

December 3, 2006

SERIES: Advent 2006

SERMON: **Son of Man, Son of God (Or, Termites in the Family Tree)**

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:1-17

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We are launching a new series of sermons this morning from the Book of Matthew, the first book in the NT and one of four that are called “Gospels.” Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all share a common theme—the good news of salvation through the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. They all have much in common but they are also very different, for each of these disciples wrote from his own individual perspective and background. If you didn’t know Matthew was a tax collector, Luke a doctor, and John a fisherman, you could probably figure it out by their writing style and the emphasis they give to the subject matter. And if you didn’t know Matthew and John were Jewish, while Luke was a Gentile, you could probably figure that out as well. Mark’s background was apparently partly Jewish and partly Gentile.

Matthew was a despised tax collector who, when converted, became totally sold out to Jesus. Not surprisingly his Gospel contains more references to money than do any of the others. But there are other unique aspects to Matthew’s writing as well. For example, he puts more emphasis on the teaching ministry of Jesus than the others, including large portions of the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse that are not found elsewhere. Matthew was also very knowledgeable about the OT, which is evident from his approximately 50 direct quotations plus about 75 literary allusions to the OT. The reason for his fascination with the OT is that Matthew primarily had Jews in mind as he wrote. He was trying to convince his fellow countrymen that . . .

**Jesus qualifies as the Messiah of the Jewish people, as well as the Savior of the World.**

How does He qualify? In his opening words Matthew offers two primary lines of evidence:

**He descended from the father of the Jewish race.**

**He descended from Israel’s greatest king.**

This basic purpose of the book of Matthew—to establish Jesus as Israel’s Messiah—is evident from the very first verse: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” That sentence constitutes the genealogy of Jesus in a nutshell. The next 16 verses merely expand on the opening verse by giving the details of Jesus’ genealogy from Abraham to David, and then from David to Jesus. I want us to read these first 17 verses of Matthew 1. This may not seem very appropriate for public reading, I think there is profit for us here if we will pay close attention.

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab,*

*Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.*

*David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

*After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah 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 Akim, Akim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

*Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ (Matthew 1:1-17).*

You may be familiar with the fact that we have another genealogy of Jesus, found in Luke 3, which traces His heritage backwards from Joseph all the way to Adam. Some of the names are the same, particularly from Abraham to David, but most of them are different, causing some scholars to conclude that the genealogy in Luke is actually Mary's genealogy, whereas the one here in Matthew is Joseph's. Others, however, contend that both genealogies are Joseph's, with Matthew tracing the line of official succession to the Davidic throne, while Luke traces the actual physical ancestry of Joseph. Both end up at the same place but by different routes. The fact is, we don't know for sure, but what we do know is that both genealogies make it clear that Jesus was a descendant of the father of the Jewish race, Abraham, as well as of Israel's greatest king, David.

Now in addition to the enormously important fact that "Jesus qualifies as the Messiah of the Jewish people," Matthew has two other truths he is bent on communicating through this genealogy:

**Jesus, the Son of Man, has His roots deep in the soil of humanity, yet  
Jesus, the Son of God, is different from any other man.**

We'll come back to those points in some detail, but right now I wish to focus on those two names—Son of Man and Son of God—that are frequently used of Jesus in the Scriptures and are shown by Matthew to be absolutely appropriate for Him. I want to share with you a brief but very important lesson in theology, namely that both the humanity and deity of Christ are essential to understanding His nature and character. Down through the centuries many heresies and cults have resulted from an overemphasis or underemphasis on one or the other of these two aspects of Jesus' person.

Some, usually theological conservatives, have emphasized His deity to the point that He has emerged as an almost other-worldly person to whom most people can hardly relate. The author of Hebrews recognizes this danger, so he stresses Jesus' humanity with these words:

*. . . he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17, 18).*

Others, usually theological liberals, have made the mistake of so emphasizing His humanity that Jesus became just an exceptional man, a great example, a brilliant teacher, but no more. Paul makes it clear we can't go that direction either, for in Colossians 1 he says things about Jesus that could be said of no mere man, no matter how exceptional or godly he might be. He writes of Jesus,

