

## What Does It Take to Be in the Lineup?

From the Series: The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.

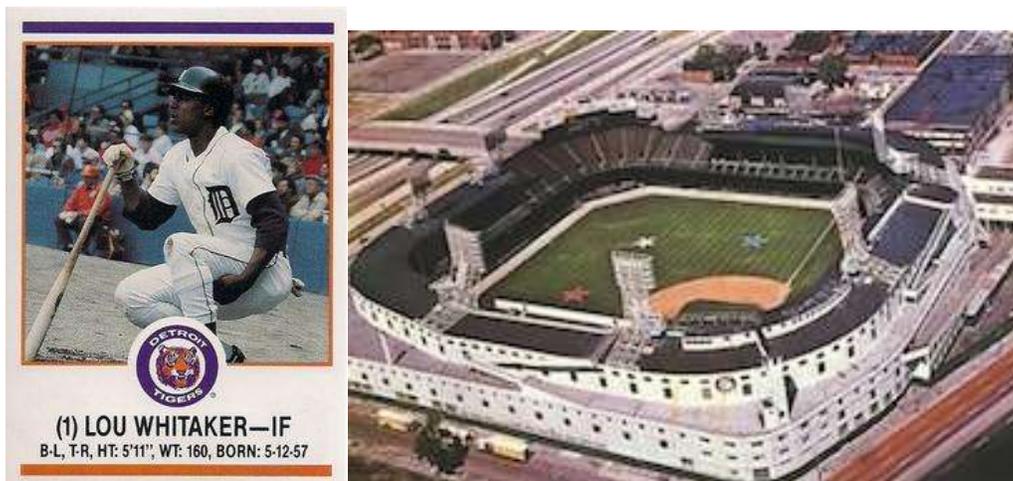
Presented to the Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

Sunday, January 19, 2020

### Introduction

My first position in “Full-time” ministry was in a church in a little place called Southgate, Michigan. That’s a little bit south of Detroit. My official title was “Assistant Pastor of Youth and Music”. My less-official title was “Assistant Pastor of Youth and Music and whatever the senior pastor didn’t feel like doing”.

So, part of my official job was youth pastor. Youth pastors do a lot of things; one of those things is to arrange for various outings for the young people in the church. One of the regular events was a visit to the local stadium to watch baseball games. Let’s go back there. The Year was 1989. The baseball team was (and still is) the Detroit Tigers. Here’s a picture of Tiger’s Stadium and second baseman at the time, Lou Whitaker.



Taking young people to a ball game can be a challenge. When you travel in from the suburbs, you have to get everyone into vehicles and deal with traffic and parking.

The biggest problem is the expense. Good seats at modern ballparks are expensive. To compare with today's prices, you can go on the Yankees web site. You'll find that a seat along the first base line costs almost a hundred dollars. Obviously, you're not going to take the youth group to a game at those prices. As you move further away, the prices come down. Midway up the stadium, the prices come down to a mere \$60. That's still a bit steep for kids who, if they have a job, they're working at McDonald's for minimum wage. But, if you go all the way to the top, the prices get more affordable. At the top level lining the stadium edge, the prices come to \$10 a seat. That's do-able.

These seats have affectionate names. Some call them the "nose-bleed" seats. Others call them the "peanut gallery". Whatever you call them, we got tickets up there. We then piled a group of kids onto a bus, took them to downtown Detroit, and walked up lots and lots of steps until we reached our seats.

Before the game started, we heard from the Tiger's announcer. He gave a word of welcome, and then announced the opening lineup: They players for the first inning. This announcer had an unusual style. He would always state the position, and then the name. He would then pause and repeat the name. So, it sounded something like this: "On first base, Alan Trammell". (pause) "Trammell". "On second base, Lou Whitaker". (pause) "Whitaker". The announcer would do this all the way through the lineup.

Now, the people who sit up in the cheap seats, the peanut gallery, had a number of interesting traditions. One was to have some fun during the opening announcements. During the pause, they would all yell out, "who?" After the name was repeated, they would all say, "Oh".

So, it sounded like this:

Announcer: "On first base, Alan Trammell".

Fans: "Who?"

Announcer: "Trammell".

Fans: "Oh".

Announcer: "On second base, Lou Whitaker".

Fans: "Who?"

Announcer: "Whitaker".

Fans: “Oh”

This went on all the way through the lineup.

Between the time the announcer finished his job and the players ran onto the field, I got into a discussion with the kids around me. We asked, **“What would it take to be in that lineup?”** Lots of young people dream about that. To be in that lineup, you would have to be one of the best ball players in the country at any given time. You would have to be strong and fast, agile and smart. In fact, you would have to be the strongest, the fastest, the most agile, and the smartest.

