

The Gift Of A Promise Kept

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[0 : 01] Amen. Thank you, Treg. If you would, please take your Bibles and open them up to the Gospel according to Matthew.

Matthew, you heard me right. We've been in the Gospel of John for the past, all of 2023. But this morning, as we consider the birth of Christ, we're going to read the birth story of Jesus.

And our passage will be Matthew chapter 1, the whole thing. So pray for me as I read Matthew chapter 1. And if you found that in your Bibles, if you would, let's stand together in honor of the reading of God's Word.

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 Aminadab, and Aminadab 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 deportation to Babylon.

[2 : 10] And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matan, and Matan the father of Jacob, and Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

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.

Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

[3 : 49] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat, and I'll pray, and we'll begin.

And Lord, this is the story, Father, of your promises.

It's the story of your promise of salvation to any who come, and any who see Christ for who he is, the Son of God. So we pray now, would you do the miracle of opening our eyes to behold him for who he is, the risen King and the Lord of all.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Christmas is finally here. Our season of waiting, Advent, is coming to a close, and tomorrow morning, tomorrow all day long, we celebrate the arrival and the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 02] You know, Christmas has always been a special time for me. I remember when I was a kid, around November time, the end of November, the sales flyers would begin coming in, the catalogs would come in.

That was a thing back then. And I would take them with my markers and pens in hand. My sisters would pass the flyers around, and we would mark off all the things we wanted to receive for Christmas.

And my parents made it abundantly clear. We can ask for anything we want for Christmas. We can put anything we want on our list.

Our list can be as long and elaborate as we want, but no promises that we would actually receive any of it.

And now that I'm a parent, that makes a lot more sense to me. I understand their position. Our asking for it is not a contract, placing it, marking it off on a sales flyer, noticing it in a store, saying that we want it is not a binding obligation.

[6 : 03] No promises. So I could wait, I could long, I could wish, I could hope, but they made very clear, no promises that I would actually receive any of it.

Well, as we open up the gospel according to Matthew this morning, we find ourselves in the exact opposite scenario. Now, I want you to try to place yourself in the moments leading up to the birth of Jesus.

God Himself, all through the Old Testament, God Himself has been making promises. He promised a seed of the woman who would come and crush the head of the serpent.

He promised a king like King David to come and to rule and to reign forever over His people. He promised a Messiah to come and to save His people from their sins.

And yet, year after year after year after year has gone by without these promises being fulfilled. You begin to wonder, when will He come?

[7 : 06] When will these promises be kept? When will God stay true to His Word? Is this too good to be true? Well, as we open up to Matthew chapter 1, Matthew, He tells us, No, no, no, no, no, no.

It's not too good to be true. God has kept His Word. The Messiah has come exactly as God has promised. So here this morning in Matthew chapter 1, we're going to see three promises kept in the birth of Jesus.

Three promises kept in the birth of Jesus. This is our outline. If you take notes, this helps you follow along with the sermon this morning. We'll see three promises kept in the birth of Jesus.

First, at Christmas we celebrate the arrival of the promised King. You know, some of you probably are wondering why I took the time to read out all of those names this morning.

All right, I saw the looks you gave me. All right, if you're pregnant, if you're expecting, you can pluck a list, a name right off this list. It's suggested baby names. You can gain a few ideas there.

[8 : 11] I worked hard on that, by the way, pronouncing this. I learned that if you just act confident and read it, and nobody knows the difference anyways, you just roll on. But let's be honest.

Most of us, when we pick up the Gospel of Matthew, when we read through the Christmas story, we skip right past verses 1 through 17 and start right at the end of chapter 1 at the verse 18.

Now, the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. We're like, okay, good, I understand this. If we're honest, we don't really understand this list of names, what it has to do with us. We don't know how to pronounce them.

We don't know who half of these people are. Not today. Matthew, he does not just start in verse 18. And so we need to understand, well, why does he include this list of names here in verses 1 through 17?

