

The Truth Proven in Christ

Matthew 1:6–17

December 4, 2022 — New Baptist Church, Huntington, West Virginia

Pastor Trent Eastman

What Is Truth?

That is the question Pilate asked Jesus after Jesus acknowledged that he was indeed King — and that as King, he bears witness to the truth. As Jesus said to Pilate, “*Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice*” (John 18:37). Pilate, however, chose not to listen to Jesus’ voice. He listened instead to the voice of the crowd that cried, “Crucify him.”

People living in our post-modern, secular age are no better. What is truth? Some declare that truth is whatever you make it — whatever you decide it to be. Some are like Pilate, allowing the crowd to define truth: whatever is popular, whatever the polls say, that becomes the measure of what is real. Many listen to their feelings as the defining voice of truth, reasoning that the only thing they can truly know is what they feel, and therefore what they feel must be true. And many more declare that any absolute truth capable of shaping and defining our lives — if it is real at all — can never be proven. Only provable truth, they say, is true truth.

Today I want to share with you not only truth, but the proof of truth. I want to show you how we can know that this truth is true.

The truth I am speaking about is woven into the very fabric of the reality we live in. It is the truth of who we are. The truth of who God is. The truth of what is good, how life is to be lived, and where genuine happiness and joy are found. This is the truth I am talking about. And by definition, it is absolute — meaning it does not change over time. It is not a truth that humanity creates. It is not internal to us but external to us. And because it is a truth revealed and given by God, it is likewise proven by God.

Today, when we want to prove something is true, we use what is commonly called the scientific method. A scientist forms a hypothesis — a prediction of what will happen under certain conditions — and if the predicted result occurs, the hypothesis is confirmed as true. How do we know gasoline is flammable? We prove it. We put a flame to it and observe the result.

In the Bible, the equivalent of the scientific method is what we might call the test of the prophet, and it works precisely the same way. A prophet makes a prediction — this is going to happen — and if what was predicted comes to pass, then what that prophet spoke is confirmed

as true. If it does not come to pass, the prophet is false. The instructions are given plainly in Deuteronomy 18:

“And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’ — when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

But if it does come to pass — if what the prophet spoke in the name of the Lord actually happens — then what was spoken is true. It is through prophecy fulfilled that the truth of God is proven to be true.

That is the goal of this message. I want to talk about truth: the truth that God has given to us, and the way we know that truth is true through the fulfillment of prophecy.

Please follow along as I read our text, Matthew 1:6–17:

“And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram 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 Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim 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 the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.” (Matthew 1:6–17)

The people named in this genealogy — like us — needed to know truth. Not a subjective truth, not the truth of their feelings or the truth of what the crowds thought, but truth: the truth of

God's nature, God's purposes, God's character. The truth of what to do and how to live when life is hard and overwhelming. And the Lord, through his prophets, spoke that truth to them. Because this truth is absolute, the truth spoken to them is the same truth he speaks to us today — a truth that has been proven according to the very test the prophets themselves established.

This morning I want to look at three people in the genealogy of Christ, hear the truth that God spoke to them through his prophets, and then see how that truth was proven true in Jesus.

Hezekiah: Light in the Deepest Darkness

Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he inherited one of the most difficult moments in Israel's history. His father, King Ahaz, had practiced a policy of appeasement toward Assyria so desperate that he introduced the worship of Assyrian gods into Judah itself. When Hezekiah came to the throne, he called the nation to repentance, to a renewal of covenant, and to faithfulness to the Lord. Just four years into his reign, when Hezekiah was twenty-nine years old, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed — completely and utterly brought to ruin — and various cities of Judah were being devastated in turn.

Hezekiah would have witnessed massive suffering, brutal violence, plundering, and the loss of life on a scale we can scarcely imagine. He would have seen refugees streaming toward Jerusalem, coming to him for help and protection. He watched his nation — the nation of Judah — reduced to a single standing city by the greatest military power the world had ever seen. He watched ten of the twelve tribes of Israel erased from history. And like many in his day, he would have cried out to God: Is the covenant canceled? Have you deserted us?

