have life with him, eternal life with him when you die.

[13 : 58] Your hope and expectation that you will not be lost, that you will not be condemned. All of those hopes come down to Jesus because all of history comes down to him. And then all of my life comes down to him too.

So much so that the most important thing about you or me this morning is not the colour of our skin, it's not the country we were born in, it's not the language that we speak or the job that we do or the relationships that we have.

The central thing is what do I make of this one man? And what does he make of me? Everything else in your life is a sideshow to that.

That's why Christmas has the potential to be so good for you. To laser focus you on Jesus Christ who stands at the centre and asks you this question.

Will you let this God be your God? Will you see that all the rivers of life and existence flow from him and to him and for him? And will you bow the knee to him?

[14 : 59] That's verse one. Let's have a look at the list of names together. I want to show you just three things from this list of names. We're not going to work through each one in turn. Let's think about perfect timing.

Perfect timing. I think this seems to be the main point of the list. So if you jump to the note at the end of the list in verse 17, Matthew tells you why it's there. He says, thus there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.

Now, what's quite interesting here is that if you work through the list and if you cross reference back to the Old Testament, you'll see that in order to make these neat number 14s, Matthew has actually missed a few characters out.

Not everyone in the kingly line gets a mention. If you want to kind of nerd out particularly, you can work out which ones they are. Don't please do it now, but you can do it later. And you can come and talk to me about it afterwards if you want to.

But the point is not that Matthew is lying to you, right? He's not trying to deceive you. He's not hoping that you wouldn't notice that he'd miss them out. Rather, what he's trying to do is he's making a point. He's a preacher, right?

[16 : 05] He's making a point and he's trying to show you the symmetry that Abraham to the rise of King David, the rise of King David came at just the right time.

14 generations, give or take. King David's kingdom to the decline in exile, that was just the right time. Just the time that God had appointed it. 14 generations, give or take.

The exile to the arrival of the fulfillment of Abraham and David, just the right length of time. 14 generations. Now you can see why that's so important to Matthew as you read his book.

One of the things that goes on in the Gospels is that people object to Jesus and call into question his background and his heritage. Some people claim he's demonic. And others say things like, you know, who even is this guy?

All right. We know he's a carpenter. Well, why are we listening to him? And yet here at the beginning of Matthew's book, his point is, no, listen, if you've been carefully thinking about this, if you've been reading a Bible up until this point, you know the time is exactly right for the Messiah.

[17 : 13] This is exactly the right time. This is the covenantal equivalent of, you know, walking up to the crossroads at Salisbury Road and Harvest Road just as the lights turn green.

You know, a green man comes on and you don't even break your stride. You just walk diagonally across. You're like, you could fly across. Right? I nailed that. Right? That's what's going on here.

And just think about what is involved for that. Right? Think about what is involved in making that happen for Jesus. Not just a bit of swift timing between the walk between the underground station and the traffic lights, but 42 generations, thousands of years, different battles, different countries, families, people, the rise and fall of whole empires, earthquakes, famines, prophets, priests and kings.

And yet just at the right time, Ram became the father of Amminidab, who became the father of Nashon. And then later, Rehoboam followed Solomon and himself was followed by Abijah and Asa. All to come down to Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

Messiah, God, keeping his promise with impeccable timing. Mind-blowing control over the course of all of history. The exact right time for God to send the Messiah.

[18 : 35] I have to confess, and this is not a good thing, but at times I think I can get, and maybe you feel this, I can get weary of this sort of application of the Bible. You know, God always keeps his promises, that kind of thing.

Can feel a bit twee, kind of a bit pedestrian. Sometimes it can feel a bit unkind when people say it, you know. God always keeps his promises. But that is, I think, the point here.

I think this is the big point. Matthew is at pains to show you from the 14, 14, 14, that God keeps his promise at the right time. And why would he, with such urgency, make a point that you probably knew already?

Well, I think it's because what's going on in Matthew 1 is that God, by the Spirit, is inviting you and me to live all of our lives based on the reality that God keeps his promise with perfect timing.

In other words, you're being invited, you know, to use a confusing sentence in English, but to put all your eggs in this basket. None of us put eggs in a basket, but it's a kind of Englishism, isn't it?

[19 : 39] You know, that the God, the God who is there, who can be trusted, the one who rules and reigns, that God has a promise of grace that comes to pass with perfect timing. You don't need a plan B for your life, right?

