

January 15, 2012 - Go! Beyond Here

We are into a New Year and into a new series of sermons. We've entitled this series "Go" and I'm excited about getting into this series this morning. We're really just going to set the stage, if you will, for what we're going to do. We're diving into the Gospel of Matthew this next several weeks so this morning we just kind of want to get our feet wet a little bit. I always enjoy starting a new series of lessons because ideally, I'm several weeks ahead of the rest of you as far as what the curve of what we're studying goes. I kind of have some sense of where this is all going three, four, six weeks down the road and so it's always exciting for me because I've been working on this for several weeks now trying to get ready for this and now I'm excited because we actually get to share it together. So, it's always fun for me to start a new series of lessons and perhaps the funnest parts about it is getting to name a new series and then see the wheels turn in your head as you try to figure out 'now what on earth does that title have to do with whatever it is we're going to talk about.

This time, we picked something very simple, just one word "Go". I thought, "I wonder what people, what's going through people's heads as they read that this is our new series entitled "Go" what things might come into your mind and so I tried to start thinking "What kind of phrases would come into my mind as I consider that. "Ready set go" or sometimes we say things like "let's go for it" or "go for the gold" or "go for the gusto" or perhaps just "go for broke". There's the saying "go hard or go home" and I always thought that must have originated with curling somehow, cause that seems a fitting place for that to come from. But maybe if you've been going hard for too long and then you decide to take it easy and "go R.V. ing" for awhile. We could get together and watch a hockey game and chant "Go, Canada, Go". Or perhaps you would prefer to chant something different like "Go, Go, Power Rangers" and maybe that's more your speed of things. These days, lots of people are saying it's important that we start to "Go Green" and some people may be inclined to put on their "Go, Go, Boots" and say to their friends "You go Girl". Not me in particular but some of you may be inclined to go that route. And then there's the classic line from Little Orphan Annie, the line that none of us can forget and still holds true today "When you gotta go, you gotta go". I thought that may be some of the things that might be running through your head as we start this series. We're not going in any of those directions this morning, where we're headed to is the Gospel of Matthew. We're going to spend the next several weeks in the Gospel of Matthew and I think there's going to be some really rich lessons in there for us.

We've talked about this before as we've started series on some of the different Gospels and we've talked about how each of the different Gospels has its own flavor or its own feel. All four of the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are writing the same story and they recount a lot of the same events, but they're four different people and they're writing to four different audiences and they kind of want to make four different points as they're writing. They each kind of have their own feel to it. About a year ago we spent time going through, does anyone remember what we did a year ago? It was one of these four. It's not Matthew so you've got a 33% chance of being right. Do you remember which one it was? Mark! Yes.

Last year we spent about this time we spent several weeks going through the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the shortest Gospel and because of that Mark has a lot of ground to cover and so Mark has a pace to it. There's kind of a tempo to Mark as you read it. There's almost this urgency as you go through the Gospel. In Mark there's this key word in the Gospel of Mark that keeps popping up over and over again. Do you remember what the key word in the Gospel of Mark is that keeps coming up over and over again? I'll give you your letters R, S, T, L, N and E. Put those up on the board for you and if you think you know it, don't shout it out put up your hand when you think you know it. Hopefully everyone's got their hand up now. "Immediately". In the Gospel of Mark he keeps using this phrase "immediately". Jesus would do something and then immediately He would go to this place. And Jesus would do something and immediately the man was headed. And Jesus would do something else and immediately this other thing would happen. So Mark has this pace this tempo, this urgency to it.

The Gospel of Matthew has its own thing to it. If Mark is about 'Pace', then Matthew is about 'Motion'. As we read through the Gospel of Matthew you're always going to feel kind of this sense of motion as we read through it. He's always talking about Jesus going somewhere, or Jesus went here. He uses words like 'go', and 'going' and 'went', over and over again. I just want to give you a sense of that as we start this morning so I'm going to throw a whole bunch of verses at you off the start. I just want to give you a sense of the over-arching scope of this kind of sense of motion that Matthew brings to his story telling about Jesus.

In actions, there's always this sense of motion.

Matt. 4:12-13 - Jesus heard that John had been arrested and so He left Judea and He returned to Galilee and He went first to Nazareth and then He left there and He moved to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

Matt. 19:1-2 - He left Galilee and He went down to the region of Judea and large crowds followed Him.

Matt: 16:21 - From then on Jesus began to tell His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and He would suffer terrible things at the hands of the elders.

Matt: 20:17 -When Jesus was going up to Jerusalem He took the twelve aside.

Matt: 26:30. When they had sang a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.

But it's not just in the geographical story that Matthew does this, it's also in many of the parables that Jesus tells. You may remember some of these stories that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Matthew. Many stories in the form of parables. Listen.

