

“The Anointed One”
Matthew 1:1-17
September 24, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

We are beginning today a study of Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew begins just where we would expect him to, with Jesus. The word “gospel” means good news, and there is no good news unless we begin and end right there, with Jesus. I think I have mentioned before the Hindu family who began visiting a church in America in order to investigate the life of Jesus. After several months of faithful attendance, they asked the pastor, “When are we going to be able to start hearing about Jesus? We’ve heard excellent sermons about marriage, child-rearing, money management and other practical topics, but not yet about Jesus. Is there some special class we need to sign up for in order to hear about Jesus?” It is often the case that the church, in its desire to be relevant, takes its focus off of Jesus and tries to appeal to the felt needs of people. There may be good advice without Jesus, but there is no good news.

Matthew starts right off with the good news in the very first verse, when he refers to Jesus as **“Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”** He concludes this section, which contains Jesus’ genealogy, by repeating the word “Christ” twice more. “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. He wasn’t the son of Joseph and Mary Christ. Rather, it is a title that means “anointed one.” It is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word “messiah.” Jesus is the one anointed by God, set apart by him for a special assignment. We have our own stories that speak of one who is special in some way and who will bring some form of deliverance. Think of Neo in the movie *The Matrix*. He is referred to as “the One,” because he will be the one to deliver the human race from their bondage to the computers. Let’s look more carefully at Jesus as God’s anointed one.

I. The Anointed One

In the Old Testament, anointing signified being set apart for a special purpose. Typically, it was kings, priests and prophets who were anointed. Their anointing meant that God had set them apart for his purpose and would empower them to fulfill that purpose. Jesus’ anointing means that he is set apart for all three offices: prophet, priest and king.

Jesus is our anointed king. The primary duty of Israel’s kings was to deliver the nation from its enemies. On the heels of David being anointed as Israel’s king, he faced the Philistine giant, Goliath. You all remember the story. The stone from his sling found its mark in the only place where Goliath was not protected by armor, on his forehead just above his eyes. Was David’s success

due to his great skill with the sling and stone? Had he practiced for hours every day until he could hit the bullseye every time? David was undoubtedly skilled with his sling, but no amount of skill would have been enough to hit a target that small. His success was due to one thing—he was God’s anointed king, anointed to defeat Israel’s enemies. God had given him this success.

Jesus is our true King, anointed of God to defeat our enemies. Who are these enemies? They are the world, the flesh and the devil. All three are more powerful than we can successfully fight ourselves. There’s the world, sweeping us along with its powerful current of false values and perspectives. It is a swift current that, if we are going to resist successfully, will require outside strength for us. The Bible also speaks of the devil and his evil army of demons as our enemies. If you knew that right now there are powerful people plotting your harm, how would you feel? There are beings far more powerful than any earthly ruler, who are in fact always laying plans for your harm. You are not up to the task of successfully defending yourself. But your anointed King is, and he will, just as David defeated the Philistine giant. You also have a powerful enemy within. I am referring to what the Bible calls your sinful nature. Think about the threat represented by an enemy that leads you to act in a way that is self-destructive, while all the time you are doing the very things you choose to do. That is what our sinful nature does. But Jesus is the Christ, God’s anointed King strong enough to fight and defeat these enemies of ours.

Jesus is also our anointed Priest. The job of priests in the Old Testament was to offer sacrifices for sin. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to the one true sacrifice of Jesus, a sacrifice that satisfies God’s just judgment. A payment must be made for our sin. Either you will pay it in the form of eternal condemnation, or God will pay it through the sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus. Because Jesus is an anointed Priest, it means that the sacrifice he offers really does work. The effectiveness of it depends on Jesus, not upon you. All you must do is receive it and rest in it.

Jesus is our anointed Prophet. A prophet brings God’s truth to us, things that would be hidden to us if God did not reveal them. He reveals truth to us ultimately through Jesus, his anointed Prophet. Have you ever wanted God to shout from heaven his truth, so that we could know for sure what is true and what is not? He has done so, and here’s what he said. **“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”** (Lk. 9:35).

Notice too that Jesus is referred to at the end of verse 17 as **“the Christ.”** He is the only one. As Jesus himself affirmed, and as the rest of the Bible teaches clearly, there is no salvation apart from Jesus (Act 4:12). This truth is vigorously opposed in our day. People want a cafeteria plan for salvation, in which God will offer an endless variety of choices for a person to get to heaven. And then people want God to accept whatever choice we make. In a sense, we want our choices to be anointed. But the New Testament begins by stating as

clearly as it can, Jesus is God's anointed one, the Christ, the Messiah. It is not your choice that is anointed, but God's chosen one, Jesus.

II. The People of the Anointed One

Most of this text contains the genealogy of Jesus, beginning with Abraham. He doesn't present this just to satisfy our curiosity. I recently signed up for a DNA test of my ancestry through a service. Using only some of my saliva, they were able to tell me where I have come from. Honestly, I did it only out of curiosity. I had been told that I had some American Indian in my ancestry, but found that not to be the case. Most of my DNA test revealed unsurprising results. It said I was 53% British, which includes Scotland in their definition of British, 33% western European and 5% Irish. The surprising part of it was that I was 6% Scandinavian. Wendy suggested, and I think she's right, that this was probably due to the Viking invasion of Britain around 800 A.D., an invasion marked by raping and pillaging.

If the genealogy of Jesus isn't for the purpose of satisfying our curiosity about where he came from, what is its purpose? It shows that Jesus has the necessary ancestral connections to be Israel's promised king. Those connections are summarized in the opening verse. Jesus is the **"son of David, the son of Abraham."** God promised Abraham that it would be through him and his seed that the nations would be blessed. He promised David that the king of the Jews would be one of David's direct descendants. So it was imperative that Jesus be able to trace his ancestry back to these two men.

