

This morning we open a new sermon series... and start a new book of the Bible to study. As we do so... I've decided to kick it off with a little interaction. I am going to ask for a little help from you. I need a couple (who has been married for at least 5 years)... and who reads the Bible regularly. Can I have a couple... who will volunteer...?

### **SELECT VOLUNTEERS**

I asked you up here to read the passage we will be studying today. You said that you have been reading the Bible for several years... so this... I'm sure will not be a problem. However... just in case you do encounter a problem... I invited your spouse to join you... as a support.

Our passage this morning is in the New Testament... from one of the Gospels... as a matter of fact. ... So let me have you turn to the first chapter of Matthew... where we will pick up with verse one... and read the first 17 verses... (our passage for the day.)

Who will do the reading... and who will be the helper...? ... .. OK... Helper... your job is to read along very carefully. ... If there is ever a time when you think a word has not been pronounced properly... I want you to raise your hand and say "stop!" ... Then give us the correct pronunciation. We certainly don't want your spouse to embarrass themselves... do we...? Reader...? Use your best preacher's voice and read it rather quickly and confidently. ...Are you ready? ... .. Helper...? You know your role...? O.K. ... You may... **WAIT!** Hold on just a minute. Don't be nervous at all the eyes out there who are watching you. And I don't want you to think – at all – about all the ears of those who will be listening on SermonAudio... as

it is broadcast (world-wide... for many years... over the internet...) ... O.K.  
You may begin...

### **Matthew 1:1-17**

Now... I have a confession to make. You see a few nights ago... my family and I were sitting around the dinner table... and the question came up as to what book of the Bible we would be studying next... on Sunday mornings. ... When I gave the answer... one of my family members registered an immediate concern. (I am not going to mention the family member's name... because that might embarrass them... and I certainly don't want to embarrass anyone this morning.) ... But **SHE** said... "Oh no... **DAD**... Matthew begins with a genealogy... and you won't get through the first two verses before everyone starts dropping-off to sleep..." ... So that is when we made our friendly little father-daughter wager...

That wasn't a cheap stunt... was it...?

Then... I hope that you would not think... that what I am about to show you... is a cheap stunt either. ... You see... what I would like to try... now... is to engage you in a controversy that surrounds this genealogy... which few people even notice... (or think about)... when they read over this list of names. Many people... who have been a Christian for many years... don't even know this controversy exists. ... All but one... of the many Bible commentaries that I studied committed any ink to it at all... but simply passed right over it. ... .. But my belief is... that not a single one of Matthew's original readers missed it. ... And I actually believe that the answer to the puzzle that I am about to present... is the primary reason for why Matthew gives this genealogy. ... .. So I will now include you in... on

this mystery... and then later in the sermon... I will present its solution.  
(Take that, Daughter of mine!)

Put your eyes back on verse 11...

### **Matthew 1:11**

When Matthew was first read... the original audience must have gasped... once the name Jechoniah reached their ears. This seems to be the last person to include in the genealogy of someone you wanted to demonstrate has the lineage of the Messiah. Anyone who knew their Old Testament Scripture... (and there would have been many in that original audience – because Matthew wrote to a predominately Jewish audience)... would have recognized that name... and the GI-NORMOUS problem that it creates... for the Messiah's lineage.

You see... (very briefly)... Jechoniah was so evil... that God had his Uncle replaced him as king... and then... God put a curse on Jechoniah so that no descendant of his would ever be king... including the expected future Messiah/King. But there he is! Matthew lists Jechoniah as one of Jesus' great-great... great-great... great-great... grandfathers. (Although reading the Old Testament record... we don't see much of anything "great" about him...)

Let's take a look... now... at that Old Testament record... so we can see this curse on Jechoniah's descendants... and why. Let's begin with 2 Kings... chapter 24.

### **2 Kings 24:10-17**

### **Jeremiah 22:28-30**

In the lineage that Matthew presents for us... Jechoniah is mentioned... but then Matthew does something unique. He quickly turns our attention away from him... and onto the very sad... and overshadowing event... when Israel was deported to Babylon. (He mentions no other event like this among all the other names.) ... "*Don't think about this last name... quickly now... look over here... remember how horrible it was when Israel got deported.*"

Luke is the only other Gospel writer to give Jesus' lineage... and guess what...? ... Luke does not even mention Jechoniah! ... Hmmm... I wonder why...? ... Have we stumbled upon a far greater controversy cover-up than Watergate... or Ben Gazi...?