Matt. 13:3 - A farmer went out to plant some seeds.

Matt. 22:8-10 - A master has set up this great banquet and none of the guests he invited came so he said “The guests I invited aren’t worthy of honour so now go out into the street corners and invite everyone you see. So the servants brought them in, everyone they could find the good and bad alike.”

Matt. 25:14 - Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is to be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip.

Matt. 25:14 - If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do. Will he leave the 99 and go out and search for the one that is lost.

But, beyond the parables, even in Jesus’ miracles there’s still this sense of motion and this sense of going.

Matt. 8:13 - Jesus said to the Roman officer “Go back home because he believed it will happen.”

Matt. 9:6 - Jesus turned to the paralytic “Take up your mat and go home”.

Matt. 8:3-4 - Jesus said “Be healed” and instantly the leprosy disappeared and Jesus said to him “Don’t tell anyone about this, instead, go to the Priest and let him examine you.”

And even beyond the miracles, there are some instructions that Jesus gives to His followers and He says, He’s talking about if someone has something against you, what you do is, you leave your sacrifice at the alter and you go be reconciled to that person then you come and you offer that sacrifice. Matt. 5: 23-24.

Matt. 6:6 - When you pray, go away by yourself and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father in private.

And then, probably one of the most famous passages out of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus came to His disciples and told them “I have been given all authority on Heaven and on Earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matt. 28: 18-19.

That’s just a sampling of verses throughout the Gospel of Matthew, where there’s the sense of motion. There’s always ‘going’. Someone is always going to someplace or just came from someplace. They’re always on the move so to speak. The words “Go”, “Going”, and “Went”, appear in the Gospel of Matthew 149 times. 149 times in 28 Chapters, which means, if you’re really good with the math, someone is going somewhere over 5 times a Chapter as you read through the Gospel of Matthew. So there’s this sense of movement this sense of going. Because this story is on the “Go”, the reader comes to the Gospel of Matthew expecting to be taken somewhere. You come to the Gospel of Matthew expecting to be pushed and to be moved

and to be nudged along. You come to the Gospel of Matthew and you read through it expecting to end up somewhere other than where you started.

So, with a story that's so focused on movement, with so much on the go, you would expect Matthew to blast right out of the starting blocks as he kicks off his Gospel. So, as we anticipate this roaring start to his Gospel, this motion, this going, here's how Matthew kicks the whole thing off. "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac; Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron was the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab," and so on and so on and so on.

Maybe not what we expected reading through the first Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew is like, well, it's kind of like sitting in this classroom---(video clip – classroom attendance scene from "Ferris Bueller's Day Off").

That's kind of how we feel like when we come to Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 1 and we get to this long, let's be honest, it's a long, long, list of names. Mostly people we don't know. Mostly words we can't pronounce. And most of us, if we're being honest, when we come to read the Gospel of Matthew, we would happily skip ahead and start in Chapter 2. But, if we assume that Matthew is writing his Gospel for a specific purpose and that he's selecting things that he includes and he excludes and how they are all arranged in his Gospel to serve that purpose, then this long list of odd names that seems rather dull and boring to us, this is what kicks off Matthew's retelling of the Christ story, then it does so for a reason, but what is it?

Shakespeare is quoted as saying, in Romeo and Juliette "What's in a name. That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." And that's true. If you took a rose, it doesn't matter what you call a rose, it's still going to smell like a rose no matter what name you give it. But, on the other hand, it's not entirely true because if I came up to you with a flower, a type of flower you had never seen before and said "Would you like to take a whiff of this dung flower?" You might be a little bit hesitant, wouldn't you? Why? Because names have meaning. Names have significance.

So, as we look at Matthew's list, there must be some meaning and significance in there. How many of you know what your name means? Anyone? My name is Michael. My mother says she picked it for me just because she liked the sound of it. I like to believe it's because she read through the meanings and saw that Michael means "One who is like God" and said "Oh, that is the perfect name for this child". But, she doesn't verify that version of events, unfortunately. What does your name mean? King. Ruby, is a stone. Everything has time, very nice. Richard, Powerful ruler, nice. Good, Barb, Stranger. Quinton - fifth son. Okay, we'll stop right there. So names have meanings. They have significance to us. When you get married lots of times the woman will change her name and take the husband's name. Sometimes, women will choose to keep their maiden name. They do that for several reasons,

that's because they're maiden name has significance, it has importance. Lots of times famous people will keep their maiden name because people know and will recognize them under that name so they don't want to lose that recognition they get from people. Or sometimes professionals will do the same. Jennifer goes by a hyphenated name: Jennifer Jacoby-Smith. And that's because on her mother's side, there were no males to carry on the Jacoby name so she decided she was going to keep Jacoby as part of her name to carry on the history of that family. So there's meaning and there's significance in the name you keep. Even for us men, we don't usually change our name when we get married. But, you can guarantee that your wife's maiden name takes on significance now that it did not have before you married your wife. There is some meaning and significance in your wife's maiden name that's different than if you had not married her. And so, our names have meaning and importance.

