

The Family Tree of Grace

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[0 : 0 0] For the month of December in the mornings, we're going to look at the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. It's on page 965 in the Church Bible.

And what we'll see today is a grace-filled family tree. Matthew chapter 1 at verse 1.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac, the father of Jacob.

Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez, the father of Hezron. Hezron, the father of Ram.

Ram, the father of Amminadab. Amminadab, the father of Nashon. Nashon, the father of Salmon. Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

[1 : 0 0] Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

Solomon, the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam, the father of Abijah. Abijah, the father of Asa. Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat, the father of Jehoram. Jehoram, the father of Uzziah.

Uzziah, the father of Jotham. Jotham, the father of Ahaz. Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh. Manasseh, the father of Ammon. Ammon, the father of Josiah.

And Josiah, the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel, the father of Abiud. Abiud, the father of Eliakim. Eliakim, the father of Azor. Azor, the father of Zadok.

[2 : 0 1] Zadok, the father of Achim. Achim, the father of Eliud. Eliud, the father of Eleazar. Eleazar, the father of Mathan. Mathan, the father of Jacob. And Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Thus, there were fourteen generations in all, from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

Amen. One of the things that we're going to think about is, why does Matthew choose to start his story of the coming of Jesus with a family tree?

Many moons ago, I studied library and information science in Aberdeen, and I had a professor there who, as his party piece, I remember one afternoon, he cleared the desk, and he rolled out a piece of paper, a huge piece of paper, on which he proceeded to map out, from memory, his family tree dating back four hundred years.

So he would tell us about who was married where, and it sounded like he'd been there. He knew that kind of level of detail. He could tell us who were the great and the good, who were the sort of notable people.

[3 : 19] And he also told us, he was one of those guys where even when his family had sort of dubious characters, skeletons in the closet, they were really interesting. They were pretty cool. You know, it's like, my great-great-grandpa was a pirate. It was that kind of a family tree.

But what he was doing, as well as teaching us how to research, he was, in a sense, saying, this is who I am. This is where I fit within this family, within this people.

Why does Matthew begin with Jesus' family tree? Because Matthew is saying to us, this is where Jesus fits in the story of God's dealing with the world and with his people.

This is who Jesus is. This isn't just a family tree. This is also Jesus' CV. Here is why he is qualified to be the Christ, to be the chosen King and Saviour.

So Matthew gives us, right at the beginning, this family tree to help people then and now to understand Jesus as a source of hope.

[4 : 29] To see how the longings of Israel, indeed the longings of the world, are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. And so what we're going to see is that his family tree, the one that Matthew gives us here, makes powerful statements about Jesus' identity and about Jesus' place.

At first, and at a very basic level, it will remind us Jesus is a historical figure. He lived in a certain place and at a certain time. The story doesn't begin once upon a time, like our fairy tales or like our myths.

This story connects us with history and with the story of the nation of Israel. We are also going to see that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promises.

We see that attention is drawn to Abraham and to David. And we're going to see why that's significant when we think about what it means that Jesus is God's Christ, God's anointed King.

And we're also going to see that Jesus' family history is marked by God's grace. Because like every family tree, as we begin to trace it, I don't know if you know yours, but at some point we will find skeletons in the closet.

[5 : 54] We will find dysfunction and breakdown. But in Jesus' family tree, that dysfunction is not hidden. Rather, it's highlighted in order to show God's love and mercy to the world.

So as we were reading that, you may have been thinking, this is really not my thing. I'm not a family tree person. I hope that whether you're that person or not, we'll be able to see that Jesus' family tree is actually a cause for worship for all of us this morning.

So the first thing I want us to focus on is the fathers of Jesus and the promises of God. I want us to focus on the two characters that are focused on in the family tree.

Verse 1, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And then that first chart of the 14 generations begins with Abraham there in verse 2.

Then in verse 6, the next 14 begin with David. So this family tree is on the one hand connecting to what God has already been doing. It reminds us as readers of God calling Abraham, of God giving him a family, that family who would become the nation of Israel.

[7 : 16] And part of that was God then giving David and the kings to rule for him. And that history is traced to the exile, the darkest days in the nation's history, and then back to the coming of Jesus the Christ.

