

Matthew's perspective of Christmas

Matthew 1-2

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In Matthew 9:9-13 we see the story of how a man named Matthew came to be a follower of Jesus Christ:

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.

¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew was one of those people you would consider beyond the reach of God. Do you know any people like that? People who would be the last one you would think would ever be interested in the things of God. It is amazing that God would use such a godless man to eventually write part of the Bible.

We do know that God's grace is big enough to cover over a multitude of sins. We do know that God is the one who draws people to Himself (John 6:44). God doesn't accept a person with an unrepentant heart, so Matthew's heart must have somehow become soft and teachable. We also see that regardless of how it happened it was true faith. We know that by the fruit that it would bear in Matthew's life in the years that followed. This is truly a testimony to the power of God to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their life situation or what they have been like in the past.

Besides this we do not know a lot about Matthew. Only that he became one of Jesus' 12 disciples. We don't read much about him preaching to large crowds or doing mighty miracles. Instead, he as an educated man used his abilities to make his greatest contribution to the kingdom of God by writing down his eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life. This in turn has been used to bring countless people to faith in Jesus Christ. We, too, should live out our faith by using our gifts for the kingdom of God, as the Spirit leads.

In summary, one reason that Mathew's listeners would take note is because his life had been changed so drastically. One could say that this book of Matthew was written by a Jew, for the Jews, about a Jew. We know that Matthew was Jewish. We can also see that he wrote primarily for a Jewish audience. We know that because he traced the lineage of Christ all the way back to King David and Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17), which would have been very important for a Jew. He used Jewish terminology often. He gave very little explanation for the Jewish customs that he referred to, because his audience was Jewish and was already familiar with them. He also gave much attention to connecting the details of Jesus' life to Old Testament Messianic Prophecies, in which the Jews already believed.

Matthew 1:1-17 is a long list of Jesus' lineage. It describes Jesus' family tree all the way back to Abraham. Many who read this passage ask the question, "Why is this even included in the Bible?" Genealogy was the ancient way of communicating the importance of group identity. This included your family, clan, and tribe. This is something those of us from the West have a hard time understanding, because our culture has become so individualistic. The Jews set the greatest possible importance on lineage.

As a Jew read the first 14 verses of Matthew 1 he would likely have been disillusioned with Matthew's beginning verses. Genealogies were supposed to be lists of men. Matthew includes four women. If that was not bad enough, one of the women was involved in sexual immorality and deception. A second was a Gentile prostitute. A third was Ruth, a Moabitess. The fourth was Bathsheba, the woman who became pregnant when committing adultery with King David.

How could this lineage result in the birth of the promised Messiah? Some Jews who heard this must have been tempted to discard Matthew's writings immediately, but two things would have held their attention and demanded that they read further. Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham. He was also a direct descendant of King David. Jesus had royal blood.

The royal line always came through the father, but Joseph was not really Jesus' father. He was his adopted father. Now in that day and time Jesus, as the first born, would still have received all the rights and privileges of a son even if He was adopted, but was that enough to entitle him to claim the name of Son of David? In Luke 3 we see the answer to this question. In Luke 3 we find the genealogy of Jesus through the family lineage of Mary. We see that she too was a descendant of King David. She was traced back to David's son Nathan. Joseph could trace his family back to King David's son, Solomon. So through Joseph, Jesus could legally claim to be a "Son of David in the royal line", and through Mary, He could claim to be a "Son of David" by blood relations.

This was just the beginning of Matthew's case to his fellow Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the Promised Messiah. It was an unexpected beginning that presented a Messiah who had not just come for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. He came not just for the good people, but also for the godless

who were willing to repent and believe. God, in his grace, saw fit to have the genealogy written by an ex-tax collector, mentioning four questionable women, and born to a woman appearing as an illegitimate son. This Messiah did not shy away from the sinful and those of ill repute. He had come to seek and to save the lost and bring the prodigals back home.

