

Jesus' Ancestors

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[0 : 00] We thank you that the light of Christ has come into the world and we pray that this morning it will illuminate our hearts for Jesus sake. Amen.

There are some things about my family history that are not all that praiseworthy. There are other bits that are probably praiseworthy. My great, great, great grandfather owned a pub in the 1850s near Launceston.

Rather remarkable given that his great grandson my grandfather was a teetotaling Methodist. One great grandfather was killed in crossfire between two gangsters or enemies in Mexico in 1921. Another indirect ancestor died of softening of the brain in Ballarat Jail. I think that meant he went mad. Our closest touch of wealth in the family was from, I think again, a great, great, great grandfather on my mother's mother's side, who was the brother of the Bunning who began the Bunnings hardware business.

If only it had been my great, great, great grandfather. In the 18th century some of my ancestors on my father's side were Huguenot refugees fleeing Europe to come to a Protestant country in England.

[1 : 36] A very mixed heritage. And I guess if all of us look back at our family history we'd find the same sort of thing. A mixture of good and bad. A mixture of good and bad of things noble and things perhaps we'd prefer to keep in the closet.

I guess even the royal family has a fairly mixed heritage. In one sense they're fortunate in that they can trace their ancestry back so many generations and yet probably there are many of those predecessors they prefer not to know about or forget about.

Mad King George III and the non-English speaking George I and the adulterer-murderer Henry VIII and so on. When we come to Jesus' genealogy and heritage we find a similar sort of thing.

We may expect that the Son of God would be born into a pure pedigree of noble and pure Israelite heritage. But it's not the case. Like all of our heritage it's mixed.

A mixture of good and bad. Jacob who's mentioned in verse 2, well he deceived his brother and stole his brother's birthright. One of his sons Judah was an adulterer.

[2 : 35] David who's mentioned in verse 6, though a great king, perhaps the greatest, was also an adulterer and in addition a murderer. His grandson Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was not a very good king.

In fact because of his harshness as king, the country split in two. And the northern kingdom went its own way and became an independent country. And Rehoboam just ruled over a small rump.

One tribe or two tribes worth of the people of Israel. There were some good kings in the list. Uzziah was good, though he became a leper. Hezekiah was not so bad either.

A good reforming king. Though he did some stupid things in showing the Babylonians around his treasury. And for that God punished him also. Josiah was perhaps one of the best kings of all.

And yet he was foolishly killed in battle with the Pharaoh of Egypt. Didn't take long for a good line to go wrong. Hezekiah, a good king's son, was Manasseh.

[3 : 29] The worst of Israel's kings. Yet he reigned for 52 years. Somehow we think that if a king was so bad, well why wouldn't God get rid of him? But he ruled almost the longest of any.

And was the worst of all. An idolater. And led the country into great idolatry. Yes, Jesus' heritage and Jesus' genealogy is very mixed. Good and bad. A great mixture.

One of the puzzling things about it is that there are five women mentioned. In ancient genealogies that was very rare. Not unique, but very rare. One of them is Mary of course, the mother of Jesus mentioned at the end.

But the other four are people of great note in a way. Yet not so noble on the whole. The first woman who is mentioned is in verse 3. Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

Tamar was his daughter-in-law. Married to his son. The son died. According to the Israelite law, she became married to the next son. He died also. Judah decided not to give her to his third son because he didn't want them all to go.

[4 : 31] So he just kept her sort of locked up in effect. In the end, she got so frustrated with this that she acted as a prostitute, engaged her father-in-law in sexual activity. And then when he had no idea who it was and then he discovered and was rather embarrassed, I think, about the event.

Not only was she in effect an adulterer. And so was Judah, of course. But she was also a Canaanite. She wasn't an Israelite. She wasn't descended from Abraham. But rather an original inhabitant of the land of Canaan.

The next woman that's mentioned is Rahab. Now Rahab's mentioned in verse 5. Salmon, the father of Boaz, by Rahab. And presumably it's the same Rahab who was a prostitute.

She was, again, not an Israelite. She lived in Canaan. In fact, in Jericho. She did, in a sense, convert to worship the God of the ancient Israelites. But nonetheless a prostitute and also not an Israelite.

Hardly the stuff of the ancestry of Jesus Christ. The third woman's a bit better, Ruth. Ruth is the wife of Boaz and the grandmother of David the king.

