

Christmas Eve 2016 — The Genealogy of Jesus: Great Hope For Great Sinners

December 24, 2016

Let's pray. Heavenly father, thank you for planning creation and carrying it out through your son. When things went drastically wrong and sin entered the world, we thank you for not leaving us broken and addicted to our sin. We thank you for not leaving us to face your eternal wrath, which we fully deserve. We thank you for taking our sin and transforming it into mercy beyond our wildest dreams. We thank you for love we don't deserve. Son of God, thank you for taking on a human body in Mary's womb. We thank you for taking on that body forever to write yourself into the creation story to save us forever. Jesus, tonight as we celebrate your birthday, we pause to worship and adore you. As we celebrate your birth where you became one of us to save us, we also look forward to Easter to remember your death and resurrection, where you accomplished the work you came to do, you paid for our sin and beat the power of death and saved us forever. Amen.

At Christmas, we typically jump to Matthew 1 or Luke 2 and study Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, shepherds and the manger. Tonight I want to do something a little different.

In Matthew 1, just before the story of the birth of Jesus is a genealogy. Most of us skip it. It feels like reading the Hebrew phone book. Did you ever wonder why Matthew began the story of Jesus with a genealogy before he told the story of Jesus' birth? Tonight, we will see why this genealogy makes the Christmas story the greatest story ever told for sinners like you and me.

We are not going to read the entire genealogy but in your bulletins I pulled out a few key parts of the genealogy for you to hear as we prepare to study.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, Matthew 1:1–3 (ESV)

and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, Matthew 1:5–6 (ESV)

and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. Matthew 1:15–16 (ESV)

The culture Matthew lived in 2,000 years ago was different from the culture we live in today. We live in an individualistic culture where we recommend ourselves to others with a resume that tells people what we have done with our life. A resume lists our degrees, our work experience and our accomplishments. Resumes are about us.

That was not how it was done 2,000 years ago. In those days, people were more interested in your family line. They wanted to know who you claimed as your ancestors before they wanted to know what you had done in life.

That brings us back to Matthew 1. To us, these verses look like a boring list of names, but in the first century, this was Jesus' resume. These were the people Matthew wanted everyone to know that Jesus claimed as part of his family tree. It was only after people read Jesus family tree resume that they would listen to what he did in his life.

For most people in the ancient world, it was exceedingly important the resume of their family tree looked pristine. Just as people today tinker with their

resumes to cover bad work experiences, in the ancient world it was commonplace to alter your family tree resume to white out the bad parts.

For instance, we know Herod the Great purged many names from his public genealogy because he did not want anyone to know people of bad character were in his family. The purpose of a family tree resume was to impress everyone with the high quality and respectability of your roots.

A pristine family tree resume is what we would expect in these opening verses of Matthew's gospel. That would entice readers to hear what followed. That is not what we find. Matthew does the very opposite of what was expected. Instead of Jesus' resume being a list of perfect people, it is a list of shockingly sinful people that were far from God.

To begin, there are five women in the genealogy, all publicly connected with Jesus. This may not strike you as unusual but in an ancient patriarchal society, woman were usually never named in a genealogies, much less five of them. Jesus closely connected himself to women. In the ancient world, giving high value to women like this was unthinkable.

In addition, most of the women in Jesus' genealogy were Gentiles women. They were the type of women that a good Jew would ignore in public and almost never take up the time to strike up a conversation, much less claim them as an important part of your family tree! These were women such as Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. They were Canaanites and Moabites, not Jews. As we learned in our study of Genesis, the Moabites were a people descended from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. To the ancient Jews, Moabites were

unclean and were not allowed into the temple or to participate in worship. They were racial and religious outsiders, yet Matthew wanted to make sure everyone knew these outsiders with sinful backgrounds were people that Jesus claimed as part of his family tree.

Something else Matthew did by including these particular women in Jesus' genealogical resume was he deliberately wanted us to remember some of the nastiest and most immoral events in the Bible, then let everyone know Jesus was connected to these sinful people and sinful moments in history.