You don't need to hedge your bets. You don't need to put half a toe in the water to use some other English idioms. You can just jump right in. Just at the right time, just at the expected time, just at the time it was needed, Christ came and he will come again.

So let me ask you, let Matthew ask you, let the Spirit ask you from Matthew 1, are you living like that is true? Will you let this God be your God?

Will you bow the knee to the God who keeps his promise? And will those promises sink deep into your heart, deep enough to transform and shape your life and your priorities?

You know, I think so often we live our lives as if life belongs to the strong and the brave. When really you know from Matthew 1 that life belongs to the God of grace who keeps his promise to the undeserving.

[20 : 45] That's what life is about. God with perfect timing bringing to pass his plan of grace and mercy. That's the first point. Second point then, generous grace.

One of the other standout things about Matthew's genealogy is the mention of four women. Bible genealogies normally link the refrain, the father of, the father of, the father of, the father of. And this is no different except for four occasions.

So verse three, look down at it. Judah was the father of Perez and Zariah, whose mother was Tamar. Then again in verse five, twice. Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed, the father of Jesse. Then again in verse six. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, to give her a name.

Now what's notable is not just that Matthew includes these women, which on its own would be quite surprising, but that there are lots of women who could have been included in the genealogy, but they don't get mentioned.

[21 : 47] So the question is why these ones? Why these women? Well, because Matthew wants to point to you the grace of God, because of who these women are. These women are not the squeaky clean women of the Old Testament, not at all.

Tamar, for example. She's the daughter-in-law of Judah. She'd been married to two of his sons, both of whom died. She was a foreigner to the people of God. But what's noted here is that she took matters into her own hands.

She tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into having sex with her by dressing as a prostitute. She got pregnant and gave birth to twins, Perez and Zariah. They don't put that in the children's Bibles, right?

It's not a story from the children's Bible stories that you'll be reading with your kids if you have them. But it's here in Matthew's genealogy. Rahab is here as well.

She too was a prostitute living on the wall of Jericho at the time of the conquest. She also was a foreigner to God's people and not someone you'd have expected to have been included. How do you know that Rahab is part of God's people and became a believer?

[22 : 53] How do you know? Well, as the story is recorded, you know because she tells a lie, right? She lies about the location of the spies. That would be her testimony.

When did you become a Christian, Rahab? Well, I told a lie and that's how I became a Christian. What about you? Is this showing her allegiance to God? She's not a squeaky clean person at all.

And yet she had faith in God and trusted in him. And Matthew includes her too. Ruth was a Moabite. She also was a foreigner. She joined God's people from outside the nation after marrying into a family who were on the run from Israel.

She was poor. She was an outcast. And she was related to the family that had done the opposite of what you were supposed to do when times were hard. Matthew includes her. Matthew doesn't mention Bathsheba by name, instead calling her by her husband's name.

Presumably, I think, to underline the fact that he was a Hittite and not an Israelite, another outsider. And Bathsheba had sex with King David despite being married to another man. Possibly against her will, we don't know.

[23 : 57] She falls pregnant. David kills her husband. Takes her as his wife. And the baby dies. Matthew references that story as well. And what are you to make of all of that?

Well, these women are here to teach us this unique characteristic of the God of the Bible. God is full of grace. He is full of grace. Without condoning any of this, without being morally responsible for the wickedness, still he can include the broken and the sinful, the weak and the forgotten in his plans of grace and mercy.

God's promise does not depend on the quality of the lives of God's people, but on his mercy. This is brilliant if you think about it.

If you or I have been writing out Matthew chapter 1 just on our own, with our own imaginations, you and I would pick out the best people in the Old Testament, wouldn't we?

And these are the stories that we would miss out. We'd make heroes of the strong and the perfect. Not the weak and the sexually deviant. But not God.

[25 : 03] Because remember, the free promises of God, which reveal what he is like, show that he is gracious. They are gracious promises. And if you want people to understand that, then you've got to remind them over and over again of the kind of people who are involved in its fulfillment.

So maybe you this morning, maybe you just think, I am too weak to be a Christian. Perhaps you feel like you're a terrible Christian.

Perhaps you think, look, if the people sat around me this morning know where I've been this week in my thoughts or my actions or my words, they would not want to sit next to me in church.

And you can think of all the terrible ways you've let God down. Maybe you feel them acutely. Perhaps you just think, I don't know as much as I should. I've been a Christian for years and I don't know my Bible.

