**Grace in the Genealogy of Jesus**

**Matthew 1:1-17**

**Christmas 2024**

**1. Introduction: The Importance of Genealogies**

This morning we want to talk about the genealogy of Jesus; yes, you heard me right. We’re going to look at his biological family tree. We’re going to look at what really is the forgotten chapter in the Christmas story. There is a reason why we usually ignore it; it’s long, boring, and doesn’t seem to be that exciting. We usually zip through it in order to get to the good stuff. You know the good stuff: the visit by the angel Gabriel to Mary and Joseph; their trip to Bethlehem; the star of Bethlehem; the journey of the 3 wise men from the east; gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; King Herod; the shepherds out in the fields tending their flock; and, the angel announcing to them the birth of Jesus.

Now, to put things into perspective, the Jews of the first century would be quite surprised at our lack of interest in the ancestral genealogy of Jesus. Because to them, ancestry was everything. To them, knowing their ancestry was extremely important; it was required and absolutely essential to live. For example, just the sale and transfer of private property required complete knowledge of one’s ancestry (Ruth 3-4). Whenever a piece of property was up for sale, the person buying the land had to prove his tribal ancestry because in Israel at the time, land had to be bought and sold within the same tribe. So, if you wanted to buy property within the area of the tribe of Judah, you had to go back hundreds of years to prove your Judean ancestry, to prove you had the right to buy the land.

This morning, we want to look at the character and background of several people who are in the ancestral biological line of Jesus. However, before we do that, we need to look further into the importance of genealogies in the bible.

Genealogies are very important in the bible. There are approximately 25 of them in 14 different books.The Jews’ great emphasis on personal identity and correct tribal identity made family ancestries and genealogies very important, going as far back as 1500 years before the time of Jesus. The genealogies also were very important to God who intended them for the protection of tribal unity, succession in the line of the priesthood, and for the succession of private property.

After the Israelites entered the land of Israel under Joshua and conquered the land promised to them, the land was carefully divided into 12 different areas for all the tribes of Israel to live in, with the exception of the priestly tribe of Levi, which dwelt in special cities designated for them. In order to know where to live, each individual family had to first know which tribe it belonged to, making family genealogies very important (Num 26, 34, 35). In addition, in order for a man to qualify for priestly function, he had to prove his descent all the way back to Levi, the brother of Moses. In fact, after the Babylonian captivity, scripture tells us that certain men who said they were Levites could not serve in the priesthood because their ancestral descent from Levi could not be verified (Ezra 2:61-62).

Ancestries and genealogies were important for other reasons. Under Roman rule, the census of Jews for taxation purposes in Palestine was based on ancestry. This is seen from the fact that Mary and Joseph were required to register in Bethlehem for taxation because they were of the house and family of David who was born in Bethlehem (NOTE: they knew their tribal status ~ 1000 years after king David). The famous Jewish historian Josephus tells us that in NT times many Jewish families kept lengthy, detailed, valuable family histories, and ancestral files. We know that even the apostle Paul was greatly concerned about his lineage from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; II Cor 12:22; Phil 3:5). So, for Jews, personal and tribal identification, family ancestry, line of descent, and genealogies were all very important and an essential part of Jewish life.

**2. Why was Jesus’ genealogy necessary to know?**

Matthew’s major purpose in writing chapters one and two of his Gospel was to prove to the Jewish people Jesus’ true identity, his tribal status, his ancestry in the line of David, and his right to rule as Israel’s king. These two chapters vindicate Jesus’ statement to Pilate when he said, “*You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world*” (John 18:37).

Every Jew awaiting the Messiah was familiar with the prophecy given to king David that one of his physical descendants would sit on his throne and rule and reign forever as king of Israel and Messiah (II Sam 7:12-16). Thus, to be accepted as a descendant of David, it was absolutely necessary that Jesus’ detailed ancestry and genealogy be clearly laid out for all to read and understand and acknowledge it as true.

**3. Two different genealogies of Jesus: Matthew’s and Luke’s**

There are two genealogies of Jesus’ birth recorded in the New Testament. One in Matt 1:1-17 and the other in Luke 3:23-38 and they are quite different. Matthew’s genealogy descends from Abraham through David and Solomon down to Jesus and describes Jesus’ legal authority to the throne. Luke’s genealogy ascends upwards from Jesus through Joseph up to Nathan to David and eventually to Adam, and describes Jesus’ royal blood line back to David establishing his right to rule as a blood descendant of king David.

