

THE SAVIOURHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 1

I. The Writer.

The one who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to write this Gospel was Matthew. Scriptural information about the early life of Matthew is very scanty. About his family we know nothing except that he was the son of Alphaeus. Where Matthew was born we are not told, but he lived and worked in Capernaum. He was a Jew in religion and a publican by profession. Publican was the name given to an employee of the Roman government whose duty it was to collect taxes from his countrymen. Any Jew who sold his services to the Roman government for this purpose was considered to be a contemptible renegade who had surrendered all claim to the respect of others. He was branded as a social outcast.

Matthew must have paid a large sum of money for the position of tax collector in the choice location at Capernaum. Matthew had a shrewd judgment, a discriminating sense of values and the power to concentrate on his task. He had plenty of grit. He displayed gumption. He demonstrated that he was an expert at gouge. He was a very successful money-maker.

One day Christ Jesus went down to the toll booth where Matthew was at his post of duty. Aware of Matthew's sinfulness, need of forgiveness and possibilities in God's service, Christ said to him, "Follow Me." When he heard that call of Christ and felt the impact of the Lord's personality upon his soul, Matthew instantly and unhesitatingly stepped out of his bondage into liberty, peace and joy as he came into possession of eternal life. As soon as he was saved, he started to follow Christ. Matthew was grateful to Christ for saving and transforming him. As an evidence of his full commitment to Him, he invited his Saviour to his home and gave a banquet in His honor. To this feast he invited many of his former associates. He wanted to introduce them to the Saviour, earnestly hoping that they too would put their trust in Him, be saved by Him and live for Him, which is exactly what took place. Matthew so committed his talents and abilities to the Lord for use in His service that he was called to be one of the twelve apostles and to write the gospel which bears his name.

II. The Purpose.

Matthew did not write this Gospel to set forth a chronological account of Christ's ministry, but to prove that the Lord Jesus was the true Messiah, Whose coming the Old Testament prophets had predicted and Whom the Jews expected.

III. The Genealogy. Matthew 1:1-17.

That Matthew's purpose was to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the Jewish Messiah was evidenced in the genealogical connection of Jesus with David, the king of Israel, and with Abraham, the progenitor of the Hebrew people, to whom God had made the promise: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and with whom sacred history may be said to have begun.

Verse one constitutes the title of the genealogy of Jesus Christ as it is recorded in this chapter, and not the title of the Gospel according to Matthew. The Messianic lineage of Jesus from Abraham through David to Joseph, the husband of Mary, was not traced by Matthew through the blood line, but by the

royal line which carried with it the throne rights. Jesus Christ is the subject of the entire Gospel. The others are mentioned therein only because of their relationship to Him.

Matthew began this genealogy with Abraham and continued to Jesus, whereas Luke began with Jesus and traced His lineage back to Adam, connecting Christ not only with the Jewish people but with the entire race. Matthew followed the ancestral line of Joseph, which was the legal line, whereas Luke followed the ancestral line of Mary, the only human parent of Jesus.

Matthew divided the genealogy of Jesus into three sections of fourteen generations each:

1. Abraham to David.

This period covered the age of the patriarchs and judges, which was the springtime of the Jewish people.

2. David to the Babylonian captivity.

This was the age of the kings, which was the summer and the autumn of the nation.

3. The Babylonian captivity to Christ.

This comprised the period of Jewish decadence, which was the winter of their political existence.

These three epochs represent three stages in the development of the Old Testament promises which found their fulfillment in the Messiah.

IV. The Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:18-25.

1. Perplexity. 1:18-19.

Joseph and Mary were engaged, but not married. Among the Jews in that day an engagement was not a light thing which might be broken off casually upon some slight pretext. The tie of betrothal was as sacred as that of marriage, and infidelities before marriage were considered as sinful as those following marriage, and death by stoning was the punishment for such sins. It was customary for a couple to be engaged for twelve months before marriage. For Joseph and Mary, this period, during which they were looking forward to their coming nuptials, was a time gilded by many bright hopes of future happiness.

After betrothal to Joseph, Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit prior to their actual marriage. It was a terrible shock to Joseph when he was informed that Mary was to become a mother. His trial was most painful because he did not know what the written gospel later plainly asserted; namely, that the Holy Ghost was responsible for her condition. Joseph did not know the details of Mary's conduct, but he naturally thought that she had been unfaithful to him. His suspicions were natural and excusable, but how cruelly they must have wounded the tender heart of Mary. Regardless of what he thought, Mary was conscious of her innocence, and the angel had announced to her the cause of her conception.

Joseph did not know what to do. Since he was a righteous man, one would have expected him to feel obligated to fulfill the Mosaic legal requirement to have an adulterous woman stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:21). Actually two of the rabbinic schools divided over the interpretation of that Mosaic injunction. The strict group, the school of Shammai, contended that Moses meant that an adulterous woman "must" be stoned. The more liberal group, the school of Hillel, insisted that Moses meant that an adulterous woman "may" be stoned. Even though Joseph was perhaps inclined toward the more strict interpretation, his love for Mary prevailed and he decided to divorce her privately without pressing charges against her.

Being a just, merciful and religious man, he wanted to do what was right. The law permitted him to make a public example of her and have her stoned, but his genuine love for Mary constrained him to do otherwise. Although what he had been told made a great demand on Joseph's faith, our hearts are really touched by his tenderness and considerateness. We admire him for his determination to do what was right, and to do it in a kind manner. His love for Mary and his kindness to her constrained him to be forgiving. What a rebuke to all who are unforgiving!

2. Proclamation. 1:20-21.

While Joseph thought seriously and prayerfully about what he should do, he apparently dropped off to sleep. Then, an angel of the Lord, perhaps Gabriel, in a dream revealed to him the truth concerning Mary's condition. The angel delivered to Joseph a message from the Lord as to what he should do. This message removed his doubts, calmed his fears, and caused him to rejoice again in the love of his betrothed. When the angel proclaimed the fact that "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost," Joseph was convinced and his heart was filled with gratitude for the revelation. This message assured him that Mary had not transgressed; therefore, his reputation could now be impaired by their marriage.

Concerning the yet unborn Child, Joseph was informed as to His birth, His name, and His mission. He was coming to root out and to destroy the diseases of the souls of men and to give them perfect spiritual health. God's Son was coming for the purpose of bringing eternal life to all who would receive Him as a personal Saviour. The emphasis here is on salvation from sin. Numerous passages in God's Word plainly declare that He came into the world for the purpose of giving Himself as a substitute for sinners and as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The salvation which He has provided is absolutely complete.

3. Prophecy. 1:22-23.

More than seven hundred years before, the prophet Isaiah had recorded the statement, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." This prophecy, which was spoken by the Lord through Isaiah, had to be fulfilled in God's own time and manner. In the fulness of time, which was also in the hour of man's greatest need, God sent forth His Son. This wonderful prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled when Mary gave birth to Jesus. And Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to the Messiah. God is with us to redeem, to regenerate, to cleanse, and to sanctify.

4. Promptness. 1:24-25.

In obedience to the command of the angel, Joseph was immediately united in marriage with Mary. Due to the existing circumstances, it is quite likely that they had a private wedding. God's Word plainly states that Mary retained her virginity until after the birth of Jesus. To be sure, Mary was not sinless, but she was chaste and upright. While we readily admit that she possessed numerous commendable traits of character, we boldly declare that it is entirely wrong to deify Mary. It is both unscriptural and sinful to attempt to exalt her to the place of a mediator between God and men.

After the birth of Jesus, Mary lived with Joseph in all marital relations, bearing four sons, whose names are given, besides daughters who were not named (Mark 6:3).