

Jesus the Messiah, Son of Abraham  
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Our Christmas text today is very short, but we are gonna use it both today and next week. If you open your Bibles to Matthew 1:1, the gospel starts with this statement right here. It says

*The beginning of the records of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. We quickly tend to run by those statements right there, 'cause we want to get into the story of astounding angels, awe-struck shepherds, and wise men traveling from afar. But, you know, Matthew's in no hurry to get past these lines. In fact, he will take the next fifteen verses verifying the veracity of what he says when he says "*Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" He will devote more time to verifying these two statements than he will to be telling the whole birth narrative. In fact, he will spend twice as long verifying the descendantcy of Jesus the Messiah through David and Abraham than he will spend talking about the birth of Jesus.

To see the grace wrapped in these statements we need to know the story, the story before the angels, and the shepherds, and the wise men from afar. And so this week and next week we are gonna be looking at the story behind the phrase "son of Abraham, son of David." This week we'll be looking at the story behind that phrase "the son of Abraham. Next week we'll come back and we'll be looking at that phrase "the son of David", and we'll look at the story behind that statement so we can see the glory, the mystery, the wonder of the grace found in Jesus. That story of Abraham, and the fact that Jesus is his descendant—is his "the son of Abraham"—begins and centers on a promise given over four thousand years ago, a promise given to a wanderer who at the time was named Abram and would be later called Abraham; a wanderer living in the east who God came to and called; and as He called him, He gave him a blessing. And that promised blessing has shaped all human history since then. The past four thousand years are simply the unfolding of this promise given in Genesis chapter 12, beginning at verse 1 and flowing down to verse 3. God comes to this wanderer named Abram, a man who was not serving God, was not looking to God, a man who was worshipping idols, pagan idols, at the time God comes to him. And we don't know if He came in a vision, if He appeared to him in visible form. We just know that somehow God communicated one-on-one this promise to him.

It began with a call to go forth from the land of his fathers and his forefathers to a land which God said, "I will show you." A land which ultimately, He said, 'Abraham, will be yours.' That promise is extended and expands and He says, 'I will make you, Abraham, a great nation. A great people will come out of you.' And then He goes on and promises personal blessings to Abraham. He promises that he will be blessed personally, he will have a great reputation, and even beyond that, He says 'You, Abraham, will be a blessing to others. Now, it won't be an unconditional blessing. Those who curse you will be cursed in return. But anyone and everyone who blesses you, they will be blessed.' It was an astounding promise. But the pinnacle of it, the pinnacle of the promise comes in the last line when God says to this wanderer,

*"In you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

'All the families of the earth will ultimately be touched with blessing through you.' That promise, as Abraham's life unfolds, is refined; it's repeated; it's reinforced throughout his lifetime. And the promise of the land becomes more definite, and he actually walks the land and sees it. And the nation begins with his family, his son being born, and eventually to become the nation of Israel. And he becomes a blessing everywhere he goes. And those who curse him are cursed in return. And that promise begins to unfold, but it is refined. And one of the last times it is stated to Abraham, near the end of his life, it is stated this way. It says 'In your seed, your descendant, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' In other words, He's sayin' to Abraham, one of the last times He states this promise to him when Abraham's much older, he comes to him and he says, 'Listen, the way all nations are gonna be, and all peoples are gonna be blessed by you or in you and through you is through a descendant of yours.' That was the promised blessing.

Matthew chapter 1 looks back to that promised blessing and tells us, and identifies and pinpoints for us who that descendant of Abraham is, who that seed of Abraham is, who that one is through whom all the nations...all the nations will be blessed. And as Matthew 1 expands and identifies him as Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed King, it goes on and it gives us an indication as to how it is that the world be blessed through this One.

Partly the reason (there's two reasons here)...partly the reason is because this one, this descendant of Abraham, would not simply be son of Abraham, son of David. He would be, in a very real way, the Son of God. As Matthew unfolds the story of the birth, in verse 20, he describes how the angel comes to Joseph. And he tells Joseph that the child who's been conceived in her, Mary his betrothed wife, he says the child who's been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit! He's not just son of Abraham, son of David—He's Son of God! And he expands on that and says, '...for this reason...' the angel expands on it and says, '...for this reason they shall call His name Emmanuel, which means "God with us."' This descendant of Abraham, Son of God in reality as He came into the world, became God with us. And it wasn't just a temporary presence! At the very end of Matthew, the last line in the gospel of Matthew, the very last statement is Jesus speaking to His disciples. He has been crucified. He has been buried. He has been raised again from the grave. And His is ascending into heaven, and He's going to be there at the right hand of the Father. His disciples are there, and they're on earth and they're still firmly planted on earth, and they're wondering 'What next? What's gonna happen?' And he makes this promise to them. He says, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.*" Emmanuel—'God with us'—the promised descendant of Abraham, God with us.

