

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

I Wonder

PART

1

TITLE

I Wonder, Am I Significant?

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1-17



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Well, it's great to see all of you. For those of you who call Providence home, it's great to see your face again. If you're new with us, welcome. We're thrilled that you've joined us. I hope that you had a great week and you are all people of courage. You're not only in town but you came on a morning like today and so I want to say thank you. I know that some of you woke up this morning wondering and hoping if I was going to look at Matthew chapter one and really cover the whole genealogy of Jesus, and I don't want to disappoint.

So if you have a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Matthew chapter one we're going to look at the first 17 verses of this Christmas story as we officially launch into a new series. It's called, I wonder. All of us wonder, we wonder about a great many things while we live in this broken world. We wonder if we're making the right choices for our life. We wonder how those choices will eventually play out. We wonder what the future holds. We wonder how long our past mistakes are going to haunt us.

We wonder about our children. We wonder if they're going to be successful. We wonder if they're safe. We wonder if they're making good decisions when we're not watching them. We wonder if we're going to have enough to retire. We wonder if we're ever going to get married, if we're going to have kids. We wonder why we feel so anxious. We wonder where God is and what God's doing and why God's waiting and why we see injustice and unfairness in the world.

There's a great many things that we wonder. We all wonder, but let me ask you this. If all the things that I've just talked about or maybe others, what is the one thing that dominates your consciousness when you wonder? When you look out and you see the world and you see things that you wish you had an answer, what's the one thing that you constantly go to and say, "You know what? There's a lot of things that I can live without, but one thing I wonder about, I wonder about this."

Every one of us wonder. Every human being that's ever walked the face of this earth and every culture and every time has wondered, including the individuals that form the Christmas story. You see the people who are in the Christmas story, they didn't apply for the part. They're just living their life and God was moving at a point in time and suddenly their life intersected with the birth of Jesus Christ and they too wondered about the same things, many of the same things that we wonder about.

And so over the next month we're going to look at just a few things that you and I often wonder about while we're here on the earth and we can be certain that the people within the Christmas story, they wondered about the same things. And so we're going to try over the month of December to make that connection. When we come to Matthew chapter one though, what we find is a list of 47 names that represent 47 people. People who had dreams, people who had fears, people who had insecurity, people who didn't want to die, and yet all of them did.

People who looked in the mass of humanity and saw people who were prettier than them and more popular than them and more handsome than them and more successful than them, and wondered, “Do I matter? Am I significant?” Some of us, this is the big thing that we wonder about. Some of you, you’re so defeated right now because somebody else is more successful, someone else is more popular, someone else is pretty or someone else is more handsome than you and your estimation. And as a result of that, you wondered, “If I wasn’t here, would anyone care?”

Do I matter? Does my life matter? Am I significant? And this is what we’re going to learn today. So let me pray for us as we get ready. Father, we come to you and specifically we come to you. We need to hear from you. There’s a million voices and there’s a million stages on the earth, but the only voice that we want to hear from is yours. And I pray that you, by your word, that’s been recorded and preserved, it’s inspired, it’s kept, and here we have it in our own hands that it would feed us this morning.

So would you speak through weakness? Would you speak through distractions that we brought into the room? And for those who are downcast and defeated and wondering if their life really matters, I pray, father, that you would answer that question in their own hearts this morning. We pray in Jesus name. Amen. Matthew chapter one starting in verse one says, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac, the father of Jacob, Jacob, the father of Judah, and his brothers. And Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. And Perez, the father of Hezron, and Hezron her on the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. And Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz father of Obed by Ruth. And Obed, the father of Jesse and Jesse, the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

Solomon, the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah. And Abijah, the father of Asa and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram. And Jehoram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham. And Jotham, the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh. And Manasseh the father of Amon. And Amon, the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon, that’s the exile.