We might say that it met the minimum requirement for Matthew to trace Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham and David. But Matthew is not satisfied with the minimum. He wants to explore Jesus' genealogy in a way that reflects why Jesus came. He wants to include people in this list that are the kind of people Jesus came to deliver. I can picture Matthew poring over his Old Testament, and making the joyful discovery that Jesus' family includes a number of people who illustrate the very heart of the gospel. I want to group these people into three categories: the outsiders, the sinners and the desperate.

There are several names in Matthew's list that are the essence of outsiders: Gentile women. It was typical of Jewish genealogies to restrict itself to men. But Matthew lists five women, including Mary, and at least three of them, and probably four, are Gentiles. Tamar was the Canaanite woman who married Judah's son. Rahab was the harlot in Jericho who received the spies sent by Joshua as Israel was conquering the Promised Land. Ruth was the Moabite woman who, with Naomi, came to Israel as a childless widow. We don't know for sure if Bathsheba was a Gentile, but it seems likely that she was. She married Uriah the Hittite, which means that he was a Gentile.

Matthew clearly goes out of his way to mention these women, because he could have satisfied the requirements of Jesus' genealogy by listing only the men who impregnated these women. That would have been an impressive list of Israel's most connected insiders. It would have included Judah, Boaz and the great king David. But instead of that, he makes it a point to include these mothers. The story of Ruth illustrates what it feels like to be an outsider. She enters the story of God's people when a Jewish couple named Elimelech and Naomi flee the Promised Land during a drought for what they think will be better prospects in Moab. But in doing so, they were disobeying God and trusting themselves instead of God. As is always the case, trusting self never turns out well. Tragedy strikes this family when all three men of the family, Elimelech and his two sons, die in Moab. Ruth was the Moabite woman who had married one of these sons, and now she is a childless widow. Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, repents of her sin in leaving Israel and determines to return, both to the Lord and to Israel. God has been working in Ruth's life, and she determines to return with Naomi, saying, **"Your people shall be my people, and your God my God"** (Ruth 1:16). This was an Old Testament expression of faith, using the covenant language common there. Ruth was changing her god from Chemosh, the Moabite god, to Jehovah, Israel's God. So she commits herself to return with Naomi to Israel, where she was not just an outsider, but a notorious outsider, being commonly and widely referred to as "the young Moabite." As someone has said, "There was nothing kosher about Ruth. She knew she would be about as welcome in Bethlehem as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah."

The story of Ruth must have been a source of great joy to Matthew, because he knew all about the loneliness and isolation outsiders have to endure. Remember that he was a tax-collector, an occupation in his day that was considered not only unpatriotic, but downright treasonous because it required cooperation with the occupying Roman Empire. His life had been forever changed when he heard the good news from Jesus, that outsiders like him could find a welcome with God. The truth of the gospel is that all of us are outsiders with God, having removed ourselves from him by our sin. But God, at great cost to himself, the cost of his only Son, has made a way for us to become insiders to the life of the Triune God.

I want to make an application of this point to our children and youth. The application concerns cliques. Maybe not all of you know what a clique is. It is when you close your circle of friends to outsiders. There's nothing wrong with having a group of friends. It is actually a great gift from God. But there is something wrong with the kind of unfriendliness that makes those outside your circle of friends feel bad, like they don't belong. That is the opposite of what God wants, and the opposite of what God himself does.

These women are not only outsiders, but all five of them have something of the taint of sexual sin about them. Tamar dressed as a prostitute in order to

have an incestuous relationship with her father-in-law, Judah. Rahab was a harlot. Ruth was a Moabite, a people whose origin is found in the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter. Bathsheba committed adultery with King David. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, though she was innocent of any sexual sin, was not regarded as so when she turned up pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. Matthew's mention of these women is his joyful celebration of the truth that Jesus came for sinners. Matthew was one of those. Tax collectors in his day were regarded as something like crooked politicians would be today, willing to bring harm to their own community for their personal gain.

The third category of those who illustrate the heart of the gospel are the desperate. We see that in the third grouping of names after the exile to Babylon. These are names mostly unknown to us through the Old Testament. Matthew likely had to do some genealogical research to get them. Such information was kept in the temple because access to the privileged part of the temple was reserved for Jews who could demonstrate several generations of Jewish paternity. These names, though, represent the growing obscurity of the house of David. Israel did in fact have a king at the time Jesus was born, but that king, Herod, was not of the house of David. And as the house of David declined, so too did the nation. They were ruled by a series of foreign nations, the most recent of which were the Romans. Jesus showed up when the nation was at a point of desperation. It took a long time for the promised son of Abraham and David to arrive. But in Jesus he has come. Someone has said, "God never seems to come when you want him, but when he gets there he's always right on time."

CONCLUSION:

There's one more thing Matthew hints at in this genealogy that becomes much more explicit later on. After tracing Jesus' genealogy to Joseph, it becomes clear that Joseph is not Jesus' birth father. We read of "**Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born**" (v. 16). The pronoun "whom" is feminine singular. Had Matthew meant to refer to Joseph and Mary, he would have used a plural pronoun. But it is singular and feminine, referring to Mary. Matthew is hinting at the virgin birth of Christ, which is the case because Jesus is the Son of God.

There is one thing not included in this genealogy that needs to be mentioned. Anyone can be included as a member of Jesus' family, even though your name may not be here. There is another list of names the Bible refers to called "the Book of Life." It contains those who are included by faith in Jesus. Any who are outsiders, sinners and desperate, who trust Jesus rather than themselves, have their names written in this book.