

Lesson 1 Lecture  
Matthew 1:1-17; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:1-80

Good morning!/Good evening! It's great seeing all of you today! Seeing the familiar faces is a treat, and seeing the new faces is a special blessing. I love all of the POW Bible studies, but this year's is going to be a very special one. Since we are covering the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we are, in effect, going to be like the disciples for the next 30 weeks. We're going to be walking with Jesus and getting to know Him more and more intimately. Admittedly, 30 weeks of a focused Bible study can seem like a long time, but I can assure you it is worth your investment. As Carol encouraged you last week, try not to get freaked out by the homework. Each day's work should only take about 10 minutes.

However, even if you don't get the homework done, please come. You will still be blessed by the discussions in the groups and what the lecturers have to say (that is unless I don't put you to sleep!) If you are willing to make yourself available to allow God to feed you the truth of His Word, I can assure you He will do exactly that. What did Jesus promise to all of us in Revelation 3:20? "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*" This year's POW is going to be a Word of God smorgasbord for all of us! Are you ready to be fed by your Savior?

The title to our lesson is "*The Royal Line: 400 years of Silence is Broken*". We last heard from God in the book of Malachi. It has been about 400 years leading up to the time of Jesus' arrival. Have you ever wondered what God was doing all those years? Carol shared a little bit of the history last week. The Apostle Peter told us a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day to the Lord. So if we do the math,  $400/1,000$  means 40% of a day, or 9.6 hours. Was God taking a long nap? This is an important point we need to keep in mind when we don't think we're hearing from God. Just because God isn't talking doesn't mean

He's not paying attention or He's not up to something **good**. He was quiet to the Jews for 400 years, but boy was He cooking up the greatest event in human history! Waiting on God can be tough, but if we are willing to trust His goodness towards us, we can find comfort and, hopefully, patience that our waiting on Him will produce something amazing.

We begin with the first 17 verses of chapter 1 of Matthew. This is a presentation of the genealogy of *Joseph*. Why would Matthew start with a genealogy? Matthew is writing this Gospel to the Jews to prove to them that Jesus is the promised and long awaited Messiah. Our homework pointed out the covenants made to Abraham and David regarding the promise of a coming member of their lineage Who would bless all nations from Genesis 22:18. The homework also offers one of the promises to David regarding the coming Messiah in Psalm 132:11. 2 Samuel offers a little more detail on God's unconditional covenant with David, "*When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*" (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

Since Matthew was writing this Gospel to the Jews, he knew they would know that the Messiah would have to come through the line of Abraham and David. Therefore, he presents the genealogical proof that Jesus is descended from both Abraham and David. For some of you Bible scholars, you may be thinking there's a problem with this proof. Let's take a look at verse 16 of Matthew 1, "*and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.*" Matthew carefully points out that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. He was "*the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.*" This is a vitally important point, which I am going to cover in a few minutes. Some of you, though, might be wondering that

since Joseph is not Jesus' father, why put in *his* genealogy? The purpose was to demonstrate that on both sides of Jesus' parent's family trees, they were descendants of Abraham and David. He wanted to demonstrate Jesus' qualifications as the promised heir to David's throne.

In Chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel, Dr. Luke presents *Mary's* genealogy. This is covered lightly in Lesson 3. There is an important difference in the genealogical line between Joseph's and Mary's. Joseph's line goes through David's son, **Solomon**. Included in that line, as noted in verse 11, is Jeconiah. Jeconiah is also known as Jehoiachin. Jeremiah 22:30 says this about Jehoiachin, "*This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.*" Jehoiachin was an especially wicked king, and the Lord judged his wickedness by not making it possible that the Messiah would come through his seed. Mary's genealogy goes through David's son, **Nathan**. There are no curses or judgments that prevent the Messiah coming through Nathan's seed. Given Mary is the biological mother of Jesus, this difference from Joseph's genealogy is very important to qualify Jesus as the Messiah from a genealogical perspective.

The homework points out in question 5 something that was rarely done by the Jews in documenting genealogical lines – the inclusion of *women*. Until Jesus came on the scene, women were at best second-class citizens. I find it amusing that much of today's modern feminism turns its nose up to Christian values in terms of women's roles in the home and society. No one in history did more for elevating women to their rightful roles than Jesus Christ. Jesus had no problem talking with women – something that was frowned upon by even His disciples. Who is the first documented evangelist? Mary Magdalene who after seeing the tomb was empty went and told the disciples that Jesus was no longer there. Throughout the Gospels

and the rest of the New Testament women are noted for their active participation in the church and in the Kingdom of God. Oh...and one more thing about these women – they were all gentiles!

Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and tricked Judah into impregnating her for him to honor the commitment to carry on his dead sons' lineage. So Tamar's methods of being in the Kingly line of Jesus' genealogy weren't exactly wholesome were they? Yet, she is in there.

Rahab didn't have to dress up as a prostitute – she was one. She was a Canaanite who provided a place to hide for the Jews who were spying on the land of Jericho. Because of her willingness to help the spies, she was spared from being killed. She would go on to marry Boaz. Boaz would later marry Ruth, who is the 3<sup>rd</sup> woman mentioned. Ruth was a good woman. The final woman isn't mentioned by name, but for those of you who were here in last year's lesson, you will recognize "Uriah's wife" as Bathsheba. She was the one who David had an adulterous affair with.

What do you think God's purpose was to include these four women in this genealogy? I believe it is to demonstrate the grace of God. God can and will use anyone He chooses to accomplish His good purposes and will. If any of you think you're not eligible to be used by God due to your past or your family's past, then you are listening to Satan's lies. The Son of God – the Savior of the world, came through a mess of very flawed people – even Abraham and David. I think Jesus turned out ok, don't you? In Vickie's and my immediate generation of brothers and sisters and going back just *one* generation we have alcoholism, significant drug use, physical abuse, atheism, Mormonism, multiple divorces, and emotional dysfunction that would confound Sigmund Freud. Yet here we are today – she leads her group and I'm up here teaching God's Word. What was our memory verse today? Nothing is impossible with God. Can I have an Amen!

Jumping into Luke's Gospel, we are introduced to two very special people – Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both of them were descendants of Aaron – the priestly line. Luke wrote the following, which we should all hope would be written about us, "*Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.*" (Luke 1:6) These two beautiful people are clearly highly favored by God. Yet, they have lived for no doubt decades unable to produce a child because Elizabeth was barren. In this culture, barrenness was looked upon as a curse from God, and it was actually acceptable for a man to get a divorce from a woman who could not produce a child. The fact that Zechariah stayed with Elizabeth into their old age tells us he loved her and was a man of integrity. For those of us who wonder why God is not blessing us when we want to be blessed, we must not listen to Satan telling us we're being punished because we are not living in a manner that is pleasing to God. This is what Satan does – he relentlessly seeks to deceive us and tempt us to not believe in the true character of God. God may be silent, but that does not mean He's not at work seeking to bless you.

The Bible is full of examples of Godly people going through extended times of real suffering. People like Joseph – Jacob's son, Job, David being pursued by Saul, John the Baptist, the apostles, and, oh yeah, this one guy named Jesus. Bad times and trials do not necessarily mean you have done something wrong before the Lord. It's quite possible God is allowing persecution and difficult times to prepare you for something important for His Kingdom. Nobody likes the tough times, and God takes no joy whatsoever in allowing pain and suffering in our lives. I don't know about you, but the most lasting lessons I have learned have been the painful ones – not the easy ones. Here we read that Zechariah and Elizabeth are beautiful Godly people, but they have been suffering for years the pain and shame

of not being able to produce a child. Their prayers have gone unanswered – until now.

One of the most privileged duties of a priest was to burn incense inside the temple of the Lord. For many, this particular duty only comes available once in a lifetime. Zechariah was burning the incense, and suddenly he was in the presence of the angel of the Lord. We'll learn this is Gabriel. I have never seen an angel of the Lord, but it must be awesome because based on the number of angel of the Lord appearances in Scripture, it seems the natural reaction to seeing one is to be afraid. Yet, I find great comfort that, without exception, the initial words from the angel is to tell the person to *not* be afraid. This is the case in Luke 1:13a, "*Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.*" No doubt Zechariah and Elizabeth have been praying for many years to have a child. From their perspective, the evidence of their prayers has been God has said "no". That must have been devastating to them as they were living in a manner that would seem worthy of God blessing them with a child. That's the human perspective, and it is limited to only what *we* can see. What we can't see is God's perspective, and that is the only perspective that really matters. The reason I can say that is if God is good, *and He is*, and God is love, *and He is*, and His plans for us are to prosper us and not harm us, *and they are*, then I should be totally ok with God's perspective. This is how we find comfort in waiting on the Lord – we so trust His character and unfailing love towards us, we can find peace and patience by the Holy Spirit within us while God sorts out His plans to prosper us.

