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# Follow Me: The Gospel of Matthew

## Victory Life Church

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Wednesday, February 26, 2020 — Introduction

### Introduction

**Matthew 1:1 (ESV)** The book of the **genealogy** of **Jesus Christ**, the **son of David**, the **son of Abraham**.

This is the “genesis” (the greek work for “genealogy” used here is the same used for the title for the book of “Genesis”) of Jesus Christ, however what Matthew is doing by putting Jesus’ ancestors at the beginning of his gospel is at least two-fold:

1. Matthew is showing how Jesus is the climax and fulfillment of a long history, the story of God and His people, Israel. Matthew will go on to use the phrase “this fulfilled what was said by the prophet...” as a way to say this story has been building to this moment, and it’s all about Jesus.
2. Matthew also is saying that this story and these ancestors find their meaning in Jesus. God has been at work with His people by means of His covenants, specifically His covenants with Father Abraham and King David. These two main covenants act as major movements in Israel’s history, but then the third movement, the exile, makes it seem like the story unravels, and God’s promises to these key figures are left hanging. Yet now, even from exile, God is still at work in bringing the Messiah, making all three movements have meaning and purpose in God’s grand story only because of Jesus.
3. There is far more to be said about the genealogy (the inclusion of 4 women associated with Gentile heritage; 2 names were slightly changed — “Asa” to “Asaph” and “Amon” to “Amos” — as a wordplay to make theological points, though it doesn’t show up in a few translations; and why a few generations were skipped — between Joram/Jehoram and Uzziah; the arrangement of 14’s is a theological point, making the numeric “14” to the literary equivalent to “David”) but these and more can be for another day.

“Jesus Christ” — “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. It is a title from the Hebrew “Messiah” (“Mashiyach” literally), which means “Anointed” or “Anointed One.” This is the title for the future King from the line of David that would liberate God’s people and establish God’s kingdom of justice and peace, not just for Israel, but for the whole world. Matthew is asserting from the first verse of this gospel that Jesus is the Messiah, the rightful ruler from the line of David, and king of Israel and the whole world.

## Scripture Readings:

- Old Testament: Deuteronomy 8:1-5 (and/or Isaiah 42:1-7)
- Psalms: Psalm 2:1-12
- New Testament: Hebrews 4:12-16
- Gospel: Matthew 3:13 - 4:11

## Jesus' Baptism

**Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV)** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is **my beloved Son**, with whom **I am well pleased.**"

**Exodus 4:22 (ESV)** Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord , Israel is my **firstborn son**,

**Psalm 2:1-8, 10 (ESV)** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his **Anointed**, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, **I have set my King on Zion**, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "**You are my Son**; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and **I will make the nations your heritage**, and the ends of the earth your possession...Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

"The nations are raging and fighting—raging indeed, against the true God; and the enthronement of God's "son" is the answer. He's in charge now, and the nations, and especially their rulers, had better be warned. Their power is broken, and he will implement God's victory."<sup>1</sup> ~ N.T. Wright

**Isaiah 42:1-7 (ESV)** Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, **in whom my soul delights**; I have put **my Spirit** upon him; **he will bring forth justice** to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. **He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth**; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the Lord , who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *How God Became King*, pg. 215

in it: "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; **I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations**, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

"Israel, the family of Abraham, has already been referred to as 'my servant' in [Isaiah] 41:9, but it has become clear that Israel as a whole is quite incapable of fulfilling this role. A 'servant' is needed who will, so to speak, be Israel for the sake of Israel, who will fulfill the divine vocation to which Israel at its best might aspire, but from which it would always fall short. And this vocation, exactly like that of the king in Psalm 2, is not simply to be God's agent in saving people from personal sin and its consequences (though that remains at the heart of it). The vocation of the servant is to bring God's justice into the wider world (42:3), to establish it in the world (42:4)."<sup>2</sup> ~ N.T. Wright

### Our Identity in Christ

**Matthew 3:17 (ESV)** and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Before Jesus performs any miracles, does any good works, teaches anything divine or profound, and before He completes the work of salvation on the cross and the resurrection, He hears the affirmation of His heavenly Father that He is loved and that He is good enough to bring His Father pleasure. This shapes the necessary foundation of His true identity, the Beloved Son in whom the Father is pleased. This also shapes the necessary foundation for our identity in Christ: that we are Beloved children of God, that we are good enough in Christ, and that His pleasure is upon us in Christ.

