

Thanksgiving is on deck. Christmas is right on its heels.
For many that means arranging plans with family. Immediate family. Extended family.
As much as we love them, no family is perfect. Sometimes this is glaringly evident.
Some families are close. Some are separated. Some are dramatic. Some are dull.

But what if this holiday season- as we prepare to spend time with our close or extended family-
what if we paused to recognize that Jesus' family tree was full of its own broken branches?
What peace might that give us?
What lessons can we learn?
Because behind every family tree is a story.
This November we'll dig into the family tree that produced divinity.

What lessons can we pull from Christ's lineage that apply to our own families?
Hidden Figures – mothers and women like Bathsheba and Rahab who were pushed to the
margins by their culture are given focus and meaning.
Royal Fumbles – how the great King David was a pitifully passive father, and the lessons we can
learn from his mistakes.

Tonight: ***The Gap***

That and more is all here in **Matthew 1:1-17** – the very first words of the New Testament.

This isn't exactly the most epic of possible openings to the Gospels.
It's a genealogy covering approximately 28 generations and 1700 years.

You ask most folks in our culture to go back as far as they can in their family tree, they can make
it two or three generations, tops. In most of our lives - genealogies aren't a top priority.

But for Jews they were of the utmost priority. They kept extensive records for both practical and
legal purposes – extending from heritage to inheritance, to legitimacy, to rights.
Being able to tie your ancestry back to Abraham was crucial and key.

I'm not sure there's a more skimmed or skipped portion of our Bibles than genealogies.
Some of you got antsy just sitting through what we read today.
Why would I sit still through a list of dozens of names my pastor can barely pronounce?

Cutting Raj's hair...

Imagine trying to cut a kid's hair while he does flips on a trampoline. It's like that.

My mom's tool to get me to sit still? My mom used to promise Twizzlers. We almost never ate
candy. My mom was a health freak. But sit still for a haircut and a Twizzler was yours.

It was such a simple promise that was faithfully delivered on each time.
This building of trust with our kids through follow through and being faithful to our word creates
the security and feeling of safety that kids aren't even aware that they need.
Some of us had this throughout our childhood.
Some of us didn't.

Proverbs 25:14 says that ***“a person who promises a gift but doesn’t give it
Is like clouds and wind that bring no rain.”***

So much of our highs and lows in life are driven by expectations spoken and unspoken - upheld and broken. And as we grow promises can make or break a lot of our earthly experiences. Solomon also said *“words can bring life or death”*
How much more upheld or broken promises?

Tonight I want to talk about **the gap**.
The gap between promises made and promises delivered.

This is Matthew 1:1

It stands in the gap between all the promises God has made and all the promises fulfilled. I don’t want to oversimplify the Bible, but...

To the left in our Bible is promises made.

To the right is promises fulfilled.

The Church spends a lot of time to the right. But I’ve talked to multiple faith-filled, faithful believers who DO read their Bibles that say they don’t spend time to the left. They plain don’t read the Old Testament.

To do that is to miss the context and the full weight of the good news that’s to the right. The consequence is that in our own lives, we waiver when we’re in the gap, because we forget the gap that Jesus entered into. We forget the promises he was fulfilling.

I want to look at what many theologians and Bible scholars point to as the most key promise in the Old Testament. It’s a promise made on the heels of the disastrous end of Eden, but pointing to a new and greater kingdom to come.

Genesis 12:1-3 - *The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt.
All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”*

My family. Your family. Each family gathering this holiday season. Blessed by Abraham. Through his descendants and the nation of Israel. That’s quite the promise.

The problem?

They were an old, nomadic, barren couple.

Their branch of the family tree was dead and leafless. And the clock was ticking.

And sometimes we forget that even after God’s promise... it kept ticking. And it kept ticking.

Abraham spends years and *decades* in the gap – the gap between God’s promises made and his promise fulfilled. And as we’ll see later... one wasn’t even fulfilled in his lifetime!

Paul speaks to this in **Romans 4:18-20**:

“Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping- believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead- and so was Sarah’s womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith only grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God.”

