

The Promised King

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight I'd like us to turn back to both passages that we read. We're going to be looking at Matthew 1 but we'll also be referring back to Isaiah 9. So let me just read Isaiah 9.2 and Matthew 1.1. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone. And then Matthew 1.1 the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1.1 is one of several places in the Bible where we find a genealogy, a long list of names in a family. And these are one of those places in the Bible where we can be so tempted to just skip it. A list of strange, hard to pronounce names doesn't seem that relevant to me. And often I've sometimes found it surprising. You think of the New Testament, you think page one of the New Testament, paragraph one of page one of the New Testament, what do you get? A genealogy, a long list of names.

And you think why would God put that there? Why is this the thing that's there first? And we think about going into a new week as we want to go into a new week at the start of December 2022. We think to ourselves is there anything here that's going to help us or be relevant to us? Well, I hope there is and I hope we can look together and see. And tonight we're going to be just digging into this genealogy a little bit more deeply under the heading, The Promised King. When we look at a genealogy or a family tree, I put it on the screen. I won't read it all through and I'm sorry that it's tiny, but I just want to have it all on the screen so you can see it. When you look at a genealogy like that, an instinctive idea can be to think, well, you know, this must be quite impressive because, you know, it's giving us a long family line. We're looking out for big names. And in this in this genealogy, you see that some of the names are royalty. And I remember as a child, I had a poster on my wall, it had all the kings and queens of Britain on it. And, you know, you're looking at that. I remember I can still see the poster in my mind. And, you know, everybody seemed so important.

Everybody seemed so impressive and successful. And even in a non-royal family, you know, very often, if we are looking back at our family tree, we're looking at a tension strung to anyone, you know, who's had particular achievements or anyone who's particularly successful or impressive. And out of first impression of Jesus, genealogy can be exactly the same. We look at this list, we tend to ignore 90% of the names that we've hardly heard of, but there's one or two that stick out to us. And they're some of the big names that you have in the Old Testament. Of course, you've got the royal line descending through David, goes all the way back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in it.

And at first glance, that can look very impressive. And at one sense, it is. But if you look at a family tree in more detail, any family tree, you'll see that the actual reality of the lives of the people in it is not necessarily as impressive as we might think. And that's through even of royal lines. You look at our own royal family's ancestry, and you see many, many stories of failure, heartbreak and misery in the lives of the kings and queens who ruled Britain. And exactly the same as two of this genealogy that we have in Matthew one. If we think in more detail about the lives that these people had, what we'll see is that for most of them, life was difficult.

And Isaiah describes that very, very powerfully when he speaks about the Old Testament community as those who walked in darkness and who dwelled in a land of deep darkness. So we might be inclined to come to this genealogy and think, you know, what an impressive heritage Jesus has got. The truth is, this is a family line with a dark and difficult past. Now, to help us see that, I'm going to do something a little bit unusual. I'm going to pick out four names from this genealogy, but I'm not going to pick out any of the famous ones. I'm going to go for the not so famous ones. So here are the ones I'm picking. Hezron, Rehoboam, Abihud and Mathan. Now, we don't know much about any of these men. We know a little bit about Rehoboam because he was one of the kings, but very little about any of the others. But we know roughly when they would have lived. Hezron comes maybe three or four generations after Jacob. In other words, it means he comes somewhere in between the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus. He's somewhere in there. Now, it's important to note that when you have a genealogy like this one, it's very, very common to miss out people in the line of succession. When it says son of, son of, son of, that could be like grand son of or great, great grand son of you. Because you can see that even in the first line. Jesus is described as the son of David. He's quite obviously not the son of David. He's the descendant of David. So son of can refer to direct son of or to descendant of. For Hezron, he's somewhere in between Genesis and Exodus. So that's roughly about then 1600, 1700, something around then. Rehoboam, we know when he lived, he was the king immediately after Solomon. So he lived about 920 BC. Abihu'd, again, don't know exactly, but probably something around 450 BC. Key thing is that that's after the return from exile in Babylon, it's more or less at the end of the Old Testament. And then last of all, we've got Matan. He comes just two or three generations before Joseph. And so maybe his grandfather, maybe his great grandfather, we can't be sure, but he would have probably lived around 100, 120, 130 BC. Key thing is that it's sometime in what we call the inter-testamental period. Now, what I want to do now is I want us to think a little bit about the days in which these people lived. So as I said, we don't know exactly anything about these people's lives, but we know a little bit about the days in which they lived. And that helps us to build up a picture of what life was like for them. And to bring that out a little bit more, we're going to interview all four of them, and we're going to ask them two questions. Where do you live and what's it like? And what I'm about to say to you is this is just fictional, I've just made it up, but it is an indicator of the settings of their lives. So let's interview all four of them. Where do you live and what's it like starting with Hezron? I live in Egypt. That's not where I'm originally from. My family are from north of here where the Canaanites live. That's their home, but we had to leave because of famine.