It is precisely at that moment — as Israel falls — that God speaks. This is the first word God gives after the destruction of the northern kingdom, found in Isaiah 9:

“But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:1–7)

There is much in this prophecy, but the truth I want to highlight is this: no matter how dark, hopeless, or overwhelming a situation may seem, God not only has the power to create something new out of that darkness — he wills it. Note those closing words: *the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this*. God’s light shines in the darkness. The people of Judah and the survivors of Israel are being told that in the very place of their greatest devastation, God’s greatest work and highest joy will unfold.

How do we know this is true? How is this truth proven?

Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the tribes of Jacob whose territorial allotments lay in the far northern reaches of the promised land, on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. If you trace out those tribal boundaries, you find that the southernmost point where Naphtali and Zebulun meet is in a valley right beside Mount Tabor. In Isaiah’s day, there was nothing in that valley — no city, no settlement. But seven hundred years later, during the days of Jesus’ birth, a small town had grown up there. Its name was Nazareth: the home of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the town where Jesus himself would grow up. And Mount Tabor, standing just beside Nazareth, is the very mountain where Jesus would take Peter, James, and John and reveal to them his glory in the Transfiguration — where, just as Isaiah said, those disciples saw a great light as Jesus was transfigured before them.

Jesus is the child born, the son given, whom Isaiah prophesied — the Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor — who will be given the throne of David and establish it in justice and righteousness forevermore. God is faithful. He keeps his promises.

And this truth, spoken in the days of Hezekiah, has not changed. It is true for us today. In your places of deepest darkness and anguish and shame — in your own land of Zebulun and

Naphtali — those are the places where God’s glory shines the brightest. How is that possible? It is possible because to us a child is born, to us a son is given, who carries upon his shoulders the weight of this world. God is at work in you.

Therefore, hear his voice and trust him.

Jehoiachin: The Shepherd Who Seeks the Lost

The second person I want to consider is Jehoiachin — also known in our text as Jechoniah. He was king in Jerusalem for only three months and ten days. Following the death of King Josiah, a period of intense political instability had gripped Judah. Two of Josiah’s sons had come to the throne and been removed — one killed, one carried off. It was in this climate of crisis that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came a second time to Jerusalem to take high-ranking captives. The first deportation, in 606 BC, had taken men like Daniel and his companions. This second wave, in 597 BC, swept away Jehoiachin himself — barely three months into his reign — along with a young priest named Ezekiel.

Jehoiachin and Ezekiel, two young men uprooted and exiled together, would grow up in captivity in Babylon. Then, ten years after Jehoiachin was taken, his city was destroyed. He was now a king without a kingdom. On the day that news of Jerusalem’s final destruction reached Babylon, Jehoiachin and the other exiles went and sat with Ezekiel, who by then was both priest and prophet. Much was spoken on that day, but among the words God gave through Ezekiel, these are the ones Jehoiachin would have clung to:

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.” (Ezekiel 34:15–16)

And then, a few verses later, Jehoiachin’s ears must have come alive at this:

“And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 34:23–24; 36:25–28)

There is much truth spoken here — the truth that the Lord is our shepherd who cares about you, who leads you to good places, who restores your soul. And the truth that it is through his presence, the outpouring of his Spirit, that a heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh — made sensitive and alive to God again.

How do we know these things are true?

We know because Jesus is the promised Good Shepherd. In John 10 he says plainly:

“*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*”
(John 10:11)

And it is in the laying down of his life that everything Ezekiel prophesied is proven true. The Lord cares about you. He restores your soul. He leads you to good places. He pours out his Spirit upon you.

Therefore, hear his voice and trust him.

Zerubbabel: Mountains Made Plain by Grace

The last person I want to consider is Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is not a king, though he is the legal heir to the throne of David. There is no kingdom for him to rule. Judah has become nothing more than a province of Persia. When Babylon fell to Cyrus the Great, the new emperor allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland, and so forty-two thousand of them made the journey back to Judah to begin rebuilding Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was among them — one of their leading figures — but he was not a king.

The first thing he attempted as a leader was to rebuild the temple, and he failed. The peoples of the surrounding land brought the work to a halt. Sixteen years passed. There was still no temple, still no real city — Jerusalem lay largely in ruins, and nothing had moved forward.