[5 : 39] However, Ruth, though noble in character, was a Moabitess. And the Moabites were some of the arch enemies of Israel. And in Deuteronomy 23 we're told that no Moabite to the tenth generation shall enter the assembly of the Lord.

In effect, that's saying that it would take ten generations or more for a Moabite family that converts to worship the God of the Israelites to be welcomed fully into the congregation of the Israelites.

You imagine a person today who's not a Christian, becomes a Christian, comes to worship here. We would refuse them full membership to the tenth generation. So that would be their great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandchildren.

Well, of course, the person who converted would be long dead and buried by that stage. But that was how much despised, even hated, the Moabites were by the Israelites. Ruth was a Moabitess.

Not only so, she was an ancestor of Jesus Christ. The fourth woman is not even mentioned by name. Verse 6, David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

[6 : 40] Why not call her Bathsheba? That was her name. And you probably know the story of King David who, in his palace, looked down the hill. His palace, of course, would be at the top of the hill. And it's a steep hill in Jerusalem where he lived.

And he would look down and see people on the roofs of their houses where they do all sorts of business. That was where they'd dry the clothes and do the equivalent of the ironing, I suppose. Where they'd sleep at night in hot weather. Where they'd do things at day. And especially in the cool of the morning and the evening.

Bathsheba was sunbaking. He liked the look of her. Called for her. Had sexual relations with her. And she bore him a son who later died. But not only that, of course, David, because of what he'd done, organised the death of her husband, Uriah.

He died in battle. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Bathsheba, an adulterer. Or adulteress. Not only that, of course, Bathsheba was married to a Hittite. Possibly herself was a Hittite.

We don't know. But again, it suggests that the pedigree of Israelite heritage is not pure. It's full of women who are not Israelites, not descended from Abraham.

[7 : 45] And in addition, three of the four women who are mentioned are involved in illicit sexual activity. Maybe the reason for including them is an allusion to Jesus' own birth. For it seems that in Jesus' lifetime he faced the accusations of those who suggested that he was illegitimate because Mary, his mother, was not married at the time to Joseph.

Betrothed, yes. But under betrothal, she was not allowed sexual relations with him. Not until after they were married, which was after Jesus was born. But certainly this strange line that leads to the Messiah, Jesus, shows us that in his heritage, in his ancestry, we find good and bad, male and female, Jew and non-Jew.

A very mixed bunch. Certainly not pure by any stretch of the imagination. And indeed marked by sinfulness. And indeed the sinful activity of the ancestors of Jesus is highlighted in this genealogy.

Why else call David was father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah the Hittite? If not to draw out explicitly the fact that it was an adulterous relationship. Why indeed mention any of the women at all?

Except to draw out the fact that they're sexually illicit relations and the fact that they're not Israelites. Because most genealogies of this time would have ignored the women entirely. Perhaps the significance of this is to show how the Saviour identifies with the sins of the world.

[9 : 11] So much so that he's born into a line full of idolaters, adulterers, murderers and non-Jews, non-descendants of Abraham. It's very easy to skip over passages like this.

I guess not many of us have ever studied a passage like this let alone heard a sermon on this sort of passage. In fact there's one chap, a German, who despised this passage so much that he wrote a little poem about it.

It's not very complimentary. He was a son, he was a son, he was a son. He begat him, he begat him, he begat him. Thus it continues in lazy monotone until dead names turn around in my brain. Genealogies plumply inserted by the limited sense of morons if not by a base hand. I tear you out. What is this dry leaf doing in the holy book full of fresh splendour of palms?

What is it whether John begat Joe down to him who made the world free? Well he didn't think much of this genealogy. So much so that he wrote that rather abusive poem about it.

[10 : 18] But indeed this genealogy makes a very important point. Nothing in the Bible of course is pointless. And this is inserted here or written here by Matthew, ultimately by God, to make an important point.

Not only the point that Jesus identified in the sinfulness of humanity by being born into a sinful line. But this genealogy is carefully arranged. It's not just a long list of names.

Indeed it's an abbreviated list. We know of a number of kings, descendants of David who are not mentioned and others earlier on before David who are also left out. Matthew tells us at the end of it all in verse 17, so all the generations from Abraham to David are 14 generations.