[7 : 54] We came to Egypt as a family because my great-great-uncle Joseph was high up in the government here. He did an amazing job. He had planned for the famine. That meant that there was enough food here. He was also really good to our family because he gave us an area of land called Goshen, and we lived there, and it was amazing how it all worked out for us. But it's not like that now.

Joseph died long ago, and since then a new king has come up, and he's got no word of what Joseph did. He has started treating us differently. None of us are getting good jobs. He seems to be treating us as Israelites very different from how he treats the Egyptians, and there's loads of us now. So sometimes I think that he sees this as a threat. It's getting harder and harder to make a living.

We're not being treated fairly. I'm not sure, but the way things are going, if we stay here in Egypt, I worry that we might end up as slaves. Trouble is, we have no king, and no one to lead us, and we've got nowhere to go. That's Hezron. Rehoboam, what about you? Where do you live?

What's it like? I live in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Well, actually it's not the capital of Israel anymore. It used to be the capital of Israel. Now it's just the capital of the southern half of Israel, which we call Judah. When I became king, I made a big mistake. I wanted to prove that I was as wise as my father Solomon. I thought that I needed to show them that I was in charge now.

So I didn't listen to what the old men said to me. The old men who worked with my father. Instead, I listened to the younger ones because I wanted to prove that I was as wise as Solomon on my own. The people wanted their workload reduced, and I thought I would cement my authority.

[9 : 48] And so instead of making their workload easier, like the old men said, I went with the younger men who said, no, make it harder. But it was a huge mistake. There was a massive reaction and rebellion led by a guy called Jeroboam. It divided the whole country. Now there's two kingdoms.

I'm still the king of the south, but our kingdom is small and weak. Most of the tribes went with Jeroboam. When my father Solomon died, we were a strong, prosperous nation. In fact, I remember the Queen of Sheba coming all the way up to see how amazing it was. But now it's not like that.

I'm supposed to be king, but I'm the guy who broke the kingdom. I don't know if it'll ever be reunited. My father Solomon was a good king. His father David was the very best. I don't think we'll ever have a king like that again. That brings us to Abihud in the end of the Old Testament.

What's where do you live and what's it like? I live in Jerusalem. Well, if you can call it Jerusalem, the place looks like a war zone. 150 years ago, this place was ravaged by the Babylonians. The devastation was unreal. My parents and grandparents were exiles in Babylon.

We've come back and there's been a huge effort to restore the city. Nehemiah and Ezra did an incredible job of rebuilding the walls and the temple. And my own family have been helping as well. So things are better now. The city doesn't look quite as bad as it did. But the old folk who can remember the temple before saying that the new one's not a patch on what the old one was. I look at this city now and it's just a shadow of what it used to be. And the biggest problem is that there's no king. We just have a governor who reports back to the empire headquarters in Persia.

[11 : 35] I look at the ruins of Solomon's palace and I wondered, will we ever have a king again? And then last of all, we have Matan. Where do you live and what's it like? I live in Bethlehem.

