

"The Genealogy of Jesus Christ"

This year for our Christmas sermon I want us to reflect on the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The church growth experts would probably tell me that that is not a good idea. But this first chapter of Matthew is also part of the Word of God, part of the Scriptures that Paul tells us are God-breathed and given for our growth.

And I do think this will be a profitable thing for us to consider. When we look at the Bible, we see lots of genealogies throughout. It seems the Jews had a lot of interest in genealogies. And obviously God thought it was important to record a number of key genealogies in the Holy Word as well. And that is fitting. Right from the fall of mankind God had made a promise to Adam and Eve. God promised that the seed of the woman would one day crush the seed of the serpent. That meant humanity had to be on the lookout for the promised child. Family trees were then recorded. Genealogies passed down. But for generation after generation, the promised seed still hadn't come. And then we find God renewing that promise along the way through other men as well. And so the records kept building until one day they found their fulfillment in Jesus.

And so if we are interested in our own family trees, how much more interested should we be in this Messianic family tree? Have any of you done any research on your family tree? It can be interesting. It can be a lot of work. But if you are a Christian, then what we have here in Matthew 1 is in a very real way part of your family tree. As a Christian, we have been brought into the family line of promise. That's right how this genealogy starts off, with the line of promise, with father Abraham, the father of the line of promise! As we read earlier, if we are Christians, then we too are sons of Abraham. We too are beneficiaries of God's promised Messiah. We benefit from the work of the Christ. We are brought into this family line.

And as we spend some time reflecting on this genealogy this morning, I believe you will see your story here as well. You'll see that this family line of the Messiah speaks of how Christ has reached out to redeem you and to bring you into his family of all who have been saved by his grace. And so let's dig into this wonderful family tree and find our story in it as well. And as we analyze this family tree, I want us to look at it in three points. First, I want us to see this genealogy as fulfilled promise. Second, I want us to see how it is a very diverse family line. And third I want us to see how this all relates to Christ's work of redemption. And so again, we'll look at how this genealogy is first a fulfilled promise, second how it is a diverse lineage, and third how it relates to Christ's work of redemption.

So, let's begin in verse 1. This genealogy begins with a focus. The focus is on Jesus Christ. This is his genealogy. It's recording the line up to his birth. But notice in verse 1 he provides a summary of this genealogy. Matthew tells us that Jesus is the son specifically of two people. He is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. That's how he introduces this genealogy.

In fact, Matthew goes back to that same division at the end of the genealogy. Look at verse 17. Matthew summarizes his presentation of the genealogy by telling us that he's divided the record into three periods. The first period is from Abraham to David. The second period is from David to the time of captivity. The third period is from the time of captivity until the birth of Christ. Three periods, and

once again Matthew highlights the same three people: Jesus, of course, and Abraham and David.

So why does Matthew highlight Abraham and David? Why are they so important that he mentions them first in verse 1 and then uses them in setting apart these three different periods in the genealogy? Well I think the main reason is that Abraham and David bring to mind the great promises of God that have been fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. God gave many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah at different times and through different men. But with both Abraham and David God made a covenant. In each of those two covenants, God bound himself to a promise. God promised that the Messiah would come through the offspring of each of these men. And so Matthew signals to us in this genealogy that God has kept his promises. He tells us that Jesus is the promised seed. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants.

The Abrahamic covenant can be found first in Genesis 12 (pg 9). You can flip there if you'd like: Genesis 12:2-3, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." And so God promises to make Abraham, Abraham who is childless, into a great nation. And God promises to bless to all the families on the earth through Abraham and his offspring! In the next few chapters of Genesis God reiterates this promise to Abraham in several ways. Flip to Genesis 17, verse 7 (pg 12). It says, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." What I like especially about how God reiterates the promise here, is that God says that his promise to Abraham is not just for him, but for his descendants as well. Of course that's what the genealogy in Matthew 1 brings out. But here in Genesis 17, the word for "descendants" in verse 7 is actually singular. You could translate it as "offspring" or "seed." Paul in Galatians comments on this verse as picks up on the fact that it's singular. Paul says that it's singular because it's ultimately fulfilled in one specific offspring of Abraham - Jesus! Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham. Jesus is the one in whom God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled. And so that's what Matthew's genealogy is getting at by highlighting Jesus as the son of Abraham. God's promise to Abraham had been fulfilled.