Why does he do this? Well, the short answer is that he is tracing the promises of God through human history to their fulfillment in the birth of Jesus.

[9 : 15] That's the point of this long historical list of names. This is history. He's tracing the promises of God through human history to their fulfillment in Jesus.

You see, the good news for Christians, we believe the Bible is not just a storybook. It's not just a collection of moral stories or fables or mythical stories.

It's not just a collection of good examples and ideas. We believe the Bible is actually rooted in history. What we read about here in the birth of Christ happened.

I remember hearing a story, a missionary shared a story with me years ago. I wish I could remember exactly who it was. But they were living amongst an unreached people group and they were translating the Word of God into their native tongue.

And they were trying to share the story of the gospel with them. And after years of laboring amongst them, after years of sharing the gospel with them, they finally had a copy of the Gospel of Matthew translated into their native tongue.

[10:19] That's amazing. That's amazing work. They were able to hand them a written copy in their language of the Gospel of Matthew. Well, as these people began to read, to the missionary's surprise, they came back to them urgently.

As you could tell, they were stirred up. They were shocked. And they said, What is this list of names here at the beginning of this book? I said, All these stories, you're telling me that Jesus is actually real.

That He actually is a historical figure. That all these stories that you're telling me about His life and His death and His resurrection, that these are true? I said, Yes, of course.

These are true. And it was there because of this long, elaborate list of names here at the beginning of Matthew that they came to believe everything else that they had been told concerning Jesus.

And so let's look at this list of names here and try to understand why Matthew includes this here.

You might notice, if you're a historian, you would notice that this list is not exhaustive.

[11:21] He is selective in who He includes. It's intentional. And we do the same thing. Okay? The critics like to point that out, that not every generation is listed here.

That's intentional. If you're related down the line to a former president of the United States, you don't lead off with Grandpa that nobody else knows. Right? He's not listing out everybody.

He's listing out those who are significant for the story that He's trying to tell. And He highlights two people in particular here in the beginning of the genealogy.

Who are they? Abraham and David. Abraham and David. He says this baby is the son of Abraham.

In other words, he is Jewish. Father Abraham. You know the story. Of course, he's the guy in Jewish history. He's the beginning.

[12:19] He's the one to whom God made the incredible promises. All of Israel, all of the Jewish people, are descendants of Abraham physically. And it was to Abraham that God made the promises in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 through 3.

He says, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Do you hear all those promises God made to Abraham?

God promised Abraham offspring, an old man well beyond the years of childbearing. He promised land. He promised blessing. And he promised blessing through Abraham to the rest of the world, to the nations.

This is the Jewish hope and desire that these promises would be fulfilled. Well, Matthew wants us to know this Jesus is in the line of Abraham.

[13:33] He is included in the promise. He's a son of Abraham. But not only this, he also says he's a son of David.

You see that there in verse 1. You see it again in verse 6. And then in the summary statement in verse 17, he wants to make sure that we understand Joseph is a son of David as well.

Well, Matthew is really trying to highlight this for us. He wants us to know. He's emphasizing for us.

This Jesus is not just a Jew descended from Abraham.

He is a Jew descended from David. In other words, he's establishing for us that this baby has a legal claim to the throne of David.

Now, our ears ought to perk up when we hear that. If we were a Jew reading this gospel, our ears would perk up when we hear that he is a son of David.

[14:30] Because all of them were waiting for the fulfillment of what God had promised to David. In 2 Samuel chapter 7, the chapter that we read earlier this morning, it says, This is a promise of a forever reigning king.

And it's through this king, we understand, through this king, this promised son of David, that all of the promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled.

See, the rest of the Old Testament, from this point onward, is leaning forward, is asking forward, is asking the question, Who is this promised son of David?

Who is this king who's coming? When will he come? When will his throne be established? When will the son of David come? Now, Matthew says, The promised king is here.

His name is Jesus, the son of Abraham, the son of David. He is the one we've been waiting for.