We’ve just started a new series, “The King and I – Matthew tells us about the King of the Universe”. In this series, we’re going to work our way through the Gospel According to Matthew. So, last week, we heard an introduction to the book. Today, we’re going to start at the beginning of chapter 1.

Matthew starts his book with the genealogy of the great King. A genealogy is a list of someone’s ancestors. In this case, these are the people who were ancestors of Jesus Christ. *If you will, you could call this a kind of a lineup.*

As we read this, we’re going to ask the same question that the kids in my youth group asked years ago:

***“What would it take to be in the lineup?”***

In other words, what did these people have that qualified them to be on this list? Let’s dive in by opening our Bibles and reading Matthew, chapter one.

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

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

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

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

4 Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,  
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,  
Obed the father of Jesse,  
6 and Jesse the father of King David.  
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's  
wife,  
7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,  
Abijah the father of Asa,  
8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,  
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,  
9 Uzziah the father of Jotham,  
Jotham the father of Ahaz,  
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,  
10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,  
Manasseh the father of Amon,  
Amon the father of Josiah,  
11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of  
the exile to Babylon.  
12 After the exile to Babylon:  
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
13 Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,  
Abihud the father of Eliakim,  
Eliakim the father of Azor,  
14 Azor the father of Zadok,  
Zadok the father of Akim,  
Akim the father of Elihud,  
15 Elihud the father of Eleazar,  
Eleazar the father of Matthan,  
Matthan the father of Jacob,  
16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary  
was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.  
(Matthew 1:1-16)

## I. Why did Matthew start his book with a genealogy?

Before we get to our main question, “What does it take to be in the lineup”, we have to answer the question, “Why is the lineup here?” In other words, “Why did Matthew start his book with a genealogy?”

1) The first answer to this question involves what we today call the “target audience” of this book. The “target audience” is the Jewish people. We mentioned last week during the introduction to Matthew’s book that Matthew wanted all of his friends to meet Jesus. His most immediate friends were the Jewish people.

The Jewish people in the days of Matthew were a very diverse group of people, just as Jewish people are today. They disagreed about a lot. But, there was one thing they agreed upon: One day, a great King would come to rule their nation. He was called, “The Messiah”, the chosen one.

This topic came up a number of times over the Advent season, so we won’t spend a lot of time here. But one of the reasons Matthew presented this genealogy was to demonstrate that Jesus was eligible to be this great king.

To qualify to be the great King, at least three things needed to be true: 1) The Messiah had to be Jewish – he had to be a descendant of Abraham. 2) He must be a descendant of King David. Matthew points these things out first thing on his list.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham... (Matthew 1:1)

So, in this genealogy, in this list, Matthew includes Abraham and David, and the connections in between. Because Jesus is descended from both Abraham and David, Jesus is qualified to be the great king. This would satisfy the Jewish believers that Matthew was trying to reach.

There is a second reason Matthew included this genealogy: **2) He wanted to demonstrate God’s power and his faithfulness to his promises.** Matthew did this

by showing that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. Again, we spoke about this during Advent, but let's just be reminded of one example:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come - and the obedience of the nations shall be his. (Genesis 49:10)

This prophecy says that all the kings of Israel must be descended from Judah. This will be true until the final great king comes. Judah was one of the 12 sons of Israel, who was the grandson of Abraham. So, in this genealogy, Matthew includes Judah.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob,  
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
(Matthew 1:2)

This shows that Jesus fulfilled prophecy.

In order to make prophecy work, you need a couple of things. **First, you need power.** A lot of things can come up between the time that you predict something, and the time that it's supposed to happen. God controls all the events from the time that he makes a prophecy, until the time that he fulfills it – he has the power.

**Second, you also must be faithful.** If God makes a promise, he feels personally obligated to expend the energy to make the promise happen.

Let's look at a life example: Lots of time, people have to apologize because they can't keep a promise. Have you ever had someone tell you they'll meet you at a certain time, and they're late? Or, they forgot? Or, something came up that they had no control over? It happens to all of us.

Or, maybe someone told you they would meet you, but they overslept? Sometimes, if you're in bed, staying in bed feels much more important than making an appointment happen. **To fulfill a promise, you have to want to fulfill the promise. You must be faithful.**

When God makes a prediction, he has the power to fulfill the prediction.  
When God makes a promise, he is faithful.

So, Matthew wanted his friends to know that God is powerful, and that God is faithful. And he demonstrated both of these things through Jesus in the way that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. This is something we're going to see all throughout the book of Matthew. Matthew points out lots of times that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. We'll highlight those as we go along.