The same is the case with David. The Davidic covenant can be found in 2 Samuel 7. You can go ahead and flip there too if you'd like (page 273). Look at verse 12. It says, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." The same promise given to Abraham is reiterated to David. Of course, this is the same promise given to Adam and Eve all the way back in the garden that God would raise up the seed of the woman to crush the seed of the serpent. But do you see how God keeps working in history? He keeps working out his promise to bring the promised seed. And as he reiterates that promise at different points to different people, we keep learning more about this promised one. When the promise is given here to David, we learn of the royal nature of the Christ. He was to be a king; a king of an eternal kingdom. Matthew makes that connection for us too - just look at verses 4 and 5 in the genealogy. He refers to David, as David the king. Jesus was the son of David the king. Clearly that has in mind the promise of the Davidic covenant.

And so Matthew's genealogy highlights Jesus as the fulfillment of these two key Old Testament covenants. There are no covenants in the Bible that more clearly bind God to this promise - to bring forth the Messiah from the lines of Abraham and

David. And so Matthew tells us that this has happened in Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy and the fulfillment of God's promises. That's why he mentions Abraham and David.

But Matthew might also be pointing to Jesus being the fulfillment of God's promises by his mention of the exile. Remember, at the end of his genealogy, he shows how he divides up the record into three periods, centered around Abraham, David, and the captivity. And the period of the captivity is the last period. It doesn't end until the birth of Jesus. The way Matthew records this suggests that the people were still in captivity. Well, that's certainly the case. Even though the people were allowed to return to the Promised Land, they were still under foreign occupation. The Jews did not govern themselves. And this captivity stood out like a sore thumb to them. And why were they in that captivity? Because they broke God's laws. They sinned and rebelled against God. But what hope did they have? Again, the good promises of God. God had promised restoration. Before, during, and after the exile in Babylon the prophets promised that God would restore the people. That's right, even after the people returned from exile, you have prophets like Malachi that speak about the restoration as still a future reality. The people returned from exile, but were still in captivity. They still needed the restoration. That restoration would come through the coming of the promised one, the Christ.

And so flip over to Deuteronomy 30 (page 183). This book is recording part of the Mosaic covenant. And this chapter talks about what will happen if the people rebel against God's laws and find themselves exiled and in captivity among the nations. And so let's read verses 1-6: "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." And so even at the start of the Mosaic covenant, God had promised restoration should the people fall into exile because of their sin. That restoration would happen through the Messiah.

So do you see what Matthew's genealogy sets out? Matthew organizes his genealogy with these three periods. And in each we are brought to mind the three main expressions of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament: The Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the Mosaic. Each looks for God's promises to be fulfilled. Each finds their fulfillment with the birth of Jesus Christ. And so that's my first point. This genealogy shows Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises of grace.

The second point I'd like us to notice about this genealogy is that it is a very diverse lineage. It is a very mixed family tree. And not a very pristine family tree for the King of kings is it? There are good guys in this list, there are bad guys, and there are, well, unknown guys on this list. Look at some examples. You certainly have some good guys, don't you? I mean godly men who sought to serve God in their lives. You have people like Abraham, Isaac, Boaz, David, Josiah, etc. Those were some good guys. But the more we know about the good guys, the more we realize they aren't *that* good. They followed God, but weren't without their sins.

Abraham we know was promised a seed, but wasn't patient enough and tried to speed things up by having a child with his wife's hand maiden Hagar, producing Ishmael. But you'll notice that Ishmael is not recorded here in the line of promise. God had other plans. David was certainly a godly man. Scripture says he was a man after God's own heart. And yet Matthew reminds us in verse 6 of David's great sin. He took the wife of Uriah as his own, committing adultery, and then covered it up by having Uriah killed. Think of the scandal that would be in our day if one of our presidents did something like this? This great king, as godly as he was, had a major moral failing. And Matthew includes that detail for us. So even the good people in this genealogy, aren't so good, are they? Then you have some pretty bad people listed in this genealogy too. People like Manasseh. Scripture says how Manasseh did some of the worst evil in Israel's history, though he did repent toward the end of his life (you can see 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33). And then you have people who appear in the genealogical records, and that's it. I'm not talking about for example some of the last people in the genealogy - people like Eleazer and Matthan in verse 15. They would have lived in between the time of the Old and New Testaments when there wasn't any Scripture written, and so you can understand why there might not be any events recorded about them. I'm thinking of people like Hezron and Ram in verse 4. Scripture tells us a bit about their immediate predecessors and their descendants, but really nothing about them. They don't make any headlines. Presumably, they weren't anyone really important or noteworthy in redemptive history. Their names are only recorded in the genealogical records, that's it.