Matthew’s intent was to validate Jesus’ legal claim to the throne by showing his descent from David through Joseph, who was Jesus’ legal, though not his natural, father. Luke’s intent was to trace his royal blood ancestry through his mother, thereby establishing his royal blood lineage back to David. Matthew follows the legal lineage through David and Solomon. Luke follows the royal blood lineage through David and Nathan, another son of David. Jesus therefore, was the legal descendant of David through Joseph, and the royal blood descendant of David through Mary. So, genealogically, Jesus was perfectly qualified to take the throne of David.

**4. So, why are two biblical genealogies necessary for Jesus?**

In Matthew 1:11-12 we read, “*Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel*.” Now, contrast this with what we read in Jeremiah 22:29-30: “*O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord! Thus, says the Lord, write this man (Jeconiah) down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David, or ruling again in Judah*.”

This is an extremely important point to understand: Jeconiah was the last king of Israel in the line of David before the Babylonian captivity in 605 BC. He had sinned so willfully and wrongfully against the Lord that the Lord punished (cursed) him. He pronounced that none of his descendants, i.e., neither his son Shealtiel (Matt 1:12) or any other male descendant could ever sit on the throne of David. It was God’s punishment against him. So, if Jesus had been the real son of Joseph, he would have been a direct descendant of Jeconiah and thus, under the curse of Jeconiah, and be disqualified from sitting on the throne of David. Remember, for Jesus to be qualified to sit on the throne of David, he needed to be the legal son of Joseph which he was; but, if he were to be the real son of Joseph, he would have been under the curse of Jeconiah and ineligible to be king of Israel. So, God had to devise a plan by which he would be the legal heir to the throne through Joseph (and he was), but not be in the line of David descending through Jeconiah. And so, God did it through the virgin birth, bypassing the blood line of Jeconiah and yet giving Jesus the royal right to reign through the royal blood line of Mary, descending through Nathan, another son of David, down to Mary.

This really is a fantastic thing! God provided every detail necessary to assure Jesus’ right to sit on the throne of David and be the Messiah. The virgin birth of Jesus solved everything. The Jewish people knew their Old Testament and were well aware of the curse of Jeconiah. They knew that no descendant of David through Jeconiah could ever rule on the throne of David. So, there needed to be a solution and God provided that solution through the virgin birth of Jesus by Mary. He had the legal right to rule through Joseph and the royal bloodline right to rule through Mary. And he was not under the curse of Jeconiah.

**5. Grace in the genealogy of Jesus**

The genealogy in Matthew’s gospel covers over 2000 years and God is highly selective in the people that he includes in the genealogy. Multiple people in Jesus’ ancestry are skipped over and left out because God wanted to emphasize the lives of the people that are included and to highlight events in their lives, their individual backgrounds, and their different qualities, and characteristics.

God chose to include each of these ancestors in the biological family tree of Jesus for a specific purpose. He designed it, orchestrated it, and his choices are surprising. He has an unusual list of characters. He leaves out the heroes, and the strong, and the good guys, and includes surprising and shocking stories. One thing that is surprising about the genealogy is that it includes women because at this time in the ancient Near East, genealogies never included women.

Simply by including four women, Matthew’s genealogy already is counter cultural. Additionally, the particular OT histories of these women and what they are associated with makes the genealogy truly shocking because they were involved in some of the most sordid, evil, and morally sinful activities in the whole OT scriptures.

Before we survey the lives and activities of these women, we have to look briefly at the two men who begin the genealogy, David and Abraham.

David and Abraham sinned greatly against the Lord and yet are included in the ancestry and genealogy of Jesus. David committed grievous sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and then worsened his sin by having her husband, Uriah, killed in battle. Also, as a warrior and king, he killed hundreds of enemy soldiers and was not permitted to build the temple for the Lord because he had too much blood on his hands (I Chron 22:8). Also, he was not an example of a spirit-led father and failed to discipline his children. One of them (Absalom), in fact, committed armed rebellion against him and tried to overthrow his government.

