

The Family of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Okay, lots of names and very unfamiliar names at that. Let me tell you a story about a musician in 2007. So a number of years ago, the Washington Post newspaper had planned an experiment.

And the experiment was that during the morning rush hour, they would get the world-famous violinist, a man called Joshua Bell, and he would perform incognito at a metro station in Washington.

And so he played a brilliant repertoire for 45 minutes on a Stradivarius violin. He was busking. The violin came from 1713.

That's when it was made, and it was worth \$3.5 million. Now, just before this morning rush hour at the metro station, Joshua Bell had played to a huge audience in Boston and had charged \$100 a ticket for people to come and watch him.

But on that morning, as he was busking, he collected a grand total of \$32.17 from a few passersby who stopped.

[1 : 10] So of the 1,000-plus commuters who rushed past him on that morning, most didn't even recognize him, let alone stop, to listen to this beautiful music.

And so they missed one of the world's most gifted musicians. Now, the reason I tell that story is because I think this is what many people do with Jesus Christ.

They walk past Jesus year after year, Christmas after Christmas, failing to recognize who he really is. And life is busy, and so in the busyness of life, with family and with work and everything else, people can just be too busy to stop and give Jesus Christ the time of day.

And perhaps that is you. You're just too busy to give him any kind of mind time. Well, what I'd like us to do this afternoon is look at one of the accounts of the life of Jesus, the one that I just read with all the names from the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew.

Because what Matthew wants to do in his Gospel is to introduce us to Jesus. And so let's just stop and listen, because what he says about Jesus is not just surprising.

[2 : 28] I think we'll find that what he says about Jesus is actually shocking. And so what we see is that the coming of Jesus on that very first Christmas is, first of all, a defining moment in our history.

And secondly, it is a defining matter for our lives. And so I'd just like to look briefly this afternoon at these two things from this Bible text. First of all, a defining moment in our history.

You notice that Matthew, in introducing Jesus to us, begins with the genealogy of Jesus, or the family line, or the family tree of Jesus. And we might be thinking, well, why not jump to angels and shepherds, wise men or kings, the star, the manger, just the classic nativity scene, because that's what we all know and love.

There's a picture up on the screen. Because reading this long list of very unfamiliar names is about as exciting as reading the telephone book, if you still get those things these days, I don't know.

But for ancient people, genealogies were actually really significant. And the reason is because your genealogy revealed who you are.

[3 : 43] And so this would have grabbed the attention of Matthew's Jewish audience, because your identity is in fact tied up in your family history. It told your pedigree.

It told your credibility. In a sense, it told you your worth. And everybody else, how significant that you are. Now these days, I guess a CV would fulfill a similar function.

And so Matthew wants to tell us who Jesus is by tracing back into his family tree. And so he says, this is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Literally, he is saying this is the genesis of Jesus. That word genesis meaning beginning, like the first book of the Bible called Genesis. And so we're being told by Matthew that Jesus, and in Jesus,

there is a new beginning.

There is a defining moment in God's purposes for the world that he made. And so Matthew sets Jesus firmly within human history.

[4 : 52] He has a family line that goes way back. And it's worth emphasizing that Jesus came into history, because I guess some people these days still seem to put Jesus in the same category as Santa Claus.

In other words, he is just some kind of mythical character in the past. And yet, what we're reading here is that Jesus is real, that he showed up in our world.

In fact, in Israel, which is the focus of so much of our news right now. And so this isn't a fairy story that begins once upon a time. No, this is the time by which we set our time.

And so Jesus came, but the question is, well, what did he come to do? Because Matthew's telling us how God is fulfilling his purposes for the world in Jesus.

That God is sending Jesus as his promised king. The king who will bring blessing to this world, our world.

[5 : 56] And that's why Jesus here is called the Messiah. Messiah is a title, and it means anointed one, because Jesus is God's anointed king.

The one that God had promised. And that's why Matthew traces Jesus' family line all the way back to David, and then further back to Abraham.

And these names, Abraham and David, are like bookends that frame the genealogy. And these are significant names to Matthew's original Jewish readers. As we read at the end of the genealogy, thus there were 14 generations in all, from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.

And so the genealogy is carefully arranged into these three blocks of 14 to emphasize, essentially, that Jesus is both the son of David and the son of Abraham.

And so Matthew's not giving an exhaustive family tree here. He's being selective in who he has included. And he can do this, because when we read father of, it can also mean ancestor of, and it can also mean in the line of.

[7 : 12] And so where any descendant here can be called father, not just the immediate next of kin. And so Matthew starts with Abraham.

