

We are kicking off a new series today studying the gospel of Matthew, and I cannot tell you how excited I am for us as a church to be diving into this portion of God's Word. We are going to be studying Matthew leading up to Christmas and then all the way to Easter—five months—focusing on the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus. We are calling this series “Kingdom Come.” In the book of Matthew, Jesus shows us what the kingdom of heaven is like and teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.” We want the love of heaven to come into our lives and into the world, the wisdom of heaven to come into our lives and into the world, the joy of heaven to come into our lives and into the world, the abundance of heaven to come into our lives and into the world, the king of heaven to come into our lives and into the world! This is going to be a wonderful series in which we learn more about Jesus, and learn to become more and more like Jesus.

There are four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each of which gives us a different vantage point or perspective on Jesus. They are all eye-witness accounts, given from the experience of different people. The last couple days our family was down in Kentucky for Thanksgiving with Keren's family. On the way home, I asked everyone in the van, “What was your favorite part of the trip?” Addie mentioned playing with her cousins. Hudson's favorite part was throwing axes. Luke talked about all the toys at Grandma's house. Keren of course talked about being with her family. They were all talking about the same trip, but they focused on different aspects of it. That's what we see in the four gospels: four different perspectives from four different people, all focused on how God transformed the world and changed eternity through the life and ministry of Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew has a special place personally, practically, and historically. Personally, Matthew is the first gospel I ever read all the way through. When I was a teenager, I read it in three hours in one sitting, and I was captured by this portrait of Jesus. I wanted to follow Jesus and be more committed to him than ever! For the last twenty years I have found myself going back to Matthew again and again and again. Practically, I have some good friends who are missionaries in a closed country, a country where over 99% of the people are not Christians. When they meet people who are spiritually open to learning about Jesus, do you know the first thing they do? They read through the gospel of Matthew with them. They have found that if they can get people to read the gospel of Matthew, there is something about the way Matthew describes Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the kingdom, the miracles, the call to discipleship, that creates a strong chance they will become Christians. And historically, Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. It's the first of the four gospels. Why is Matthew first? Because in the early church, Matthew was the most frequently preached through, the most beloved and cherished of all the books in the New Testament. For 2,000 years, this book has helped people fall in love with Jesus and follow Jesus, and I can't wait to see how that happens for us!

Almost every time I pick up a book, I turn it over to learn a bit about the author. There is often a picture of the author and a short biographical sketch—where they live, the size of their family, their professional experience or credentials. It allows me to get to know the author before I read the book. What would that look like for the gospel of Matthew? If we turned the book over, what would we see?

Matthew was a tax collector. Matthew included his testimony in the gospel he wrote. In Matthew 9:9 he said, “As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth.” Don't hear that with modern eyes. I'm sure today, being a tax man isn't considered most people's favorite profession. No one gets excited about a three-hour meeting with an IRS agent. We don't love the tax man today, but in ancient Israel, they despised tax-collectors. They were the single most loathed group of people in the entire nation. The Jewish people hated the Roman Empire; they were oppressive, heavy-handed overlords. The Romans required a heavy tax from the Jews, but instead of collecting it

themselves, they relied on Jewish people who betrayed their own countrymen to come work for them. The Jewish tax collectors were required to give Rome a certain amount based upon the region they oversaw. But they lined their own pockets by overcharging the people. Tax collectors were the most hated of all people because they turned their backs on their own countrymen, partnered up with an evil, oppressive empire, then financially exploited the people in their community for personal gain. If you could visualize, according to ancient expectations, the most likely and least likely people who were supposed to inherit the kingdom of God when it came, you'd have the religious professionals up top (Pharisees, elders, teachers of the law); you'd have your devoted, sincere worshippers next; then your disengaged people who only went to the synagogue a few times a year; and then all the way at the very bottom were tax collectors. The worst of the worst. The lowest of the low. Jesus saw Matthew, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Everyone would have expected a word of rebuke, a message of confrontation and condemnation. Instead, Jesus said, "Follow me," and "Matthew got up and followed him." Jesus came for everyone!

Matthew was a tax collector who became an apostle. Not only did Jesus invite Matthew to follow Jesus, but he also invited Matthew into his inner circle.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4)

As an apostle, Matthew followed Jesus for three years and was a personal eye-witness to everything he recorded in his book.

Matthew was a tax collector who became an apostle who wrote a gospel for the Jewish community. Matthew was a Jew and his gospel was written specifically to the Jewish people to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah for whom they had been waiting. Matthew detailed over a dozen ways Jesus fulfilled specific Messianic prophecies, and continually highlighted ways Jesus fulfilled the "shape" of Israel's history. The details of Jesus' life retell the story of the nation of Israel and bring it to its long-awaited, climactic fulfillment. Let me give you a few examples of the way Matthew draws attention to this.