It was then, after sixteen years of stagnation, that two prophets appeared: Haggai and Zechariah. They began to speak truth into the paralysis, encouraging the people to take up the work of rebuilding, and the people did. But Zechariah’s prophecy went further, and what he said to Zerubbabel — the man with no kingdom, standing before a mountain of obstacles — was this:

“*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’*” (Zechariah 4:6–7)

The great mountain in this prophecy represents all the obstacles, barriers, and powers that had kept Zerubbabel from completing the work. And the truth the Lord spoke through Zechariah is that these barriers will be removed — not by human strength or political power, but by the Spirit of God. And when the work is done, it will be received as grace.

That truth speaks directly to us. The obstacles and barriers we face — the things we have no power to move on our own — are removed by the power of God, not ours. And what God does, he gives to us freely, as grace. What are the mountains in your life? What sins keep getting the better of you? What fears hold you back? What attitudes harm you and those around you? What keeps you from truly knowing and enjoying God? These mountains are made a plain by the work of God in Christ, and they are given to you not as reward but as grace.

How do we know this is true?

I want to offer as proof another prophecy of Zechariah that Zerubbabel himself would have heard — one that must have puzzled him deeply. Zerubbabel was the rightful heir to the throne of David. He was the political leader of the returned exiles. But when the rebuilding of the temple neared completion, the dedication ceremony focused not on Zerubbabel but on Joshua the high priest. Silver and gold were collected from those who had returned from exile, and a crown was made — not for the king, but for the priest. Zechariah recorded the word of the Lord:

“Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’” (Zechariah 6:11–13)

Zerubbabel is the rightful king. But prophetically, the crown is placed on the head of the high priest. How could this be? How could the coming King and Messiah also be the High Priest?

Matthew, writing his genealogy for a Jewish audience steeped in the history of their priests and their kings, answers this question through a detail that his first readers would have recognized immediately. At the close of the genealogy he writes: *“So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.”* Matthew is clearly placing great weight on this number fourteen. Have you ever wondered why?

I spent considerable time with that question, reading through commentaries and old sources, until I came across a brief remark — almost a passing observation — in an older commentary, noting simply that the fourteen generations correspond to the high priesthood. The people of

Matthew's day, it suggested, would have understood immediately what he was pointing to. That single line sent me searching: through Jewish historical sources, through Josephus, through the lists of high priests preserved in ancient records, counting those priests in groups of fourteen from Aaron, the first high priest, down to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

What I found was remarkable. The history of the high priesthood, from Aaron onward, divides into groupings of fourteen priests that mark the great turning points of Israel's story — from the tabernacle to the end of the united kingdom; from the construction of Solomon's temple to its destruction in 586 BC; from the exile through the restoration and into the Hellenistic period, ending with the murder of the last legitimate high priest, Onias III, in 170 BC; through the corruption and political chaos of the Hasmonean period; and finally, from the high priesthood under Herod through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, with Joseph Caiaphas serving as the fourteenth and final high priest of that era. Then one final group of fourteen carries the priesthood from Caiaphas to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

I believe this is precisely why Matthew is so insistent on the number fourteen. It is his way of declaring to his Jewish readers that Jesus is not only the legal heir to the throne of David — he is the true High Priest. He is the fulfillment of what God promised in the covenants. He is the one in whom kingly authority and priestly intercession are united in a single person, just as Zechariah prophesied. It is through him, and by him, that the power of God is at work to remove mountains — and it is given to us by grace.

The Truth Proven

Because Jesus fulfills prophecy, he is the proof.

He is the proof that in our deepest and darkest struggles, God's light shines — that there is no darkness too deep for that light, and that in the very places of our greatest failure and hurt, the Lord makes something new.

He is the proof that the Lord cares about you — that he leads you to places that are good, that he restores the soul, that he pours out his Spirit upon you.

He is the proof that the power keeping you from knowing and enjoying God is removed not by your own strength, but by the Spirit of the Lord — and that this work of God is given to you as grace.

I know these things to be true because of the fulfillment of prophecy.

Therefore, hear his voice — and trust him.

A Final Word at the Table

There is one more truth, and one more prophecy.

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4–6)

And because it is fulfilled — our wounds are healed, we are forgiven, we have life.

As we come to this table, we proclaim that fulfillment together. In the words of Paul:

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)