Many probably had questions about Jesus' background, but Matthew laid out a clear case that sought to clear up any confusion, and provided clear reasons that Jesus of Nazareth should be believed in as the promised Messiah.

In the first two chapters of Matthew, we see his perspective of Christ's birth and all of the "markers" that helped show the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the promised messiah. Mary, Joseph and Jesus did not live in a vacuum. Others could support these claims and remember some of these events. The truth of His writings could be verified by the early church who were still alive at the time of Matthew's writings. Following are a list of writings that Matthew used to show Jesus birth as fulfilment of the messianic prophecies:

- In Matthew 1:21-23, an angel from God came to Joseph and told of how Mary would give birth, even as a virgin (Isaiah 7:14, 700 BC). This confirmed the Old Testament prophecies and helped explain the likely preconceived ideas about Jesus' birth.
- In Matthew 2:3-6, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just like the prophet said (Micah 5:2, 700 BC).
- In Matthew 2:9-11, the wise men from the east came to visit him in Bethlehem. Surely the residents of Bethlehem would be able to verify this event.
- Matthew 2:13-15 - An angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph and warned him to flee to Egypt with his family for their safety, just as the prophet said (Hosea 11:1, 750 BC). Provable and in line with prophecies.
- Matthew 2:16-18 - Then Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Herod had the male children who lived in and around Bethlehem killed (Jeremiah 31:15, 600 BC). Historical, in line with prophecies.
- Matthew 2:19-23 - Finally Matthew tells of how Jesus' family finally returned to Nazareth as the prophets had spoken. Provable.
- Matthew 3 – It describes John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus, one like Elijah, who pointed to Jesus as the Messiah and baptized Him.

Throughout his book, Matthew would continue to mention these "markers" that gave proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Matthew contains more than 60 Old Testament quotes, seeking to prove to the Jews that Jesus was truly the Christ and Promised Messiah.

Jesus of Nazareth was not just a simple carpenter's son from a small town. He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew was familiar with his own sin, and had experienced firsthand the transforming power of Jesus Christ. He wanted the world, but especially his fellow Jews, to experience Christ as well. As we think of the Christ child during this Christmas season may we draw near to Him and be transformed, one day at a time.

In these verses we find evidence of a Sovereign God who is over all things. This sovereign God was sufficient for preparing the way for the coming of Christ and is also big enough to carry us through the difficult times that we face in our lives today.

God has a plan. He is orderly and is moving our world to its intended end. We don't have to fight for control, because He is in control. Even in the midst of the chaos in our world today, we can have confidence that our God is in control and is inviting us to be a part of his plan as we move toward Christ's return.

Regardless of our past, God is a God of new beginnings and second chances. God is ready and willing to draw us into his family, if we will turn from our sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

1. Grace can reach farther than we think.

Matthew was a chief of sinners, but yet his life was changed by faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The Gospel does not change, but our presentation of it does.

Matthew had a love for Christ and a heart for the Jews. So he wrote strategically protecting the purity of the gospel while at the same time presenting it in a way that would be clearest to the Jews. This alone is not enough. Only the Spirit of God reveals truth, convicts of sin, and grants faith. But we are called to share the truths of the gospel.

3. God can use imperfect people for His purposes.

God, in his grace, saw fit to have the genealogy written by an ex-tax collector, mentioning four questionable women, and born to a woman appearing as an illegitimate son. This Messiah did not shy away from the sinful and those of ill repute. He had come to seek and to save the lost and bring the prodigals home.

4. How has God equipped you to serve Him?

We don't read much about him preaching to large crowds or doing mighty miracles. Instead, he as an educated man used his abilities to make his greatest contribution to the kingdom of God by writing down his eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life. This in turn has been used to bring countless people to faith in Jesus Christ. What gifts do you have to lay before the cross of Christ?

5. As we experience the Gospel we will be compelled to share it with others.

He had been changed by the Gospel: the truths of the Gospel and his experience of the Gospel.

6. Trust in God who reigns over all things.

God reigns over all things. He is over our _____ situation.