

The Genealogy of Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

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People of God: When Reuben was born, I received an email, announcing his birth, entitled: The Tie Breaker. It doesn't take long to figure out which side of the family that email came from. After all, this is DeVries' first grandchild. But on the DeJong side, there were ten of them—five boys and five girls. Reuben broke the tie. But that won't be for long. It was also interesting to note that Lindsey and Brent are the youngest children in their respective families. These are all little tidbits in the genealogy of Reuben.

What do these details say about Reuben? If we would research his family tree even further, would we gain further insight into the person and character of Reuben? What would his family history tell us about his potential future? Most of us would probably answer, "It doesn't mean too much." What counts is what Reuben will say and do. Not his genealogy. Though a few would add, his Dutch heritage will reveal itself in streaks of stubbornness, being hard working and being a penny pincher. And there may be certain characteristics that come from the DeJong or DeVries side. But I won't dare touch upon what that might be.

But overall, we probably don't look to our genealogy to give us a sense of who we are. Our family tree isn't the first thing we look to in order to give us our identity.

Yet that is how Matthew begins his gospel. When he begins to tell the good news of Jesus Christ, he starts off this with this genealogy. For Matthew, it is one way of answering the crucial question: Who is Jesus? That's a question; each one of us must answer. Who is Jesus?

In this time of year, we will hear songs about the birth of Jesus mixed in with songs about dreaming of a white Christmas. And indeed that word "Christmas" will be used by stores to get us to buy more and more Christmas presents. But who really is this Christ of Christmas? Who is this

Jesus, whose birth we celebrate? One way, Matthew answers this question is through this genealogy.

And so, Matthew's purpose isn't to provide some historical trivia, or to cause pastors to stumble over the pronunciation of names, but to lay the claim that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises, given especially to Abraham and David. These two names, Abraham and David, are highlighted in verse one; they are the key names that Matthew uses to divide his genealogy into three parts so that they are mentioned again in verse 17.

Who is Jesus? He is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises given to Abraham. After the flood, God restarted the plan of salvation with Abraham. He promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, being a blessing to all the nations of the world. God promised Abraham a land, flowing with milk and honey, a new Garden of Eden, where God's people would serve and worship the Lord.

Who is Jesus? He is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises given to David. In II Samuel 7, God promised David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." David and his sons were called to establish a kingdom in which the rule of God was obeyed; where there would be justice, righteousness and peace for all of God's people.

These promises given to Abraham and David were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They needed to be fulfilled in him, because the third division of this genealogy indicated that something had gone terribly wrong. The third division mentions the exile. The exile was the low-point for God's people. It was the undoing of God's promises given to Abraham and David. This wasn't God's fault. This was the fault of God's people. But something needed to be done. Otherwise, God's promises would not come to fruition.

Jesus was God's answer. Jesus would be the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David. Through Jesus, all the nations of the world would be blessed, as through Jesus salvation can come to all. Through Jesus, the promise of a land would be extended to the whole creation. In Jesus, this whole creation will be restored and renewed. Through Jesus, the kingdom of God will be established here on earth. Justice, righteousness and peace can be achieved. All through Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of all these OT longings and expectations. The fulfillment of these covenant promises given to Abraham and David.

These are the promises of God mentioned in the form of baptism. Baptism expresses, albeit in a different way, what this genealogy is trying to teach. God's covenant promises are ours in Jesus Christ. In baptism, we are

incorporated into God's covenant community and all these promises given to Abraham and David, fulfilled in Jesus Christ becomes ours. That's the best Christmas present one can get.

Now this genealogy teaches us another point through the inclusion of the names of four women.

Now in those days, it was not customary to mention women in a genealogical list. After all, the family name and inheritance went from father to son. Yet Matthew mentions four women, using the expression "whose mother was." This makes these names stand out from the rest.

Now if you were going to mention any women in this genealogical list, you would think you would mention the four famous matriarchs of God's people—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael and Leah. These were the women God's people of the OT respected and revered, as they did their husbands, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yet Matthew does not mention these four famous women.

Instead, he mentions Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. All four of these women were pagans, not originally belonging to the covenant community. Tamar was a Canaanite who seduced her father-in-law so that she could have a son. Rahab was another Canaanite from Jericho, a prostitute. Ruth is probably the least morally questionable person of the four, but she too was a Moabite woman. Bathsheba is not directly named. She is referred to as the wife of Uriah, a Hittite; another foreigner and a reminder that her inclusion into this family tree was the result of adultery and murder.

That's quite a few skeletons in the closet. But by mentioning these four pagan women, Matthew wants to underscore the gracious nature of God's plan of salvation. God's promises are not restricted to just the Jews, to one ethnic group. Instead, God's promises are for all the peoples and nations of the world. That's not just a NT theme. It's also a theme of the OT. The inclusion of these four pagan women indicates that. And now in Jesus, these promises are indeed extended to anyone.

Nor are these promises intended for the morally upright; for those who have their act together. Instead, they are intended for those who recognize that they are sinners, needing the grace of God. God's promises are not just for men, but also equally for women; not just for adults, but also for children. God's grace shown to us in Jesus Christ can cover any sin.

And so today, in this act of baptism, Reuben is grafted into the family tree of Jesus. He becomes part of the family of God. While on the one hand, this is possible because he was born to believing parents, we need to remember that we are all outsiders—we are Gentiles who have been engrafted into the family of God. We are like the four pagan women.

And this engrafting is a sign of God's grace and mercy. After all, we are born sinners, having inherited a sinful nature due to the fall into sin. Yet God calls us to be his people and gives us the sign of this inclusion.

But that means this family tree becomes our family tree. These strange names are our spiritual ancestors. Their stories are part of our story. And that's why Reuben needs to be told these stories. The stories of Abraham, David, and the exile and how that story reaches its fulfillment in the story of Jesus. But the story doesn't end with Jesus. The story continues. We're now part of it. A story that centers upon Jesus.

That Jesus is unique is indicated in verse 16, with the mention of Mary: "and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." All through this genealogy we hear that repetitive refrain: "So and so was the father of so and so, who was the father of so and so"—and on it goes. But all of a sudden there is a break to the pattern. Joseph is identified only as the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus.

Joseph may have been the legal father of Jesus, but not the biological father. The next section will explain how God intervenes through the Holy Spirit in order for Jesus to be conceived. Jesus is no ordinary son of Abraham and son of David. He is also the Son of God. That makes him unique. That's another key point this genealogy makes. Jesus is unique.

This is an important reminder as we head towards Christmas. Ebay has already being counted down the days to Christmas for some time already. Today, the church begins its countdown with the beginning of Advent. Advent calls us to keep the focus on Jesus.

This time of year can get very busy. There are lots of activities and distractions. There lots of good stuff happening—from Christmas concerts, like the one we're hosting next Sunday night to family gatherings. It's good stuff. Though we need to recognize the bad stuff as well—like the commercialism of the season, with the push to spend far more than we should. However busy it gets, keep the focus on Jesus.

That's also necessary in baptism. It's easy to focus on Reuben and what this child means to his parents, grandparents, extended family and friends. After all, Reuben is right here in front of us, easily coddled and loved. Jesus is more difficult to see. But in baptism, we can keep a focus on Jesus.

Jesus, the one fulfills the covenant promises given to Abraham and David, Jesus the one who ended the misery and disappointment of the exile, Jesus is the one who claims Reuben as his own child, Jesus the one who calls him and us to follow him, sharing in the blessings and promises given

to Abraham and David and now fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Amen.