

The Hidden Plan of History

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 April 2024

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Where are we going as humanity? Are things getting better or are things getting worse?

The label, when you find labels like open the box before eating the pizza, it makes you wonder whether we have any hope at all as humanity.

Where are we going as humanity? Some people think that eventually we're going to just end up destroying ourselves. That things are getting worse and worse. And despite all our technological advancement, we're going to end up in this post-apocalyptic society and civilization is just going to crumble eventually.

Other people think the opposite. Other people think we're actually going to advance as a civilization. And through all our technological discoveries and inventions and medical advancements, eventually we'll get to the point where one day we'll have no wars and no poverty and no crime anymore.

We'll be the perfect society. That's what some people think. What about you? Where do you think humanity is going? Down or up? Where is history headed? And it's difficult, isn't it, to tell.

[1 : 13] Some days you think you see signs of us going somewhere. But some days you just see signs of us going nowhere, going in the opposite direction.

And the conclusion that many people will come to looking at history is that really we're just going around in circles. That every generation is pretty much the same problems and the same issues. We just have, you know, better phones. But we're still, it's just history and our problems and our issues are just, history is just a circular thing. And humanity is just keeping on going through these cycles.

And it's just going to carry that way until, you know, the sun explodes. What do you think? Where are we going? Well, you might be wondering why Matthew starts his gospel, why the whole New Testament starts as it does with this list of names.

Seemingly rather boring. Something that we'd normally skip over to get to the good stuff. And so we wonder why does Matthew start his gospel this way. But what I want you to see this morning is the reason he does, and the way he presents these names, is specifically to show us something important.

[2 : 29] Matthew wants to show us as we start his gospel that history is not going around in circles, but it is actually going somewhere. It is going in one set direction, and it always has been.

God has a plan for humanity that he has been working out since the beginning. That's what Matthew wants to remind us of in his opening chapter here.

But also, he doesn't only want to remind us that history is going somewhere, but he makes a startling claim in these opening verses that in the birth of Jesus Christ, God's plan for the world, his ancient plan for this whole planet has started to be fulfilled.

And so if we read this list of names properly, we'll actually find that it's one of the most exciting passages in the Bible. And this morning, I want to help you to see why.

So, as we look at these verses from 1 to 17, it is really a summary of the history of Israel up until this point in the Bible, which is essentially the summary of the whole Old Testament.

[3 : 41] But what's interesting is it's not a flattering summary. You know, often people write histories of their countries, and they'll include all the heroic and important things. Matthew does include a lot of the important heroic figures, but he also includes a lot of stuff that any Israelite reading this would have rather wanted to forget.

He deliberately mentions things that were stains in the history of Israel. Like, for example, in verse 6, when their greatest king, Father Solomon, by Uriah's wife.

Why did you have to mention that, Matthew? You could have just told us Solomon was the son of David. Not that he actually, you didn't have to remind us that he murdered, had a man murdered to

sleep with his wife, who he lusted after, and that's how Solomon got born.

Why did you have to mention that, Matthew? And he does that throughout this list. He mentions the rather seedy parts of Israel's history. He does mention good kings and the great patriarchs, but he also mentions evil kings like Rehoboam and Manasseh that Israelites wouldn't have wanted to remember.

And of course, he mentions one of the darkest periods in Israel's history, the exile into Babylon, where they lost their city, they lost their kingdom, and they were taken away as slaves to the empire of the Babylonians, which many thought was the end of the nation of Israel, and God's plans, and their story.

[5 : 04] And it was a disaster. And that essentially is what Matthew's doing. So he's taking the survey of Israel's messy history. But what he does here is, as you notice, there's a pattern.

And what he does is he arranges, he takes this messy history, and he arranges it, he rearranges it in such a way that it reveals this hidden pattern behind it, that it has always actually been moving towards something, and that's what he makes the point at the end in verse 17.

He says, so, now if you look at this history that I've laid out in this way, all the generations from Abraham to David were 14, and from David to the exile into Babylon, 14, and from the exile to Babylon until Christ, 14.

So you see how he's taken this messy history that people thought was really going nowhere, and he arranges it into this really beautiful pattern to show that it has always been part of a perfect plan, that God has always been at work, even when it didn't look like it.

behind the scenes, that history has been going somewhere, and God has always been working through this messy, broken nation of Israel, even when they messed up.

