

A Promised Saviour

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[0 : 01] So Alex must be in one of a select company of people in our congregation this year who has read through a genealogy. So we've done Genesis and a few of you had a good time doing that as well.

So I think we're beginning to pick up the theme that God uses and puts genealogies in his word. And so we must try and work out why they're there. Well, let me pray for us before we start. Father, thank you for your word, every bit of it, even the bits that we wonder why are there. But we know that they're there for us, for our sake, to build us up, to help us to trust in you and to help us to know who you are and who your son is.

So help us to do that tonight and help us to live according to that truth. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, we've got a little outline as well if you want to use that to follow along.

Well, we live in a world that's full of promises. By that I mean that it's promises that make society function. Society works because people make and keep promises.

[1 : 08] So I'm not just talking about promises that you might make to your friend or husbands might make to wives, although those are all important. But I'm talking about those promises that actually underlie every aspect of life.

Implicit promises that sometimes you don't realize are actually promises. So, for example, every time you buy a carton of milk, did you realize that you were relying on a promise?

Best before 5th of September 19... No, 2015. It's long-life milk, so now that it's open, it's not quite until next year.

But that's the implicit promise, isn't it? That if you drink it before the 5th of September 2015, you should be fine. Drink it afterwards, and don't blame the company if you fall sick.

When you turn up at a train station at a certain time, expecting a train to arrive, you're relying on a promise made by Metro in their timetables.

[2 : 09] So the next train to Liddell is arriving at 7.57pm, for example. And we get upset, don't we, when it doesn't? It comes at 7.58.

No, maybe more than that. But why is that? Because we're upset because that was a broken promise by the company. When you put your money in the bank, you're actually doing it because the bank's given you a promise to give you that money back if you demand it.

I hope you realize that. Otherwise, you're being a bit foolish by giving them your money. But on and on I could go, because we rely on promises in life, don't we?

And a world where no one keeps their word or promise, whether it's individuals or companies, is a world of chaos. And as Christians, we shouldn't be surprised by this because we worship a God who makes and keeps promises.

The God who created this world is a God who makes and keeps promises. That's his character. And as Matthew begins his gospel, it's this character of God that he's trying to show.

[3 : 20] That's what the genealogy is there for, to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament. He's God's chosen one, promised by God.

And that's our first point. And so the book begins with these words, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. So right from the start, Matthew is telling us that these are the two names that we need to look for or pay attention to in the genealogy, that of Abraham and David.

Now, in case anyone's unaware, the words Christ and Messiah are the same thing. So if you have different versions, some will say Christ, some will say Messiah. Christ is the Greek. Messiah is from the Hebrew.

But they both mean the same thing, that it's the chosen one, the anointed one of God. And so Jesus Christ is not his surname, but that's his title. Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah.

But let's come back to Abraham and David. Matthew highlights these two men because it's to them that God's made his promises. And so firstly, we look at Abraham. God made this promise in Genesis chapter 17 and verse 4.

[4 : 26] I've got it up on the slide. To him, he said, as for me, this is my covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abraham. Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

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 generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God. So kings, anointed ones, will come from Abraham.

That was the promise that God gave to him. And they will rule in the land that God gives to them, which is exactly what happens in the days of King David. But then with King David, God made a further promise, and that's why he's the other name to watch out for.

But if we flick to 2 Samuel 7, which I've got the slide of the verse as well, in verse 12, this is what the Lord promised to David. The Lord declares to you, David, that the Lord himself will establish a house for you.

[5 : 37] When your days are over and you rest with your ancestor, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He's the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish a throne of his kingdom forever.

I will be his father, and he will be my son. So God's further promise now to David is not only that there will be kings, but there will be a throne forever from the line of David, a royal line extending from David forever.

And so that's why the genealogy is divided the way it is. Of the three sections, Abraham and David sit at the start of the first and second. In the first, 14 generations follow Abraham until King David, who then in turn heads up the next 14 after him.

Which sort of leads us into the third section, from verses 12 to 16, if you look with me. Because then we have to ask, why is that there? It's not a person that heads it up, not a significant person to which God has made promises.

Rather, it's headed up by a description that says, that marks the time of exile to Babylon. So what's so significant about this event, that it should form a separate section of its own?

[6 : 57] Well, because this was the time when seemingly all of God's promises to David, to Abraham, came crashing to a halt. It was a time when no more promised land, no more great nation, no more king.