[15:59] You know, if you're here with us, if you're a guest with us, you might wonder, why in the world do Christians talk so much about Jesus?

And why do we make such a big deal about this man, Jesus? Why do we celebrate Jesus at Christmas time? Why do we talk so much about him? It's because we believe that Jesus is the one whose throne will never end.

We believe that Jesus is Lord over all the earth. We believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise to David, that he is the king who will reign forever.

That he's the one who defeats all of our enemies, not just physical enemies. That's far too small.

That Jesus is the one who defeats all of our enemies of sin and of death and of the devil.

He's come to reign and to rule. And we believe that Jesus, King Jesus will come again to reign and to rule forevermore. That's what we celebrate at Christmas time. The king has come just as God promised.

[17:07] And we believe that this king, this king Jesus, he's the one through whom all the promises made to Abraham come to all of us by faith.

You see, the promises made to Abraham are not exclusively Jewish. Not physically, at least.

We understand from the rest of the New Testament, Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

These promises are extended in Christ to any who have faith in the promised Messiah. So that he says again in Galatians chapter 3, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

And what a gift, church. And what an undeserved, miraculous gift to be included in the people and the promises of God.

[18:16] Not by birth, and not by what we've done, not by our goodness, but by grace alone, through faith in the promised Messiah. This is incredible grace. And the gift of Christmas is not for those who are worthy to receive it.

In fact, Jesus' own family line shows us that he has come to redeem sinners like us. This is what we see in our second point this morning. Second, at Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of the promised Redeemer.

The promised Redeemer. I want you to notice something else about this list here, which is that it is not pretty. This is a messy history.

If I were going to present my family line to you this morning, I would probably scrub it a little bit and not share all the dirty details of my family. I would want to edit a little bit.

But that's not what Matthew does. This genealogy, I want you to see, it's filled with people and circumstances and stories that are completely messed up.

[19:26] This is shameful and it's messy. It's sinful. It's interesting. The story of the birth of Jesus and the messiness of this story is highlighted through four women that he includes in this genealogy.

Five, actually, if you include Mary, but we'll focus on four here. You should know that it was not at all normal for anybody to include women in a genealogy in this time.

Typically, the normal pattern was just to list out the fathers. But Matthew, he swerves from that pattern a little bit to draw our attention to four women in this list.

Did you notice them? Why would he do that? Why would he do that? Why would he swerve from this cultural pattern? Well, for one, I think that this highlights the new countercultural dignity given to women through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Women are not a second-class citizen in the kingdom of heaven. They are fellow heirs alongside men, co-heirs with Christ. They are fellow image bearers of God.

[20 : 37] Yes, they are made distinct and different. We are made differently from one another in ways that we don't have time to talk about this morning. But we are equal in shared dignity, value, and worth in the kingdom of God.

That was not usual in this culture. This was not the norm. But here is Matthew drawing our attention to four women in the story of Jesus. And yet, these four women are not the ones that we might choose.

If you and I were writing this list, these four women are not the ones that we would pick out. He lists Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

Are you familiar with these stories? Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. He lists Tamar first. He says in verse 3, Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

What's the big deal? If you want a little Christmas Eve devotional reading, go home and read Genesis chapter 38 this afternoon. And you'll see that Tamar prostituted herself to her own father-in-law.

[21 : 53] And that's how she bore Perez and Zerah. It's not a pretty story. Why would Matthew go out of his way to draw our attention to this story, to put her name in Jesus' family history?

He lists Rahab in verse 5. He says, Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab. At least Tamar was Jewish. Rahab was a Gentile prostitute.

And yet, if you know the story, if you remember the story, the Lord redeemed her from her life of prostitution. He plucked her up out of her home, out of her people, saved her from the judgment of God, gave her a place with the people of God, is a beautiful story of redemption.

And then he lists Ruth. He says again in verse 5, Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz, the father of Obed by Ruth. Now, what in the world is wrong with Ruth?

