

A PREGNANT PAUSE

There are many different kinds of silence.

Serene silence - like the first snowfall of the year. Maybe you go out early in the morning before footprints have tarnished the ground.

Angry silence - every married couple has experienced, maybe over something silly like doing the dishes wrong or your spouse putting the toilet paper roll on the wrong way for the 80 thousandth time.

Awkward silence - like when your pastor preaches from texts in Leviticus about all the sexual stuff you're supposed to avoid...

Mischievous silence - when all of a sudden your kids STOP making noise and you just KNOW they're up to something.

Terrible silence - in the aftermath of a disaster when you're still trying to make sense of what just happened...

Comfortable silence - car ride when no one speaks because you're just enjoying the time.

400 years...that's the amount of time that passes between the OT and the NT in silence. One flimsy page separates them in your bible, but that page represents centuries where God's people didn't hear from Him like they were used to.

The Christmas story is about the breaking of that silence. Which may make it all the more strange that when you open up to Matthew - the very first book of our NT - the opening verses are just a list of names - some familiar, but many not and, quite a few that are difficult to pronounce.

Many people's eyes kinda glaze over when they come to these parts of the Bible, but this list is actually incredibly important. It symbolizes not just Jesus' family line, but God's work of salvation throughout the ages - beginning with a promise to the family of Abraham and culminating in the fulfillment of that promise through Jesus - the blessing of salvation for all nations.

We're going to spend some time reflecting on this list this morning - and I'm going to add some commentary along the way as we read our scripture text just to remind you of who some of these people are.

Join me in...

READING

Matt 1:1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob, *[This family's story comprises the majority of the book of Genesis. God chose Abraham to bless and make into a nation that He said would eventually bless all nations.]*

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, *[12 in total]*

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

[You may remember the exceptionally disturbing story about this couple from our series in Genesis. Tamar was originally Judah's daughter-in-law, but after 2 of his sons died while married to her, Judah had her sent away rather than caring for her. Later he ends up sleeping with her when he mistakes her for a lady of the night on the side of the road - she gets pregnant, and when Judah hears through the grapevine he's livid. Then evidence comes to light that he's the father ... leading to the humble statement - "she's more righteous than I". They have 2 kids, twins, Perez and Zerah]

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab, *[A's daughter Elisheba actually marries Aaron, Moses' brother]*

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon, *[N and his son Salmon both live during the time of the Exodus]*

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was **Rahab**, *[another helpful prostitute, Jericho]*

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was **Ruth**, *[Ruth was a Moabite, the only foreign woman to have a biblical book named after her. Israelites were supposed to be very wary of Moabites, esp. their women, because there was a fear they'd lead them into idolatry. But Ruth cares for her Jewish Mother-in-law after both their husbands die in Moab, and returns with Naomi to Bethlehem. Ruth's reputation of going above and beyond to care for Naomi and trust in the Lord quickly becomes known to Boaz, and a romance blossoms]*

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

David, if you didn't know, is a big deal. He's the 2nd king of Israel, but by far the most well-known. Although he was far from perfect, he was known as a man after God's heart. He loved God passionately, and authored much of the Book of Psalms. Within the covenants that had already been made with Israel - God made a special covenant with David that he will bless his descendants, and that from his line will be established an everlasting throne.

This is important because as we'll see, things kind of take a roller coaster ride after that.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**, *[that's Bathsheba.]*

Uriah was a hittite, but also one of the "mighty men" recruited into David's army. Unfortunately, in a very low moment of David's life he betrays Uriah by sleeping with his wife, and then when she gets pregnant, instead of owning up to his mistake to his friend, he has Uriah killed.

Not a stellar moment for David, but an important one because they have David's son Solomon who becomes one of the wisest kings in Israel's history. He's generally looked on favorably, but he was also a bit harsh, maybe a tad dramatic like his dad, and definitely gets his weakness for lust from his father.

