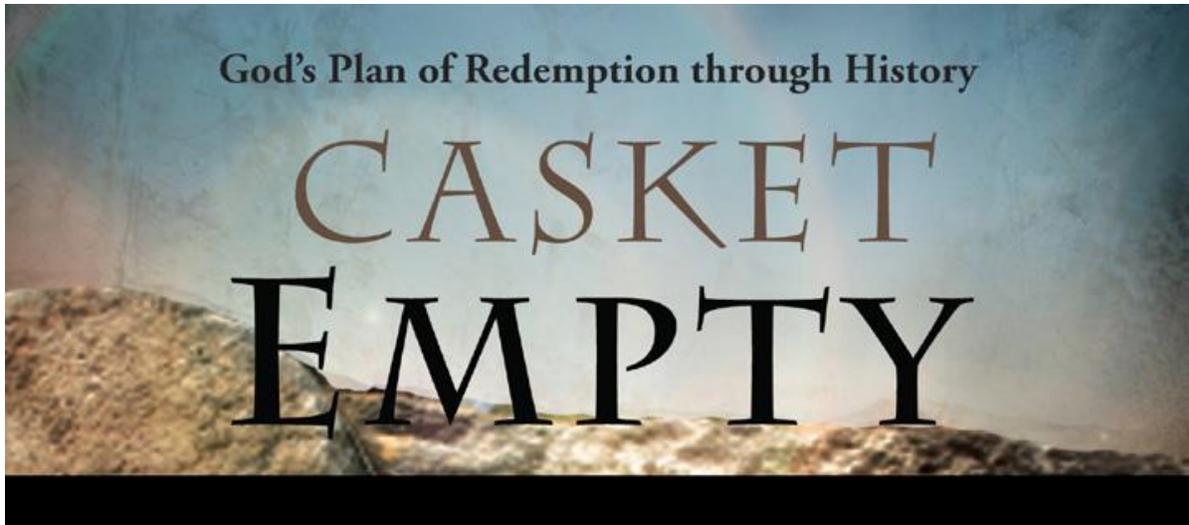


M is for Messiah
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
March 4, 2018

TEXT: Matthew 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4; John 1:1



We want to consider this morning the very first sentence of each of the four Gospels. Opening sentences make a big impression. It's a remarkable thing to consider that the Lord God Almighty, in sending His one and only Son into the world, would entrust the communication of that to people. Isn't that amazing? The New Testament begins with four accounts. If you know nothing about the Bible, if you're opening it for the first time, one of the first impressions that you get is that the life of Jesus is essential. It's the topic that gets most space and the most attention. So, I want you to keep your Bible open because we are going to look at just the first sentence of each gospel writer. It's like four parts making one choir. It's like four instruments coming together to make great music in a band. Four different writers, four different angles, describing one life more important than any other and one life whose ultimate meaning is to be found in His death. Will you follow with me as we look inductively together at the opening sentence of each of the four gospel writers?

"Gospel" means good news, and each of the gospels has an angle on the best news the world has ever heard. We begin with Matthew 1:1. Matthew 1:1 starts with the statement:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

This is the opening sentence. Some of us are readers and we love to hear the word *book*; a

smaller set of us are really into genealogy. It's an acquired taste for many, but as we'll see, that's a very significant word for Matthew. Matthew's opening sentence tells us that he's writing a book, and the book begins with a genealogy, and its main subject is Jesus. In this first verse, he tells us three things about Jesus. Let's look at them together.

The first thing he says is that **Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah**. This is a Greek word that means *anointed one*. For those not familiar with the Bible, the anointed one or Messiah is the focal point of God's promise. As we traversed the unfamiliar territory of EXPECTATIONS the last couple of weeks, the focus of the hope of Israel is of a coming King, and Matthew does something remarkable. He tells us in the opening sentence of the New Testament that Jesus is this coming King: *Christ* in Greek; *Messiah* in Hebrew. The first words of the New Testament tell us that Jesus is the one.

Not only does he tell us that Jesus is the Messiah or Christ, he tells us that **Jesus is the Son of David**, and this echoes God's promise to David through Nathan the prophet that he would have a Son who would reign forever. His dominion would be universal in scope, and Matthew has said that Jesus is this Son of David.

Thirdly, Matthew says that Jesus is the **Son of Abraham**. When we look back to the Old Testament narrative, we see that the Son of Abraham is the promised descendant coming through Abraham's line, through whom blessing would be brought to all the world. It's a remarkable opening sentence that the Lord gives and moves Matthew to write.