For example, it says *Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar*. Why did Matthew expand this section and add these extra family details? Earlier in our study of Genesis, we learned the circumstances of Perez and Zerah's birth. At the time, Judah was a hard core rebel that left home. In rebellion against his family and his God, he married a Canaanite woman that was far from God. Together they had three sons, two of which were so evil God struck them dead. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law from his oldest son's marriage. According to the custom of Levirate marriage in that day, Tamar was to become the wife of Judah's next youngest son so the younger brother would allow her to conceive and he would bear children for her former husband through his younger brother so the family line would continue. Judah, with his first two sons struck dead by God and only one son left, decided to not give Tamar to his third and final son. Judah refused to let the family line continue with his daughter-in-law Tamar. After many years of waiting Tamar was desperate to conceive children and pass on her deceased husband's name.

Eventually Judah's own wife died and he was left alone. Since there was no sons of Judah left to marry, and Judah was now single, Tamar hatched a plan to bear children and continue the family line. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and seduced her father-in-law. She conceived the twins—Perez and Zerah, through him.

That was an act of incest. Judah fathered his own grandkids. Everywhere in the Bible that is against God's law. Matthew could have simply mentioned Perez as the next person in the family tree. He didn't. He named Judah, Perez, Zerah and Tamar to bring the whole story of that dysfunctional family back to mind. This was Matthews way saying, "If you come from a crazy mixed up dysfunctional family, so does Jesus. He understands. He claims Judah, Perez, Zerah, and Tamar as part of his family tree."

How many of you remember the story of Rahab? She was more than just a Canaanite that was far from God. She was a Canaanite prostitute. How many people would intentionally include a prostitute in their public family tree? Matthew wanted everyone to know that Jesus doesn't run from those struggling with sex sin. Jesus claims those struggling with sexual sin as part of his family tree.

Maybe the most interesting story in the whole genealogy is King David. When we hear his name we think here is somebody everybody would want in their family tree; royalty!

Matthew adds, in one of the great ironic understatements of the Bible, that David was the father of Solomon, "whose mother had been Uriah's wife." Even if you knew nothing about biblical history, you would find that strange. Why not just

give her a name? Why not just say Solomon's wife Bathsheba? Matthew referred to her as Uriah's wife to use cloaked language to bring to mind one of the worse chapters in Israel's history.

When David was a young fugitive running for his life from King Saul, a group of men went into the wilderness to be with him. They believed in him. They risked their lives every day to protect him. They were called David's Mighty Men. Uriah was one of David's mighty men. Uriah was one of the inner circle of 30 men to which David owed his life. He owed them everything. They were his closest and most loyal friends.

After David became king, his Mighty Men continued risking their life on the battlefield for David. One spring, instead of going to battle, David decided to stay in Jerusalem and pursue leisure. One afternoon, from his palace window, he saw a beautiful woman bathing in the nude on the roof of her house. David was intoxicated by her beauty. He sent for her. He took her and slept with her. He left her pregnant. This woman was Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. David called Uriah home from the battlefield to get him drunk. He hoped he would sleep with his gorgeous wife and think he was the father of the child in her womb. It didn't work. Uriah was a man of such high character that he refused to sleep with his wife while his troops were still in the heat of battle. To cover his sin, David wrote a letter instructing Joab, the commander of the army, on how to arrange Uriah's death. Then he made Uriah carry that sealed letter to his commanding officer, a letter which arranged his Uriah's own death. This way David could swoop up Bathsheba once Uriah was dead, marry her and appear to be the hero so his

close friends's wife wouldn't be a single mother. The truth was David committed adultery with the wife of one of his best friends, with the wife of a man who risked his life every day for David, for years!

What David did was one of the most despicable, vile, evil things a man can do to another man or to get a women as his wife. That was the wickedness of David. Would you want to associate yourself with David or Bathsheba after you knew this? Would you want to be connected with the child of this illicit relationship? One of the children born from that marriage was Solomon, whom Jesus claimed as part of his family tree.

The reason why Matthew referred to Bathsheba as Uriah's wife was not to slight Bathsheba. It was to slam David and remind everyone of the depth of the wickedness that David stooped to acquire her. It was out of that immoral union and from one of David's most sinful moments that Jesus traced his family line.