Abraham, a man of great faith and honored as being an example of faith to imitate in the book of Hebrews, lied twice concerning his wife Sarah. When he feared for his life and did not trust the Lord to protect him, twice he lied to pagan kings telling them that Sarah was his sister rather than his wife (Gen 12:11-19; 20:11-18). When the Lord eventually interceded for him and the truth was discovered, it brought great shame to himself, Sarah, and to the Lord in whom he supposedly trusted and claimed to serve.

Yet, in spite of their grievous sins, God used Abraham and David greatly in his plan for Israel. God made Abraham the father of his chosen people, Israel, through whom the Messiah would be born. David became king of Israel and received the Messianic promise that one of his descendants (the Lord Jesus) would be blessed by God and sit on his throne and rule the nation of Israel and the world forever. David became the father of both the legal and royal lines of descent leading to the birth of the Lord Jesus.

**Now let’s turn to the women in the genealogy of Jesus.**

First, we find Tamar. Matt 1:3 tells us that “Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.” What kind of woman was Tamar? Her story is in Genesis 38. It’s a story of deception, incest, and harlotry.

Judah chose Tamar as a wife for his firstborn son, Er. Er, however, was an “evil man in the sight of the Lord” and the Lord struck him dead (Gen 38:7). According to OT Jewish Levirate law, Er’s brother Onan became Tamar’s husband. But when he refused to father children with Tamar, God struck him dead, too (Gen 38:10).

So, being desperate of being childless and not willing to wait on the Lord’s timing to find the right husband, Tamar developed an evil scheme to get Judah to father her children. She took off her widow’s clothing, dressed as a harlot, put on a veil to hide her face, and waited by the road until the time she knew that her father-in-law, Judah, would be traveling by. When Judah passed by, not knowing who she was, he approached her for sex and she agreed (Gen 38:18). Twin sons were conceived through this evil act of harlotry and incest. Their names were Perez and Zerah; and since Perez was born first, he is included in the Messianic genealogy of Jesus.

This is a shocking story. Did you realize that a woman like Tamar was included in Jesus ancestry? No need to look anywhere else in the bible to find some redeeming aspect to her life. There is none! In a way she’s nothing more than a “footnote” in early Jewish history; however, she stands out as an example of the frailty and sinfulness of humanity.

And how about Judah? He is another example of great sinfulness. He was the fourth son of Jacob and Leah and the founder of the tribe of Judah. The “Kingdom of Judah”, the “Land of Judah”, and the word “Jew”, are all named after him. So, how could such an immoral incestuous person have all these things named after him. How could he be so honored? And, how could he be included in the genealogy of Jesus? The answer is that it’s all by God’s grace and it’s remarkable!

Next, we find Rahab in the genealogy, Matt 1:5a says “Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab.” Rahab’s name is more familiar to us. She is known as “Rahab the harlot” and is mentioned several times in Joshua (6:17, 23, 25); in Hebrews (11:31); and James (2:25). She was a Canaanite, whose army was considered a mortal enemy of Israel. When we first encounter her in scripture, she is an idolatrous, outcast gentile woman, a professional prostitute. And, the most memorable thing we remember about her life is that she told a lie. Her story begins in Joshua 2.

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were ready to enter the promise land. Joshua sent spies to scout out the land around Jericho and when they came into contact with Rahab in her home, she protected them. When city officials became aware of the spies, they came to her house looking for them. However, she hid them on her roof and then lied to the officials telling them that they no longer were there. She knew the Israelite army already had completely destroyed several armies; and, would destroy Jericho, too. So, she bargained with the spies to save her and all her family’s lives. They agreed to spare them if she kept everything secret and hung a scarlet (red) cord outside her window to let the attacking Israeli army know which house was hers. She did this and the Israelites spared her and her family.

Rahab abandoned the gods of the Canaanites for the true God, Jehovah. She not only became a convert to the true God but also was included in the Messianic line. According to scripture, she married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz and was the great, great grandmother of king David. She was a professional prostitute, yet we find her in the genealogy of Jesus. This is truly an amazing story.

