

The Father of Faithfulness

Ps 89:46-52, Matt 1:12-17

Brothers and Sisters, when you are an adult, a grown-up or even a university/college student the Christmas season is filled with deadlines, due dates, parties, recitals, special presentations and family obligations...

And it almost requires hiring a personal assistant to keep track of all the things you need to do, places you need to be and people you need to spend time with – not to mention making sure that you are able to schedule in the time to put up the Christmas decorations and do your Christmas shopping – that's Christmas as an adult.

But... set all that aside for a moment and press pause on your busy schedule... and think back to a simpler time, a less complicated time... a time when you were younger, when you were a child and the Christmas season was all about waiting.

Waiting in eager expectation, waiting with agonizing anticipation, waiting... counting down the months, the weeks... waiting for those last few days, those final hours until Christmas arrived.

And of course what we were all waiting for was our opening Christmas presents; those toys, games, bicycles, dolls, books, musical instruments... whatever it was that had caught our eye earlier in the year and we had asked our parents to give us those gifts for Christmas – and they promised us they would.

Do you remember doing that?

All those presents sitting under the tree, boxes and packages wrapped up so you had no idea what was in them – but you had examined all of them and you knew which ones were for you.

And you would try to figure out what it could be, looking at the size of the present or its shape, or maybe you gave it a shake... or you were that sneaky kid who would try to lift a

corner of the wrapping paper and see what was underneath and try to tape it back up so your mom wouldn't know you had been peeking.

And maybe before your family would open presents there were some family traditions that had to happen first before you got around to what you were really waiting for...

In my family we had to set the table and have our family Christmas dinner, and then after dinner my mom would put on some Christmas music which we cleaned up and washed all the dishes...

And then we had to sing some Christmas carols, my mom would play the piano and my dad would play his trumpet and us kids had to sing...

And then we had to sit down on the couch and my dad would bring out the big family bible and he would read the Christmas story – from Matthew and from Luke...

And then we had to do some sort of reflections about what Christmas meant...

And by this time my three sisters and I were nearly half-crazed with the waiting and finally my parents would say “ok now we're going to open our gifts” and we'd all go just a little berserk with the excitement of it all after having waited for sooooo long to see if we were going to get what had been promised to us.

So, brothers and sisters it's good for us to think back and remember that time in our lives when Christmas wasn't about being busy... but it was about waiting and anticipating and looking forward to something... because that how the scriptures view the birth of Christ.

And as we finally come to the end of Mathew's introductory genealogy this morning we need to recall that sense of waiting and anticipating we may be familiar with and try to imagine what it would be like... to wait for the very first Christmas to occur.

You see when we were younger, and we had asked our parents for something and they had promised that they would get it for us at Christmas – we knew when that would happen, we knew when it was coming...

If it was the summer time, we knew it would be four months or so until December when Christmas happened and you opened your present either on the 24th or the 25th.

But for those people who are mentioned or implied at the very beginning of this genealogy – Adam and Eve, Abraham, David – they had no idea when Christmas would come and they would see the fulfilment of the promises that God had made to them.

Adam and Eve are promised that one of Eve's offspring would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) Abraham is told that through his seed ALL nations would be blessed (Gen 22:18) and David is promised that one of his descendants would sit on Israel's throne and rule forever (2 Chron 7:18)

Those are some amazing promises that God made – just considering them on a personal level for those individuals. But they even more significant when you consider the implications they have for addressing the evil and suffering and sin for everyone else in this world as well.

So while receiving these promises would have been amazing – the waiting, the anticipation, the expectancy, the delay would have been almost unbearable.

And in fact, it is the waiting and becoming impatient with God to take whatever next steps are required towards the fulfillment of these promises... which gets Abraham into trouble more than once when his own patience runs out and he takes matters into his own hands.

So brothers and sisters, waiting and anticipating is what Christmas should really be about – looking forward to something, expecting God to act and to fulfill His promises.

And as we look at the third and final section of the genealogy this morning – Matthew makes us wait.

Before we finally get to Jesus we must go through this next set of fourteen ancestors, all of whom are relatively obscure and insignificant – but Mathew has us going through them anyways.

Because it highlights the tedious waiting, where you are edgy with boredom, just wanting to get past whatever it is that is currently happening to get to what is really important.

Especially after last week's message where we learned that God reveals Himself as a God of judgment, and as Hebrews 12:11 says *"No discipline seems pleasant at the time..."*

So it is tempting to want to jump from the Babylonian exile straight to Jesus' birth where we receive the fulfillment of ALL God's promises across the ages.

