

13.12.06 midweekchurch Matt 1:1-17 Matt1a(mid)

I heard a story a while back about a missionary who was translating parts of the Bible for a small tribe in the highlands of New Guinea. The missionary knew he had to start somewhere, and decided he would start with the NT. Once again he had to decide which part of the NT and he chose Matthew's gospel.

But when he got to Matthew's gospel he passed over the first couple of verses, the genealogy and went straight into the birth of Christ. As he translated key parts of the gospel, he distributed them to the natives, with very little response.

It was only when he had translated the whole gospel and produced it as a booklet did the natives start becoming interested. In fact many of them became Christians. Why? What had made the difference? The genealogy at the start of the gospel. The tribe was very aware of their roots. And to them the genealogy proved that what they were reading was not made up but was grounded in history.

And as I came to deciding what I would preach on coming up to Christmas, I was tempted to leave out the genealogy. Aren't the genealogies the most boring part of the Bible? Isn't it like reading through a telephone directory with all those such and such begat such & such & how do you pronounce fathered how do you pronounce it?

Yet the Bible claims that *"All Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."* All Scripture. Including genealogies! So I stopped and had a look at the first few verses in Matthew. And I realised that this was the place that Matthew started when he wanted to explain Jesus birth. And so this was the logical place for me to start as well.

For the genealogy forces us to look back, **1. To a great heritage.** Because as we read this family tree, our attention is grabbed by some of the great names in the Bible. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Manasseh are all mentioned. When we hear these names, the stories that we heard about these people in Sunday School, or Church, flash through our minds. The mental pictures we have of these people flash up before us like an old newsreel in the cinemas.

And that would be the same reaction that Matthew's first readers would have had. Yet these names are no just there to catch our attention. Let's look at the first verse: *"This is a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham."*

Jesus is **Abraham's** son. Well what do we know about Abraham? He was the guy who left everything to follow God. He was the guy to whom God made some of the most amazing promises to: *"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. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all the people of the earth will be blessed through you."*

Jesus being Abraham's son shows us that God is now going to keep the promises he made to Abraham almost 2000 years beforehand. God's plan, His purposes, His promises are just about to be fulfilled. God has not forgotten them, but Jesus the son of Abraham will be the catalyst to bring them to fruition.

Yes, Jesus is Abraham's son. Jesus is the one who will make his followers into a holy nation. He

will give his followers blessings by making us part of the family of God. Yet it will not just be the Jews who are blessed but all the people of the earth will be blessed through Jesus, both Jews and us Gentiles.

For Jesus is also **David's** son. And God made some pretty awesome promises to David in 2 Samuel 7. He said “*I will build up a house for you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me, your throne will be established forever.*“

David's throne had vanished now that the Roman's were in control. But here was another son of David, one who stood in the royal line - a true heir to the throne. And now this throne was ready to be claimed again.

You see Jesus doesn't inherit things like property or money or special family heirlooms like we might inherit. Instead from his famous ancestors Abraham & David, he inherits something more precious. He inherits God's promises

So the first thing we have learnt is that God's plan is about to be fulfilled. God's purposes are never forgotten. God will indeed keep his promises. Now that's not boring is it? For when God says he will never leave us or forsake us, he means it. When he tells us that we will never be tempted beyond what we can bear, he is not pulling us by the leg. And when he declares that this same Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead, it means it will happen, even if he seems to be taking his time. God's plans are for real. God's purposes will be fulfilled.

So the genealogy has forced us to look back, to look back at the glorious promises that Jesus inherits. But it also reminds us of the darkest day in Israel's history, the tragic exile of God's people. **2.To the Tough Times.** For when Matthew divides Jesus family tree, he does so into three parts, with each part placing the spotlight on its beginning. The first stanza is from the calling of Abraham, to the great king David (v.6). The next stanza is the period of the monarchy from the greatest King David to the time when the royal line was snuffed out v.(11). And the last stanza is from this failure, this defeat at the hands of the Babylonians, this exile on to the time of Jesus.

So the family tree then recounts both the highs and the lows. Not just the great promises, the great characters but also the darkest period of Israel's history, when they were defeated in battle, when they were made a puppet state, when they deported away from God's promised land, God's temple, God's King and to be the slaves of another nation. So the family tree points to the depths of despair in which God's people plummeted when they became refugees.

