

The Promised King

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us just to turn back together to the passages that Hunter read for us. And today we are going to begin a short series in the run-up to Christmas called The King of Christmas.

Let's read again a verse from each of the passages that Hunter read for us. First, Isaiah 9-2, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. And then the words of verse 1 and chapter 1 of Matthew. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Matthew chapter 1 is one of several places in the Bible where we find a genealogy, a long list of names in a family. And I guess if we're honest, this is perhaps one of the places of the Bible where we can be very tempted to just skip ahead.

A strange list of names, many of whom we know very little about, can seem unlikely to have much for us today.

[1 : 14] Is there anything in that genealogy that's going to help you or me today or in the week ahead? Well, I want us to have a look together and see what we can see.

Our title, as you can see, is the Promised King. And rather than having sermon headings as such, we're just going to look at some of the names that appear in this genealogy.

If we do stop to see a genealogy, it can be quite an overwhelming thing to look at. You can see in the screen there, there's just loads and loads of names. But instinctive approach to something like this can be to see it as something quite impressive.

And that's especially true if a family tree includes royalty. I remember as a child seeing a poster of all the kings and queens of Britain.

And looking at that poster, it looked like a list of strong, successful and important people. And even in a non-royal family, when we look back at family trees, often our attention is drawn to the impressive or the successful figures in any family's history.

[2 : 26] And our first impression of this genealogy of Jesus could very easily be exactly the same because if you look at the big list there that Matthew's got, there's many of the prominent names from the Old Testament.

And a key part of this genealogy is that it gives us the royal line descending from David. So at first glance, it all looks pretty impressive.

But if you look at a family tree in more detail, you'll see that the actual reality of the lives of the people listed is not necessarily as impressive as our first impressions might conclude.

And that's true even of the royal family in our own nation. If you go back through history, you'll see stories of heartbreak, misery and failure in the lives of kings and queens who ruled our country.

And exactly the same is true in this genealogy in Matthew chapter one. If we think about the lives that these people actually had, we'll see that for most of them things were difficult.

[3 : 41] And Isaiah describes that very powerfully when he speaks about the Old Testament community as those who walked in darkness and who dwelled in a land of deep darkness.

So we might come to this genealogy and think, wow, what an impressive heritage Jesus has. The truth is, this is a family line with a dark and difficult past.

Now to help us see that, I want to just pick four names out of this genealogy to look at more closely. There's actually lots that we could look at in this genealogy.

One of the things that's particularly interesting is the mention of women. But what I want to do is actually just pick out four of the men and I'm going to go for some of the slightly not so obvious ones.

So I have picked, slightly randomly, Hezron, Rehoboam, Abaihud and Matham. So Hezron, he's probably three or four generations after Jacob.

[4 : 50] So that means he comes probably in between the book of Genesis and Exodus. Now just to note that in genealogies like this in the Bible, it's not uncommon for them to skip out generations.

So being the father of someone doesn't necessarily refer to immediate offspring. It can also refer to someone being the descendant of someone else.

And you see that actually in verse one of Matthew where it says that Jesus is the son of David and the son of Abraham, obviously in a sense of being a descendant.

So Hezron, probably three or four generations after Jacob. So that's roughly kind of 1600, 1700 BC-ish. Rehoboam, he was king after Solomon.

And so that was around 920 BC, his reign was 931-913. Abaihud, he is a little bit further on, probably around 450 BC-ish.

[5 : 54] Again, we don't know exactly, but he comes after the Jews have returned from exile in Babylon. And that means he's more or less at the end of the Old Testament, pretty much at the kind of conclusion of the Old Testament era.

And then we have Mathan who comes just a generation or two, two or three generations before Joseph.

He may have been his grandfather, he may have been his great grandfather. We can't be sure. He probably lived around 100 BC, maybe a wee bit before. The key thing is that he lived in the bit between the Old Testament and the New Testament, what we call the inter-testamental period.

Now I don't know very much about any of these four, except Rehoboam we know a little bit about from the book of Kings and Chronicles. However, we do know quite a bit about the days in which they lived.

And the knowledge of the periods in which these people lived can help us build up a picture of what their lives were like. And to try and kind of bring us into their lives a wee bit for these, not just to be kind of names that just seem a million miles away, I thought we could interview them to find out more about them.

[7 : 13] So we're going to interview them in inverted commas and we're going to ask them two questions. Where do you live and what's it like? So let's start with Hezron, where do you live and what's it like?

I live in Egypt. That's not where I'm originally from. My family are from north of here where the Canaanites live. That's our home, but we had to leave because of famine.