Some of you may have family traditions that are wrapped up in your names. My wife's name is Michelle Elaine. Her mother's name is Mary Elizabeth. And you can go back several generations and find women who have initials M. and E. So that's part of their family tradition and part of their family tree.

My family has a little bit different tradition. My grandfather's name was Arthur Burt. My dad's name is Robert Arthur. My name is Michael Robert and our second son is Harrison Michael. So, we kind of have this tradition that goes on. So there is some significance in the names that we have and we carry. Do any of you have traditions in the naming of your family? I see some heads nodding a little bit. Okay. We have significance that we give to people. Names are important. But, the names in my family tree may not have much meaning to you and the names in your family tree may not have much meaning to me, especially if I don't understand the significance that they carry. So, likewise in this long list of names that Matthew provides us with, maybe that doesn't particularly excite us as we read through it. That just might be because we don't really understand the significance of the names that are listed there. One commentator says this about the start of the Gospel of Matthew:

"It might seem to a modern reader that Matthew chose an extraordinary way in which to begin his Gospel. It might seem daunting to present, right at the beginning, a long list of names to wade through. But to a Jew, this is the most natural and the most interesting and indeed the most essential way to begin the story of any man's life." William Barclay.

So, what is the meaning in these monikers? Of the denotation of these designations. What are the nuances of these nomenclatures? Well, we're not going to find anything super profound in here. We're not going to find any kind of hidden cipher in their names, but I think what we are going to find, we're going to find some clues to what Matthew's Gospel will hold for us in the weeks to come.

There are three names in particular or three groups of people that we want to look at this morning out of Matthew's list of people that give us some hint as to what is to come.

First is King David. King David was a revered and conquering King of Israel. He was the proto-type King. If Israel could ever pick another king to have they would pick him because he was it. He was the end all and be all. He was the ultimate as to what Israel looked to as a king. Matthew talks a lot about King David. He uses David's name 17 times, which is more than any other book in the New Testament. By tracing Jesus' lineage back to this great King, Matthew not only gives legitimacy to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, but he ties Jesus to a promise that God made to David back in 2 Samuel 7. This is what God says to David:

“Further more, the Lord declares that He will make a house for you, a dynasty of Kings. For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, one of your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time and your throne will be secure forever.”

This is a promise to God's people and it is one that every Jew knew very well and every Jew was looking for the fulfillment of. So, as Matthew ties Jesus to this promise, he is connecting the dots between Jesus and David and he is unmistakably declaring to his Jewish readers that, the story you are about to hear, is the fulfillment of God's promise to His people. It's kind of like when you're watching T.V. and after the commercial break that screen comes up and says “The following program may contain scenes of violence and coarse language. Viewer discretion is advised.” Right? That's kind of what Matthew is doing here at the beginning. He's saying “If you are going to read this story, be prepared because I'm going to tell you how God answered His promise and kept His promise that He made to David.”

Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish people and his gospel is universally recognized as the most Jewish Gospel in terms of style and content. That makes Jesus' connection to David all the more important. This story is written to and for God's people. Describing the way that God keeps His promise to His people. But here's the twist. Even though Matthew's Gospel is written to a Jewish audience, more than Mark and Luke and John, Matthew's Gospel also puts Jesus at odds with the Jewish religious leaders, more than Mark or Luke or John. Matthew's Gospel is chalk full of confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the teachers of the Law and the Synagogue Rulers and the High Priests. Matthew establishes Jesus as the Messiah in Chapter 1, and then spends the rest of the Book detailing how God's people misinterpreted and misunderstood and just plain missed, what God was doing.

The Israelites were God's people in the ancient world but, we are God's people in the modern world. I believe that no matter how long you have been a Christian, there is something new in Matthew's Gospel about God's promise to His people, and how He is fulfilling it, that you need to discover. There is something about this story that you haven't yet heard. There is something about God's character that you need to discover. There is something about the way you live out your life as a child of God that you need to take to heart. So, as we begin our study of Matthew's Gospel, we have to ask ourselves “How will we respond to what God is doing? Will we see it or will we miss it? Will we join it or will we avoid it? Will we

embrace it or will we resist it? Will we yield to it or will we fight against it? Our hope and prayer for each one should be the same as Paul's words for the Church in Colossae when he writes:

Col 1:9-10 - "So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We asked God to give you complete knowledge of His will to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit all the while as you grow and learn to know God better and better."