We have all seen pictures of refugees, who have been forced to flee from their own lands due to war, or famine or disease. We can picture the panic in their eyes, the desperation in their speech, the despair on their faces as they cope with the fact that they have lost everything - their belongings, their land, their families.

Matthew's family tree points us back to those sort of times and reminds us that God was there. His plan was still being enacted. There is never a time when our hope is so low, when life seems so hard, that we are not still a part of God's plans.

For God was with Jesus descendents, the Israelites, through both the best of times and the worst of times. God is the God of history, it is HIS STORY. His power is seen in what he has done in the past and that very same power is available to us today. So we look back to a great heritage, to the tough times and to the skeletons in the closet.

3. To the skeletons in the closets As the saying goes every family tree has a few nuts and Jesus family tree has many people, both men and women that in some way are not the best of characters to be associated with. So as we read through the list of names we see Kings like **Mannasah** and **Rehoboam** and **Jeroham** who were evil kings, who turned away from God, yet God kept his promises. We see **Jehoiachin** who was king when Israel was defeated and sent into exile because time and time and time again they had forgotten about God. Yet God still keeps the family line alive.

Yet it is not just the men who are the skeletons in the closet, there are four women mentioned in Jesus family tree & each one has a significant past, each has a few details you would like to sweep under the carpet.

There's **Tamar (v.3)**, the mother of Perez and Zerah, didn't she act as a prostitute? Wasn't she forgotten about by her father in law Judah, left on the scrap heap when her husband died and didn't she stand by the side of the road in a way that told everyone that she was a local prostitute. Didn't she then actually sleep with her father in law Judah. Tamar, that's a name you want to forget. Yet she is in the family tree of Jesus.

And then there's **Rahab(v.5)**, who live in Jericho and who allowed the Israelite spies to stay on her roof and gave them safe passage back home. Another prostitute who left her nation to follow the true and living God.

There's also **Ruth(v.5)**, the Moabite woman who looked after her Israelite mother-in-law after the death of her husband. Now the Moabites were a despised people, the natural enemies of God's people yet Ruth's love and commitment to her family brought her to Boaz, who marries her. It was through her that the line of David followed and eventually leads to Jesus.

And lastly there's **Uriah's wife (v.6)**, the lady who one day went up onto her roof to bathe and was spotted by King David. She was married and so was he, but they made love and she ended up carrying his child. She told him the news and David sought to hide the whole sordid affair. He even ended up killing her husband and a number of other innocent men. But Uriah's wife, whose name was Bethsheba gave birth to her child, it was a boy, and the boy was named Solomon and he ended up being the heir to the throne.

So there is a number of evil and wicked kings, two prostitutes, a cursed Moabite, an adulteress and plenty of foreigners – the grace of God is seen by each of them still being in the line of Messiah, a gracious King, indeed, who came for sinners.

You see Jesus family carries as much baggage as ours does. The Saviour of the world came from people that we would not even have anything to do with. God's chosen King had to come to this earth because of people like his relatives.

You see this genealogy has shown us God's plan and his power but it also shows us his grace. God wants us to see this evening that through Him anything is possible. Through Him, it does not matter how bad our past is, our lives can be changed. God's grace is so amazing that even these skeletons, even these deeds can be forgiven.

4. To the everyday people.... Yet I feel there is one further reason why Matthew starts with a genealogy. It's to look back and show that Jesus is not just one who inherits the great promises of

the past, who can trace his line through the tough times in Israel's history, who has his own share of skeletons in the closet but also to show that there were ordinary, everyday people, like you and me, who also were his ancestors.

We see people like **Eliakim** and **Azor** and **Zadok** who lived through a time when they heard nothing at all from God. But God's silence didn't mean that they had been forgotten. There are some that we know nothing about.... Nahshon, Salmon, Abiud, Azor, Eliud, Mattan.

Nothing remains about them, except they are ancestors to Jesus, the son of God. Ordinary, everyday people yet who were related to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Men and women who never did anything particularly great or memorable, or earth shattering, yet are still given the privilege of being a part of God's royal family.

And I think that is a great encouragement to people like you and me. Because when you think about it we're not great people in the world's eyes. Not the great scholar, not the great leader, but we can be part of the Royal line, part of the family of God.

For when we ask Jesus to take over our lives. When we look at the baby in the manger and realise that in his adulthood he will take away all our sinfulness, then we become part of the family of God, we become one of Jesus offspring. We, although being ordinary people can extraordinarily become part of the family of God.