We all came to Egypt as a family because my great-great-uncle Joseph was high up in the government here. He did an amazing job. He had planned for the famine and that meant there was enough food here.

He was also really good to our family because he gave us an area to settle in called Goshen. It was amazing how it all worked out. But it's not like that now.

Joseph died long ago and since then, her new king has come and he's got no word of what Joseph did. He started treating us differently. None of us are getting good jobs and he seems to be treating us Israelites very differently from how he treats the Egyptians.

[8 : 19] There are loads of us now and I sometimes think he sees us as a threat. It's getting harder and harder to make a living.

We are not being treated fairly. I'm not sure, but the way things are going, if we stay here in Egypt, I worry that we might end up as slaves.

Trouble is, we have no king. We have no one to lead us and we have nowhere else to go.

Interview number two is with Rehoboam. Where do you live and what's it like? I live in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Well, actually, it's not the capital of Israel anymore.

It used to be the capital of Israel. Now it's just the capital of the southern half of Israel, which we call Judah. When I became king, I made a big mistake.

[9 : 11] I wanted to prove that I was as wise as my father Solomon. I thought I needed to show everyone that I was in charge now. So I didn't listen to the old men who had worked with my father.

The people were wanting to reduce their workloads. I thought that now that I was king, I would cement my authority. So I did the opposite. I pushed them even harder.

But it was a huge mistake. There was a massive rebellion led by a guy called Jeroboam and it divided the whole country. So now there's two kingdoms. I'm still king here in the south, but our

kingdom is small and weak.

Most of the tribes went with Jeroboam. When my father Solomon died, we were a strong, prosperous nation. In fact, I remember the Queen of Sheba coming all the way to see how amazing it was.

But now it is not like that. I am supposed to be the king, but I'm the guy who broke the kingdom. I don't know if it will ever be reunited.

[10:13] My father Solomon was a good king and his father David was the very best. I don't think we'll ever have a king like that again.

So view number three is with Abaihud. Where do you live and what's it like? I live in Jerusalem.

Well, if you can call it Jerusalem, the place still looks like a war zone.

150 years ago, this place was ravaged by the Babylonians. The devastation was unreal. My parents and grandparents were taken as exiles to Babylon.

We've come back and there's been a huge effort to try and restore the city. Nehemiah and Ezra did an incredible job of rebuilding the walls and the temple. And my own family were helping as well.

So things are better now and the city doesn't look as bad as it did. But everyone says that the old folk who had seen the temple before and who have lived long enough to see it being rebuilt, they said that the restored one isn't a patch on the original.

[11:19] I look at this city now and it's just a shadow of what it used to be. And the biggest problem is that there's no king. We just have a governor who reports back to empire headquarters in Persia.

I look at the ruins of Solomon's palace and I wonder, will we ever have a king again? And our last interview is with Mathan.

Where do you live and what's it like? I live in Bethlehem. A lot of my family lived in Jerusalem over the years. In fact, my family is connected to the kings that used to reign there.

But we don't live there now. It's far too dangerous. I still remember a few years ago it was absolute chaos. A Greek king called Antiochus came and he caused havoc.

They were even worshiping the Greek gods used in our temple. It was unreal and the fighting afterwards was brutal.

[12:15] We came to Bethlehem to be safer. In fact, my ancestors are from this town so I still have family connections. Things have settled down a bit but there's always rumors of fighting.

You see, no one knows who's really meant to be king. There's guys in Jerusalem who are ruling us but I'm not sure they're actually connected to David's royal line. And we keep hearing talk about some country in the West that's becoming really strong.

I think they're called the Romans or something like that. I don't know what kind of country my grandchildren will live in. I have no idea who their king will be.

These four interviews are obviously illustrations that I've just provided from my own imagination. But they do reflect what we know about the days in which all these people lived.

It's reminding us that when we look at that genealogy in Matthew chapter one, we're not seeing Jesus coming as the crowning moment in a long-standing success story.

[13:17] It's the opposite. The history of God's people from Abraham all the way down to Matthew chapter one, it has occasional bright spots but for most of it, whether it's the days of Hezron, Rehoboim, Abaihut or Mathan, these were dark and difficult days.

The Old Testament people of God were meant to be a family nation united together as descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, living together as God's people under the King who feared God and who protected them.

But they're now a broken family and a broken nation. And I'm sure that Hezron, Rehoboim, Abaihut and Mathan and everyone else in this genealogy, I'm sure that they would have looked at their lives, looked at their families, looked at their nation and thought, I wish things were different.

