

Text: Mt 1.1-16

December is upon us and it is time for our Christmas series. Some months ago, I began thinking about this (as usual) and noticed a phrase in two of the stories about Jesus' birth:

Mt 2.13 ¶ Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, **“Get up!** Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”

Mt 2.20 ¶ **“Get up,** take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead.”

From there, I looked back to the first time the angel came to Joseph, when he had made his mind to put Mary aside quietly. That night, the angel came and spoke to him in a dream.

Mt 1.20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

The angel doesn't say, “Get up!” here, but I can imagine it being part of the conversation.

These three stories give us three of four Sundays in December.

I needed one more passage to complete the set!

Then I began to think about where Joseph was at the beginning of his part in the story (Nazareth). I thought about what Nazareth meant in his life, about his role in the line of David, about his own hopes and expectations for his own life.

The position Joseph found himself in was a low position in Jewish society. Joseph needed to look up and get up from where he was... but first we will have to put him down... (not “Get down” but take a look at how he *got down*, and what God meant to do with him from his lowly position).

Which brings us to the genealogy in Matthew 1.

Read Mt 1.1-16

Proposition: The pretensions of man obscure the deep need of redemption that our Lord Jesus came to accomplish.

I. Rise (1-6)

A. The seed of the Messianic line: Biblical covenants (1)

1. The point of the covenants: a King is coming (David listed first)
2. The promise of the covenants
 - a. Abraham: all the families of earth blessed (Gen 12.3)
 - b. David: I will raise up your descendant, and will establish his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7.12-13)

In these promises, the whole world has hope.

B. The beginning: the patriarchs (2)

1. The first of the line: a man childless into his old age
2. The second of the line: a man frustrated in his home with conflict over children
3. The third of the line: a deceptive man with a large, troubled family, yet the choice and blessing of God

C. The development of a nation: Egypt (3-4)

1. The patriarchs moved to Egypt, with Pharaoh's respect
2. The nation grew as an isolated population within Egypt, losing esteem, but growing in Numbers
3. God brought them out with a mighty hand

D. The rise of the King: Judges (5-6)

1. After the conquest, the nation settled in the new land, but not in full control
2. As they assimilated rather than overcame, the nation's faithfulness wavered, and they experienced the "judge's cycle"
3. Amid darkness, a thread of holiness and redemption (Boaz and Ruth) brought Obed, Jesse, then David

II. Apex (6)

- A. David, the man after God's own heart (not perfect, but devoted, humbled, forgiven, faithful) – established the height of Israel's power
- B. Solomon, the gifted son of David, expanded Israel to its greatest influence, but weakened the kingdom by foreign alliances (and wives)

III. Decline (7-11)

- A. Rehoboam lost the ten tribes of the north
- B. The kings alternated in faithfulness and unfaithfulness; success and failure; growing weaker and less influential as the kingdom waned
- C. The sons of Josiah are unnamed, except Jeconiah, the least of them: they lost the kingdom

One might think that this is the lowest point of the line of Joseph, but we will sink lower still

IV. Obscurity (12-18)

- A. There are no kings in this list – Zerubbabel is a governor after the return but it is downhill from there
- B. Most of the names that populate the rest of the list are unknown, except that they sometimes appear on lists like this in the Bible
 1. What did these men do in these years?

“The nine names from Abiud to Jacob are not otherwise known to us today.”¹

2. We have the project of the rebuilding of the temple (completed by about 516 BC) – did any of them take part?
3. Later we find Judah oppressed by the Seleucid Empire of Syria, or sometimes the Ptolemaic Empire of Egypt – did any of them resist?
4. Finally, we have a brief moment of light in Judah when the Maccabees revolt against the Seleucids and win independence – what role did these men play?

¹ D. A Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 68.

C. Finally, we come to Jacob, father of Joseph, and Joseph himself

1. The things we know about Joseph

- a. He is a τέκτων, a carpenter, a builder of things, perhaps a stonemason [the word is general]

Mt 13.55 “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”

1) A job as a laborer is obscure enough

2) In the Empire, manual labour wasn’t the lot of “civilized people”

“From a Roman perspective, carpentry was a slave’s profession.”²

- b. He lives in Nazareth

Lk 1.26-27 ¶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

1) Nazareth an obscure village on the NW side of Galilee

2) Off the main road, overlooking the valley of Jezreel

3) He and Mary will have to travel to Bethlehem, a day or two south and east, for the census

- c. He is betrothed to Mary, likewise of the line of David, but not yet married

Mt 1.18 ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

² Acher Niyonizigiye, “Gentle Joseph, Meek & Mild,” *Christianity Today*, December 2021, 34.

2. Why are they in Nazareth?

- a. These two represent two families, of the line of David: “refugees from Bethlehem,” living in Nazareth
- b. Did they move to escape the eye of the Romans? [though humble, of the line of David]

You can't get much more obscure in ancient Judah than being a laboring man, living in an obscure Galilean village, holding down a job the wealthy would never imagine taking on.

V. Applications

A. The difference between the elevated and the obscure

1. In history, it is only a few generations [a repeated pattern]
 - a. Ruling dynasties last a few generations
 - b. A weak ruler comes, someone else pushes him off
 - c. The descendants (if any survive) sink into obscurity
2. In reality, no man has any dignity
 - a. The rich may cloak themselves in power
 - b. The poor will cloak themselves in self-justification
 - c. All will cover their emptiness in one way or another

Our pretensions are an attempt to obscure our need of redemption.

B. The condition of mankind

1. Created in dignity
2. Fallen in sin
3. Functioning under condemnation

Rev 3.1 ¶ “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.’

Jn 3.18 “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Jn 3.36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Rm 1.18-19 ¶ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

4. God reached into creation, taking an obscure man, Joseph, (and an obscure woman, Mary), to begin the new creation in Jesus Christ

Man in his emptiness, obscurity, powerlessness finds the authority for salvation when God intervened

Jn 1.12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

Conclusion:

Proposition: The pretensions of man obscure the deep need of redemption that our Lord Jesus came to accomplish.