After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel. And Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel, the father of Abiud and Abiud the father Eliakim you the father of Eliakim. And Eliakim the father of Azor and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Akim, and Akim the father of Eliud. And Eliud, the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, praise God, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations. Yeah, it's really amazing, isn't it? I agree. So all the generations of Abraham to David were 14 generations. And from David to the deportation of Babylon, 14 generations, and from the deportation of Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations. What does this tell us about your life mattering? And that's what I want to show you is what God does through this text to reinforce to each one of us that you are significant.

First thing we see is that God gives us significance by creating us in his image. If I were to hold up a new invention that you had never seen, you'd never heard about, and you had absolutely no category that arose within your consciousness of what I was holding in my hand. The only way for you to understand the significance of that new invention would be for you to talk to the inventor or to read the owner's manual. And so it is with our life. You and I, we were created in the image of God.

We were created by God. And so to grasp our own significance, the only way to understand our significance is not to assign to ourselves some kind of arbitrary significance. It's to hear from the inventor the significance that he has endowed to our very lives. And so we have to look to God. And when we open up the Bible, at the very beginning in chapter one of the book of Genesis, you get to verse 25 and we're told that God's creating everything, a habitable earth for us to be able to live on.

And what it says there is this, is that God made the beast of the earth according to their kinds. And he made the livestock according to their kinds. And then it says, and God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Same idea according to our kind. In other words, God made things in such a way so that when you see a puppy you learn something about a dog, but when you see a human, you learn something about God. We were created in the image of God. And as a result of that we are endowed with a special kind of significance.

You see, what we're told is that God stamped us with his likeness. Romans one and two says that he literally cut us like channels within us, categories that only make sense because there is a God. It's sort of like a stamping set to where there's a piece of metal and there's some little design at the bottom of it and you take it and you strike it with a hammer and it leaves an impression. It leaves a marking, a likeness upon whatever it is, whether it's metal or whether it's leather.

It's saying that God has stamped us with his likeness, that God who is love and God who is holy, and God who is just, and God who is trustworthy and truthful and eternal and graceful and forgiving and wise. You see, this is why we're different from other created things. We have the capacity to love in ways that no animal is able to love, no tree is able to love. You and I were created by a holy God. And what that means is that when we sin against God, we feel guilt because we violated something that has been stamped within us.

When we see things in the social world, interactions with people where we say, "That's not right." The very reason that we think and say that's not right is because we have a category of rightness, of justice within us so that two different people from different parts of the world, if I went up and slapped a child, both would say that's not right and we don't have to be taught that. It's because it's been stamped upon us. God is eternal and that's why when you go to a funeral, everything in you says it's not supposed to be like this.

It's because we were made to live with him forever. We can forgive because God has forgiven. We can become wise and discerning because he is wise, infinitely wise. We were created in the image of God. And then the Bible does something that's remarkable. It says, okay, so God created this man named Adam and Eve in his image, stamped his impression upon them and then it says, and that impression was transferred from one generation to the next. Five chapters later, this is what we read.

We read, when God created man he made him in the likeness of God. This echoes what we just read in chapter one, but then it goes further and it says, and Adam father to son in his likeness. Now we just read 47 names, the people who one fathered another. And here it says that God creates Adam and then Adam has a son and that son, is says, is in his own likeness. Now the best way for me to show you this because most people through time and in time you can read theology books to where people have had the idea is that because God created Adam and Eve that then we have a part in creating our own offspring that somehow that the likeness of God is diminished as we move further and further away from the garden.

And so many of us... Let me get little stamps that are here. This is Tabitha's little stamps with little E, right? Is we start thinking about our lives and the importance and significance of our lives through history and it sort of looks like this. To at one point in time in history is the impression of God, the likeness of God was so stamped, it was so ingrained upon us that it was rich and it was real. But through subsequent generations there's some kind of diminishing of his likeness over time.

