

Jesus: the Fulfiller of God's Promises

Rich Nathan
December 1 & 2, 2018
Four Part Harmony
Matthew

This morning, we're beginning the season of the Christian calendar which Christians have called Advent. If you're coming from a non-churched background or if you were raised in a church where Advent was never mentioned, Advent simply means the arrival or the first appearance of a notable person or thing. We speak about the advent of television and the difference that made to family life or the advent (the arrival) of jets and the difference that makes to traveling.

For Christians, Advent is all about the anticipation of the arrival of Jesus on Christmas. In many denominations, Advent is celebrated on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. Some of you may have a family tradition of setting out an Advent wreath.

Slide
Advent wreath

With four candles, one for each of the four Sundays of Advent, and in some traditions there is a fifth candle which is called the Christ candle and it's lit on Christmas morning.

This year, during Advent, I'm going to do a series titled "Four Part Harmony". What we're going to do is look at the different portraits painted of Jesus by each of the four gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We have four gospels, but only one Jesus.

Some of you may ask, if there are four different portraits of Jesus written a generation or two after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, how do we know if these portraits accurately communicate what Jesus actually said and did, or if instead, the stories and sayings are just made up by the author?

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Jesus' memory has been accurately preserved

New Testament scholars tell us that after Jesus' ascension, his sayings and his deeds were communicated through what is known as oral traditions that were unevenly distributed throughout the Christian movement. Some sayings and events may have been transmitted to Rome through the Apostle Peter. Other sayings and events were communicated to what is now known as western Turkey through the Apostle John.

There are some sayings or events that are in one gospel, but they are not found in another.

So, when a gospel writer like Matthew sat down to write, he had a host of orally transmitted materials that he drew upon to write his gospel. He didn't create the materials. The gospel writers simply worked with the materials – the parables, the sayings and events in Jesus' life – that were present in his particular Christian community for a generation.

You might say, "Rich, even if the gospel writer didn't intend to create new sayings or deeds for Jesus, how do we know that this isn't just a giant telephone game – where one person says "bear" and another person hears "pear" and pretty soon we're a million miles from the words of the original speaker?

We need to understand the way oral tradition worked in pre-modern societies. These days, most of us can't remember anything! We carry our brains in our pockets. We call our brain Siri or Alexa. And when we want to know something, we say, "Siri, tell me this." Just as an aside, have you ever wondered why all these personal assistants found on your phone are females with soothing voices? Why aren't they given names like Rocco or Tony? Why don't they speak in Brooklyn accents? "So, you want directions to toity toid street in the Bronx? I can do dat for you!" But I stray!

The point is, these days if we want to know something, we just ask Alexa. For those of us who are older, who grew up in the pre-internet age, we were forced to actually memorize things. I can still tell you the list of US Presidents from Washington to Trump – all 45 of them and the years in which they served. And I can recite Rudyard Kipling's poem "Gunga Din" and portions from the Hebrew Bible that I memorized in third grade.

But in the ancient world, before the printing press and the mass distribution of books, people's memories were so much better than ours! For example, some of you may remember reading Alex Haley's personal history of his family called *Roots*. Or maybe you saw the TV mini-series. The basic story is that Alex Haley, who was African-American, traced his ancestry back to a village in the West African country of Senegal. In these villages there were very old men, called "Griots", who were basically genealogical archives of oral history. These men would apprentice for 40 or 50 years and older Griots would train them to remember the entire history of their particular tribe going back four or five centuries. They'd be able to narrate facets of tribal history for as long as three days without ever repeating themselves.

In cultures where no books existed, there are often people trained to memorize tens of thousands of bits of information and to accurately communicate it in a way that we in the West can't even imagine. We can hardly remember the names of our next door neighbors or our own phone numbers. We have no comprehension of what a trained memory can do.