Now, there's a third reason that Matthew included this genealogy. This reason isn't stated in the text, but I think it's true based on my study of Scripture. **3) Matthew included this genealogy to demonstrate that People are important to God.** People are important. Their names are important. Their lives are important. Their stories are important.

Do you know what that means? It means you are important to God. Your name is important to him. Your life is important to him. Your story is important to him. The Bible is a collection of stories about real people. In Many cases, their names are a prominent part of the stories that the Bible tells.

So, Matthew starts his book with a genealogy. He does it:

- 1) Because of his target audience, the Jewish people, who were looking for their Messiah.
- 2) To demonstrate God's power and faithfulness through fulfilled prophecy.
- 3) Because people are important to God.

So, now that we know why Matthew included this list of names at the beginning of his book, let's get back to our question: "What does it take to be in the lineup?" Or, more specifically, who were these people, and what qualified them to be on this list?

## II. Who were these people, and what qualified them to be on this list?

Let's answer that question by looking at some of the names, some of the people on this list. Sadly, we don't have time to meet them all, but let's look at a few important ones.

We're going to learn that each of them did something special, or they had a special quality that allowed them to be here. We're also going to learn something very important; something surprising. We're going to learn that they lacked qualities that you would expect.

Let's look at some of these very special people.

### 1. Abraham

We first meet Abraham in the book of Genesis in chapter 12. Abraham at the time was living in an ancient city called "Haran". The location is thought to be in modern-day Turkey. One day, God appeared to Abraham. Here's how the conversation went:

1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; (Genesis 12:1-4)

So, why is Abraham on this list? First, God picked him. For reasons we do not know, God picked Abraham to be the father of the whole Jewish race.

Second, Abraham trusted God and he obeyed God. Abraham was a successful person living in a safe, comfortable place. God told Abraham that, if he was willing to leave the safety and comfort of his home, and go where God told him to go, that Abraham would receive all kinds of incredible things. We're told that Abraham believed God. So, he obeyed when God told him to go.

So far, we can see why Abraham is on the list. He had faith. But, there's also something surprising about Abraham. Let's read about it.

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." (Genesis 12:10-13)

Abraham had a surprising problem. He didn't always trust God to protect and provide for him. He went to the land God told him, but then there was a famine. Did he pray to God and ask for God to provide? No. Instead of trusting God, he ran down to Egypt.

While in Egypt, he gets scared. Does he ask God to protect him and trust that God will do that? Again, no. He told a big, whopping lie. This got him into trouble.

So, this tells us something.

***Perfection is not required to be in the lineup.***

That's true of others on the list. Some of them do much worse things than Abraham.

There's a lot more to learn about Abraham. We'll run into him a lot as we study the Scriptures together.

How about another name?

## **2. Ruth**

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth... (Matthew 1:5(b))

Let me summarize a few things about this woman. The book of Ruth in the Old Testament starts with the story of a family who lived in ancient Israel: A father, a

mother, and two sons. During the time that they lived, there was a famine: Not unlike the one that happened when Abraham was alive. Like Abraham, the family travelled to a neighboring nation to find food. While Abraham travelled to Egypt, this family travelled to Moab.

While there, the sons married local women. Now, in ancient Israel, most Jewish men tried to marry Jewish women. Young people could marry someone from another nation, but you had to do so carefully. Jewish believers had as one of their prime directives to encourage and protect belief in one true God. People from other nations had a way of being dedicated to other gods.

Things in Moab didn't work out very well. The father died. Then, the two sons died. So, the mother is left living in a foreign nation in poverty with her two daughters-in-law.

The mother, whose name was Naomi, heard that things have gotten better back home. She tells her daughters-in-law that she's leaving, and it's OK for them to stay and start their lives afresh in their homeland. One of the young women takes Naomi's advice and leaves. But the other, whose name was Ruth, does something highly unusual. Let's read about it.

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Something amazing has happened. Ruth, who grew up in a land filled with idols, has come to love the one true God. She loves her mother-in-law, and she loves her Jewish family. She is willing to leave everything to go to the land of Israel with Naomi.

So, Ruth has some qualities that would place her on a list of memorable people in the Bible. But she also lacks something that you might expect. She lacks *pedigree*. Why do I say this? You would think that the Jewish Messiah would have all Jewish ancestors. Jesus has not one, but two people in this genealogy (Ruth and Tamar) who are not of Jewish descent. How can this be possible? For Jesus to qualify for the throne of Israel, he only needed to trace his lineage from Abraham and David.