There's been people who have thought these things. And yet God ensures through the pages of scripture that the quality of his likeness is not diminished as it's transferred from one generation to the next. And this is why. Psalm 139 verse 13 says, you formed my inward parts and you knitted me together in my mother's womb. You know what that means? It means when Adam and Eve had their third son, what it says there is that God himself was actively at work in the womb of Eve knitting together a life, creating and stamping the very likeness of God upon every generation.

And this is true of every baby that's ever been conceived, is that God is at work within the womb, giving and bestowing upon every child dignity and personhood. Now this is really important when we come to a text like ours because we see this genealogy of all these generations and we think, "Well, what does all that matter?" And what he's saying is this, is that God is endowed upon all 47 of these individuals and on every single one of us in this room and in the world today with significance.

And our significance is not contingent upon our gender, it's not contingent upon our age, our race, our ethnicity, how beautiful we are, how accomplished we are, or even how honorable we live. Within this text, there are men and women, there are young people and old people, there are Jews and Gentiles. Within this list, there are people who accomplished amazing things on this earth and there are people who accomplished nothing on this earth. Within this list, there are people who lived lives of tremendous honor and dignity, respectability, and there were people who were marked by utter dishonor.

And yet God's, his image was pressed upon every one of these individuals just as it is to us and therefore there's significance. And so let's consider and honor the worth of each human being. Do you see that you're significant, God made you in his image? You see, when we know and understand the worth of each human being, what happens is it changes how we treat each human being beginning with ourselves. Some of us, we feel defeated. We feel like we don't matter. And so you know what we do? Some of us in this room, we harm ourself.

You are harming something of tremendous significance to a holy God. Some of us in the room, we speak down to ourself. We insult ourself. We tell us, "You're terrible. You're a loser. You're never going to amount to anything. You see, you always fail," and we just constantly perpetuate a lie about us to ourself. People who understand that every human being has been stamped by the image of a perfect God, they don't harm themselves and they don't dishonor themselves, nor do we do the same things to other people.

You see, you look around this room and honestly, there's Jews and Gentiles in the room. There's men and women, there's young and old. There are people that may in a social construct be considered more beautiful and less beautiful, more accomplished and less accomplished, more honorable and less honorable. There are people in this room right now who are in a womb, a real womb. We have pregnant moms in the room right now and God's image has been stamped, knitted together within the womb.

When we understand and consider the vast significance of human life inside the womb, outside the womb, young, old, Jew, Gentile, black, white, doesn't matter what it is. Christian, non-Christian, reached unreached. Do you know why we go to the nations? Because there are people who are created in the image of God who have significance that he loved and died for. Were we to be able to determine and assign value to human beings? We may say, "You know what? They're not as important," but they are. And so let's consider and honor the worth of each human being.

The second thing, God reminds us of our significance by calling us by name, so he creates us in his image and then he calls us by name. This is beautiful. We all have a name and you know what your name is. You probably know at least one person's name in this room if you don't, my name is Brian. Now you do. We all have names. My wife and I, Tabitha, we have three sons. We had the privilege of assigning each of them a name Josiah and Caleb and Seth. And it's interesting that names have meanings.

They also have meanings to us. They signify uniqueness. When we say this person's name, what we're saying is I'm talking to you and not that person. But it's also interesting as names become the doorway to a million memories. You can just think of a name, can't you? Bill, Mary. If you know a Bill or Mary, you immediately think of what they look like and what they're like and what they've done and how you know them, maybe how you first met.

You hear a name and you know that person, you know anything about them, suddenly that name is like a doorway. It's like a vault that opens up and there's an entire experience of life that's connected to that person. We all have a name. We all know that significance is conferred upon us when others call us by that name. There's been calamities in human civilization. One such calamity comes when we suppress human dignity, when we don't recognize that every single person has been created in the image of God, and that social calamity is called slavery.