*He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).*

In contrast to the overemphasis or underemphasis that some give to the humanity and deity of Christ, the Bible, maintains an incredible balance between them, affirming both and denying neither. Bible-believing scholars have defined the person of Christ this way: "Perfect humanity and undiminished deity, united in one person forever but without mixture." Nearly every word in that definition is important. He was and is a man, and He differs from us in only one way, albeit a very profound way—He *never* sinned. Listen to Max Lucado's perception of the practical implications of Jesus' humanity:

*Angels watched as Mary changed God's diaper. The universe watched with wonder as The Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him. . .*

*Jesus may have had zits. He may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on him or vice-versa. It could be that his knees were bony. . .*

*For thirty-three (over thirty) years he would feel everything you and I have ever felt. He felt weak. He grew weary. He was afraid of failure. He was susceptible to wooing women. He got colds, burped, and had body odor. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. And his head ached.*

*To think of Jesus in such a light is—well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? (Bet that crossed some of your minds!) It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. Clean the manure from around the manger. Wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Pretend he never snored or blew his nose or hit his thumb with a hammer.*

*He's easier to stomach that way. There is something about keeping him divine that keeps him distant, packaged, predictable.*

*But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out.*

*Listen to him.*

*"Love your neighbor" was spoken by a man whose neighbors tried to kill him.*

*The challenge to leave family for the gospel was issued by one who kissed his mother goodbye (permanently) . . .*

*"Pray for those who persecute you" came from the lips that would soon be begging God to forgive his (own) murderers.<sup>i</sup>*

But the definition I offered identifies Jesus as not only perfect humanity but also undiminished deity. He was and is God, possessing all the divine attributes and prerogatives. True, He did voluntarily surrender the independent use of some of those attributes and prerogatives during His time on earth, as discussed in Philippians 2. For example, He chose during His incarnation to live within the limitations of space and time, and He even chose not to know the time of His Return. (Doesn't that blow your mind—an omniscient person choosing not to know something?) But he was *never* less than God.

The definition goes on to say that His humanity and deity were united in one person forever—that means He is still a sinless man and He is still God today. Christ rose bodily from the grave and He ascended bodily into heaven and one day He will return bodily to this earth. But His humanity and deity are not mixed. Jesus was never just a godly man, nor was He a man-like god. He was and is the "God-Man."

Now what I have just offered you is a pretty heavy theology lesson in five minutes, but theology is built, or should be built, upon the simple statements of Scripture. And in this genealogy we find some of the most basic biblical data regarding both the humanity and the deity of Christ. So let's return to the genealogy of Matthew 1 and make some observations.

There are three distinct sections in the lineage of Jesus—Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile (roughly 600 B.C.), and the exile to Jesus. Chances are you are familiar with few of the names in the third section—you may know only Joseph, the husband of Mary, and perhaps Zerubbabel, who was the leader of the Jews when they returned from the Babylonian Captivity. The reason is that most of these names come from the 400 Silent Years between the Testaments, and these names are not found anywhere else in the Bible. In the first section, all of us are probably familiar with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though perhaps we are surprised that Joseph the patriarch is missing. That is because the Messianic line did not come through Jacob's son Joseph, but rather through another of his sons—Judah.

The second section of names are familiar to those who have studied the OT books of Chronicles and Kings—names like Solomon, Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah. These stories are there for a reason, and it's not just to take up space! God wants us to

know these stories so we can profit from the profound lessons found in them. And the better we know them, the better we can understand that . . .

**Jesus, Son of Man, has His roots deep in the soil of humanity.**

**His lineage includes notorious sinners.**

**His lineage includes some notable women.**

**His lineage includes foreigners.**

We're about to see that there were some Termites in the Family Tree of Jesus.

We need to realize right from the start that Matthew's genealogy is selective rather than complete. In order to maintain a certain symmetry, namely three sets of 14 generations, he omits a number of generations. One example can be found in verse 8. Jehoram was actually not the father of Uzziah but rather his great-grandfather. Now please don't think of this as an error in Matthew's research, for the term "father of" in Greek also means "ancestor of." It was very normal for ancient genealogies to pick and choose which ancestors to mention. Unfortunately we cannot be certain why Matthew was bent on this symmetry of 14; it may have been simply a memory device.

But if *I* were writing a selective genealogy, as was Matthew, I don't think I would include the notorious sinners he does.