You could do this through the fathers. Women, apparently, are exempt from this requirement.

By reminding us that God included Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew makes an important point:

***Pedigree is not required to be in the lineup.***

Perhaps Matthew includes this fact to start another theme that he will expand on in his book. Later, he quotes Jesus:

11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 8:11)

So, what does it take to be in the lineup? So far, we've learned that perfection is not required to be in the lineup. Pedigree is not required, either. People from all over the world are welcome.

Now, I wish we had time to look at all the names. We need someday to look at the lives of people like Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. We need to learn about all the kings in the line of Jesus: David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah. For now, time only permits us to hit one more name.

### **3. Ahaz**

Let's read about the king named Ahaz.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. 2 He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and also made idols for worshiping the Baals. 3 He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. 4 He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. (II Chronicles 28:1-4)

Well, this is odd. **Ahaz didn't follow the one true God.** He followed idols. He did terrible things; detestable things. He was weak, unfaithful, cocky, misguided, and simply evil. To summarize this man: There is not a single good thing we can say about Ahaz.

You know how I said earlier that each person on the list had something good or special about them that qualified them to be on the list? Well, I was wrong. As I said, there is not a single good thing we can say about Ahaz. So, what's he doing in the list?

Ahaz had only one accomplishment in life. He was a king of Israel, and he lived long enough to have a child. That child continued the lineage that eventually led up to Jesus.

Perhaps Matthew included Ahaz because he wanted to set a tone for his book. Recall that Matthew wants all his friends to meet Jesus. Well, the story of Jesus is complex. The Bible is a complex book. God, who is described in the Bible is complex. He is complex, and he is very different from us. He does things very differently than we do. He has altogether different goals than we do.

We started with the illustration of a Baseball team. I mentioned the conversation that I had with the kids in my youth group. We wondered what it would take to be in the lineup of a major league baseball team. As we said earlier, you would have to be the best. You would have to be the strongest, the fastest, the most talented.

So, when you watch a major league ballgame, you see the results of that. You see the best. You see the players who are successful, at least on some level. **However, the kingdom of heaven is very different.**

Of course, some of the people are what you'd expect. We will read in Matthew's book about people who met Jesus and followed him right away. Those are great stories.

But, we will also read of people like Judas. Judas had every opportunity to know who Jesus was. He spent years following Jesus around. He saw miracles. And yet, Judas betrayed Jesus. Why is this?

Imagine watching a major-league ballgame. One player is what you'd expect; a successful athlete who hits a home run. The next player though, is clearly out of shape. He has a beer-belly. He doesn't look like he knows how to use any of his equipment. This is strange, because he has access to the best trainers and equipment available. But, he doesn't take advantage of anything he is offered. Because of this, he strikes out.

Someone asks the coach, "What is that guy doing in the lineup?" The coach answers, "***The owner wants to give him a chance. He's the owner – he can do whatever he wants.***"

God is God. He is complex. He can do whatever he wants. Sometimes, he makes a genuine offer of love to people who never respond. And so, we get a man in the genealogy named Ahaz; a man who has missed every chance he's been given. Later, we will meet people like Judas, Caiaphas the high Priest, and Pontius Pilate. People who are given amazing and rare opportunities to speak directly with Jesus Christ. Tragically, not only do they fail to respond positively, they are all involved in the trial and crucifixion of the Messiah.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

Matthew starts his book with a genealogy, a list of all the descendants of Jesus. Matthew wanted all his friends to meet Jesus. His immediate friends were Jewish. He wanted them to know that Jesus had all the qualifications to be the king of Israel; the Messiah. We'll later learn that Jesus has qualities to make him King of a much greater realm. He is king of the Universe.

By starting with a genealogy, Mathew shows us that God has great power, and great faithfulness to his promises. Jesus fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah. Matthew will show us more as we study his book.

By starting with a genealogy, Mathew tells us that people are important to God.

We asked the question, “What does it take to be in the lineup”. We met Abraham, a man who was far from perfect. So, perfection is not required. But, when given the opportunity, Abraham made God his king.

We met Ruth, a woman who loved the God of Israel, but who had no pedigree. So, pedigree is not required. People from all over the world are welcome. But, Ruth made God her king.

Then, we met a man named Ahaz. He refused to make God his king, in spite of rare privilege.

To push the baseball illustration, it seems that what it takes to be in the lineup is a willingness to join the team, obey the coach, step up to the plate, and swing.

So, as we study the book of Matthew, we learn that the King of the Universe offers us amazing love. The question now comes before us:

***Will you accept that love, and allow Jesus to be your King?***