

“Who is this Jesus?”
Matthew 1:1, 18-25
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We will be looking at Matthew 1 in this study and it will kick off our winter and spring series where we'll look at some key episodes from the life of Christ. This is God's Word. Matthew 1:1, 18-25 says, *[1] The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

[23] “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

[24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called His name Jesus.

Now, I trust you will agree with me that if you want to understand events, you have to have an idea of who the players are. Above all, in the Gospels, the player is Jesus. In this study, we're going to look at the titles and the roles that Jesus had as described, especially in Matthew 1:1 but also 18 to 25. I want to start by telling you a personal tennis story. One day about 25 years ago, by now, I was off to play a tennis match on a Saturday against some excellent foes. As I was leaving my wife said, ‘So who are you playing today?’ I said, “The best team in the league on their court which is a very strange court and we'll get killed.” She has heard me pronounce tennis death too many times to take it very seriously. She said, ‘Have fun storming the castle’ and off I went. Now, as I got to the court, hope began to surge as I saw one of the two players who was big and hit the ball hard, but his footwork seemed a little slow and he was a little bit erratic. I thought we might have a chance to win today but it all depends on his partner. His partner wasn't showing up and it's about one minute before match time. We're getting close to a forfeit. Then someone arrives whose name is Althoff and he's young and he moves kind of like a cat and holds his racket in his left hand in a somewhat menacing way. I was the one to warm up with Althoff. When you warm up you look for skills and deficiencies. I hit the ball to him and he hits the ball back to me hard, bouncing about eight feet in front of my forehand. This happens eight times in a row and then eight times in a row the ball bounces right to my backhand waist high. He's clearly warming me up. I'm not warming him up.

This goes on a little while, I'm seeing all skills, no deficiencies. I say to my partner, “we need a hit to your guy” and we start to play. We hit ‘your guy’ lefty all the time and it's 4-4 after eight games and we're so excited. Then lefty kind of drifts off the court and it's one on two and Althoff is just hitting winner after winner, crushing us eight points in a row and the first set is over. I thought I heard something like ‘finish soon’ from Althoff to lefty. I leaned over to my partner and said, ‘If we lose this next set in 15 minutes, we'll know something.’ Now, in case

you're wondering to lose a set in 15 minutes is obliteration and we lost the next set in 14 minutes. We won one game and we're very excited about that. As we shook hands at the net, I said, "That was great. Who are you?" And he said, 'I'm one of the pros here. I was just filling in. You know, the guy didn't show up. So just to give you a match.' I said, "I figured that out a long time ago. I want to know who you are.' He said, "I did get off the tour about a year ago." So I've been playing against the man who was one of the top 100 players in the world, and he was 32 years old which explained everything. You have to know who you're playing.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us who is involved. To make any sense of the Gospel stories, you have to know who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ. Matthew 1:1 tells us this is the story of Jesus Christ, Son of David, son of Abraham, and we're going to take that apart so we understand the Gospel stories, because really it makes no sense unless Jesus is someone truly unique. There's a virgin who's pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Explain that to me, please and an angel speaks to a man who says to go ahead and take her. You've never touched her and she's pregnant. I get it but you need to take her as your wife and you don't get to choose the baby's name. I'm going to tell you His name is Jesus.

The question, 'who is this' comes up over and over again in the Gospels. In fact, when Jesus performs miracles, that's one of the most common things people say. Pretty early in His ministry, there was a big storm. Jesus was teaching and healing some people, and He crosses the Sea of Galilee in a boat and a huge storm comes up, which can happen in Israel, and the boat's about to go down. Jesus, exhausted from His ministry, is asleep in the hull and the Disciples wake Him up saying "Jesus, you just might want to know the boat's going to sink, we're going to drown." Jesus gets up and commands the wind and the waves and they stop immediately. The Disciples say, 'Who is this? Who even commands the wind and the waves? Who is this? We have to know.'

A little bit later, a man is lowered through a roof and Jesus heals him but before He heals and He says, "Your sins forgiven." Those who heard Him say this say, 'Who is this? Who even forgives sins?' In the last week of Jesus' life, when the hosannas ring out, the children praise Him and people are laying palm branches, people say, 'who is this?' In fact, not only Israelites, but even at the end of Jesus' life, those who were most hostile, the chief priests at Jesus' trial said, "Who are you? Are you the Christ?" Pontius Pilate, Roman Procurator, who really shouldn't have cared much, said, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Everybody wants to know who this Person is, and Matthew tells us He is Jesus, which means Savior. He is Christ, which means someone who's anointed and appointed for a task. He is the son of David, which means He's from the line of Israel's kings. He's son of Abraham, founder of Israel. He's also born of the Holy Spirit. He is also Emmanuel God with us, which is a kind of a rubric that holds over the entire Gospel stories. This is who He is.

