

# The Family Tree

---

Today, I would like to tell you about a tree. And although it's not a Christmas tree, it does have everything to do with Christmas. If you will turn with me to your Bibles or look in your scripture handout for this morning, please follow along as I read to you one of the most exciting passages in Scripture. They are the opening 6 verses of the family tree of Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:1-6 (NIV) reads as follows: <sup>1</sup> A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: <sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, <sup>3</sup> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife . . ." That is the first of three sections that begin Matthew's Gospel and, together, they give us the genealogy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now you might be wondering why I say that these are such "**exciting**" passages—after all, when you first read them, all they appear to be is just a list of names. But, they are so much more than that. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy is right on the money here in telling us that: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB) And that is certainly the case with the genealogy of Jesus.

And think about it—people today are taking a renewed interest in genealogies. They really do find them to be exciting. Have you noticed all those ads on TV that offer to clue you in on your personal genealogy? You can buy these little kits that allow you to give a sample of your saliva, and from that sample the genealogy company can read your DNA. And from that, they can tell you where your ancestors came from and what percentage your various strains of heritage may be. It is a fascinating technology and sometimes people are completely surprised to out who their ancestors really were. I guess that's what makes it so exciting. But these things cost money. One of the on-line sites charges you \$99.00 for their service—and it's on sale for Christmas at \$69.00. But all of you are so very lucky to be here, because this morning you can have an even more exciting genealogy—and it's absolutely free. It's the one we just read about in the Book of Matthew.

But what is it about this family tree that should spark our excitement? Well, for one thing, Christmas is such a wonderful time of year and this opening chapter begins to tell us all about the birth of Christ—and that's exciting! Furthermore, this genealogy is exciting because it reminds us about our

own personal relationship with God and, at the same time, deal with those difficult times that can descend upon us.

Now how can that be? How can one man's mere pedigree be of any comfort to us in a world so filled with problems and difficulties? There are certainly a lot of problems today—and they don't go away around Christmas time. Maybe your rent is past due and your landlord is about to evict you; or the bank is looking for that late mortgage payment and threatening to foreclose on your home. Or, maybe the boss has just announced that the company is down-sizing, and lay-offs are coming just around the bend. Or could it be something the doctor just told you?—something that you feared would go away, but now it looks like an illness that may lead to some very dark times. How can a mere genealogy such as the one found at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel address such serious issues as these? . . . It can. And it does.

Matthew's genealogy mentions some people who faced serious difficulties as well. The fact that some of them were women is quite amazing. Rarely if ever would a family history back then mention any females whatsoever. But Matthew repeatedly mentions women in Jesus' family tree—in fact, he does so five times. In Matthew 1:3, he mentions Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, who was left in the hopeless position of an abandoned widow.<sup>1</sup> Her future prospects appeared nil. Yet, this Gentile woman showed more faith than her Jewish father-in-law. And through circumstances that only God could have directed, she was redeemed and bore a son who would form a link in the family lineage of Jesus Christ.

Or consider, Rahab who is mentioned in Matthew 1:5.<sup>2</sup> Rahab's situation had become so dire that she had to resort to prostitution just to survive. And yet, through God's hand and her hospitality to God's people, she was able to pull herself up. Eventually, she gave birth to Boaz, who grew up to be the man who married Ruth. And as the line continued, this same Rahab became the great-great-grandmother of King David himself.

And, what about Ruth? Until Boaz came along, her prospects were dismal. She was a widow in a foreign land without any husband to protect her. And when it came to genealogies, hers was a liability in the land of the Israelites. She was looked down upon as a lowly Moabite—as such, she was viewed as a descendant of Lot from his own sinful incest with his daughters (Genesis 19:30-37).<sup>3</sup> In addition, she had to support her mother-in-law, Naomi. Food was scarce to feed her own mouth, but two mouths to feed seemed almost impossible. But, no matter how dark the future may have appeared, Ruth was a faithful person. She remained true to her pledge to Naomi, when she declared: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Ruth 1:17 (NIV) In what

must seemed to be an unlikely turn of events, Ruth was taken in by the wealthy Boaz who redeemed her from the dire straits that she was in. Here, God once again showed his faithfulness to those who are faithful to Him.

And what about that reference in Matthew 1:6 to a woman described as “Uriah’s wife”—otherwise known as Bathsheba?<sup>4</sup> This is a woman whose difficulties sprang not from abandonment or economic hardship, but from her own guilty conscience. For she had committed adultery with King David—an act that eventually led to the murder of her own husband, Uriah—for which David bore his own guilt as well. Yet, Bathsheba and David produced a son named Solomon who would build the Temple in Jerusalem, and would form one more vital link in the chain leading to Christ.

And then, of course, we have Mary—the young Jewish girl who was so innocent when the angel announced to her that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. But, with this joyous news, came a bitter reality. When her pregnancy became obvious, ugly frowns and shameful gossip from her family and friends must have cut her like a knife. And when the time came for her Holy Child to be born, she looked around and found that it wouldn’t be born in the warm surroundings of her home with family and mid-wives to assist her, but in a stable filled with the sounds and smells of cows, camels and donkeys. Yet, through it all, she never waived. She was always faithful.

