

Matthew 1:1-17 “Written Off or Written In?”

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[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Man, thank you all so much. What a beautiful song, expressing the longing of God's people for Him to come, to come to Him that first time. You can think about them singing that. And we also feel that, don't we, as God's people now longing for Him to come a second time.

We've spent a few months here walking through some key stories in the Old Testament where that longing is palpable because God has promised that He's going to restore the broken relationship with His people, to send the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent, to provide the sacrifice for our sins, to install the permanent king on David's throne so that His people are rescued from their rebellion and restored to relationship with Him in His place, bearing His image for His glory.

That's what He's been promising. And God has kept His people going for generations with glimpses of His faithfulness to these promises. But it's not all there yet, is it? We get to the Old Testament, the end of it, they're still awaiting Messiah, true fulfillment. 400 years later, the New Testament opens with the Gospel of Matthew, specifically written to God's people who have lived this story with this longing, this expectation to tell them good news, the Messiah, the Christ has come. It's Christmas at the beginning of Matthew. The promised rescue and restoration is finally here.

And so I thought, since we are now among those who are tracking with the Old Testament, right? You've all made it through, that after many sermons of that, we would go to the Gospel of Matthew this Christmas season and look at Matthew's account of those promises being fulfilled in the coming Jesus.

[2 : 3 0] Matthew's going to tell us about some pretty amazing things, about a virgin birth, about a divinely named child, about the visit of the Magi from afar. But he starts this morning at the beginning of his book with the background on Jesus. He gives us a genealogy all the way back to Father Abraham, recorded with a specific purpose in mind of pointing us to Jesus's place in this epic story.

Some of you are going to have trouble hearing me read this list of names without hearing Andrew Peterson singing in your head, that's okay. Whether you know who that is or not, listen as I read for names you recognize in the family tree of the Son of God. When God writes his story with the most important person of all coming, who gets included as part of that process? Look for people you recognize. Matthew 1 verse 1. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king, and David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah, and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon."

And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Listen very closely.

I don't want to read this twice. And Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

[5 : 45] So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations. And from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations. And from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

This is God's word. Let's ask for his help. Father, what a family tree. Here that we might see the Savior you sent for us.

Help us see him. Help us as we look to your word to see those you sent to bring him to us. Show us, Jesus, anew and afresh for our hearts.

We ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Now that is quite a list, right? Forty some names in there.

Some of them pronounced correctly. But regardless, I want you to contemplate this morning not just a long list of names. Think about the generations of waiting that they represent.

[6 : 55] This list goes back way beyond where any of us can even trace our family trees. Many, many people have come and gone and still waiting.

Still trusting God. Still awaiting the one promised Savior. When's he coming? And Matthew is writing this to say, now.

Now, now he's come. I'm telling you about Jesus Christ. The promised Messiah. The anointed King. He is the hero here, right?

He's the focus of Christmas. You know that. The coming of the Christ. That's what it's about. And so we're going to come back to him in just a few minutes.

But as God tells the Christmas story in this account, as he focuses our attention on his son come to rescue us, to bring us back to him, he tells us about many other people in his family.

[8 : 02] Maybe fresh off Thanksgiving, you are very aware that there are awkward people in every family. You know, difficult people to explain, you know, in each of our stories.

Nearly every Christmas movie has that family member who just doesn't fit, right? If you are struggling to think of one in your family right now, maybe it's you. We can talk later.

But a lot of times we try to write difficult people out of our stories, don't we? To avoid being with them. Not to introduce them to the kids or the girlfriend, right?

This could be awkward. It's enough of an instinct that we have that many of us struggle this way with God and his story. He's writing such a big, glorious story throughout history, right?

That we often feel like we're outside of it for a couple of reasons. Perhaps either he's got us as so insignificant that surely he's forgotten us.

[9 : 17] He's just written us out of anything important. Maybe for you it's because of pain or grief. You feel forgotten.

Like God's moving on with things but left you behind. Just kind of written out of his story. Or perhaps what you feel is that God has actually written me off.

He's got really important things to accomplish and any time he hands the ball to us, we just fumble it. We can't handle it. We've sinned so big.

We've messed up so bad. We've blown it so often that we just assume God has given up or moved on from us. I mean, if we're honest, that's how we often treat other people like us.

So perhaps without even really thinking about it that way, we've written ourselves off, relegated to a life distant from God. Of just getting by and scrolling through life, hoping maybe we'll end up in heaven against all odds somehow.

