

The End of Exile

(Matthew 1:1-17 – December 27, 2020)

Well, hello, and welcome to *The Voice of the Church*. Over the last 4 weeks, we've been looking at Christ's genealogy in Matthew Ch. 1. And we've seen the Davidic imprint on these verses, highlighting Christ as king. We've seen his ministry to the Gentiles anticipated, & last week we saw that he's "numbered with transgressors." A number of beautiful truths we've seen in these verses... Now, I'd like to look at one more, as we consider the theme of Christ restoring his people from exile. As we'll see, that's one of the main points of the last part of this section.

You recall, Matt. 1:1 introduced Christ, the Son of David & Son of Abraham. Vv. 2 to 6 trace his genealogy from Abraham to David. The next section from David to "the deportation to Babylon." And then the final section, vv. 12 to 17, says this: "And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, & Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, & Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, & Abiud the father of Eliakim, & Eliakim the father of Azor, & Azor the father of Zadok, & Zadok the father of Achim, & Achim the father of Eliud, & Eliud the father of Eleazar, & Eleazar the father of Matthan, & Matthan the father of Jacob, & Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So, all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations, & from David to the deportation to Babylon 14 generations, & from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ 14 generations."

What's Matthew doing, here, in these verses...? It reminds me of the song, "*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*." I'm sure you know the song, where it says, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear..." Notice, the hymn-writer suggests Israel is still captive in exile until the coming of *Christ*. Which is interesting, since at the end of the OT, God's people have *returned* from exile... And, so, why would this great **Christmas-hymn** suggest that God's people are still in exile?

Well, it's because of Matthew chapter 1... Even though the people have *returned*, the GLORY that God said he would *fill* the second temple with has not yet come! The overthrowing of enemy kingdoms has not yet occurred! The descendant of Zerubbabel who would rule as God's signet ring has not yet come! These are all promises that the prophets gave God's people when they returned, but they've not yet been fulfilled...

The people are in the *land*, but they are effectively still in Exile. And notice how Matthew very intentionally communicates this in the way that he structures his genealogy... Now, from just a cursory reading of Matt. 1, you might be tempted to think the deportation to Babylon in v. 12 is nothing but a mere *transition* to conveniently break Israel's history up into 3 sections of 14. But it's actually far more than that...

Matthew demonstrates his literary sophistication again with his use of symmetry in these first 17 verses. As he uses this parallel structure – a sort of “1-2-3, 3-2-1 pattern...” Where v. 1 goes Christ-David-*Abraham* (in the order it mentions the 3 men) & the *rest* of the genealogy proceeds in the exact *opposite* order: Abraham-David-*Christ*. Giving us what biblical scholars call a “chiasm,” this “parallel structure...” Only, there is an interruption...

The literary pattern is *broken* in v. 12 by the intrusion of the Exile, making it stand out like a sore thumb! Matthew places this lone historical event in the middle of a long list of names, as that which breaks up the literary pattern, & interrupts what we would otherwise expect... And that's really what the Exile was – an interruption in the fulfillment of God's promises, an interruption in what we would expect, where the Davidic kingdom is put on hold! The promises to Abraham are put on pause!

And what Matthew is suggesting by placing the spotlight on *this* event & making it the last major historical marker before the coming of Christ is that Israel is still in Exile! The 3rd part of this genealogy is **the unending exile** with no Davidic king on the throne! They're still waiting for one to come & restore them from Exile. “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, & ransom captive Israel.” Take your seat on David's throne & bring us back into the presence of God!

And that is exactly what Christ has come to do... “The kingdom that was inaugurated with David & *lost* in the Exile is restored with the coming of Christ! The very *structure* of this genealogy indicates that with Christ is the beginning of the restoration of the kingdom!” God has NOT forgotten his promises! Though 500 years have passed since a promise was made to Zerubbabel that God would make him like his signet ring – 600yrs since they were dragged off into Babylon – God has not forgotten his promises! Not even their **sin** which brought them into Exile can frustrate the fulfillment of God's plans... (Which is what Matthew goes on to say in v. 21 – “he will save his people from their *sins*...” Their “sins” which brought them into Exile!). Not even they can frustrate the fulfillment of God's plans.

And while Matthew is making this point on a larger redemptive-historical scale, let me just say this: “Neither can *your* sins, or the sins of others in your life, or the sins of society as a whole, frustrate the fulfillment of God’s plans!” If there is one application we can take away from these verses: it’s that God is the God of history, who makes ALL things work together according to his perfect his plan, & *nothing* can frustrate that plan... That plan which culminates in a glorious kingdom where those who have been separated from God because of their sin are brought back into his presence by Jesus!

That’s what Christ has come to do: to bring those who have been separated from God back into his presence! And that’s what we see in the names that are ascribed to him at the end of the chapter. He’s called “*Jesus*, for he will save his people from their sins,” “*Immanuel*,” meaning ‘God with us.’ These names, taken together, are a promise of restoration from exile!

The exile was about separation from God because of sin. But in these two names, we see that he *saves* his people from their sin by *bringing them back* into God’s presence! With the coming of Jesus, the exile is over! God is once again dwelling with his people! The king is once again on the throne...

And this king is not only bringing his people *Israel* out of exile... But “his people” include ALL who confess allegiance to the Son of David – whether Magi from the East, or Canaanite “dogs” begging from crumbs, or a Roman centurion! The new King of Israel is establishing a new kingdom, and that kingdom is centered entirely around HIM, so that all who trust in him are part of his kingdom, and are restored to God!

The coming of Christ into the world is not just about a cozy baby lying in a manger. The coming of Christ into the world is about God restoring his people into his presence, who’ve been separated from him because of their sin. He is the Son of David, whose heavenly kingdom has no end. He is the Son of Abraham, whose kingdom includes Jews, & Gentiles, & everyone in between. He is the friend of sinners, who identifies with the Rahab’s & Tamar’s, with those who are overwhelmed with guilt and shame... And all of this he does in order to draw us back to God. What a beautiful gospel story Matthew chapter 1 tells. An invitation to worship the king, to place our sins upon him, and be restored to the Father... I pray you’ll do that. For that is the only way that the problem of man’s separation from God can be solved... Thank you for listening, and may God bless you.