[6 : 23] That didn't stop God from doing what he had planned to do through them in the Old Testament, because he had made promises. He had made promises. He had covenanted himself to this nation for a time in history.

He had made promises, and he had made this covenant with Israel, and he was going to fulfill them, and no matter what the Israelites did, no matter how much they messed up, no matter how bad they fell, he was going to fulfill his promises that he made to them.

God was always working out his plans in the background. And that is quite an encouraging thought, isn't it? That for those in covenant with God, like the nation of Israel was in the Old Testament, like we Christians, the church is in the New Testament, in this age, for those in covenant with God, he is always working out his plans in the background of history for us, even when it doesn't look like it, and even when we mess up.

Isn't that an encouraging thought? Nothing, no amount of us, and no amount of us messing up is going to stop God from carrying out his plans, the things that he's promised. And he's always at work.

There's always a pattern. And there's always a picture, even if we can't see it, even if it looks all confusing to us, our lives and our world and our history. God is working.

[7 : 56] God is carrying out his plans. Some of you might know, Jean, my wife, likes cross-stitching. She's pretty good at it. She's often, I'll often find her just sitting on the bed, carrying on her cross-stitch.

For those of you who don't know what cross-stitching is, I can't really describe it. She'd draw pictures with cotton and thread and stuff, in material. It's better than that.

I call it needle drawing. But anyway, sometimes I'm going to come in to the bedroom, and Jean's sitting on the bed doing a cross-stitch. And I come in, and the door of the bedroom's at the foot of the bed.

And I'll see her doing cross-stitch, but I'll see the back of it. And I'll say to her, it doesn't look very good, love. I think you've messed it up. But of course, I'm looking on the wrong side.

From Jean's perspective, it's a beautiful picture forming. And everything, every thread, is exactly where it needs to be, from her side. Even though from my side, it looks like chaos.

[8 : 58] You see, what Matthew is doing here is, he is giving us a picture of history from God's side, from God's perspective. And he's showing that it's always been leading somewhere.

It looks chaotic. I mean, you read a secular history book, where is history going? It looks all over the place. What's happening? I don't know. History is just going in circles. But if you, if you read history from God's perspective, you see that it's all part of a pattern.

It's all part of a plan. It's always been going somewhere. Towards the perfect fulfillment, of God's plan, for this world. And nothing will stop that.

But what is that plan? That's the real question we need to ask. What is God's plan? If everything is heading towards something, well, what is that something? Where is history going, according to the Bible?

Well, that is exactly what Matthew wants us to think about in the very first verse of his gospel, the very first verse of the New Testament. He wants us to think about the plan that God has for the world.

[10:01] And that's why he mentions these two men, besides Jesus. He mentions David and Abraham. Have a look at verse one. This is the account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Now, why mention that? Why mention that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and David? Well, it's because, if you know anything about the Old Testament, these are the two main men who God had revealed his covenant and his plans to in the Old Testament.

And so, let's look what he says to them. Now, I want to take you to two places in the Old Testament where we see God outlining not just his plans for Israel, but you'll see his plans for the whole world. And so, we start in Genesis 12. You don't have to turn there. You can see the verse will be on the screen behind you, but you can. And this is when God reveals himself and his plans to Abraham. And he says, this is what happens. So, Genesis 12, 1 to 3. The Lord said to Abraham, go out from your land, your relatives and your father's house to a land I will show you and I will make you into a great nation.

[11:16] And I will bless you and I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt. And all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.

All the peoples, all the nations on the earth will be blessed through you. This was far more than just God's dealings with a man and a people group in the Middle East. God had a plan for all nations. And right at the beginning, in the first book of the Bible, he starts to reveal what his plan is to this guy called Abraham. And he promises him that from Abraham, this fairly unknown goat herder, that a nation is going to come.

And from that nation, something is going to happen that is going to be a blessing to all nations. That's God's promise. The covenant with Abraham.

Now, that word blessing, we've got to understand it's far more than what you say when someone sneezes. Bless you. You know, blessing here to Abraham, that word and the meaning behind it is significant because what it means, what blessing means, what God is promising to Abraham here, is that he's going to undo the results of the curse in the world.

