

Hope for the Holidays Part 1

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Wonderful to see you. The history of human beings seems to be going nowhere quickly. It's going quickly because we have technologies, new technologies, every generation.

At groundbreaking speeds, we are learning new things. There are new developments and there is growth and cities are growing and economies are growing. But it's also going nowhere. Some would think. Because if you look at history, if you've looked at history before, you'll realize that the same problems happen every generation. And so no matter how much technology we have, no matter how fast our smartphones can connect to the internet, there is still crime and there is still poverty and there is still greed and there is still disease and there is still war.

Therefore, it seems that no matter how much we try to get a handle on things in our world and our societies, if history teaches us one thing, it's that we never get it right.

No matter how much we try to rule our world and the societies God has given us, we just can't crack the secret. We just can't do it properly. And history teaches us that.

[1 : 22] You know, whether... Think about all the rulers, the great rulers of the past. So you think about the great empires, for example, the British Empire. Which at one point, get this, the British Empire owned 26% of the planet at their height.

And they were experts at ruling. They had lots of practice in it. And yet, they still caused as many problems as solutions that they brought to the countries they ruled.

And left a lot of problems when they left. After the time of imperialism, you had the communist experiment in the sort of late 19th, early 20th centuries.

And if you know anything about the philosophies of Karl Marx and Joseph Stalin and them, they want a utopia on earth.

They want a society. And they had this great vision of a society where everybody has enough.

There's no poverty. There's no one in need. And yet, what happened? Well, they ended up killing, at last count, something like 61 million people.

[2 : 23] Died under communist rule because of violence or starvation. And then, of course, after that, after that failed, you have the glorious golden age of capitalism and democracy.

And this really is our best chance yet in history. And yet, we've seen in our own country and overseas recently that democracy is prone to as much corruption as any other attempt to try to rule our societies.

Or rule our laws. Here, for example, are pictures of parliaments around the world. This is democracy in action. Right? It hasn't fixed anything.

And this failure to rule. So, if history teaches us anything. If you go to history class and it's rather boring at school, just learn one thing. And that is that we can't get it right.

That's the one lesson history teaches us over and over again. This failure to rule the world that God has given us. And that is, in fact, the story of the nation of Israel.

[3 : 24] So, as you open your Bibles and you read the Old Testament, you get introduced to this country, Israel. And they probably had the best chance of any country in history to build a society that works.

First of all, they had instructions from God himself. They had a blueprint in the Ten Commandments and the law of Deuteronomy. They had a blueprint of how a society can work properly.

And they had supernatural aid, economically and militarily. God was giving them a lot of help from heaven. And yet, they still managed to mess it up.

If you read the Old Testament and you follow the history of Israel, it makes quite depressing reading. And you wonder why we're reading about this country that keeps failing, just like any other

country in the world.

Why this particular one in the Middle East? Well, what we also discover as we read through the Old Testament and we read the story and the history of Israel, we discover something else.

[4 : 24] We discover that God hasn't actually left us alone. And in all this mess that humanity finds itself in, God is still there and he still, believe it or not, has a plan.

He has a plan for this world and he's been working in the background all along. And that is why Matthew introduces his gospel with this list of names.

It seems boring, I know. But I want to, if I can do nothing else this morning, I want to convince you why it's so important that the New Testament begins like it does.

And that the story of Christmas begins like it does with this list of names. Because this is actually, if you understand it, one of the best proofs that we have that history is not going nowhere.

But rather that we're heading to the fulfillment of a plan of God that has been in the works since the beginning of creation. And so that's what we're going to look at as we study this first half of this chapter.

[5 : 30] Firstly, seeing that God does have a plan. God does have a plan for this world. That's the first thing we learn about from this genealogy. The first thing it does, really, it's a review of the Old Testament.

And it covers, if you read these names, it's actually covering everything that God has done up until this point. And it shows us that it's all been part of a very carefully laid out plan.

And it doesn't look like it. If you go into each of those stories and you read, you know, the story of Tamar or the story of Solomon or the story of Asa, which are all in the Old Testament, you read those.

They seem just like normal human failures and problems. And there are a lot of problems and issues. But this, Matthew, what he's doing is he's taking all these people and these characters and these stories from the Old Testament and bringing them together.

And he wants the reader right at the beginning of his gospel here to step back. And he lays it out to show us that there's been a plan all along. As you've been reading through your Old Testament, as you've been reading this history of Israel, God has been working.

[6 : 35] And now we start to see the formation of how it all fits together. That's how he introduces his book with this genealogy. That it's all part of a plan. That's the first thing we need to get.

