



# New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

## IMPRINTS

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Nothing seemed out of the ordinary for Donald Peters when he woke up November 1<sup>st</sup>. The 79-year old stopped by the 7-11 in Danbury, Connecticut and bought himself a lottery ticket, same as he and his wife Charlotte had been doing for 20 years. He went home to putter in his yard like he would on any normal day. But the routine came to an abrupt end, because while he was working outside, Donald suffered a massive heart attack and died.

After 59 years of marriage, you can imagine Charlotte's grief. You can sense how hard it would be to envision life alone after that long together. In fact, in all the chaos, it was nearly a month later before she even gave a thought to the lottery ticket Donald had bought that fateful day. When she found it again, she almost threw it away, but decided she'd take it to the grocery store and check it out. Good idea. Turns out Donald had bought a \$10 million winning ticket. Completely unknown to her, Charlotte's husband had given her a gift that changed everything.

I think that's a great story, because it's all about joy appearing in the middle of grief, pain being met with blessing and an unbelievable turn of events that literally transformed someone's life forever. You can't help but be happy for that woman.

Meeting Christ is kind of like learning you've just won \$10 million dollars. You can't even take in how much change he will introduce to your life. Have you ever known anybody whose world has been transformed because of meeting Jesus? Fox News had a story last week about Mosab Hassan, the son of one of the founding leaders of Hamas. His father is currently serving time in an Israeli prison.

Mosab was expected to be the next generation of Hamas leadership. As a college student, he regularly spoke in support of the terrorist attacks being made against Israel. But nine years ago, he happened to bump into a British missionary. He started secretly reading the Bible and was struck by this command of Jesus, found in the book of Matthew:

**Matthew 5:43-44**

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies.*

Mosab had never heard that concept before and it grabbed his heart. So he became a Christian and got out of Hamas and today is a spokesperson for forgiveness and reconciliation in the Middle East.

That's a pretty dramatic life transformation, all because of an encounter with Christ. And as I read through the rest of Matthew, I find record after record of individuals whose paths cross with Jesus and who ever after bore the imprint of his touch.

Over the next several weeks, what I want to do is take a closer look at some of their interactions with Christ, to get inside their world. What did it feel like to be healed up, to be taught, to be empowered, to be fed or forgiven or challenged, to be heard and to be loved by Jesus? And as we do that, we find that it's not just the leper or the centurion or the Canaanite woman or the blind guy or the Pharisee in that story – it's us. We're not spectators – we're characters in the plot. What can you and I hope for in a meeting with Jesus? How should it change us?

We won't go verse by verse through the book of Matthew – we'll pick and choose a bit as we go through. But before we begin, I did want to take just a brief moment to talk about the book as a whole. We've done studies in other gospels, but this is our first time as a church to work our way through sections of Matthew, so I wanted to give a little background this morning.

During the first 100 years after Jesus returned to heaven, Matthew was the book most Christians turned to for any knowledge they had about Christ's life and teaching. Theologians study the writings of early Christian leaders, and Matthew is by far the most quoted of the gospels during that first century of the church. It has continued to have enormous influence in every generation of the church.

Part of the reason for that is because Matthew contains more of Jesus' teaching than any other book. If you want to learn what Jesus actually said while on earth, there's no better place to start.

Matthew also does something incredible for us, because he was keenly interested in showing how Jesus fulfilled so many Old Testament prophecies. Nobody connects the dots better than Matthew and he really helps us see the big picture.

The very first line of Matthew reads like this:

**Matthew 1:1**

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:*

Remember learning to write topic sentences when you were in school? You had to start off your paper with a clear statement that would give your teacher an idea of what your paper was going to be about.

We might want to zip right past Matthew's first statement here, but it really functions like a topic sentence, especially if we dig into the wording a little bit.

Any time you translate writing from one language to another, you have to make some judgment calls as to how to best communicate the thought. Literally trying to force things over word for word makes for very awkward sentences in the new language. Sometimes the grammar is totally different between the languages. Sometimes a word holds lots of meanings in the original and you have to choose one of them to use in the translation.

All that to say there are occasionally some nuances that any given translation may or may not pick up. In this particular case, the NIV translates it:

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ*

When a more straightforward reading of the original Greek would be something like this:

*The book of the beginnings of Jesus Christ*

It's the same word the Greeks used for the title of the book of Genesis – beginnings. I kind of like that better. Beginnings is a bit broader than genealogy. When you say beginnings, it includes the list of Jesus' ancestors, but it also could be applied to the whole book of Matthew. This is the new thing God is doing that we talked about last week. This is where the Jesus story begins, the story that continues, right down to today.