Next, we find Ruth in the genealogy. Matthew 1:5b tells us that “Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse.” Just one generation later, another gentile woman is included in the genealogy of Jesus. Ruth was a Moabite and the entire Moabite race was the result of incest. The events are described in Genesis 19:30-38. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot fled with his two daughters and because he was afraid to live in a city, he lived in a cave. Shortly afterwards, the two daughters were fearful that there would be no one to marry them and give them children. So, the oldest daughter devised a plan for them to get their father to drink wine, get drunk, and to lure him into having sexual relations with them.

Scripture says that Lot had no idea what was happening, but his daughters on two successive nights each took the opportunity to get their father drunk and lure him into incestuous sexual relations. Afterwards, both of his daughters became pregnant by him. Scripture says: “Thus, both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. As for the younger, she also bore a son and called his name, Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day (Gen 19:36-38).”

Ruth was a Moabite, a tribe of people who were the result of incest. And, their very existence was greatly offensive to God and the Jewish people. Deuteronomy 23:3 states one of the laws that governed worship of God in Israel: It says “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord.” Yet, Ruth entered among the Jewish people, became the wife of Boaz and like Rahab before her, converted to the truth of Yahweh and found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Her great grandson in Scripture is king David.

Finally, we find Bathsheba included in the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew 1:6 says, “David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.”

According to II Samuel 11, at the time of year that kings usually went off to war, David decided to stay home. One evening during this time he was walking on his roof and noticed Bathsheba, who was beautiful, bathing on the roof top of her home and lusted after her. He sent his servants to bring her to his palace and had a secret sexual relationship with her. However, it wasn’t secret very long. She became pregnant.

When David learned that she was pregnant, he tried to cover their sin in a variety of ways. First, he brought Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, back from war and sent him home to be with Bathsheba and assumed that he would have normal sexual relations with her. Then, no one would know that the baby was not Uriah’s. But David’s attempts to cover his sin with Bathsheba failed. Uriah was a man of great integrity and refused to have sexual relations with his wife while his men were at war sleeping in tents on the battlefield. The next night, David even got Uriah drunk but he still would not compromise and go home and sleep with his wife.

When David realized that his plans to cover his sin with Bathsheba failed, he sent orders to his commanding generals in the war to put Uriah on the front line of the battle and then to withdraw from him during the battle leaving him to fight alone and be killed. This happened and, in effect, David killed Uriah.

Worse yet, David took Bathsheba to be his wife and the child conceived by their sinful relationship died shortly after birth. Eventually, David was confronted in his sin and repented and was forgiven. We know that Bathsheba conceived again and bore a son, Solomon, who became the next link in the Messianic ancestry. Thus, Bathsheba, guilty of the sin of adultery, became part of the ancestral line that culminated in the birth of Jesus.

**6. So, how does all this apply to Christmas?**

What a genealogy the Lord provides us: Abraham, David, Judah, the kings of Judah, and Jeconiah! Then he includes four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Wow! Almost all of these people (men and women) committed great sin, sometimes very evil sins, and all were very shameful.

When we read this, it’s like the Lord is nominating members for a “Hall of Shame” rather than a Hall of Fame. There were two harlots, one of whom was a professional prostitute, a cursed Moabite, and an adulteress. When you add in Jeconiah, and other kings that preceded him, along with Abraham, David, and Judah, it’s very clear that Jesus’ genealogy is filled with disobedient, very sinful, evil people. People whom you would never expect to be included in the genealogy of the Messiah, the eternal, perfect, God-man who lived a sinless life on earth, and afterwards died on the cross for our sins.

So, what is God’s message from Jesus’ genealogy? What is God saying to us? What does he want us to take from it? Is there something that “stands out” to you? I think two things really stand out.

First, this genealogy is a message against self-righteous people. This genealogy was a “knock-out punch” by Matthew against self-righteous, proud Jews. These people were shocked that God would identify with people like this and even worse, include them in the genealogy of Messiah.

Jewish people, especially Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees attached tremendous importance to their ancestries. They were very proud of their purity and pedigree in their ancestral lines. The fact that the Messianic line included gentiles, cursed kings, harlots, adulterers, liars, and other sinners would have been extremely shameful and offensive to self-righteous Jews.

Most self-righteous Jews simply trusted in the fact that they were Jews. They thought they deserved heaven because they were descendants of Abraham and could trace their genealogies back to him. They believed they did all the right things. They didn’t break the Law and lived moral lives. They thought that they actually deserved God’s grace and eternal life. They thought heaven was something they earned through good works, keeping the law, and following their man-made religion.