[12:39] That's what blessing means. It's the opposite of curse. Now, curse is what happened to humanity in Genesis 3 when we fell from God, when we and God parted ways. That's what happened. Humanity and God parted ways.

That's why we're in the mess we're in. And we have been for thousands of years. Because we're in, by nature as humans, we're in broken relationship with God. That's the reason everything's gone wrong.

And the Bible is quite clear about that. But, very soon after that happens, even though we wanted to go our own way, live our own lives, run the world our own way, and look what we've done with it, God doesn't give up.

He has a plan. And very soon afterwards, He starts to lay out this plan, how He's going to undo this curse, and the effect of the curse in our world one day. God's got a plan to undo the curse.

Just as sin has spread to all nations, and brokenness, and the curse spreads to all nations, and you can't escape it, you know, you might think this country is going down the tubes, and you know, you might think everything's broken.

[13:47] You go to another place, the grass is not greener on the other side, because curse is there in its own way. Sin is there in its own way. You can't escape it, and you can't escape the sin inside. But God says He's got a plan.

Just as sin has spread to all nations, that He is going to bring blessing back into the world, and it's going to spread, like an antidote of the curse, eventually to all nations as well.

That is how God starts revealing His plan for the nations, and it's pretty awesome, isn't it? That this is what God has planned. But then, as the Old Testament continues, He reveals just how He's going to do this, and He reveals more and more about this plan.

So we pick it up in what He says to David. That's the next major part of this promise. And I'm going to read a few verses from what Gene read earlier to Samuel from chapter 7.

This is what He says to King David from verse 12. I will raise up after you your descendant who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom.

[15:01] And then from verse 16. Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever. forever. Okay, so now this is the next reveal of God's plan.

The next major reveal is that not only has He planned to bring blessing and undo the curse in all the nations, but the way He's going to do it is through a human being in the line of David from the nation of Israel who is going to somehow bring God's good rule into the world.

God's government into the world where before it has just been our government trying our best and failing. And that God's rule, God's good rule, that is something we need in this world.

We, by nature, are creatures that need to be ruled. Much as you want to live your life independently and rule your life yourself, how's that going by the way? Okay, we need to be ruled by a ruler who knows how the world works and how our lives work.

But we need a ruler that's good. Our rulers don't work well. They fail. I mean, we've got elections coming up in South Africa and I hope you're going to do your democratic responsibility and vote if you can.

[16:26] If you're of age and you're a citizen of South Africa, you should vote. It's important. But we know in the back of our minds, don't we, that whoever we vote for, they're still not going to fix the world.

They're still not going to ultimately fix our country. They might make things better, might improve the economy or whatever it is, but they're not going to fix things ultimately. No human government will. But God is saying here to David and it continues throughout the Old Testament that his government is coming and his government will fix this world. and it's coming.

It's a real thing. It's coming into this world. That is God's plan for the world. And we need to get that fixed in our minds if we're to understand the importance of how Matthew starts his gospel.

God's plan for the world is to reverse the effects of the curse on our countries, our nations, our societies and on our lives and to establish his government, his good rule in this world and to restore this world to what he has always planned for it to be.

[17:35] And it is going to happen. God has promised it. And no matter what we do, nothing will stop God from achieving his plans for this world.

And so, when we start the New Testament and we read Matthew saying Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, what he's saying is that this man who has now been born into history is the one God was talking about to Abraham.

He's the one God was talking about to David. He is the one who is going to bring about God's plan. He is the man who all of history has been leading to.

And what that means is that you cannot ignore him. You can try but you shouldn't. you can try live your life without reference to Jesus Christ but you shouldn't.

No matter who you are you can't ignore this man who all of history has been leading to. Who is the culmination of God's ancient plans for this world and who is the one who is going to bring them about in God's time.

[18:49] You cannot ignore this man. Whether you're a Christian or not, whoever you are, whatever you believe, you can't ignore this man. You don't want to carry on living in a broken world do you?

Anyone? You want this world to be fixed don't we all? You want to live in a fixed world? You want to live in a fixed society? You want the curse to be overcome in your life don't you?

Well this is the man God has appointed to do it. All of history has been leading towards him. You can't ignore him. And if you're not convinced, by the way, if you're not convinced that this is the man all of history has been leading towards, if you're not convinced that this is the man sent by God and appointed by him to be the fulfillment of God's plan, just stick around.

