

Trophies of Grace 10-5-03

Matthew 1:1-17

Over the last several months I've been watching the Lord lead the choice of sermon topics and noticed that He continually brought up exegetical preaching. A book on exegetical preaching just happened to fall off a car near my home, and the person that found it just happened to pass it on to me. Hmmm? I'm much more comfortable doing topical preaching on things the Lord has been laying on my heart and teaching me personally, yet over and over again I've felt the call to begin preaching through the Bible, one book at a time. I believe that our God who is Sovereign over all things can have the text apply to us each week even as we walk through Scripture. So here we go, in the direction I believe the Lord is leading.

We are going to begin right at the beginning of the New Testament. The first three gospels are called the synoptic gospels. The word synoptic comes from two Greek words that mean to see together. Mark is believed to have been written first, and of the 105 sections in Mark, 93 occur in Matthew and 81 in Luke. Many portions are copied word for word.

It is thought that Matthew was the second Gospel to be written. Critics have tried to suggest that it was written 50 to 100 years after the life of Jesus; even though the traditional date had been 37 A.D. Recently a small papyrus portion of Matthew was rediscovered and was written in a style of Greek that ended about 50 A.D. That is a strong indication that Matthew was written no more than 20 years after the crucifixion. Eyewitnesses of the events would still have been living when it first circulated. If 37 A.D. were indeed the date it was written, it would explain the particularly Jewish emphasis, for the gospel did not go to the Gentiles until 38 A.D.

One of the earliest church historians, Papias, wrote that Matthew, also known as Levi, had collected the sayings of Jesus in Hebrew. Most of the other disciples were fishermen, but Matthew was used to writing. He was a hated tax collector. He was working for the occupying power of Rome when Jesus called him to leave all and follow Him (Matthew 9:9). He brought his pen with him into his new life as a follower of the Rabbi Jesus. It is believed that from this source of the sayings of Jesus, many of the parables in the gospels have been copied, including those in the Gospel of Matthew.

Each gospel has its own emphasis. Matthew's emphasis is to declare to the Jews that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy, and that He is the King of the Jews. He attempts to show them that the Kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom under the reign of their Messiah, Jesus. It is no wonder then that this Gospel begins with the lineage that goes back through the line of David to Abraham. These are the two men to whom God made promises concerning their descendents. Of Abraham it was promised that through his seed, a descendent, the entire world

Commented [notes1]: ⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. Matthew 9:9 (NIV)

would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). David received the promise that an heir would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Throughout Matthew's gospel we will see the phrase, "This happened to fulfill the prophecy ..." The chances that Jesus of Nazareth would fulfill just 8 prophecies is one in one hundred million billion or millions of times greater than the total number of people that have walked the earth. Matthew will give us 16 specific prophetic fulfillments in the life of Jesus.

The fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies given over the millenniums past should have convinced the readers that Jesus is the Messiah. To us, it shows "that in this universe there is purpose and design and that God is meaning and willing certain things to happen." -William Barclay Our lives and the details of them are not random haphazard events. Everything is about the Son of God and our relationship with Him.

The very first line of Matthew is the original title. The Greek is BIBLIOS GENESIS. Just as Genesis was the beginning and record of man, so Matthew here begins the book of the beginnings and record of Jesus the Messiah. Christ is MESHIAH, or anointed one. Under the Old Covenant, there were three callings in which anointing with oil was prescribed. The priest was anointed to represent the people to God and God to the people. Without the Holy Spirit's presence he could not perform his calling. The prophet was also anointed with oil. To speak for God required the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The king, too, was required to be anointed. Without the Holy Spirit, the spirit of wisdom, he could not govern in an unselfish evenhanded way. Jesus was all of the above. He was filled with the Spirit from birth, but He was anointed with the Spirit at the baptism of John. He is our Prophet, our Great High Priest, and our Eternal King. So then, this begins a book of the record of Jesus the anointed One, Son of David, Son of Abraham.

