

UNTIL HE COMES

Twelfth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *The Body of Christ* from Matthew 1:1-6 and 12-18
“All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations.” Matthew 1:17

Just a few blocks from where Barb grew up in the city of Pittsburgh, on a hilltop in a park sits the Allegheny Observatory. Its history dates back to 1859. The present building that houses the telescope was completed in 1912. In those days the observatory was a fully functioning and valuable scientific tool for studying the heavens. It actually set the official time for the United States until that task was taken over by the Naval Observatory in Washington DC. But today, of course, with the haze of light that emanates from the city around it, and the technology of the Hubble Space Telescope, the Allegheny Observatory is almost blind.

Astronomers now estimate that there are something like seventy sextillion stars in the universe. In case you're not sure exactly what seventy sextillion means, it's 70,000 million million million. Still can't picture it? Then write down the number 7 and add 22 zeros. That's actually more stars than there are grains of sand on all the beaches of the Earth combined. In our own Milky Way Galaxy there are only 100 billion to 300 billion stars. Of these, about 8400 are visible to the naked eye. But if you try to see them from a city, the number of stars drops to just dozens.

I'm telling you all of this for a reason. Abraham, from his mountaintop homestead in the land of Canaan, led a fighting force of a few hundred men against a coalition of invaders that had captured the city of Sodom down in the valley and carried off Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family. Abraham defeated the enemy and set Lot free. On his way home Abraham stopped in the fortress city of Salem, which a thousand years in the future would be Jerusalem. He went there to meet the king of Salem, the mysterious Melchizedek, who is described in Genesis 14:18 as “*a priest of God Most High.*” Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe--or ten percent--of the booty he had captured from the enemy, and he returned the remainder to the king of Sodom. Melchizedek pronounced a blessing upon Abraham in the name of God.

In the next chapter, Genesis 15, God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham looked into the future and asked God if he would give him a son to be his heir. God promised he would do this, and then he took Abraham outside. It was night. There were no city lights polluting the darkness. All the stars hung there blazing. God challenged Abraham to count the stars and he promised to give Abraham as many descendants as there are stars. The point wasn't that the number of Abraham's spiritual descendants would literally equal the number of stars in the sky. Rather, God was saying that Abraham would have so many descendants that it would be impossible to count them. And then there is this verse, Genesis

15:6: *“Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.”* Righteousness that comes by faith. Where have we heard that before? Neither Abraham nor you or I are able to make ourselves acceptable to God by being good or by being religious. We can never be good enough. The righteousness Abraham received that night by faith was the righteousness earned by Abraham’s future son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This whole story found in Genesis 14 and 15 is about the coming of the Savior, Jesus.

It’s at precisely at this point that the New Testament begins. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 1, verses 1-18. Matthew begins his story about the birth of Jesus with a genealogy. Verse 1 says, *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”* I want to consider this genealogy for a few minutes with you. Look at Matthew 1:17 where Matthew summarizes the genealogical record. *he taatgcofo.ceto bco utgehig.generation igi.f..vnhe nhe .vnoT. Td ve.t the awavesiion*

curse God had pronounced against Moab because of how they had treaded Israel as they traveled to the promised land. She was a widow, and Boaz married her. Their grandson was Jesse, the father of King David. Ruth's story is told in the Bible book that bears her name. It is a peculiar honor for one from another land.

Then in verse 7, although her name is not given, we find Bathsheba who committed adultery with David. He eventually married her and their son was the glorious King Solomon. The last woman mentioned is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is the only really good woman in this bunch. But isn't it interesting that all of these other women, who were flawed and ruined by sin and totally unqualified before God, are nevertheless included in the line of Christ. They were saved by faith in their descendant, the Savior Abraham was looking for. The point Matthew wants us to take away from this genealogy is that it's not the righteous, but sinners, who have a place with God through Jesus Christ. It's not people from a Christian background only, but all people, no matter how pagan they may be or what nation they may come from. Some of you understand this very well, for you have come from a background of sin and ignorance of God. Or you have family and friends who are far from God. And yet no one needs to be excluded. Salvation is for all who will come to the Lord Jesus and trust in him to save them.

There's another thing to notice about this genealogy. The first group of fourteen generations contains names that we are fairly familiar with. We've already mentioned several of them: Isaac, the son of Abraham; Jacob, the son of Isaac; Judah, the father of one of the twelve tribes of Israel; Boaz and Jesse and David. Famous names all. The second group of fourteen generations are kings. If you are at all familiar with the history of Judah, you know names like Rehoboam and Asa and Uzziah and Hezekiah. The third group contains the names of people you've probably never heard of. You may know Zerubbabel, but who ever heard of Shealtiel or Abiud or Azor or Achim? They're nobodies, like most of us. And yet each of these three groups has one thing in common, whether they are famous or important or nobodies. Each generation was looking to the future for the coming Savior God promised Abraham he would send.

Let's analyze this a bit more. Obviously some of these people did a better job of looking ahead in faith than others. Some understood more than others. But there is a two thousand year period covered by these forty-two generations. How did it happen that generation after generation they kept looking? How did it come to be that they didn't give up and conclude that the promise to Abraham was just so much legend? Two thousand years is an awfully long time to keep watching. The answer is--indeed has to be--that each generation successfully passed on to the next generation their hope and faith. And the new generation looked and watched and then passed on that hope and the promise to the generation that followed them. For two thousand years they did that--generation after generation.

