

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Christmas #1**

## **The Family Tree of King Jesus**

(Matthew 1:1-17)

### **Introduction: Genealogies - to skim or not to skim...**

As is evident from our decorations, songs and traffic, Christmas is coming. Seventeen days and counting.

That means it's getting close to the time when some of us start thinking about planning to begin making preparations to commence exploring the possibility of shopping. (Unless you're a show-off and already did your shopping on Black Friday or Cyber Monday...)

Of course, with Christmas getting close, the year 2019 is wrapping up. We can almost see 2020 from here.

As you think about the upcoming year, you may be setting your sights on the good goal of reading through the Bible over the course of the year. If so, on January 1<sup>st</sup> you'll be sitting down to read Genesis 1 in hopes of reading Revelation 22 sometime next December.

Let me warn you that if you intend to read through the Bible in a year, you'll face a moral crisis early on, because, while the first four chapters of Genesis are riveting narrative, chapter five is a different kind of animal.

Genesis 5 traces the line of Adam forward to Noah and his three sons. It is a genealogy.

*Genealogies are valuable...*

So. Do you carefully read all of Genesis 5 or do you skim?

Do you let your eyes skim over the names - **Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech** and **Noah** - or do you thoughtfully read all the names?

It can be tempting to skim, not read, genealogies. You may even suspect that the Bible's genealogies are "filler", written to be skimmed. Breeze through the genealogies and get on to the story.

Don't do it. If it seems that speed-reading through an endless list of sometimes unpronounceable Jewish names is reasonable, you will skim to your loss. There is gold to be found in the genealogies.

My father was an avid, amateur genealogist, who had great interest in our little branch of the Smith family tree. From him I learned that if you take a somewhat circuitous route through aunts and second cousins, you can link our family to Captain John Smith, the pioneer settler of Jamestown in the early 1600's.

Thanks to Dad's studies, I know that my ancestors fought in the American Revolution, the Civil War, and in World War I.

And, I've learned that one of my forebears was banned from a Kentucky Baptist church in the 1800's. (I'm just as glad that Dad couldn't ever find a written record as to the reason for the ban)

In my family tree there are some highlights and some lowlights, some beautiful branches and some rotten fruit.

There are stories to be told from my genealogy and from yours. And the Bible's genealogies trace the family trees of significant people: Noah, Abraham, Jacob and King David among them.

Of course, for us, the most important genealogical records in the Bible are the two we have of Jesus.

Matthew gives us one of the genealogies and Luke gives us the other. Both list the Lord's ancestors, but they work in different ways.

### **The THEOLOGICAL Point of Matthew's Genealogy**

#### **Intro: The Essence of the Genealogies...**

##### *The distinctives of Luke's genealogy -*

Luke's genealogical record (Luke 3) starts with Jesus and traces His roots backwards all the way to the first man, Adam.

Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew, and he wrote from a universal, all-of-humanity perspective. He traced Jesus' line through His mother, Mary, and emphasized His natural line of physical descent.

##### *The distinctives of Matthew's genealogy -*

Matthew's account, though, is Jewish, start to finish. It was written with the Jews in mind and it emphasizes Jesus' Jewishness, as does the entire Gospel of Matthew.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, Matthew thought that knowing Jesus' genealogy was important. For him to have started his book with the record of the forty-two generations preceding Jesus tells us that it is important to know the Lord's roots. So, this is where we're going to focus today.

My father's interest in genealogy led to some interesting explorations of Virginia cemeteries on family vacations when I was young. Dad would take us deep into long-neglected graveyards to find markers of lost ancestors to get a better picture of our family tree.

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<sup>1</sup> As well, Matthew's genealogy was written in a way that would be easily memorized. His list of names divides neatly into three sections of fourteen generations each. Fourteen generations from Abraham until David; fourteen from David to the fall of Jerusalem; fourteen from the fall of Jerusalem to the time of Jesus.

And today, without the poison ivy Dad and I had to crawl through, you and I are going to go rooting around in the genealogy of Jesus to find Matthew's hidden treasures.

The first thing you will notice as you look at the genealogy is that Matthew begins the record of Jesus' lineage with the greatest hero of the Old Testament, the patriarch Abraham.

#### **Jesus Was a JEW - In the Direct Line of Abraham**

Mentioning the father of the Jews first was a savvy move on Matthew's part, because it established immediate credibility with the Jews of his own day.

Abraham was the one who had received great promises from God concerning a land (Canaan), and a nation (Israel), and a greater Son (Messiah).

Anyone with a claim to be Messiah would have to be descended from Abraham, and that is definitely how Matthew presents Jesus.

Jesus was a physical descendant of Abraham, Jewish through and through. And that's not all.