We need to understand. You might not think that if you look around in the world today. You really might not be convinced that there's a plan. You might be one of those people who thinks that history is just going around in circles and not really getting much better.

But it's reasonable to conclude that God has a plan. That the creator of this world actually has a plan for what he wants to do with it. Isn't it? If there is a God and he created all this and he's all powerful, surely it's reasonable to assume he has a plan of what to do with it.

Well, that's what the Bible tells us he does. Instead of just sitting in heaven and watching us try and fail again and again, it's reasonable to assume that he has a plan to establish his own rule in his world.

That he wants to rule in his world. And the Old Testament tells us that. The Bible tells us. That's one of the main things the Bible does as we read it.

[7 : 52] It tells us about the plan of God. And if we get that, then we can live each of our little lives in light of something much bigger than ourselves. And much bigger than our few years on this earth.

We can live it in light of the big plan. That's why we have the Bible. To tell us that plan. And the Old Testament shows us what that plan is. It would take a long time to go into the details.

But to summarize God's plan for this world, the Old Testament teaches us through the narratives of the history of Israel and the prophets. That God's plan is to break through from heaven into a world that doesn't want to know him.

By forming a kind of a bridgehead of his rule through a particular human from a particular nation. You know what a bridgehead is? It's a military term actually.

It's when an attacking force is getting into enemy territory. And they cross a river. And they take a bridge. And then they establish a kind of a fortification at the end of that bridge.

[8 : 56] It's called the bridgehead. To hold just that little bit of the enemy territory. So that they can send all of their supplies and their vehicles and their troops through to conquer that land.

That's a bridgehead. And in a very similar way, God's plan for this world is to establish a bridgehead of his rule in this world.

In a particular nation and in a particular person. That's the beginnings, the seed of his authority and rule for this whole world.

That's God's plan. That's really the summary of what the Old Testament says. And this particular human from a particular nation through whom God is going to create this bridgehead into humanity to rule this world.

Is known in the Jewish scriptures as the Messiah. Very important figure. Without the Messiah, the Old Testament would pretty much just be a semi-boring history book.

[9 : 56] But it's the Messiah. And it's the prophecies about the Messiah. And it's this picture we get of this person, slowly but surely, that's built up as we read the prophets.

That we realize what God is doing. That this is the person. The human being through whom God is going to get his rule into this world. So, there's many prophecies that talk about this Messiah.

But let's go to one. It's the one that Michiel read for us earlier. Isaiah chapter 9. This is one of the little vignettes, little pictures we get of who this figure is going to be.

That God is going to carry out his plan for this world through. Isaiah 9 from verse 6. For a child will be born for us. A son will be given to us.

And the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast.

[11 : 00] And its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord of armies will accomplish this. There, in a nutshell, is God's plan for this world. That someone is going to come.

And the government will be on his shoulders. He will have a vast dominion. It will be prosperous.

And there will be justice and righteousness forever.

Basically, it's talking about a man who is going to bring God's good rule and it will actually work for a change. The rule of God in this world will work like our rule cannot.

And we read in other prophecies, not only will he bring this just and right and good rule to this world that so desperately needs it, but that rule will extend into the fabric of creation itself and we will have a restored creation where he will reverse the effect even of sin and even of death.

[12 : 10] And that is the expectation that is built up throughout the Old Testament. That is where we're headed as we read the Old Testament. And it's funny because you read the Old Testament and there's two storylines that are parallel.

The one storyline is the failure of human beings. If you think we're pretty decent people, just read the Old Testament and you'll realize that deep within us is something that can never be who we should be.

It's called sin. And the Old Testament is so important because it helps us to grasp it. And so we read this downward failure of the story of Israel, but at the same time, in the background, there's these hints through the prophets of this restored creation.

And they grow and they build. So as you read the downward of Israel, you also read more and more about the Messiah who's going to come and fix everything. And that's why it's sweet and sour reading the Old Testament.

Well, Matthew's purpose here at the beginning of the New Testament is now to prove that that whole plan is now kicking off in our world, really in our history.

[13 : 18] You can go to the places where this happened. And they happened in our timeline. So God's great plan that he had only been talking about up until now has now come into our world and kicked off.

And that's his purpose, Matthew's purpose in writing his gospel. And he starts here in the first verse with the claim that Jesus of Nazareth, born in Israel, in the Middle East, roughly 2,000 years ago, he is the Messiah.

He is. He is the Messiah, the Old Testament is talking about. That is the point that Matthew's trying to make here. And he lays it out. He lays his cards on the table right in verse 1. Jesus, the Christ, or the Messiah, depending on your translation.