Matthew’s primary audience in writing his gospel was Jews, and by including people such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba in Jesus’ genealogy, he knew he was confronting proud, self-righteous people who would “look down their noses” at sinners like these, like Rahab and Ruth. He was showing them that God does not accept proud and self-righteous people but “gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).” He was showing people that salvation is a free “gift of God, not of works (Ephesians 2:9).” God wants proud, self-righteous people to understand they are sinners and need to humble themselves, turn from their sin, and come to him through faith in Jesus Christ and be saved.

Second, this genealogy is a message that emphasizes that God is a God of love and grace. It’s abundantly clear from the genealogy and explains why these people are included in it. The story of Christ coming into the world is God’s love message. It’s for everyone like the people in this genealogy that are willing to see their own sinfulness, their own brokenness, their own need, who are willing to admit they are not deserving of the grace of God. It is a message of love, mercy, kindness, and grace.

This genealogy is a message that highlights God’s love and grace. These people are included in this genealogy because Jesus came to earth and identified with these kinds of people who aren’t proud and self-righteous and reached out to them. They are included in his genealogy to demonstrate that God’s love and mercy and grace can reach anyone.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”, whether they are prostitutes, business men, religious insiders or outsiders, moral or immoral. Jesus says, in my church, those things don’t matter. Sin cannot stop God’s grace from reaching a person. In fact, there is more grace in Jesus Christ than there is sin in your life. That’s what Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 5:20, “Where sin abounds, grace did much more abound”.

The inerrant word of God does not hide the dark sinful side of people’s lives to make them look good but brings out all the unwelcome sin, ugliness, and shame for us to see. It’s important for us to know this because these people are not what’s on display here; **God’s grace is on display**.

Take Rahab and Ruth for example. They are two very memorable women, not because of their position and not because of their sin but because of God’s grace and mercy to forgive them. Rahab is better known as “Rahab the harlot” throughout the scripture and is mentioned twice in the New Testament (Heb 11:31; Jam 2:25). In both instances, she is referred to as an example of genuine faith. In spite of her background as a professional prostitute and gentile, she was saved and will spend eternity in heaven, not because of something she said or did, but because the God she followed out of Jericho is a God of mercy and grace.

Ruth was a Moabite. The Moabite people existed because of an incestuous sexual relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. Because of this evil sin, the entire Moabite nation was cursed by God down to the 10th generation and were forbidden to fellowship and worship with the Jews. Yet she turned to the God of Israel and followed her mother-in-law Naomi out of Moab into Israel in order to worship the true God. And because of the grace and mercy of God, she was forgiven of her sin, accepted into Jewish society, and married Boaz, and became the great grandmother of king David. None of this she deserved but she followed the true God and by God’s grace, she is included in the genealogy of Jesus.

**So, what’s the “take home” message today? It is three-fold:**

**1st, “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).** Jesus’ genealogy includes sinful, broken people who humbly turned to God from their sin and pride. Jesus’ genealogy confronts the self-righteous person in his pride and offers salvation to everyone who will humble themselves and turn from their pride and sinfulness and come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

**2nd, Jesus Christ is the “friend … of sinners” (Lu 7:34).** This genealogy demonstrates it. Nearly everyone mentioned was a willful, disobedient, and sometimes, evil person. Yet, God included them in the genealogy. This really emphasizes how God reaches out to people. If God allows these people into his son’s genealogy, he’ll allow anyone into his family who comes through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. God loves sinners and reaches out to everyone, regardless of their past. God will save anyone who comes to him humbly in faith in the Lord Jesus.

**3rd, at Christmas time, God’s grace is on display**. This is reflected clearly in why Jesus came to earth. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (I Tim 1:15). Luke wrote he came “to seek and to save the lost” (Lu 19:10). He himself said, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Matt 9:13). His grace is sufficient to forgive sinners for whatever sin they might have done. He came to earth to live among sinful men and to experience what we experience. And, after he lived a sinless life and fulfilled his purpose on earth, he went to the cross, died, and took our punishment for sin. That’s the love and grace of God. And the message now is “whosoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17).