[10 : 31] And that's why I want us to see the people who are actually included in God's Christmas story. It just might completely change your view of yourself in relationship to God.

Or it might completely change your view of someone else. So first notice God's Christmas story features failures.

When I say it features them, I mean intentionally highlighted, like he doesn't want you to miss them. There are, for example, five women listed in this genealogy, which is very notable because typically at this time only men were recorded in lists like this.

But God goes out of his way to write these women in. Obviously not every woman who is involved through the generation. But he picks four to mention before Mary.

Of those four, three are prostitutes or adulteresses. Wow. Tamar. Tamar, in one of the most sordid stories in the entire Bible of sinning and of being sinned against.

[11 : 51] Rahab, you remember her? In Jericho. And Bathsheba, who's the wife of Uriah, who becomes Solomon's mother as a result of a sinful relationship with David, right?

In other words, notable sinners, people who have failed morally in public ways. God seems eager to include them in his family tree.

Just note right here in particular that women objectified by others are dignified by God. Against all cultural norms of the day, God values them and writes them in.

Men, are we following God in resisting, even contradicting cultural norms in our day?

The norms of pornography culture, of an external beauty culture, of a consumer culture, all of those objectify women, don't they?

[13 : 10] And too often, we selfishly go right along with the norms of our culture. Brothers, we speak to you for a minute.

And to myself, we must say no. No. No matter who else objectifies you, I eagerly, intentionally value you, dignify you, honor you like my God does.

He's so good, isn't he? So good. Talk about failures. There's David himself. In many ways, this list is built around David.

If you look back and study it. He's one of the two names up front. Of the many kings listed here, and there's a bunch of them, how many are referred to as the king?

Just one. David, a leader of God's people, a recipient of God's precious promises. So maybe it's no surprise that he makes it into Jesus' genealogy.

[14 : 18] But do you think anyone in the family expected his entry in the family annals to read, David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah?

Awkward. What? What about Goliath? What about the man after God's own heart? Couldn't we have talked about that part?

Nope. An entry here that highlights his adultery, murder, denials, cover-ups. The man supposed to lead God's people instead used them for his own selfish ends.

Failure. And this becomes true in different ways of each of these kings now lined up after David. King after king. None perfect.

Some worse than others. Building up or perhaps you would say trending down to the deportation and exile in Babylon. One after another that was seen as the leader of God's people.

[15 : 26] High expectations, right? Great responsibility. And they represent a whole nation of people who fail to honor Yahweh in their generation.

Who build altars to foreign gods. Who look for hope to nations around them and other people and horses and chariots. And not to their God.

Failures. Failures. Failures. Failures. I want to ask you this morning, what about your story? Does your story involve chapters of living for yourself?

Running away from God? Failing publicly? Feeling like you've let yourself down? Let those you're supposed to love down?

Maybe let God down? Let God down? I want you to hear good news this morning because most of our stories have those chapters.

[16 : 24] So far from writing you off because of your failure. God has this huge heart for writing people like you into his big story of rescue and restoration.

I don't know exactly what it will look like for each of us. But the story of Christmas is of a Savior who comes for people exactly like you.

Who is born in too small Bethlehem. Remember? We read that earlier. Bethlehem not worth giving attention to until all of a sudden it's put on the map. Dignified by the birth of the Son of God.

Who comes as friend of sinners. Who intentionally wants us in his story. Warts and all. So that his gracious character and his redemptive power is highlighted even in our weakness and failure.

Thank the Lord for that. Pastor Ray Ortlund says that is the very essence of the people of God. What we now call the church.

[17 : 32] It's a community where wonderful things happen to unworthy people for the glory of Christ alone.

Y'all this family tree is all about him and his glory. But if you know that you're unworthy then come around here and expect wonderful things to happen.

Wonderful things to happen to you and in your story because he is so great and so gracious. Now if you are in the family. I also want you to think if you're living with that same heart as God has toward failures.

Are you replicating that in your life? Is it possible that you're writing people off that God might be writing in to his story? Or do you make notable failures feel at home, safe with you?

Do you treat even leaders who let you down the way Jesus treated Peter? Pursuing him, restoring him, writing him a key role in his story. Are you more than just okay with sinners being in your story?

[18 : 54] Are you intentional to include them because they help you to understand and reflect the heart of God? Do you eat with failures? Do you listen to their stories?

Do you share your mutual need for the rescue of Jesus with the messiest people you know? You know you may think but I don't know what to talk to him about. I suggest to you you'll find you have more in common than you may think.