I will come back to this mystery a little later. Right now... let's start at the beginning of our passage... verse one.

### **Matthew 1:1**

OK... laying my cheap tricks aside (to try to hold your interest)... I must say... Really...?! I mean... com'on... "*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" ... What an unusual and... to our minds... an uninteresting way to begin a book! ... Didn't Matthew take a creative writing class in High School...? ... Was he absent the day the teacher taught about using an engaging hook...? Did he not know... that if you want your book to be read by many and to sell a lot of copies... a writer must capture the attention of his readers... in the first few lines? ... (In the public speaking classes that I teach up at the college... I make such a big deal that the students must actively capture our attention as their listeners... in the first 30 seconds of their speech... because each

of us have our own internal dialogue... that is just waiting to take over in our heads... and once it does... no one will hear a word you say.)

Of course Matthew knew all this... and that is exactly why he began this way. ... Now... let me tell you why...

As I said earlier... Matthew's first readers were primarily Jews. ... The Jewish Bible contains the same books as our Old Testament... but they are arranged in a different order... (possibly this was to avoid having the sacred writings terminate... with the curse that appears at the end of Malachi.) They probably knew a little something about the creative writing process too... and that would not have been a "happy-ever-after-ending." ... But for whatever reason... the Hebrews placed the Chronicles at the end... and that arrangement... is not without significance. You see... the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles... are simply long lists of names.

This is because... when Ezra the scribe wrote his Chronicles... he had a special audience... and special objectives in mind. .. Ezra wrote for the Jewish pioneers who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. ... They had come to stake a claim in the promised land... for the coming of the Messiah... Who was being so loudly heralded by the prophet Zechariah... but there was an enormous obstacle.

The land (they were returning to) was still "trodden down of the Gentiles." Judea was only a small province in the Persian empire. ... Furthermore... these pioneers (or repatriated Jews)... had a mandate to build a temple... not a palace... to set up an altar... not a throne.

Thoughtful people were asking, "*What has happened to God's promise to David?*" ... Ezra wrote to assure them that although the throne was gone... because of their national sins... and the debaucheries of their kings... the lineage for the future... and promised Messiah... still existed.

But then came the silent centuries. ... For four hundred years — after the last piece of the Old Testament was written... until the events that Matthew announces... God said nothing to His people.

Again... thoughtful people were asking, "*Now what has happened to the royal line of David?*" ... They would look at the end of their Holy Scriptures (at the Chronicles)... and realize that the lists of names were incomplete. 400 years of silence from God... and the promise that the royal line would never lack a man to sit on the throne of David... seemed to mock them. The royal line through Solomon had been cursed by Jeremiah because of the sins of Jechoniah... (also called Jechonias, or Jehoiachin, and contemptuously Coniah). ... So... it sure seemed as though God had forgotten His promise.

But Matthew startles his readers by telling them that the royal line was still alive! It terminates abruptly and permanently in the person of Jesus Christ. Matthew could have found no more compelling opening sentence: "The book of the generation [genealogy, pedigree, lineage] of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." "*It isn't over, Folks... and I am going to prove it by showing you how Jesus fits the requirement of the proper lineage.*" (Assuming we will ignore... or he can explain the existence of Jechoniah being in it.)

During the trial of Jesus... Pilate pointed to Jesus and said to the Jewish people... "*Behold your King!*" ... But do you remember their response... that we can read in John 19:14-15...? "*We have no king but Caesar!*" Jechoniah was the last King they ever had... who possessed the required pedigree... The people's cry - "*We have no king*"... was probably an accurate snapshot of Jewish cultural thinking... of that day. "*It might as well be Caesar...*" ... But then Matthew calls out in startling fashion – "*Wait! Here is Jesus' pedigree. He indeed was your King... and you will have no other King. The royal line comes to an end in Him.*"

The genealogy which opens the Gospel of Matthew and the New Testament is... in many respects... the most important opening to any book in the New Testament. ... In fact there could be no better way to begin what we call the New Testament. This is why... I'm sure... those who decided which book would be first... selected Matthew. It presents a great literary hook that startles the reader to perk-up and pay attention... (so Matthew's High School creative writing teacher can be very proud of him)... It perfectly connects the two Testaments... and breaks the 400 year silence.