The second person we read about in this list is Abraham. Matthew doesn't just trace Jesus' lineage back to David but he goes one step further following the line all the way back to Abraham. The connection to Abraham was important to the Jews, without a doubt, but even more importantly, it ties Jesus to the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18. God say this:

"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemy and through your descendants, all nations of the earth will be blessed, all because you have obeyed Me."

By connecting the dots from Jesus all the way back to Abraham, Matthew is serving notice that, even though his Gospel is being written primarily to the Jews, his message is going to be for all nations. And that means, no matter who you are, the message of the Gospel of Matthew, is for you. This is not a "Christians only" story. This is not an exclusive book club. It is not an offer available to select members only. So, if you are a first time reader, this Book is for you. If you are a tag along attendee, this Book is for you. If you are a cautious observer, this Book is for you. If you are a studious seeker, this Book is for you. And even if you are a hesitant hoper, this Book is for you.

The third and final group of people we want to look at in Matthew's list of people, is a group of women. There is five of them. Their names are Mary, Bathsheba, Ruth, Rahab and Tamar. I tried to find pictures of these five ladies, but for reasons that will soon become apparent, it was hard to come up with pictures that I could use up on the screen for these five women. But, these five women are included in Matthew's list of Jesus' ancestry, and that, in and of itself, is odd. Generally speaking, when the Jews would write up their genealogy they would not include women in the list because ancestry was traced through the males. Inheritance was traced through the males and so, in that time, in that culture, it was really all about the males, as far as the genealogy was concerned, anyways. And to some extent, in that culture, women were considered to be slightly less individuals. I'm not saying that I think women are lesser individuals. Quite the opposite. But, in that time, in that place, that's how they were viewed. So for Matthew to have included five women listed in that list of genealogies, this was quite a big deal for those who would read it.

But, it's more than just including five women in the list, there are some things about these women that are rather shocking, even to us today, but would have been just flabbergasting to Matthew's original readers. First of all, Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, they were not Hebrews, which would have been a little unnerving to some of the Jews who first read it. Ruth, was a Moabite. And actually the law said, I didn't know this until I was studying for this lesson, but, in Deuteronomy 23, it says that a Moabite was not allowed in the Synagogue to the 10th Generation. So, if your great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, grandparent was a Moabite, you were not allowed in the Synagogue. Your child would be, but you were not. That's how the Jews kind of viewed this race of people and Ruth was one of them and she is included in this list. So, these three people are foreigners to the Jewish race and so that is odd for them to still be included in this list.

But, beyond that, four of these women had what we might call a questionable past. I won't go into the full detail of these stories, but Tamar pretended to be a prostitute so that she could trick her father-in-law and ended up becoming pregnant by him and having a son by him. Now, that's not usually the kind of stuff you want to include in your family heritage album. Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho and when the spies came, they hid at her house perhaps, because no one would think twice about strange men going into her house. That's what happened all the time.

Bathsheba, you remember, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then there was a series of events that kind of spiraled down and down with that. But, none the less, she was involved in this rather dubious affair. Kind of a smudge on the history of Israel. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, we know the full story, but to people who were looking at it first hand, all they saw was that Mary was engaged to Joseph and suddenly became pregnant by someone else and they don't know who. And so the reputation of some of these people was questionable to say the least.

By including these women, which early Jewish readers would consider to be of questionable character and heritage, Matthew is declaring that the message of his gospel is going to be intended for everyone. And that means, no matter what you have done, the message of Matthew's Gospel is for you. This is not an exclusive offer for those who have got it all together. This is not a promise just for those who have never messed up. This is not an invitation only to those who have flawless lives. So, if you've messed up a little, or a lot, this Book is for you. If you have fallen just short, or fallen flat on your face, this Book is for you. If you made a few mistakes or made more than you can count, this Book is for you. If you've had your occasional bad days, or if you occasionally have good day, this Book is for you. And if you can't imagine why anyone, least of all God, would want to have anything to do with you, this Book is for you.

As Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 9:12-13. "Healthy people don't need a doctor. Sick people do. Now go and learn the meaning of this scripture. I want you to show mercy not offer sacrifices. For I have come not to call those who think they are righteous, but those who know

they are sinners.”

So as Matthew begins his Gospel and as we begin our study, the message is the same. Whether you are a long time Christ follower or a first time investigator; whether your life is on the right track or it has been derailed; whether you have got it all together or it is all falling apart; No matter who you are or what you've done, there is a message in the story of Jesus that you need to hear and take to heart. Matthew's Gospel is going somewhere and he wants to take you with him. God wants to show you something in these next few weeks, maybe several somethings that will help you move beyond where you are now and into something better. Into a more complete life. Into a freedom from the past. Into a stronger sense of purpose and mission. Into a more genuine and active faith. Into a greater hope. Into a bigger promise. Into a deeper relationship with Him. Are you ready to GO?