You're big failures in need of a bigger savior. You could have lunch. Next notice that this genealogy includes both outsiders and insiders.

What you would have expected in a genealogy of Jesus is one Jewish man after another in a pure line of descendants for a pure family tree.

After all that is part of what's important here to trace back to Abraham and to David. It's important, right? But there are several outsiders, those you might not expect, people who are somewhat out of place in this list or in the family of God at all, we might think.

[20 : 07] We've mentioned it's easiest to catch the women when they're included. Several women in this genealogy included in a way that would have been quite unusual. Three of them are Gentiles.

Rahab, a Canaanite. Ruth, a Canaanite from Jericho. Ruth, a Moabitess. And Bathsheba, whose husband at least was a Hittite.

Foreigners to the people of God. Outside of God's covenant promises. Not familiar with the ways and the practices of a good Yahweh-fearing Israelite.

And yet, included and intentionally mentioned in the genealogy of the king of the Jews, the promised Jewish Messiah. Why?

Partly because once again we get a glimpse of God's heart. The God who said to Abraham that he would bless all the nations through him. Starts writing them in, doesn't he?

[21 : 14] Slowly for now. One name at a time. But already being written in in a significant way. And y'all, that's most of us. Right?

Gentiles. Some of us have a Jewish heritage in here. But most are Gentiles grafted in by grace. So if you show up at church for a gathering of God's family today.

And you think you don't belong because you didn't grow up here. No way. You show up at the family gathering and you don't know how to pronounce family members' names.

Neither does the pastor. Don't understand exactly how it could work with this whole Christmas thing about Jesus being the son of God.

And he's the son of Joseph by Mary. Neither do we. Okay? But come next week. And we're going to learn together about that part of the story.

[22 : 12] Southwood, we are to be a family like God's family. Intentionally invite an outsider to your church, to your grace group, to your home, to your life.

And see what God does. He loves to work there. Okay? It's also true though if you look at the passage as a whole. You'll realize there are plenty of insiders included too.

Matthew's Jewish audience. Those who would consider themselves religious insiders. They're the ones who trace lineage to Abraham, right? They're the ones looking for that.

They're the ones who tell stories of King David still. And others in the list. They are the ones who want to know the generations between the Babylonian exile and the coming of the Messiah.

They're tracking with that. I've pointed out to you the exceptions to the rule in the genealogy. But most of it is a very Jewish rendering of generation after generation of God's covenant people.

[23 : 17] The men in this genealogy were circumcised. Many read the Old Testament. Most of them worshipped Yahweh. At least some. Those who have grown up among God's people.

They're sinners too. But he hasn't written them out of his story either. In fact, God's pattern of growing his kingdom is regularly covenant child after covenant child.

Generation after generation. Kids who grow up in church and can quote more scripture than Shakespeare. He loves them too. Okay? Listen, the Messiah came as a Jew for the Jews as well.

Lived among the Jews. Be patient with people who are a little too churchy. Too uptight for your liking. They need Jesus too.

Especially when they act like they don't. Failures. Sinners. Outsiders. Insiders. All written into God's story.

[24 : 23] Why? Why here? All for the sake of what? Honoring Jesus. As important as every individual in the family tree is.

Matthew is sharing it with us to point us to Jesus as the Christ. Don't miss this. He's very clear about it. God's Christmas story focuses on Jesus.

From the start, verse 1, to the finish. Verse 16. Jesus is the Christ. The promised Messiah.

The anointed one. He is the son of David. The one who will rightfully and righteously reign on David's throne forever. One king after another in this list has failed to be the righteous ruler needed.

But now, Matthew says, the king is here. The anointed Messiah has arrived. He is the one who's the son of Abraham.

[25 : 24] He's come to be the perfect savior that the Jews have longed for. But he's come in the line of Abraham to be the blessing to the nations that God promised Abraham. He and his descendants would indeed be.

And as we've seen in this family tree already, God has the nations on his mind. Matthew even intentionally leaves some kings out of the list.

You may not have noticed. Why? Because it's not all about every individual name being included. He's painting this perfect structure.

He's trying to paint a beautiful picture for you. Highlighting Jesus as the king to bring God's people back from their rebellion and exile into joyful, obedient relationship with him.

What Matthew is telling you is Jesus is the perfect savior for everyone on this list. Jew and Gentile. He's come for you.