In this genealogy there are moral outsiders that are adulterers, adulteresses. Their are incestuous relationships, prostitutes and moral failures. There are cultural outsiders, like Canaanites and Moabites. There are gender outsiders, like multiple women. The Law of Moses excluded all of these people from God's presence, yet Matthew wanted everyone to know that these are the roots Jesus' chose to have in his family tree.

Why did Matthew want everyone to know Jesus claimed these people as his roots?

First, Matthew wanted everyone to know that great sinners, moral outsiders, cultural outsiders and people from dysfunctional families were part of

Jesus' family tree in the past because he wants to graft those very same kinds of people into his family tree in the future. If you are a great sinner far from God that is the family line Jesus came from in the past and it is the people he came to graft into his family tree today.

It doesn't matter what you have done in your past. It doesn't matter if you killed people. It doesn't matter if you were even on the paid staff of hell. If you repent of your sin and trust in Jesus' death to save you from your sin, the grace of Jesus Christ will cover your sin and graft you into Jesus' family tree. After studying this genealogy and seeing the sordid pasts of the people in this list, each of us should realize that we are in good company in Jesus' family. Jesus won't reject us because of our sin but he is willing to graft us into his family tree. There is hope for us after our sin.

Second, in the Old Testament, there was something called ceremonial uncleanness. If you wanted to stay holy and respectable, you needed to avoid contact with anything unholy or unclean because the dirtiness of sin or someones uncleanness was contagious. You caught it like a cold. The sinfulness or uncleanness of others polluted you. In the Old Testament, God's people went out of their way to avoid contact with people that had a bad background or people involved in any sin or even any kind of physical imperfection. Contact with uncleanness was catchy. It would leave you contaminated.

Jesus turns this whole thing around. Our sin and moral filth can't pollute him when we become part of his family tree. Instead his holiness and purity spreads to us when we become part of his family tree. As it says in Isaiah 1:18,

though our sins are as red as scarlet, Jesus cleans us and makes us *whiter than snow*. Those lowest on the totem pole of life and those most sinful in this world can't pollute Jesus with their sin, instead they are made holy by coming to Jesus and being grafted into his family tree.

Third, Jesus family tree doesn't just remind us that the moral and social outsiders need Jesus. It reminds us that everyone needs to be connected to Jesus, even people like King David, desperately need to be connected to Jesus. While David wrote many Psalms in our Bible and he was called a man after God's own heart, it turns out David needed to be connected to Jesus to take care of his sin more than anybody else in the genealogy! The only way David was part of Jesus' family tree was by receiving grace from God he didn't deserve. The only way David was made right with God after his sin was by connecting to the family tree of Jesus to have his sins made clean and washed whiter than snow. Becoming part of Jesus family tree is the only way our sins can be washed away and we are made whiter than snow for anyone.

Conclusion

Tonight, we remember the one of the greatest moments in the history of the universe. The one who created the universe moved from outside of his creation to inside of his creation by taking on a human body forever so he could die on a cross and rise from the grave to save us forever. Let us not just remember why he came but let us remember the family from which he came. He came from a background of cultural and moral outsiders and great sinners because those are the people he came to save. Though their sins be as red as

scarlet, when they are grafted into the family tree of Jesus, he made them white as snow.

Tonight if we confess to him our sin in prayer and by faith trust what he did on the cross and the empty tomb, we will be grafted into his family tree, just like David, Rahab, Tamar and Judah. When we are grafted into his family, his holiness will make us clean. Our sin will be washed away and made whiter than snow.

Tonight will you go home with the greatest gift of all? Will you confess your sins to Jesus, asked to be grafted into his family and let his holiness make you whiter than snow? Let's pray.

Pray

Jesus, thank you for inspiring Matthew to begin his gospel with a genealogy. We confess that for many Christmas' we ignored this list of names because it didn't seem important. Tonight we want to thank you for these names. Thank you for coming from a line of great sinners for great sinners. Tonight we confess our sin and we take up your offer of being grafted into your family tree. Though our sins be as scarlet, your holiness will change them to be white as snow.

Amen



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