I remember a few years ago at Kenwood, we had a retreat called, "What is a Christian?" It was scheduled out, planned accordingly, for all the children of the church. I was assigned a task, one slice of time in this retreat. My job was to come in and teach the New Testament to the children of Kenwood in an hour. That's the kind of thing you'd think to ask the pastor to do, isn't it? All these kids gathered together in one room, packed in, and I simply started at the beginning. I read Matthew 1:1: *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."* I asked all these children, taking great pedagogical risk, "Why does the New Testament begin this way?" Front row, red hair, I will not identify the child who is now a young adult and college student. Red hair, hand waving, and I thought, "This is so risky. Am I really going to entrust this hour to her? I have got to go through the whole New Testament; anything could happen here." The hand, the face, the strain. I said, "Yes, why does the New Testament begin in this way," and this young fourth-grade girl said, "Because these are the two great hopes of the Old Testament!" I said, "That's right; that's exactly right!" Then I thought, "How did she know that?" Then I recalled that children at Kenwood have Old Testament survey as kindergartners; New Testament survey as first graders; and then I remembered that my wife had taught Christ in the Old Testament for the third-graders. I thought, "This is great!" That's

why we don't have children gluing cotton balls on paper. We want to build the categories of God's truth into hearts. Some people will say that the kids don't understand everything. I said, "That's okay, neither do the adults, but we have to build the truth in," and Matthew 1:1 sets in front of us a towering opening statement.

The first sentence of the New Testament tells us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and then Matthew flows down a genealogy that climaxes with the return of God's presence. The very first Bible I ever received, when I was a high school student, was a Gideon New Testament. I didn't make it out of the first chapter. I was given this green Gideon New Testament and someone said, "You've got to read this. It's important." I thought, "Okay, I've heard about the Bible, let me start." I flipped the onion skin paper over and I started with "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham.*" I didn't know any of those names, and then I read this genealogy. I thought, "Why do people make such a big deal about this Book?" But, you see, Matthew has a lot to say. "*The book of the genealogy,*" for those who are more familiar with the Bible, you will recognize this formula. The book of the genealogy, the genealogy of Jesus is a repetition, a key phrase from the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis is organized into 10 sections that all begin "*The book of the genealogy*": this is the genealogy of Jacob, the genealogy of Isaac. Every time we see that phrase in Genesis, that means this is the next move of God's redemptive plan. Matthew's opening breath is alerting a trained reader that God's decisive next move is at hand, and he tells us glorious things about Jesus. Matthew is someone who was a tax collector. We are close to April, and most people don't feel huge surges of affection for people who collect taxes. That was true in the 21st century and that was true during the 1st century. No one wakes up in the morning and says, "Hallelujah! I get to pay my taxes today." Maybe we should. One of my former mentors said, "When you really think about it, it's a pretty good deal. We live in a great country!" Matthew was a tax collector, but we learn from the Scriptures that he's also a Levite. Each gospel writer makes a cameo appearance in his account, and Matthew's cameo is in Matthew 13:52 when he refers to himself as a scribe who's been training for the kingdom of heaven and brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Matthew's account is saturated with Scripture quotations, and his first sentence points us to Jesus, the return of God's presence: the Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham. That's a pretty powerful first sentence, isn't it?

The second gospel account is the gospel of Mark. The gospel of Mark begins his first sentence in Mark 1:1:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

According to early church testimony, the gospel according to Mark is a summary of Peter's preaching in Rome, and one of the distinctive features of Mark's gospel is that it has many Latin

