

## Title: “From Sinners, For Sinners”

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Joshua 6, Matthew 1:1-17

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**Lesson:** *Our obedient Christ comes to us through sinners, to sinners. He comes from a line of sinners and that line extends past the pages of Matthew to include His church. Through our baptism in Christ's death and resurrection, we are included in that lineage and active in that story that starts at Genesis, to Christmas, to His crucifixion, to Easter and now anticipates its final chapter at the end of the age.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

You never have a second chance to make a first impression. I can only imagine that this phrase or even this idea was nonexistent during the time of Matthew's writing. How else could you excuse the opening chapter of his book? He clearly was not aiming for the NY bestsellers list and he had to have known that any movie produced in the future would have cut this section out completely. How many of you even skip it when you read the book? It's seemingly just a list of names, a genealogy from Abraham to Jesus. So why then did he include it? And why did he *start* with it? Why did he think that *this* would present his best foot forward?

To answer that you have to know more about Matthew. Before meeting Jesus, this guy was in a tough spot in life. He was a tax collector which meant he had very few friends. The Romans hated him because he was a Jew and the Jews hated him because he collected money for the Roman government. That, and most tax collectors made their money by overcharging everyone and keeping the excess. You couldn't get much lower than a tax collector. Matthew even records Jesus affirming this in a lesson that he gave. He was teaching the crowd how to confront someone who sinned against you. Jesus provides an escalation path, of sorts but then ends with this: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Yes. Matthew was despised and rejected by society.

It was *because* of his standing in the community. It was *because* he was hated by the world. That is why he *had* to start with the genealogy of Jesus. It was *that important* to the gospel story that Matthew was about to tell. He knew that there were people like him in the world, and that there would *always* be people like him in the world. They may not be tax collectors, but they would be just as bad - just as sinful. Just like him, they needed to hear this message of forgiveness and hope.

And so, Matthew starts with the most powerful statement he could make. Screaming from the list of ancestry is *this* message: Jesus came *through* sinners. Jesus came *through* sinners *for* sinners.

Matthew knew that his only hope for salvation, his only hope for self-worth would have to be found in Jesus because it could not be found anywhere else. Society despised him. The world hated him.

He could never redeem himself. There was nothing he could do to fix the situation he was in. All hope was lost. Nothing he could do to change his standing before the Jewish community. His standing before men was known, but what about his standing before God? If Jesus couldn't save him, if Jesus *wouldn't* save him, if Jesus came from a royal bloodline or through perfect people, then all hope was lost for Matthew. And all hope was lost for the rest of the world's sinners. But Matthew knew that hope wasn't lost for him. On the contrary he held firm to the promise of salvation won on the cross. Through faith he knew that he was saved and a place for him was reserved in heaven. And if *he* could be saved, if he could receive that hope and assurance then it was a message, a gospel that had to be proclaimed. And it had to start with the ending: Jesus came through sinners for sinners. There can be no other starting point than this for his gospel.

And so, he starts with Abraham. A man righteous before God. A man chosen by God to be the Father of all Christ's people. But not all of the descendants could stand as tall as Abraham before God. We read about Rahab in our OT passage tonight. She was clearly not an upstanding citizen. She was a prostitute. Why would she be included in Matthew's list? Because it destroyed any argument that any pharisee or Christian or anyone would have about self-righteousness. We play no part in God's work of justification. Our standing before him is based on him alone, we are completely passive in that work.

These men and these women were far from sinless, far from blameless, far from deserving to be included in Jesus' lineage. Rahab was as sinful as Matthew, as inconsequential to the world as he was. And yet Jesus came through her lineage.

But he knew even more than that. We read the opening of his gospel, but the ending is just as telling. The last sentence of the book reads like this:

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in<sup>in</sup> the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew wrote these bookends to give hope to the hopeless, freedom to the enslaved. He opened and closed his message this way because he was one of the sinners that needed to hear this message of salvation and restoration. Jesus came to rescue the troubled, heal the injured, and find the lost. Jesus came for *Matthew* and he came for *us*.

Don't miss this next point because it is so easy to do so. Matthew drew a line that began in the ancient past, extended to his time, but then with the last sentence in his book, makes it clear that *we* become attached to this story. Jesus came *through* sinners in history past *for* sinners in present and future. God came *through* sinners to save us. We are part of God's story of salvation. Our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus connects us to this story. Make no mistake, the meaning that Matthew found in Christ is offered to us. The same forgiveness of sins that Jesus bestowed on Matthew is offered to us. And every time we gather around the table of God, every time we partake in the Lord's supper, we are assured once again that we *are* part of this story. That we are the sinners that Jesus came to for.

Over the next few weeks we will explore the lives of just a few of these people in the line of Christ. Tonight, we read about Rahab and next week we will read about Bathsheba. In the week that follows we will conclude with Joseph. These were ordinary people, like you and me. These were sinful people, like you and me. These were restored and forgiven people, just like you and me. I hope you will join me over these next two weeks as we continue to explore the lineage of our savior.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You have come to us through a lineage of sinners. A line that extends past the opening pages of Matthew to include all your church for all time. Through our baptism in your death and resurrection, we are included in that lineage and active in that story that started in Genesis, continued on to Christmas, to your crucifixion, to Easter and now anticipates its final chapter at the end of the age. Lord, we thank you for your gracious work of salvation and look forward to the day when we will be in your presence for all eternity. In your name we pray. Amen.