But no, Mathew slowly and deliberately picks his way through Jesus' ancestry – making us wait; Abihud was the father of Eliakim, Eliakim was the father of Azor, Azor was the father of Zadok... and on he goes.

Why? Well because Matthew has determined he's going to present this genealogy in three sections of fourteen to us, so he's going to list fourteen ancestors in this last section even if they are obscure.

In fact half of them are mentioned once or twice in the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles and only in passing, and for the rest of them this is the only place in the scriptures where they are even mentioned...

So this group of ancestors has no real significant involvement or contribution in the way the two previous groups of ancestors has had – but that's Mathew's point.

Because brothers and sisters this section of the genealogy is set up to reveal God as a God of faithfulness, covenant faithfulness.

Before we get to Jesus, Mathew wants us to clearly understand and experience that in spite of the lack of covenant faithfulness on the part of God's chosen people, in

spite of humanity's tendency towards idolatry and injustice - God still keeps His part of the Covenant.

God's covenant faithfulness is set in stark contrast to the unfaithfulness and ineffectiveness of those listed in this section of the genealogy – not just because this is a list of nobodies, but because Matthew takes us all the way up to Joseph with so-and-so what the father of so-and-so, the father of so-and-so... and then all of a sudden right before he gets to Jesus he changes the pattern.

Now, you will recall the alterations that Mathew has made in the previous sections – in the first he inserted the names of four scandalous women, in the second he omitted names four times, either by changing them or skipping over them completely.

So in this third section, his alternations continue both from the first and second section – He inserts one more woman - Mary, and skips over one more name, who would have been

the fourteenth father listed here who fathered Jesus through Mary – Yahweh.

You probably haven't bothered to count all the men in this section this morning – but if you did you would notice that from Jeconiah to Joseph there are only thirteen men – but Matthew says quite explicitly in vs. 17 there are fourteen generations in each section.

So, did Mathew not know how to count? No – rather by deliberately omitting Yahweh's name as the father of Jesus, Mathew means to highlight that God (Yahweh) is such a faithful covenant God that He not only keeps his promises after all these years and all these generations, but He himself also steps in to fulfill what is not His responsibility.

And when Matthew changes the paternal pattern in vs. 16 by inserting Mary's name, we suddenly see all these generations stop at Joseph before we get to Jesus. Mary is Jesus' mother yes but Mary is not of Joseph's line, she's not related to him.

Suddenly we realize that Jesus is not born of Joseph, and so it's not hard to see how the men in this genealogy had nothing to do with contributing in any way towards the birth of the Messiah.

But yet Matthew has deliberately listed each one... because it needs to be shown how God was stepping in to fulfill their responsibility when they were unable to.

Even more so than God enabling Abraham to father a child when he no longer had any vigor and his wife Sarah was past her childbearing years...

In this case God himself fathers Jesus Christ through Mary on behalf of the line of David so that Israel will have a King who can lead them in Covenant faithfulness and fulfill God's promises to Abraham to bless ALL nations, and crush the head of the serpent as promised to Adam and Eve.

So when someone steps in to father a child for a male relative who has died to preserve their family line – we're not

unfamiliar with this... this is that custom of a kinsmen redeemer / guardian redeemer that we learned about in the story of Ruth back in November.

You see while Joseph and his ancestors were biologically alive – the story of this genealogy shows they were habitually covenantally unfaithful – which means they were spiritually dead in sin- and impotent to produce an heir who could be the child whom God had promised.

So God steps in as the kinsmen redeemer and fathers a child through the woman, Mary, who is betrothed to a spiritually dead Joseph.

So God shows just how faithful He is by providing Joseph with a legitimate legal heir connected to David's line, who is also spiritually alive and able to be a faithful covenant partner and fulfill God's promises to David, Abraham and Adam and Eve and thus fully reveal God for who He is.

As Heb 1:1-2 says *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."*

So – what exactly is it that God has spoken to us through the Son He fathered through Mary? Well Matthew’s genealogy tells us - God is mercy, God is judgment and God is faithful, so faithful that He provides what He requires for our covenant faithfulness.

And the good news in God’s covenant faithfulness friends, is that God’s faithfulness produces faith in us – faith in Christ as the covenant keeper on our behalf to be sure, but also faith in God’s faithfulness.

Because as I said earlier, in the scriptures... Christmas is about waiting... and it still is.

You see even though Christ has been born- and in his very person, in his very nature, all God’s promises have been fulfilled and God has been fully revealed to us – we are still waiting for all of that fulfillment to be realized in the coming Kingdom of God.

We are still waiting for Christ’s second coming where He will usher in the new heavens and the new earth – as was promised.