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam, *[Rehoboam was just awful; it was under his bad leadership that the kingdom split into 2 - Israel and Judah. ALL Israel's kings end up being unfaithful to God, but much of that may have been avoided if Rehoboam hadn't fractured the kingdom. He's also known for his unfaithfulness to God]*

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, *[J was a GREAT king - he brought Judah back to faithfulness and ushered them into a time of peace and prosperity, and even makes significant strides in improving relationship with the rest of Israel, but by this point they've really gone astray; His biggest weakness is having too much faith in people. He marries his son Jehoram off to the king of Israel's daughter - and Jehoram turns away from God and just tanks all the progress Jehoshaphat made]*

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah, *[3 other kings between J & Uzziah, all awful]*
⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, *[a good king who trusted in the Lord. He ruled in Judah and helped to resist the Assyrian army even when the Northern tribes fell to them. Later in his life Hezekiah gets sick but then is miraculously healed when he asks God for a few more years. Afterward, however, his pride gets the best of him and he shows off his blessings and wealth to a Babylonian ambassador who came to congratulate him on his recovery. The prophet Isaiah tells him that although he won't see it with his own eyes, his vanity will result in Judah falling to the Babylonians years later.]*

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹ and Josiah the *[grand]*father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. *[Josiah was faithful king, but his sons cement the pattern of continued disobedience. And after several prophetic warnings and calls for repentance from God. The Lord allows the nation of Babylon to take what is left of the Jewish people into captivity.]*

It's at this point that the story begins to get the most concerning for God's people. Things had already headed down a tumultuous path. The kingdom split up, and the Northern tribes were getting into all sorts of idolatrous hijinks.

But at least there was the Kingdom in Judah - and as long as a son of David sat on the throne, there was hope.

The Exile threw everything into a tailspin. Jerusalem was captured. The King was deposed, a puppet ruler for Babylon was installed. The Temple was destroyed. And everyone with any skill or education was hauled off to Babylon - exiled in a foreign land.

¹² After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, [*Zerubbabel, gov'd Judah as a Pers. province and led return to Jerusalem allowed by Cyrus. He apparently ran into some difficulty and was later replaced as governor by Nehemiah - a Jewish man who had served as Cupbearer to Persian king Artexerxes.*]

¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, [After this, David's family line falls into relative obscurity. There is no longer a monarchy, and there is little need to keep up with it while they are in occupation.

The following 9 names are known only from Matthew - nowhere else in OT or other Jewish literature. He likely had access to records stored in the Temple that were destroyed when the Temple was demolished by Romans in 70AD.]

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵ Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ 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 Messiah.

Let's Pray. Lord, we praise you for a salvation story that rings through time.

A family with a promise of blessing.

A people saved by God's mighty hand.

A nation marked out for faithfulness.

A kingly line, with an everlasting promise

... imperiled by leaders who turned away.

A hope silenced in years of dismay.

But then bursting forth in a small forgotten corner of the Roman empire.

Jesus, the Messiah.

Jesus, the hope of nations, who has captured our hearts and given new life.

As we remember the gift of Jesus' coming, may we long for the day when He'll return.

May you speak to us this morning through Your Word. Amen

This is not a passage we tend to reflect on, because it's importance is not always immediately evident to us. But Matthew was originally writing to Jewish Christians who were eager to learn about how this Jesus could be the Messiah they'd been waiting for. And not only that, but what kind of Savior and King would he be?

I. JESUS IS LORD OF ALL

There's a few things that we should know about Matthew's work here to really appreciate it.

First, the 3 sections of 14 generations is important. Matthew is very intentional about breaking this up into 14s because that's a special # for the Messianic prophecy.

Jews in the 1st century loved working with numerology in the Hebrew, and each letter of the Hebrew alphabet would correspond to a #. When you add up the letters in David's name, guess what # you get...14!

Matthew wanted to really drive home that Jesus was the Messiah descended from David's line, so he made sure to highlight this number just to drive home his point. We actually even know that left out at least a few names from the king's section just to make it fit. There are 3 kings missing after Joash and another after Josiah.

His creativity there with the structure of this genealogy doesn't mean it's any less accurate.

The point of most Jewish genealogies is to establish a legal record of inheritance, and it was a well-known practice to condense these lists where possible to make it easier to memorize and communicate.

Father here can just as easily refer to a grandfather or great-grandfather, especially if there's enough certainty about those links.

It's not surprising that he focuses so much on David; nor that he skips some generations. What IS surprising is that he notes some people you wouldn't think - particularly in regards to the women included in the list.

It's unconventional for him to have mentioned women at all in his genealogy - that just wasn't the typical practice. But you would have thought if ANY WOMAN was mentioned, it might have been someone like Sarah, or Rebekah, or even Leah - Judah's mom.

Instead, we get mentions of some women with pretty scandalous stories. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba ALL have some scandal in their lives, and it's questionable that any of them are Jewish. Tamar was believed to be Canaanite. Rahab was from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba might have been Jewish but was at least originally married to a Hittite. And ALL of them, whether the scandal around them was well-founded or not, showed themselves to be pious and faithful.