A lot of my family lived in Jerusalem over the years. In fact, my family's actually connected to the kings that used to reign in Jerusalem, but we don't live there now. It's far too dangerous. I still remember about 50 years ago, it was absolute chaos. The Greek king Antiochus came and he caused havoc. He was even worshiping the God's use in our temple. It was unreal and the fighting afterwards was brutal. We came to Bethlehem to be safer. And in fact, my ancestors are from this town, so I still have family connections here. Things have settled down a bit, but there's always rumors of fighting. You see, no one really knows who's meant to be king. There's guys in Jerusalem who are ruling us, but I'm not sure that they're actually connected to David's royal line. And we keep hearing talk about some country in the West that's becoming really strong. I think they're called the Romans or something like that. I don't know what kind of country my grandchildren will live in and I have no idea who their king will be. Now, all of that's just as an illustration, but it all reflects what we know about the days in which these people lived. It reminds us and teaches us that as we look at this genealogy in Matthew 1, we are not seeing Jesus coming as the crown of a long line of impressive people. It's the opposite. The history of God's people from the days of Abraham all the way through to Matthew 1. There's, yes, occasional bright spots, but on the whole, whether it's in the days of Hezron, Rehoboam, Abihud, or Matan, these were dark and difficult days. And that's reminding us that the Old Testament's not a success story. It's a story of failure and brokenness. The people of God were supposed to be a family nation united together as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob living together under the king who feared God and who protected them. But now they're a broken family and a broken nation. And I am quite sure that Hezron, Rehoboam, Abihud, and Matan and everyone in this genealogy would have looked at their lives. They'd have looked at their families. They'd have looked at their nation and they would have thought, I wish things were different. For them, the past was a source of pain. The present was a source of sorrow. And the future was a reason to fear. And I have no doubt that for many of us it's exactly the same. So while we're all excited about Christmas and for everything that it's going to bring, and maybe the reason that we're excited about it is because it's a welcome distraction from all the pressures and difficulties of life. Maybe you look back into your past and you see so many bruises and scars. Maybe the present just now is a huge struggle and every day is just difficult. And maybe when you think about the future, instead of being a source of joy, it's just a reason to worry. Maybe you look at yourself, maybe you look at your family, maybe you look at our nation and you think, I wish things were different. I think that's the experience of many, many people. And when we feel like that, there's two things that we tend to long for. We long for people to lead us. And we long for people to listen to us. These are two of the biggest cravings that a human society has, either as individuals or collectively together. We long for people to lead us. That's why so often when we wish things are different, people will put their hope in a new government, in a change at the very top. And so just like the people in this

genealogy would have longed for a good king, so often we are longing for good leaders. And throughout history, people have placed huge hopes in different political movements, whether that's Marxism, capitalism, socialism, liberalism, nationalism, whatever it may be. And the reason people do that, the reason they follow these ideologies with so much hope is because they want our nation to be led out of dark days and into something better. People long to be led we long for a good leader. But at the same time, we want to be listened to as individuals.

And so we want our personal needs met. We want our opinions heard. Our preference is respected. We want the wrongs in our life to be put right. And so we want a voice. We expect certain rights.

We don't want to be treated as though we're just an anonymous statistic. We don't want to be treated like we're just another name in a genealogy. And these two things stand side by side.

[17 : 00] We long to be led as a people, as a community, as a nation, and we long to be going in a good direction. And at the same time, we want to be listened to as unique individuals, a united population being led, unique individuals being listened to. And these are cravings that all humanity has to be led and to be listened to. But these two things can so often stand in tension with one another. And so you often see this, the tension between these two things.

And everybody, you know, we, you know, we want everybody, if we've got our preferred leader, we want everybody else to listen to them as well. And yet at the same time, we want everybody else and their leaders to listen to us. And so there's this tension between saying we will all got to listen to him, but at the same time, you got to listen to me. And the result is that so often, we see people that want national change, but they want personal affirmation. In other words, they want the whole nation to be different, but we want to be able to carry on doing things our way ourselves. And you see that in lots of different ways. Good example is the whole population of Britain just now is united in the fact that we want to use less energy. And yet so often, as individuals, we carry on doing what we've always done, and we don't reduce our own use.