It would have been at that time when Israel wondered if God keeps his promises, whether the word that he gave to David and Abraham were instead null and void. Now, mind you, Israel deserved all they got.

They had worshipped other gods and been disobedient to God's laws. And God had warned them. If we look, we wouldn't turn to it. I'll just read some passages to you in Deuteronomy 28.

God had warned them that they would be punished and expelled from the land if they disobeyed him. So verse 15, chapter 28, he says, However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your needful trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed and the crops of your land and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

[8 : 11] Further on, it says in verse 36, The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or to your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone.

You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and rich coup to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. And then one more finally in verse 63, Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you.

You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

Among these nations you will find no rest, no resting place for the sole of your foot. They are hard words, aren't they? But God was serious about them obeying him and loving him.

And so you see, God was true to his word, both his promises as well as his warnings, both for Israel's good and Israel's bad. But it left Israel at that time during the exile longing for a messiah, someone to restore the kingdom to Israel, a king.

[9 : 29] And after 70 years, they did return from exile. God did return them to the land. But if you read books like Ezra and Nehemiah, they did not actually enjoy their own freedom.

They still had foreign rulers over them all the way to Jesus' time. So first the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans. They never actually had another king.

And so the question remained for them, would God keep his word and restore the kingdom to Israel? This was the people's hope. And they were hoping for a messiah all the way until Jesus' day.

Well, with the genealogy, Matthew is now declaring that, no, God is indeed faithful. Even when Israel hasn't been faithful, God will fulfill his promises in Jesus, in this person that comes at the end of the genealogy.

And he brings this out even more with the use of numbers. So you may have noticed that there are three sets of 14 generations. It says there in verse 17 that there are 14 generations of, from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to the Christ.

[10 : 36] Now, three sets of 14 is equivalent to six sets of seven. And seven, as you know, is a significant number in the Bible. It's a number for completeness, a number, you know, that's the number of days of creation.

And so with the six sets of seven, what Matthew is signaling is that they were on the verge of the seventh seven, when God will work to bring all his promises to fulfillment.

This was the climax, the seventh seven. And the seventh seven is, of course, Jesus. So even as Israel had gone into exile, God was still working, after all, carefully preparing for the fullness of time when the Messiah would come, when he would bring God's plans to completion and make good all of God's promises.

This plaque, which Jeff made the kids do at Sunday school a while back, this is my daughter's, which is the best, of course, I think summarizes it perfectly.

It says, Jesus is the yes to all God's promises. Jesus, the Messiah, is the yes, the fulfillment of all God's promises. Every promise that God has made has been in preparation for this moment in history, when the Messiah would come in the person of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 55] Now, friends, I don't want you to underestimate the importance of this genealogy, because if Jesus didn't come from Abraham and David, then in one sense, all bets are off. It wouldn't have mattered that he could have walked on water or fed the 5,000.

He wouldn't have been able to be the Messiah because he was not the son of Abraham or David. It would have made God a liar. He had to have had this genealogy in order to be the Messiah.

And you might not realize how big an issue it was, but in those days, if you've met Jesus, you wouldn't quite fit the bill as the Messiah. He grew up in the north, in Galilee, not Jerusalem, where you would expect the king to come from, or in the south at least, in the land of David's tribe, Judah. And more likely than not, he would have had a northern accent, different to the south. It's a bit like having an Irishman come up in London saying, I'm next in the line to the throne of Queen Elizabeth II.

You have to do a lot of convincing to persuade anyone. But Matthew will go on to show in the next two chapters, and we'll look at that over the next two weeks, three weeks, that not only is Jesus from Abraham and David, but also how he came to be living in the north, in Nazareth.

[13 : 15] Well, having established Jesus' genealogy, Matthew now turns to something even more important, I think, that the promised Messiah, the one promised by God, is actually God.

That Jesus is God, and that is why he is fit to be the Messiah. For only then will he be able to successfully complete God's mission. So verses 18 to 25 is where we'll look next, because that spells it out quite clearly.

But there are, I don't know whether you've noticed it, but there are already hints about that in the genealogy itself. So if you look with me again, just back a couple of verses in verse 16, I want you to notice how Matthew describes Jesus.

Did you notice that Matthew doesn't say that Joseph was the father of Jesus? Instead, Joseph is the husband of Mary, who was the mother of Jesus. Now this is a very specific form of words, because Jesus was not conceived by the seed of Joseph, but rather by the Holy Spirit.