The point is, Jesus' sayings and parables and the events of his life were so important to his followers that they were almost certainly memorized by people whose memories were great and for whom remembering Jesus' actual words was incredibly important! For Christians, we also believe that the writing of the four gospels was assisted by the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who preserved Jesus' words accurately and revealed more of the truth to the writers.

Today, as we begin this Advent series from the four gospels titled "Four Part Harmony" we're going to start with Matthew's portrait in a message I've called "Jesus: the Fulfiller of God's Promises". Let's pray.

Of all the gospels, Matthew is the most insistent that Jesus came to fulfill all of God's promises in the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Old Testament. In fact, Matthew quotes the Old Testament nearly three dozen times and repeatedly shows how Jesus fulfills something that the Old Testament pointed to. For example, we read in Matthew:

Slide Matthew 1:22-23

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Or

Slide Matthew 2:23

²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

There are literally dozens of Old Testament prophecies concerning how people could identify the Messiah when he came. And Jesus fulfilled these Old Testament promises that were written hundreds of years before he was born. This is one reason why many Jews have placed their faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. In fact, currently there are hundreds of thousands of Jewish men and women around the world – Jews who have been bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, Jews who can read Hebrew and who celebrate Passover every year, Jews who are culturally Jewish and are only one or two generations removed from the Holocaust – believe that Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to send the Messiah.

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Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to send the Messiah

Here's what we read in Matthew 1:1

Slide Matthew 1:1

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

Right out of the gate, Jesus is called by Matthew “the son of David” which is the title that Jews gave to the Messiah. Jesus is the descendant of David, the fulfiller of all of the promises God made to King David, the greatest of the Old Testament kings. And Jesus is the son of Abraham. He is a true Jew.

Matthew is telling us from the beginning of his gospel that he is writing a story, not about the founder of a new religion called Christianity. He is telling us a story about a person who fulfills all the Hebrew Scriptures, the one who answered all the prayers prayed by Jews for over 1,000 years that God would send the Messiah to save this messed up world.

Matthew is the bridge book that links together the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the root. The New Testament is the fruit. Or as the old nursery rhyme puts it:

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The new is in the old contained,
The old is by the new explained.
The new is in the old concealed,
The old is by the new revealed.

Three times in Matthew’s genealogy recorded in Matthew 1, Matthew calls Jesus “the Messiah”.

Slide Matthew 1:1

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

Slide Matthew 1:16

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

Slide Matthew 1:17

¹⁷Thus 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.

The word Christ is not Jesus’ last name, as I’ve told you many times. Christ is a title. It comes from the Greek word “Christos”. Christ is used 531 times of Jesus in the New Testament. It translates the Hebrew word “Mashiach” which we would translate in English to be “Messiah”.

Christ means “anointed one”. In the Old Testament, people who were appointed to a special office, like the office of king or the office of priest or the office of prophet, would

often be anointed with oil. Oil would be placed on their head. In this sitting, this ordination ceremony, anointing with oil would mark someone out as a person especially approved by God to carry out God's mission in the world.

Over the course of Jewish history, the hope grew that there would be an ultimate final anointed one who would fulfill all of God's promises that God made to the Jewish people. Matthew begins his gospel by announcing that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the one we Jews have been looking for throughout our whole history.

Let's read verse 17 again,

Slide Matthew 1:17

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.

Matthew is laying out his genealogy of Jesus in this perfectly structured sequence of 14 generations between Abraham and David, 14 generations between David and the exile to Babylon, and 14 generations between the exile and the birth of Messiah. Matthew's decision to lay the genealogy out this way – 14, 14 and 14 – is not at all random. In Hebrew, the letters of David's name

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Add up to 14. This ordered genealogy is meant by Matthew to communicate the conviction that God's plan, conceived thousands of years before Jesus was born, was working itself out in perfect fashion leading to the birth of Jesus the Messiah. God is the author of history, Matthew is trying to tell us. God is in control of all the events of history.