The angel of the Lord continues in verse 13b, "*Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.*" (Luke 1:13b-15a) Not only are they finally going to get the child they've been praying for throughout the years, this child is going to be someone very

special to the Lord. Again, Zechariah and Elizabeth wanted the immediate blessing. In their *waiting* on the Lord, God *maximized* the blessing beyond what they could have hoped for. Gabriel told Zechariah that the child's name was to be John. The name used in the original text was "Johanan", which means *the Lord is gracious*.

The angel goes on to tell Zechariah that the child is not to take wine or any other fermented drink, that He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born, and he lays out his son's life mission. This mission is spelled out in Luke 1:16-17, "*He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*" The Jewish leaders called into question John the Baptist's identity in John's Gospel as they were marveling at the success of his ministry. He confessed he was not the Messiah, and when they asked him if he was Elijah, he said "no".

The last words from God in the Old Testament were from Malachi 4:5-6, "*See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.*" John the Baptist is not Elijah, but he was operating in the *spirit* and the *power* of Elijah. He was the promised one from Isaiah 40:3, "*A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*" Jesus told us His opinion of John, "*Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.*" (Matthew 11:11a)

After hearing this amazing message from Gabriel, Zechariah asks him how can this be because he and Elizabeth are old. Gabriel tells him he will not speak

again because he did not believe his words. There's an important distinction we need to point out at this junction. Later, we are going to see Mary is going to ask a question of Gabriel when she hears the news she is going to become pregnant without knowing a man. Zechariah's question was based on doubt. Mary's question would be about how the process would work. She believed, but she wanted some clarity as to how she was to become pregnant. God has no problems with us asking Him questions. In fact, He encourages and welcomes questions. However, if the questions come from a place of doubt or seeking to trip Him up, He doesn't have much patience for those questions. The process of knowing God, or anyone else for that matter, *should* include a long series of questions to help us gain an understanding of Who He really is. But these questions should be sincere and motivated by the desire to know the truth – not of pre-judgment or a refusal to believe.

If Gabriel's first message was amazing, what he was about to announce was going to change the course of human history. We learn that Mary is living in Nazareth, and she is pledged to Joseph. In the time of Christ, there were three stages of relationships between a man and a woman.

1. Engagement – this could happen at anytime - even very young – it was very common that marriages were arranged
2. Espousal – this would last one year prior to betrothal - more like today's idea of engagement. To break an espousal - required a writ of divorce.
3. Betrothal – the actual marriage

Joseph and Mary are currently in the espousal stage. She was likely 15 or 16 years old at this time. Mary was no doubt an extraordinarily spiritually beautiful and pure woman. Because of the Catholic church's elevation of Mary as a co-redemptrix or someone to be prayed to, many within the Protestant church have

taken an unfair dismissal of Mary. No, she was not on the same level of Jesus, but she was the chosen one of God the Father to carry and parent His only begotten Son. Gabriel confirms God's opinion of her in verse 27b, "*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*" Don't we all want to hear that from God or an angel of God? Well, I have the privilege to tell you that ***you are!*** Do you know this? As a follower of Christ, you are an adopted child of God. You have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. You are deeply loved and cared for by the Creator of the heavens and earth! Our circumstances may not give us evidence of this, but as we see in today's reading, we cannot trust our circumstances to reveal the truth of God's love and devotion to us. That's why we must regularly pay a visit to the Cross of Christ to remind ourselves how truly favored and blessed we are. If God was willing to send His Son to die for our sins, then we must have some serious value to Him. If you don't take anything else I say from this lecture, please remember that you are highly favored and loved!

Just as he did with Zechariah & Elizabeth, Gabriel gave Mary a preview of what this Child's life will be in verses 31-33, "*You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.*" Notice the importance of the name in Gabriel's messages to Zechariah and Mary. The first thing he tells them after the news they are going to have a child is their names. Naming a child was a big deal in this culture. The name given would either have a connection with someone of the family's history, or the name had a specific meaning or purpose to it. The Hebrew name for Jesus was Jehoshua, which means *Jehovah is salvation*. This ties in nicely with Psalm 27:1a, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?*" So you have John, which means the Lord is gracious, and you have Jesus, which means Jehovah is salvation, you put the two

together the two, and you get “*the Lord Jehovah is gracious in salvation*”. Pretty cool, huh?

