

Congregation, it's always a little difficult to write a sermon on just one verse, yet that is what I hope to do this morning. There are two things that we need to keep in mind. The first is that the good news of Jesus Christ's coming would mean nothing unless you understand the bad news first. And then secondly we also remember that a text without a context is a pretext, so let me start by putting this verse into its context. And the broader context is the whole of the Old Testament. In fact, except for the first two chapters of Genesis, it is mostly bad news. And if it were not for God's gracious intervention with his OT people, the news would have been far worse.

In the first two chapters of the Bible we read that God created all things good, but then already in the third chapter, man decided that he wanted to be God and the bad news started when they disobeyed. With Adam and Eve's sin, death came into the world as God had promised - and it doesn't get worse than that! We also note however, that immediately after the fall into sin, God promised a Saviour and it is the Saviour Jesus Christ whom Mat 1:1 is referring to.

Now in Matthew's gospel, the genealogy of Jesus Christ goes all the way back to Abraham, following Joseph's ancestors, or as some scholars suggest the throne succession, whereas Luke's genealogy in Chapter 3, goes all the way back to Adam, following the physical succession. Well, Matthew writing to Jews, begins with Abraham. The mention of this name to the Jews would immediately bring to mind all those wonderful OT promises of God for his people.

Let me briefly review with you those promises, (Gen 12:2-3), "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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"

And again, (Gen 13:15-16) "...All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted..."

And again, (Gen 17:6-7) "I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

And again, (Gen 22:17-18) "...I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." What beautiful promises! How wonderful they are!

Although these promises were partially fulfilled in and through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and those after them, there was still a lot that was left undone. Unfulfilled to date was God's promise that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." And, though Israel was a numerous people, they still were not as many as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore or the dust of the earth.

And then the mention of Jesus being the Son of David would have immediately reminded the Jews of the promises God had made to King David through Nathan the prophet in 2 Sam 7:11-16; "... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom ...and he will be on the throne forever..." And so on. The great covenant God was not dead and He had not forgotten his people. Though some of these promises had been fulfilled in the reign of King Solomon, every Jew was waiting and looking for an even more glorious fulfilment in the Messiah.

So Matthew, beginning the way he does, is stating that Jesus is the longed-for, hoped-for, and prayed-for Messiah, the One who fulfils all those glorious promises given to Abraham and David. The narrow context also shows that things were not as they should be. God had graciously returned his people to the Promised Land after seventy years of exile in Babylon.

But things were never quiet the same. Although the exiled people had returned to the land, they were still living as a people who were under a curse, which is actually the last word in the OT in the book of Malachi. They were still under the authority of others and self rule by their own king was only something they could dream about. Yes, the temple was rebuilt but the glory of God had not returned as it did in the days of Solomon! All this was the direct result of disobedience to God's law and rule. The post-exilic people of God failed to honour God and listen to His prophets.

Malachi records the unfaithfulness of the priests and the people. The priests dishonoured God by offering blemished sacrifices, left-overs and by not teaching the law. The people dishonoured God by divorcing the wives of their youth and then their subsequent inter-marriage with daughters who worshipped foreign gods. They robbed God by failing to tithe

as the law commanded. On the political front they were also experiencing God's displeasure. Politically they were still in exile. They were still under the rule of the Persians. After the Persians, during the four hundred years of silence, Alexander the Great took control in 332 BC. In 323 BC when Alexander died, the region was divided up amongst his generals. After that period there were a number of smaller dynasties in control, until finally in 63BC the expanding Roman empire took control.

So in many ways, because of their own disobedience, the Jews were experiencing the curse that Malachi had spoken about in the last verse of his book. And so after what seems like four hundred years of silence, God speaks to his people through his servant Matthew. From a curse to the greatest blessing of all time! "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Here we have the genealogy of the Saviour! Now as much as we may perhaps struggle to understand why Matthew wrote the genealogy he did and Luke wrote it the way he did, the first century Jews to whom Matthew wrote wouldn't have had any trouble understanding what Matthew is saying here in the opening verse.

Finally, after 400 years of suffering, the Saviour is coming. God was fulfilling his plans as described in the OT. The Messiah has finally arrived, the one that was promised by the OT prophets. The great deliverer and redeemer of his people was coming! For centuries they dreamed and spoke with longing of His coming. During the exile in Babylon they would have longed for this day to come! And now that the Messiah had come all that was wrong in the world would be set right.

God's people would be set free from oppressors. The rich would no longer tyrannise the poor. The lame would begin to leap and jump and dance for joy. The blind would see a world of vivid colour. The deaf would listen to the songs of birds and the music of harps. The deserts of Israel would be turned into fragrant gardens. Swords and spears would be hammered into ploughs and hoes. Enemies would become friends. Jerusalem would be at the centre of the world, and all the kings and rulers of the earth would come there to worship Israel's King.

This was wonderful news. In starting with these opening words, Matthew is beginning his Gospel with a message of hope and good news for his fellow Jews. Matthew actually elaborates on Jesus as the son of Abraham in the story of the wise men (Mt 2:1-12) from the east who come to worship He "who has been born king of the Jews" (Mt 2:2). When we see those wise men bowing before and worshipping the Child, we see them joining the throng of people who count Abraham as their father. It is through Jesus as the son of Abraham that Gentiles are also blessed, and that God's eternal promises are kept and not broken.

When one looks at the genealogy in Matthew, it shows God's love for His people throughout the centuries; not just for the Jews, but also for us, who were Gentiles. It shows that God is continually at work in our world. It shows that His faithfulness continues to reach to all generations and His covenant love goes from parents to children. The only way we can get from Abraham to David and through the exile to Jesus is because of God's providence. Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, is evidence of God's planning.

However, having said all of this, it becomes painfully obvious that the Jews didn't understand the real meaning of the coming Messiah. They didn't not realize or understand that Jesus came to pay for their sins and be the perfect sacrifice as the angel said to Mary. His name would be Jesus for he would save his people from their sins.

It's not that the Jews didn't know they were sinful, they did! The Sadducees and Pharisees made them aware if that! They just didn't understand the mission of Jesus or the correct path to becoming righteous before a holy God. In fact, they thought the Messiah would become their earthly King and that Israel would be the centre of the world.

They thought they could appease their God with their 'righteous' works! But when Jesus told them his kingdom wasn't of this world and that their righteous deeds were like filthy rags they were disillusioned with the Messiah. So much so that they rejected him as the Messiah and hung him on a cross. It's amazing isn't it! Here is Matthew, writing to Jews, using the word Christ, Messiah, the anointed one, just like the OT Kings and priest that were anointed for a special task, and they rejected Him (1 Ki 2:10).

Again, it's not that they didn't know. They knew it alright! Andrew says to Simon in Jn 1:41, "We have found the Messiah that is the Christ." However, the Pharisees pride, their desire to have people call them Rabbis and give them special places to sit in the synagogues, blinded them to the real mission of Jesus Christ. They were unwilling to bow down to the Messiah.

Congregation, we find that same pride in many people today. You can speak to people about God, about creation, about heaven, you can even mention the birth of Jesus at Christmas time, but don't mention Jesus as Saviour! For the moment

you do that, people feel vulnerable, because they realize they cannot save themselves. Instead of embracing the good news of a Messiah, a Saviour of sinners, they reject him and turn their backs. Congregation, may our pride or our position or our status not interfere with our understanding of who Matthew is speaking about in verse 1 and why Jesus came.

May we stand in awe of what God is doing here. He breaks four hundred years of silence, and brings about the means of the salvation of sinners, including us. For if the Messiah had not come as promised we would still be in our sin and Christmas would be empty. That is where many Jews and others who reject the good news still find themselves today.

In four weeks we celebrate Christmas the birth of the Saviour. We will sing carols and favourite Christmas hymns. Wonderful! And why not? We know that a sacrifice was needed and it was only Jesus who could pay. By his birth and subsequent death and resurrection we are set free, free from eternal hopelessness. Free from the bondage of sin, free to live for him in thankfulness.

But there is another aspect! The Jews longed for the coming messiah after four hundred years of suffering. It's now been 2000 years since his first coming. And I cannot help but think that as Christians, we don't have a similar hankering for Christ's second coming! We are so comfortable, so at ease with our pilgrimage that we have forgotten there is a better home to come. My prayer is that as come near to remembering and celebrating the birth of our Saviour, we may also speak about his impending second coming when all things will be made new.

That dear friend is the message that needs to get out. May people everywhere be fit and ready to meet him. The Jews rejected him but that will not be possible the second time round. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the Glory of the Father. May we tell it near and far! For it is only in Messiah Jesus that all the peoples on earth are blessed; it is only in Messiah Jesus that Abraham's descendants become as numerous as the sand on the seashore; it is only in Messiah Jesus that God has established an eternal covenant.

It's only in Jesus we have forgiveness and made right with God and it is only then we can be assured of eternal life. As we draw near to Christmas, may the good news of Jesus Christ ring forth. Amen.