Because Matthew in the next few chapters is going to work to make sure that you see how all of the prophecies have been fulfilled to prove beyond any doubt that this is the man.

So stick around if you're not convinced. Just come back next week. But if you are convinced, if you're a Christian, if you are in covenant with God, then, you know what's really cool about reading this and reading, just being reminded of God's plan for history is to know that we are not caught up in that.

[20 : 17] As Christians in covenant with God, we have now come into the stream of God's plans for history. We are caught up in something much bigger than ourselves and our lives are going somewhere as well.

When we are caught up into God's plan, it means our lives are going somewhere. Our lives are no longer as Christians going around in circles pointlessly. And that, you know, that is, I don't know about you, but that's what gets me up in the morning as a Christian.

There's lots of mornings that I would rather just not get up. And if you think that it's just, I'm just going to get up and go through another day and I'm just going to do the same thing that I did last week and I'm just going to carry on and I'm just going to get older and more sore and that's life. If really, if that's how you look at life, how do you even get up in the morning? Really, I'm asking because the only thing that gets me up in the morning is to know that God has called me to live a life that is going somewhere.

that is not going around in circles. That God has a plan for this world, for the future and He has called me to be part of it.

[21 : 27] And that is, that is what makes life worth living if you're a Christian. That we're part of this great plan and we get to play a role in it. But also, what this tells us as Christians is that this plan of God is something that everybody around you needs to know.

That you, you have a responsibility to help them to see. That you can't keep to yourself. If it's global and if it affects everyone, if it's this big, it's not just your personal religion that you can keep to yourself.

Jesus is not just your personal religion that you're going to, you know, you like, but it's your, that's what the world wants to tell you. You know, keep your religion to yourself. And sure enough, the religions can do that.

I don't mind. But this is different. This is not just another religion we keep to ourselves. This is news. This is a public truth that everybody needs to know. Your friends need to know.

Your work colleagues need to know. The people at school need to know. The people at the sports club need to know. Everybody around us needs to know this. This is a public truth that affects everyone.

[22 : 43] This is where history has been leading to. This is the man God has appointed to fix all of us. This is the solution to everything. And people need to know that.

Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that Jesus is the solution to all the problems in the life of your work colleagues and your friends and your squash mates and whatever it is?

Those people who are all just living their own lives. Jesus has come and he's the solution to the problems, the curse that they're under. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus is the one God has appointed to fix everything, all of this and all of us?

Well, if you really believe that, then you will act and you will speak as if it's true with excitement and with urgency. And that's what the early Christians did in the first century.

They lived not just in a holy huddle. They wanted to make this news known to all around them. God has sent the one who is the fulfillment of his plans, who is going to fix all of us and they made it known and that's why the church grew so rapidly in the first few centuries because they were excited and urgent about this great news.

[24 : 03] That is Jesus. I think 2,000 years later as Christians we've lost that urgency. We've made it our own personal religion and we've forgotten that this is a public truth that changes lives.

And God has put us in the world to make it known. People out there need to know this. But they need to know this because they, whoever they are, can also be part of it.

And that is the other thing we need to see before we finish this morning from this genealogy. The fact that no one is excluded from God's plans. From the potential of being part of what God is doing in this world.

You can refuse if you want but no one is excluded by nature of who they are. And Matthew shows this in this genealogy by including, I wonder if you noticed as Dylan was reading it for us earlier, by including people in his list that no one would have expected to be there.

Did you notice that? Especially the woman that he often mentions. You don't strictly need to mention the woman in a genealogy which is about fathers, fathering fathers.

[25 : 15] But he deliberately mentions, stops and pauses and mentions these women. And the thing about these women was that not only were they all in some way Gentiles, so not originally Israelites, not originally part of the people of God, but most of them are people who had done some questionable stuff in their lives.

They were not the kind of people you invite over for Sunday lunch. Tamar, in verse 3, you know who Tamar was? She pretended to be a temple prostitute to trick her father-in-law to having sex with her.

That's what she did. That's her in the Bible. That's what she's famous for. Rahab, in verse 5, was a Canaanite prostitute who had slept probably with dozens and dozens of Canaanite pagans before she turned on her own nation and helped the Israelite spies.