But let's ask ourselves the question, why highlight Abraham? In Genesis 12, we first meet Abraham in Genesis 11, but in Genesis 12 we discover that God calls Abraham out of false worship in order to become one of God's people, and he makes great promises to Abraham.

He makes a covenant. He commits himself to Abraham and he says, I will give you a family, I will make your name great, and I will give you the land known as the promised land.

And he said to Abraham, So one of the reasons Matthew highlights Abraham is so that we are clued into the fact that Jesus comes to be that promised seed.

He is the one through whom all the nations of the world, all peoples, can know God's blessing and God's goodness. But the question is how? How does that goodness come to us through Jesus?

[8 : 53] Well, let's continue thinking about the story of Abraham. In Genesis 15, you can read about it later, There's this moment where Abraham is getting older and he still doesn't have any family, and he's saying to God, You promised me family and I don't have any, and God recommits himself to giving him a great family, making him a great nation.

And to prove his commitment, he enters into this covenant ceremony. And in this ceremony, Abraham is told to take some animals and to slaughter them, to cut them in half and to make a path.

So there's an animal, half an animal all the way up one side and half on the other side, making that path. Because in Abraham's day, when two kings wanted to make a binding agreement, this is something that they might do.

They would walk through it, having made their agreement, they would walk through these cut-up animals as if to say, If I break my word to you, let what happened to the animals happen to me.

If I break this covenant, may death come. Back to Genesis 15, Abraham in a vision sees God as a flaming torch and God alone walking through the pieces of the cut-up animal.

[10 : 19] Here is God saying, I am absolutely committed to my covenant promise to bless the world. And if this covenant is broken, may what happened to those animals happen to me.

Now what does this have to do with our story? What does this have to do with the story of Jesus? Well, the Bible tells us that God made us in His image, in His likeness, so that we might worship Him, so that we might live in covenant relationship with Him, where we would obey Him joyfully, where we would love Him truly.

But for us as people, we have all broken covenant with God by our lack of love, by our false worship, by our sin, and by our rebellion.

And when we think in covenant terms, and when we think of Genesis 15, therefore, because we are covenant lawbreakers, we should face the penalty for breaking that law.

We deserve God's judgment. We deserve to face death. But God in His goodness sends Jesus as an act of love and mercy.

[11 : 48] What does Jesus do for us? He comes as the perfect Son of God, who lives in perfect obedience to God's law, but then on the cross, He dies for covenant lawbreaking.

He takes our sin on His shoulders, and He faces that penalty. His body is torn. That He takes the penalty so that we might once again live at peace with God.

We might be forgiven by God and enjoy life with Him. Jesus coming, and coming to die on the cross, is our way back to God.

That's God's blessing for the world. That's how Jesus fulfills that promise to Abraham. That for anybody who understands, I'm a sinner before God, and I cannot make myself good enough for a holy God, we see Jesus as good news.

Because we are invited to trust in Jesus as our Son of God, as our Savior, the one who in love took our sin to give us eternal life.

[13 : 13] so that through Him, we can know true love and peace and joy that comes from God. So the fathers of Jesus, Abraham here reminds us of the promises of God.

But he's not the only one who's highlighted. We're also told about David. David stands at the head of the second of the 14 generations.

David was the father of Solomon, we're told in verse 6. So why highlight David? Well, David was the great king.

He was God's chosen king, described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. And he too received a covenant promise from God.

So in 2 Samuel 7, there's a moment where David wants to build a temple for God, and God says, no one of your son, Solomon, he'll build the temple.

[14 : 13] But God says, I'll make a name for you, David. And he promises that one of David's family would rule and reign as king, not for a while, but forever.

Not just of some people, but over all people. David is promised the universal eternal king would come from his family.

Now, when we get to our family tree here, and as we think about the history of Israel, history suggested this promise was under threat. Because bear in mind that the exile had happened, so there were no longer kings of Israel sitting on the throne.

Owing to their disobedience, owing to the fact that they kept walking away from God and choosing to worship idols, they had been sent out of the promised land, they had been defeated and taken prisoner, and even now, they are ruled by Rome.