In telling Mary that Jesus will be given the throne of his father David, he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever, and his kingdom will never end, Gabriel is telling her that she is to give birth to the Messiah. This was the hope and dream of every young Jewish girl – to be the blessed mother of the Messiah. You are probably familiar with the saying, “*Be careful what you hope or wish for.*” I’m certain Mary’s vision of what it would be like to be the mother of the Messiah was very different than the one Gabriel was about to lay out before her. This began with how she would become pregnant – the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and cause her to become pregnant. For this to be the Messiah, His conception had to happen this way because Isaiah 7:14 foretold it, “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*”

Gabriel goes on to tell Mary that her relative, Elizabeth, is with child, and she is six months pregnant. Gabriel’s final words are our memory verse and a foundational truth of our faith, “*For nothing is impossible with God.*” (Luke 1:37) This translation of this verse is what grammarians call a “double-negative”. Another way to say this is “*Everything is possible with God.*” I am not a big fan of the NIV version, but I actually *like* its interpretation, “*For no word from God will ever fail.*” Mary needed to hear this because despite the joyous news of being given the honor of carrying the Messiah, there were going to be serious challenges and complications. As we mentioned earlier, Mary was espoused to Joseph at this time. Under Jewish law, Mary’s pregnancy without being with Joseph would make her guilty of adultery and could be stoned. Despite knowing this, Mary accepted Gabriel’s news with humility and grace, “*I am the Lord’s servant....May your word to me be fulfilled.*” (Luke 1:38)

Mary goes to meet with her cousin Elizabeth, and upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth's baby leaped for joy in her womb. This is a fascinating detail of the accounting of this period of Mary's life and is evidence that this part of Luke's Gospel is almost certainly coming from Mary herself telling the story to Dr. Luke. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies over Mary. She ends her comments with an important statement, "*Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!*" (Luke 1:45) What was it that made Mary blessed? – That she *believed*. Mary did nothing to do or politic for this honor. She saw the grace of God and chose to believe it to be true. Folks, what makes us blessed, what gets us saved, what makes us children of God has absolutely nothing to do with how good we are or what we do. Grace isn't grace if it is worked for. Our only "work" when it comes to being blessed is to **believe**. Yes, it is *that* simple.

Verses 46-56 present what is known as the *Magnificat*. It is a beautiful and extraordinary outburst of praise to God. It also is a remarkable presentation of the character of God. Remember, Mary is likely only 15 or 16 years old! This is clear evidence of why God chose her to carry His Son. In the interest of time, I'm not going to go over this section in detail. However, if you're in a place where you are struggling to think of ways to praise God, reading over these 10 verses is a good way to refresh your perspective.

Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, and her neighbors and relatives wanted to name him after her husband, Zechariah. When Elizabeth tells the people his name was to be John, they challenge her because there was no one among hers or Zechariah's relatives with that name. Then all these people finally show some courtesy and ask Zechariah what the baby's name should be. Remember, he has not been able to talk since he doubted Gabriel's message. By confirming his name would be John, Zechariah got his voice back. Notice what the first thing Zechariah

does upon getting his voice back – to praise God. This blows the mind of the people and causes them to wonder what kind of child this was going to be. Dr. Luke adds a very important and encouraging word that we all could use in Verse 1:66b, “*For the Lord’s hand was with him.*” We see the judgment of God on Zechariah due to his unbelief, but then we see the grace and forgiveness of God in response to Zechariah’s public statement of belief. Even though Zechariah was judged for his unbelief, the Lord’s hand was still with him. Today’s quick-to-shame, judge, “God’s abandoned you” culture has masked the truth that while God will discipline us, it does not mean He doesn’t love us or His protective hand is not with us.

Zechariah is then filled with the Holy Spirit, and he begins to prophesy through a song. In verses 68-75, Zechariah’s words are focused on the Lord and His deliverance. Beginning in verse 76, he turns his prophetic words towards his son, John, and the life he is going to live. Verse 77 is a strong prophecy, “*to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.*” Think about these words at this point of our story. There is no cross, and there is no Jesus. However, God has given to Zechariah the revelation that salvation comes through the forgiveness of sin. This verse leads me into my closing.