So often, we want, we want, you know, national rules to be enforced, except when they apply to us. And the whole COVID lockdown was a fascinating example of that in terms of human behaviour.

And there were several times when I met people, nobody in here, but people I know from elsewhere, I met people who for ages were strict, strict, strict, strict, strict about the rules. It's like really strict about distancing, about not, you know, you couldn't go near them or anything like that, you know, everybody, they would be very critical of anybody who didn't self isolate or anything else, really, really, really, really, really strict until the day when they got COVID, and then they stopped obeying all the rules. And it was so interesting to see that. Just one rule for everybody else, a different rule for me. And we can see that in lots of other ways. Everybody in the country wants fairness. But at the same time, we kind of want a wee bit of an advantage for ourselves. That's why, you know, we will all cry out in outrage at any form of exploitation of people who work. And yet at the same time, when we go shopping, what do we look for? The cheapest price. We all want to see national generosity. But we don't want our own wealth taken away. That's why we are equally enraged by a shortage of nurses and teachers, and also at the prospect of higher taxes. No word of the fact that the latter pays for the former. Now, I know that in all of those things, I'm simplifying things.

What I'm trying to do, though, is set before you the fact that there's this tension between the fact that we want to be led and yet we want to be listened to. And the same was true for people like Hezron, Rehoboam, Abihud, Matt, and they were not disposable. Nobody's. They were unique individuals with their own needs, their own circumstances, their own challenges and struggles. But yet they were also part of a wider society. And they desperately needed a leader, a king to rule.

[20 : 46] To rule and defend them. In other words, we want somebody to rule and to be in charge, but we also want someone who cares. We desperately want those two things.

The genealogy in Matthew culminates in many ways, culminates with Matan and Joseph, and they're still waiting for that person. He hasn't come. And without that king, they had no one to lead them, no one to listen to them. The people walked in darkness and dwelled in a land of deep darkness. They longed for things to be different. We're the same as individuals, as families, as a nation. What's the answer? Well, the answer is in this genealogy. But in order to see it, we need to roll up our sleeves for 10 minutes and look closely at what it says.

If we go back to Matthew one, we see that although we are given lots and lots of names in the run up to Jesus, there's two that are most important, David and Abraham. Matthew highlights them in his very first sentence of his gospel. And that means that for Matthew, the key point he's making in this genealogy is that Jesus is connected to David and he's connected to Abraham. And we need to recognize why that is so important. Abraham and David are key figures in the Old Testament and their lives mark crucial moments in the great plan of salvation that God is revealing.

When we think of the Bible as a whole, we are thinking about God's relationship with humanity. That relationship was established at the creation broken at the fall in Genesis chapter three. And the rest of the Bible, the whole of the Bible, is the story of how God is putting that right.

He is restoring us into our relationship with him. That relationship is described by the Bible as a covenant. That's the key term that describes that relationship. A covenant is establishing a committed, serious, deep, lasting relationship. The Old Covenant or the Old Testament, as we tend to call it, is showing us bit by bit how this is going to be restored. It's revealing initial indications, shadows of what God's plan is going to involve. That all culminates in the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, the New Covenant or New Testament, as we call it, which is revealed in and through the Persian and work of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 47] David and Abraham are key figures in that Old Testament, Old Covenant era. And each of them reveal key aspects of God's plan to save us. And there's a key word that we should associate with each of them. With Abraham, the key word is family. So when you think of God's covenant with Abraham, I want you to think family. God makes this great promise to Abraham that he will have a family and that through his family, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed.

And you see that structure shapes the rest of the Old Testament because their identity is determined by their family connection to Abraham, Stanton, Jacob, also called Israel, their nations organized according to family relations with the 12 tribes, all that kind of stuff. You can see it in loads of places all the way through the Old Testament. Family is key to God's plan. With David, the key word is kingdom. That's again pretty obvious. David was the great king and he was established as God's king and it was through his descendants that the Davidic dynasty was established and it was through that line that God's ultimate king was going to come. So when you see the name Abraham, you need to think family. When you see David, you need to think kingdom. And these are key parts of God's covenant plan to restore us into our relationship with him. All of that means that when Matthew highlights David and Abraham in verse one, he's pointing us to all of this. He's pointing us to the fulfillment of God's covenant promises that he has made to these men. And that's telling us that Jesus comes as part of that family line and Jesus comes as part of that royal line, part of the family line going back to Abraham, part of the royal line going back to David. And that means that we are being told two crucial things about Jesus. We're being told that he is family and he is king. He is family and he is king. That means that for people like Hezron, Rehoboam, Abihued and