And from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations. And from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, 14 generations. Well that's not many generations to cover 2,000 years.

Obviously it's selective. It's deliberately organised into three equal groups of 14. And the emphases in the genealogy come at the beginning and the end and the breaks in between the three groups of 14.

[11 : 23] Abraham, David, the exile to Babylon and the Messiah at the end. And that corresponds to the very first verse of the chapter before the genealogy itself begins.

Matthew writes an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Three things about Jesus and each of the three groups addresses that issue in reverse order.

The Messiah, the son of David and the son of Abraham. Literally of course a Messiah is just an anointed person. Usually in the Old Testament it applied to kings though sometimes priests were also anointed as well.

And the word Messiah is just the Hebrew word which we are more familiar with the Greek equivalent Christ, Christos, which also just means the anointed one. Of course it came to be a title for Jesus, a name for him.

But really originally it was used as the name the anointed one, Christ or Messiah. Well the first group of names in verses 2 to 6 take us from Abraham to David.

[12 : 31] Abraham was the father of the Jews, the father of Israel. To him at the beginning of the Bible almost in Genesis chapter 12 were various promises made. Extraordinary promises to an old man and his old and barren wife.

Promises which included not only blessing for his descendants and land and so on as we heard in the first reading today. But also and ultimately blessing to all nations. For Abraham and Abraham's descendants were to be the means by which God would bless the world.

God's purposes were world directed. But he chose a limited group. Abraham and his descendants to be the means for that world blessing. It comes out of the context of Genesis 1 to 11.

The story of the original creation and its fall. Of the universal sinfulness of all of humanity. And it's in that context that God made promises to Abraham. Those are the promises that were to reverse the situation.

And bring about God's blessing in the world. According to how he originally created it. During that time Abraham eventually gave birth to a son Isaac. Obviously miraculous.

[13:40] He was 99 or so when he was born. Isaac then to Jacob and Jacob had 12 sons. Most famous of which is Joseph. The one with the technicolored dream coat who went to Egypt became prime minister and then cared for his other brothers when they came down during a famine along with their father Jacob.

And then for 400 years they lived in Egypt. Eventually under oppression. And yet that family originally 70 people who went to Egypt grew into a vast and numerous nation.

But under oppression in Egypt. And then God raised up Moses the leader. Not an ancestor directly of Jesus. But nonetheless the leader of the people who confronted the Pharaoh the king of Egypt and brought them out through the Red Sea.

Through 40 years in the wilderness as we've seen in the book of Deuteronomy. And then under his successor Joshua into the promised land that God had promised Abraham about at that stage 600 years before. And then for 400 years in the land the people of Israel lived without a king with various leaders unrelated to each other that God raised up from time to time.

The Bible calls them usually judges. But that doesn't mean white wigged fellows. It means people who are called to rule and govern to lead the administration as well as to fight in battle. People like Gideon and Jephthah and Deborah and Samson.

[14:52] That period ended with the call of Israel for a king. Their life in the land for 400 years had been fairly unstable and now at last they called out for a king. Well that's the first period that's covered by the first group of 14 names from Abraham all the way to David.

Most of the names we're not familiar with. It does include Boaz who was married to Ruth as the book of Ruth tells us. It includes Jesse the father of David who's mentioned in 1 Samuel as David's father.

But David of course was not the eldest as indeed many of these sons are not the eldest. But David was the one chosen by God anointed by Samuel to become the king. So Matthew's first claim about Jesus is that he's the son of Abraham.

Not the son in the sense that he's just a true Israelite as though we're children of Australia or something like that. But rather pointing to the fact that in Jesus all the promises of God to Abraham in about 2000 BC would be fulfilled.

It is to Jesus that those promises are directed and it's in Jesus that their fulfillment will be found.

And in particular the promise that God would bless the world through the descendants of Abraham.

[16:01] Matthew's gospel is making it clear and he goes on to make it clearer that it's in Jesus the descendant of Abraham that the blessing of God for the world is found. Many people regard Matthew's gospel as being the most Jewish of all four gospels the stories of Jesus.

And yet Matthew is very clear in his understanding understanding that the gospel of Jesus is for the world not just for the Jews not just for those descended from Abraham but for all people everywhere whatever their race whatever their background.