And Matthew doesn't just say it's the beginnings of Jesus – it's the beginnings of Jesus Christ. Christ wasn't Mary and Joseph's last name. Christ is a title that means God's anointed one, or Messiah. Matthew is making a statement right up front about who Jesus claimed to be. He's the one.

And not to belabor this topic sentence, but then Matthew identifies Jesus as the son of David and the son of Abraham. Do you have any famous ancestors? I'm somehow related to General MacArthur from World War II, although I'm not quite sure how. One thing's for certain, though. I may have heard about General MacArthur, but he sure never heard of me. The same is true for any of your famous forefathers. They didn't have a clue who was going to come after them.

Here's the thing about the two famous relatives of Jesus that Matthew mentions in this first sentence. Both of them were specifically told that they were going to have a very powerful, famous descendant. The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to tell him this not long before he died:

### **1 Chronicles 17:10-14**

*I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.*

Here David is told that one of his descendants is going to have a much different kind of kingdom than his. By calling Jesus the son of David, Matthew means THE son of David, the one who fulfills this prophecy.

The same is true with Abraham. Look what God had told him:

### **Genesis 22:17-18**

*I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.*

Paul makes a big deal later that when God made the promises to Abraham about his offspring, it was singular and not plural, and that he was talking about Christ. So again, when Matthew speaks of Jesus as the son of Abraham, he means THE son – the one that will bless all the nations.

If we tie all that together now, we can see that Matthew's purpose in this book is to say that Jesus is the one everybody's been looking for. As David's heir, he's the rightful king, and as Abraham's heir he's the one who is going to impact the whole world. All the stories Matthew tells flow from his belief that Jesus is answered promises.

What an awesome premise for a book! **Jesus is God living up to his word.** Jesus is God's fulfillment of what he said he would do. That is the nature of everything recorded about him – his conversations, his actions, his attitudes. Everything shows him as the one having God's authority and taking God's grace to the nations. And all the people we will meet in the coming weeks will experience that firsthand.

If you talk to my cousins Randy and Mandy, they will tell you that a tradition at our family reunions was for us kids to put on some kind of a show. We'd get all dressed up, make our parents sit in the lawn chairs and then we would enthrall them with our amazing acting skills. At least we thought we did until our other cousin who was about 3 went streaking past everyone with no clothes on. That kind of broke the spell.

But the one thing we never bothered to worry about with those skits was a backdrop. We could be down in the basement, out in front of the barn, it didn't matter – we weren't concerned with trivial things like a set. Or a plot for that matter.

Matthew is much better at setting the stage for his drama. Before the action gets underway, he spends time painting a backdrop for us that creates the context where everything else in the book will play out.

Normally we don't spend much time thinking about backdrops. It's like staring at wallpaper. That's not where the action is, so why bother?

But in our time remaining this morning, I want to stare at that wallpaper with you. By wallpaper, I'm meaning the genealogy of Jesus. Try not to get too excited. I know there's nothing better than listening to a bunch of begats.

This is the part we prefer to skip over. But in light of where our focus is going to be in our study, I think it's the perfect launch pad for us. So let me read it through for you first.

*Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,  
Perez the father of Hezron,  
Hezron the father of Ram,  
Ram the father of Amminadab,  
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,  
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,  
Obed the father of Jesse,  
and Jesse the father of King David.*

*David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,  
Solomon the father of Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,  
Abijah the father of Asa,  
Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,  
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,  
Uzziah the father of Jotham,  
Jotham the father of Ahaz,  
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,  
Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,  
Manasseh the father of Amon,  
Amon the father of Josiah,  
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

*After the exile to Babylon:  
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,*

*Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,  
Abiud the father of Eliakim,  
Eliakim the father of Azor,  
Azor the father of Zadok,  
Zadok the father of Akim,  
Akim the father of Eliud,  
Eliud the father of Eleazar,  
Eleazar the father of Matthan,  
Matthan the father of Jacob,  
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary,  
of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

*Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.*

An old professor of mine regularly likes to ask random students to come up and talk about their family tree, naming people as far back as they can go. Most of them are lucky if they can get as far as their great grandparents. Not too long ago, my folks were up for a visit and Derek blanked on my mom's name. So he asked Addison. "Hey Ad – what's your grandma's name?" Addison said, "Uh...Grammy?"