BUT... The entire Bible rests upon its accuracy. ... So hold on... because we do need to contend with the little blemish... the caveat to Jesus' Messianic pedigree... that I mentioned earlier... ... which we will get to in a few minutes.) Right now... I would like to have J. Vernon McGee weigh in on this.

On the subject of Jesus' lineage... being His verifiable credentials... McGee writes...

*The enemies of Jesus could have checked them and probably did. This is interesting and important because they challenged every move of the Lord Jesus, even offering a substitute explanation for the Resurrection, but they never did question His genealogy. The reason must be that they checked it out and found that it was accurate.*

*This is most important because it puts Jesus in a very unique position. You remember that He said the Shepherd of the sheep enters in by the door but the thief and the robber climb up some other way to get into the sheepfold (see John 10:1-2). That "fold" is the nation Israel. He didn't climb into the fold over a fence in the back, and He didn't come in through the alley way. He came in through the gate. He was born in the line of David and in the line of Abraham. This is what Matthew is putting before us. He is the fulfillment of everything that had been mentioned in the Old Testament. So the enemies of Christ never could challenge Him in regard to His genealogy. They had to find some other ways to challenge Him, and, of course, they did.*

If a man suddenly appears and claims to be a king... the public immediately asks for proof. ... What is his background? ... Who pays homage to him? ... What credentials can he present? ... Anticipating these important questions... Matthew opened his book with a careful account of the birth of Jesus Christ and the events that accompanied it.

A few more points regarding Matthew's genealogy may be helpful. ... First... he is not giving us a comprehensive genealogy. ... (Not every descendant in the family tree is included in this list.)

If you compare this genealogy with the one in 1Chronicles 3 (some of the names are spelled differently)... but perhaps more significantly... you will find that (in verse eight)... the names of Ahaziah... Joash... and Amaziah are left out. ... Also in verse 11, we find that Matthew skips Jehoiakim... ... But for some reason... he DOES include the problematic Jechoniah.



The genealogies that we find in Genesis (and elsewhere in the Bible)... are quoted to give us a highlighted view of a line of descendants. ... Every individual is not necessarily named. But we are given enough names so one can trace a certain line... in a family or Jewish tribe. Matthew skips over some... and includes others... in order to make several points... that readers have been gleaning over the years.

Matthew's genealogy is specifically arranged in groups of 14... as Matthew himself tells us in 1:17.

### **Matthew 1:17**

Matthew has arranged his genealogy this way to punctuate the reason that he gives it to us. ... Matthew goes out of his way... for us to make the connection between Jesus and King David.

Without getting bogged down with all of the details... let me simplify it by saying the Jews assigned numbers to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the name David equals the number 14. ... I know that there all sorts of people today who search for hidden meanings in the Bible... and they like to use numbers. ... To me... I think they are being distracted from the plain meaning of the text. ... We will do well if we simply read and accept what it clearly says... and not go looking for hidden meanings and insights.

But apparently it has been established that when Matthew wrote his Gospel... the Jews were really into this. They called it gematria. ... So what Matthew cleverly does is arrange three groups that say "David"...

“David” ... “David.” ... Every way that he can... he wants his readers to see Jesus’ connection to David through His genealogy.

This list is saturated with Old Testament history. Consider the following: David... the first name mentioned... is the king whose line God promised to establish for all time (according 2 Sam 7:14). ... Then... Abraham was the one through whom God's promised blessing would come to the whole world (Gen 12:1-3, 15:1-6). ... Isaac... Abraham's son... was a miracle-baby... born to a mom named Sarah... who was shocked to find out that she would have a child. ... This supernatural birth would set the stage for Mary... who was also pretty shocked (though for different reasons) to find out that she was going to have a child.

Tamar is the first woman mentioned... (which is pretty amazing... because ancient genealogies never mentioned women. But this one does... four times... because Matthew is making some astounding points.)

According to Genesis 38... Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law... and in that chapter of the Old Testament we are given a very ugly and scandalous story. (It isn't taught very often in most Sunday Schools to young children.) ... Tamar tricks her father-in-law into an incestuous affair... because she wanted to shame him and call attention to a responsibility that he was shirking toward her. This led to the birth of the twins that Matthew mentioned in verse 3... Perez and Zerah.

The second woman mentioned is Rahab. ... Who was she...? Oh, just a gentile woman who was a prostitute. ... But she helped the Israelite spies

when they visited Jericho... and she was spared when the people of God came into the promised land.