The Bible claims that Jesus was not only Jewish, but a king.

#### **Jesus Was a KING - In the Direct Line of David**

- In John's Gospel, one of the disciples, Nathaniel, recognized Jesus' royalty when he said, **[1:49] "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."**
- When Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds saw Him as the king He was, throwing down garments and palm branches in front of Him, crying out, **[Matthew 21:9] "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."**
- When He stood trial before Pontius Pilate, hours before His crucifixion, Jesus claimed to be a king whose kingdom was not of this world. His exact words to Pilate were, **[John 18:37] "You say correctly that I am a King."**

But claims need to be backed up. And, the back-up we need is found right here in the genealogical record.

Beginning with Abraham, Matthew went on to list Abraham's son, grandson, great-grandson, etc..., until he wound up at King David.

From David, the line flows through every king of Judah until the downfall of the Jewish monarchy.

Jesus, without question, was in the line of royalty.<sup>2</sup>

### **Application Point #1: The genealogy of the KING**

So, Matthew, writing to fellow Jews who needed to know if Jesus had a valid claim to the throne of Israel, proved it by His ancestry. All the evidence needed is right here in the first chapter's genealogy.

They got the evidence they needed and we, too, have the evidence we need to say that Jesus is a king. To which we might say, "So?"

So, let's say that you believe in Jesus. You have placed your trust in Him. The Bible tells us that anyone who believes in Jesus for eternal life has eternal life. You are a daughter, a son of God through faith alone in Christ alone.

Have you reckoned with the reality that your Savior is also a King? Are you learning the grace of submission to your Savior King?

Being saved by a king means that what He says, goes. My king, Jesus, deserves my unalloyed allegiance. King Jesus deserves your allegiance, too.

It is only reasonable and right that you would *obey* your king.

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<sup>2</sup> This second section of the genealogy is followed by the third and last series of names. These names take us from the deportation to Babylon all the way up to the birth of Jesus Himself (vv. 12-16), through a period of Jewish history in which there were no kings over Israel.

And, there is no surer path to joy than to *follow* Jesus with every minute of your day and every ounce of your energy.

It is in submission to King Jesus that you will find the abundant L-I-F-E He promised.

The genealogy of Jesus highlights that He is royalty - but we have only scratched the surface and there is so much more to see.

The name list of Matthew 1 may at first glance appear sterile and colorless. Looks can be deceiving, though, because behind the names are stories that speak of God's power, love, and grace.

### **The PERSONAL Point of Matthew's Genealogy**

#### **The POWER of God: A Matter of Praise (1:2)**

The first words of the genealogy are, **[1:2] Abraham was the father of Isaac...** and those words call to mind the story of Isaac's birth.

When Abraham first heard from God (Genesis 12), God promised that he would become the father of a great nation through which the whole earth would be blessed.

Of course, the fulfillment of that promise depended on Abraham becoming a father. And, at the time God promised, he and his wife, Sarah, didn't have any kids.

When God first made that promise, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was about sixty-five. God re-stated that promise several times on several occasions.

When the promise was given for the last time, Abraham was 99 years old, and Sarah was about 90, well past the age of childbearing.

And when, biologically speaking, they are at the age of impossibility, we turn to Genesis 21 and find the story of Isaac's miraculous birth.

Their long-empty nursery is finally filled with laughter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Isaac" means "laughter" in Hebrew.

Granted, here in Matthew, all we read are the words, **[1:2] Abraham was the father of Isaac** - but reading the words reminds us of how God was at work behind the scenes. The birth of Isaac was a Class A miracle.

Then, as we keep on reading in Matthew, we discover that the story of Jesus' birth was also a miracle story.

After reading, **[1:2] Abraham was the father of Isaac**, there is really no surprise that Jesus was also miraculously born. After all, He was a descendant of Isaac, the miracle son of Abraham and Sarah.

What we read really what happened. What we celebrate every year is true. God was involved in Jesus' conception in a way He has never been involved in the conception of any other person.

It makes perfect sense to kneel in worship before the Baby in Bethlehem's manger - because, miraculously, the Baby Mary laid there was Mary's Creator.

So, there is the gold of miracles in this genealogy. And there is more gold besides. We see these golden nuggets reflected in the light of gender.

There are four mothers mentioned in Matthew's genealogy.

Their appearance is remarkable because women aren't typically mentioned in Jewish genealogies. The normal account moves from father to son.

The presence of moms in this very Jewish genealogy is so out of place that it is as if Matthew is shouting, *"Here is something important. Don't miss this. Pay attention."*

For instance, take a look at verse five.