He moves forward to David. He goes to the exile in Babylon, and then he arrives at Jesus. So let's just think briefly about Abraham and David and why they're significant, because Abraham was the great father of the nation of Israel.

And so God had promised Abraham that he would bring blessing to all the nations of the world through Abraham's family. And so Jesus fulfills God's promise to Abraham.

Jesus will bring blessing to all the nations of the world. And then if you fast forward to David, David was the great king of Israel.

And God had promised David that he would produce a king with an everlasting kingdom through and from David's family. And so Jesus fulfills God's promise to David.

[8 : 15] Jesus is the king whose kingdom will last forever. So he is a true Jew in the line of Abraham. Jesus is. And Jesus is a true heir in the royal line of David.

Because back then, as is still the case today, it's the bloodline that puts you on the throne, isn't it? It's the bloodline that marks you out as royalty.

And so the message is, the creator God who made the world has a plan for the world and it centers on Jesus Christ. And that's why this genealogy moves forwards instead of backwards.

To say that from the very beginning, then God knew exactly what he was doing and where he was going. And that's why the coming of Jesus at Christmas is the defining moment in human history. Because Jesus doesn't just give Christmas meaning. Jesus gives human history meaning. Which means that Jesus gives your life and my life meaning and significance too.

[9 : 32] And that's why the coming of Jesus is not only, first of all, a defining moment in our history, but it is also, secondly, a defining matter for our lives. Now, why is that?

Well, when we discover the kinds of people who make up the family tree of Jesus, we see why Jesus had to come. Because they help us see who Jesus is and why Jesus came.

Now, perhaps you've seen the BBC TV series, Who Do You Think You Are? where these celebrities who are interested in their past will be on the show and they will look back into their family tree and the aim is the celebrity wants to better understand who they are with reference to all

the people who came before them in their family line.

Well, we're given the family tree of Jesus to help us better understand who Jesus is. Now, remember we said that in ancient times, your genealogy revealed who you are.

Whereas these days, it's your CV that tells people who you are. Your CV outlines your education, your qualifications, your work experience, your achievements, and so on and so on.

[10:47] But of course, you would not include everything on your CV, would you? No, you wouldn't. You'd leave out the bits you don't want people to know about.

Well, the same was true of a genealogy in ancient times because you would leave certain people out. You'd make sure, of course, all the respectable people were in there in your family line, but you'd leave out all the rogues.

Try and forget about them. Keep them off the list. And this is what makes the family tree of Jesus so intriguing. Because in a patriarchal society, it was usually only the fathers who populated the genealogy with the line and the name passing through the male heirs.

But the genealogy of Jesus includes a number of women, which is surprising and shocking in a Jewish genealogy. In fact, five women are listed.

And so they are all the mothers of Jesus. Now, Matthew didn't need to include them, but what's interesting is that he did. And so by mentioning their names, what he's doing is he is deliberately drawing our attention to their stories.

[12:06] But their stories are full of scandal and full of shame. In fact, these are some of the most sordid stories in the whole Bible.

And so I'd like us to take a look at each of the women involved. And they're sordid stories, so I'm glad the children have left to go to creche and to explorers. So of these women, the first up is a woman called Tamar.

Now, Tamar seduced her father-in-law, who was called Judah, by posing as a prostitute. And so she covered her face so Judah wouldn't recognize her.

And then she tricked Judah into having sex with her. And then she became pregnant with two twin boys called Perez and Zerah. They're in the list. So this was an incestuous act, but it is part of the family history of Jesus.

Next up, there's Rahab. Now, Rahab was a prostitute by profession. By birth, she was a Canaanite, in other words, a Gentile, a non-Jew.

[13:16] And she is also part of the family from which Jesus came. And then there's Ruth. Ruth was a Moabitess, again, a non-Jew.

And her race came about through incest. So the story is that a man called Lot got drunk, and he had sex with his daughters.

You read this in Genesis chapter 19. And so as a result of this, the Moabites weren't allowed in the assembly of the Lord. They were outsiders. But Ruth, though an outsider, was converted to God, and she became part of the family line from which Jesus came.

And then there's Uriah's wife. Her name is Bathsheba. But Bathsheba isn't mentioned here. And presumably, Matthew only puts her down as Uriah's wife because we're meant to recall the whole sordid tale of what happened to Bathsheba.

In fact, Bathsheba was married to Uriah the Hittite, who was one of King David's mighty warriors. But then when Uriah was out fighting for David, David committed adultery with his wife.