Do you understand what this means, that God is in control not only of the events of history but the timing and events of our own lives – good, bad and otherwise? Yes, good people and bad people do what they do. And, yes, demons do what they do. But over everything – ruling, guiding, lovingly arranging the events of our lives – is God.

Some of you might say, "Rich, my life is a tangled mess! I've made some really horrible choices. People have stabbed me in the back or abused me. Someone I love prematurely died or got sick. How can God be in control of all of this mess?" If you read the Bible from beginning to end, you'll learn that the Bible teaches certain things about the mess of this world. We talked a lot about this in a series that I did just this past summer that I called "When Life is Unfair".

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When Life is Unfair graphic

By the way, all of the teachings that we do here at Vineyard Columbus are found online. You can go to

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VineyardColumbus.org

or I have my own website,

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richnathan.org

You can find a video or audio of the teachings there and I also put my transcripts there.

The Bible teaches us several things about the mess in this world. First,

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- Evil is an intrusion into God's good creation

God made the world to be good and very often, people suffer when they've done nothing to deserve it – nothing wrong, and certainly nothing worse than people who don't suffer.

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- Evil is an intrusion into God's good creation
- We human beings are responsible for our own choices

We can't blame God or our circumstances or our parents or our teachers or someone else for what we choose. We are responsible for our own choices. But third, here's the incredible mystery of the Christian faith:

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- Evil is an intrusion into God's good creation
- We human beings are responsible for our own choices
- God is completely in control of what happens and God will ultimately defeat evil and bring about good in our lives and in the world

Listen to these Bible verses regarding God's control over this world.

Slide Ephesians 1:11

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Slide Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

No one, including me, knows how these three truths all hold together. Whatever happens – death and greed and sin and betrayal and abuse do not have the last word. I don't know a more comforting verse in the Bible than

Slide Psalm 57:2 (ESV)

² I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me.

Do you believe that? God is at work through good, bad and otherwise to fulfill his purpose for you. Some of you are going through a really hard time right now as we approach Christmas. You may have lost a loved one and you're anticipating doing Christmas this year without a family member and it's really, really hard. Or you may have gone through a miscarriage or you've been ill or your heart has been broken by a separation or a divorce or a broken engagement or a broken relationship. Whatever you're going through, this year like years in the past we are going to have a Blue Christmas service at Vineyard Columbus at our Cooper Road campus.

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Blue Christmas info (in RA folder on Dropbox)

Hundreds of people each year come to Blue Christmas and have found tremendous encouragement by attending this service. If you know someone that you think could really use an encouragement injection at this time of year, why don't you invite them to go with you to the Blue Christmas service?

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- Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to send the Messiah

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Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to forgive sin

In Jeremiah 31, almost 600 years before Jesus' birth, God promised this through the Old Testament prophet named Jeremiah:

Slide Jeremiah 31:31, 34

³¹ "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,

or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

I want to go back to Matthew 1 and look at some of the names that Matthew lists in his genealogy. The first thing that jumps off the page for anyone familiar with Old Testament genealogies is that Matthew mentions four women in his genealogy of Jesus.

Slide Matthew 1:3

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

Matthew mentions Rahab and Ruth.

Slide Matthew 1:5

⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,

And in verse 6, Matthew makes an indirect reference to Bathsheba.

Slide Matthew 1:6

⁶and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

The woman who had been Uriah's wife was Bathsheba. Four women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. What is so special about mentioning these four women? There are obviously hundreds of other women in Jesus' genealogy. What's so special about these four in particular?

First of all, you need to know that Jewish genealogies rarely included women. So, Matthew is doing something very deliberate here. He is suggesting that women are included on equal footing with men in the kingdom that Jesus introduced to the world. Jesus, the Messianic King, is bringing about a revolution of culture in which women and men are equals in the kingdom of God. Not only are four women mentioned, but these four are Gentile women, not Jews.