So the line of kings had ended, and so there's this source of tension, will it ever come back? Will there ever be a king in the line of David on the throne?

[15 : 24] And here is Matthew's message. This eternal king has come, because Jesus has come. And he has come to rule perfectly for God.

You can read the history of the kings of Israel, and you discover that in many ways, they all failed to perfectly reflect God's rule, but Jesus won't.

And so he is the answer to the darkness and the fear. He is the answer to hope beyond despair, and that ties in with the title that Jesus is given.

Jesus is the Christ. He is God's anointed one, just as the kings of Israel were anointed with oil to show that they were chosen by God and were given authority by God.

This is true absolutely of Jesus. He is God's chosen king for us all. Therefore, there is a summons to us.

[16 : 24] God has sent Jesus his king. And so we need to ask ourselves, am I submitting to his good and loving rule?

And for us as a church, there's also an opportunity, there is a mission for us. How can I be part of establishing the kingdom rule of Jesus in my life and where I am?

How can I be built up in my faith so that my life is founded on Jesus and his word and his salvation?

How can I share the good news of Jesus with the people around me and my friends and my family? How can I be helping to build other Christians up in their faith so that they will continue walking with Jesus, the king, and submitting to his rule?

So the fathers of Jesus that are highlighted here speak to us of the promises of God. Let's think now about the mothers of Jesus that are mentioned and the grace of God that we find in this section.

[17 : 46] Before we do that, let's talk about airbrushing for a couple of minutes. Why is it that we, as people, airbrush when we are about to post a photo, perhaps to social media, quite often people will like to do a little bit of photoshopping, a little bit of editing, before that gets made public.

You will find that too, when people are writing history or biographies, they will sometimes airbrush history. Now let's not focus on those failings of a particular leader or a particular nation.

Let's concentrate on the great and the good moments. Why do we, as individuals, pretend that we have it all together, that we have life figured out?

Why do we feel that urge to pretend that our family is the perfect family sometimes? We want to airbrush our flaws. Now we maybe have different reasons for doing that.

Sometimes it's because we're proud. Sometimes it's because we had that fear or anxiety of being found out. Sometimes it's because our self-image and our feelings of self-worth are not based on trusting in Jesus, but this perception that we are the ones that have got life all figured out.

[19 : 05] Now, compare this with Jesus' family tree. Compare this with what Matthew presents for us here. Matthew goes out of his way to reference time and again elements of dysfunction.

He highlights in this family tree those who are both sinners and those who have been sinned against. Matthew chooses to highlight surprising figures to highlight God's grace.

To show that being part of Jesus' family isn't just for the great and the good. It's not for people who've got their lives all sorted out. It's for those whose lives are broken. Those who are needy. He's for us.

How does he do that? It's largely done actually through including women. Did you notice? Father, father, father, father, father. But then occasionally we hear about a mother. That was very unusual in Jesus' day.

Family trees were drawn based on the male line. But it's not just every woman that's included. Very particular women are included in this family tree.

[20 : 22] But before we get to the details here is Matthew reminding us that Jesus came for those who perhaps society undervalues. Those who might be forgotten.

Those who are undervalued. Jesus came for. God's love is not restricted. God's love is open. God's love is open to anyone who will receive it.

But let's look at how Matthew highlights grace for us through the women that he chooses to include. Our first is in verse 3.

We're going to give a brief biography, very brief biography of these women. Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.

What's her story? Well, you can find it in Genesis chapter 38. Tamar was married to one man who died. His brother was supposed to marry her and continue the family.

[21 : 28] But he is disobedient. Judah, her father-in-law, promises to care for her and to provide for her but lets her down. She's badly treated with no prospect of family.

So what Tamar does is she dresses up as a prostitute and she tricks her father-in-law to sleep with her to begin a family.

So she has these twins. That's her story. The second woman that's mentioned is in verse 5. Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Now when we turn to the book of Joshua and Joshua chapter 2, we find that Rahab is an actual prostitute living in Jericho, one of the enemy cities that Israel will defeat.

But Rahab fears God, honours God, recognises that God has given Israel the promised land and so she joins the people of God.

- [22 : 32] Our third woman mentioned is also in verse 5. Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Ruth gets a book in the Bible.

