

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: A Three-Dimensional Christmas
(The birth of Jesus from John, Matthew, and Luke)

Jesus' Family Tree

(Matthew 1:1-17)

Study #2

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

When you are reading through your Bible, do you read all of it?

Really?

If you begin a year-long read through of the Bible on January 1st, you'll probably begin with Genesis.

You'll be doing just great through the first four chapters of Genesis.

But then you'll come to Genesis 5. There, you'll be faced with a question because Genesis 5 contains a long genealogy.

So, do you carefully read all of it, or do you skip over the genealogy?

Do you read the names - **Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech** and **Noah** - or not?

It can be tempting to skip the Bible's genealogies.

You may even see them as optional, or that they should be skipped so that you can get on with the story.

Don't give in to the temptation to do that. If you skip over a list of ancient Jewish names, you will be cheating yourself out of a blessing.

There is gold to be found in the genealogies.

I should know. My father was an amateur genealogist. He father took great interest in our small branch of the very large Smith family tree.

From Dad, I learned that by taking a certain road through aunts and cousins, you can link our family to Captain John Smith, the pioneer settler of Jamestown in the early 1600's.

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

I've also learned that one of my forefathers was banned from a Kentucky Baptist church in the 1800's. (Dad didn't look very hard to find out why...)

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. The Bible's genealogies bring to mind powerful stories of very important people.

The THEOLOGICAL Point of Matthew's Genealogy

Intro: The Essence of the Genealogies...

The distinctives of Luke's genealogy -

For us, the most important biblical genealogies are the two we have of Jesus.

Luke's genealogical record (Luke 3) starts with Jesus and traces His roots backwards.

Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew. He traced Jesus' line through His mother, Mary, and emphasized Jesus' natural line of physical descent, all the way back to the first man, Adam.

The distinctives of Matthew's genealogy -

Matthew's account, though, was written with the Jews in mind. It emphasizes Jesus' Jewishness, beginning with Abraham and moving forward in time to Jesus.

For a couple of reasons, we are going to focus on Jesus' ancestors, as Matthew lists them.

My father's interest in genealogy led to a few messy trips to old cemeteries on family vacations when I was young.

Dad would take us into overgrown, long-neglected graveyards to find markers of ancestors to get a better picture of our family tree.

Today, without the poison ivy, you and I are going to explore the genealogy of Jesus to find Matthew's hidden treasures.

The first thing you will notice is that Matthew begins the record of Jesus' lineage with the greatest hero of the Old Testament: Abraham.

Jesus Was a JEW - In the Direct Line of Abraham

Mentioning the father of the Jews first was a smart move on Matthew's part. It established immediate credibility with the Jews of his day.

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

Jesus - who claimed to be the Messiah - was a physical descendant of Abraham. He was Jewish, through and through, and he was the Messiah.

And Jesus was 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."**

And when He stood trial before Pontius Pilate, hours before His crucifixion, Jesus claimed to be a king. He told Pilate, **[John 18:37] "You say correctly that I am a King."**

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

Matthew listed all the generations between Abraham until he landed at King David.

From David forward, he listed every king of Judah until the downfall of the Jewish monarchy.

Without question, Jesus was in the line of Messianic royalty - and we have only scratched the surface of what we can learn from this genealogy.

In what follows, I'll be unpacking some of the stories behind the names in the list. The names bring to mind stories that speak of God's power, His love, and His grace.

The PERSONAL Point of Matthew's Genealogy

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

Go back to the first words of the genealogy: **[1:2] Abraham was the father of Isaac.**

When God first spoke to Abraham (Genesis 12), He promised that Abraham would become the father of a great nation.

Of course, the fulfillment of that promise depended on Abraham becoming a father.

When God first made that promise, Abraham was childless, and seventy-five years old. Sarah, his wife, was childless, and sixty-five.

Over the next twenty-five years, God re-stated that promise to Abraham several times.

When the promise was given for the last time, Abraham was 99 years old, and Sarah was about ninety, way past the age of childbearing - and still childless.

But, when we turn to Genesis 21, we find the story of Isaac's miraculous birth.

Granted, here in Matthew, all we read is, **[1:2] Abraham was the father of Isaac.**

But those words remind us that God was at work behind the scenes. The birth of Isaac was a miracle.

As we read on in Matthew, we learn that Jesus was also miraculously conceived.

But we aren't surprised. After all, He was a descendant of Isaac, the miracle son of Abraham and Sarah.