loanwords in it. Mark's Hebrew name was John. He was a native of Jerusalem. He was a young man, and he includes a veiled reference to himself in Mark 14:51. Did you ever wonder in the gospel of Mark who the young man is who is at a distance and sees Jesus arrested and is scared and runs away? That is Mark. That's a young man, afraid, but desiring to follow Jesus. This John Mark would eventually joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey with great success in Cyprus, and then he panicked again when they reached the shores of Asia minor and were confronted with 12,000 foot high mountains, and Paul said, "We're going to cross over those and share Jesus with people on the other side. Mark said, "I've got to go home," and he ran away. He discovered more over time and later served Peter in Rome, and he was even reconciled with Paul. The gospel of Mark is an action-oriented gospel. If you struggle with attention, if you struggle with keeping focused, Mark is the gospel for you. Forty times in Mark's narrative, the next scene happens with Mark's saying: "*immediately.*" He links all events: immediately, immediately, immediately. It's a rapid-fire, action-oriented gospel. For a cultural context, the Roman world was on steroids; they were action-oriented, and Mark's gospel presents Jesus as a powerful Savior. Mark's gospel begins with the bold announcement in Mark 1:1 concerning the good news:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Mark's opening statement tells us, as Matthew does, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised One—first breath, no doubt, no ambiguity about it. Jesus is the Messiah, and not only Messiah, He is the Son of God. To a Roman world, the category of son of God was something being claimed by the Caesars. Coins, as you've seen if you've been around Kenwood for a while, coins of the Empire at this time were regularly minted with the inscription: "Caesar was the son of the divine one, or son of God." Mark wants to be absolutely clear in his first sentence that the real Son of God is Jesus the Messiah and that the real warrior is a warrior who saves, that Jesus is the one who comes to bring the kingdom. Mark identifies, after his first breath, that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God. Mark tells us the beginning of the gospel is in the ministry of John the Baptist who comes forth as a herald in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord Himself. Mark's gospel will hold your attention, and Mark's gospel is a great gospel for those who are action-oriented or have very little background in Jesus. That is the reason that we are going to use Mark's gospel this summer at Kenwood for evangelistic small groups, because it's a great gospel to begin with if you don't have a lot of background.

The third gospel account is written by Luke. Luke is the only Gentile author, the only non-Israelite author in the New Testament. According to early church testimony, Luke was originally from Antioch. He became a believer in Jesus through the ministry of Paul and joined Paul on his second missionary journey. Luke's gospel, as well as his second volume, Acts, is dedicated to a literary patron named Theophilus, and Luke tells us in his opening sentence why he wrote it.

Luke's opening sentence is flowery. It's elegant and that's why Matthew gets one verse, Mark gets one verse, and Luke's opening sentence is four verses. Not only is Luke's opening sentence four verses, his opening word is a fancy word. I don't know if you use the word *inasmuch* very often, but I don't. The word *inasmuch* translates an unusual Greek word that signals right from the beginning that we are in the hands of a literary man. Luke's opening sentence is designed to capture the attention of learned people. Luke is an educated man. He's a physician, He's writing with polished and style, and Luke tells us at the very beginning that that inasmuch as many have undertaken, literally, many have set their hands, to compiling or arranging a narrative. Many people have done that, to compile a narrative, the ESV translates as, of *"the things that have been accomplished among us."* The word that Luke actually uses here is *"of the things that have been fulfilled among us,"* as we see in other translations like the New International Version. Many people have set their hand to put together a narrative, a story. You can't understand Jesus as a set of isolated statements. Jesus doesn't come to give us proverbs. Jesus doesn't arrive to give us maxims on how to live. Jesus comes with a narrative, a story, that has a beginning, a middle, a climax, a purpose, and implications. All the Gospels are narratives, and Luke knows that other people have done it. He doesn't give their names, but he probably is referring to Matthew and Mark. Many have undertaken, and he says, *"just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses."* He uses a very technical word here so that we can know for sure that what we know about Jesus is from people who were eyewitnesses. This is critical for the faith that we believe in. They were eyewitnesses, and then they became ministers or servants of the Word. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:16:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

Then he quotes in 1 Peter 2:17, saying they heard the voice of God the Father say audibly:

"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

As Jesus was transfigured in radiant glory before their eyes, Peter says: "I was there and I heard that, and I want to tell you about the glory of Jesus."

The apostle John says it this way. He says in 1 John 1:1-2a:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it. . ."

Christianity rests on eyewitness testimony, and these eyewitnesses then became, according to Luke, servants of the Word, and they transmitted the Word. The New Testament is the most attested and transmitted document, or set of documents, in the history of the world by an overwhelming amount. The writers of the New Testament became servants of the Word, and