So all the waiting that Matthew puts us through as we go through this last section of the genealogy also prepares us for the reality that we are living in the time between times right now, in the already *fulfilled* but not yet *realized* time of waiting...

Jesus came to bring peace on earth, to bless ALL nations, to reverse the curse, overcome death, to reconcile God and man, crush the head of the serpent and we see glimpses of that for sure...

But there is still war and violence and terrorism, there are nations and peoples that still do not know the gospel, people still get sick and die, and many people live in outright rebellion and denial of God, and we fight a spiritual battle against the devil and his demons.

And brothers and sisters in your own life you may be waiting on God's promises as well – you've received your salvation in Christ as your covenant substitute, the Holy Spirit is at work sanctifying you – but that is a process... and we are all still waiting for our promised perfection.

And in our day to day lives we may be waiting for God to provide... waiting for God to heal... waiting for God change our circumstances... waiting for God to restore relationships... waiting for His promises to be realized, just like those who were waiting for them to be fulfilled by the first Christmas.

So we need to have faith in God's covenant faithfulness.

We need to know and believe and trust that God is a faithful God so that we can persevere as we wait for God to fulfill promises in our life and as we wait for Christ's return and the realization the new Heavens and the new Earth.

We need to live by faith not by sight - especially if it is taking longer than we anticipated and we're not sure when it will occur, and we can't see any evidence of it moving forward.

Brothers and sisters – Christmas reminds us, encourages us and proves to us that God is a faithful God, to the point of fulfilling our responsibilities for us! So Merry Christmas.

But this shouldn't be new information to us... You see that is the final reason why Matthew puts together this genealogy in three sets of fourteen.

Matthew wants to tell us that waiting for Christ's second coming will be very similar to waiting for His first coming in the following ways.

First the second coming will not be bound to historical precision as we know it, just as Matthew is somewhat free with his historical data in this genealogy, but nonetheless it will involve real people, in real places and will occur at a

specific date and time determined by God's sovereign choosing.

That is why the total of this genealogy, three times fourteen which equals forty two, shows up again in Rev 12:6 where it is talking about the period of time, , where the church is taken care of by God and the dragon is not able to destroy it, and that period of time is 1,260 days or 42 months.

Second we will experience Jesus revealing God to us in similar threefold pattern of mercy, judgment, and faithfulness.

We experience God's mercy in the forgiveness of sin that Jesus offers to us, we experience God's judgment in our lives as the Holy Spirit continues to reveal just how deep our sin goes, and finally we experience God's faithfulness in that He continues to refine and sanctify us.

Just as Paul says in Philipians 1:6 *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

And thirdly, this pattern in the story of God's people leading up to the first coming of Christ seems to repeat itself in the story of God's people as they wait for the second coming of Christ.

Starting with God's mercy in Jesus Christ as it extends to the gentiles and they become a part of the true Israel in Jesus – and the Church as we know it is born, and despite the weaknesses and scandals of its leaders, and the heresies and false teachings which plague it, by the power of the Holy Spirit the Church spreads across the world.

Very similar to how Israel was given the Promised Land, and eventually reached its golden age under King David and King Solomon.

But then it moves into judgment, where just as King Solomon and his successors drifted away into idolatry and injustice and the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, so to the Church has struggled with idolatry, injustices and schism – especially

as it ignores those who speak to the church prophetically calling it back to covenant obedience of God's Word in Christ.

To be sure there are eras of revival, where godly men and spirit-filled women lead the church back to the true and right worship of God and repenting of injustices – like King Asa did, like King Hezekiah did.

But overall there is an overall downward trajectory that occurs until, as Jesus warned His church in Revelation 2:5, *"If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place"*

Which leaves us in that place where we are totally dependent upon God's covenant faithfulness, and we will discover that the Church as we know it and experience it right now – for all the good that the Holy Spirit does in us and through us - the Church will not usher in the new Heavens and the New Earth.

So just as we've seen God step in and father Jesus through Mary... Christ will also need to return to this world and fulfill

the responsibility himself which He gave to His church in order to bring in the new heavens and the new earth.

Why is this important brothers and sisters? Because it prepares us to wait realistically, it helps us to realize God's promises don't all come together at once – but they do come. He is faithful.

It helps us continue to trust in His faithfulness while we wait, while we endure trials and struggles and challenges and persecution – and even face the possibility that we may see Christ himself before we see Him bring in the new heavens and the new earth.

It prepares us to live and wait and be faithful – in this time between times – where in celebrating Christ's first coming at Christmas, we prepare ourselves for his second coming and we anticipate the realization of all God's promises...

Because brothers and sisters – God is a faithful God, Jesus reveals that to us, so we say come Lord Jesus, and we wait. Amen.