Let's start with the name Jesus. The name Jesus is very familiar to us. It means the Lord saves or Yahweh saves. In the Old Testament Hebrew, that would be the name Joshua, which in Greek becomes Jesus. Now we think of Joshua, who led the Israelites into the Promised Land when Moses was done, and we realized that his salvation was primarily material, that is to say, physical or military. He led the people into the land, and a lot of people expected Jesus to deliver primarily in that way. And He did deliver materially. He gave sight to the blind. He fed those who were hungry. And that's important but the main thing Jesus did was not to deliver materially but as Psalm 130:7-8 says, *[7] O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. [8] And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.* The main thing Jesus does is deliver us from our sins.

If you look at the genealogy in Matthew 1:2-17, it's the Kings of Israel, it's very obvious that Jesus is descended from kings. He comes from the line of David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Ahaz and Manasseh which are kings that jump out at you. He's royal in His lineage. If you look more carefully at the kings, you will notice about half of them are Godly and about half are ungodly. And you realize that even the Godly ones are flawed, right? Starts with David. Do I need to remind you of his sins? And then we go to Solomon. Do I need to remind you of how he began to live for alliances and wealth and women? He clearly failed and other kings that we don't maybe know as well, like Jehoshaphat, who was a very good king overall, but he lost his trust in God for a while, began to make alliances with pagan kings, which was against God's law, and then showed those kings the treasures of Israel and in a sort of a feast of pride. Then came back and plundered them later on. Those are the good kings. Then there are bad kings. There's one named Ahaz who worshiped the gods of Assyria and brought the altars of pagan gods into the Temple of Israel and practiced human sacrifice. Then there's another that comes by later, Manasseh and he was the worst of them all.

Also, when in this genealogy in Matthew there are four women listed. It's beautiful that genealogies in the Bible include women for in those days, women didn't get mentioned in genealogies, but God knows all the men, all the women, all the children so we give thanks for that, but if you look at the women, you notice that they're not the most savory bunch. Tamar is mentioned. She is known in the Bible from Genesis 38 for playing the role of a prostitute. Then there's Rahab from Jericho, who was a prostitute. There's Bathsheba who is called in the genealogy the wife of Uriah the Hittite who had an affair with David. So three of the four women committed what we might call red letter sins. It strikes you as you read the story and so it's very clear that Jesus came from the human line, warts and failures and all. He did not come to praise his forebearers, He came to save them. In fact, you can even see the decline due to sin in the sad end of the lives of all the kings. Jehoniah, the last king mentioned in the genealogy is maimed, dragged off in captivity. Then the people at the end of the genealogy are obscure until you finally come to Joseph, who was just an ordinary carpenter, not a famous person at all.

At the end of the year, we all tend to have lists of things like favorite movies, favorite books, favorite events. I like to try to think sometimes of the line I heard in the past year that I liked and the line I heard this year a lot was 'technology works until it doesn't.' Have you heard that this year? It's such a good line and it describes what happens on my cell phone when I have an appointment that I know I put in and not only is that one missing, but there's about 150 others that just went away while I was sleeping. Then I try to call up one of my friends and about 75 or 100 of my friends in my contacts are just gone. I get so upset with technology. I'm a professor. I write in the grades, but you can't write it with your hand anymore. You have to enter it. Then it says 'Crash' and all the grades are gone. I don't remember whether they got an 88 or a 93. I have to read it over again. It's very frustrating. I have to tell you, it's not the main problem. The main problem is not technology. The main problem is sin – sins like pride, greed, selfishness, anger, suspiciousness and everything else. Jesus did not come to give us better technology, He came as Savior to save us from our sins. Jesus is God saving. That's His first name.

The second name of Jesus is Christ. In our mentality or tradition, it's almost as if Jesus has two names where His first name is Jesus and his last name is Christ. Like John Smith, it's Jesus Christ. That's not what they called Him when he walked around on earth. They called Him Jesus Son of Joseph, or Jesus the Carpenter Jesus of Nazareth. And Christ is actually a title. It's a little bit like the name Senator or governor or captain or general. When you have the title Christ in the Bible, it means you're set apart. It really means anointed, but anointed by God. Kings were

anointed to be good kings. Priests were anointed to sacrifice well, and usually prophets were anointed. You're anointed by God set apart for a task.