For them, the past was a sort of pain, the present was a cause for sorrow and the future was a reason to be afraid. And I'm sure that for many of us, although our circumstances are different, I'm sure that for many of us, things are the same.

So while, yes, we're all really excited about Christmas and looking forward to what that might bring, maybe the reason we're so excited about Christmas is because it will bring a kind of distraction and relief in the midst of all our struggles.

[14:49] Maybe you can look at your own life and look at your past and maybe it's left you with many bruises and scars. Maybe the present right now is a struggle and maybe even no one else is

aware of it.

And maybe the future, rather than being a source of hope, is just a source of worry. Maybe you look at yourself, at your family and at your nation and think, I wish things were different.

And when we feel like that, I think that there's two things that we as humans tend to long for. We don't just mean as Christians, I mean just as humans across the board.

We long for people to lead us and we long for people to listen to us. So that's why when people want things to be different, they put their hopes in a new government.

For Abaihud and Reheboham, that would have been a new king for us. It's not a king or a queen, it's a government. But it's just the same thing, it's longing for new leadership.

[16:03] People want new leaders to change things, to lead society into a better place. And throughout history, people have placed great hope in different political figures or political movements, whether it's Marxism or Socialism or Capitalism, Nationalism, whatever it may be.

And the reason people cry out for ideologies like that is because they want our nation to be led out of dark days into something better.

But at the same time, we want to be listened to as individuals. So we want our personal needs met, we want our opinions heard, we want our preferences to be respected, and we want our feeling of being wronged to be put right.

We want our voice, we expect certain rights, and we don't want to be treated as just like an anonymous statistic in a great population that our government is leading.

And that's why we all hate it if a government makes us feel as though we as individuals don't matter. So when we feel like we're in dark days, we long to be led as a united population, but we also long to be listened to as unique individuals.

[17:33] We want these two things that you can see on the screen. But what I hope you can all see is that very often these two longings come into tension with one another.

So we want everyone else to listen to our preferred leader, but at the same time, we want people, including our leaders, to listen to us as well.

And that tension then manifests itself in lots of different ways. So for example, people will want national change so that things are different, but personal affirmation so that they can carry on doing what they like doing.

So for example, nationally, we all want emissions to be reduced. Individually hardly any of us want to use any less electricity.

People want national boundaries, but at the same time, they want personal freedom. So the national boundaries are to restrict people, but we want personal freedom to step over the line, and of course, lockdown has been a very, very powerful example of that.

[18:49] People want national fairness, but personal advantage. And that's why as a nation today in 2020, we simultaneously cry out in outrage about slavery and exploitation, but at the same time, we always pursue and demand the cheapest prices.

And we never dare to stop and ask whether there might be a connection between the two things. In a similar way, people want national generosity, but personal increase.

That's why we can be equally enraged by a shortage of nurses and a higher tax bill, ignoring the fact that the latter pays for the former. Now, I acknowledge that in all those examples, I am oversimplifying things, but even so, I do think it's true today that many of the difficulties we face are because of the enormous tension that exists between our longing to be led as a united society and our longing to be listened to as unique individuals.

And that was true for people like Hezron, Rehoboam, Abaihud and Matham. They're not disposable, nobody's. They're not just numbers and a statistic, names and a list.

They were all unique individuals living in their own circumstances with their own challenges, their struggles and their needs. But they were also part of a wider society that desperately needed a leader, someone to rule, defend and unite the nation.

[20:22] But without that king, they were a people with no one to lead them and no one to listen to them. They were a people who walked in darkness and who dwelled in a land of deep darkness.

They longed for things to be different and we are the same as individuals, as families and I think as a nation.

So what's the answer to that? Well, I think the answer is in this genealogy, but to see it, we need to look a little bit more closely.

So if we look again at Matthew 1, we'll see that although there's many, many names mentioned prior to Jesus, there are two that are most important, Abraham and David. And we know that they are most important because Matthew highlights them in verse 1, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. For Matthew, the key point he's making in this genealogy is that Jesus is connected to David and he's connected to Abraham. [21 : 32] Now why is that so important? Well Abraham and David are key figures in the Old Testament and their lives mark crucial moments in God's, in the outworking of God's great plan of salvation.

This is where it's helpful to think about the Bible as a whole and when we think about the Bible as a whole, really it's all about humanity's relationship with God.

That relationship was established at the beginning when humanity was created. That relationship was broken when we sinned and rebelled against God. All that happens in the first three chapters of Genesis and the rest of the whole Bible is about how God responds to this and reveals his plan to save us and restore us into a relationship with him.

Now to describe that relationship, that concept of relationship, the Bible uses a key word and that word is the word covenant.