Perhaps you recognize you don't live as you should. Listen, the truth is, right? You are, I am a terrible Christian, right? We are too weak.

[26 : 05] We are too sinful. We are too wayward. We are too double-minded to deserve God's promise. But still, God's promise is for the undeserving. God's promise is for the Rahabs, the Tamars, the Bathshebas and the Ruths.

It's for the abused. It's for the broken. It's for the sexually immoral and the wayward. It's for the outsider and the outcast. And notice it's not to cover up those stories or pretend they don't matter.

It's not to leave us in that mess. It's not to condone the immorality either. But it is to eclipse them with redemption. The perfectly timed, generous grace of God.

Again, let's just pause here for a moment. Let's try and labor this if we can. I think, if you think like me, we tend to think, don't we, that life starts perfectly and then we mess it up.

And it gets kind of worse and worse as the years go by. But notice in the story of the Bible, the story of the Christian is, it doesn't start perfect, right? Perfection comes at the end.

[27 : 10] And God's redeeming promise to you, to me, is so good that it means that you will be able to look back at your life. And even the worst things that have happened in your life, the sin in your life, the fact that you were a prostitute on the walls of Jericho, the fact that you tricked your father-in-law into having sex with you, whatever it is, you will look back and see that that is the location of God's grace and his mercy to you.

You know what? I think we think, don't we, because of the way we think about our life, is that we will try and airbrush out some of the things that have happened to us. But actually, the gracious promise of God means that those, even those most painful things, are the master brushstrokes of the great artist who is painting something beautiful and wonderful by his grace.

And you and I get to be part of it. God's promise is not for the deserving. It's a promise of generous grace. Thirdly, and finally, an important distinction.

Now, this is a little trickier to see, but I think it's important. It kind of sets up next week, right? So let me read to you verse 16 again. And Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

Now, that verse stands out, not just because it's the conclusion ending with Jesus, but because notice that Joseph isn't actually called the father of Jesus. He's called rather the husband of his mother.

[28 : 43] Do you see that? And that's what sets up next week's passage, where Matthew is clear to underline that Joseph and Mary didn't consummate their marriage until after the birth of Jesus, because Jesus was not his son.

As verse 18 puts it, she is pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Now, that means that Matthew wants you to know, wants me to know that this both is and isn't Jesus' family tree at the same time.

Jesus is both from this line and not from this line. Jesus is both fully human with the fallen humanity before him, and yet stands apart because he's born through the Spirit.

He is the second Adam of Romans 5 that we were looking at a few weeks ago. This is such an important distinction, isn't it? Jesus is one of us, one with us. He has the same flesh and blood, the same human weakness and frailty.

He is the same crying baby who is hungry for his mother's milk. He has the same stumbling first steps. He still has to learn to speak. He still hit his thumb with a hammer as he was learning to drive in nails.

[29 : 46] And yet he is different to us because he is the Son of God, born of a woman but eternally begotten of the Father. Jesus here at this point, he is in flesh arriving in the creation that he created.

The God of eternity past who spoke into being the world in which we live. The God who sustains it now surrendered to a small, helpless baby.

And all so that you and I can receive the gracious promise made to Abraham and David. It's a list, isn't it, really, of chapter one of could have beens and would have beens.

And we don't need another one of those, do we? We need somebody who is both like us, enough to understand the human experience and relate to us and take on from us all of our sin and our wickedness.

But we need someone who also is different to us. Someone with the atoning power of God himself. Someone whose sacrifice would be infinitely valuable in the eyes of the Father.

[30 : 55] And that's who Jesus is, God in flesh, to make good on his promise of grace. And that's what we're going to be finding out more about next week. Let me pray as we finish.

Amen. Amen. So may we just take a few moments of quiet. You can pray in your own heart. Thank God for his perfect timing, for his generous grace.

For the person of the Son, come to fulfill his promise. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we come to you.

As the ruler and Lord over all history. He has revealed himself in promises. Promises unlike any other.

Promises of grace and mercy and kindness. Promises which now rule over all of history and all of our lives. Promises centred on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 28] And we come and thank you for your grace and your kindness. Thank you that men and women, people like us, can find a place in your covenant of grace.

As we come to the Lord Jesus. Oh, we pray please. Over these weeks of Christmas, might you fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. We want to pray that we would see him to be the treasure that he really is. And that we would live lives for his praise and his glory. As we pray in his name.

Amen. Amen.