We still do things like this today. I have grandchildren and they play sports and the older ones are ten and seven now, but already they can be the captain of the team for a game. The coach goes over to Jonah or Estelle and says, "You're going to be the captain of the team today." The child says, 'What does that mean?' "It means you have a special job. You're supposed to hustle, play hard, focus and encourage your teammates. Today, that's your job." It's kind of special and Christ is a title kind of like captain or senator, and it means Christ has been set apart.

Now, what people thought in that day was that the Christ would be set apart to defeat the Romans, cast them out of Israel and give the nation freedom again. There was a book that was written a little before the time of Christ, not much and it had a prediction about the Christ. This is not in the Bible but it was a popular book in their day. It said "See, Lord, raise up for them your people, their king, the son of David, to rule over Israel in the time known to you, O God, undergird him with strength, to destroy the unrighteous rulers (that's Rome). Purge Jerusalem from Gentiles who trample her to destruction." That's what they were looking for.

Jesus has the roles, but He does it God's way. He is the King who defeats our greatest enemy, which is not Rome and it's not technology. Our greatest enemies are sin and death and He defeated them by His death and resurrection. He is the priest who goes into the temple not to offer bulls or goats or rams, but to offer Himself His own blood and He is the Prophet who tells us the greatest truths about our need of Him and about Himself. He is anointed and appointed for those tasks. Now, that's not all He does.

Jesus is also Emanuel, which means He's the presence of God. Jesus is more the presence of God than the Temple is. His greater than the temple. The temple represents the presence of God, Jesus is the presence of God. Jesus is the Sabbath that is to say, He's the one who truly gives rest to His people because we can rest in Him. This is something we need. We need to rest in Christ because we can't save ourselves. I'm not a news hound but it seemed the biggest event in the news over the last couple of weeks was this hearing in Washington, D.C., and the presidents of three of our great universities of Harvard, MIT and Penn were all there. They were asked about anti-Semitism on their campus, specifically calls by their students, sometimes howling at their Jewish students for the eradication of Israel and for genocide. A United States representative said, 'What do you make of public calls for genocide on your campus?' And all three of the presidents said, "That depends maybe and maybe not. I mean, if you have a brick in your hand and you're rushing at somebody who's Jewish, then maybe you shouldn't do that. But to call for genocide is free speech and so we need to protect that."

Some people had a problem with that. In fact, people from right, left and center all had a problem with that, not to deny that we believe in free speech. That's essential to American culture. But they said, 'the problem is you're very selective about your free speech protections' and they started listing cases like a woman who said people are male or female and that was speech that was not permitted. She was giving a lecture and she was canceled for saying that or using the wrong pronouns. That's not free speech but calling for genocide can be okay even though the Jews are the most persecuted group and victims of the greatest genocide of history. Then people started to complain. They said, 'What are these people saying? How can they say such a thing?' Then they began to try to make up for it and they apologized and they said, "I should have said this and that. I'm sorry" and one of them offered to resign. She did resign and it was accepted and they were trying to make up for it.

You may be thinking, ‘why is he telling this story?’ It is because Jesus does what we cannot make up for. It is the human tendency to say I erred and I didn't make up for it, and we can't. That's why Jesus came. I'm not against making up for things. If you spread a rumor, a false story about one of your friends or an acquaintance, you should make up for it by undoing the rumor and say, “I said this and it's wrong.” It's good to make up for things when you make a mistake, but you can't make up for sin and Jesus came to solve the problem of sin. He is Jesus. He is the Christ.

He's also the Son of David. That's number three. The Son of David means that Jesus came from the royal line. It means he's a descendant of David and Solomon and there are 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David, kings until the end of the monarchy, and then 14 more to Jesus. Throughout all this, when things were going down, when the nation was moving toward collapse, when the name Son of David just didn't mean so much anymore, like maybe the name Roosevelt or Lincoln doesn't mean what it used to mean, there was always a hope. The hope was a promise that God spoke to David that maybe applied a little bit to Solomon, but really pointed to Jesus.

The promise found in the II Samuel 7:12-15 goes like this; *[12] When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. [13] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [14] I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, [15] but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.*

So Jesus is the great son of David and at times when Jesus does things like cast out demons, He'll cite His title – the Son of David. I cast out demons by the finger of God, and I do it as the Son of David, and Jesus is the One who crushes His adversaries, but if you look at the Bible the way the term Son of David is used most of all in the Gospel of Matthew, especially to some degree also in Luke, is to describe His healing activity. Now, reflecting on this, I think J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of The Lord of the Rings, has a line in one of his novels, and that is ‘the hands of a king are the hands of a healer.’ There's actually an expectation among people that a truly great leader will heal. It's kind of like a story told here and there, and it's the story that is true in Jesus' life.