those who received the Word not only read it and shared it, but they copied it and distributed it. Do you know that we have 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and some of those manuscripts are within just a generation, some may be within 10 years, of the writing. Not only do we have these Greek manuscripts, we have 10,000 early translations. People took the Word of God and they translated it. Why? Because people needed to hear. This is the greatest news the world has ever received. Not only did they translate it, but they were talking about it. If by some strange happenstance we lost all of the manuscripts of the New Testament, all the early translations of the New Testament, we still would have the Bible now because early Christian writers quoted it. Do you know how many quotations there are of the New Testament in early Christian writing? There are one million citations. If we lost all the evidence for the New Testament, we could reconstruct it because every verse in the New Testament is cited 100 times. What's happening? The Word is getting out, and Christians did something which they never do. Okay, let's be honest. We are not cultural innovators here, right? We tend to trail behind. Once things get really popular, then we think okay we have got to do that. We rarely get out in front of culture, except in the history of the church, we have gotten out in front of culture in this way. Christians were the first ones to make use of the Codex form of a book. You aren't all familiar with that. A Codex is a bound book. It's a lot easier to use than a scroll, although now we are going more retro because we're doing more scrolling with our smart phones. But the book form, Christians used to disseminate the Word.

George Henry is a dear friend and a Gideon in Cincinnati. We have had a long-term partnership, and the Gideons are always passing out Bibles, getting the Word out. George came to visit us this week, just to check in and see how we were doing. He said to me, "David, David, we are trying to stay current as Gideons." We're all trying to do that. He said, "Listen. We've got an app." I said, "Really? You've got an app?" He said, "Yeah, let me show you how it works." He pulled it up on his phone and said, "Here's the Gideon app." Did you know that there's a Gideon app? I didn't. Maybe you all did. He said, "Look, all the Bible is here. Let me show you what's really cool. Choose your language." I said, "Okay, George, you have my attention. How many languages do you have in there?" He said, "There are 1,280 translations of the Bible on this app, and it gets better. You select one, and most of them have the audio built in, too." So if you are meeting with someone who doesn't know Christ and you don't know their language, and maybe their native language of their heart is Arabic, and you just want to tell them from God's own words who Jesus Christ is and they are struggling to follow along, you can say, "Just a second. Let me open up the Gideon app and select the Arabic New Testament. Let me let you hear in the language of your heart, because this is the most important news the world has ever received."

In Luke 1:3b-4, which is the climax of Luke's first sentence, Luke says:

“ . . . it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

Luke's gospel was written to give an orderly sequence, an arrangement that sticks, an outline that is easily grasped. You can tell Luke went to graduate school because he writes and thinks with these orderly outlines, and he tells you the outline upfront. Isn't that so pleasant? Some of us learn like that.

The fourth gospel is the gospel of John, and John's opening sentence is this in John 1:1:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

For those familiar with the Bible, you will recognize that phrase *in the beginning*, because it's as though John is writing a new Genesis: the new creation of the world is coming to pass. John draws our attention to the Word and that the Word was with God. Then John says a remarkable thing, that the Word was God, that this divine Word then became flesh, human, took on flesh and dwelt among us—literally, tabernacled among us. John and his brother James were some of the earliest who were called to follow Jesus. James's brother was killed, the first Christian martyr among the 12, killed by Herod Agrippa. John ended up fleeing Jerusalem during the Roman siege of the city and spent his later years in the city of Ephesus in ministering, preaching, teaching, and pastoring until he was exiled to the island of Patmos. He looked towards those cities and people that he loved, and then the Lord finished the Bible by giving him a revelation of the glory of Jesus as He is today. John's gospel is sometimes called the preachers' gospel because every unit of John's gospel is a complete presentation. John is aware of the other gospel writers. The other gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, build up inductively to the confession of Jesus as Messiah. John's gospel tells you everything in each scene. That is why John's gospel is so effective for the seeker. John's gospel is powerful for someone who doesn't know Christ because in every portion that you read, you get the opportunity to believe. John tells us why he wrote in John 20:20-31:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

All four of the gospel writers share the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. They share the conviction that He fulfills the hope of Israel that we've talked about the last two weeks, that His birth marks the arrival of the kingdom of God, the return of God's presence, the next decisive step in God's plan. We are going to journey together over the next several weeks to look at the life, ministry, preaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and I want to challenge you as we head into this to keep your eyes closely fixed on Jesus. You have got to consider who

He is, what He says, what He does, and ask yourself what it would mean to follow Him. Jesus is no ordinary person, no mortal teacher. He is Messiah, Son of God, Emmanuel. The gospel writers are seeking to persuade you; they're not seeking to inform you. They are seeking to persuade you that: Jesus is the King, my King; that Jesus is God, my God; that Jesus is Savior, my Savior, and that only He can satisfy. Jesus satisfies our souls, and God in His wisdom placed four accounts. They are different in emphasis, in style; they share the same aim to persuade.