Most of us are not nearly as aware of our heritage as a first century Jew would be. Genealogies were incredibly important ways to not only connect with the past, but also to solve legal questions and inheritance rights.

They were incredibly important. And there were different ways to organize them and structure them if you wanted to highlight or emphasize certain aspects of a person's past. Some of you who have been polishing your resumes know what this is all about. Depending on the job you're applying for, you might draw attention to certain management experience, while for another job you might tweak the resume to devote more time to certain technical skills you've learned.

In other words, it's not a generic list of facts about your employment – it's a selective list to say best what you want it to say. And Matthew is doing the same thing here. There were many public records of most of Jesus' family tree. Even today, we can still cross reference large chunks of it with genealogies in the Old Testament. But Matthew intentionally shifts the focus. He didn't just cut and paste – there are particular people and patterns highlighted for us.

Tamar jumps out right away. Talk about an embarrassing family secret. Judah's oldest son Er marries Tamar, but he's bad news and he dies childless. Judah's second son uses Tamar for sex, then he too dies. So Judah promises Tamar she can marry his third son when he's older, but never comes through on that promise.

Tamar really wants a family and now has no options because she's considered tainted goods. So one day she learns that her father-in-law Judah is going up to the temple, so she disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces him on his way. And she becomes pregnant.

News that she's pregnant gets out and Judah puts on this big show of being outraged that she would engage in prostitution, still not knowing he's the father. Then he finds out and he's brought to his knees as his hypocrisy is exposed.

Jesus' line goes right back to that union. Women are hardly ever mentioned in Jewish genealogies, because lines were traced through the fathers, not the mothers. So Matthew is going out of his way to draw our attention to a bit of scandal.

And he doesn't stop there. The next woman he brings up is Rahab – the woman who hid the spies in Jericho. Not only was she a prostitute – she was also a Canaanite. Israelites weren't supposed to marry Canaanites. If Matthew is hoping to show the purity of Christ's Jewishness, he's not helping his own cause.

The same is true when he mentions Ruth. Ruth was a good woman, but she was from Moab. God felt so strongly about Moabites that even if one of them converted to Judaism, they couldn't come into the Temple for ten whole generations. Becoming part of the community was an extremely long process if you were a Moabite.

Then of course there's Bathsheba, David's moment of weakness. He uses his powers as king to force her to sleep with him, gets her pregnant and kills her husband. What a crazy foundation for bringing a child into the world. Yet there's Solomon, right in the lineage of Jesus.

The women are just one surprising feature of this genealogy. Some of the kings are equally unsettling. There's Uzziah, whose pride got so bad that God struck him with leprosy.

And then there's Jeconiah, another evil ruler who epitomizes the corruption that kept ruining the throne. Look what God said about him through Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 22:30**

*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."*

If ANYBODY should be missing from Christ's genealogy, it should be the man God pronounced this kind of curse on. Yet here he is, with a secure spot forever.

And then, right in the middle of Matthew's list of names you have this mention not of a person but of a place – Babylon. God's people in exile, in captivity. Far from their homeland, hopelessly removed from all the promises God had made. It was a bleak, sad state, forever preserved in the family history of Christ.

So rather than give us this pristine, squeaky clean pedigree for Jesus, Matthew seems to go out of the way to kick up some dust. We tend to think of a family tree looking something like this – orderly, symmetrical and with nice, neat boxes. What we find though is more like this – a windblown, gnarled tree that is weathered and worn. We don't see a long line of distinguished saints – we see a rogue's gallery. The rich and the poor. The abused and the abusers. The cheaters and the cheated. The old and the sick. The young and the beautiful. The helpless and the powerful. Murderers and schemers and idolaters and liars. The entire human condition finds representation in this list.

This is the Jesus story, and that's what makes it so incredible. God enmeshed himself totally in humanity. Jesus is forever bound to all these broken and wounded people. It begins to become clearer what Paul meant when he wrote this:

### **2 Corinthians 5:21**

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...*

Jesus is right there in the thick of things. There's no distance between him and this mess. And that means hope for each of our messes. We can enter the Jesus story the same way all these people did.