"Only the love of God in Christ is capable of bearing the weight of our true identity." ~ Pete Scazzero<sup>3</sup>

### Jesus' Wilderness Temptations

The three temptations of Christ that try to make Him question His identity and His Father's love for Him are the same temptations we face with our identity in Christ and the Heavenly Father's unconditional love for us.

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<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *How God Became King*, pg. 215

<sup>3</sup> Pete Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pg. 50

**Matthew 4:1-11 (ESV)** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This story (and its parallels in Mark and Luke) is making a claim: that there is a force bigger, more sinister, than human stupidity and poor choices at work in the world, wreaking havoc and chaos and evil on the world. Jesus sees His identity and vocation to confront this force.

**Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (ESV)** And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has **led you these forty years in the wilderness**, that he might humble you, **testing** you to **know what was in your heart**, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man **disciplines** his **son**, the Lord your God **disciplines** you.

“Discipline” — don’t think “spanking.” It is the Lord leading His people into an experience to that will reveal the truth of who they are and what is in them. How did Israel do in the wilderness? Fail.

Matthew is trying to show us that Jesus is restarting their story. He will succeed as their king where they have fail. Matthew is also pulling the story all the way back to Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden, where a tempter came and tested humans and they failed. Jesus, as a new representative of humanity, will succeed where all humans have failed.

“Tempt” — our English word makes us think of tempting to “do evil”. A good translation is to “test,” not tempt with evil, but to “reveal the truth.” Like a teacher who teaches their students and wants to know who has retained the information, they would “test” them, not to catch them in doing wrong, but to know the truth about what

they know. It is the Spirit that led Him into the wilderness, not to do evil, but to discover the truth of what is in Jesus.

### **Temptation One:**

**Matthew 4:3 (ESV)** And the tempter came and said to him, "**If you are the Son of God**, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Jesus is presented as the Son of God, loved by the Father. Then comes a voice, "really? If you are, why are you in these circumstances. If you are the Son of God, do something about it." Jesus is now starving. The tempter comes to undermine His identity by pointing out these circumstances. "If you're the Son of God, why are you out here going through hell of hunger and thirst? That shouldn't be if you really are the beloved Son of God. If you are so loved, why are you doing out here?" His loyalty and trust in the Father is being tested. "Clearly the Father does not have your best interest in mind, otherwise why would you be out here? If you're the Son of God, surely you can do something about it."

Jesus' trust is trying to be undermined by the tester. Can Jesus trust the Father to lead Him and guide Him in His will? Does Jesus trust the Father with His life? Does He trust that regardless of His circumstances, they do not define who God is to Him? But Jesus appeals to Scripture to be the definer of His Sonship. He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, which in context addressed Israel as God's son.

**Matthew 4:4 (ESV)** But he answered, "**It is written**, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

### **Will the Messiah just feed stomachs?**

It is a noble thing to provide food for the hungry. Jesus even does so on multiple occasions (Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:32-39). However, if Jesus is the Messianic King who is called to liberate God's people from slavery to sin and death, then He recognizes that He could provide for all of their natural needs and yet not liberate them, thus failing in His *actual* vocation. Jesus recognizes that our deepest need is not a lack of food to properly feed ourselves and our families; the deepest need is that we are slaves to our cravings and hungers, idolaters of desire, sinners trapped in lusts. The Messiah must do more than meet physical needs, but to feed the deepest need of the human heart: the need for God's life-giving, liberating word.

People do not ONLY live by bread. He is reasserting that you can exist as a human with food, shelter, and clothing and yet still not truly live as a full and flourishing human (animals need those). There is a reality that we are beings that need more than sustenance, but we need purpose, a story, a community. When we are denied these things, we are not fully human. To truly live, we need a Word from the Creator to tell us the truth of who we are and what we are here for, binding us together in

that story of God's purpose. Our lives have meaning because of the Word spoken to me by the Father that I trust, more than my circumstances.