There are several generations left out of this genealogy, though it is probably an exact copy of a public record. It was not uncommon to leave out generations, as long as the main characters and bloodline are complete. Genealogies were very important to the Jewish people. Davidic family records were kept in Kochaba, a town on the East side of the Jordan, Nazareth, and Bethlehem. Kings had to come from the lineage of Judah. Priests had to prove their lineage back to Levi. In claiming that Jesus was the Messiah, Matthew wanted his readers to understand right off that Jesus was descended from Abraham and David. This was the foundation for all that followed. You can see the trust and faith the Jewish people had in recorded word of God. We need an even greater faith and trust in it today.

Verses 2 and 3 start Jesus' lineage with the Patriarchs. Before we get very far we notice something unusual, a woman is mentioned. This is uncommon in the Jewish records, for the bloodline comes from the father. But what is even more unusual is the woman that Matthew chose to mention, Tamar. Many of you know

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."
Genesis 22:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."
2 Samuel 7:16 (NIV)

Tamar's story. You can read the whole story in Genesis 38. Let me just abbreviate it by telling you that her husband died, the husband's brother that married her died, and the father-in-law would not let the other brother marry her as prescribed in the law for fear that son would die also. She dressed like a prostitute and ensnared her father-in-law, Judah, and had twins by him.

If that was part of my family tree, I'd want to keep it quiet, but God doesn't see things as man does. I have a murderer in my family tree. If we all knew the true story of our family trees we would probably find things we'd want to hide. All of us have a family tree with corruption because all of us go back to Adam. Why did God make special mention of Tamar instead of covering up her presence? She is a trophy of grace. Through ungodly means she entered into the lineage of the Messiah and yet, God in His grace included this woman whom the world had despised. When man was unjust toward this widow, God reached out in mercy to her. As you read through the Bible you'll find that God cares about the ones that the world considers garbage (Isaiah 1:17). Jesus is the friend of the hated tax collector like Matthew, the prostitute like Mary Magdalene and Tamar (Matthew 11:19).

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:17 (KJV)

One of her twin sons, Perez, is recognized by rabbis to prophetically be a forerunner of the Messiah. They believe the circumstances at the time of his birth predicted that the Messiah would break out of the boundaries the Law had placed on man. For the Jewish reader, seeing Perez in the lineage had a special meaning. God was giving the Jewish readers every opportunity to see that Jesus is their promised King.

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' But wisdom is proved right by her actions." Matthew 11:19 (NIV)

To show you that God is serious about us getting the message of grace, in verse 5 we read of Rahab. She was a professional woman of the night in Jericho. When she heard the stories of what God was doing for the Israelites, she became a believer in the God of Israel. She believed to the extent that she was willing to risk her life to hide the Israelite spies. She and her family were the only ones saved in the fall of Jericho, and they became Israelites. Her past was not forgotten, but it was forgiven. She started a new life.

Commented [notes7]: ²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? James 2:25 (NIV)

Did you know that converts to Judaism were baptized signifying a death to their old life and the beginning of a new life, similar to Christian converts today? Let's call her trophy of grace number 2. God drew this prostitute from her idol worshipping past into the family of God, a path for the lineage of the coming Messiah. All Canaanites were to be destroyed or driven from the land, but God made an exception for this lady of all the people in Canaan. She is even mentioned in the book of James and Hebrews as an example of putting faith into action! (James 2:25; Hebrews 11:30-31) You see, God is not willing that any should perish, and he will make an exception for anyone who will respond to the Holy Spirit.

Commented [notes8]: ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. ³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. Hebrews 11:30-31 (NIV)

But there is still one more lady in the same verse, Ruth. She was a Moabitess. Moabites were not to enter the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3). There

Commented [notes9]: ³ No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. Deuteronomy 23:3 (NIV)

is no mention of any misdeeds in Ruth. Her heritage was the only thing one could hold against her, but the Lord made another exception because of her heart. An entire book of the Bible is dedicated to her story, the book of Ruth. The fourth and last woman in this genealogy is the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Her name is Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11-12 tells her story. It reminds us that David, who received the Messianic promises to his descendent, was far from perfect. He had her husband murdered in battle to cover his indiscretions with her. If anyone was ever a trophy of grace it was David.

Two Canaanites, a Moabitess, and a Hittite. Each of those ladies was from another culture, not supposed to be included among the Children of God. "If Matthew had ransacked the pages of the Old Testament for improbable candidates he could not have discovered four more incredible ancestors for Jesus Christ. But, surely, there is something very lovely in this. Here, at the very beginning, Matthew shows us in symbol the essence of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ, for here he shows us the barriers going down." ~William Barclay
God has always reached out to the world and welcomed in any who would respond to the wooing of His Holy Spirit, the declaration of His character in nature, or the working of God through His people. These women were examples that declared that God welcomes anyone who will come to Him by faith. It almost seems that He delights in welcoming the worst, for by contrast they make the grace of God more evident.

Throughout the New Testament we see illustration after illustration of the same theme. The Apostle Paul is in my estimation one of the clearest examples of all. A persecutor of Christians becomes the leading Apostle and author of much of the New Testament. What a trophy of grace!

And what about you and me? I can tell you I'm a trophy of grace. I'm no one special, but God took me out of the depravity of my wicked heart, years in a cult that preached the truth alongside lies. When God called me to preach and pastor, I said, "Lord, You can't want me. How could I help build your Temple when there is blood on my hands?" I thought that because I had taught what was polluted in the past, God would not use me today. His response broke my heart, "If you are willing, I am willing." What? God could use me for His glory? How can that be? Maybe that is why it is. He uses those who have come to realize it isn't in them, not in their ability, outside the realm of respectability, but a demonstration of sheer grace. The one, who is forgiven much, loves much and becomes a trophy of grace on the heavenly mantle (Luke 7:47a).

We read through the pages of Scripture and see these ordinary, sinful, people and realize that they are so much like us, and yet, God included them in His great work. What a loving, gracious God. Grace looks into the distant future and sees the finished product. He makes the flaw into an accent of beauty. By contrast, the more flawed the original material, the more amazing the final work of art. All that is required is for the material to yield itself to the hand of the artist. Blobs of color turn into works of art, chunks of stone into fine sculptures,

Commented [notes10]: ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. Luke 7:47a (NIV)

and lumps of clay into beautiful ceramics. When the Artist looks at you He sees the final product. He values you as if you were the finished work, and that finished work looks like His Son (Romans 8:29).

Let's go back to the passage for a few more observations. In verse 11 of Matthew 1, Jeconiah presents a problem. Jeremiah prophesied that no one from his line would ever sit on the throne (Jeremiah 22:30). Mary's line does not go through Jeconiah. Since Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, the lineage through Mary is the one that is counted on for human rights and heritage. She is the only one with a physical connection to His birth.

In verse 16 we do not end the genealogy with Jesus the son of Joseph, but "*Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*" Matthew is careful to let us know that even though he is telling us of Joseph's lineage, he is not the father of Jesus. In the book of Luke, we have another genealogy that is believed by many to be that of Mary. Though it sounds like the lineage of Joseph, there are examples of lineages through a son-in-law that go up the wife's family line when a family line ends in a female. Thus we would read the Luke 3 portion as "Joseph, the son-in-law of Heli". The part from David to Jesus differs in that Mary's line descends from Solomon's oldest brother and through the priestly line. This makes it legitimately possible for Jesus to be both priest and king.

Matthew shares the genealogy of Jesus to convince us that Jesus is indeed the Son of David, a child of Abraham. He is not a phantom but a real man with lineage like us. Because He became a man, He can relate to our experiences and burdens and even temptations. But Matthew also has a hidden message. God reaches out to any who will respond to Him from every nation. No one is beyond the reach of His grace, and sometimes He sovereignly chooses some of the worst to be trophies of grace.

Maybe you have come this morning thinking that you are too bad for Jesus. You can never be too bad for Him. The only people that were too anything for Jesus were those that thought they were too good for Him. You might be a Tamar with some terrible mistakes in your past, or even a Rahab, completely worldly, or a sweet person like Ruth, just born to a family of unbelievers. You might have been drawn into trouble like Bathsheba, or may be a person who has really been off base like the Apostle Paul or me. Your loving Father sees what He is making you into. He sees the finished work and loves you as if you were already like Jesus. Will you yield to His hand this morning so that you can join the many others who have become trophies of grace?

Communion

Commented [notes11]: ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers
Romans 8:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ³⁰ This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."
Jeremiah 22:30 (NIV)