But this mixed history of the Lord's family tree goes on. Beyond this big picture of some good guys, some bad guys, and just some unknown guys, look at some of the special notes that Matthew gives us. You know, usually genealogies are very dry. So and so begot so and so and they begot so and so, and on and on. But Matthew colors up this genealogy in several places with some of his own commentary. Notice first in verse 2. It says that "Jacob begot Judah and his brothers". He adds, "and his brothers" for Judah. Why? Well, Judah along with his 11 other brothers make up the 12 tribes of Israel. This genealogy is not just the story of the tribe of Judah. All Israel is a part of this line and a part of this story. I think he brings that home again later in the genealogy. In verse 11, it says that Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. In verse 11, Matthew might have in mind a broader use of brothers. He might be referring to all the Jews who together were brought into captivity. The point: the nation of Israel together tasted of the exile. Just as they were included together early in this line of promise, Matthew reminds us that together they were chastised because of their sin, and thus brought into captivity together. And so by Matthew mentioning brothers here twice, he's calling us to see how all of Israel, all of God's people, are a part of this family line that leads to the Christ.

And look at the women Matthew chooses to tell us. That's also an extraordinary feature of a genealogy. And indeed, each of these women make it into the genealogy in extraordinary ways. In verse 3 we see Tamar. Tamar had the twin sons with Judah, but Judah was actually her father-in-law. That's right. You can look at Genesis 38 for that story. Tamar deceptively tricked her father-in-law Judah into impregnating her after Judah refused to honor the levirate law custom when Tamar's husband died. Judah was supposed to give his last son to Tamar to raise up an offspring but didn't, and so she tricked him. This was a scandalous situation to say the least, but through it God continued the line. Of course the next woman Matthew tells us about is in verse 5: Rahab. Rahab was a prostitute and a citizen of Jericho, a city marked out for destruction by God. But she chose to ally herself with Israel and so was brought into the covenant community and into the line of promise. You can read about her story in Joshua 6. The next woman mentioned is Ruth in verse 5. The book of Ruth paints her as a commendable young

woman, not a prostitute or seducer of men, but a loyal daughter-in-law. But she was also as a Moabite, representative of the sin of her parents-in-law who had left the Promised Land and married their children to Moabite women. She was seen as an outsider in the book of Ruth. But when all the men in the family died, she went back with her mother-in-law to Israel, making the one true God her God. There in the Promised Land, God sent her a kinsman redeemer in Boaz who preserved her in the line of the promise. For through Ruth and Boaz, King David would come! And the fourth women mentioned in this genealogy is in verse 6, the wife of Uriah, whose name was Bathsheba. We already mentioned how she reminds us of David's moral failings, but nonetheless, she is part of the line of promise through which God would bring the Christ.

And three of these women were gentiles and thus outsiders to the covenant: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. And even Bathsheba may have been seen as an outsider, though a Jew by birth, since she was the wife of Uriah who was a Hittite. So she might have been seen as a Gentile in some sense too. And so we see Gentile women brought into the family of Israel, and brought into the line of promise. They were strangers and aliens to God's promises. But God brought them and made them recipients of these promises.

And so that is my second point. This genealogy is quite a mixed bag, isn't it? The Messiah has quite a diverse family tree, doesn't he? But that leads us to our third point. I want us to see how this diverse family tree leads us to see *how* Christ is the promised redeemer. It's actually in this tattered family tree that Jesus' work of redemption is foreshadowed.

You see, we've seen quite a mixed heritage here. Jews, but even some Gentiles. Some good people that weren't so good, some nobody's so to speak, and some people that lived most of their lives in rebellion against God. Why would Matthew mention these people in the family line?