So this is what now Matthew says in verse 18. This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother, Mary, was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

[14:28] Because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Now parentage for the Jews is traced through the father. And so if Jesus is of divine origin, that sort of creates a problem, doesn't it?

Because if he's divine, how can he be a son of David? Well, Matthew goes on to explain how, because in God's providence, God caused a virgin who was pledged to be married to be with child. Now if he had just simply chosen a virgin, not pledged to be married, then Jesus would have no earthly father, would he? But if he had chosen a married woman, then Jesus' divine origin could not be guaranteed.

But God chose Mary, a virgin betrothed, to be married to Joseph, but not yet married. And that is how we are able to get a divine Messiah, who is also the son of David.

[15:44] Now at first, Joseph was rightly concerned with Mary's pregnancy. If any woman came up to me and said she was pregnant, I can safely assume that she must have slept with someone.

And so, yeah. And so that would have been Joseph's natural conclusion for Mary. And so being a righteous man, by that I think what Matthew is saying is that someone who is keen to follow the law, he was obliged to divorce her.

But he was a righteous man, but at the same time, understanding, because he wanted to do it quietly so as not to publicly expose Mary. But God intervenes and appears to Joseph in a dream to safeguard his promises.

Now this is the first of the five dreams that we'll look at over the next two chapters. And every dream is critical to changing or keeping the course of history of events so that God's promises are fulfilled. So in this dream, the angel assures Joseph, telling him it's okay to marry the mother's boy because she wasn't being adulterous. The baby was from God. But then Joseph is also given the right to name the child.

[16:56] And it is this exercise of this right which allows Joseph to be the rightful father, the legal father of Jesus, thereby making Jesus a son of David.

Can you see God at work there? Now the angel then says in verse 21, she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

And so in this pronouncement by the angel, we have the second confirmation then of Jesus' divinity. Now the name Jesus, many of you will know, is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua or Yeshua.

Yes, which means God saves. I'm sure you know that, Joshua. And it was actually a very common name in those days. But the fact was that people who named their sons Joshua or Jesus would have done that without thinking that their sons were divine.

I'm sure that when Michelle did that, there was no sense that Joshua was going to be divine. But the angel actually instructs Joseph to call the boy Jesus and then he explains why.

[18:11] Because he will save his people from their sins. His name means God saves and then the angel says that Jesus will be the one who saves. And so when you put two and two together, it's a claim that Jesus is God.

God saves, he will save, so Jesus must be God. And then the angel says that the salvation that Jesus will bring is not the overthrow of Roman overlords, but from their sins because that is their real need.

You see, it wasn't their sin that drove them into exile. It wasn't the Babylonian enemies. Had Israel remained faithful, God would have protected them.

And sin continued and remained their problem when Jesus came. They may have wanted freedom from the Romans, but God knew that the freedom they really needed was from their sin.

And it's much the same today, isn't it? We may think that what we need in life to be happy is more freedom, more money, more friends, more power. But what we really need to be saved is from our sins, to know God's grace, to experience the forgiveness of sin, to know the richness of God's grace to us when our sins are forgiven.

[19 : 32] That whatever wrong we've done, no matter how bad we think we are, because Jesus died on the cross for us, we are saved. We are no longer separated from God because of our sin.

Sin is what lies at the root of everything that's wrong with our lives, with our society. And that is what Jesus came to save, to free us from. Well, there's one more final reference to show us that Jesus, the Messiah, is God.

And Matthew draws on the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 7 to do that. Now, this prophecy in Isaiah is actually quite tricky because if you look back there in its original context, it actually referred to an incident during Isaiah's time.

The woman with child could have been King Ahaz's wife, which was the king at the time, or Isaiah's wife. It wasn't explicitly a prediction of a Messiah or Savior to come. What's more, the word back in Isaiah wasn't the word virgin in the sense of someone who hasn't slept with another man.

But it's tricky because neither was it the word you'd use for wife, which is what you would expect to use for someone with child. So it's a bit confusing, but what is clear, though, is that this prophecy sits in a whole series of other prophecies from Isaiah chapter 7 to Isaiah chapter 9 where there is a constant, not constant, but numerous references to a special child or wonder child.

[21 : 00] And it culminates, I think most of you would be familiar with Handel's Messiah, his oratorio, in chapter 9 with those words that it's, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

And so what Matthew does is he very creatively not just pick out a verse as if to say, oh, that's fulfilled in Jesus, one for one correspondence, but he's picked out a verse to then say, go back to the context and you'll see a rich fulfillment of all the prophecies and all the expectations but all he does is mention one verse but you're meant to go back and read the whole series of prophecies in context.