It's really what the Bible is all about and it's referring to a committed, serious, deep lasting relationship.

[22 : 45] The Old Covenant or the Old Testament as we tend to call it is showing us bit by bit how this relationship is being restored.

It's a bit like a series of foundation stones being set out, that line, that arrow there that you can see for the Old Covenant, it's like bit by bit setting out stones for how God is going to restore this relationship, each one being pieced together as a shadow pointing forward to the New Covenant or the New Testament as we tend to call it, where God's ultimate plan to restore our relationship is accomplished and revealed through Jesus, Christ.

In the Old Testament, Abraham and David are two of these big covenant foundation stone moments.

God came to them and he makes a covenant with both of them, each of which reveals a key aspect of God's plan to save us. With Abraham, the key word is family.

God comes to Abraham with a covenant promise that he'll have a family and he did. In fact, the whole nation of Israel are descendants from him and their whole society was structured around their tribal connections within that family.

[24 : 03] But on top of that promise of a family nation in Israel is the promise God gives to Abraham that one day all of the world's families will be blessed through Abraham's.

So for Abraham, key word is family. For David, the key word is kingdom. God comes to David with the covenant promises that his family, his descendants will be the ruling dynasty in Israel.

But again, on top of that, God promises that one day one of David's descendants will be a king who reigns forever. So whenever you see Abraham, I want you to think family.

Whenever you see David, I want you to think of the word kingdom. Both of these are key parts of God's covenant plan to restore us into a relationship with him.

All of that means that when Matthew highlights these two names, Abraham and David, he's telling us that Jesus is coming to fulfill the covenant promises made to these men.

[25 : 15] In other words, Jesus is part of the family line going back to Abraham and he's part of the family line going back to David.

That means that Matthew is telling us two crucial things about Jesus. He's telling us that he is family and he is king.

That means that for Hezron, Rehoboam, Abaihut, Mathan, everyone else in this genealogy, everyone connected to the family nation, full of unique individuals who've walked in darkness and dwelt in a land of darkness and who desperately need a king to lead their family.

For them, a brighter future has come and it's described so beautifully by Isaiah when he says the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and those who dwell in a land of deep darkness on them a light as shone.

In that passage in Isaiah 9 that we read, Isaiah is prophesying about Jesus who comes to fulfill and restore all these things.

[26 : 23] I want us to focus especially on what he says in verse 6 where it says, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

And the government shall be on his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Here Isaiah is saying that Jesus is family. He says to us a child is born, to us a son is given. For the family nation of Israel walking in darkness and sorrow, here is the promise of a savior who will be one of us.

He is family. And Isaiah is also saying that Jesus is king. He says that his government will be on his shoulders. That family nation who desperately needs a king is finally going to get one.

Matthew's telling us therefore that for the people in this genealogy and for the whole Jewish nation in the first century, for whom whose past is so dark and bleak, for them the future is bright because Jesus is a son and a brother in this family and he's a king and a governor who will lead them.

[27 : 39] The years of waiting are over and for the Jews, this is a brilliant moment. The promised king has come.

But if you read on in the Gospel of Matthew, you'll discover that for many of the Jews and especially for their leaders, the coming of Jesus was a big disappointment.

And that's because they got their expectations wrong. Their great expectation was that Jesus would restore their family and restore their nation.

So that meant getting their kingdom back, driving out foreign rulers and rebuilding their territory.

And that meant getting their family back, getting rid of foreign influence and re-establishing their national identity.

They wanted Jesus to restore things back to the way they were in the days of David, back to the days of old in this genealogy. But that was never what Jesus came to do.

[28 : 44] He did not come to go back to the old days because they were dark days. Jesus did not come to restore the family.

He did not come to restore the kingdom. He came to expand them. And that is because that is exactly what God promised Abraham and David and everybody else in the first place.

The goal for the covenant family promise with Abraham is not just for his family nation, it was for all nations and all families. Jesus has come to call everyone into his family and we are united together in him as brothers and sisters.

And the goal for the covenant kingdom promise to David is not for Jesus to reclaim a throne in Jerusalem, it's that Jesus would reign over everything as king of kings, as ruler of every square inch of the universe.

The bright future that's come in Jesus is not just for the people in this genealogy, it is for everyone. Jesus has come to be king over all.

[29 : 54] He is and he's building a family that stretches across the nations. He's not come to restore this family nation or this kingdom, he's come to expand it.

But the key thing I want us to see is that the fact that Jesus is family and the fact that Jesus is king means that he will do two things for you that no one else can.