Matthew satisfies the scholar. Matthew is filled with quotes of Scripture. He includes Jesus' teaching more than any other, and Jesus' teaching is sublime. It's so sublime that it can be studied infinitely, in-depth, and yet it's so sublime that it can be understood. Pastor Scott is going to preach the entire Sermon on the Mount next Sunday. See him smiling? People have written hundreds of thousands of pages on that and he's going explain it in 30 minutes. A good teacher, a great teacher, can say a lot in a short time. No pressure, Scott! Matthew's presentation satisfies the scholar.

Mark satisfies the soldier and the action-oriented person. I have had a really electrifying past couple of days. I got to fly down to Florida and teach 10 hours on Greek exegesis. As we were gathering together, the first student in the class showed up in his Navy uniform. He was of Colombian descent and is a worship pastor in his church in Florida. We started talking, and I said, "Why are you in this class?" He said, "I'm a pilot and I know how to fly. I know the machine that I fly in, and I'm trusting that machine to save my life. I fly that machine at high speeds, and I've flown through with 3,000 bullets coming at me, and that machine has kept me alive. I know how it works. I grew up as a cultural Christian, and someone led me to a living faith in Christ two years ago. I'm trusting this machine to keep me alive because I know how it works. I've trusted Jesus Christ to keep me alive forever, but I don't know how His Book works and that's why I'm here." I thought, "This is going to be a great class." I asked him yesterday, "Would you finish our time of studying God's Word by leading us in worship? This study should take us into worship. Jesus satisfies the scholar; Jesus satisfies the soldier." He led us in singing *Cornerstone*, what we just sang. God is good! Mark's gospel climaxes with the confession of the Roman soldier: "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

Luke satisfies the surgeon, the educated person, a professional person, a person of means, of societal reputation, someone who is attentive to detail, who learns by orderly sequence. Luke's gospel will build you up in its powerful testimony. The climax of Luke's gospel is the necessity that "*repentance and forgiveness of sins would be made known to all the world,*" and Luke is keen to share the next part of the story in Acts. We are thankful that the Lord stirred his heart to do that.

John satisfies the seeker, the person wondering if God has a plan for me. John's gospel includes

the lines that have been quoted more than any other to lead people to saving faith in Christ, and John's gospel at its heart answers this question that is in the heart of every human being. It's in your heart; it's in my heart; it's in the hearts of all the people around us who don't yet know Jesus Christ, and that question is: Does God love me? John's gospel answers that question:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

These four voices are persuading us that Jesus satisfies.

We come to Messiah and we come in the presence of the King of glory. We have the banner now for MESSIAH, and I just thank God for the artists among us. This is an original painting done



by Hailey Marosi, a young adult in our church. It's very moving, isn't it? I asked Hailey about it, to tell me what happened to her, and she spoke about how the Lord just moved her to the paint this. She had never done anything quite like it. These are her words. She said: "I wanted to show Messiah in a way that was traditional but also new. I wanted to stack the painting with layers of saturated color like a celebration with royal colors such as yellow and gold, but blood red as well." At the heart of this painting is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and He is depicted as the Lamb. He is a royal Lamb because He has the standard, the signal of a cross, the victorious banner. He is the one who carries out and executes the will of God, and you see beneath Him the seals of the will of God being opened, and yet He is a Lamb because our King, our Savior, our God saves by offering His life as a ransom for ours.

The opening sentences of the gospels draw our attention to Jesus the Messiah, but the most amount of space is to Jesus' final week. In that final week, He gathered with His disciples. He took bread and He broke it in their presence, and He said, *"This is My body which is broken for you."* He took the cup and said, *"This is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood which is given for you."* We come to the table of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory, God Himself, Savior of the world. This is not our table, not Kenwood's table. Do you know that two billion people will partake this week of the broken body, shed blood of the King of glory, Savior of the world. If you have trusted in Him, partake with us. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we honor You and we extol You, and we gather together around the table of the King. Lord, I pray for those among us who are seeking, that they would be satisfied in Jesus. Lord, I pray for the surgeon-like types among us who need everything in order, that they would find satisfaction in You. I pray Lord for the soldiers among those who want a hero worth living and dying for, that they would be satisfied in Jesus. I pray for the scholars among us who are hungry for meaning, hungry for insight, that they would be satisfied in Jesus.

In His Name we pray, Amen.