Matan and everyone else in the genealogy and everyone connected to that family nation that's full of unique individuals across all the centuries, those who have walked in darkness and who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, those who desperately needed a king to lead their family. It means that for them a brighter future has come. And that's described so beautifully by Isaiah the prophet when he says, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, a light has shone. That prophecy in Isaiah chapter nine is pointing towards all of this so powerfully. It culminates in the wonderful words of nine six, which I want to just focus on a wee bit and link it to everything that we're saying about this genealogy. What does it say nine six? For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. The government shall be on his shoulders, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. What's Isaiah saying here? He's talking about the coming Messiah. He's talking about Jesus and he's telling us two crucial things. He's telling us that he's family.

Because he's one of us. To us a child is born, to us a son is given. For the family nation of Israel that's walked in such darkness and has seen such sorrow, here is the prophecy between one of us, his family. But Isaiah is also saying that he's king because the government shall be on his shoulders. He's the one who's going to reign. The family nation that desperately needed a king is finally going to get one. Matthew is telling us that for the people in this genealogy, for the whole Jewish family nation in the first century who had such a dark and difficult past, for them the future is bright. Because Jesus is a son and a brother in this family and he is a king and a governor who's going to lead them. The years of waiting are over. The king has finally come for the Jews. This was a brilliant moment. But if you read through the rest of Matthew's Gospel, you discover that for most of the Jews and especially for their leaders,

Jewish, this coming savior was a big disappointment. Jesus was a huge disappointment. And that's because the expectations were all wrong. Their expectation was that Jesus would restore their family and that he would restore their nation. So that meant them getting the kingdom back, driving out foreign rulers, the Romans it would be by this stage, rebuilding their territory, reestablishing their sovereignty. And they thought it meant getting their family back, getting rid of foreign influence, getting rid of mixed marriages and all this intermixing and compromise and reestablishing their national identity. Everybody else out, keep it for ourselves.

[29 : 42] They wanted Jesus to restore things back to the way things were in the days of David, back to the way things were in this genealogy. But that was never what Jesus came to do. He did not come back to go to the old days because they were dark days. He did not come to restore the family or to restore the kingdom. What did he do? He came to expand them. And he did that because that's exactly what God promised to Abraham and to David and to everyone in the Old Testament. That's the big goal. The big goal of the family promise made to Abraham was not just for his descendants, not just for his family nation. It was for all nations. And Jesus has come to do that, to call everyone into his family where we can be united together as brothers and sisters and him. And the goal for the covenant kingdom promises to David is not aiming for Jesus to reclaim the throne in Jerusalem. It's for Jesus to reign over everything as king of kings, lord of lords, ruler over every square inch of the universe forever. The bright future that has come in Jesus is not just for the people in this big long genealogy. It's for everyone. He's not come to restore this family nation. He has come to expand it. And what that means is that all of this is for you and for me. And the incredible truth is that the fact that Jesus' family means that he cares. And the fact that he is king means that he rules.

He will lead you and he will protect you. That means that he is able to govern and guide and lead a united body of people that no one can number and he can show us a better way to live. And so he brings a community together that no one can number. And yet at the same time, he'll never forget that you are a unique individual and he'll never stop listening to you. And that's all because of who he is. Isaiah describes it here. He tells us that he's the wonderful counselor. That means that he knows how to lead well. And you see that so clearly when you read through the Gospels, he shows a far, far better way to live. You go to the Sermon on the Mount, you see the incredible wisdom that the wonderful counselor has showing us how to live in a way that's so different to all the nonsense that you see in the world around you, that he's able to guide us, lead us, show us a better way.