**His lineage includes notorious sinners.** In fact, when I mention anything about my own genealogy, which my mother has worked on for years, I am quick to point to individuals like Patton Atwood, my great, great, great grandfather. Anyone from Rockford, IL knows the Atwood name because of the Atwood Homestead Golf Course. The beautiful stone clubhouse was once Patton Atwood's home. Love's Park sits on the Atwood farm and the world-famous Clock Tower Museum and most of the clocks were given by Seth Atwood.

I could go back even further and mention another of my ancestors, Harmon Atwood, who came to Boston from England in 1642 and married Anne Cop. Cop's Hill was named for her father, who gave the land for the Old North Church in Boston. We can even trace that branch of our family back to Nicholas Atwood, born in 1539 in Sandersted Court in England; his occupation was Assistant Sergeant of the Queen during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. I have no problem mentioning these individuals in my own genealogy.

But I'm not inclined to name any ex-cons, drunks, gamblers, or other scoundrels in my background. But Matthew *does*. He is not only committed to the truth; he also wants us to know that Jesus has his roots deep in the soil of humanity, even sinful humanity. And we need go no further than the list of kings he mentions to see some pretty notorious sinners— idolaters, adulterers, murderers, and violent persecutors of the righteous. Manasseh, to take just one example, is described by the Lord this way in 2 Kings 21:11-13:

*Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols.*

*Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.*

**His lineage includes also some notable women**, and the reason this stands out is because Jews didn't normally mention women at all in genealogies. Matthew, however, mentions five women, and amazingly, three of the five are women of ill repute. I want to suggest that Matthew must have had a special purpose for going out of his way to mention these names. You may recall that during His earthly life Jesus often endured the slurs of His enemies to the effect that He was an illegitimate child. In John 8:41 they claimed, "We are not illegitimate children," implying, "as you are." It was apparently common knowledge that Jesus was not Joseph's child, leading his enemies to conclude that He must have been fathered by some other man.

Matthew, desiring to counteract this gossip, may have inserted with some relish the names of Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba in Messiah's genealogy, all adulteresses but all clearly part of the Messianic line. In effect he is saying to the gossips, "You want to eliminate Jesus as Messiah because you don't know who His father was, and yet King David came from the likes of Tamar and Rahab (and, in fact, King David himself committed adultery with Bathsheba)."

Perhaps even more remarkable and instructive than the fact that notorious sinners and women were included in Messiah's ancestry is the fact that Matthew points out that . . .

**His lineage includes foreigners.** As we noted last week, the Jewish people were always separatists, partly for right reasons and partly for wrong ones. God commanded them not to intermarry in order to protect them from syncretism and idolatry. But they always took things too far and became exclusivistic toward all Gentiles. Instead of sharing their knowledge of God with outsiders, they kept the truth to themselves. It is instructive, then, that Matthew highlights two foreigners in the genealogy of Messiah. Rahab was a Canaanite and Ruth was a Moabite. These nations were long-standing enemies of the Jews, yet God included them in the ancestry of His Son.

Now I think there is a good reason for Matthew's mention of notorious sinners, women, and foreigners in his genealogy. If Jesus is going to be seen as not only the Jewish Messiah but also the Savior of the world, then the inclusion of all people—righteous and unrighteous, men and women, Jews and Gentiles—is critical. He had his roots deep in the soil of humanity. He had no advantages over us in terms of ancestry, nor in terms of status or wealth or education. He was one of us.

But Matthew is also intent on communicating to us that Jesus was more than a man.

**Jesus, Son of God, is different from any other man.**

**His genealogy starts and ends with a supernatural birth.** The first entry in the genealogy proper is this, “Abraham was the father of Isaac.” The simplicity of that statement hides a fantastic miracle, for Abraham and his wife Sarah did not get pregnant until he was 100 and she was 90. They were both long past the child-bearing age, even considering that people generally lived longer in those days. But if the birth of Isaac was supernatural, it was *nothing* compared to the birth of Jesus. It’s one thing to activate the reproductive organs of an old couple so that they are able to conceive; but it’s an entirely different class of miracle to have a woman get pregnant without any involvement from a man at all.

Sadly, there is a strong skepticism toward the Virgin Birth today, even in Protestant seminaries. A recent survey showed that nationwide 56% of seminary students and faculty do not believe in the Virgin Birth—and that in spite of the fact that it is clearly taught in the Scripture. You can see it right here at the end of Jesus’ genealogy in verse 16, where it says, “and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, *of whom* was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” A short grammar lesson reveals that there is no ambiguity here regarding the parentage of Jesus.