Very seedy history. And of course, Bathsheba, in verse 6, a Hittite wife who committed adultery with David who had her husband killed. And so, Matthew here is showing us that the history of even God's chosen people was littered with sin and brokenness and shame.

Which, on the one hand, shows why Abraham's family and David's kingship could never ultimately bring the blessings to this world, to all nations, and bring God's saving rule to earth because, at the end of the day, they are no different to any of us.

[27 : 00] these Israelites who were called up to be part of God's plan, just because they're in the Bible, they were still sinners. They were still just as sinful, still just under the curse.

And that's why none of us can fix this world. No matter what clever government systems we invent, no matter what leaders we put into power, we can't fix this world because of our sin.

We've been trying for thousands of years and failing for thousands of years because of the sin that is inside us because we are all broken. We all fall short of God's glory.

Just like these people that Matthew highlights. But also, he does it to show that that sin and brokenness and the mistakes we make doesn't disqualify us from being part of God's plan to fix this world.

That's the beautiful thing. He highlights these broken, fallen people, but he shows in the same breath how they were integrally part of God's plan. And as we read Matthew, we'll discover how Jesus, when he comes, when he came to this world, he brought blessing into the lives of some of the most broken people.

[28 : 23] And he included, as he was walking around, you know, Israel and Jerusalem and Galilee, he was including and reaching out to people who everyone else would have written off.

It's amazing how much he did that. He went to the most unworthy as a way of showing what he's here to do and a way of pointing towards the cross that he was going to where he ultimately died for the sins of those people who had messed up their lives.

Died for the sins of us. And that, that is why God doesn't write off anyone in his plans. no matter how much they've messed up their lives, no matter how many mistakes they've made, God does not write them off.

And so neither should we. You know, never, never think that a person is not decent enough to come to church. Or, you know, they're not decent enough to be a Christian because they've messed up too much.

And that's a terrible thing that a lot of Christians think. That you've got to have a certain standard before you can be accepted as a Christian. Well, God doesn't do that in his plan in Matthew.

[29 : 47] Jesus doesn't do that when he goes around and restores broken people. He goes to the most broken. He includes the most broken to the point that the religious people started complaining at him. We want to come to your meals.

Why are you inviting all the, like, really down and out people? And then he answered them that the doctor doesn't come for the healthy but the sick.

It's a cool answer. But you see, we should also think that way if that's what our Lord thinks. We shouldn't write anyone off. We should never think a person's not decent enough to be a Christian, that they've got too many problems, that they've messed up too much to be welcomed here at St. Mark's.

I mean, let's be honest. How would we treat a Tamar who walked into St. Mark's? How would we treat her if we knew her history? How would we treat a Rahab who walked into St. Mark's?

How would we treat a Bathsheba? We mustn't think that we can write anyone off if God doesn't. But you mustn't think that about yourself either.

[30 : 58] You mustn't think that you don't belong because of stuff you've done, because of the ways you've messed up, because of how you couldn't be the Christian you wanted to be, how you've fallen.

You mustn't think that God writes you off because of that. And you mustn't write yourself off. God doesn't write you off. No matter how much you've messed up, no matter how much shame you carry deep down, especially because of perhaps sexual sin that you've committed that no one knows about, that only you know about, and you carry that shame and you think God can never accept you, and you can't belong.

Well, you know what? God knows about that. And yet he still has a place for you in his plan for this world. where this world is going. In the future, God wants you to be part of that, no matter who you are, no matter how much you've messed up, the future that he has planned for this world beyond this life, and he wants you to be part of it, if only you will recognize and bow the knee to the one he sent to take you there, the one all history has been pointing to, Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Will you come back next week so we can find out more about him? Let's pray. Oh, Lord, we worship and praise you for your plan of salvation for this world, that it is going somewhere, even in all the mess.

And we thank you that through Jesus our lives can be caught up in that, and our lives can be going somewhere, even in all the mess. Lord, we thank you for the grace that Christ has brought, and I pray that you would help us to know that you don't exclude us, but you've sent Jesus to deal with our sin, and that we can be part of what you're doing in this world, and we pray that you would help us to see how we can, and to get on board with what you're doing, and to follow Jesus into life, and into healing, and restoration.

[33 : 14] In his name we pray. Amen.