She's the virtuous woman. I agree. She's a wonderful example of virtue, a wonderful example of God's providence and redemption. And yet, Ruth is not a Jew.

[23 : 03] Ruth is a Moabite. She has no natural claim, no birth claim to any of the promises of God made to the Jews. She's a Gentile. She's a foreigner.

It would be unthinkable that the king of the Jews would come from a Moabite woman. And yet, it's exactly what Matthew tells us.

The story of Ruth is a story of God providentially working out all the details of the world to bring about this promised redeemer through an obscure Moabite widow.

Why does he do things like this? Why does God choose to do things like this? God has brought about his promise in the most unthinkable way. The Christ has come from a line of misfits, rejects, sinners, not those who you and I would choose to be a part of the story.

And still, it gets worse. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and then in verse 6, David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

[24 : 14] That would be Bathsheba. You know this story. This one might be the messiest of them all. David took Bathsheba, another man's wife.

He slept with her while her husband, Uriah, was off at war. She conceived a child and then to cover it all up, he had her husband killed. This is a story of murder, of deception, of adultery.

This is one scandal after another, one failure after another, one sinner after another. This seems like this conversation shouldn't have left the dinner table. And Matthew wants us to know.

He clues us in to the messy history of the line of Jesus Christ. He does not cover it up that the Messiah is a descendant of messy, sinful people.

The royal line of promise is polluted with sin and shame. that the Christ has come from a line of misfits, rejects, sinners, and again, not those who you and I would pick out to be a part of the story.

[25 : 24] Why? Why does Matthew tell us this? Well, for one, if you are embarrassed by your family, take heart, it could be much worse. If you gather with your family tomorrow morning and you look around the room and say, these guys are just a mess, I have good news for you, you're in good company.

But more importantly than that, the fact that the Son of God came from this messed up family line is a clear sign to us that Jesus is not turned away by your mess.

Jesus came to redeem our mess when the Word of God became flesh. That's what we celebrate at Christmas, church. When the Word of God became flesh, He wrapped Himself up in our messed up sinful story.

He stepped down from the throne of heaven to enter into our mess, to enter into the chaos of our lives, to enter into our shame and our guilt and the sin of our messed up lives in order to redeem us from it.

that's the gospel. That the Holy Son of God became sin for us on the cross so that in Him messed up sinners like us might become the very righteousness of God.

[26 : 55] What a gift. You know, if you're struggling with a particular sin this Christmas season, if you're lost in the wages of sin this Christmas season, if you're just dealing with the effects of living in a sin cursed world this Christmas season, if you're walking through grief or despair or sadness or loneliness, I want you to bring that to Jesus.

There is not a mess in this room that would surprise King Jesus. He's not waiting for us to clean ourselves up to come to Him. No, no, no, no, no.

Remember what Christmas is about. God Himself came down to us and stepped into our mess to save us from our sin. If you truly understand the person in the heart of Jesus, we would never say anything like, well, I just need to clean myself up a little before I come to Him.

I just need to clean myself up. My life's too messed up right now to get serious about God. I need to pull myself together first. No. You are invited right now to bring all of your mess and drop it in His lap.

He's the friend of sinners. Charles Spurgeon, he says it like this, he says, Jesus is heir of a line in which flows the blood of the harlot Rahab and of the rustic Ruth.

[28 : 20] He is akin to the fallen and the lowly and He will show His love even to the poorest and the most obscure. He's the promised Redeemer, church.

And third, finally, see at Christmas we celebrate the arrival of our promised Savior. And now we enter into some familiar territory.

Starting at verse 18. It says, Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And when you understand the family history, this makes a lot more sense that the birth of Jesus would come this way to an unwed pregnant mother. This is another scandal. But the difference, of course, is that this scandal is without sin.

Joseph and Mary were betrothed to be married. Oftentimes, weddings in this culture were prearranged by the parents when the children are young and they called that engagement.

[29 : 28] It's not quite like our engagement in our culture. And then they become betrothed to one another when that engagement becomes legally binding. And so they're called husband and wife now for about a year before they actually get married and come together as husband and wife.