So what can we say about that story after the few highlights and lowlights we've looked at. I'll just leave you with three thoughts. First,

The Jesus story is a place where **outsiders become insiders**.

A Tamar who has no family future is given THE family future. A Rahab who's a foreigner with a bad reputation becomes a key figure in the faith. A leper king isolated and shunned by everybody else is brought into the heart of God's community. Those who were excluded before can now belong completely.

Isn't it beautiful that Matthew is the writer to pick up on this theme. Because he's the disciple who was a tax collector. If anybody knew what it was like to be on the outside, it was him. Knowing Jesus changed his status as much as anyone else's.

That's one of the great promises of the gospel for all of us:

### **Ephesians 2:13**

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

If you feel far away from God or like you are somehow outside the scope of people he would care about, take a good hard look at this family tree. There are no outsiders.

No outsiders. So why do people feel ostracized at church? Why do some Christians come across as if they know who belongs and who doesn't? I think that happens when we begin with the knowledge that we belong to God, but it goes bad when we think the opposite is true – that he belongs to US. That he loves us because we're good. That he's actually quite lucky to have us on his team..

When we think God belongs to us we feel we have to protect and defend him. We're not as inclusive as God, and don't want to let people in who don't measure up or fit our ideals.

But the truth is God doesn't belong to anyone. He is whole unto himself. But he gave himself to the whole world – no outsiders.

I think a second truth that emerges from these lines is that the Jesus story is a place where **curses are reversed**.

I think of that king who wasn't supposed to ever have an heir on the throne and yet through Jesus he did. Or Ruth who would have been banned from the Temple for being a Moabite, now considered part of God's true Temple – his people. Or a whole people lost forever to Babylon – only to have God do the impossible and bring them back home.

There was a great example of this last week on TV. ABC had a story about Frank Slaughter and his family. About 15 years ago, Frank had a run-in with the law and found himself suddenly an inmate at Allegheny County Jail. For some guys, that is the first step in a downward spiral, where they can't seem to break out of bad patterns and end up spending most of their adult life incarcerated. But for Frank it was different. It made him reevaluate everything. He turned to God and got his life straightened around. When he got out of jail he became a deacon in his church.

But not only did he get his freedom back – he took a job as a corrections officer himself in the very jail where he had done time. His mission now is to help other inmates turn their lives around and find hope.

To me, that pictures the power of Christ to reverse a curse. He not only releases us from whatever has been holding us down – he begins to actually counteract the situation with an opposite force of his blessing.

It would be easy for God to forgive our sins and still not reinstate us to full status with him. Ease up on the punishment but not allow for much future relationship. But that's not what he does. In the Jesus story we find God taking all the curses on himself, absorbing them so we don't have to, and then pouring out blessing after blessing on us.

Some of you are plagued by situations you feel are irreversible this morning, and my prayer for you as we go through these stories in Matthew is that the feeling of despair and helplessness will fall away, because Jesus is all about freeing us from impossible situations and turning those curses into reverses that show the power of God and impact lives around us for his kingdom. He can bring you back from Babylon.

Finally, the Jesus story is a place where **grace is always greater**. It was greater than Abraham's old age. It was greater than Isaac's playing favorites with his sons. It was greater than Tamar's pain and it was greater than Judah's sliminess. It was greater than the injustice Uriah suffered and greater than David's adultery. It was greater than all the good kings' goodness and greater than all the bad kings' badness.

We have all done terrible things and had terrible things done to us by others, but I tell you this: No matter the wound or the weapon, they are swallowed up in the one thing that's always bigger: God's love.

You may be feeling that your pain and suffering has gone unnoticed. You may feel powerless and defeated in your situation. But God is not a God who looks the other way. He doesn't forget his children, and what seems dark now will not stay that way forever.

**Psalm 30:5**

*Weeping may last for the night,  
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.*

The story of Jesus is a big shout of joy that God is setting the world right. Christ is still God living up to his word – bringing outsiders in, reversing curses and righting wrongs. If he can do that with all these people, there's hope for you and me as well.

**Isaiah 55:1**

*"Come, all you who are thirsty,  
come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without cost.*

I love that. We've got nothing to buy our way in, nothing to pay God off, and he says, "You can buy it for free. No hidden strings. No cost. Just come."

Do you need that grace this morning? Do you need a reversal or two in your life? Do you need to know you belong?

The price has been paid. Come buy and eat. The Jesus story is your story.