It's the same word just in Hebrew and Greek. But now that's not what people think of Jesus, is it?

We've actually got to stop and just think, what does the average person think when they think about

Jesus?

If you went and interviewed random people on the street and you said, who is Jesus? You would get a variety of answers. You would get, well, he was a great moral teacher.

[14:30] He taught us how to live. He was a great example of sacrifice and how you should be nice to people. Some people, if they go to certain churches and you ask them, who is Jesus to you?

They will say, he is a great cosmic force who will improve my life. And he helps me every day to live my best life. Some people, if you go to and ask, who is Jesus?

They won't say it. But they will think of him as an insurance policy. A heavenly, eternal insurance policy. Well, as long as I go to church and tick the boxes and say the right things, then I think I'm covered eternally if anything were to go wrong after I die.

Those are generally the majority views of who Jesus is. A heavenly insurance policy, a cosmic force, a great example. Not many people will answer.

He is the supreme ruler sent by God to bring God's rule back into this world. But that's who Matthew introduces him as. But the reason people don't realize that or think of Jesus in that way is because, well, let's be honest.

[15:40] It didn't seem like that when he came. When he came to this earth, born to some Middle Eastern peasants. He was not born into royalty or into the upper class.

Not having much, even as Isaiah the prophet says, much esteem or majesty that we should esteem him. And so it doesn't seem like he's the Messiah, the great figure who's going to bring God's rule into this world.

And that is why Matthew wrote his gospel like he did. To prove that he really is the Messiah that the Old Testament talks about, even when it doesn't look like it. And then if you read through Matthew's gospel, which we're going to do over this month, not the whole gospel, just the beginning, but you'll start to see how much he bit by bit proves the Messiahship of Jesus so that you don't get deceived by the fact that he doesn't seem like it when he came.

It's very important to get this, that Jesus really is the Messiah. And that's why he started with this genealogy, and that's why we need to understand this genealogy.

What it is, it's a list of names, as you can see, but it's a political claim to kingship. That's how claimants in a royal system would claim the throne, through their genealogy.

[17:02] They had to prove that they were of the right line to rule in any kingdom, in any royalty. And so these genealogies, to a person who understood royalty, were very important.

So this is a political genealogy. Interestingly, Luke also has a genealogy, and it's slightly different, because Luke follows the biological line, Matthew follows the political line, and who had the right to rule down the ages.

And so here, the first thing he's doing in this genealogy is establishing Jesus' legal right to the throne of David. Why was that important? Well, because one of the criteria of the Messiah was that he was going to rule on the throne of David.

And so this is the first of many criteria that Matthew shows you Jesus fulfills, one by one. He ticks all the boxes of the Messiah. But there's more that this list of names does, as we read it again, and we read it carefully.

Because not only does it establish Jesus' right to rule, but it also shows us that despite the ups and downs of history, God has been planning perfectly all along for the Messiah to come at just the right time.

[18:14] That's why Matthew organizes the genealogy into three groups of 14. Now, Hebrews had a thing with numbers. They had a very close relationship with numbers.

You see it a lot in Revelation and some of the Old Testament books. The number 7, the number 3, the number 14 were all significant numbers. They were ways of indicating something.

And what Matthew is trying to indicate here is the fulfillment of a whole lot of history. And the perfection of timing. That's kind of the number 14, double 7, has an idea of completion or fulfillment. And so Matthew is showing in his arrangement here that in each stage of history, from the patriarchs to the monarchy, from the monarchy to the exile, and from the exile to Christ, each stage of history, everything happened exactly according to God's plan to lead to the birth of Jesus.

That was the climax of God's plan through history, to lead to the birth of Jesus, to make that bridgehead in His world to start establishing His rule. And so that's the second thing this genealogy does.

[19 : 23] It shows us that with all this chaotic history, if you step back and you look at it from a bigger perspective, you can see God is doing something.

History is not going nowhere. But then there's a third thing this genealogy does for us. It shows us how God carries out His plans in ways that no one expected. Did you notice, as Alan was reading for us earlier, how many women were mentioned in the genealogy?

Well, the fact that any women were mentioned is something highly irregular in a kingly ancient genealogy. And so you've got Tamar, you've got Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, you've got Rahab, and you've got Ruth as well.

And most of these women had very questionable moral characters. If you know the history of them, you would wonder why Matthew includes them.

Tamar slept with her father-in-law. Bathsheba was an adulteress and Rahab was a prostitute.

These are ancestors that the family would rather forget.