- *The journey to Egypt.* The nation of Israel left the promised land, went down to Egypt, and then came back to the promised land. Matthew is the only gospel writer to tell us about Jesus doing the same thing.
- *Temptation in the wilderness.* The nation of Israel was tempted in the wilderness for forty years. Matthew tells us Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. Where Israel failed, Jesus was faithful.
- *Moses' miracles and teachings.* Moses was the first great leader in Israel's history. He performed ten miracles and went up Mount Sinai to bring down God's law. Matthew shows Jesus beginning his ministry by going up a mountain to preach the Sermon on the Mount, the new law of God. Immediately after coming down from the mountain, Jesus performed ten miracles. In every way, Jesus fulfilled the promises, expectations, and hopes for the Jewish community.

Matthew was a tax collector who became an apostle who wrote a gospel for the Jewish community who was martyred for Jesus. Early Christian tradition tells us that Matthew traveled to tell as many people as possible about Jesus. He journeyed to Ethiopia, where he had a very significant ministry. His preaching convicted people in power, and one day the king ordered his execution. While he was presiding over communion and preparing the Lord's Supper for his congregation, one of the king's bodyguards snuck up behind him and stabbed him in the back. His broken body and shed blood literally lay on top of the symbolic representation of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. This man gave his entire life, and

even his death, so that others would be able to know Jesus and love Jesus and follow Jesus, and ultimately so that we could know, love, and follow Jesus, as well.

Let's dive into the gospel. "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). In the original Greek, this word "genealogy" is the word "genesis." Matthew is drawing an unmistakable connection all the way back to the very beginning, to the first book of the Bible, in which we learn the story of God creating the world and forming humanity. He is letting us know that through Jesus, God is, in a very real way, recreating the world and reforming humanity. Through Jesus, we have a new genesis, a brand-new beginning.

Genealogies give us connections to our past. Most of us have a strong desire to know where we come from and who we are connected to from the past. A few years ago, while our family was on a road trip, we stopped at a gas station to get some snacks and fill up the tank. As I was filling up, an RV pulled in next to me and I asked the driver where he was coming from. He said Indiana. I said I was from Indiana. He said technically he was in Greenwood. I said, "Hey, I live in Greenwood! What took you there?" This guy looked like he was in his mid-70s. He said, "You may not believe this, but I went up there to meet my daughter for the first time in my life." I smiled and said, "I've got to hear this story." He told me, "Someone gave me a call about a year ago and said she was adopted at birth and spent her entire life wondering about her biological dad. She took a DNA test to see if any matches came up, and it matched with my name. I asked where and when she was born. She said California in 1971. I lived in California in the 70's. It was all about drugs, sex, and rock'n'roll. It was totally possible. I looked at the DNA results, and this was clearly my biological daughter. We've been talking on the phone for the last year, but we just took the RV up to Indiana to spend the week together, in person. It was an incredible trip. I got to meet the daughter and the grandchildren I never knew I had."

People love to feel connected to family, distant family, and to see the connections from one generation to the next. Imagine how much more true that is if the family has power or wealth. The United Kingdom has a list of those who have the right to the throne if King Charles dies. Genealogical records are kept to prove who has the right to the throne.

—The King of England—

1. The Prince of Wales
2. Prince George of Wales
3. Princess Charlotte of Wales
4. Prince Louis of Wales
5. The Duke of Sussex
6. Prince Archie of Sussex
7. Princess Lilibet of Sussex
8. The Duke of York
9. Princess Beatrice, Mrs. Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi
10. Miss Sienna Mapelli Mozzi
11. Princess Eugenie, Mrs. Jack Brooksbank
12. Master August Brooksbank
13. Master Ernest Brooksbank
14. The Duke of Edinburgh
15. The Earl of Wessex
16. The Lady Louise Mountbatten-Windsor
17. The Princess Royal
18. Mr. Peter Phillips
19. Miss Savannah Phillips
20. Miss Isla Phillips

21. Mrs. Michael Tindall
22. Miss Mia Tindall
23. Miss Lena Tindall
24. Master Lucas Tindall

Anyone who wants to ascend to the throne of England must show their connection to this family. Ancient Jews kept extensive lists like this, to show who could be the rightful heir to Israel's throne, to show who was qualified by his birth to lead God's people. That's exactly what Matthew shows us to kick off his gospel—he shows us 42 generations, tracing the lineage of Jesus all the way from Abraham, 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, right up to Joseph, who was the earthly father of Jesus, in perfect fulfillment of the promises God made.

We are going to spend the first three weeks of this series diving into the genealogy and looking at the way in which God sovereignly guided history, working in every generation, working through all sorts of different men and women, including people from all walks of life, meeting them in their imperfections, in order to prepare the world for Jesus. Let's read the next several verses.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. (Matthew 1:2-6)

We don't have time to dive into every one of these individuals and stories, but I want to highlight six of them and show how each one of these individuals served as an example of Christ, and how, when Jesus came, he was the perfect fulfillment of the mold that came before him.