In the middle of the darkness of the time of the judges, Ruth stands out as light. Here is another foreigner. She's from Moab, a hated enemy of Israel.

But she turns to God. She sees her mother-in-law's faith, her faith in God. She trusts in the God of the Bible.

She moves back to Israel and she becomes a model in her community of faith and loyalty and she becomes part of King David's family line.

Then we have a fourth woman mentioned or not mentioned in verse 6. Jesse, the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

- [23 : 36] So we know from the story of the Bible that this is Bathsheba. You can find this story in 2 Samuel chapter 12. Now you might be asking why is her name not mentioned?

Is that disrespect on Bathsheba? No, I think the intention is to show that King David had really messed up. The focus is on the fact that he has committed adultery.

He's taken another man's wife. He's slept with her. When she becomes pregnant he arranges to have Uriah, one of his brave soldiers, killed.

But Bathsheba has a place in the family of Jesus. And of course the fifth woman is in verse 16 and that's Mary. Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

Mary, the teenage virgin who is chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus the Christ as a gift of grace. And we'll think about her story next week. But what binds all those unusual surprising stories together it's God's grace.

- [24 : 48] As Tim Keller puts it, there's a place in the family of God according to this family tree and according to the Bible for those who are outsiders because of their gender.

For those who are outsiders because of the society or the nation that they come from. Because of their moral failure and compromise. There is grace available in Jesus.

Jesus. So you might be here today and you're thinking, well, I'm not from a Christian country. I'm not from a Christian family. Could God love me?

And here is Matthew led by the Spirit of God to point us to stories that say, yes, of course, here is Rahab. She's not from the people of God.

Here's Ruth. She's from a foreign nation and she knows they know God's grace. Maybe we're sitting here full of guilt.

- [25 : 50] I've done terrible things in my past. Could God accept me with the mess that my life has been? Think about the stories that we've just reflected on.

Here is Tamar dressed up as a prostitute to commit incest with her father-in-law. Here is the story of David and Bathsheba and adultery and murder and there is grace.

For them I've been sinned against. Does Jesus provide hope that my identity can be rooted in something other than the way people have treated me?

Again, Tamar, Bathsheba say yes to us. The grace of God is greater than our sin and greater than the sins committed against us.

The family of Jesus today, as it was then, is not made up of the great and the good. The family of God is made up of those who have skeletons in our own closets.

- [27 : 02] It's made up of people like us who are messed up, who are broken, who get things wrong. But there's still hope for us because of God's grace.

Jesus' family is filled with tremendous love and hope because it reminds us that we're not the centre of the story. Jesus is. All of this history is moving towards the coming of the Christ, the one who brings forgiveness and new life and promise from God.

So this family tree gives us really good news if we see our spiritual need, if we see Jesus coming to fulfil God's loving rescue plan, if we see how faith in him brings us into this family tree of God.

So as we enter into Advent season, here is an invitation to slow down to stop and to reflect. Because if this is true, then it's something that's too important to ignore and it's something that's too important to just rush past in the middle of all the other stuff that we do at Christmas.

Don't let that stuff cause us to miss Jesus the Christ and to miss the fact that here is a family tree that is dominated by grace.

[28 : 44] I guess in every family tree there are qualities that pass down through the generations, whether that's in terms of physical appearance, whether it's in terms of our temperament and personality, whether it's the things that we happen to be good at.

what is it that passes down the family line of Jesus? In Jesus' family tree, grace is the cord that runs all the way through.

It goes right down to our DNA, in fact, as the people of God. And so that has implications for us as a church as we live together. We should be the most graceful and the most gracious place in the world.

We should be an attractive community of goodness, where the way that we live together makes people stop and think, what is it about them that's so different in a good way?

It gives us a mission to share this spirit of Christmas, giving of ourselves to extend kindness, to offer friendship to those who are lonely, to offer reconciliation where there has been breakdown, to extend kindness to outsiders because that's what Jesus does for us.

[30 : 21] So, Jesus is God's Christ. He is God's way of blessing the world. He is God's eternal king. Will we delight in him, really delight in him, love him, worship him this Christmas?