[20 : 34] You wouldn't expect them to be in a genealogy. We recently watched an episode of The Crown on Netflix. I don't know if you watched that. It's the story of the royal family, the British royal family, over the years in Queen Elizabeth's reign.

And just a disclaimer, I don't think it's large, a lot of it is fictional. But it's based on true events. And one of the true events that this episode we watched was based on was how at one point the royals actually had in their family line two mentally ill relatives.

They're cousins of the queen, like distant cousins. And what they did was they actually hid them away from society. They packed them off to a mental institution and they had them declared legally dead. They had death records.

And the reason is because it would give the royal family a bad name to have these people in the bloodline who had mental illness.

It was a very bad, wicked thing to do. But you can kind of understand because they were so keen to keep their name pure, they didn't want to mention in the bloodline people who would kind of taint the royal record.

[21 : 46] Well, Matthew doesn't care about that. When he's writing this royal record of Jesus. He's not only unashamed of these women in Jesus' bloodline, but he deliberately puts them in.

He didn't have to. He deliberately puts them in. Why? Well, because he wants to emphasize that God works in history to achieve his purposes in ways that we don't expect.

Like working through these questionable women and sending the Messiah to a world to be born to a virgin peasant in an animal feeding trough.

Very unexpected. Very out of the ordinary. But that's how God works. That's the point Matthew's trying to make. Throughout history, God has worked in ways that we least expect. Through people that we least expect.

And so do you see the significance now of this genealogy? It shows that Jesus really is the Messiah authentically. He is truly the Messiah that God has been planning to send throughout history, even if it doesn't seem that way on the surface.

[22 : 49] The question, of course, to us, 2,000 years later in Cape Town, South Africa, is, so what?

Maybe that's you this morning. Maybe you're like, okay, that's interesting. History is being tied up.

It's being fulfilled. And Christmas, I get the significance of Christmas, but why do I care?

You're thinking that maybe? Maybe you're sitting at home watching on YouTube and you're thinking, okay, well, I've watched so far. 20 minutes in and what does it mean for me? What relevance has all this stuff got to me and you today now here?

Well, to understand that, you need to see one other detail in this genealogy. Right in the first verse, it says, An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And so Matthew specifically mentions and starts the genealogy at Abraham. Why? Well, to say not only does Jesus come and fulfill the promises about David's line that the Messiah would come through, but he also fulfills the promises that were even made to Abraham right at the beginning.

[24 : 02] What were those promises? Well, if you've been with us for a few years, you'll know what those promises are backwards. But if you haven't, just turn back to Genesis. It starts at Genesis 12, verse 1 to 3.

But it develops then, as you go through Genesis, this amazing promise that God makes to Abraham. That through his family, the whole world is going to experience the reversal of the curse.

Now, just pause. That's the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12, 1 to 3. But just pause and think about that. Like, you are sick maybe now. Or you shouldn't be at church. You may be watching on YouTube and you're feeling sick.

Or you're disabled. Or you are in debt. Or your marriage is falling apart. Whatever it is. These are all effects of the curse. These are all effects of our sin and our separation from God.

But God, even though we turn our back on God, God didn't turn His back on us. He has, right from the beginning, He took Abraham out of his nation and He said to him, Listen, through you, I'm going to do something.

[25 : 09] And He gave him the end result right at the beginning. He said, I'm going to reverse the fall. I'm going to bless the whole world. Blessing, when God says it, is a reversal of the curse.

A reversal of sin, a reversal of death. And God said to Abraham, through you, through what I'm going to do over thousands of years in your family line, I'm eventually going to bring blessing to the nations.

And then He says it again over and over throughout Abraham's life. But here in Genesis, turn with me to Genesis 22.

22 verse 18. Listen to how He says it here. This is God talking to Abraham and He says, Genesis 22, 18. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring.

Because you have obeyed, Micah 1. By your offspring. In other words, through Abraham's line, a ruler was going to come through whom all the nations of the earth would eventually be blessed.

[26 : 13] And what that means for us then, as Matthew includes this whole part of history in His genealogy. That it's all been part of the one big plan. It means that God's promises in the Old Testament to break His rule into the world through this appointed Messiah was always with the express purpose of making His blessing available to you sitting in Plumstead in 2020.

God did all this throughout history to make His blessing available to anyone and all people. And that is actually another reason.

Matthew mentions these questionable women. Women of questionable characters. If you go back to the genealogy and you look at them, why does He mention Tamar?

Why does He mention Uriah's wife? Why not just say her name? Why is she Uriah's wife? Why does He mention Ruth?

Well, I'll tell you why. They were all Gentiles. They were all non-Jews. Uriah was a Hittite. That's why he's mentioned. To establish Bathsheba as a Gentile.