His faith didn’t weaken as he spent more and more time in the gap. It grew stronger. That seems an illogical equation. That’s challenging to every ounce of my flesh.

I remember like it was yesterday driving down 64 past Mercury Boulevard listening to ***Good Good Father***.

But being a dad was something I’d always dreamt of. Looking to my future, I couldn’t really see it without a family. Listening to this song, Steph and I were a couple miscarriages deep and three years deep into an adoption process that had no sign of ending.

I hear God ask me...

“Will you still call me a Good Good Father even if you never have a son or daughter that can call you the same?”

He was asking me in that moment what he asks all of us when we’re waiting years into a gap between promises made and promises fulfilled:

“Will your faith in me weaken and waver, or will it grow stronger?”

Those moments where God speaks I can count on two fingers.

How often do we think: ***I WISH GOD SPOKE TO ME LIKE HE DID ABRAHAM!!***

I think we forget that from God’s first conversation with Abraham when he was roughly 75 to the last conversation when he was roughly 175, there are eight recorded conversations and dreams between God and Abraham. Eight times over 100 years, with decades of silence in between!

He didn’t have a Bible.

He had to cling to his last encounter, often without seeing immediate fruit... for years.

God has given us more of his voice and direction than Abraham ever had.

You want to hear God’s voice? Pick up your Bible and read it out loud.

It’s a gift Abraham didn’t have that we take for granted over and over again.

Genesis 15 – **“some time later”** – Abraham had been living in the gap. Still waiting on the fulfillment.

God again speaks to Abraham, promising protection and reward.

Abraham – *“O Sovereign Lord, what good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son? ...you have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.”*

What did God give Abraham as a reminder?

The stars. A constant reminder of his faithfulness that would never go anywhere.

Isaiah 40:

“Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars?

He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by name.

Because of his great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing.

O Jacob, how can you say the Lord doesn't see your troubles?”

That was a fill in the blank text for me:

O Justin, how can you say the Lord doesn't see your troubles when he created each of the stars and calls each by name?

But **Genesis 15** is also where God takes his covenant oath and where you see the heart of what the Bible is all about.

First off, God has Abraham cut a bunch of animals in half.

This was a customary way to walk out a covenant oath in that culture.

The lower person would walk between the divided animals as a symbol that if I don't keep my side of this covenant, may I be cut to pieces like these animals.

God went through the pieces.

The shock was that Abraham was never asked to go through them himself.

It meant God was making a promise for both of them and that he would take on the punishment for both of them. He was saying I'll be torn to pieces if you don't keep your promise.

God was saying I'm not just the covenant and promise maker.

I'm the covenant keeper. Even in spite of your sin and failings.

Matthew 1 comes after many many generations have passed.

David and his kingdom rises as a fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham, God makes his covenant with David... then it crumbles due to sin and goes into exile.

And for 400 years leading up to Matthew – there's been silence. No prophets. No voice. Silence.

It's known as the intertestamental period.

That's entire lifetimes coming and going, lived in the gap.

“God are you faithful?”

“God do you even remember your promises? Do you even remember us?”

See, we set up our nativity scenes every year and look back some 20 centuries to Jesus's birth.

But for centuries and generations leading up to his birth- God's people were in waiting.

Living in the gap between God's promise made and God's promise fulfilled.

And many generations died before seeing it come to pass.

God was asking them – *“will your faith weaken and waiver, or will it grow stronger?”*

This is what Matthew is pointing to with his genealogy. He's saying to the faithful Jewish people: ***You wait hasn't been wasted. It never is.***

And yet Israel's expectation was a military Messiah and a kingdom that would topple the Romans. And then... Jesus dies.

The thrill of hope met with the agony of disappointment.

Not based on God's unfulfilled promise...but their unmet expectations.

But Jesus death on the cross pointed all the way back to Genesis 15.

Darkness came down on Mount Calvary the same way it came down on Abrahams animals and Jesus was torn to pieces.

Jesus was all but torn in half physically because he was taking the covenant curse

When he said at the Last Supper, and we say at communion:

This is the blood of the covenant... this is my body broken for you...