**The LOVE of God: Not ONLY from or for the Jews (1:5)**

*Rahab - citizen of Jericho*

**[1:5] Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab...**

A man named Salmon fathered a son named Boaz. And, in a break with normal style, he mentions the mother of Boaz. The mother's name may or may not be familiar to you: Rahab.

Rahab was the heroine of the story Joshua tells of the battle of Jericho. She was the Jericho harlot who spared the Jewish spies who had sneaked into Jericho before the Jewish army's attack.

Jericho was the city where *"the walls came a tumblin' down"* when the Jews won their first military victory in the Promised Land. To say, *"Thank you"*, when the Jews defeated Jericho, they spared Rahab and her whole family. Then, Salmon - a Jew - married Rahab and she bore him a son, Boaz.

Now, what is so significant about Rahab that she found her way into the Jewish genealogy of Jesus?

Well, to this point, every person mentioned in Jesus' genealogy has been a descendant of Abraham. And earlier, I made a big deal about Jesus' Jewishness and the Jewishness of the genealogy.

But Rahab wasn't Jewish. She was a Canaanite. She was a Gentile through and through.

Hang onto that thought for a minute as we highlight another woman who is mentioned in the very next generation in the line of Jesus.

*Ruth - citizen of Moab*

**[1:5b]...Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth...**

Salmon and Rahab's son, Boaz, had a son named Obed. But Matthew named the wife of Boaz: Ruth. Why mention the mother?

Well, it might be because Ruth was a prominent figure in the Old Testament, with a whole book of the Bible named after her. Plus, the story of how she and Boaz met and married is a great story.

But that isn't why she's mentioned. No, she shows up for the same reason Rahab does. She was not of the line of Abraham. Ruth was a Gentile, a member of the Moabite race.<sup>4</sup>

Again, Matthew's genealogy was written for a Jewish audience. But including the names of Rahab and Ruth does nothing to reinforce Jewish nationalism.

So, what do these inclusions accomplish?

### **Application Point #2: The all-inclusive genealogy of Jesus**

Just this: They tell all the readers of the Gospel of Matthew that, while Jesus is Jewish, He is not *of the Jews only*. And, while Jesus is *for the Jews*, He is not *for the Jews alone*. Jesus is *OF* all people, and Jesus is *FOR* all people.

We're always hearing people say, "*Don't miss 'the Christmas spirit.'*" And by that people often mean "*Give gifts*" or "*Spend time with family*" or "*Be nice*" or some such thing.

But, since Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, if the term "Christmas spirit" means anything, it has to have something to do with Him and His birth.

The *Christmas spirit* is the Good News that "**God with us**" is a reality into which any person - any ethnicity, any age, female or male - can enter through faith in Jesus.

The Baby born in Bethlehem was God. He lived a sinless life. He died a sacrificial death on a Roman cross. He rose a conquering LORD to redeem people like you and me from the penalty and power of sin.

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<sup>4</sup> Moabites were relatives of Israel, because of their having descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew. They were also a despised race because they worshiped false gods.

If before this morning you have never seen what Christmas is all about, see it now. See the love of God in the gift of Jesus, born for you.

So, yes, just like the retailers tell us, Christmas is about gift giving and gift receiving. Only the retailers don't go big enough. They promote big screens and high tech. God went big in the way only He could by giving the gift of high touch in His Son, born as an Infant.

And the perfect response to the offer of that gift is to simply say, "*Thank You, Lord*" and receive what you don't deserve and could never earn - the absolutely free gift of eternal life.

Now, there is one final piece of encouragement I want us all to see here in Matthew's genealogy, and I'll admit at the outset that what I'm about to highlight may not appear to be all that encouraging. But wait for it. It's there.

Any genealogist will discover, after enough digging, that there are twisted roots and dirty laundry, horse rustlers, a hanging or two, and some shady characters in any family tree.

They are there in my family tree and they are probably there in yours. Read carefully and you'll find that even in the family tree of Jesus there are some very dirty linens.

### **The GRACE of God: Don't Cover Up That Dirt (1:3,6)**

*The story of Judah and Tamar (v. 3)*

#### ***[3] Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar***

And here, again, Matthew mentions a mother: Tamar. And remember, whenever you hear the name of a woman in a Jewish genealogy it is an invitation to sit up and take notice.

So, what's the big deal about Tamar?

Well, like Rahab and Ruth, she was a Gentile. But Matthew has a purpose in mentioning her that goes beyond Tamar's Canaanite roots.

The reason she finds herself in this genealogy of Jesus' ancestors is that, while she bore Judah's sons (Perez and his twin brother, Zerah), Tamar was not Judah's wife. She was his daughter-in-law. Yep.