[27 : 33] As was Ruth. If you read the book of Ruth. As was Tamar. And so, the reason these women are mentioned is not just to show us how God works in ways that we don't expect.

It's to show us that God has always planned to bring His blessing to all nations. And that is also why Jesus didn't take up His rule right away when He came to this earth the first time.

But rather went to die on a cross. To pay for your sins and mine. Because we could never be part of God's plans as Gentiles. People outside of God's promises and covenant to Abraham.

Unless our sins are dealt with. Unless Jesus does something to bring us into God's people. And that's what He did on the cross. So that even sinners like you and me and Tamar and Bathsheba and Rahab can have their sins forgiven and be part of God's big plan for the restoration of this world.

Which He's deliberately delayed for thousands of years to give us a chance to be born, to hear about Jesus and to be part of it. And so what Matthew wants to show his readers in this opening of his Christmas story is not only that Jesus is the authentic fulfillment of all of Old Testament history.

[28 : 47] Everything that's come up before this in the Bible. And the means by which God will bring His good rule back to this earth in a restored creation.

But He also writes it to show us that Jesus is applicable to all people, Jews and Gentiles, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter where you live. This birth of this Messiah in Israel 2,000 years ago.

This birth of this Messiah is applicable to you. Because He makes salvation available to you. And eternal life and resurrection available to you. So what must you do?

If that's true. If what Matthew is claiming here is true. What must you do about it? Well, after Jesus died, He rose again from the dead.

Which was, by the way, the final and ultimate proof of His Messiahship. Because that's what the Old Testament said would happen. And that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, proved that He was the

Messiah.

[29 : 47] Even if He didn't fulfill expectations like people expected Him to, in the way people expected Him to, the resurrection is undeniable. That He is the Messiah.

And so once you've read through the whole of Matthew, you get to that, you can't argue. There's just no argument left. Jesus must be the Messiah. But after His resurrection, and Peter then, Peter, one of His disciples, went and preached to a whole bunch of Jews and explained to them that Jesus is the Messiah, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Where did He do that? Acts chapter 2. You should know. We've just done that. What did He say to them? And what did they do? If you want to know what to do, if what I've said today and what Matthew says is true, what must you do?

Well, this is the answer. Turn with me to Acts chapter 2. It's the fifth book of the New Testament, just after John. Acts chapter 2, from verse 37.

When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart. Peter replied, whoever throughout history, whoever comes to realize who Jesus really is, this is what they must do.

[31 : 28] Repent and be baptized. Repent means to, literally to turn around, but it's to turn your mind around. It's to change your mind about who Jesus is, and to then line up your life with Him, and what He is doing.

And be baptized is the sign, the covenant sign of coming into God's people. If you have done that, if you know Jesus is the authentic ruler that God has sent, who will restore God's rule to this world, then what do you do?

Well, then you need to get your life in line with that. I mean, that's what coming to church, and hearing sermons, and going to Bible studies, is really all about. It's learning how to get your life lined up with the Messiah, and start doing in your life what He's doing in this world.

There's really no, nothing else that's more important than lining up your life with what the Messiah is doing, to what God is doing. And that means getting involved in the mission of God's church, because Jesus left His church on earth to continue His work before He returns, to establish His rule once and for all.

And the most important thing, if you believe that He's the Messiah, is do everything you can to get on board, get involved in the work of Christ's church on earth. And that is why, flip back to Matthew right to the end, that is why Matthew ends His gospel like He does.

[32 : 58] Because if what He said at the beginning of His gospel is true, then what He says at the end of His gospel is something we all need to listen to and obey.

Matthew 28, from verse 18, Jesus came near and said to them, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you, and remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.

And this and this alone is what can give us and those around us hope for the holidays in 2020. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the story of history pointing somewhere.

We look around and we read the newspapers and we can easily despair as we look at current events. Thank you for this reminder this morning that history is going somewhere, that you have a plan that you are working out perfectly through your Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

[34 : 08] Help us, Lord, to line up our lives to the reality of Jesus and who He is. Lord, for those who have not yet come under His rule, but who are sitting there now, wherever they are, realizing this is true, cause them to repent and to be baptized and to be brought into your plans for the restoration of this world.

And Lord, for those of us who have repented and we serve the risen Lord Jesus Christ, help us each and every day to seek to do the work of Christ. Through the church and through the brothers and sisters you've given us and through the resources you've given us, help us to make that our number one priority each and every day, especially this month as we celebrate Christmas.

Give us opportunity to speak about Jesus, to help others to realize who He is and be saved. And we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.