

Waiting for Messiah

King of Heaven: The (Un)expected King

Matthew 1:1-17

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Different from What You Expected

Thanksgiving is past. And Black Friday is past. So, for a lot of you, the Christmas shopping has already begun. Many of you kids are already counting the days until you'll get to open those presents. You're waiting in expectation. Will you get what you want? Or will you get something different and then have to *act* like you're excited?

How many of you have ever received something for Christmas that was different than you expected? And frankly you were disappointed. But then you later came to appreciate the gift, and even discover it was better than what you expected?

One year when our kids were younger we decided to surprise them with short family vacation the day after Christmas. But instead of telling them we were going on vacation, Maggie wrapped up a number of clues about our vacation disguised as gifts.

One kid opened a pair of goggles. It wasn't quite what they expected, but they politely said thank you. Another opened a pair of flip flops and another received a beach towel. At that point they were beginning to wonder what was going on; they saw a theme emerging. Then someone opened a picture of a swimming pool. Their eyes lit up. "Are we getting a swimming pool for Christmas?" Well not quite. Maggie had one more gift to help them get the point. It was a picture of a wolf. "Are we getting a puppy?" Again, no.

They weren't seeing how the pieces held together. So, we explained it. We were going to spend the weekend at Great Wolf Lodge, a water park in Kansas City. This turned out to be the best gift that Christmas, but it definitely wasn't what everybody wanted or expected.

Advent is all about waiting and watching for Jesus. We remember Jesus' first coming and we look forward to his second coming. At the time of Jesus' first coming, the Jews were waiting. They were expecting a Messiah to come and save them. Even though they had come out of Babylon and returned to Jerusalem, for many, they still considered themselves in exile. The throne of David had not been restored and they were still under the thumb of the Roman Empire. They were waiting. They had great expectations for a Messiah.

We begin a new series this morning in the Gospel of Matthew. And Matthew makes it very clear that he sees Jesus as the fulfillment of this expectation for a Messiah. The opening words read, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Or to put it in different words, the book of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah.

Throughout his gospel, Matthew's going to emphasize that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of a Messiah. But he also teaches us that Jesus is a different kind of Messiah than they were expecting. Many Jews were very disappointed in Jesus. But as we study Matthew, we see that Jesus was far better than they were expecting.

Our passage this morning is Matthew 1:1-17. It's a long genealogy. Most people skip it or miss the significance of it all. It seems like a strange way to introduce a book, but I don't think it would've been a surprise to the original Jewish readers. Genesis and Chronicles are full of genealogies. And these are the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible. We don't normally think of Chronicles as the last book of the Bible, but it was in the Hebrew Bible.

Ever since Genesis 3:15, God's people have been watching and waiting for the offspring of Adam and Eve to come and save them. So, they traced their lineage. The genealogies in Genesis focus mainly on the line of Abraham. And the genealogies in Chronicles focus mainly on the line of David.

They were watching and waiting for a Savior from the line of Abraham and David. So, we shouldn't be surprised when we open the first book in the New Testament to find a genealogy that shows Jesus as the descendant of Abraham and David.

Matthew 1:1-17¹

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into three sections. One begins with Abraham, one with David, and one with the deportation. I believe these three sections correspond with three different covenants God made with his people. The covenant he made with Abraham and David. And the new covenant he promised during the exile in Babylon. These three movements in God's plan of redemption find their climax in Jesus, the long-expected Messiah.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

Through this genealogy Matthew is introducing for us the main themes he's going to cover in the rest of his gospel. He plays the notes of a melodic line that he'll develop throughout his score. He hints at ways Jesus fulfills expectations for a Messiah in unexpected ways. He unwraps small clues that point to the surprise gift of Jesus.

For the sake of time, I'm only going to focus on Abraham and David this morning. I'll pick up on the exile and new covenant themes later in the series.

ABRAHAM

Let's begin with Abraham. The Jews expect the Messiah to come from the line of Abraham. And they expect him to fulfill the promises made to Abraham. But he does so in ways they didn't expect. The promise made to Abraham was that God would bless him and make his offspring into a great nation. He also promised that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). But with these great expectations, God also *placed* expectations on Israel. He expected them to walk before him and to be blameless (Gen. 17:1-2).

By the time Jesus shows up on the scene, Israel had forgotten some of these expectations. They had forgotten that part of what it meant for them to be the people of God involved emulating the faith of Abraham and obeying God. They focused more on simply being ethnic descendants of Abraham than living in right relationship with God. They also forgot that part of their charter was to be a blessing to the nations.

There are only three references to Abraham in the rest of Matthew. And these references remind the Jews what they'd forgotten about the covenant with Abraham.

The first reference is found in John the Baptist's ministry in Matthew 3:7-10. As the religious leaders come to witness John's ministry, he says to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John was teaching them to not presume upon their ethnic pedigree. Being the people of God involves more than simply being a descendant of Abraham. It involves living in right relationship with God. It involves repentance and faith in Jesus. It involves bearing fruit. This was different from what they expected. But this is exactly what God told Abraham and it's exactly what Jesus the Messiah taught throughout his ministry. Those who belong to the kingdom of heaven will obey the king of heaven.

The second reference to Abraham is found in Matthew 8. It highlights the faith of a Gentile, a centurion. When Jesus saw the faith of the centurion, we're told he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (Matt. 8:10-12).

Jesus says Gentiles will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. But some Jews, even though they were descendants of Abraham, would not be citizens of the kingdom. This was unexpected. But it shouldn't have been. God told Abraham this. And we even see four Gentile women in the Messiah's genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. This was always God's plan. And so, Jesus taught

this. In fact, in Jesus' last words before the ascension, he called the church to go and make disciples of all nations. Through Jesus, the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham are being fulfilled.