Ruth is the third woman mentioned. She too was a Gentile... a Moabitess. The Moabites were a people known for their sexual immorality... and who at one time were forbidden to come into the assembly of God's people. These 14 generations leading up to King David make up the first of three sets of 14 generations.

In the second set of 14... we see the fourth woman mentioned (the wife of Uriah) that would be... Bathsheba. ... Bathsheba was brought into David's kingly line through adultery and murder. Her husband was a Gentile... and she probably was too.

Then... picking up with Solomon... Matthew lists the kings in Israel leading up to the exile. ... Now here it gets VERY ugly! A few of these kings honored the Lord... but most of them were terribly evil... sacrificing their own children... by throwing them into the fire in the belly of the idol Molech. They constantly lead the people of God into sin and idolatry. ... This eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem... the cutting off of the descendants of Jechoniah from being in David's lineage to be King... (Oh Yah... we still have to talk about that... don't we...?)... and then came the exile to Babylon.

In the third set of 14 generations, in verses 12-16, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy from the deportation to Babylon to the birth of Jesus Christ.

All in all... this is one crooked family tree! ... It is so full of despicable characters... and surprises. ... Yet... this was the family tree through which the incarnate Son of God stepped onto the pages of human history.

Satan sure brought his heaviest artillery against the Judean monarchy. He knew that the Messiah must come from these descendants... and he did everything he could to corrupt the royal seed. ... With Matthew's genealogy... we can see how Satan went about his business.

He tried to discredit David... himself... using Bathsheba. But that failed. Next he tried to curse the seed through Solomon's problem of lust and liberalism. Jerusalem would eventually look and sound more like the city of Babylon... than the city of God.

When Solomon died... his son... Rehoboam showed himself to be such a fool... that the kingdom divided between the Northern Tribes of Israel... and the Southern tribe... known as Judah. ... From there... the Davidic line of Kings digressed... into quite a quagmire of debauchery... having nothing at all to do with Israel's God. ... By the time God finally rejected Jehoniah... and said... no more Kings from this lineage... it sure seemed as though Satan had his victory!

But do you want to hear something REALLY cool...? The whole time that Satan was concentrating his attack on this Davidic line of Kings... there was a completely different lineage of David living out through the ages... who Satan was not as focused upon. (Satan got sucker-punched!) ... You see Solomon was not the only son David had. David had another boy... (living in Solomon's shadows) named Nathan.

Luke did not mention Jechoniah... because Luke was giving a different lineage. Luke's focus was not on David's genealogy that was passed through Solomon. Luke's focus was on David's genealogy... as it passed through the other son of David – Nathan! You see... David and Bathsheba were mom and dad to Solomon and Nathan.

And here is what is really cool. Mary... the mother of Jesus... as Luke shows us... is a descendant of Nathan! Jesus **has the credentials!!!** He is from the Kingly line – and the curse of Jechoniah... which would apply to **Joseph**... (Jesus' adoptive father)... does not effect Jesus. Why...? Because of the Virgin Birth. The Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary... and the Davidic prophecy (that a descendant of His will be on the throne forever) – is perfectly fulfilled. Satan's effort to foil God's plan – failed!

So why does Matthew give us the lineage of David through Solomon...? Why didn't he give us Nathan's lineage... as Luke did...?

Remember that Matthew was writing his Gospel to a primarily Jewish audience. And I happen to believe that Matthew was the earliest of the Gospels to be written. When Matthew wrote... there were many Jews riding the fence... deciding whether or not to place their faith in Him. A huge hindrance to this genealogy-conscious people... would have been the Jechoniah curse. ... *“Wait a minute! He cannot be the promised Messiah... because He comes from Jechoniah's line...”*

I believe that Matthew is writing a defense to a main objection about Jesus during that time. ... He acknowledges the truth about the lineage of Jesus' adoptive father – Joseph... AND THEN... Matthew immediately launches into a detailed description of the virgin birth – that no other Gospel gives.

Matthew is saying – it doesn't matter! Jesus is Mary's biological child – but not Joseph's!

Matthew's genealogy is so much more than a list of names or simply a historical record for first-century Jewish readers. It presents Jesus Christ as the climactic fulfillment of God's promises of a coming King and Satan's defeat. ... But also included in this genealogy is a picture of how God saves. Matthew tells us at least two things in this opening section about the nature of God's salvation.