There is the gold of the power of God seen in miracles in Jesus' genealogy. And there is more gold.

Matthew mentions four mothers in his genealogy.

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

Reading a woman's name in a Jewish genealogy is like seeing a penguin at the Alamo.

By including a few moms in Jesus' genealogy, 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...

In a break with normal style, Matthew mentions the mother of Boaz: Rahab.

Rahab was the main character of the story Joshua tells of the battle of Jericho.

Jericho was the city where *"the walls came a tumblin' down"* when the Jews won their first military victory in the Promised Land.

And Rahab was the woman who spared the Jewish spies who had sneaked into Jericho before the Jewish army's attack.

Because she had been such a help to them, the Jews allowed Rahab and her whole family to live after Jericho fell.

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 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.

And she wasn't the only Gentile Matthew lists. Verse 5 continues.

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 gives us the name of Boaz's wife: Ruth. Again, why mention the mother?

She shows up for the same reason that Rahab did. Like Rahab, Ruth was a Gentile, a member of the Moabite race.

Remember that Matthew's target audience was the Jewish people. So, what do the inclusions of Rahab and Ruth accomplish?

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.

This is one of the great truths of the Bible. God's heart is for all people.

God has allowed me to see this over and over again, up close and personal.

Everywhere I've been on Missions trips - Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Russia - I have seen the same thing.

Lots of wonderful cultural distinctiveness, differences in dress, traditions, language and more.

But the same love for Christ. The same heartfelt music and passionate messages and vibrant witness.

The same is true here at our church.

No matter our background, culture, demographic, or country of origin, Jesus offers Himself to us all.

There is no place on earth where the one who believes is not welcomed.

There is no group of people to whom God says, "You are not welcomed."

And THAT is the Christmas spirit.

The Christmas spirit doesn't mean, "*Give expensive gifts*" or even "*Spend time with family*."

The *Christmas spirit* is the Good News that anyone can enter into a living relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

If before this moment 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 stores tell us, Christmas is about gift giving. Only the stores don't go big enough.

They promote big screens and high tech. God went bigger. He gave His only Son, born as an infant, to save us.

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

Now, there is one final golden nugget I want us all to see from Matthew's genealogy. It may not appear golden. But trust me. It is.

Genealogists will discover twisted roots and dirty laundry, horse rustlers, and shady characters in any family tree.

They are there in my family tree and they are probably there in yours, too.

Matthew wants us to know that there is some very dirty laundry, even in the family tree of Jesus.

Listen to Matthew 1:3.

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

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 is that, while she bore Judah's sons (the twins, Perez and Zerah), Tamar was not Judah's wife.

She was his daughter-in-law. Yep.

Here is the very ugly story of Judah and Tamar. (See Genesis 38)

Judah, one of the sons of Jacob, married a Canaanite woman. She 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, the Lord took Er's life. Then, Judah gave Tamar to Onan as a wife. But Onan also died because of sin.

Judah next promised Tamar that he would give her as a wife to his third son, Shelah, when Shelah grew up.

Well, 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. Then, cloaked and veiled, she sat by the side of the road as prostitutes did in those days.

She stayed there until Judah passed by. Judah 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 Tamar was able to prove that Judah - her father-in-law - was the father of the twins (Perez and Zerah).

I told you. It's an ugly story.

But 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.

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 who had been the wife of Uriah.

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 awful 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, took advantage of her, and then had her husband, Uriah, killed in battle so that he - David - could marry her.

The redemptive genealogy of Jesus

So, Merry Christmas, right? These are not exactly the kinds of stories you expect when you come to church at Christmas time.

But maybe these are exactly the kinds of stories we should expect during December.

What Matthew has done in referencing Tamar and Bathsheba 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. He would grow up to be a poor Man in an oppressed nation and would die a horrible death on a Roman cross.

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

Out of the sinful messes of Judah and David, God brought about the birth of Jesus.

Here is Good News: God can bring something beautiful out of your mess, too.

God used people who wrecked their own lives and the lives of others to bring Jesus into the world. Today, God is still 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.*"

Or "*Because of what I have done, God would not ever use me*" - look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew.

Better yet, look at Jesus.

Jesus never ever did anything wrong. And He never ever separated Himself from people who did wrong.

You could often find Jesus among the least, the last, and the lost of society.

His first followers were cowardly, arrogant, racists. He turned them into loving, God-centered, Gospel ambassadors.

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

He came to earth to redeem our wreckage and to bring beauty out of ashes.

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.