He is mighty God. That means that no one can threaten him. He's got all the strength and resources of God himself. And what does he use that strength for? He uses it to protect you.

And that's why he can say that nobody, absolutely nobody can snatch you out of his hand. Jesus is the everlasting Father. Now you might say, oh, hang on, is that not talking about God the Father? Well, I don't think it actually is. Usually we refer to God the Father as Father, we refer to Jesus as Son. And that's absolutely true. But I think the whole of this verse here is referring to Jesus. And so the phrase everlasting Father is in reference to Jesus. And that's because the term Father is often used associated with kingship in biblical terms. It's been used in the idea of a king being Father over his nation. And I think one of the things that that presents to us is the fact that Jesus as a ruler is always compassionate, compassionate towards his children, compassionate towards those who he rules over. His compassion will never end. And he's the Prince of Peace.

He has come to bring peace in a world of chaos. And so he's not come to restore one particular nation to this kind of little territory at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. He's come to expand that nation to make a wonderful kingdom and a wonderful family. And instead of being this crushed, battered list of names that we have at the beginning of Matthew, Jesus is establishing a magnificent, beautiful church family that stretches across all the nations. That's why we can be part of this family too. We can be citizens of his kingdom. And all of it means that two amazing things are true for you and me tonight. The first is that we can be united together as part of something better, that craving that we have for a better society, for a fairer nation, for a kinder community, for a healthier culture, for loving friendships, for warmth and generosity and justice and goodness. That's the kingdom society that Jesus is calling us into. That's what he's calling us to be. That's what the church is meant to be. And if we fail to be there, it's because we've stopped following his leadership. He's calling us into this beautiful society that's calling us to be part of something better, a great collective family, a family kingdom that is something beautiful to be part of. That's the first key thing that's true. But the second key thing is that as we are united under his leadership, as we become part, become part of this massive kingdom that has innumerable people in it, at the same time, you will never, ever, ever stop being unique to Jesus. You'll never, ever just be to him a citizen or a number or an unknown name in a genealogy, because to him you are family and he cares about you so, so much. He loves you, he knows you, he died for you. He'll never stop listening to you.

[36 : 36] That means that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, it means that you are part of something special and you are someone special. Now isn't that what we are just desperate for?

Desperate to be part of something special, something better than all the nonsense that you see in the world around you, all the conflicts that you see between people, all the just rubbish that happens in the world. You just want to be part of something better. Jesus says you can be part of something better, but at the same time we want to be someone special. We don't want to just be forgotten, abandoned, disposable. Well in Jesus you are part of something special and you are someone special.

Jesus is the promised king and he's the perfect brother. That means that right now Jesus is ruling the universe and at the same time he's holding your hand. And if you're a Christian, I hope that it shows you three things. I hope it shows you how amazing Jesus is and what a massive difference he makes for today, for this week, for the rest of your life. I hope it shows you how precious you are to him and how safe you are in his arms. And I hope it shows you that genealogies are cool.

And it's amazing how God is piecing everything together. But what if you're not yet a Christian or what if you're not sure, because there's loads of no-not-sureers in our church community. What should you do? Well it depends on how you feel about it all. Maybe you're not that bothered and if you're not that bothered about all of this and if you're desperate for me to finish, just I want you to do one thing this week. I want you to compare what Jesus promises with whoever it is that you vote for. So whatever it is that you think should be leader in the nation, compare them with Jesus and just think that through in your head.

If you are bothered by this though, if you hear the gospel and you're thinking, I really want this to be sorted, if you're bothered by this, if you long to know the peace and security that Jesus gives, if you know that you need him more than anything else, if you long to be part of his family, if you wish things were different, if that's true then you don't need to use your head because you already understand everything. What you need to use now is not your head, you need to use your heart and you just need to pour out that heart to Jesus and ask him to forgive you, ask him to heal you and in your heart accept him as your savior and follow him and heal to the rest. In Jesus we have the one who is the perfect king, the perfect brother, he will rule and lead us forever, he'll never stop caring about you. Jesus is just amazing.

[40 : 07] I mean, let's pray.