First, **God saves only by His sovereign grace**. The list of names in verses 1-17 is full of evil kings and sinful men and women, a description that includes Abraham and David as well. Abraham was a polygamist patriarch who lied about his wife twice. David was an adulterous murderer. And the list goes on and on. It's amazing to think that the great, great, great, great, great grandparents of Jesus hated God and were leading other people to hate Him too. Clearly, then, **Jesus came not because of Israel's righteousness, but in spite of Israel's sinfulness**.

Throughout Scripture we **see the sinful responsibility of man**. Evil kings and evil men lived their lives in rebellion against God, and they were responsible for their sin. Nevertheless, God was working in and through these people. In the midst of man's sinfulness, we also **see the supreme will of God**. At no point were any of the men and women mentioned in this genealogy outside of the sovereign control of God. Yes, *they* were choosing to disobey God, and *they* were responsible for that. At the same time, God was ordaining all of this to bring about the birth of His Son.

In addition to the men mentioned earlier, the list of sinful women on Matthew's list is equally stunning. The message is clear: **Jesus came for (and through) the morally outcast.** Tamar was guilty of incest. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth was a Moabitess... a people known for their sexual immorality. ... Finally... Bathsheba.... even though she committed adultery with David.

So we have adultery... sexual immorality... prostitution... and incest. ...So why is this theme of sexual immorality... and so prominent in this genealogy...? And why are *these* people included in the line that leads *to* Christ?

For the same reason *your* name is included in the line that leads *from* Christ — solely because of the sovereign grace of God. Praise be to God that He delights in saving sinful... immoral outcasts!

This theme of sovereign grace even applies to Matthew, the author of this Gospel. Matthew was a tax collector... a Jew who made his living by cheating other Jewish people. ... When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him... the only people Matthew knew to invite to his house for a party were moral reprobates – fellow tax collectors! ...Matthew knew he was the least likely person to be writing this Gospel... which is fitting for a book that announces good news.

God saves not based on any merit in us... but totally on sovereign mercy in Him. ... If He didn't save like that... we would all be damned.

Not only did He come for (and through) the morally outcast... but also **Jesus came for (and through) the ethnically diverse.** ... These

women—Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth—were all Gentile women. This ethnically diverse genealogy leads to the second aspect of God's salvation in this genealogy: **God saves ultimately for His global purpose.**

Recall the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3... that "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God's promise to His people is for the sake of all peoples. This universal plan will reappear throughout Matthew's Gospel... and at the center of this plan is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Matthew's Gospel teaches us that an emphasis on missions is not just a made-up program that man has come up with - it's all over the Bible. Missions have been the purpose of God from the very beginning of history... with His saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ. Now all followers of Christ are on a global mission to make this King known among all nations... to spread the gospel of this kingdom at home and among every people group on the planet.

At the end of the day... how does God save us? ... Solely by His sovereign grace. Why does God save us? Ultimately for His global purpose... AND THIS... is at the heart of Matthew's genealogy. The question then becomes how we will respond.

As we move forward in the book of Matthew, we are going to see three distinct groups of people: (1) The religious leaders who deny Jesus, (2) the crowds of people who follow Jesus as long as He gives them what they want and attracts their interest (but who ultimately and eternally walk



away), and (3) the very small group of disciples who are going to follow Jesus, learn from Him, and eventually lose their lives for Him. As you read Matthew's Gospel, you must decide which group you are in.

**Like the leaders, will you completely reject Jesus?** We are going to see attacks on Jesus' character and attacks on Jesus' claims throughout this book by people who pridefully choose to deny that Jesus is King.

**Like the crowds, will you casually observe Jesus?** This is the place where many church attenders, probably even many church members, find themselves today. Content to observe Jesus, to give Him token allegiance, they add Him as a part of their life. These are people who do good things and are actively involved in the church in different ways. They are, in some way or another, associated with Jesus. And one day they will say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?" (7:22). And Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!" (7:23).

**Like the disciples, will you unconditionally follow Jesus?** In a day when nominal Christianity and lazy discipleship are rampant in America and in many places around the world, will you rise up and say to Jesus, "You are King, and because You are King, there are no conditions on my obedience to You. I will follow You wherever You lead me, I will give You whatever You ask of me. I will abandon all I have and all I am because You are King and You are worthy of nothing less"? This is the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus the Christ.

How will you respond?