

Matthew 1:1-17

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, welcome again to Trinity Baptist Church on this Christmas day. You have made it to church on the least attended Sunday of the year. According to statistics, when Christmas falls on a Sunday, it is the lowest attendance of any Sunday of the year. So if you come back on another time, you'll probably see a larger crowd here at Trinity on a Sunday morning. Though next week is New Year's Day, so I don't know about New Year's Days. You know, it's another tough one.

But we'll be here. So, and it's, you know, it's somewhat ironic that Christmas has become the day when most people in this country stay home from church. Many churches, some churches have even canceled their service this morning, and others have combined multiple services into one because so many of their members are traveling. And if Christmas were not on a Sunday, it would be quite unusual for a Protestant church in America to meet. Now, there are, of course, practical reasons for this phenomenon, right? You only get a certain number of vacation days every year. And most, many companies shut down this week between Christmas and New Year's. So if you're going to travel, now's your time. And of course, many people went to Christmas Eve service last night.

But I think the biggest reason is that Christmas in America has become primarily about gathering with family. Three years ago, there was a Time Magazine article about this, and they put it this way. For most American Christians, Christmas is a day for family, not faith. Interesting. Christmas is about coming home, coming home to mom and dad, grandpa and grandma, or maybe seeing your grown children and your grandchildren and nieces and nephews, visiting with uncles and aunts and cousins and all those members of your extended family that you can't quite tell how they're related to you, but they're related to you somehow. I have an Italian extended family, so I have a lot of people in that category.

I don't know about you. But now, of course, coming home to family isn't always easy. Maybe you wish that you didn't have to see certain family members at this time of year, or you dread when all your family has to get together. Or maybe you wish that you could be with your family. Maybe they're too far away, or some of them have passed away, and so this Christmas may be lonely and bittersweet. And that's always true for some around the holidays. But whatever your thoughts and feelings are this morning, whatever your plans are for the rest of the day, what I want, the scripture that we're looking at this morning tells us that Christmas is not about going home to blood relatives. Christmas is about finding our true home in Jesus. And this morning, we're looking at the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verses 1 through 17. If you want to turn there, it's found on page 681 of your Pew Bibles. Matthew begins his Gospel, his story of the life of Jesus, with a genealogy of Jesus' ancestors, all the way back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

[3 : 0 1] Now, I'm not actually going to read through the whole list of names this morning. We've been doing this passage for four weeks, and we've read through the names at least twice. So this morning, I won't read through the whole list of names. And you might be wondering, why in the world would Matthew choose to begin the first book in the New Testament with a long list of names, a genealogy? And why would they choose to preach on it on Christmas Day besides? Not exactly the best way to grab the attention of the readers. But if you were a Jewish person living in the first century when Matthew wrote his Gospel, it would totally make sense to start with a genealogy, because a genealogy is a reminder of your family history, your roots, your heritage, the sufferings that your ancestors went through to bring you to where you are today.

And for a first century Jewish person, a genealogy represented the ways that God had been faithful to their ancestors, how God had provided for them through the generations.

And it was a signal that the life of Jesus should be understood in the context of what God had done and what God had promised for the people of Israel in the Old Testament.

Now, let me recap what we've seen over the last three weeks looking at this genealogy. So three weeks ago we looked at Jesus as the seed of Abraham, the one through whom all the nations of the world will be blessed. Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus as the son of David, the promised king who has come to make all things right. And last week we looked at Jesus as the offspring of outcasts. Jesus' ancestors included foreigners and even prostitutes, because God chooses to display his saving power through weak and despised people. And today we're looking at Jesus as the hope of the remnant, the one who brings God's people home from exile. Now before we delve into that main theme, let me, I want to look briefly at how Matthew organizes this genealogy. So just look down with me briefly at verse 1. It says, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Now that phrase, record of the genealogy, appears only two places in the Greek Old Testament. And they're both in the opening chapters of Genesis.