Early in His career, Jesus is walking from point A to point B, and two blind men see Him and they say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us” and He heals them. When Jesus left Israel and went at one point to Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman, a godless woman far outside Israel, came to Him and said, “Jesus, Son of David, my daughter is suffering terribly. Heal her, please” and Jesus healed her. Going back to the people who are blind again at the end of His ministry right before He entered Jerusalem for the last time, there are two more blind men and Jesus is going by with a crowd of thousands of people and the blind men say, ‘What's all the commotion?’ And they said, ‘it's Jesus.’ So the blind men start to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.” The crowd tells them to be quiet but Jesus hears them and He stops and heals them. Jesus is a healer. Jesus heals people. It is interesting, that the farther outside people were in Israel, outside the religious class, the more likely they were to simply plead for help. And then another group kind of plead but also had expressed doubts.

There were others who called Jesus Son of David in anger. They were the religious leaders, which reminds us again that you can see Jesus and respond in different ways. Even today, the vast majority I trust, who are here calling on Jesus, son of David, with hope and faith.

There are some who call on Jesus, who sing the songs, and they have a little bit of doubt. Then there are those who don't really believe much of it at all. If that's your case, then I encourage you to think and pray and see if God has something to say to you. But Jesus is a healer. If you're sick, you want to pray to Jesus and also go to a doctor. You can do both. If you are in a tough relationship and you're thinking about it at Christmas time, you can pray to Jesus to heal the relationship, but also, you know, plan what you will say, questions to ask and how to work toward healing. If you're in need of economic healing, you would pray, but keep working and Jesus heals.

Recently I talked with a man who's an elder, not in this church but elsewhere. I've known him for a while. He owns two fine restaurants and he told me the story of the day about 20 years ago when there was a real chance his restaurants were going to close. It was Tuesday and he couldn't make payroll for Friday. I don't know what you know about the restaurant business, but people who work at restaurants like to be paid and so Friday comes around. You don't make pay, you lose your staff, you're in trouble, you can lose everything if you can't make payroll. He kept working on his food, but he also kept praying. The next night, a huge party unexpectedly arrived in a very exorbitant mood. They spent more than any party ever spent and suddenly had all the money to pay for his bills. That was 20 years ago. He's never turned back. The Lord provided, the Lord healed his business.

You may have financial troubles and think 'is Jesus going to heal my troubles?' The answer is some businesses do go under, even for believers and even believers who pray and see the doctor may find that their illness does not go away, becomes chronic. Of course, we all meet the Lord one day and so there's no promise that everything will be better in this life, that every relationship will be healed but it's interesting to me that when the Bible looks forward to Jesus meeting Him and setting all things right, He gets called Son of David again. In the very last book and chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, it says that there is a tree of life for all who have been washed by Jesus, thus Son of David. When Paul was looking at his death in his last writings, II Timothy, his last book before he was unjustly executed, he said in II Timothy 2, 'Remember Jesus Christ the Offspring, the Son of David, if we die with Him, we will also live with Him.' So, we look forward to that Day when we meet the Son of David. We give thanks for healing in this life and look to the next life because there is more to come. The Advent season looks back, but also forward to Jesus' second coming.

The last name of Jesus is Son of Abraham. People who study the Bible and get summaries of what the different books of the Bible are about, often will say that the Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel written for the Jews, and they give various reasons for that, and there's certainly some truth to it. But one of the things they point to is that the genealogy over in Luke starts with Adam where Jesus is for mankind, right? And it starts in Matthew with Abraham, who's the father of the Jews so they say that proves that Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews because He was the first Jew. That's, that's half true. But if you know the story of Matthew and the story of Abraham, you know that Abraham started off as a pagan, right? When God called him, he was not part of the Covenant family. God sovereignly called him to Himself and said to him, from the very beginning, 'I'm making you the father of My people, but not just My people. I have other people in view. I will make you a great nation, Israel, and I will bless you and I'll make your name great and you'll be a blessing and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.' That includes us today. All nations were blessed.

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew in Matthew 28:18-20 says, [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore*

and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” It’s the Great Commission. So clearly Jesus is for the nations. Matthew is for the nations.