Well, you say, he was just being historical. No, that's not enough. First, let me point out that Jews sometimes skipped generations in telling genealogies. We're not entirely sure why, but it seems that this was an acceptable convention - the overall family tree is still preserved. And Matthew actually does this. He doesn't mention every single physical generation here. He skips a few at a few places, just like was common practice. But he chose not to skip others that you might have expected him to skip.

Instead, as we've seen, Matthew actually volunteers additional information that he didn't need to tell us. For example, he didn't need to tell us about these four women that really represent various aspects of Israel's "colorful" history, a history that was often a sinful history. Did people need to be reminded that the great King of kings' royal lineage included prostitutes, adulterers, and Gentiles?

We should all know how this works. We all know the concept of the "black sheep of the family." You know, that's the one in the family that no one talks about. You go to your grandma's house and look through old pictures and find that one of them has a person cut out of the picture. And you ask your grandma about it, and she says, "We don't talk about that." You see, the black sheep of the family are the ones we are embarrassed about for some reason. Surely many of the people in the Christ's lineage would fall into this category. Surely you would think if you are trying to show Jesus' right to the Davidic throne you might not include any details that would look bad on his record. And yet Matthew, through his research, and by divine inspiration, felt we needed to know these details.

Why? Well I think in this family tree, we can understand the true mission of the Christ. It is so fitting that the Christ would come into a line like this. This is representative of the people he came to save. Sinners who need forgiveness. Even the most righteous of this line show that they are not the Christ. They too need a savior. And even others who were outsiders. Gentiles, foreigners to God's promise, brought into the one family tree representing all of God's people. Isn't that *our story*? We gentiles are like all the foreigners and outsiders in this list. And even the most godly of us, still fall so short of God's perfect standard of righteousness. None of us can save ourselves. We all need to be ingrafted into this family tree. We all need to be recipients of Christ's saving work. We all need Christ to redeem us. And saints of God, the good news is that if we belong to Christ, then we too are sons of Abraham. We too have been grafted into this family tree. The Christ is the one promised even to us. We are blessed by the redemption that comes in Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection means our salvation!

We just finished a bible study on the book of Ruth and we saw how Boaz was called a kinsman redeemer - a *goel* in the Hebrew. Isn't that what Jesus became for us? Isn't that what this genealogical record records? You see, Jesus, is not just the son of Abraham and David. This genealogy records for us the human lineage of Jesus, but at the end it begins to show us that Jesus also has a greater lineage. You see, a fifth woman is mentioned in verse 16. Mary. Blessed Mary, literally the mother of God. For as the book of Matthew goes on to show, the Virgin Mary was found to be of child by the Holy Ghost. And so Jesus is also the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity who existed from all ages. This eternal Son of God came into the womb of the Virgin Mary and took on human flesh. He became a kinsman with humanity. And he chose this checkered family tree as the family he would join. Why? To show what it means for him to be our kinsman redeemer. Jesus came into a checkered family line like this to show us that he came to save sinners and strangers. He came to save the prodigals and the outcasts. He came to redeem people like you and me. He came to die on the cross for us who are sinners. That is what we celebrate at Christmas. The eternal son of God becoming man, into a family line that is our family line. Broken and scarred because of sin, desperately looking to the promised savior. That savior has come with the birth of Jesus!

And so, I appeal to each one of you today. Is this your story? Is this your family tree? God's word tells us that it can be by faith. You can identify yourself with the family of God's people. You can do that by believing in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

And so which identity will you embrace? Will you embrace your old self, full of sin and rebellion against God? Or will you say that you delight in being considered a child of Abraham? Yes, one with a checkered and mixed heritage according to the flesh, but a part of those whom Christ has come to save!

This doesn't mean you disregard your earthly families to be a part of God's family. But it does mean that your new identity becomes your greatest identity. It means that your old ways of living as a sinner and as a stranger to God's family are done away with. You no longer find your identity in that old way of life. Now you say, I am part of God's family; and that's because of Christ. And so may you "live Christ" all your days. And as we live for Christ, we do so looking forward to the next time that he will come into this world. We look forward to that final day when he returns to bring his family into heavenly bliss for all eternity. Amen, and Merry Christmas!