Abraham—Abraham is referred to throughout the Bible. His story is recorded in Genesis 12 - 25. He left his homeland and his father's family to set out on a journey to the promised land. As he did so, even though he had no children at the time, God told him that one day all the people of the world would be blessed through his offspring. He said, "Look up at the sky. If you can count the stars, that's what your offspring will be like, that's how many people will be brought into the family of God through you." Abraham is not only an ancestor of Christ; he's an anticipation of Christ—a man who left his father and his home country, setting out on a journey to the promised land to expand the family of God and bless the entire world.

Isaac—Isaac was born miraculously to a father who was 100 and a mother who was 90. His story is recorded from Genesis 21 - 35. He was the child who God promised Abraham. To test Abraham's faith, God called Abraham to take Isaac up a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. Isaac, who was a teenager at the time, went on the journey with his father and carried the wood for his own sacrifice up the mountain. At the last moment, God provided a ram as a substitute. Isaac is not only an ancestor of Christ; he's an anticipation of Christ—a beloved son of promise, who came into the world through an impossible way, and who climbed a mountain while carrying the wood for his own sacrifice.

Jacob—Jacob was the younger of twin boys born to Isaac and Rebecca. His story is told from Genesis 25 - 49. Jacob was the one who worked for fourteen years to marry the woman of his dreams. He had a dream in which he saw a ladder bridging heaven and earth. He wrestled with God through the night. At the very end of his life, he offered a blessing to his twelve sons. He is not only an ancestor of Christ; he's an anticipation of Christ—a groom who paid the ultimate price for the bride he loved, who wrestled with

God through the night in the garden of Gethsemane, who blessed his twelve followers at the end of his life, and who himself became the ladder that connected heaven to earth.

Judah—Judah was one of Jacob’s twelve sons. His story overlapped with his father’s and is recounted in Genesis 29 - 50. He was the older brother who came to Joseph’s rescue. When another brother, Benjamin, was set to be enslaved, Judah offered to give his life in exchange, and himself became a prisoner so his brother could be set free and reunited with their dad. He is not only an ancestor of Christ; he’s an anticipation of Christ—our older brother who not only protects us, but also gives his life in exchange for ours so we can be set free and restored to our Father.

Boaz—His story is recounted for us in Ruth 1 - 4. He became the husband, the kinsman redeemer, to the widow Ruth, and to her mother-in-law, Naomi. These were desperate and destitute woman who had no one to provide for them; Boaz was a man of integrity and honor who sacrificed to provide for them and protect them. He is not only an ancestor of Christ; he’s an anticipation of Christ—the man of honor who sacrificed to bring the hurting and impoverished under his protective covering.

David—David was the great-grandson of Boaz. David’s story is recounted for us from 1 Samuel 16 to 2 Samuel 24. We know so many details about his life. He is described as a man after God’s own heart, someone who led the nation in worship, the most powerful king in Israel’s history, and the one who, when the rest of the nation was terrified by their enemies and Goliath, stepped up to fight the giant no one else was willing or able to fight. He is not only an ancestor of Christ; he’s an anticipation of Christ—the rightful King who loves God with all his heart, leads God’s people in worship, and steps up to personally fight the enemy we were powerless to overcome.

There is a span of 1,000 years from Abraham to David. Throughout an entire millennium, through one family, one generation at a time, God was preparing the world for Jesus, not only by providing a biological lineage, but also by giving us pictures and windows into the type of Messiah God would one day send. God was preparing this all along!

In this opening section, Matthew does something very unusual, very unexpected, something that was basically unheard of in ancient Jewish genealogies—he included four women in Jesus’ genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Not only was it unexpected to include women, because heritage and inheritance in Jewish society were passed down from father to son, but it is likely that every one of these women was a Gentile, outside the ethnic people of God. Most scholars assume Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites; Ruth was Moabite, and Bathsheba was a Hittite. Ethnically speaking, they were outside the family of God. Two of these women were prostitutes. Ruth may have enticed her soon-to-be-husband at night, and Bathsheba, while her husband was off at war, had a sexual encounter with King David. These women were considered by everyone to be outside the family of God; there was brokenness and sin and shame and regret in their lives, and yet God chose to use them, because those are the very people the kingdom of God is for: not for the in crowd, but for the entire crowd; not only for the religious people, but for all people! Christ is coming for everyone!

We can learn so much in these few opening verses. We learn that God is sovereign over history, that every page of the Old Testament prepares the way for Jesus, that God has been faithful in every generation, that God will be faithful in this generation, that God uses the least likely people, that God’s kingdom is for everyone, that God invites each of us into his family.

I want us to end today by looking one more time at the interaction Jesus had with Matthew at the tax collector’s booth. “As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him” (Matthew 9:9). That’s what today, that’s what this entire study is going to be about. Jesus is going to see us right in the middle of

whatever it is we are doing, he is going to see us in all of our mess, see everything about us that is imperfect and misaligned and not how God intended it, and in his great grace he is going to say, "Follow me" and we get to decide if we are going to make the decision to get up and follow him. I hope we will.