

Congregation, I learnt many years ago, that despite the difficulty of getting your tongue around a long list of names in Scripture, it's never just a list. So somewhere, we need to ask, "Why has the Holy Spirit caused Matthew to begin this gospel with a long list of names, which shows the genealogy of Jesus?" We don't need to go to ancestry.com and pay a monthly subscription to get a genealogy, that at best only goes back a few centuries, we have it before us, black on white.

Perhaps first and foremost, Matthew, writing primarily to Jews, the inclusion of this list is for their encouragement. And why not? It goes all the way back to their forefather Abraham, who God called out of a pagan culture to be the beginning of His covenant people. It also mentions David, to whom God promised kingship forever. So plenty of encouragement for the Jews already in the opening verses. But I suggest that there is also plenty of encouragement for the Gentiles, those outside of the Jewish nation and that includes us.

So this morning I wish to show that by asking who Jesus is, and then digging a little into this list. Matthew describes some unusual characters and events throughout his gospel, even in this chapter. There is a virgin who is pregnant by the agency of the Holy Spirit. An angel appears to prevent a young man from setting aside an unwed mother. Then the angel picks the name of that child and declares that he will be the Saviour of God's people. It all revolves around this child Jesus. But who is he?

A storm threatens to swamp a boat, drowning everyone on board and Jesus stands up, rebukes the wind and the waves, and they stop at once. His disciples see it and ask, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Matt. 8:27; Mark 4:41). He forgives sins and the bystanders ask, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49). He enters Jerusalem attended by a crowd that lays cloaks and palm branches on the road before him. They call out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and the city asks, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21:10).

At his trial, the high priest of the Jews asks, "Are you the Christ?" Pontius Pilate asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Matt. 26:63; 27:11). Wouldn't it just be great if more people asked this simple question as we speak about Jesus. He is the Son of David—born the king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the son of Abraham who comes from pagan background, and yet because of God's calling, will bring blessing to the nations (1:1). He is born of the Holy Spirit (1:18). He is Immanuel—God with us (1:23).

This child, receives names such as Jesus and Immanuel not because they were fashionable or manly, but because they were fraught with significance. And the reason he came and was born the way he was is to save his people from their sins as his name suggests. Jesus is a Greek name, but in the Hebrew it is Joshua meaning the Lord (Yahweh saves.) It would have immediately reminded the Jews of how Joshua succeeded Moses and led Israel into the Promised Land.

In Joshua's day, the Lord saved his people physically and materially by giving them their land and ending their years of wilderness wandering. However, Jesus's coming begins to address the problem that lies at the root of all pains and sorrows in this world, sin. And that is what we in the genealogy. Jesus descended from the line of Jewish kings. Matthew names fifteen of them, from David to Jeconiah (v11).

And although Jesus came from a noble line, this line of kings was not all righteous. About half of the kings were men of faith including David, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Yet even among the men of faith, some committed striking sins. Jehoshaphat entered into alliances with wicked men (2 Chron. 20:35–37). In foolish pride, Hezekiah showed the treasures of Israel to her powerful enemies, who later plundered them (2 Kings 20:12–18).

After years of successful rule, Uzziah became proud and dared to usurp the role of a priest. He entered the Lord's temple to burn incense on the altar (2 Chron. 26:1–21). Oh, and let's not forget King David – adulterer and murderer. These so called men of faith also needed to be saved. About half the kings in the genealogy were truly wicked. For example, Ahaz worshiped the pagan gods of Assyria. He practiced human sacrifice. He killed one of his own sons. He stripped the gold and silver from the temple and gave it to other kings. He defiled the Lord's altar and installed pagan altars instead (2 Kings 16). Rehoboam and Jeconiah were almost as bad and Manasseh was worse. Indeed, Manasseh "did more evil than the nations" that the Lord drove out of Canaan. He promoted the worship of idols and murdered innocent people (2 Kings 21:9–18).

Matthew doesn't just mention Jesus' genealogy to show us that Jesus descended from a human line, but that his forebears also needed to be saved. Isn't that also what Paul said in Romans 3:25? "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,

through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished”

But it is not just the men either. V3 Tamar, the daughter in law of Judah, the son of Jacob played the role of a prostitute in Gen 37. Vv 5-6, Rahab, the mother of Boaz, the prostitute from Jericho, who helped Israel’s spies (Josh 2,6). Ruth, the Moabite who was adopted into the family of Boaz (Ruth 1-4). And then we have Bathsheba, an adulteress, the mother of Solomon, the with of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11–12). By the way, of the four mentioned, only Tamar was a true Jew.

You see, when you start digging into this genealogy, it is quite clear that Jesus’ genealogy is probably not all that different than our own. The last part of the genealogy mentioned shows that Israel was reaping the consequence of their sins (vv 11-16). The Assyrians dethroned Israel’s king and Babylon conquered Judah and deported its leaders, and declared the pitiful remnant to be their slaves.