In these five women, the family tree in Matthew reveals that those who are in line with Jesus were not always spotless saints living a pain-free life. Some were broken, in need of restoration. Others had backgrounds filled with difficulties, hardships and even overwhelming guilt and shame. They are people whose lives show us that God is the God who sees.<sup>5</sup> And yet, there you are—going through your own personal trials and suffering. And maybe sometimes you feel tempted to scream out, “**Yes, but does He see me! And, if God does see, why doesn’t He send help my way?**” When you feel that way, there are so many passages of Scripture that you can look to for hope. If you have trouble memorizing chapter and verse numbers, just remember this genealogy in Matthew. It’s easy to remember: it’s in the very first chapter in the very first Gospel in the New Testament. And it will remind you that God both sees all the things that are happening to us, **and** He is always acting on our behalf and for our welfare—sometimes we just don’t realize it.

Where can you see this in the genealogy? Well, it’s just about in the middle of it, in verses 11 and 12, and again in verse 17. There, Matthew mentions the Babylonian exile three times.<sup>6</sup> It’s unusual that you would see this kind of historical reference in a genealogy unless it has some specific purpose—as it surely does here. So what was the Babylonian exile? It was the time during the sixth century B.C. when Jerusalem was all but destroyed by the Babylonian army, and the Israelites were carted off into

captivity in Babylon. The people of Israel had rejected God for so long that if He hadn't allowed this painful experience to happen, His people would have continued on their wayward path until they might have been lost forever. It is interesting how Matthew describes this Babylonian exile. You would think that he would describe it as being some kind of punishment or judgment upon the wayward Israelites. But, the Greek word that he uses for "exile" is *metoikesía*. It simply means "a change of residence." In other words, from God's perspective, this wasn't so much a punishment as it was a means of restoring His people's relationship with Him. And if it took a "change of residence" to accomplish that, then God would see that the "change of residence" would occur. Sometimes we need to remember that when we are subjected to trying times in a "changed residence"—maybe a painful "residence" that we'd rather not be in—perhaps it may be the "change of residence" that benefits us most and strengthens our faith in God and our reliance upon Him.<sup>7</sup>

Even so, I am sure that many of those in captivity screamed out those same questions that can come into our minds during tough times. They likely asked: "**God don't you see our pain, and why don't you do something!**" And yet, for those who remained faithful, even in captivity, God was doing something. He was reshaping them, strengthening them, and bringing them back to the point where they would once again follow His ways, and not their own. And because of this, they didn't stay in captivity forever. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we see God's hand at work in allowing His people the opportunity to return to Jerusalem where they began to rebuild both their city and their spiritual lives.

And so it is with us. Sometimes we too are exposed to the difficulties of life—not as a punishment necessarily, but that through such tests we are refined and made stronger in Him—in faith, we learn to rely upon God. That's why Jesus' genealogy in this opening passage of Matthew isn't just a list of names. It is a testimony to the faithfulness of our God to those who trust in Him. And even more than that, we can begin to see that this *family tree* isn't solely about Jesus. It is the genealogy of the Church—it is the genealogy of you and me. It is the family tree of people who, despite their burdens, hold to their faith in God. That's right!—did you know that your personal genealogy can actually include Jesus? Not in the biological sense, of course—but certainly in a spiritual sense, you are part of Jesus' family. We too are brothers and sisters of Christ. We are sons and daughters of God. The Scriptures assure us of this: <sup>11</sup> "So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup> For He said to God, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people." Hebrews 2:11-12 (NLT) Paul continues along the same lines in his letter to the Ephesians and tells us: "[God's] unchanging plan has always

been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And He did this because he wanted to!” Ephesians 1:5 (TLB) But how do we take advantage of such an adoption? There is only one way: “It is through faith that all of you are God’s children in union with Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26 (TEV)

See how exciting genealogies can be! They can tell us where we came from—which is good. But, the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel—the one that ***God wants us to have***—gives us so much more. It not only tells us where we’ve come from—it tells us ***where we are going***. Romans 8:17 (NIV) proclaims: <sup>17</sup> “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” When we chose the family tree of Jesus, we will share in the glory of His Kingdom—the glory of eternal life.

So what family tree would you like to be a part of this Christmas? Interestingly enough, your choice of family trees comes down to picking between two very real trees. And they are very old trees indeed. They actually grew in the Garden of Eden. On one of the trees was an apple—just hanging there, glowing in temptation. It was a tree whose fruit offered moral knowledge as filtered through the evil eyes of the world. Unfortunately, someone, who is in all our pedigrees—a man named Adam—chose that wrong tree. As a result, death and sin entered into the world. But then there is the other tree, the tree that grew from the root of David. Jesus is that tree.<sup>8</sup> He is the Tree of Life. Jesus said that He is “the way and the truth and the life.”<sup>9</sup> He came into this world that we may have life, and have it more abundantly.<sup>10</sup>

Which tree will you chose? Whose family will you be a part of? It doesn’t matter how dark your past may be—Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba are proof enough of that. It doesn’t matter how many difficulties you may be facing now: Jesus wants you in His family today. And that is the most exciting news of all!

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
December 10, 2017  
Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2017

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:3 (HCSB) . . . Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Aram.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:5 (NIV) . . . Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse . . .

<sup>3</sup> John Hutchison, “Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew’s Genealogy,” – *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 630 (Apr. 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: 158.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 1:6 (NIV) . . . and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife . . .

---

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 16:13 (NLT) Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?"

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 1:11 (NIV) . . .and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

<sup>7</sup> Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 22:16 (ESV) [Jesus said:] "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

<sup>9</sup> John 14:6 (NIV) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

<sup>10</sup> John 10:10 (KJV) [Jesus said:] "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly."