



Matthew 1:1-17
A Polluted Pedigree: sinners in the line of Christ

This morning we begin a study of the life of Jesus. In the coming months we will see who He is, where He came from, what He did, what He said, what happened to Him, and why it was so important. We'll learn all of this from the gospel of Matthew. We'll start with the first verse of the first chapter and each week we'll move a little farther along so when we finish we will have read and considered everything God used Matthew to write down about Jesus.

I think it's going to be a great time for us a church. We will grow in our understanding of who Jesus is whether that means learning things for the first time, or being reminded of old things that strike us in new and fresh ways. I believe God will lead us in a season of growth personally and corporately if we listen to Jesus in these pages and consider the question: Am I available to Him?

I want to encourage you to read ahead – you see where we're going, start studying on your own – see what God impresses on you as you read, and see if you have any questions about what the Bible says, and then, if your questions aren't answered in Sunday's sermon, seek out answers. Ask your small group leader or one of the pastors or do some more research on your own, but let's learn about Jesus together and see how He wants to change us, our church, and our community in the process.

By now we all know: God has plans, plans to work in us and through us, plans to call people to Himself, plans to save human souls from sin, suffering, and misery, and plans to comfort and heal. I believe He is going to advance those plans as we progress through this gospel. And I believe there's no reason He can't use you to do it. God is in the business of transforming human lives – a fact that is on clear display in Matthew's gospel and also in his life.

Matthew was one of the twelve disciples, a group of men who were with Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry until the crucifixion. He wrote down things he heard from the mouth of Jesus and experienced along with Jesus.

Matthew is not his original name, his parents called him Levi. He was a Jew and he lived in Northern Israel in the city of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee, near where Jesus stayed. He had money at a time when most people did not, he was able to afford things and throw parties, but Levi was not a very popular guy, in fact, he was hated and despised by many of the people in his community because Levi was a tax collector.

During the time Jesus lived, the Romans ruled their famous Empire, which stretched all the way from Europe, down to North Africa and through the Middle East. And like most

governments, the Romans collected taxes. But, they did it through contractors. The Romans would establish a region for taxation and then determine how much they felt they should receive from it. And then they would hire a local to oversee the tax collection for that region.

But here's the problem: only the person they appointed would know how much he had to collect. So, there was a minimum he had to gather for Rome, but he could adjust that number a little bit to include something for himself off the top and that is how the tax collectors got paid. So when you paid your taxes, you never knew how much was going to Rome and how much was going to this guy.

So Matthew, or Levi, makes a living by squeezing money out of people for the government and his own pocket. And he's taking that money from his own people, the Jews, and giving it to a foreign power that is occupying their land and controlling their lives. Most of his neighbors viewed him as an opportunistic traitor, the living, breathing, expression of Roman occupation and oppression in their city. As one pastor noted: "He had better make a lot of money, because he wouldn't have a lot of friends, except among other tax collectors and Gentiles."¹

Think about what his job cost him: no one wants to say hi to him on the street, he wouldn't be welcome at community events; he wouldn't be welcome in the synagogue where people went to worship God each week on the Sabbath. But he would have money, position, and power. Is that an OK trade? And, do you think we have people in our region making similar trades today? Trading in their family for power, position, or money? Compromising their walk with God for the sake of making a few buck or seizing an 'opportunity'?

Let me ask: what makes you turn your back on your family and your people and your religion, all the things that give you your identity and place in the world? What was going on inside this man? What was he trying to find? What did he feel like he needed? And why did he feel like the only way to get it was to betray everyone and everything else? No one forced him to serve as a tax collector, as far as we know he chose this on his own, in fact, he probably maneuvered and schemed for it and worked to guard his appointment. Why? And did he feel like it was worth it?

Maybe he did in the beginning. Maybe he felt the trade-off was "just the price you have to pay" to reach your goals. But I think at some point he began to feel the isolation of it all, the emptiness of it all, the disappointment of it all – the kind that settles in at night when you're trying to fall asleep and your deepest thoughts start to bubble up in burning questions – the questions you want to shut out or run away from.

I think God was pressing him with those deeper questions – stirring his soul to ask: is this really what it's all about? Is there anything else? Is this what life is? What *should* I be doing? Can I ever go back? Can I ever be forgiven? Can I really change?

¹ Scroggie. Scroggie also calls Matthew "A farmer of Roman taxes."

I believe God was agitating Matthew's soul, just like He might be agitating some of yours, stirring you up, troubling you with deep questions and desires for deeper things.

For Matthew, it all came to head one day when he was sitting at his desk near Capernaum. Because on that fateful day, Jesus, a poor, blue-collar carpenter just beginning His public ministry walked by, looked at Matthew and simply said, "Follow Me." In that one moment, everything made sense – Matthew was ready for it, though he didn't know what "it" was, and he immediately surrendered – gave up his position with Rome and became a follower of Christ.

Finally, he felt like he had found what he was really looking for. Here's a man who had made great sacrifices for his career, and suddenly he found something he was willing to give it all up for.

Friends, that's who Jesus is. He is the one worth giving up everything else for. He is the one worth following. He is the one who shows up as the answer to all our questions and puts everything in order. If you're feeling unsettled today, if you're asking those deeper questions, listen for Jesus, because He's coming to you and saying the same thing – with authority and tenderness, He is telling you – "Follow Me." It's not a question, it's a command, but it's a gentle command and full of promise that you can discover who you really are, in Christ.

Look at what Jesus did with Matthew's life – He took who Matthew was, what he was good at, and gave it meaning and purpose.

In order to be a tax collector you had to have some amount of education, you had to speak both Greek and Aramaic and be able to read and write, you also needed to be well-organized and keep good records. Now, don't those also sound like great skills for someone to capture the details of the life of Jesus and pass them on? It turns out, accuracy and details matter to a tax collector AND a gospel writer.

Friends, the same skills that made Matthew a good tax-collector were redeemed, transformed, and used for God's glory.

And I wonder how He wants to do the same for you? What skills and abilities has God given you, what qualifications and opportunities has He given you? And how might He want to use them if you surrender yourself and say, "Lord, I am available to you"?

I hope you're asking the question. Because God does have a plan for your life, He is building His kingdom and His church, and you have opportunity to be a part of it – to have all your abilities and your gifts used for His glory and the good of those around you.

And that might mean He calls you out of the marketplace and into the ministry, like He did with Matthew, or maybe He simply opens your eyes to see how you can make the marketplace into your ministry by seeing your job, or your team, or your school as the place where you serve Jesus with the gifts and abilities He has given you.

As your pastor, this is what I want for you, I want you to see that God is with you wherever you go that He wants to use you, if you are available to Him and if you will look at your context and ask: God what are you doing here and how do You want me to join in? What will it mean for me to “Follow You” here?

But right now we need to see how it all played out for Matthew – how God used his eye for detail to record important things about Jesus and where He came from.

I want to recognize, right away, this is more detail than you might prefer - next week will be much easier as we dig into the story of Mary and Joseph - but this is the way Matthew begins his story, so let’s read through it and then talk about what can learn from it, because it’s all here for a reason.

Matt 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

2 Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. 4 Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. 5 Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, 6 and Jesse begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. 7 Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. 8 Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. 9 Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. 11 Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. 14 Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud.

15 Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. 16 And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.

Now if you take a class on communication, public speaking, or writing, they will tell you how important it is to grab the attention of your audience. This doesn’t quite seem to hit that mark for us, does it? So why does Matthew choose to start off this way?

And the answer is: because he didn’t write it just for us. This is God’s Word, it’s what God wants all people to know – people from every tribe, and language, and county and jungle and village on the planet – people who lived in the 1800s and the 800s, all over the world

and all throughout time. And those people did not, and do not, live in the same media-saturated culture as we do.

To most of them, to most of the people in the history of the world, family is important. If you meet someone new, you want to know where they fit – who is their family, where do they come from, what's their connection? Today, we meet people in total isolation, as if their past and their lineage have nothing to do with who they are. For most of the world though, and for much of history, people were understood to have a place where they fit. Matthew is showing people where Jesus fits.

And that was very important, especially for the Jews who were the first to read what Matthew had written. They knew what God had said in the past, so they expected the Messiah to come through a particular family line, to come through the line of Abraham and also be a descendant of David. This genealogy shows that Jesus does both. It proves that God kept His promises and did what He said – Jesus is the fulfillment of what Jewish people had been hoping for centuries. That's why it's so important to open the book with a family tree.

And actually, if you think about it, we do still care about connection and family today. Some of the most popular stories of our time are about family. Think of Star Wars, Harry Potter, even Downton Abbey, they're about family: who is related to whom and who is the descendent of whom, who is the father of whom? What family are you in?

And then, think of the popularity of DNA kits where you take a swab of your saliva and send it in for analysis to learn where your ancestors came from, or the popularity of sites like ancestry.com. It turns out there is something in each of us that really wants to know: where did I come from, who am I connected to, and how do I fit in? Sometimes, for all of our modern independence, like Matthew, we wonder if it's worth the cost of being alone.

Of course, the problem with families is: they're messy. We might have some family members and ancestors that we're proud of and get along with, but we've also got some people we don't exactly like, or aren't exactly proud of, or that we're disappointed about or tired of. Well, you find the same thing in the line of Jesus: heroes and harlots, victims and victors, role models and rogues.

Take a look at the ladies in this list. Now, first of all, you have to know that it was extremely rare for women to be included in a genealogy, but these ladies are, and when you get to know at a little more about them, you might be shocked that this is line of Jesus.

First you have Tamar, you meet her in Genesis 28 where she put on a disguise and sold herself as a prostitute to her father-in-law Judah because he wasn't keeping up his responsibility to take care of her, in the process she got pregnant and gave birth to the twins Perez and Zerah. So yeah, you've got a bit of a mess right there.

Then you have Rahab who really was a prostitute, and she wasn't a Jew, she was a Canaanite, a different ethnicity. We meet her in Joshua 2 where God takes extraordinary

measures to save her and her family from the destruction of Jericho and bring them into His blessing and promises for Israel. And this is a common thing, to see God adopting people in, bringing people that you would not expect into His family.

It's the same thing that happened with Ruth who we meet in the book of Ruth – she was from Moab, a nation the Jews hated. She had been married to a man who was a Jew, but he died along with all the other men of the family leaving Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi in a precarious position. But God changed her life and her destiny through the kindness of Boaz, and the woman who once felt as though she had nothing, eventually had a grandson who sat on the throne of Israel: King David, Israel's most beloved king.

Of course, David didn't always make the best choices. He's famous for things like slaying the giant Goliath, but he's also infamous for stealing the wife of another man. Bathsheba "had been the wife of Uriah" until David used his position of power to take advantage of her, which you can read about in 2 Samuel 11.

Each of these women were in a vulnerable place – Tamar couldn't get the support she was entitled to, Rahab was a citizen of a city facing destruction, Ruth had lost her husband and all economic security along with him, and Bathsheba was the victim of a predator. Some of them brought difficulty on themselves, others were just victims of circumstance or the choices of others, but God redeemed them all and turned their stories into part of the lineage of Christ.

And then you have the kings – they're a mixed bag as well. From King David on you have a list of rulers who had a spotty record of righteousness and debauchery. We just mentioned David's highlights and humiliations, but then you have men like his grandson Rehoboam who was a wicked ruler – so bad in fact that it led to a split in the Kingdom. His son Abijah was wicked like dad, but then things turned around with Asa who was good, and so was his son, Jehoshaphat, but Joram his son was wicked and then he had Uzziah who had some good moments, but was also struck down with leprosy for attempting to enter the temple and burn incense, something only the priests were allowed to do (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

What's the lesson here? It's this: politicians will never be our saviors, it doesn't matter what party they represent, they're still human beings and human beings are tempted to make bad choices because of power. They don't, and can't know everything, do everything, or fix everything. And even if things are good for a season, they're going to be bad again sooner or later because human beings are still involved. No political party is ever going to save us or be 100% reliable.

The flip and flop of the character of the kings also shows us that good parents can have bad kids and bad parents can have good kids because we all, every generation, need to have our own relationship with God. You can't ride on your parent's coattails on the one hand, but neither are you doomed by your parents on the other. We all need Jesus and we can all have Jesus.

So, what we find in the genealogy is God fulfilling His promises – doing what He said He would do: provide a savior through Abraham and David who would be a blessing to all humanity.

But we also find a sample of the kind of people Jesus came to save: Jews like Jacob, Jesse, and Josiah, Moabites like Ruth and Canaanites like Rahab, men like Solomon and women like Tamar, saints like Boaz and sinners like Uzziah, rulers like David and carpenters like Joseph. People like you, and people like me. We all need Jesus.

This genealogy shows us that no one has it together enough, no one is popular enough, no one is powerful enough to create their own forgiveness and salvation.

But it also shows us that no one is too far gone, no one has too much or sinned too big to be forgiven. We all need Jesus who came to call sinners to salvation, and to give us a new identity in Christ.

This genealogy presents God's extravagant grace on display and we see it again in the life of the man who wrote it down. There is a God who brings the outsiders in.

This morning if you will turn to Jesus He will include you in His family - where your sin abounds grace abounds much more. And if you will make yourself available to Him, He will go to work in your life like He did in Matthew and redeem and transform your skills and abilities for His glory. Will you do that?

We're about to celebrate communion, and as the men distribute the elements, I want to encourage you to take a moment and pray. Confess your sins to God, ask for forgiveness, and offer Him your life once again – to make of it whatever He pleases. For His glory, and your satisfaction and joy.

Let's pray.