So when we look at the family tree of Jesus we realise that our names can be on it too. For Jesus family continues right down to today. We are not part of Jesus family by virtue of our birth or by being a Jew. We become part of Jesus family by being adopted by God. By him choosing us, to have this special access to Him.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that incredible that the nobodies in this world eyes like you and me can become somebodies, even a part of the family of God. Not because we are better than others but because we are born again into God's family. As we trust in what Jesus did for us, not just in his birth, but in his death and resurrection. Where he dies to forgive you your sins and he invites you to be a child of God.

A child of God. A descendent of Jesus. Someone special to God. Is that you? Have you made that step of asking God to adopt you? Do so, for that is what Christmas is about. God coming to earth in the person of Jesus. God coming to show us how great is his power, his plan, his grace and his fatherhood. God coming into this world to make you a part of his family.

And we get all of that from one genealogy. You see the Bible is not boring its full of life, because its full of people like you and me. And its is chock a block full of a Saviour called Jesus who came to call us back to our Father. This Christmas time lets not forget that it really is a time to look back and see what Jesus has done for each one of us.

*****a

A crown, a robe, or a scepter usually identifies kingly royalty. King James V of Scotland would on occasion lay aside the royal robe of king and put on the simple robe of a peasant. In such a disguise, he was able to move freely about the land, making friends with ordinary folk, entering into their difficulties, appreciating their handicaps, sympathizing with them in their sorrow. And when as king he sat again upon the throne, he was better able to rule over them with fatherly compassion and mercy. Though he put off a royal robe and took on a beggar's coat, His royalty remained. He did not cease to be a king. He is more of a king – when we recognize such compassion and grace.

The Gospel of Matthew identifies a King, without a robe, a crown, or a scepter. Nevertheless, this King still deserves the honor of our worship and the right to reign over the nations

*****b

Consider the history summed up in this genealogy... It is marked by gross sin (Abraham, Judah, David), blatant idolatry, captivity in Egypt, captivity in Babylon, a succession of flawed kings, and hostile enemies, yet God's plan is carried out to completion. It is as if God is saying, The famine in Egypt couldn't starve My plan. 400 years of slavery in Egypt and another 70 in Babylonian captivity couldn't shackle My plan. Murder, corruption, and idolatry could not stop My plan!

*****c

This is important in history because the transfer of property required proof of lineage to the rightful family. Since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 no genealogies exist that can trace the ancestry of any Jew now living. The primary significance of that fact is that, for those Jews who reject Jesus and still look for the Messiah, his lineage to Abraham or David could never be established. Jesus Christ is the last verifiable claimant to the possessions of Abraham and throne of David, and therefore, He alone qualifies to be Messiah and King.

*****e

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities. Early one chilly December morning an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter ever so carefully. The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son, would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah--I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply: "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly: "Mister, are you God?"

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He isn't born into a perfect family filled with "halos and harps." There are some nuts in Jesus' family tree just like yours and mine.

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Know what? Jesus died for all types of people. Whether prostitute (harlot) or virtuous, whether

shepherd or king, whether servant or master, Jesus died for all types of people that they might have eternal Salvation upon believing in Him as Lord and Savior.

Joseph (husband of Mary) – Surprise, surprise! The Bible does not say, “Joseph begat Jesus.” Everyone else in this genealogy “begat” a son, except for Joseph. Something unique must have happened!

*****h

There’s another king who lived hundreds of years after Herod. His name was Charlemagne. One day he came to the cathedral and was shocked to find the gate barred by the bishop. “Who comes?” shouted the bishop. The heralds answered, “Charlemagne, Lord and King of the Holy Roman Empire!” Answering for God, the bishop replied, “Him I know not! Who comes?”

The heralds, a bit shaken, answered, “Charles the Great, a good and honest man of the earth!” Again the bishop answered, “Him I know not. Who comes?”

Now completely crushed, the heralds say, “Charles, a lowly sinner, who begs the gift of Christ.” “Him I know,” the bishop replied. “Enter!”

*****I

Then there’s the major star of this story,
is this the Messiah who all the whispers and rumors were about,?????????????
the one to redeem and re-establish the kingdom.

*****j

A Tour of The Graveyard - 1:1-17

A tour of the phone book.

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