It's confusing, I know. But the point is that Mary and Joseph were betrothed, legally bound to one another. But they had not yet come together as husband and wife.

And Mary comes with some surprising news for Joseph. Surprise! I'm pregnant! And Joseph, as you and I probably would do, he was surprised and he wanted out.

I can't blame him for that. But it says he was a just man and he wanted to honor Mary so he planned to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord appears to him and gives him some more shocking news to change his mind.

He assured him, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 43] Now this is a miracle. And without going into too much detail, I'll just say that's not how babies are born. That's not how babies are made. My children are young but they know enough to know that babies come from having a mommy and a daddy.

You need both of those elements in some way, shape, or form. Out of all the millions of babies born, this is the only one in the history of mankind that did not have both mom and dad in some way.

He was begotten, not made, as the Nicene Creed tells us. Just as was promised, 700 years before he was born in the book of Isaiah.

He says he was born of a virgin. Verse 23, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Why does this matter? I wonder if you really understand the depth of why the virgin birth is such a significant part of the promise of God.

[31 : 50] He wrote about it 700 years before Jesus was born. It happened just as he promised. Why is the virgin birth such an essential part of the Christmas story? It's not just because a virgin birth is extremely unusual.

It's much more than that. If Jesus is not born of a virgin just as God promised, then he cannot be the promised Savior. Put it another way, the virgin birth is what makes possible the promise of verse 21.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. It should be obvious to us, but a sinner cannot save us from our sins.

This was the problem with the Old Testament priesthood, was it not? A sinner cannot bear the sin of the people of God because he's too busy bearing his own sin.

A sinner cannot take away our sin and shame. He cannot bear the wrath of God against others' sin because he's too busy bearing it against his own sin.

[32 : 56] A sinner can't defeat death if he's earned it for himself. You get the picture? If Jesus is just another sinner born the same way as you and I, as every other sinner in the history of mankind, then he dies the same way as you and I and we die without hope.

But that's not what happened, is it? Matthew says Jesus was born of a virgin, which means, here's the point, he does not inherit original sin.

I'll say that again. Because Jesus is born of a virgin, born not by ordinary generation like you and me, he does not inherit original sin.

Do you get it? Do you see the significance of this? See, every one of us, all of us who are naturally descended from Adam, key word, naturally, every one of us are natural born sinners.

All of us naturally inherit Adam's guilt, inherit Adam's sin. We are born into a state of sinfulness, all of us.

[34 : 10] All of us but one. And no one is righteous. No, not one, we're told. We're all born naturally into this curse of sin. Even Mary, now I know our Catholic friends disagree on this, but nowhere in Scripture does it say ever that Mary was sinless.

She's born into this mess just like we are. There is one and only one exception, the promised Savior, Jesus Christ.

And what we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of a sinless human being. The true and better Adam who will succeed where Adam had failed.

Who will bring life where his sin brought death. Who will save his people from our sins. Who will be Emmanuel, God with us.

See, Jesus, he saves us from our sins by doing what none of us could ever do. He lived perfectly in our place.

[35 : 16] And then he died as a perfect substitute, a perfect sacrifice in the place of sinners so that he might give us what he has earned by undeserved grace through faith.

This is what Paul tells us in Romans chapter 5. He says, The free gift is not like the trespass.

For if many died through one man's trespass, Adam, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

[36 : 30] church, this Christmas, as you go to bed this evening, as you wake up tomorrow morning with your head spinning with gifts and presents and meals and family and everything else, would you reflect for just a moment on the glorious promises of God for you in Christ Jesus?

Jesus, we're told that this promise is for you and your children and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

I pray that you will rest and remember the glorious gift of a promise kept in Jesus Christ. That no matter how deeply you have sinned, the good news of Christmas is the promised Savior has come that all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

And that no matter your past, your failures, your history, your mess, the good news of Christmas is that the promised Redeemer has come.