Remember the women in the genealogy? I told you before they were sinners. This time I’m going to tell you three of the four were non Israelites. Rehab was from Jericho was a Canaanite and that’s the people who lived there before the Israelites took the land. Ruth was a Moabite, a sworn enemy of Israel. There’s Bathsheba, who was married to Uriah the Hittite. That’s not an Israelite. Unless you’re Jewish, you’re a Gentile, you are an outsider. You were not part of the people of God. If you’re German or Dutch or Irish or English or French or Nigerian or Korean or Chinese or Ethiopian, you’re Gentile. I know that if you grow up in church, you feel like an insider, and you are and that’s great. If your parents trained you in the faith, you’re baptized, in very important ways, you’re an insider.

Essentially, we’re a bunch of outsiders. Your ancestors worshiped Zues, Thor and warrior deities, generals that were successful. They were so successful, the people said, ‘I must have the spark of the gods.’ Let’s worship them and God rescued us from that. We were outsiders as surely as Abraham. It’s amazing that God has called us to Himself. The God of Israel called a bunch of Germans and Nigerians to Himself. This church is good at that. I just keep hearing wonderful things about this church. One of the great things about this church is its commitment to missions, national missions and international missions. Let’s keep it up and name what’s good in this church. That’s certainly one of the good things in this church. We have to stay strong with financial support and deeds to back it up.

I finished a book a few days ago, about a woman named Seema, and her story is that she went to visit a relative. She was a Persian, but from Iran. She went to London to visit a family member who settled there and she met Jesus for real. I mean, big time radical, total sold out conversion. She went back to Iran and she put a cross on her rearview mirror. People in places like Iran notice that and they all especially notice it because she’s the kind of person called a sayyid, meaning she is a lineal descendant from the great Prophet Muhammad, in fact, a sayyid on both sides, which means an important person. She was also a physician so everybody knew her and very intelligence. The committee saw the cross and said, “Seema, you need to take that cross down.” She said, ‘okay.’ She took it down and put up a bigger one. They said, “Seema, you need to take that cross down” and she really knew Jesus and had given her life to Jesus and said, ‘I will not take it down.’ The committee arrested her and was very polite because she had taken care of some of them when they were children, she had taken care of their parents and other family members.

They didn’t take pleasure in arresting this woman and telling her what everybody knew and that is, if you publicly convert to Christianity, you’re liable to the death sentence and if you’re sayyid, they really mean it. The committee said, “we’re sorry to tell you this, but you have seven days now.” She got out of the country and how she got out is almost defying belief but she did. She lost everything. Her husband divorced her. She’s no longer a physician. Nobody cares about her degrees when she gets other countries. She lost her wealth, her status, everything, and was just an ordinary refugee living in a cement building in Italy for a year, wondering when she’d ever get out of the refugee camp, if anybody would ever receive her. Somehow that relative who was in London knew some people in Oklahoma named the Dawsons – a retired engineer and retired schoolteacher. The Dawsons heard about it and they heard that Seema is a good person and they said, “We’ll take her.” They sponsored her and she lived with them for the first

months in America because they believed in love. They believed that Jesus is the good shepherd and therefore we should shepherd.

There's a movement out today called EA known as effective altruism. Effective altruism says when you're an altruist, you need to give your money the best way you possibly can, as well as your time, the best you can and one of the tenets of effective altruism is if you're really good at earning money, don't actually serve people – just keep earning more and more money and pay them to do good for you. It's so much more effective if you're good at making money. Do like this? I hope the answer is 'no.' No one likes this. It has a certain logic, but we know better than this.

Last week somebody said to me about this church, "Some people think of this church as a place up on a hill that writes checks." It's not true. We write checks and we care for people because we follow Jesus, right? Jesus is the Savior who also cared for people – those who are blind, deaf and hungry. That's what we do at the Christmas season. We say we believe in Jesus, the Christ the Savior, the Anointed One and empowered by God to deliver His people and we believe He is the Son of David, the Healer and we should do our part to heal as best we can in this life. I know I'm beloved and so I'm going to love the people around me, not just with a check, but also with my life, with my energy, like the Dawson's, because they follow Jesus and cared for these people. So let's celebrate, Jesus who comes to save, the Christ and power by God to actually fulfill His task. The Son of David, powerful King, but gentle Healer, and the Son of Abraham, the father of Jews, and the source of blessing to the nations, even to us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for all that You do, and all that You say. Thank You for everything You said about Your Son so it would be ready for Him to come and to redeem, to offer His life for His people. Lord, we are Your people or perhaps some are not yet Your people but are thinking about it, maybe contemplating. Guide us all we pray one by one to know who You are, Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, to worship, love, and follow you, to be changed by You and to be a blessing to the nations by it. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.