

Text: Matthew 1:1-6a

Sunday 29th November 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Introduction to series

Today we begin a new series that will see us through to the end of the year. But first, here's a question for you to think about or engage with in the Live Chat: how far back can you trace your family history? I know my dad has done some work on this and there's also that TV programme which helps people trace their family line. At times something unexpected arises, a revelation that impacts the identity of those living today.

Over the next three sermons we're going to focus on the genealogy of Jesus, as found at the start of Matthew's gospel. The genealogy is structured with three sets of fourteen generations and we'll take one set each week. Often when we read this list of names we find it dull and a bit odd, we don't really see the relevance of it.

But in Jesus' day, and at the time when Matthew wrote this gospel, having the genealogy of Jesus written down, spelt out, would have been impressive, exciting, compelling for the people of their day because it revealed the roots of Jesus, it revealed His identity.

As we journey through Advent, my hope is that we will not only become familiar with the identity of Jesus, but that our own identity might be matured as well. Because when we place our faith in Jesus, when we identify as people who follow Him, then as the New Testament tells us, we are "in Christ" – we share in who He was and what He was about – in truth, our identity becomes entwined with His identity, because we are now part of the family of God. So, let us open our Bibles and hear today's passage read for us but Norma Thompson. (PAUSE)

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be true and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Matthew's tracing of the family line of Jesus began with these words:

'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham...' (v1)

With so few words, Matthew would have grabbed the attention of his original readers, because he is making big claims about Jesus: Matthew is claiming that Jesus is not only descended from Abraham and David, ...

but that the promises given to these individuals, and the hopes that God's people had kept alive for hundreds of years, Matthew is claiming that in Jesus these promises, these hopes, are now being fulfilled. So, let's briefly see what those promises were.

To Abraham, **God had said:**

'I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

...and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you.'

(Genesis 12:2-3)

With Abraham, God initiated a plan to bless all peoples, all nations, to bring them back into relationship with Himself and so be part of His kingdom and know the life that can only come through a relationship with the living God.

But the Lord also made a promise to David, we read:

“...when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom...I will be his father, and he shall be my son...my love will never be taken away from him...Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.”

(2 Samuel 7:12, 14-16)

An incredible promise, a promise that had seemed to be lost, or unfulfilled for so long, and yet the people continued to wait for a son of David to be born. We saw in our last series in Isaiah, several of the prophecies given by God, confirming to His people that He would fulfil this promise: that a King would come and in time this individual came to be known as the Messiah, the Anointed One, or in the Greek, Christos, from which we get the title Christ.

So, when Matthew says: ‘This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham...’ – this is a very loaded statement and part of Matthew’s purpose in detailing the family line is to affirm and validate the identity of Jesus: He is Messiah, the Christ; He is heir to the promises of David and of Abraham.

But, what does that mean for us? For you and me? Well, we need to understand that Jesus – who He was, what He was about, the message He conveyed and the ministry He carried out – all of this was so vast, so multi-layered, multi-faceted that none of the gospel writers could weave everything together, so they each sought to capture a perspective on Jesus, a perspective that spoke to the needs and concerns of a particular audience.

Now, these perspectives do not conflict – it's like seeing a diamond from different angles, with its different faces and cuts, yet each perspective allows us to appreciate the overall beauty and significance. It's the same with Jesus, **for in Matthew's gospel** we find a focus on the "Kingdom of heaven" and the "son of David". Again and again, Matthew uses language...

to get us thinking about the kingdom of God and the rule of Jesus. But Matthew's focus on this, is not only in reference to historical promises being fulfilled in Jesus – **Matthew also knows** that following Jesus, identifying with Him and His family line, is to identify with the Kingdom of God and the rule of Jesus in your own life and as a community of faith. To follow Jesus, within Matthew's gospel, is to recognise Him as King and ourselves as His subjects and ambassadors. To have faith in Jesus, is to confess Jesus as King of kings and actively seek the extension of His Kingdom. So, it's no surprise that Matthew concludes his gospel **with these words:**

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' (Matthew 28:18-20)

You may still be wondering: how does this relate to us? Well, firstly – you are welcome; you are welcome into the Kingdom of God for God delights in you. For a long time, Israel misunderstood its place and its role, becoming very insular, writing others off. But God always had a plan that was for all the nations, for all peoples – we saw that in the promises made to Abraham and in the verses we read today, we see mention of three women – and I'll say more about them in the coming weeks – but for now, let's notice that Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and probably even Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, were all foreigners. They were Gentiles, outsiders, usually excluded, ostracised, unwelcome. But they are named in the family line of Jesus to help us see the all-embracing love of God; we see His welcome to the nations, to one and all, to any who will come to Him in faith through Jesus.

I wonder, do you know this welcome, friends? Do you know the affirmation of God? You may not because you are not yet following Jesus, and if that's you, then God extends His welcome to you as well and all you need to do is come in faith to Him through Jesus. Friends, when you know the welcome of God, it changes your life because you realise you're not written off, you are valued, you are precious to God, He truly delights in You and wants You to know a place in His family, through faith in Jesus. Friends, do you know the welcome of God?

But what if you do know the welcome of God? What if you do follow Jesus and part of your identity is having faith in the One who is Messiah, the promised King? Well, if that's you brothers and sisters, **then let me ask: in our day-to-day lives, in the life of our congregation, where...**

is our focus? What is our priority? Is it the Kingdom of God? So, for example, we are exploring our future place with the seven Braes churches coming together as a Hub – is our focus on the Kingdom of God, or is it upon our building and our future as Brightons? As a congregation, do we have an identity defined by the Kingdom of God?

Or on a personal level, are you sharing in the great commission, given to all of us who follow Jesus? We saw, in the verses from Matthew 28, that we're all sent to make disciples of the nations; each of us is personally called by Jesus to be His ambassador. Is that part of your identity? Because it's not optional, it's not for a select few; everyone who claims to follow Jesus is called to make Him known and extend His kingdom.

So, here's an easy first step, to help us all grow in our identity as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. **In the next couple of weeks,** our church Christmas card will be coming out, but due to restrictions we're not delivering to the whole parish. Instead, each church household will receive two cards – one for yourself and another to give away, that you might invite someone to watch or attend a service over the festive period. This is a really simple way of extending the welcome of God to another person and playing your part within the Kingdom of God as His ambassador.

I pray that over this time of Advent, we will see more clearly the identity of Jesus and grow in our identity as people who are in Christ: welcomed and sent out.

May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn,

HYMN MP-210 *Hark, the glad sound*