This is what Matthew is telling us as he lists the generations in chapter 1. And then in chapter two he lifts our eyes to the heavens again. Once more there are men who are out at night studying the stars, charting their movements, straining to compel the stars to reveal their secrets. Then one night a special star appears. The amazing thing is that these men who scoured the heavens as Abraham had done two thousand years earlier, were not possessors of the promise. But they figured out the meaning of the star that had begun to shine. They mounted an expedition and traveled north along the Euphrates River, following the same path westward across the upper Middle East that Abraham had traveled when God first led him to the land of Canaan. Their path turned south through Syria and down past the Sea of Galilee. And they entered the same city Abraham had visited two thousand years before—Jerusalem. “Where is the king born to the Jews?” they asked. After consulting the Scriptures, the king of Jerusalem sent them to Bethlehem, the home town of David. There they found the one who had been promised to Abraham, the one who came at the end of the genealogical line, the one born to Mary, the wife of Joseph, the son of Jacob. The promise to Abraham was fulfilled. The long wait was over. And the reality of salvation was offered not just to the linear descendants of Abraham but to people of every race and nation—hundreds of millions of them!

Now it’s been two thousand years again. And guess what? We too are called to watch, for Christ has promised to come again, this time not as a baby in a manger, but as a conquering king, bringing with him the fullness of eternal life. And once again people who believe in him are called to look to the skies. In the very last verses of the Bible in Revelation 22, Jesus speaks about his second coming. In verse 12 he says, “*Behold, I am coming quickly.*” And then in verse 116 he says, “*I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star.*” So we look again for a star, for one who is the fulfillment of the genealogical list Matthew has given us. From the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis, to the beginning of the New Testament, to the very last page of Holy Scripture, the message is the same. Keep looking. Watch for a star. The Savior is coming!

But its been two thousand years, and that is a very long time to keep watching. The very same message Matthew relays in chapter 1 applies to us now. Whether you are famous or important or a nobody, your assignment is the same. If the human race is going to keep on watching until Jesus comes, then you must successfully pass on to the next generation the hope and the promise. You must lead your children so that they will know how to teach their children to watch for Christ.

We have a problem, however. How do we do this? These days the skies are not dark like they were in the time of Abraham, or in the period of the wise men from Persia. The light of the city has hazed out the blackness, making the stars hard to see. Just like that telescope at the Allegheny Observatory in Pittsburgh, it is hard for us to see more than a few dozen stars. Our attention and

the attention of our children is so often caught up in the busyness of life, the material comforts, and the relentless hammering of electronic media. There is a danger that our children will stop looking, stop hoping, stop waiting for Christ to come. It's not the first time it has happened. The physical descendants of Abraham stopped looking after Jesus came the first time. Not many of them today peer through the night skies to seek the first signs that their Savior is returning. What is to keep that from happening to our children or our grandchildren?

Let me suggest several things you and I must do. First, you and I must consciously realize just how important the second coming of Christ is. We must deliberately commit ourselves to watch. That requires us to be a counter-culture people. You and I cannot belong both to Christ and also to the world at the same time. We must choose one or the other. Joshua put it succinctly. "As for me and my house," he said, "We will serve the Lord." Are you determined to serve him? Is he your number one priority? Oh, I urge you to make it so. That's why Abraham came to Canaan. Because following God was more important to him than anything else. And that was when God gave him the promise and he saw the stars.

Second, pray for yourself and for your children that you and they might know Christ well and will live for him. God answers prayers like that. Abraham prayed for his family that they might inherit the promise. Job did it, day after day, praying for his adult children. Mary and Joseph did it, praying for their children day after day. The apostle Paul did it, praying for members of the church and members of his own family. You've got to do that too. If you don't pray for them you leave them without one of the most important assets they need in the struggle to live for Christ. That's why my mom and dad prayed for me each day that they lived. That's why Barb and I pray for our sons and their wives and their children to follow Jesus and watch for his coming. We are helping them to keep on believing as we pray for them. Please, you do it for your family.

Third, make coming to church your family's priority each Lord's day. There is something extremely important about establishing a pattern early. The psalmist writes, "*I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.*" Mary and Joseph did that for their children. I have seen the remains of the synagogue in Nazareth where Jesus was taught the word of God and where he went to school. We must do this week after week until the pattern becomes second nature. Worship points us to what's really important in life. In our culture travel is easy, vacations have shifted to the weekends, work encroaches upon the Lord's day, and so also have sports and other activities. The result is that our kids can be subtly taught that worship and putting God first are options, just one of the many we choose from on Sundays. Our children need to see the stars. If we don't lead them to worship week by week, the lights of the city will blind them to the heavenly promise.

Fourth, at home teach your children the things of God. Do you have family devotions? Do you gather around the table and talk about the things of God? Do you read the Bible together and pray together? Are your kids memorizing God's word? Husbands and wives, do you pray together? Are you leading your family to love Christ as you do? If you and I are not careful to set a good example, our behavior may cancel out what we say we believe. This is how we keep each generation looking to the skies, waiting for Christ to come, and resting on the confident hope that eternal life is real. We must keep doing this generation by generation until Christ comes. Keep on and wait for the promise to unfold.

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