Once at the beginning of the story of Adam and Eve, what we had read for us earlier in the service, and once at the beginning of Adam's genealogy in Genesis 5. So Matthew is making an intentional link with Genesis, the book of beginnings. And now Genesis also contains several genealogies, but all of them are named after the first person in the list. So there's Adam and his descendants, Noah and his descendants, Abraham and his descendants, Isaac, Ishmael, etc., and their descendants. [5 : 55] But in Matthew, it's the reverse. It's the genealogy of Jesus. And Jesus is the last person in the genealogy. The whole genealogy leads up and climaxes in Jesus. You'll also notice that Matthew's genealogy is organized in three parts. Verses 2 through 6 is from Abraham to David. In other words, the pre-monarchy period in Israel. Verses 6 through 11 is from David to the exile, the period of the monarchy, the kingship in Israel. And verses 12 through 16 is the post-monarchy period from the exile to the Christ or to the Messiah. So Matthew has deliberately structured the genealogy around the three major historical periods of Israel, before the monarchy, during the monarchy, and during the exile. And in verse 17, Matthew summarizes. He says, there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile, and 14 from the exile to the Christ. Three groups of 14, which is also equal to six groups of seven.

Now, you might be wondering, what in the world does all that mean? In brief, the point is this. The coming of Jesus marks the beginning of a new era in the history of God's saving plan. The coming of Jesus is a new beginning. That's why he makes these connections with the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. That's why Jesus begins the seventh seven. Seven was the number of completion or perfection. The point is the period of preparation, all these historical periods are leading up to Jesus. The period of preparation is now complete. The time has come for God's saving plan to be fulfilled. There's a new beginning in Jesus. And in particular, the period of the exile is now over. Now, you might ask, exile? Well, what's the exile all about anyway?

Well, to understand the exile, we have to go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, all the way back to the book of Genesis. And we read earlier from Genesis 2 and 3, the account of God making a beautiful home for Adam and Eve, our first parents. Now, think about what characterizes a happy home. Peace, right? In a happy home, people don't just avoid fighting with each other. They actually enjoy and appreciate one another. And in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve experience close fellowship with God and each other. God is portrayed as a gardener who formed them out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into them. He fashioned Eve to be a companion for Adam. He walked with them in the cool of the day in the garden. Adam and Eve knew and loved one another. And in the bond of their marriage, they could be totally vulnerable and totally secure with one another, naked and unashamed.

Complete, perfect peace. Well, another thing that characterizes a happy home is provision and protection. In a happy home, children can grow up secure under the provision and protection within the boundaries of their parents.

And in the Garden of Eden, God provides abundantly for Adam and Eve. Every tree that was pleasing to the eye and good for food. Beautiful and nourishing at the same time. And a life-giving river flowed through the garden. And the tree of eternal life was in the middle of the garden. God gives them great freedom to eat from any tree in the garden. Abundant provision. But then he sets one very clear boundary for their own good. There's one tree that they must not eat from.

[9 : 59] Establishing a boundary. Reminding them that God is God and they are his creatures. So there's provision. There's peace. There's provision. There's protection. And finally, there's generosity. In a happy home, people are freely generous. Because in a happy home, a truly happy family is not just about themselves. It's not completely self-enclosed and insular.

Rather, a truly happy family overflows with generosity and hospitality and service to the outside world. And we see this also in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are commanded to work and take care of the garden. To cultivate it. But they're also commanded to go and be fruitful and multiply and fill the world. To spread the life and peace and joy that they had in the garden in fellowship with God.

And spread it throughout the entire earth. They have a God-given mission to accomplish. So we see God made a truly happy home for his creatures. A place of peace. A place of provision and protection and protection and a place from which they could carry out their mission in the world. It was the happiest home that has ever existed on the earth. And yet, it lasted only a very short time. Because Adam and Eve rejected God's boundaries.

And ignoring the bounty of God's provision, they fixated on the one forbidden fruit. Instead of trusting God's clear directions, they looked for loopholes and ambiguities. And they started thinking and then acting as if they had planted the garden all by themselves.

[11 : 42] When in reality, they were only managers of an inheritance that God had made for them. And of course, after their rebellion against God, everything falls apart.