This is instructive for us today. Even though most of us here today aren't Jews, we can also easily presume upon our heritage. We can place our confidence of salvation in our parents' faith or in a decision we made in the past. The only way to be saved from our sins is to repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus. And if our faith is genuine, it will be demonstrated in our lives.

DAVID

Let's look now at David. David is the major highlight of the genealogy. We're told that Jesus is the son of David, even before we're told he's the son of Abraham. David is repeated five times in this genealogy. Then in verse 17 we read, "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations."

We know from the rest of the Bible that there were more than these forty-two generations from Abraham to Christ. But Matthew highlights these three groups of fourteen for a reason. Why is this significant? Well Hebrew numbers were often represented by adding together Hebrew letters. It's a method called gematria. And the number fourteen in Hebrew was made by putting together the Hebrew letters D-V-D. And that doesn't stand for digital video disc. It stands for David. Matthew wants to emphasize how important it is that Jesus is the son of David.

Matthew refers to Jesus being the son of David more than any other gospel. And that makes sense. In a book that's focused on the kingdom, it's important to establish that Jesus is the king. And everybody expected that the Messianic king would come from David's line. But again, although the Jews expect the Messiah to be David's son, there's so much about Jesus that is unexpected.

This comes out in Matthew 22:41-46, in a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. They've been questioning Jesus, trying to trap him. But then Jesus puts a question to them they can't answer. They acknowledge that the Christ will be the son of David. So, Jesus quotes Psalm 110, and asks them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

I'm not going to explain this in detail now. I just want you to get the point. Even though Jesus is the son of David, he's also the Son of God! Jesus is not only the Davidic king; he's also the king of heaven. And the Jews didn't expect that.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is repeated and unique to Matthew. What Matthew wants us to see is that the kingdom of God is nothing like the kingdoms of this earth; it's from heaven.²

Think of the Sermon on the Mount. It's all about how the kingdom of heaven is so different from the values of the world and even different from many Jews' understanding of God's laws in the Old Testament.

The king from heaven exercises his reign in completely unexpected ways. He's not a military leader who comes into town and drives out the Roman Empire and establishes a throne in Jerusalem.

² Jonathan Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*

Instead he repudiates violence. He heals and welcomes Gentiles, including Roman officials. His message involves turning the other cheek, humility, and waiting for the consummation of his kingdom when he returns. He doesn't exert his authority by force. Instead he exerts his authority through calling his disciples to follow him, teaching them, and even forgiving their sin. Quite unexpected.³

The deportation to Babylon was because of Israel's sin. Just look up the lives of the names in the genealogy and you'll know how sinful Israel was. But when Jesus shows up, he doesn't cast down Israel's enemies. Instead he does the completely unexpected. He voluntarily allows the religious leaders and the Romans to crucify him so he can pay the penalty for his people's sins. Then he says his kingdom is for all who believe in him and receive the forgiveness he offers at the cross. He's the long-expected Messiah, but he's at the same time so unexpected.

A couple of weeks ago, I learned some new slang from Isaiah's brother Tylin. For his thirteenth birthday, I took Tylin to get wings at Pam's Wings With Things on 13th Street (that's right, not Pam's Wings and Things, but Pam's Wings *With* Things). I got buffalo hot wings; he chose honey mustard wings. We've been there before, but they were especially good this time. We were so busy eating, we didn't do much talking. But after I made it about half way through my order, I decided to ask Ty what he thought of his wings. He looked up with honey mustard all over his fingers and face and said, "these wings hit different."

Have you ever heard that phrase? I hadn't. And I didn't know what it meant. So, I looked it up on the Urban Dictionary. When something hits different it is significantly better or worse than the way you experienced it in the past. That's exactly the way I felt. I don't know what it was. Maybe new management. Maybe I was hungry. Maybe it was the special occasion, but the wings at Pam's hit different than before.

I don't want to be irreverent. But that phrase kept going through my mind as I was writing this sermon. Jesus transforms the expectations for a Messiah. Now that Jesus has come on the scene, we no longer look at the covenants with Abraham and David the same way. They hit different! Jesus transforms the way we think about them. And even though Jesus was a disappointment to many Jews in the first century, I think it's fair to say that what Jesus brings is significantly better than what people expected in the past.

As I said in the weekly email this week, 2020 has been like the longest Advent in my life. Everything we're going through right now leaves us waiting and watching, looking and longing for deliverance. But I pray our longing won't simply be for a return to the way things were in 2019, or 2018, or some other version of the past we think is better.

The coming of Jesus should recalibrate our expectations. Matthew teaches us that the kingdom of God will come. God's will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But not fully until the king returns from heaven. And until that day, we need to focus on the priorities of the kingdom of heaven, not the concerns of earth.

We have a promise that the gospel of the kingdom will go forth to the ends of the earth before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). There will be a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation saved by the

³ Robert Kinney, unpublished notes on Matthew

king of heaven. The pandemic has done nothing to put the brakes on that promise. So, let's continue to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom.

And that reminds me to ask you, where do you stand with Jesus? The Jews in Jesus' day were so concerned with how the Roman Empire was affecting their lives that they forgot that the main thing they needed saved from was not Rome, it was from their sins. The same goes for us. The main thing we need saved from is not the pandemic or the effects of the pandemic. The main thing we need saved from is our sin. And praise God, the Messiah has come to save his people from their sins.

Have you placed your faith in Jesus' death for your sins? Have you repented of your sins and bowed the knee to King Jesus? And if so, is your life bearing fruit in keeping with your faith and repentance? Those are the marks of those who belong to God.

We have no control over this world, but God does. We do, however, have a responsibility to respond to Jesus and to follow him.

Jesus is more than we could've ever expected. Let us give him our full allegiance, as we await his return from heaven.