There's a second way that that descendant of Abraham is able to bless all. Not only does He bless by being God with us, His unseen presence even here in this room right now...but His name, given to indicate His ability to bless. The angel tells Joseph as he meets with him, "*You shall call His name Jesus,*" which means "Yahweh", or "the LORD saves", and he adds this statement to this. He says, "*For He...*", this descendant of Abraham, "*...will save His people from their sins.*" Now again, this is one of those phrases in our time, with all the pressing situations that we face, we can run by this like 'Ok, save us from our sins? Ok, good.' Because our concerns tend to be a little more pressing when it comes to the world economy being stabilized, or our national enemies being neutralized, or our environment being preserved. We want somebody who will preserve democracy and sustain it and maintain it. We want somebody who can stop the cultural drift of our times. And if it isn't on the big scale of things, we want somebody who can at least secure our financial future, who can restore our health when we are sick, who can mend our broken relationships. We want someone who can enter in and make our dreams come true. And so when the promise is "He will save you from your sins", we don't slow down and grasp the wonder of that.

We are today going to slow down and grasp the wonder of that, because the promise that He will save His people from their sins is a glorious and a serious promise. I said earlier that we're gonna say some really astounding things about Jesus today, and I'm gonna say 'em right now, and I wanna say 'em very carefully. So I'm gonna read. Jesus is able to save you and I from our chronic resistance to God, whether it is that active rebellion that just shakes the fist in God's face to say "My way!" or it's that passive resistance that simply continually raises questions of doubt or lives in disinterest—Jesus is able to save us from that. In fact, His promise to us when we come to Him is that when He is done with us we will be done with sin. No more will its stain be on our record. No more will it grip our soul. And no more will it loom in front of us. *We will be free*—not just forgiven; we will be free.

We will be free from that selfish grip of greed that drives us to grasp for more, and more, and more, and more, and keeps us from ever knowing the wonder and the *freedom* of contentment that says, 'I have enough.' He will free us from that heavy weight of self-importance, that unbelievable burden of pride within, that heaviness that weighs us down when we think we're what it's about, when we think that we're the important one here, that unbelievable burden of having to be the one with the answer, the solutions. What a heaviness to think this is all about you. What freedom when you can put that down.

Jesus is able to set us free from that self-pleasing drive of lust, that overpowering impulse of sensuality that reacts to stimulation like Pavlov's dog, so much so that we begin to behave like dogs. Jesus can free us from that. He's able to free us from that self-absorbed weariness of worry, that constant wearing anxiety about what might happen, how you might fail, and how you may disappoint people who are watching you. Jesus frees us from that to unbounded confidence. He frees the self-centered from the demands of impatience that either reacts in anger or in pouting when you don't get your way, and then blames everybody else when you get your way and things turn out badly. He frees us from that.

He frees us from the bitterness of self pity, that bitterness that will not let go of a wrong done...years and years after it's done, that feels like there's one more person that needs to know how badly you were hurt, that bitterness that feels that person has not yet paid the full price. Jesus can free you from that self pity of bitterness.

His promise is when we come to Him, when He's done with us we'll be done with sin. No longer will it stain our past. No longer will it grip our soul. And no longer will it darken our future. It is a glorious and, I want you to understand, it is a serious promise. It is a promise that took Jesus to the cross, and it is a promise that will call you to the cross of self-denial every day. But in the end you will stand before God...free...free.

Son of Abraham, the One through whom all the nations will be blessed because He, this son of Abraham, is Son of God, "God with us." This son of Abraham is Jesus, the One who saves from our sins. That's the story. Let's make sure we see the grace.