They hide from God. They start blaming each other. For the first time, they feel guilt and shame. Instead of spreading life throughout the world, they spread sin and death.

And so at the end of Genesis 3, God banishes Adam and Eve from that garden of life. And the weight of the tree of life is blocked by a flaming sword of judgment.

They're exiled to wander in a harsh and lonely world. And all the things. Their work becomes painful toil. Raising, bearing, and raising children becomes a painful and difficult process.

Their relationships, once peaceful and whole, are broken and strained. And into this world, every human being since Adam and Eve is born. We're born in exile.

[12 : 47] We're born separated from God, far from our true home. We long for peace. But this world and our hearts are full of strife.

We strive to make an impact on the world, but our efforts are often frustrated. We desire security and love. But no one can fully meet all our needs.

In the words of you two, I still haven't found what I'm looking for. And so we might wonder, is there any way back home?

Is there any way out of exile and back home with God? Well, throughout the Old Testament, we see that God promises that he will provide a home for his people.

And most of the story of the Old Testament is about God starting with Abraham and his family. Taking them. And taking them from slavery in Egypt into the promised land.

[13 : 50] Establishing them there. And he promises that that land will be a place of overflowing provision. Like a new garden of Eden. Where he'll dwell with them. And so he sets up a temple as the place of his presence with them.

And the king as a representative of God's rule and authority and love. So that's the first part of the Old Testament. God rescues the people from slavery in Egypt and brings them into that land of promise.

But then the same pattern happens. Just like it did in Eden. Instead of worshiping the true God, the people of Israel set up shrines and temples to idols. Instead of remembering and thanking God for his gifts, they take the gifts and ignore the giver.

Instead of speaking the truth and being generous, they tell lies and take advantage of the weak. They pollute and vandalize the home that God had made for them.

And God's very patient with the people of Israel. He sends them prophets to warn them. To turn back to him. When they're oppressed and they're beaten down by their enemies and they cry out for help, he answers them.

[14 : 59] And delivers them. But finally, after they keep on resisting and keep on disobeying and keep on not listening. He finally says, okay, I'll hand you over to...

You don't want me in your life? Okay, I'll hand you over to your enemies. And so they're cast out of the land. They're cast out from the presence of God.

They're exiled to Assyria and to Babylon. The temple is destroyed. The king is deposed. The land is ravaged. And it seems like it's all over. But yet, despite all this, the prophets still look forward to a day when God will bring his people home.

And not just Israel will be restored, but people from all nations could join the family of God. So listen to these words from the prophet Isaiah. A message directed towards the people who are in exile. Isaiah says, See, Isaiah and the other prophets looked forward to a day when the people would be brought back from exile and restored to relationship with God.

[16:52] Just as Adam and Eve had been in the garden. And we see some of the Israelites did come back. They came back from Babylon. They resettled Jerusalem.

They built the wall. They built the temple. And there was great anticipation, but then disappointment. Because the temple was never even as great as it had been. And they were never, the kingship was never restored.

In Jesus' time, the nation of Israel was dominated by the Roman Empire. By oppressive foreign rulers. And so the people in Jerusalem, the people in Jesus' time were waiting and hoping to really be brought back from exile.

Waiting for God's kingdom to come on earth. Hoping that one day that their sin against God, which had caused the exile in the first place, would somehow be forgiven.

And finally taken away. Hoping for some way back to that tree of life in the long lost garden. And so that's, and so we come to Matthew's genealogy.

[18:05] Where Matthew says there are 14 generations from Abraham to David. And 14 from David to the exile. And 14 from the exile to the Christ. Matthew is saying that in Jesus Christ, the exile is over.

It's an incredible claim. That in Jesus Christ, not just the people of Israel, but the whole world can come home to God. And be restored to peace with God.

And can experience his provision and protection. And his generosity overflowing once again. It's an amazing claim.

That everything they were hoping for. And that hadn't ever been fulfilled. Would be fulfilled in this man. In Jesus Christ.

But then as we read on. If you read on through the story of the life of Jesus. Jesus doesn't set up a great big palace in Jerusalem. He doesn't raise up a military army to drive out the Romans.