[26 : 24] Jew and Gentile. Jew and Gentile. Jew and Gentile. All the failures and outsiders and insiders in this list need Jesus, the Christ, to be the righteous king and the perfect savior.

That's the point of Christmas. That rescue has come. In the person of the one long promised to be and do for us what we couldn't be and do for ourselves.

That's Paul's point in 1 Corinthians when he writes these words. Consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world.

Even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. We're not all that amazing. Okay? Just own it.

[27 : 29] That's us. But because of God, you are in Christ Jesus. It's about him. He became to us, what did we need?

Wisdom from God. Oh, we needed wisdom. Who became to us righteousness. We needed righteousness. Who became to us sanctification.

We needed that. And redemption. Oh, we needed to be rescued. So that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

It's about him. See, in God's economy, failures become successes. Sinners become saints.

Outsiders become included. Even religious insiders become dependent believers. All because of the one great Savior, Jesus the Christ.

[28 : 26] It's all about him. That is why even people like us who need him so desperately can be included in the story. Jesus is the joy of every longing heart.

Both the first time that he's born to go to a cross in our place. And for those of us who start by singing that he's come, but are still longing desperately for him to come again.

He's the joy of our hearts as we long for his return to make us alive with him and bring us home with him forever. The hopes and fears of all the years are still met in the little town of Bethlehem by a God who writes into his story.

People like you and me who should by all accounts have been written off. A woman I've known for many years who's gone through much and is now undergoing cancer treatment shared some of her story publicly.

I'll read just a little bit of it to you. She writes, This news is not easy for me to take.

[29 : 55] First of all, you don't know me like God does. I'm not a sweetheart or a good person. I'm a mess. I'm bitter and angry. I'm self-righteous and rude.

I'm self-centered and confused. I'm divorced and distraught. I don't know about you, but I like to earn things. Money, respect, friendship, love.

But with God, everything I have and everything I am comes up short. Way short. He sees me as I really am. And it's not pretty. I deserve to be written off, written out of his story, and I feel it.

So here I am holding nothing good, being nothing good. Why does God love me? Because as much as I like to make everything be about me, this isn't.

It's about him. It's about what all the best stories are about. Prince Charming. He sees me here pitiful and in need. And he comes to my rescue.

[30 : 59] He scoops me up and says, I know. I know you can't make it. I know your energy is gone and your goodness is non-existent. I have you.

I will do it all for you. I will be everything you can't be. And he's so beautiful. He's absolutely radiant in his holiness and purity.

He didn't come for me because I'm a good girl and I earned it. He came because I'm broken and I know it. And he wanted to love me and give me hope for every day forever. He's so beautiful that he writes me into his story.

He sees the beauty he made me for and he wants to restore me to that beauty. I don't know why he loves me. And I spend most of every day running away from him.

But I know deep in my dirty little heart that his love is true love. Inescapable. And on Sundays, my favorite day, I can't run. I just have to sit there and hear it.

[31 : 59] He loves you. Why? Because he does. If you ever feel the need to have someone love you the way he loves me, then in the words of a hymn writer, all the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him.

And if you are angry at the church for being full of hypocrites, I understand. That's why we're there. Because we need him most of all.

Yep. God's family, right? Full of failures. We're messy. Needy. But listen.

There's good news. Dear friends. Your great Savior and King, Jesus the Christ, came to be born to include you in his very family.

Even when you were a failure and an outsider, undeserving of his love, and he knew it, and he didn't give up on you. He gave you himself.

[33 : 07] And he wrote you into his story, the most wonderful story in all the world, with the most delightful ending yet to come. And it's still underway right now. With him still as the hero, and with each of us as significant characters because of his grace.

So there are many others just like us who need you to write them into your story, who need to know this righteous king, this perfect Savior we have.

Who will hear from you and feel from you that Jesus is the focus of the story and that he writes them in rather than writing them off?

Let's pray. Let's pray. Jesus, help us to understand because we're not used to being treated like this.

To have the one who deserves all the attention to welcome us, to draw us in, to care about us. We praise you and we thank you for your grace and love, your mercy stooping to live with us and die for us.

[34 : 27] And we ask for your help. By your spirit, might we show that kind of love? Might we love as we have been loved? Might we find those who think they would not be lovable to you and help them know that they are because of who you are.

Jesus, help us. We want to be your church. We want to be a place where wonderful things happen to unworthy people. And so would you make us more and more into your image as we sit with you, as we walk with you, as this Christmas season we realize you've come after us and you're coming for us again.

Thank you. We ask in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.