

**A Reminder from Matthew:
The Kingdom of God is Open to Everyone, Even the Unlikely**
Matthew 1:1-16

Introduction

I don't know about most of you, but I can be a pretty forgetful person. I forget things all of the time. And despite using to-do lists and electronic planners I still manage to forget to do things or don't show up for appointments. And sometimes I forget really important things, like the fact that God loves me or that as His child I have something to offer the world. And I'm sure you probably forget things both big and small as well. The fact is, we need reminders.

Thankfully, we aren't alone in our need for reminders. And this morning, I want to look a passage in Matthew that I think he intended as a reminder, not just for Christians of his day, but for us as well.

It is almost universally agreed by scholars that Matthew's gospel was written to Jewish Christians. These would have been Israelites raised in the Jewish faith who, either because of direct contact with Jesus during His earthly ministry or through the preaching of the apostles, had chosen to follow Jesus as the Messiah.

But just like people in any culture, their coming to faith in Jesus didn't automatically rid them of the negative parts of the world-view acquired from their home culture. Specifically, they didn't instantly lose their deeply ingrained belief that Gentiles, or non-Jews, were not worthy of being a part of the people of God. Even though they had likely heard from the apostles that Gentiles were now a part of the kingdom of God, it probably wasn't very natural for them to include outsiders. They needed a reminder.

And even though we don't think in categories like Jews and Gentiles today, if you are like me, and I know I am, you need a reminder that the kingdom of God is not just for those already in it, it is for outsiders as well.

So this morning I want to look at part of Matthew's reminder to his readers by looking at a passage that we typically skip over when we read our Bibles: the opening genealogy in Chapter one.

The Reminder in Summary

Matthew opens his gospel this way:

The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Now you will notice that before he even starts the genealogy proper, Matthew connects Jesus to two very famous people in the history of the Jewish people, David and Abraham.

By connecting Jesus to David, Matthew is placing Jesus in the line of the Kings of Israel. And more importantly, he connects Jesus to the promise of God that one day a descendant of David will reign on David's throne with justice and righteousness forever.

Isaiah: 9:6, 7 – For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on his shoulders;
And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace

There will be no end to the increase of his government or peace
On the throne of David and over his kingdom
To establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

So right up front, Matthew has identified Jesus as the promised king who will reign eternally and benevolently over Israel from David's throne.

But he doesn't stop there. He then connects Jesus with Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel and the Jewish faith. And again, Matthew is also connecting Him with the promise that God made to Abraham that He would bless the nations through Him.

Gen 12 - 1Now the LORD said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
2And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
3And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

By connecting Jesus to Abraham, Matthew is identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all of the people of the earth, not merely the nation of Israel. So with both references together, what we have is Matthew presenting Jesus as the promised king from the line of David who would bring the eternal and good rule of God to the people of Israel and ultimately even to all of the nations.

Now if that last part about all of the nations sounds familiar, there is a reason for that. At the opposite end of the book, Matthew gives us these final words of Jesus:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and

the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew ends his gospel with the same idea that he started with. He opens with the good news that Jesus is the one who will finally bring the blessing of God, not just to the Jews, but to all of the nations and he ends with Jesus passing that wonderful privilege on to his followers. Outsiders, it seems are to be included in the kingdom of God.

The Reminder Illustrated

Well, the genealogy that follows in some ways merely supports what Matthew has established already. But before I jump into it, let me say a few quick things about genealogies in the Bible. First, genealogies were primarily used in the ancient world to establish a person's importance by showing their relational connection to well-known ancestors.

And secondly, they didn't always include every single person in the individual's family line. They often merely mentioned the more known or important ones. So when we see the phrase "so-and-so was the father of so-and-so" it may not always mean that the person was the actual father of the next in the series. It can also mean that they were "the ancestor of" the next person. So, just because they may not have included every single person, doesn't mean that what they did include isn't true. It certainly is. And people at the time of Matthew's writing could have verified all of it in the public archives. Matthew is probably just presenting a summarized version for us. Lets take a look at it:

2Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. **3**Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. **4**Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. **5**Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. **6**Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. **7**Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. **8**Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. **9**Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. **10**Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. **11**Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. **12**After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. **13**Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. **14**Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. **15**Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. **16**Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

This genealogy is unique in a number of ways. The first two I'm going to give you in passing because they could be sermons in themselves, but I do want to point them out:

First, Jewish genealogies rarely if ever included women. The tracing of a family line was always done through the males in the family. So for purposes of establishing lineage, it was not necessary for Matthew to include, five times, the woman by whom the next in line was born. But he did...

Secondly, Matthew clearly points out that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father. **Read v. 16 again.** Even though Jesus is qualified to be next in line for the kingship of Israel because he is the eldest son in Joseph's family, it is never stated that Joseph is his father. Matthew does explain what happened regarding Jesus' virgin birth later in the chapter, but even here in the genealogy, Matthew hints at the unique nature of Jesus' birth.