But he mentions this one in Isaiah because of the naming of the child. That's what's the relevance between what's happened in Matthew chapter 1 and Isaiah chapter 7. And so Matthew says in verse 22, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. So Joseph would give him the name Jesus because that's his mission to save, but others, those who are God's people presumably, will call him Emmanuel.

That is, they will come to see in Jesus that he is God with them, with us. That is, in Christ, God is no longer far away but living among them, becoming one of them.

[22 : 34] And that, after all, is what salvation is all about, isn't it? To have relationship with God, to be dwelling with God among his people. So friends, whatever challenges there are in life, whatever our struggles, to have God with us makes all the difference in the world because not only does he give us the strength to face those struggles, but in Jesus, he also understands intimately what we've gone through.

Because whatever we're facing, Jesus also faced when he lived as one of us. He shared the same human condition, the same physical frailty. He knows what it means to be tempted and tested even though he did not sin.

He understands us and that's why he is, in that sense, with us. Not just with us in the Holy Spirit, but with us in understanding what we've gone through as well.

Friends, I started by saying that life is built around promises. People, government, companies make them all the time, whether explicitly or implicitly. And we have to rely on them to some extent to function, don't we?

But whereas humans fail to live up to their promises, we've seen today in this passage that God does not. You know, God could have just sent Jesus in one sense and he could have just saved us without, in one sense, breathing a word about it beforehand.

[24 : 06] We would still have been saved, right? He died on a cross, didn't say anything, just died on a cross and then after that, you know, he announces we're saved. But God doesn't do that. He

doesn't do that because God doesn't just want to save us, he wants us to know that we can trust in him as well.

And that's what the promises are for. God wants to show us that he's a trustworthy God, that he will never fail us, that when he makes a promise, he will follow it through. And that's clear in Matthew chapter 1.

We see it through the genealogy and we see it again in the story itself, which we will see over and over again in the next two weeks. Each of the key moments in Jesus' birth, you will notice, is accompanied by an Old Testament reference.

And that's Matthew's way of saying, whatever God's doing now, he's actually said so before so that we can trust him. And the thing is that if time and space permitted, Matthew could have given more than just these five examples.

There would have been hundreds in the Old Testament to show that God's made promises which is now fulfilled in Jesus. Just that reading that I chose in Jeremiah chapter 30, seems like a bit far-fetched or unrelated.

[25 : 17] But I chose it especially because we find in that one sentence in verse 11, both of the promises made in Matthew 1. It was spoken during the exile when the people were hoping for salvation.

But in Jeremiah chapter 30 and verse 11, God says this, I am with you, Emmanuel, and will save you, Jesus declares the Lord.

Friends, if we bother to read the Old Testament, there are no shortages of promises from God. And especially after we add the New Testament promises to the Old, there's just heaps of promises that God has already made for us to live our lives.

And we are called to do just that, to live our lives in light of God's promises. God has given them to us for a purpose so that we can trust in him. Whatever situation we have in life, we have promises that will allow us to trust and believe in God to live our lives.

First of all, we believe in Jesus for salvation. That's the starting point. But having done that, we are to live out our entire lives trusting in all the other promises that God has made, all of which are yes in Christ.

[26 : 31] Yes in Christ. So the promise of peace is yes in Christ Jesus. The promise of security yes in Christ Jesus. Belonging?

Yes in Christ Jesus. Our daily needs? Yes in Christ Jesus. Love, joy? Yes in Christ Jesus. And so the next time you have to make a decision in life, you're faced with a tough choice, ask yourself this question, what has God already promised that you can rely on to make a decision?

And then put your trust in that, even though it is to live by faith and not by sight. Even though it means to have faith in God rather than have faith in things or people.

Because people ultimately will fail us, won't they? But not God because he's shown us that in sending his son Jesus, all his promises will come to pass and we can rely on him to fulfill his promises.

Amen to that. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are a God of promises and more than that, you have the power and the willingness and the ability and the love for us to fulfill them.

[27 : 47] Everything is yes in Christ Jesus. So help us to treasure your word as we look at it for it is full of promise, full of assurance of what you have already done for us and will do for us.

And help us to live in light of those promises rather than be fearful of the uncertainties in this world. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.