He will lead you and he will listen to you. So in other words, he is able to govern, guide and lead a united body of people that no one can number and he can show us all a better way to live.

And yet at the same time he will never forget that you are a unique individual and he will never stop listening to you.

How do we know that? Well we know it because of how Isaiah describes him. He says his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[31 : 14] Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. That means he's got the sense to know how to lead well. And you see that so clearly if you read through the rest of Matthew, you see that he shows us all a far better way to live that is counter-cultural to all the darkness that we see.

That we see in society around us. It also means that he's able to guide you as an individual. He's always able to meet you where you are. He will never abandon you.

He will always listen when you pour out your heart to him. Jesus is also Mighty God. That means that he doesn't have the strength and resources of a powerful emperor.

He has the strength and resources of God Almighty. But what does he use that strength for? He uses it to protect you.

That's why he's able to say to you, no one, absolutely no one can snatch you out of his hand.

[32 : 19] Jesus is also Everlasting Father. Now that might sound confusing because usually we refer to God the Father and Jesus as Son. And that's absolutely true. But I do think it's the case that the whole of verse six is referring to Jesus.

And the term Everlasting Father here is being used in the sense of a king being Father over his nation, which is a phrase that you do see in the Old Testament.

And I think that the truth that that image is presenting to us is the fact that Jesus is compassionate and that he cares about his people and that compassion will never end.

And Jesus is the Prince of Peace in a world where so many societies are in conflict, where so many individuals are in distress, Jesus has come to give us peace, peace with one another and peace with ourselves.

Jesus has not come to restore one particular family to a position of territorial or political dominance in a small region of the world. He's come to expand that family and that kingdom and to transform it from a crushed family dwarfed among the nations into a church family stretching across all nations.

[33 : 42] That means that we can all be part of this family and we can all be citizens of his kingdom. And this fact that Jesus is family and the fact that he's king, it means that two amazing things are true.

The first is that we can be united together as part of something better. So that craving that we all have for a fairer society, for a kinder community, for loving friendships, for warmth and generosity and justice and goodness, that is the kingdom society that Jesus is calling us to be.

And that's what the church is meant to be like and if the church fails to be like that, it's because we've stopped following Jesus's leadership. Jesus is calling us all to be part of something better, something beautiful, something that we all long for.

And this is where we see the tragic reality of present day politics where people are pouring their hope into people to give them something better and they can never deliver it.

But Jesus can. And in him we can be united together as part of something better. But the second thing is that as we are united together under his leadership at the same time, you will never, ever stop being unique to Jesus.

[35 : 13] Because to him you're never just a citizen. You're never just a number in a population or just an unknown name in a genealogy. To him you are family.

You are his precious sister or brother who he loves, who he knows, who he died for and who he will never stop listening to. That means that if you are a Christian or if you become one, that means that you are part of something special and it means that you are someone special.

Jesus is the promised King. He's the perfect brother. That means that he is ruling the universe and at the very same time he's holding your hand and he'll never let go.

And if you're a Christian, I hope that shows you three things. I hope it shows you how amazing Jesus is and what a massive difference he makes for today and for this week and for the rest of your life.

I hope it shows you how precious and safe and secure you are. And I hope it shows you that genealogies in the Bible are seriously cool.

[36 : 35] But what if you're not yet a Christian or you're not sure? What should you do? Well, that depends on how you feel about it all.

If you are not really bothered by any of this and maybe you're not and it's okay to be that honest, if you're not really bothered and if you've had to endure the last 30 odd minutes of this sermon, all I would ask you to do is make a comparison.

Try and look a bit more closely at the community leadership that Jesus offers and the individual compassion that he constantly displays.

I want you to look at that. Look at how Jesus leads a group and look at how he cares for the individual. And then I just want you to compare that to whoever it is that you normally vote for.

And you need to use your head to think that through. But if you are bothered by this, if you long to know the peace and security that you can see Christians have, if you know that you need Jesus more than anything else, if you long to be part of his family, if you wish that things were different, then it's not so much your head that you need to use because you actually already understand enough.

[38 : 03] What you need to use is your heart. You need to pour out your heart to Jesus.

Ask him to forgive you. Ask him to miss your Savior and just start following him. And he will do the rest.

Amen. Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you so much that you are the God who keeps his promises.

And we acknowledge that we desperately need leadership to show us all how we can live together as a community and how things can be made better.

But we also desperately need your care for each of us as individuals. And so we just thank you so much that Jesus is able to do both of these things and that He's able to do them perfectly.

[39 : 09] The perfect King, the perfect brother, our amazing Savior. We thank you so much for everything you've done for us. Amen.