When we start assigning people names like cattle. You see, one of the things that we learn in history, in all cultures, Rome, the Roman empire, where all of this is taking place at this point in time, slavery was an enormous part of their market. It was a significant part of the cultural fabric of the empire called Rome. And it wasn't necessarily race based. It was oftentimes economic, but sometimes it was race. It was prevalent though, and one of the saddest tragedy that we see, not only in Rome, but in every culture where slavery has actually been perpetuated is this.

It's calling human beings by a number instead of a name. Somebody buys five slaves and they say, "You know what? I'm going to forget all your names, so I'm just going to call you one, two, three, four, five." And they don't have to remember your name. It doesn't matter who you are. I don't care about your significance or your personhood. I'm just going to call a number and I'm going to have somebody do what I want. And do you know what's remarkable about the new Testament? The new Testament doesn't hide this.

You turn in your Bible, you don't do it now, to acts chapter 20 verse six and we find a man there, his name is Secundus. You turn to Romans chapter 16 and we find the scribe who actually wrote for Paul, his name was Tertius. A few verses later we find a man, his name is Quartus. Do you know who these people were before knowing Jesus Christ? History tells us that they were slaves. They weren't given a name, they were given a number.

Over a period of time, these unique, significant people began to go by their number. In Matthew chapter one what we find is God conferring significance by calling each of them by name. I was tempted to be honest with you earlier in the week. Well, I'll just read verse one. I'll say there's a bunch of names and we'll get to verse 16 and that kind of destroyed the whole point. They're all important, so we need to read each one of them or at least try to.

You see, when you come across names within the scriptures and you find it frequently, if you ever read first Chronicles, you got to read 10 chapters before you get to something other than a name. They're recording everything. Who's in the choir and who's the builders and whose kids are these people? There's names everywhere. And some people, as you're reading through the scriptures, you get to that period or you get to Matthew, "No. Let's just skip all these people. Let's just get down to the good stuff. Verse 18 now the birth of Christ Jesus took place in this way and that's encouraging. Let's get to that."

Every time you see a name or a list of names within the scriptures, you should hear God say to you, just as I recognize and record this person, I want you to know that I recognize and record you. I care about you. I see you. You're significant to me just as these people are significant to me. Do you remember how Jesus calls us to himself? He calls his own sheep by name. And do you remember what Jesus does to those who trust him? He says, "I will never blot his or her name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my father."

You know Jesus Christ is your savior and Lord, then your name is actually spoken in the throne room of God from one person in the Trinity to the other. What a remarkable thing that God treats us with such dignity and significance. And so let's take comfort that God is interested in our lives, that he cares about our lives. He knows us, he knows all about us. And as you take comfort at the thought that God is interested in our lives, remember that grace is intended to be shared and so first be amazed, but then be interested in others.

When you come in this room and you see all these people and you say, "I don't know all these people," meet one, introduce yourself to one, learn the name of one, care for one. They're all people just like you. So God gives us significance by creating us in his image and by calling us by name. And third, God reveals our significance by fulfilling his promise to redeem us. I want you to let this idea sink into the registry of your significance meter. Okay? Let it weigh heavy upon the scale, your scale that says, this is significant and this is not.

You ready? Jesus, the son of God died in your place to bring you to God. The son of God was crucified, condemned, beaten, spat upon, bound, arrested, in your place. You can go to libraries in the world, there's an amazing one in Prague. It's called Strahov Library. You can see it here. And you go in there, it's a theological library, has 200000 theological books all about God dating back to the 1600s. In these books, it's amazing. You look at all the theology books in the world and describe so well how God has loved us.

But did you know there's not a single person who's ever been able to describe why God loves us? Even the new Testament is surprised. Hebrews chapter two verse six he says, what is man that you are mindful of him? A human being's looking at other human beings and he's, "Why would you delight in us? Why would you call us significant? Why would you make promises to us?" You look at the pages of the scripture and the pages of the scripture, you know how they begin? It says that God created a habitable earth for man.