The topic of the virgin birth of Jesus is absolutely vital to the fullness of the truth of the Gospel. God put into place the system of substitutional sacrifice for sin prior to unleashing the 10<sup>th</sup> plague on the Egyptians. To avoid the angel of death that was to kill the firstborn human/animal of every household, the Jews were instructed to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts of their homes. The angel of death would pass over those homes with the blood of the sacrifice and spare those in those homes. This is what is known with the Jews as the “Passover”. The sacrificial animal couldn’t just be any animal. From Exodus 12, the sacrificial animal must be “***without defect***”. For Jesus to be the perfect

sacrifice for us, He had to be without defect. What did Pilate say about Jesus, “*I find no fault in Him.*” How about Judas Iscariot after realizing the betrayal he committed, “*I have betrayed innocent blood.*” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “*God made Him who had no sin, to be sin for us.*”

Here’s the thing, folks, if the sacrificial animal was flawed in any way, then it was not deemed acceptable by the priest. Jesus’ resurrection was the “stamp of approval” from God the Father that due to Him being unblemished – without sin – He was the acceptable sacrifice. His pure shed blood didn’t just cover our sins – it washed them all – past, present, and future - as white as snow. If Jesus had sin in Him or was flawed, He would still be in the grave, and we would be stuck in our sins with no forgiveness. There is, tragically and dangerously, a material portion of the church today that does not see the virgin birth of Jesus as a vital piece of the salvation process. They emphasize that it is only the resurrection that matters. My point is this, if Jesus was not the perfect and spotless Lamb of God – free from sin because of the Holy Spirit’s pure seed impregnating Mary and His rejecting all temptation during His life – then the resurrection **does not** happen. The entire story has to be true, or the entire story falls apart.

In closing, I would like to present you a challenge for this year’s Bible study. My challenge is for you to take a piece of paper or open up a writing document on your computer, tablet, or phone and write at the top “*What Jesus Teaches Me About God*”. Since Jesus is God, He is the example of God’s true character. What was Jesus’ response to Phillip’s request to show the disciples the Father? “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?*” (John 14:9-10) Jesus also said in John 10:30, “*I and the Father are one.*” Whatever we learn about Jesus, we are learning about God. Below the title to this page, you are to write/type what you

learn about God through Jesus. For example, one of my observations is, *God is a promise/covenant keeper.*

If you can, I would strongly urge you to write on the right side of what you've learned the Bible verse(s) that support or back up what you've learned. I quoted – Matthew 1:1-17 for this example as the genealogy is a proof that Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah. As you go through the lessons, I am challenging you to allow God to reveal Himself through His Son His true character.

While I can't promise the rest of the lecturers will do this, at the end of each my lectures this year, I'll provide you my list. You may have more or less than I do, and that is fine. This challenge is meant to help you make God more personal to you through an understanding of God's character. By doing this, your faith is undoubtedly going to grow because your trust in Who God truly is will grow. Romans 10:17 promises, "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*" The second question on today's homework was asking you "What are your goals for this year's Bible study?" Mine includes filling out this list of things Jesus teaches me about God. If you take filling out this list seriously each week, you are going to develop an amazing character study of God – all backed by Scripture. I am believing for you if you choose to regularly review this list, your relationship with God will explode in greater faith, trust, and intimacy with Him. Your life will never be the same. God designed us to have a relationship with Him, so the maximum possibilities of our lives are only available if we are daily walking with and communing with Him. We will only do this if we trust Him. If you seriously take up this challenge, I guaranty your understanding of the true character of God will build your faith in Him will grow as you trust Him more. I hope you do this.

Ok - so here is my list of the things Jesus taught me about God in this lesson. I've already given you my first one:

- God is a promise/covenant keeper – Matthew 1:1-17
- Our dark past is no match for God’s grace – Matthew 1:3,5,6
- God desires to offer salvation. Jesus is the Messiah and was God’s only begotten Son – Luke 1:32
- His virgin birth proves nothing is impossible with God – Luke 1:37
- God can and will do miracles – Luke 1:31
- This last one is not directly related to Jesus, but I believe it is an important truth we need to believe. God listens to prayers even when we don’t think He is – Luke 1:13

I encourage each of you to begin this list – it will turn into a journal.

Ultimately, you will have an incredible and personal reference to remind you how much God loves you and cares for you. Think that’s worth your time? Let’s pray.