Gonna make three quick statements. I'll back each one of 'em up. By the time we're done, as we now know the story, I trust you'll see the grace of this promise. Number one—you need to recognize, you need to understand, you need to know and recognize that when this promise of grace was given the world was in rebellion. The world had turned against God and said, 'We do not want You to rule us.' It had started out as a great, and a grand, and a glorious creation of God, but it had gone bad; it had gone horribly bad in the Garden when Adam and Eve sinned. The story is told in Genesis chapter 1. It is explained in a key passage of scripture, Romans 5, where we're told it is through that sin, that sin of that one man, that sin entered into the entire world like an infection that has infected each one of us with chronic disease ever since. Towards the end of that chapter we're told again, as Paul comes back to that concept, that idea, he'll say that it's "*...through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.*"

How bad was it, this world that had rejected God, where sin had come in and begun to infect everyone born of man? How bad was it? We're told in Genesis 6 that it was so bad that God looked at this world, and He saw that it was continually evil; the hearts of men were continually evil. And we're told that one of the most profound, darkest statements in all of scripture...we're told that God looked at this earth where every intent of every heart was evil, and God said He's sorry that He made man on the earth and He was grieved, He was pained, in His heart. That was the world, and the condition of the world, when God said to Abraham, 'I'm gonna bless everybody through you.' That's grace—a world in rebellion that has rejected God, and God says, 'Through your descendant I'm gonna bless all the families of this earth.'

Need to recognize...when Jesus came the world had not improved. It was a world in rebellion against God. Matthew 2 tells a story I never see in a Christmas play. When the wise men come into Jerusalem and they're looking for this king, and Herod the ruler—the wicked, powerful, cruel, brutal ruler of Israel at the time—hears of that, he identifies where in the proximity this child was promised, and he figures out what could be the outside age of the child, and he's looking for a child approximately two years old living in the region of Bethlehem, and he sends out his soldiers, and they kill every child under two years of age in that residence, in that area. Jesus came into a world where kings kill children...a king so brutal that one of his Roman friends said, "I would rather be Herod's dog than his sons." And that's the man who's proclaimed the king of the land. Jesus came into a world that was in rebellion against God. A promise of grace given to a world in sin, and then that promise of grace released in a world of sin with Jesus' coming. And I want you to know the world is still in rebellion against God. It is.

Did something I don't think I'll ever do in Christmas again. I think it was a tactical mistake, but I'm living through it. I decided that...Marlene wanted to see some Christmas videos, so we were watching some Christmas videos. You know, the type that make you weep and hold hands, and all that stuff, ok? Well, at the same time I decided I'm gonna watch some documentaries. And so I watch "A Death in Gaza". I follow that up with a documentary called "Janjaweed", the story of civil war in Sudan. And then I capped it off with the story of Nanking—the invasion of the Japanese when they took the capitol of China and two hundred and fifty-five thousand (255,000) Chinese were brutally murdered. It wasn't very cheerful.

And then Joel brought me up short in his usual, quiet, unassuming way. As I'm talking about the darkness of it, he says, "But Larry, there was grace being extended." And you go through all three of those stories and you'll find it. In Nanking a missionary protecting thousands of young girls with nothing but an American flag and saying "Don't touch 'em!"; in the Sudan relief workers from all over the world, and among them you'll find individuals who speak of Jesus; and then the story of Gaza. That's the one that's most personal to me.

About a year ago, when we were burned out and Joel came with me to a story about the little church in Gaza that had been damaged by Israeli bombs... Gaza's a small strip of land in the southeast corner of Palestine where the Palestinians were uprooted when Israel was given Palestine. These were put in the Gaza strip like a reservation, and they are brought in there. They're not a sovereign nation. They've got a border around them that they cannot come and go at will. And there's millions of them in there. And it's a place filled with hate and anger at the injustice of everything. And the documentary I watched describes...I've never seen so much hatred in young children as

they dream of the day when they can blow themselves up as terrorists and destroy somebody. And in self preservation the Israelis try to contain the hatred that is building in there. Both sides struggling with injustices done for centuries. And in the middle of that is this little church with a pastor named Hanna Massad who grew up in Gaza, found Jesus in Gaza, and continues in his little church which has been bombed three different times...his little church where the youth pastor was kidnapped and killed, leaving three little children behind him, by Islamic terrorists...a church where bombs fall from Israeli jets and blast out their windows. In the middle of all that there is this pastor who's gotten his doctorate in America and could be living fine and comfortable in the U.S., and has spent the past year trying to get back into that land, and is now back in Jordan crossing the border every opportunity he can get—just to tell people about Jesus.

The promise was given in a sinful world. And the promised grace was released in a sinful world. And the promised grace is being extended through people like Hanna, people like us, in a world of sin. You know the story. See the grace.

As you go through this week I encourage you to rejoice in it, to cherish it; but I also encourage you to also extend it. So I ask you to stand with me as we close in prayer.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in the freedom of Jesus, Emmanuel, son of Abraham, son of David, who saves us from our sins. Amen.