God gave dominion to man. God gave instructions to man and then we sinned against God. And in response, God made promises to man to send the redeemer. The word redemption or the word redeem, it means to purchase. In other words, when we sinned against God, we incurred a debt that was so significant, it was so big, it was so much we could never repay it, so we were trapped forever and we needed somebody to be able to pay that off. We needed a redeemer.

And the Bible says that God, at the moment when humanity first sinned against him, he says, "I'm going to send you a redeemer. Someone who can make payment." The payment is not a small payment, it's the precious blood of Jesus. Peter, he's so amazing, he goes, "You talk about significance, you were purchased not with silver and gold and stones. You were purchased and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ." Now I know that there is a distorted theology out there.

It's a man-centered theology that says that God, I've even read this before, right? Is that we are equal in weight and worth to the son of God, and it's proved because Jesus the son of God died for us. So he cares even more about us than he does about a son. This is not true. Everything is for the honor of Jesus Christ. We are not the point. We are not the sun that all the planets of the world orbit around. Jesus is the son. Jesus is the one, literally where everything is supposed to orbit around him.

And yet you cannot escape the fact that by Jesus creating us in his image, by Jesus calling us by name, by Jesus willingly giving himself to redeem us, you cannot conclude that we are insignificant to him. But there is significance, there's worth. And Matthew's genealogy unpacks God's pursuit of our life. And so let me just show you just a few things here so that you can sort of see and go, "Okay, I absolutely get what he's doing here."

The word father, that we read many times through there can also mean grandfather or even ancestor. That's why in verse one it says that Jesus, right, was the son of David, but David wasn't his dad, he was his ancestor. And if you really do a deep dive through all of these names, you're actually going to find that some of these people weren't the next person's dad. Joram, right? Was one of them. It says that he's the father of Uzziah. Well, actually he was the great-great-grandfather of Uzziah.

So what's actually happening here? What's happening here is this, is that Matthew has an intent in writing these names down. And his intent, it says in verse 17, was to build three different groupings of 14 generations over three different historical, significant times in history when God made specific promises that he was going to bring his Messiah. He starts with Abraham. To Abraham who is worshiping rocks, God says, "Get up. I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you into a nation." And then he says to him, "In your offspring, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

In other words, there's one coming, there's a redeemer coming and he's going to bless all nations. Generations pass, and we get to the next historical time as the nation of Israel is built, now all of a sudden they need leadership. And so there's kings and the second king is named David. And God makes another promise to David. He says, "I will raise up your offspring after you and your throne will be established forever." Well, David's son was Solomon and Solomon died. So we know that he wasn't talking about Solomon.

We know in verse one he was talking about Jesus when it says that Jesus was the son of David. And then all of a sudden during the kings, Israel went through this absolutely deplorable time, morally, sinfully. They were deep in rebellion. And so you know what God did? He said, "If you don't repent, you're going to have to go into exile. I'm going to bring another empire in. They're going to conquer you and they're going to send some of you out of here." That's the deportation of Babylon we read several times.

Well, right before that took place, God made a promise and the promise was this, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, shall call his name Emmanuel." And in the fullness of time, the virgin Mary had Jesus. If you notice, right? But the entire genealogy traces all the way down to Joseph, and then all of a sudden he skips tracks and he comes over and he goes, "And Mary..." And the reason is because she was a virgin. But just like every adoptive son, Jesus was entered into the lineage of his dad, Joseph.

And that is exactly why Joseph's family became his family, uncles and aunts and grandparents, it was Jesus's family. In his lineage, we're told here is extremely messed up. You see, in addition to all of these sinful men, 42 men, Matthew records who all needed a savior. Matthew does something startling and unusual for a Jewish genealogy and he adds five women. And now if you were to ask any Jewish woman or man during this time, "Look, we can only pick five but we've got to pick five women from all of Israel's history." These would not be the five that anyone would choose.

