



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Some people are profoundly interested in genealogies. My brother and one of my cousins are like that. I find genealogies of some interest, but hardly the stuff sermons are made of—or are they?

Today, as we start out “On The Road to EASTER”—a 28-day devotional journey through The Gospel According to Matthew—we are to read chapter one, and the first seventeen verses offer a genealogy of Jesus. I shall not read the entire section—I’ll leave that for you (some of the names can seem like tongue-twisters). It is segmented into three groups, as described in the last verse. I will read each of the segment headings, and the ending.

### **Matthew 1:1-17**

*<sup>1</sup> This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham:*

*<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac.*

*Isaac was the father of Jacob.*

*Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers...*

*<sup>6</sup> Jesse was the father of King David.*

*David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah)...*

*<sup>11</sup> Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).*

*<sup>12</sup> After the Babylonian exile:*

*Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.*

*Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel...*

*<sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.*

*Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.*

*<sup>17</sup> All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.*

This genealogy of Christ fascinates me for four reasons:

- It presents a cluster of significant realities

- It dismisses several false assumptions
- It undermines our excuses for inaction
- It advances certain spiritual implications

Let me illustrate...

### **It Presents a Cluster of Significant Realities**

Above all, it is structured to point to Christ. This is made clear in the opening line.

Then, it shows that Jesus had the proper pedigree to be the Messiah, in that He descended directly from Abraham, which settles the nationality issue; He came from the line of God's chosen people, the Hebrew nation.

And He also descended directly from David, the psalmist-king of Israel, which settles His right to the throne to reign as the everlasting King.

Typically, according to Hebrew custom, lineage was determined through the eldest son, but in this genealogy, in most cases, the line of descent passes through the younger brother. This is remarkable!

Yet another indicator that the pre-eminence of Jesus as God's Messiah was not the result of human endeavors or inheritance, but of the sovereign will of God.

This genealogy was designed for memorization.

The text begins with the Greek word *biblos* (the book), and it reads like the title of a paper: "The Book of the Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."

This suggests that Matthew inserted a lesson from an early catechism as his introduction. When I say "designed for memorization," I am referring to its brevity (some names and generations are left out), and its arrangement in three "equal" groups, each representing fourteen generations, punctuated by historical highlights of Jewish history—all, aids to memory.

### **It Dismisses Several False Assumptions**

For instance, the idea that Christianity is sexist and dominated by men. While nearly every culture of that time was male-dominant, Christ (and those who follow Him) sought to remedy that. Matthew included four women in the list of Jesus' ancestors, a rare and daring exception.

Another falsehood was the notion that Christianity was exclusively Jewish in its design and makeup—yet, three of the four women mentioned by Matthew were foreigners, and Bathsheba would have been considered as one because she had married a Hittite.

Then there was the idea that the Bible was written by merely human authors. I have often thought, if people had contrived the Scriptures by themselves they would read so differently. Their heroes would have had a superhuman quality; instead, they are portrayed in the stark light of day, with all their warts and scars and foibles. Several of the characters in the list have dark blots in their background.

Finally, there is the folly that Joseph was the actual, biological father of Jesus, and that Jesus was given the look of deity and that superhumanness I just referred to by people who were trying to deceive their readers and hearers. I haven't the time today to explain how flimsy that argument is, but note the clarity of Matthew's words in verse 16:

*Jacob (was) the father of Joseph, (who was) the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*

The New Living Translation makes it very clear by dividing it into two sentences:

*Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.*

### **It Undermines Our Excuses**

Jesus' ancestors were a strange lot! I have already mentioned the women, at least three foreigners, some rather wicked people, some totally unknown individuals (that is, their stories are nowhere recorded in the Scriptures), and some good people who did terrible things.

We should learn at least two things from this:

- (1) Individual characters are not pre-determined by the people in their backgrounds (bad blood is not inherited), and
- (2) People are not necessarily influenced by what their ancestors did or how they lived.

This, then, confronts many of the common excuses of our day:

"My mother/father was like this, so I can't help it."

"I'll never make any difference; I'm a nobody."

"I have sinned so much (or so badly) that God could never use me."

"No one in my background was a Christian."

"Look where I came from! I can't serve the Lord."

"I had my chance, but I blew it. Now there's no hope for me."

If the holy Son of God could arrive on a train powered and inhabited by the people in this genealogy, you, too, can be all that God has in mind for you!

*"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." (Romans 8:28)*

*“Now to Him Who, by (and in consequence of) the [action of His] power that is at work within us, is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly, far over and above all that we [dare] ask or think [infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams]—to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen (so be it).” (Ephesians 3:20-21; AMP).*

### **It Advances Certain Spiritual Implications**

Not the least of these is the identity of Messiah. The Jewish people dreamed of His coming for at least a thousand years. Many counterfeits did come, luring the people into heartbreak. When Jesus came, many were skeptical (many still are today), yet Jesus’ genealogy demonstrates the confluence of two godly lines—both Joseph AND Mary descended from Abraham and David. Thus, Jesus is called The Christ (Messiah).