But Matthew wasn't done shocking his Jewish male audience by mentioning women in Jesus' genealogy or mentioning that they were Gentiles. Three of these women had

very suspect sexual backgrounds. If you read the story of Tamar back in Genesis 38, she pretended to be a prostitute in order to be impregnated by Judah. Tamar had children by pretending to be a prostitute. Rahab was a prostitute. Now, Ruth doesn't seem to have the sexual past of the other women. But when we get down to Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, we know from the Bible that she was either a victim of rape if you read the story as non-consensual sex or an adulteress if you believe the story illustrates consensual sex.

What's the point of including women with such questionable backgrounds in this genealogy? Matthew is communicating to us that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to forgive all sin! Jesus is the Savior of the world, the one who saves people from their sins! Jesus is the one who can overcome any broken background by the power of his forgiveness offered to each of us at the cross.

You know, the Bible has so many different ways of communicating to us the greatness of God's forgiveness. Let me mention just a few of the ways. One of the ways that God communicates total forgiveness, the ability to rescue us from our broken sexual past or our pride and self-superiority, our addictions, our racism, our anger, our abuse of others or any one of a million things that we have done or failed to do. One of the ways that God communicates in the Bible that he will forgive all of our sins is to promise to separate us from our sins as far as the East is from the West.

Slide Psalm 103:12

¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

I don't know if you have ever meditated on how far the east is from the west. Have you ever thought about the fact that God doesn't say, "I will separate your sins as far as the north is from the south"? Rather, God says, "I will separate you from your sins as far as the east is from the west". Here's the reason. If you start going due north from any point on earth, you will eventually cross over the North Pole and start going south. North and south meet at the North Pole. That's not true if you go east or west. If you start going west and continue in that direction, you'll always be going west. If you go east, you will always be going east. East and west never meet. In other words, they are an infinite distance apart. When God says that he'll remove our transgressions as far as the east is from the west, he's saying that he is removing our sins an infinite distance from us. He uses this expression to tell us that our forgiveness is total! It's complete. We're never going to meet up with forgiven sin again.

Or to change the metaphor, read this promise in the Old Testament prophet, Micah:

Slide Micah 7:19

¹⁹You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot

and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

When sins are hurled to the bottom of the ocean, it means they are gone forever, never to be recovered, never to be looked at, never to be examined again! Micah writes that God hurls our sins to the bottom of the sea. Our sins don't just fall overboard and float to the bottom. They might float up again. God sends our sins to the bottom of the sea whenever a person asks for forgiveness and turns to the cross of Jesus Christ for salvation. As the old hymn puts it:

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What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What happened to the sin of Rahab, the former prostitute? What happened to the sins of Tamar who pretended to be a prostitute in order to get pregnant? What happened to the sins of Bathsheba and her adultery with King David? God separated these women from their sins as far as the east is from the west. He put an infinite distance between their sins and these women. God took their sins and hurled them to the bottom of the sea, never to dredge them up again. Friend, what do you think God does with your sins, things that you're ashamed of from your past? Your lies, your broken sexuality, your angry outbursts, your judgments and grudges, gossip and unforgiveness – what do you think God does with your sins? If you ask him to forgive you, he does the same thing with your sins as he did with the sins of Tamar and Rahab and Bathsheba and Ruth. He completely and absolutely forgives you.

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- Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to send the Messiah
- Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to forgive sin

Slide

Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises regarding Israel

To teach you a highfalutin sounding theological phrase, Jesus recapitulates in his own experience the whole history of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Matthew and the rest of the New Testament is insistent that everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament anticipates Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament speaks about Jesus. New Testament writers read the Old Testament and they saw Jesus everywhere.

For example, we read this in Matthew 2:

Slide Matthew 2:13-15

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew was quoting from the Old Testament prophet Hosea in Hosea 11:1. Hosea was talking about the calling of the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt during the Exodus. But when Matthew thinks about Jesus, the Messiah, he thinks of the nation of Israel coming in this person, this final representative, this ultimate fulfiller of everything concerning Israel. Matthew thinks of Jesus.