In English the pronoun “whom” has no gender and no number. The same pronoun is used whether one is referring to a man, a woman, more than one man, more than one woman, or even a mixed group of men and women. But in the Greek language, there is a different form of “whom” for each of these cases. There is a masculine singular form, a masculine plural, a feminine singular, and a feminine plural. The only time the feminine singular form is used is when a single female is the antecedent.

Now which form of “whom” do you think is used here in verse 16? Yes, it’s the feminine singular, meaning that Jesus was born of Mary, *not* of Mary and Joseph. The Virgin Birth is, of course, confirmed later right in this chapter. Look at verse 18: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but *before* they came together, she was found to be with child *through the Holy Spirit*.” A few verses later the angel speaks to Joseph and says, “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is *from the Holy Spirit*” (1:20). And a few verses later, “The *virgin* will be with child and will give birth to a son” (1:23). One simply cannot maintain the authority of Scripture *and* at the same time deny the Virgin Birth.

So, the genealogy of Jesus starts and ends with a supernatural birth. A second key way in which Jesus is shown to be different from any other human is that . . .

**He is called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.** In the birth narrative that follows immediately after the genealogy, Joseph is told by the angel, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” You know something, friends, no ordinary person could save anyone else from the penalty of their sin, because every ordinary person has his own sins to pay for.<sup>ii</sup> Only a perfect man, a God-Man, one with infinite love and power, could save others from their sins. Jesus was that One. And third, . . .

**He is called Immanuel, which means “God with us.”** Following the birth narrative we read, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, God with us” (Matthew 1:22, 23). When Jesus was conceived and born into this world, God became a human being. For the first time in history, deity and humanity were united in one person. He could reveal what God is really like to those who struggled as time-and-space-bound creatures to understand a God whom they could not see and weren’t even allowed to represent in form or image (due to the fact that any representation would be inadequate and a distortion). Here finally was One who was able to adequately and completely introduce God to man and man to God.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). The name “God the One and Only” clearly refers to Jesus here, and it says that Jesus has made the Father known. The Greek term used here is one you may have heard of—“exegete.” It means to “explain or interpret.” It is what a Bible scholar tries to do with a particular portion of Scripture—to uncover and reveal all that is there. Well, that’s what Jesus has done for us in regard to the Father—He has explained and interpreted and revealed to us the Father’s heart.

The Father’s heart is to bring His children home. We are like a child separated from his natural parents at birth, who lives all his life with an adoptive parent. This person may be happy but he has the vague feeling that something is missing, he wonders about his roots, and he often feels somewhat disconnected. Then one day the child is contacted by his birth parent who professes to want to develop a relationship with him. What does he do? Well, some who find themselves in that kind of situation are thrilled and eagerly enter into a relationship with the long-lost parent. But others say, “No, I don’t want a relationship with you,” and frankly that’s understandable on the human level because some of those human parents abandoned their children without cause.

Now put all this in spiritual terms. At birth we were separated by sin from our Father who created us. Every single one of us has experienced the vague feeling that something is missing, we’ve wondered about our roots, and we have felt disconnected. I dare say most of us have asked, at one time or another, “What am I here for?” Yet when we hear that our Creator Father is looking for us and wants to have a relationship with us, many of us are like the child who says, “No, I’m not interested,” or “it’s too late.”

The difference is that our heavenly Father never abandoned us; we abandoned Him. He was there all the time, calling His child to come home. He is seeking a personal and even eternal relationship with you. Isn’t it time to say, “Yes. I’ve struggled too long with these awful feelings of disconnect. I know now that those feelings of estrangement are the result of sin in my life. Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, to pay for my sin. Thank you for offering me the free gift of salvation.”

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i. Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*, 25.

ii. Imagine a warden coming to get a man who has committed a capital crime and leading him down the hall to the death chamber. Suppose an inmate along that hall were to call to the warden, "Wait, that man is my friend, I'll take his place." The warden would be incredulous. He would undoubtedly say, "You can't do that. You're scheduled to die for your own crimes next month." But if someone who had no criminal record and was therefore completely free from the law, were to say, "I'll take that man's place," that would be at least morally, if not legally, acceptable. No, it took a perfect man, a God-Man, one with infinite love and power to save His people from their sins.