This genealogy also reminds us of the limitations of human relationship (even by blood!)—Jesus’ own relatives had to put their trust in Him! There is no salvation through ancestry; God has no grandchildren. Whatever good or godly example your family tree may have provided, each individual must discover Christ for themselves and enter into a relationship with Him individually. Have you done that? We can help you with that.

Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus also reveals the source of our personal significance: everyone finds ultimate significance in Jesus Christ alone, for He is the God who made us, who knows us, and who loves us faithfully. What could be more significant than that?

I believe the fruit of the study of this portion of Scripture is threefold: confidence, humility, and hope.

### **Confidence**

We may have confidence in Christ because...

Jesus’ genealogy shows us that He is the rightful King of the Jews! In fact, the entire gospel of Matthew focuses intently on Jesus as King, and even His genealogy points us to His kingship! He’s the son of Judah, the son of King David—through whom the royal scepter would never depart.

The very first sentence points in a similar direction by referring to Jesus, not just as just “Jesus,” as Luke did, but as Jesus CHRIST. And Christ isn’t His last name! It’s a messianic title! Jesus The Christ. Jesus The Messiah! The everlasting King of the people of God.

It was the message at the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel account, and also at the end, when it was scrawled on a sign that hung above Jesus' head on the cross: "The King of the Jews."

## Humility

Jesus's genealogy gives us every reason to have confidence in Him as King, but it also gives us reason to have no confidence in the flesh, the nature of humanity.

This genealogy helps us develop humility...

Here there are, on full display, sharply flawed human beings in Jesus' own family tree. It's not a pretty lineup.

Why do you think that is? I think it's because even Jesus' lineage is dripping with God's grace. Jesus was NOT the most evolved in a long line of super humans. No—He was the least expected from a long line of sinning people.

And your lineage probably isn't much different. Mine either. People mess up. There's not much hope of a change there. But the Good News is that that in itself doesn't disqualify us!

This genealogy shows us what God has done through human history in order to save us. It reminds us that we are all so bad (even the best of us), that God Himself had to intervene on our behalf. He entered our world as one of us, born of a virgin, in order to live a perfectly sinless life, and die as a ransom payment for our sin.

So you see then, the Gospel isn't good advice for how to clean up your life. Nor is it good advice for how to defeat your sin. No, the Gospel is good news about what God has done for us in order to secure for us a salvation we could never gain for ourselves. Like the chorus we used to sing:

*He paid a debt He did not owe  
I owed a debt I could not pay  
I needed Someone to wash my sins away  
Now I can sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace  
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay!*

Friends, this genealogy of Jesus illustrates that even a broken, sin-stained person like me or you can be adopted into God's family—and this happens entirely by grace.

*"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become (white) like wool.  
(Isaiah 1:18; ESV)*

Do you need a spiritual physician to heal your sin-stained heart? Then look to your Savior, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, so that by His grace, you can join His family tree.

When we join Christ's family tree, we will lose all sense of moral superiority to others.

Our world naturally values the things of earth and of this life—culture, class, money, education, and achievements. We let these things divide us, so we look down on others.

Who do you look down on? (You know you do.) The rich? The poor? The educated? The illiterate? The liberals? The conservatives? The extroverts? The introverts? The overly religious? The irreligious? The stubborn? The compliant? White people? People of color?

We all have a head full of labels that we're inclined to apply to others to minimize or dismiss their value; we fail to remember that they were made in the image of God, for His glory, as were we. Sometimes, we cannot even *imagine* it!

Yet the only thing that stands between an abject sinner and the Savior is a prayer of repentance and faith. Just a simple prayer. One breath.

## Hope

Jesus' genealogy gives us tremendous hope.  
Inside of Christ's family tree, we don't apply those labels anymore.

For in Christ's family, the church, those things don't matter anymore, because every single one of us becomes a member of Christ's family tree by sheer grace!

*"We don't deserve the least of His mercies."*

*"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Not "some," but ALL.

So how can we retain any sense of superiority? We can't. Not really. Not if we're honest. Not if we truly understand what it means to be saved. Not if we truly appreciate what it means to be in God's family.

I am so grateful for this genealogy.

What's in a name?

Matthew's record of lineage shows us:

- **How God works through humans (not in spite of them) to accomplish His amazing plan.** His grace is sufficient to produce good fruit in our lives, if we will trust and obey Him.
- **How little our own genealogy actually determines our outcome.** (Jesus' was necessary only to establish His royal line.) So, let's get rid of all the excuses for why we can't worship and obey and serve the Lord.
- **How important it is to be rightly related to the One to whom this genealogy belongs.** Do you know Him today? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Have you been grafted into His family tree?

Put your trust in Jesus Christ today.

God can use you to forward His plan of salvation and reveal His Kingdom in this world. There's nothing too difficult for our God.