Jesus’ life is a retelling of the story of Israel. Jesus went through all the various experiences of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus is Israel in person. Sometimes you hear on Christian radio preachers say if you want to find the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, keep your eyes on the nation of Israel. To which I say, if you want to find the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, don’t keep your eyes on the nation of Israel, keep your eyes on Jesus!

Don’t keep track of events in the Middle East or the latest headlines in the newspaper. Open your Bibles and keep your eyes on Jesus. Jesus went with his parents to Egypt as refugees, just as in the Old Testament, Jacob and his whole family went down to Egypt as refugees. In fact, many of the Old Testament heroes whose lives we celebrate – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses – were refugees who sought food and safety in a new country. The Bible is filled with stories of Jewish refugees fleeing from a place of poverty or oppression and finding asylum in another country. And Jesus went to Egypt when he was a little boy with his parents, Joseph and Mary. Fleeing a dangerous country, Jesus found safety and asylum in Egypt. You can apply this as you choose.

What Matthew sees in the life of Jesus is the story of Israel told event by event. In Matthew 4, Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days recapitulating the 40 years of Israel in the wilderness. But rather than succumbing to the temptation that Israel succumbed to in the wilderness, Jesus overcomes the devil. He is God’s true Son. He is righteous, faithful Israel in person.

Whatever is happening in Israel or the Middle East, my eyes are on Jesus. Jesus is the fulfiller of my hope. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hope regarding Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises of forgiveness. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises regarding Israel.

So, what should we do this first week of Advent regarding Jesus? I think it’s important to point out that no one is born a Christian! Or to use a Jewish term, no one is born a Messianic, a follower of Messiah Jesus. Becoming a Christian, becoming a follower of

Jesus is something that every human being must choose. Every human being, Jew or Gentile, whatever your parents were – they may have been Catholic or Lutheran, you may have been raised in a Baptist or charismatic church or a Pentecostal church, you may have been raised outside the church as non-religious or Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu, you may be coming from a “spiritual but not religious” background. Whatever your background is – every human being is faced squarely with this issue: what am I going to do with Jesus, the Messiah and Savior?

A person becomes a follower of Messiah, a person becomes a Christian through repentance and faith. Repentance means simply to turn around. In other words, you’ve been going your own way in life, you’ve been calling the shots, you have always kept Jesus from having complete control of your life. To repent means I turn around. I go God’s way. I allow Jesus to call the shots. I turn the control of my life over to Jesus. I welcome Jesus to be the Lord of my life.

And faith means that I trust God’s provision of Jesus to gain me forgiveness and salvation. Faith means that I trust that I don’t have to earn my way into God’s good graces. Faith means I stop trying to save myself through my own self-help methods. I’m done trying to improve my life on my own. Faith is trust that Jesus, Jesus alone, his life, his death on the cross and his resurrection is enough to gain for me forgiveness and salvation and the gift of a new life.

Friends, today I want to speak to two groups of people. Whatever your religious or non-religious background is, however long or short you’ve come to the Vineyard. Maybe this is your first time, maybe this is your thousandth time. Today, if you’ve never received Jesus completely as your king and your Savior in repentance and faith, in a moment I’m going to ask you to stand and do so.

The second group of you, some of you in the past may have turned to Jesus as King and Savior, but you have turned away from him. You’re a million miles away from him today. In a moment I’m going to ask you to stand and surrender your life to Jesus, asking him to forgive your sins.

Gospel call.

Jesus: the Fulfiller of God's Promises

Rich Nathan

December 1 & 2, 2018

Four Part Harmony

Matthew

#FourPartHarmonyVC

- I. Jesus' memory has been accurately preserved
- II. Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to send the Messiah
- III. Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises to forgive sin
- IV. Jesus is the fulfiller of God's promises regarding Israel