The hell of hunger and thirst do not define the meaning of my life. Love and loyalty to the Father whom I trust is more real than the circumstances we find ourselves in.

What hungers have I placed before my relationship with God? What cravings or desires have I assumed are my ultimate needs? Where have I tried to fill my stomach with satisfying my cravings and yet starved myself from God's word? Because we have so many desires and hungers, we assume that life is spent trying to satisfy them.

Jesus says that there is more to life than filling my stomach. Life is in being fed by the ongoing, continual word from God, my intimate relationship and connection with Him.

### **God is my Provider**

What is the character of God as Father? What does it mean to be God's child? There are legitimate needs in our life that need to be met, not the least of which is food. We can't live without food for very long. But who do we trust most to provide for us? Ourselves? Our own ability, skills and knowledge? Or can we trust God?

God's provision in our lives might not look like what we think it should. In the context God provided for Israel as His son just what they needed, but not more. Allowing us to have certain hungers that go unmet, yet feeding and providing us just what we need seems to be a form of discipline God brings into our lives that makes us realize how much we need the word that proceeds from the mouth of God, an intimate relationship with Him.

### **I am NOT What I Do (Performance)<sup>4</sup>**

Jesus could achieve something great and be known for mysteriously transforming stones to bread. He could solve humanity's hunger crisis, making an incredible contribution to the world, and even become famous for it. He would be a success.

What have you achieved? How have you demonstrated your usefulness? What do you do? Most of us consider ourselves of value only if we have "scored sufficient successes." When we don't, we push harder, go faster, try harder, cram more into the schedule; we go inward into depression, shame, fear, and blame, afraid we might be a failure, and failures are not worthy, they are not enough.

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<sup>4</sup> From Pete Scazzero's book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pg. 50-53

## **Temptation Two:**

**Matthew 4:5-6 (ESV)** Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "**If you are the Son of God**, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

New tactic: quote Bible. Psalm 91 is a beautiful poem of prayer and trust and dependence on the Lord when we are in difficult circumstances. They went to the Temple, the hot spot of God's presence. There the tempter tried to get Jesus to prove who He was and prove the Father's love; prove His protection over you to see if it's true.

**Matthew 4:7 (ESV)** Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

## **Will the Messiah win fame by spectacle?**

Jesus could take possession of people's will by making an overwhelming spectacle of His power. Jesus could make a display of His identity and relationship with God by proving God's protection over Him by doing something spectacular.

The tester twists the Scriptures, treating the Scriptures as a "genie in a bottle" formula, perform a trick and God has to be in your service. This will prove you are loved and blessed.

"Once again, Satan made a direct assault on Jesus' identity. He knew that if he could get Jesus to waiver in His identity, he could derail His destiny. He tried to get Jesus to prove who He was by some kind of action (doing vs being). But Jesus knew who He was and had nothing to prove." ~ Duane Sheriff<sup>5</sup>

## **God defines who I am**

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6, recounting Israel's failure in the wilderness by trying to make God prove His protection and provision for them on their terms. This kind of relationship puts God in our service. Jesus won't do this, He won't make the Father do that. He trusts the Father. The Father is the One who is in control, Jesus will not make Him do tricks, but will choose to obey Him in all things, even if it means giving up His life.

What is the character of God as Father? What does it mean to be God's child? It means that He is in charge and I am not. I cannot make Him do for me what I think He should do. He is the source of life and I can trust Him, living in obedient surrender

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<sup>5</sup> Duane Sheriff, *Identity Theft*, pg. 181

to Him. It means that because of who He is and who He made me to be in Christ, I have nothing to prove. People's acceptance and rejection of me does not define who I am.

### **I am NOT What Others Think (Popularity)**<sup>6</sup>

Many of us are addicted to what others think. A great fear that plagues our modern age is being invisible. We put ourselves out there, grasping and striving, to gain the approval of people. We place a higher premium on what people think than we realize. We often live in a trap of a pretend life out of an unhealthy concern for what people think of us.