If you don't know the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), let me just tell you that it is one of the ugliest stories you will ever hear. I'll just highlight the pertinent lowlights.

Judah had married a Canaanite woman, who bore him three sons, the oldest two being Er and Onan. When Er, his oldest son, came of age, Judah gave him this Canaanite woman - Tamar - as a wife.

However, because of sin, Er died by the Lord's hand. Then, Judah gave Tamar to Onan as a wife. But Onan also died because of something he did against Tamar.

Next, Judah promised the now twice-widowed Tamar, that he would give her his third son, Shelah, when Shelah came of age. (Yes, Shelah might have been a bit nervous at this...)

Well, the years passed and Shelah grew up. But Judah didn't keep his promise. He did not give Tamar to be Shelah's wife.

So, Tamar took matters into her own hands. She dressed herself as a prostitute and then stationed herself, cloaked and veiled, by the side of the road as prostitutes did in those days.

She stayed there until Judah passed by. When Judah walked her way, he paid her a prostitute's wage, not knowing who she was.

Later, when Judah was told that Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was with child, he became furious at HER immorality.

But the end of the story shows Tamar proving that Judah (her father-in-law) was the father of the twins (Perez and Zerah).

I told you. It's an ugly story. Yet for some reason, Matthew wants you and me to remember that story when we read the genealogy of Jesus. He draws attention to the story by mentioning the mother - Tamar - by name.<sup>5</sup>

And there is one more woman, one more mother, Matthew wants us to see.

*The story of David and Bathsheba (v. 6)*

***[6b] David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba<sup>6</sup> who had been the wife of Uriah.<sup>7</sup>***

Unlike Rahab, Ruth, and Tamar, Bathsheba was Jewish. So, why is she included in this genealogy?

She makes her way into Matthew's genealogy because of the shameful way in which she became David's wife.

Of course, Matthew left out all the sordid details of the David / Bathsheba story. But his Jewish audience knew all those details.

Matthew doesn't stop to tell us - but we know - that Bathsheba *had been* the wife of Uriah until King David took her, sexually violated her, and then consigned her husband, Uriah, to a death sentence in battle so that he - David - could marry her.

### **Application Point #3: The redemptive genealogy of Jesus**

Merry Christmas. Indeed.

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<sup>5</sup> To highlight sin, we could also draw attention to Rahab's line of work (she was a prostitute). We might cut her some slack, though, as she obviously became a godly woman, sided with the people of Israel over the people of Jericho, protected the two spies, and married the Jew, Salmon.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, "*her of Uriah*." In the original Greek, Bathsheba is not named.

<sup>7</sup> Uriah wasn't even a Jew. We assume that Bathsheba was, but Uriah was not.

Not exactly the kinds of stories you expect when you come to church in the Christmas season. But maybe these are exactly the kinds of stories we should expect and reflect on during December.

Matthew's carefully crafted genealogy suggests that it is good to not skim over, but to think on these things when paying attention to Jesus' life and birth.

What Matthew has done has been to give us a special kind of genealogy. It is a *redemptive* genealogy.

The redemptive message is that God sent His Son from glory to be born a Baby in Bethlehem's smelly stables, to grow up to be a poor Man in an oppressed nation, and to die a horrible death on a Roman cross.

Out of that mess God provided our salvation, proving that out of any mess, God can produce something beautiful.

We've just seen two amazing messes, and out of those messes God brought about the birth of Jesus. God is able to bring something beautiful out of your messes and mine, too.

God used people who wrecked their own lives and the lives of others to bring Jesus into the world. Today, God is still using wrecks and redeeming human wrecks to press Jesus into the world.

If you have ever had the thought, "*Because of what I have done, God could not ever use me/God would not ever use me*" - look at the genealogy.

Remember what Judah did to Tamar; remember what David did to Bathsheba.

Better yet, remember Jesus.

Not that He ever did anything wrong, but that never - not once - did Jesus separate Himself from people who sinned. It was never surprising to find Him with the least, the last, and the lost of society.

He came to earth to redeem our wreckage, to bring beauty out of ashes, to create something new and fresh out of messes.

His first followers were, by turns, cowardly, bombastic, arrogant, racist, hot-tempered. He turned those messes into loving, God-centered, servants.

He has been turning messes into trophies of grace for two thousand years. He is still turning messes into trophies of grace.

So, today, as you reflect on your life, think of God's *love* and *compassion*. As you consider past misdeeds, hear the word *grace*. Today, as you realize that you have strayed, hear the word *forgiveness*.

Hear that in Jesus, God puts the broken back together.

If God can bring His Son out of a lineage as twisted as the one we have seen today, you can trust Him to do wonderful things *in* and *through* you, too.