Jesus’ family lost their rank as kings. They lost their wealth and land, and if it were not for God’s gracious intervention on several occasions throughout their history, they would have lost their identity. Jesus’ family like any family have members who have made a mess of their lives and who some members would rather disown. But they too are people, who, with true repentance, that Jesus came to save and we should not forget it.

But thankfully, Jesus came as Promised, the Christ, the Messiah as Matthew mentions. This title means he was anointed, set apart and to be empowered by God for a special task. In Israel, priests and kings were always anointed; prophets were also anointed from time to time.

In Jesus’ day, “Christ” came as One anointed with God’s strength to deliver the people. Unfortunately, the Jews thought of the Christ as a king because they hoped for a military victory and release from Rome. But Matthew’s Gospel gradually reveals that Jesus was anointed for a far greater victory than that. In fact, Jesus became the ultimate Prophet, Priest and King. He is the prophet, anointed to tell the truth about humanity and himself. He is the priest, anointed to offer a perfect sacrifice, none other than himself to remove the guilt of our sin. He is the king, anointed to defeat our greatest foes, sin and death and reign forever.

He was anointed in this way because we cannot defeat sin and death. He became the sinless sacrifice needed to redeem us, for we cannot atone or compensate for our sin. Unfortunately, when Jesus failed to deliver the Jews in the way they expected, many concluded that he must not be the Messiah. There is a danger when people fashion Jesus after their own ideals and expectations, for when it somehow doesn’t work out, they conclude that he cannot be the Saviour. Now of course there are times when things don’t turn out the way we have expected of even prayed for, but Jesus is both Saviour and Lord. Did Jesus himself not pray, “Father not my will but yours be done!”

Now we have mentioned that Jesus follows the lines of the Kings. But Jesus is not just any king. He is the Son of David (1:1). Jesus is called “Son of David” nine times in Matthew. He is the long-promised heir of David as this chapter clearly shows (1:1, 20). Through him Israel hoped for restoration. They expected a king to heal the land by removing the Romans and other pagans who defiled it.

They also expected healing for the people, one by one. Early in his ministry, in Galilee, two blind men followed Jesus and called out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (9:27). Once a Canaanite woman approached him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (15:22). Again, just before Jesus entered Jerusalem, “two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ (20:30–31).

There is a pattern in these encounters. First, the outsiders of Jewish society, the down and outs, and the occasional Gentile appeal to Jesus as Son of David and are healed. Yet, the crowds “generally respond to these healings with doubt.” For example, when Jesus cast demons out of a man who was blind and mute, so he could talk and see, the people asked, “Could this be the Son of David?” (12:23). The religious authorities respond with anger (21:15) and accuse Jesus of blasphemy (12:22–32). Even when the children began to shout praise to him, “Hosanna to the Son of David” the chief priests and scribes became indignant and asked Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” That is to say, “Tell them to stop.”

Jesus replied that he did hear and saw God’s purpose in it, for Psalm 8 says, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Matt. 21:14–16). Oh congregation, what a blessed Saviour we have. He offers his strength to the weak and wounded. He offers hope to the yearning heart, healing to those who need to be healed and above all

forgiveness to all who truly repent. The difficult of getting people to embrace Jesus as the healer of relationships and forgiver of sins is that so many people in our society have everything and hence they do not see the need for Jesus in their life. Nevertheless, the call continues to go out, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 ESV).

Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews, so he starts with Abraham, the father of the Jews. Yet, having said that, Matthew expects us to know that Abraham was a pagan, a Gentile too, before God called him. God chose him in order to establish his people, Israel. God's first and greatest promise to Abraham says, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Gen. 12:2).

God also promised Abraham that through his offspring "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Gospel of Matthew ends with this very idea. Jesus will bless the nations. He commands the apostles to make disciples of "all nations" (28:19). I dare say that most of us here, if not all are the descendants of Gentiles, not Israelites. We were outside the covenant, strangers and aliens to God. Today, we are the sons of Abraham, sons and daughters of the covenant through the grace of God that reaches out to the lost.

To be a Christian was never our birthright. Yet, God in his grace has called us into a relationship with him through His son Jesus. Whether we are Aussies, or English or Kiwis or some other nationality, we have every reason to marvel at this grace. What a great blessing to be made a child of Abraham, all by grace, through the Lord Jesus Christ. What a great reason for worship. God included all sorts of people in Jesus' genealogy, some were ok, many were not. None were worthy, yet God brought them in.

Likewise, let us remember to welcome all into this family of God. Those who seem worthy and those who seem unworthy, into it. God's has given us a Saviour who can save all. So the first seventeen verses of Matthew are not just a list. Rather, it is a list showing God's amazing love through the ages to bring about the birth of his Son, to save people from every nation into his eternal kingdom. May that love encourage us to share with others. Amen.