They'd start with Sarah and probably Rebecca and maybe Rachel and Leah and fifth ones that coined toss probably, but that's not where he goes. Let me tell you about the women. He says, Tamar. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute to sleep with their father in law who had Perez. All right? Wasn't expecting that one. Then we get to Rahab. Well, Rahab didn't need to pretend to be a prostitute because she was the professional prostitute. And Rahab, she had Boaz.

Ruth was a gentile who had Obed. Bathsheba participated in committing adultery with David, she had Solomon. And then we get to marry, the fifth. Well, praise God for Mary. But did you know that even Mary confessed her need? Mary knew that she had a problem within her own heart as well, which is why when she found out that she was pregnant, she sang a song and one of the verses in her song says this, "My spirit rejoices in God my savior." Mary needed a savior, a redeemer as well.

She had a debt she could not pay. Now why would Jesus choose this line of all lines? The reason is because Jesus is a friend of sinners. That's why they even gave him the name Jesus. You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. Jesus lived among sinners, he died between sinners. And do you know why? Because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Have you trusted Jesus? As we get ready to take the Lord's Supper let me encourage you to trust Christ and seek to make him known. For those of us who have trusted Christ you have to understand something about life, and that is the whole purpose of our life is to know God and is to make him known. That's why we are here. He's commissioned us to make disciples. And why this matters is because when you look at a genealogy with 47 different names that stack up like a chain of people, you see, just as there was a chain of people that went from Abraham all the way down to Jesus.

So Jesus intends for there to be a chain of people from his resurrected body to you and through you to other people. He says, make disciples. The last thing we want to be in our life is a chain that doesn't go anywhere else. We have been given life and hope and grace, to keep that to ourself is to miss so much of the point. You see, your spiritual lineage, who you share the gospel with, who believes, who shares the gospel with somebody who believes, who shares the gospel, it forms a chain from the cross just as Matthew one forms the chain from Abraham to the cross.

And so let me urge you as we have been encouraging you, who can you be praying for this month? Who can you bless this month? Who can you share maybe even a portion of your story, your faith with this month? Who could you invite to Providence this month? For those of you who have never trusted Christ, we urge you today to believe in him. I invite you now to trust him. He is the promised one. He is your redeemer, the only redeemer, the only one who has the weight within him, the holiness, the righteousness to be able to make that payment for us.

He died and he was buried and he rose from the dead. He invites us to trust him and he invites us by our very name. And so let me encourage you to take the time right now to trust him. You say, "How do you do that?" Well you pray to him. He says we must receive him. And how you do that is you talk to him and you say, "God, I admit that I am a sinner and I cannot pay my debt. And I'm believing in Jesus Christ alone who can and who did."

I confess him Lord of my life, and the Bible says in Romans chapter 10 it says that those who confess him as Lord of their life and believe that God raised him from the dead, it says they will be saved. That could happen to you this morning, and I urge you to let that take place. One of the most amazing things that God gave us to help us remember all this is the Lord's Supper. So for those that are going to be serving us, if you want to go ahead and stand up and head to the back as they prepare to service these elements, let me encourage you to remember why we do this, why Jesus said that we do this.

The bread and the cup, they're symbolic of his body and his blood. To hold them in your hand, to actually take them personally is to say that I am trusting in Jesus Christ, that I am not ashamed of Jesus Christ. So if you've never done that, then the Bible encourages you to let these things pass. I would ask you to take the time while others around you may be taking it, to consider the claims and the life and the accomplishments of Jesus Christ. If you have trusted Jesus though, even if you just trusted Jesus this morning, right now, you are welcome to the table.

We do this to remember what he's done and to proclaim what he's done. And so let me pray for us. And as the elements are being served, I encourage you to pray to him. Father in heaven, we love you, we need you. We thank you for your grace in our life. And as these elements are passed, would you search our heart, see if there's anything offensive within us that would lead us to confess our sin to you and be forgiven? Would you help us father, to see that significance is bound up within us because of you? And so we don't take pride in ourself, we celebrate you now for you are the point of life. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.



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