[14:36] And it happened when David spotted Bathsheba taking a bath when he was in his palace. And one day, he then had Bathsheba brought to him. He had sex with her, and she became pregnant.

And then David had Uriah, her husband, killed so he could marry Bathsheba. And then Bathsheba gave birth to their son Solomon. And so when Matthew calls her Uriah's wife, it wasn't to dismiss Bathsheba, but it was to denounce King David.

Because despite being Israel's great king, David was guilty of adultery, and he was guilty of murder. And so in the family line of Jesus, what have we got? We've got stories of incestuous sex, commercial sex, and adulterous sex.

Sexual scandal and shame runs right the way through the family tree of Jesus Christ. These stories are probably more suited to the front page of the Sun newspaper than they are to the first page of the story of Jesus.

And of course, nobody wants to air their dirty laundry in public, do they? But here, it's all on show. And so why highlight these women and their stories?

[15 : 57] Well, these women didn't actually belong, did they? They're all outsiders. Moral outsiders, racial outsiders, cultural outsiders.

And so the law of Moses would exclude all of these people from God's presence. And yet, they're part of the family of Jesus.

Which is telling us it is not just the right living, the rule-keeping, and respectable people who are part of the family of Jesus.

Because we've got kings here, but we've also got prostitutes. There are men and women, Jews and Gentiles, the moral and immoral, the good and the bad, and everything in between.

And Jesus claims them all as if to say, this is my family. These are my people. But their inclusion doesn't just tell us about them, they're in there to tell us about Jesus, about who he is, and why he came.

[17 : 04] Where the good news of Christmas is essentially that Jesus came from this dysfunctional family to save dysfunctional people like me and you, because he wants to bring us into his eternal family.

And so when it comes to Christianity, it is obviously never the case that the good people are in and the bad people are out. Because the family of Jesus is full of shame and scandal and sin.

And yet Jesus owns it. That's not to say the sin doesn't matter. It does. And that's why Jesus came. He came to deal with sin and to restore sinners like us, like them.

And so Christmas is telling us that God became man and entered into our world. So Jesus is the only good person whose every thought and word and deed was only ever good.

And yet Jesus did not distance himself from the shame and from the scandal of sinners during his life. Jesus even faced scandal and shame himself because Jesus was falsely accused.

[18 : 22] He was mocked. He was spat on. He was beaten up. He was treated as a criminal and he was crucified on a cross. And so why did he endure all of this?

The answer is out of love for us. On the cross, Jesus bore our sin and our shame to save us from the judgment we deserve for it.

Jesus willingly took the punishment for all the wrongs that we have ever thought and said and done. Because on the cross he substituted his life for mine, his life for yours, his perfection for our failure, his holiness for our shame, his beauty for our brokenness.

And that's why as we read this genealogy of Jesus and see all of the human disgrace, we get a startling reminder of God's grace and how far and how wide that grace extends to welcome people in.

And so it doesn't matter who you are or where you're from or what you did. Sounds like the Backstreet Boys but it's not meant to be. None of this matters.

[19 : 43] It doesn't matter how you're living right now because the message here is God's grace can overcome the greatest scandal, the deepest shame and the ugliest sin.

So don't ever think that God is somehow shocked by your life or your sin or your mess or your failure. Don't ever think that Jesus somehow can't handle your sin and shame, that it's too much for him.

God's grace is for everyone because we are all equally lost and all need to be saved and yet we are all equally loved by God at the same time.

We all need God's grace. No one is so good that they don't need it and yet what we're reading here is that no one is so bad that they can't receive it if they turn from their sin and trust in Jesus because in Jesus what God does as he flings wide open the doors to invite us in to his family.

So he wants to forgive the foolish, to restore the broken, to reconcile his enemies, to use the disgraced. And that's all of us if we're honest enough to admit it.

[21 : 06] We are well aware of our own brokenness in our hearts and in our lives and in our families. We feel our shame and we can't hide our failures forever even if we can for a wee while.

And yet despite what we are Jesus came to take our sin away and to unite us to himself. So we need not be an outsider when it comes to God.

We need not be excluded from God forever because in Jesus alone do we find what we most need and what we deeply long for in life.

And so the genealogy of Jesus' past family is an invitation to enter Jesus' present family. And because Jesus was born, he lived, he died, he rose again for us, trusting in Jesus means that we find a warm welcome, unconditional love, a seat at the table and an eternal home in the family of Jesus Christ.

That's why the coming of Jesus is a defining moment in our history. The question is, is it a defining matter for your life and for mine?

[22 : 35] BECOME CHAPural rest Jumping Jesus'