All this also points back to Genesis 15.

God isn't just a promise maker.

He's a promise keeper.

Even when the gap is thousands of years.

This is birds eye view.

This is universal.

This is big picture.

What about your picture?

What about your view?

How does this effect you next week?

What about the personal dreams that are unfulfilled?

What about the prayers that aren't yet answered?

The prayers prayed for our sons and daughters, wives and husbands?

What about the gaps we live in?

When will the answer come?

I don't have the answer.

But I find it interesting that in Genesis 15 God makes two promises in his covenant to Abraham – descendants and land that they would possess.

The first happens in Abraham's lifetime. The second doesn't. It happens some 400 years later!

I pray for all kinds of things.

I'm praying that God heals both Steph and Raj.

It might happen in this life. It might not. But it will certainly happen in the next.

But bottom line - my relationship with God isn't contingent on whether results meet my expectations. Jesus didn't meet the expectations of many people who spent centuries waiting for the Messiah. And here's the thing about expectations:

Expectations are always looking to the future. **Relationships** are rooted in the present.

This is so healthy to take to heart as parents when it comes to our families.

I've got expectations and hopes for Raj. This isn't unique. Every parent has these for their kids. I have hopes of him being done with diapers. Him being able to communicate. Him being able to dress himself.

I live in the gap ...waiting on those things to come. Some may never come. We don't know.

So often we can't wait...

We can't wait until our child is past the terrible twos,

We can't wait until they can bathe and go to the bathroom by themselves.

We can't wait until they are out of this teenage drama phase.

And then before we know if they're off to college and we're thinking... who was that kid even?

I want to be a good parent – and good parents focus on the present and cherish each stage of development... tolerating the drawbacks in order to enjoy the present.

In parenting and in LIFE - present relationship is more important than expectations for the future. I want to be content with relationship rather than driven by expectations- healthy or unhealthy.

The same can be for family members we're ready to give up on. Friends and family who are still rough around the edges.

How often do we get so caught up in our expectations of God that we neglect our relationship? Prayer is an exchange where we seek results, but never an avenue to relationship. God's Word becomes a place we seek personal direction, but not relationship with God. We miss the person behind the promises, and we suffer for it in the gap.

When it comes to the promises of God I'm praying for while I stand in the gap – personally I look two places:

THE PAST

Either Jesus was real and there's an empty tomb or there isn't.

I may not understand how every promise will play out, but I **WILL** fix my eyes on Jesus.

I want to follow the man who by faith went to the cross and then beat death.

I don't fully understand just how Abraham's faith **GREW** rather than **WAVED** while living in the gap. But **Romans 4:17** gives me a good clue: "*Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.*"

And when those problems linger...

I can look to **THE FUTURE**

His faith didn't weaken as he spent more and more time in the gap. It grew stronger.

That seems an illogical equation.

But the longer I wait, the closer I must be to the promise.

Marathons... I've run two. It doesn't matter how long you train. You don't get tired mile 26. You get tired like mile 11. But you endure. I didn't train so I'd have a pain free marathon. I trained and ran hundreds of miles because I needed endurance.

The longer I run. The closer I am to the finish line.

May we be a people that don't just stay faithful and not waver, but a people whose faith GROWS in the gap.

May we stand in the gap in faith. May we kneel in the gap in prayer.

But may we run in the gap. Keep pressing. Keep moving.

Keep trusting God to lead. Keep growing.

Hebrews 12 says: *Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus.*

In the MSG version it says this of Jesus:

Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way

“I'm in the gap” I'm waiting. I'm wondering. I'm wavering.

Let me encourage you...

We read that Abraham's faith didn't waver in Romans and then turn back to Genesis – that's eyebrow raising. Didn't waver? What about that whole Hagar and Ishmael mess?

Well maybe God's understanding of faith is different than ours?

When we think of having unwavering faith, we make no room for doubt, mistakes, or anxiety.

But perhaps unwavering faith is a paradox.

Maybe it means we keep coming back to the God who doesn't waver.