Matthew is careful to highlight these women for TWO reasons: [1] He wants to reinforce that even while scandal around Mary's pregnancy is ill-founded, it's completely consistent for God to work within situations that some would look at with raised eyebrows. And [2] this Messiah that is born TO the Jews is not *only* a Messiah FOR the Jews.

JESUS IS LORD OF ALL.

That's where this is interesting for all us Non-Jewish readers in the modern world. All of these individuals - great, scandalous, known outsiders, insiders barely known at all - they're all are part of the family tree of our wonderful savior.

And if the Lord emerged from such a family, what would make you think He wouldn't welcome you into it? [PAUSE]

Matthew goes above and beyond proving that Jesus is the awaited Messiah of the Jewish people. Jesus is the Messiah for the whole world. He's the Savior for you and for me.

II. GOD'S HOPE LASTS LONGER THAN OURS

Preparing for this message got me reflecting quite a bit on my own family tree. This has always been a weird subject for me because my family really just doesn't talk much about our history. I couldn't really tell you much about either side of my family past 2 generations.

Some people get really into genealogy, but the truth is that all family trees eventually trail off into a question mark.

I don't know anything about most of the folks that came before me. Even if I did know their names, I couldn't tell you anything about what their lives meant, what their professions were.

I was comforted by the fact that even while this list was super thorough, there wasn't much more than names listed for the last third of Jesus' family line.

For this last portion of Jesus' family tree, Matthew isn't just interested in linking Jesus' to all these famous figures before Him. Matthew wants us to feel the weight of the silence. He wants us to reflect on the fact that this salvation has been years, centuries, a millenia in the making.

GOD'S HOPE LASTS LONGER THAN OURS DOES

This is one of the reasons that the season of Advent is SO important. Beyond all the excitement and commercialization of the Christmas season is the remembrance that God DOES fulfill His promises. Even when it feels like our last hope died out years ago - God says, I am not yet done. I will still yet be faithful, and I will not forget my promises.

In Israel's long wait for Jesus reminds us that the hope of God's salvation in our lives is far more enduring than we can imagine. No matter how hopeless you feel your situation is, no matter how long it has been, the Lord can still bring restoration.

So as we begin this Advent season, the best way we can prepare ourselves to remember and understand Jesus' birth is to pause and reflect on all that has come before.

To remember the silence where hope speaks the loudest.

III. BE STILL AND KNOW THAT HE IS GOD

The problem is WE DON'T LIKE QUIET THESE DAYS. We avoid it like germs or bad news. We fill our lives with noise. Interruptions from our interruptions.

They did a study in 2000 on human attention spans and found that the average person has an attention span of about 12 seconds. They recreated the study about a decade later and the number went down from 12 seconds to 8. In comparison, there's actually data that says a goldfish's attention span is about 9 seconds... let that sink in for a second.

University of Virginia and Harvard did a study to measure people's discomfort with being still and quiet. For the experiment, they were asking participants to sit in an empty room at stare out a window for the hellacious amount of 5 minutes.

To make it more interesting, before the experiment, they administered to everyone an electric shock - not harmful, but painful. They asked participants to rate the shock on a scale of "not so bad" to "I would pay to avoid that". Here's the fun part - they only used the participants who said they'd pay to avoid it for the rest of the study.

And as they were asked to sit for 5 minutes, they were given a buzzer and told that if the boredom becomes too overwhelming, they can press the button to receive an electric shock to pass the time.

70% of men end up shocking themselves. 30% of women did - which really just tells you everything you need to know about the difference between men and women.

ARE WE MISSING IT?

Psalms 46:10 reminds us of the wisdom of stillness, "BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD."

In our rush and busyness, are we missing what God is doing? In our inability to be still, are we missing the faithfulness of God?

It's stillness that allows us to appreciate the blessings in our lives.

It's stillness that allows us to really see and understand the need of others around us.

And above all else, it's stillness that reveals to us the heart of God.

CONCLUSION

Related - how many of you have heard the phrase, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."?

In a similar vein, I once heard this tidbit of wisdom, "Most of all you should be kind. But if you can't be kind at least be honest. If you can't be honest, at least be quiet. And if you can't be

quiet, then it's no wonder you're not honest and kind - because it's silence that humbles us, and it reminds us that our hope is only found in Christ."

I pray that this season would be filled with intentionality, with choosing to be still - to long for, wait for the presence of God to meet you. To be humbled and to be filled with hope.