“True freedom comes when we no longer need to be somebody special in other people's eyes because we know we are lovable and good enough.”<sup>7</sup> ~ Pete Scazzero

“Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.”<sup>8</sup> ~ Henri Nouwen

Instead of being content in our identity in Christ, being the loved and accepted child of God that we are, we express that discontent by compulsions of attention, of affirmation, and applause. We praise outrage, as if it's a badge of honor to immaturely and prematurely give our heated opinion about everything in order to get a “like” or a “share” on things that are really none of our business. In an attempt to be special, we become like everyone else, trying to prove we are something and being afraid that we are nothing. And yet, our true identity is that we are loved and that we are enough.

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<sup>6</sup> From Pete Scazzero's book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pg. 50-53

<sup>7</sup> Pete Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pg. 53

<sup>8</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, pg. 11



## **Temptation Three:**

**Matthew 4:8-9 (ESV)** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

The tester changes tactics. Challenging identity didn't work. Instead of challenging Jesus' identity, he just appeals to Jesus' destiny and to wrestle as to how to fulfill it. So the tempter makes an offer of power. Jesus is a king. Jesus is destined to bring God's kingdom to all of creation. What kind of king is he? And what kind of kingdom will he bring? The ruling and governing structures of society are infiltrated by evil and under the influence of this tempter.

## **Will the Messiah take a shortcut to power?**

The 20th century was the bloodiest century humanity has ever known. Millions of people slaughtered in the name of some utopia. Humanity and the structures we build are under the influence of evil. It's about the strong eating the weak. Might makes right. Make the machine run smoother and more efficient no matter who it steps on. Jesus is going to have to deal with this level of evil, not just personal sin.

**Matthew 4:10 (ESV)** Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Jesus recognizes that this is something demonic influencing him, He has an emotional, visceral response. This influence is compromising the heart of what He came to do. This is not the only time He was tempted with this (Matthew 16:13). Jesus will not be a king that grasps for the reigns of power, slaughtering humans in the name of power and possession.

These temptations are Jesus trusting the Father in becoming a different kind of king, one of self-giving love. In living and dying from this kingdom, He shapes a new kind of people, calling us to follow Him in the way of self-giving love.

It is at this point Jesus has victory over evil. Jesus has power over evil, despite the circumstances of our lives. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection invites us to see that this story, this word, is what is the truth of who I am and what true life in this world really is, and that I can trust God in all things.

## **God will happens God's way**

What is the character of God as Father? What does it mean to be God's child? His ways are not always our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). When it comes to God's will, there are no shortcuts or compromises. No matter how clear we understand God's will, our commitment to fulfilling it must include following His ways in the process. Our

temptation is not to trust God in the fulfilling of His will, but to grasp in life. The temptation is to think that we are on our own and we have to take control in life. What it means to be a child of God is that I can trust Him to be in control and not have to grasp in life.

### **I am NOT What I Have (Possessions)**

Jesus *had* nothing and was tempted to think He *was* nothing because of that. The devil is playing on profound issues of fear and the source of security. The “consumer culture” we live in measures our success by what we own. \$15 Billion a year is spent by marketers seducing children into believing their identity is found in the latest toy, trinket, device, or clothes. And as adults we measure ourselves by comparison. Who has the most money, the most happiness, the perfect body, the best job, the most fulfilling marriage? Our sense of worth is found in possession and position.

Other people’s success and possessions, their comforts and rewards may tempt us to believe that they are more loved or cared for by God. We struggle celebrating other people’s success because in our heart we want to be them, to have what they have. The enemy preys on such a struggle feeding us the lies that we do not have enough and therefore are not worthy of love or admiration. Yet Jesus models a surrender to the Father as the anchor of identity, that no matter what I have or do not have, no matter what others have or do not have, I am secure in the One who loves me and is pleased with me.

### **Conclusion**

Being a disciple of Jesus is like going into the wilderness. If you become a disciple or are a disciple, do not expect your life to become easy. The world is under the influence of evil and is trying to teach you this other way of living. You will have relationships that will be testing, you will have the voices come into your head that will try to get you to question God’s love and care for you, tempting you not to trust Him. Will you know what to do when you hear those voices?

**Psalms 103:13-14 (ESV)** As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

**Hebrews 2:17-18 (ESV)** *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a **merciful and faithful high priest** in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, **he is able to help those who are being tempted.***

**Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our **weaknesses**, but one who **in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.