[19:11] We see that Jesus lives his whole life as an exile. Jesus is born not in a palace. But in a manger. In a feeding trough for animals. Because there was nowhere else for him to stay.

Matthew tells us as a small child. Jesus became a refugee. His parents had to flee. From the wrath of King Herod. Who wanted to kill all the babies. So they had to flee from their homeland.

When Jesus grew up. He depended on the hospitality of others. He said foxes have holes. And birds of the air have nests. But the son of man has no place to lay his head. And finally.

At the end of his life. Jesus was crucified. And Hebrews tells us Jesus was crucified. Outside the gate of the city. What's the point of all this? The point of all this.

Is that Jesus became homeless. So that you and I could come home. Jesus became an exile. So that you and I could be restored. See Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden. Because of their disobedience.

[20:12] And there was no way for them to get back in. The people of Israel were exiled from their land. Because of their disobedience. And they never experienced the hoped for restoration. Every one of us is born in exile.

Far from God. And all of us have turned away from God. We have sinned against him. In our thoughts. In our words. In our deeds. But unlike Adam and Eve.

Unlike the people of Israel. And unlike all the rest of us. Jesus Christ lived a perfectly faithful and righteous life. He deserved only approval. And welcome from God the Father.

But instead. In his death on the cross. He experienced the punishment of death. That a sinner would deserve. The punishment that Adam and Eve.

And the people of Israel. Deserved. You see. Jesus became. The ultimate exile. So that we could come home forever. To God. When Jesus died on the cross.

[21:11] He died so that all of our guilt. And all of our shame. Could be wiped away. Once for all. And God raised Jesus from the dead. As a new Adam. The head of a new humanity.

As the leader of a new people of God. A new Israel. The first born. Among many brothers and sisters. The point is. Through Jesus. We can become children of God.

We can be part of God's family. Now. And forever. You know. I don't know what your families are all like. But even the best families. On earth. Are subject to change.

People grow old. Sometimes they move away. And eventually people die. But God's family. Lasts forever. Jesus promises that one day he will return. And he will make an eternal home. For his family. For his people. For everyone. Who trusts in him. In a restored world.

[22 : 16] Where every tear. Will be wiped away. So let me ask you. On this Christmas day.

Have you come home to Jesus? Have you said something like. Jesus. I've lived far away from you. I have dishonored you. But please have mercy on me.

And forgive me. If you come to him. Jesus will receive you. He will never turn you away. Jesus said. Whoever comes to me. I will never turn away. And the Bible also says. To all who receive Jesus. Who believed in his name. He gave the right. To become children of God. See if you. If you put your faith in Jesus. You have God. As your heavenly father. You have Jesus. As your elder brother.

[23 : 10] And every Christian. Is your brother. And sister. You're no longer. In exile. You're included. In God's family.

And that's what the church is. The family of God on earth. That's why we're gathered here. On this Christmas day. And that's why we meet here. Every week. To be God's family. Together.

Together. To listen to God. Our heavenly father. To worship. And praise. Jesus. Our God's son. And our savior. And to be filled with the power.

Of the Holy Spirit. So that we can love one another. As brothers and sisters. And so that we can go into the world. And overflow. With his generosity. And his life.

And his peace. We're far from perfect. But Jesus promised his disciples. Where two or three. Are gathered in my name. I'm there.

[24 : 07] He's here. With us. Jesus became an exile. So that we could come home to God. Come to him today.

Let's pray. Lord God.

We thank you for. Your great provision. For your children. That we saw. First. In the story of Adam and Eve. And how you planted a garden for them.

And dwelt with them. In intimate fellowship. And Lord Jesus. We thank you. That despite. Our rebellion against you.

Despite the ways that we have. Ignored. And rejected you. That you have not abandoned us. But that you have come.

[25 : 05] To bring peace. Between us and you. And by extension to one another. Lord thank you for that promise.

Of an eternal home. Of a family. That will. Be together forever. In your presence. Lord we pray that we would.

That you would enable us. As your church. To be your family on earth. We pray that many people would find.

Life and peace. In you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.