Thirdly, and this is the observation I want to emphasize today, at least two of the women mentioned in the list were gentiles, or non-Jews. Rahab was a Canaanite woman from Jericho who helped Joshua's armies take that city as they were occupying the promised-land and she later married into the royal line of Israel. Ruth, who lived slightly later in Israel's history, was a Moabite woman who, after marrying an Israelite, became the great grandmother of King David.

Though it is unclear from the scriptures themselves, some scholars think that two of the other women might have been non-Jews as well. Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah may have been a Canaanite woman – the scriptures don't say. And there are two theories regarding Bathsheba. One says that she was a Hittite herself and the other says that she was a Jew whose marriage to Uriah the Hittite would have made her seem as a foreigner in the eyes of her people.

Whether these last two were foreigners or not, it is still an amazing thing that Matthew would include at least two gentiles in the lineage of Jesus, the promised king. Which once again leads us to the question, "why?" If including gentiles in a Jewish genealogy was so out of the ordinary, then why did Matthew do it? I believe it was because he, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was trying to make a point – the same point that he was trying to make when he quoted Jesus at the end of chapter 28 when He says, "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." His point is that even though God had established a special relationship with the nation of Israel, He has always intended that His kingdom include gentiles and outsiders as well.

The Reminder Applied

Now remember, this message may not have been new to Matthew's readers, but it probably would have been challenging for them to hear. Generations of cultural and religious conditioning had trained them to think of their fellow Jews as the likely ones to receive the blessings of God and to see Gentiles or outsiders as the most unlikely people to be blessed by God. So I can imagine these Jewish Christians becoming comfortable

inviting those who were like them into the family of God and, probably unintentionally, ignoring those who were different from them.

Well, like I said earlier, we don't think in categories like Jews and Gentiles these days. But we can probably all relate to the idea of being more comfortable sharing our relationship with Jesus with people who are like us and, again unintentionally, avoiding those in our lives who seem too different.

Now, before you freak out, please know that I'm not asking everyone to go out and find the person scariest person they can and invite them to follow Jesus. But I am suggesting that we each ask the Lord what it would look like to trust Him for the courage to begin spiritual friendships with people in our lives that we might not normally connect with or who seem to be unlikely potential followers of Jesus.

And I think this will look different for each of us. Some of you really enjoy meeting new people no matter how different they might be. Others of us, however, are really uncomfortable with the new and different. And some of us may be so comfortable with the familiar that we may not be in relationship with anyone who isn't trying to follow Jesus. I personally have been surprised at how, in the last year since leaving campus ministry to teach at a seminary, it is difficult to even be in proximity to people who don't consider themselves Christians.

So what might this look like? Where should we start? Let me offer a few suggestions. For those of us that have a hard time identifying any people who don't follow Jesus in our lives, the first step is probably to start looking for them. Introduce yourself to your neighbors or a co-worker you don't know. Parents, you can talk to other children's parents wherever your kids are: school, the park, playing in the neighborhood, the pool. The options abound.

Another idea is to use your passions or hobbies as a way to meet others in town who may not follow Jesus yet. Take your hobbies out of the house and join a club or take a class about something you want to learn. You never know who you will meet. This spring, I joined a Macintosh Users Group, which is an informal club for people who share the love of using Apple Macintosh computers. So far, it is me, seven retirees and the librarian at Manhattan Christian College but we've only met a few times so who knows how relationships will grow.

Others of us already have people who don't know Christ in our lives. So the next step for us is to take it to the next level. If the people who don't follow Jesus that come to mind for you are people you tend to avoid, then maybe not avoiding them is a start. Talk to them. Even better, ask them questions. People love to talk about themselves. Ask about work or their vacation plans or their kids if they have any. Again the possibilities are endless.

If the people that come to mind are those you have already established some sort of casual conversation with, try inviting them a step closer into your lives. Ask a co-worker

to lunch or invite the neighbor you chat with over the fence over for burgers on the grill. Another option is to ask others for help. Asking one of my neighbors for help with my lawn is about the only way I have to connect with him. But hopefully my repeated asking will let him know that I think he has something of value to bring to my life. And maybe someday we will talk about something besides my lawn. You get the idea.

The last thing I would suggest is something you are all probably pretty good at: serving. Pay attention to the needs of those around you. It might be as simple as offering to take a shift at work for someone who is having a difficult time or taking a meal to a neighbor who is ill or who has just had a child. Anything you would do for one of your friends at church can be done for those around you who don't yet follow Christ.

Whatever the next step is for you, be patient. Relationships take time. So if your first attempt seems to flop. Wait a week and then try again. With time and prayer, you never know what the Lord might do in the life of someone around you so may seem like an unlikely follower of Jesus.