As it begins here with the allusion to the promises to Abraham that the world would be blessed so the gospel of Matthew finishes with an even clearer statement when Jesus after the resurrection tells his disciples go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

The book of Matthew the gospel of Matthew you see is bracketed by these allusions to the Abrahamic promise that all the nations will be blessed through Abraham's descendants and ultimately that means through this one descendant Jesus Christ.

Jesus you see is a universal saviour he's not just the God whom Christians are to worship but he's the God of all and it is our responsibility as Matthew's gospel will make clear especially at the end to bring all people to worship Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour.

[17:18] Israel the middle bracket of names in this genealogy takes us from David through to the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Israel's first king was Saul he's not on the list he's not related to Jesus he was not a good king 1 Samuel makes that clear the book 1 Samuel and his disasters were many and Samuel was then called by God to anoint David and the second half of 1 Samuel shows the tussle between Saul and David and how eventually God brought David to the throne of Israel and made him king over all Israel firstly in Hebron and then in Jerusalem.

Notice that in this genealogy the kingship of David is stressed so Jesse is the father of King David all the ones who follow are also kings but they're not mentioned as kings but the fact that David is king is important and we'll see why in a minute.

Now in the second bracket we have a list of kings David Solomon we know as the wise king under whom Israel achieved its greatest wealth and greatest extent. It didn't last for long because his son Rehoboam was a bad egg fairly harsh man and because so many Israelites didn't like him they rebelled against him and the kingdom divided in two and most of Israel had another king Jeroboam but Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned over the tribe of Judah and maybe a few others as well. Israel's history fluctuated in the next 400 years we're talking from 1000 BC of David's accession through to 587 BC some of these kings as I've said were good some bad none perfect many omitted the key to it is the fact that in David's reign God made promises to David as well if we're defined in the Bible the two main places where God makes promises the first is to Abraham as we've already seen and had read and the second was to David in 2 Samuel 7 God promised to David an everlasting dynasty to reign on his throne but from David would come a successor of David one of his own kinsfolk and thereafter another child or grandchild and this list of kings shows us that that actually happened from 1000 BC when David came to the throne to 587 when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem descendants of David were on the throne of Israel that didn't apply in the northern half of the kingdom which divided off their kings were not all Davidic descendants indeed most of them weren't and despite the fact that in the south there were assassinations coups military defeats and victories the next king was always a descendant of David and the next king also not always son to son occasionally a nephew or a brother once even the queen mother but generally always kings who are descended from king David because after all [20:09] God had promised David in 2 Samuel 7 that there would always be a king of David on the throne Matthew's second claim you see about Jesus is that he is the son of David not only the one in whom the Abrahamic promises will be fulfilled but also the one to whom the Davidic promises are directed he is the long expected king the one whom God promised when he said to David there will be a king of David or David's line over his throne forever Jesus is the one who's come to fulfill that promise and next week in Matthew 2 we'll see more clearly how he does that as the true king in contrast to other wicked kings round about it also explains the shepherd imagery that's applied to Jesus as well because David before he was king was a shepherd he was known as a shepherd king and so the expectation was that not only a king in David's line but a shepherd king would come it explains Jesus' statements about I am the good shepherd and so on as well Jesus then is the king who would come to bring God's rule to reign in righteousness and peace and to bring God's reign forever the trouble for Israel was that in 587 the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem destroyed the temple laid waste the city and took off to Babylon the leaders the rulers and the wealthy of the nation along went

King Jeconiah sometimes called Jehoiachin he lived in effect under house arrest in Babylon for most of the rest of his life the list of names that goes from verses 12 to 16 in the third group are mostly unknown to us the first couple Salathiel and Zerubbabel are known elsewhere in the Old Testament they were leaders or governors of the people after they came back from exile but they were not kings and none of the rest of the list was kings was a king either the Babylonians you see were eventually defeated by the Persians 50 years after Jerusalem fell the Persians were fairly kindly people and they allowed the defeated groups to go back to their own homelands and that included the Israelites who in 538 BC began to go back to the land of Israel or Palestine not very enthusiastically at first just dribs and drabs going back they found a land at waste and underpopulated a land that had gone to rack and ruin it took a lot of encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in order for them to build a temple took another hundred years nearly before they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and the priest Ezra re-read the law and urged the people to obedience to the law during the period of exile the prophets foretold that there would be a restoration a glorious restoration of the people of Israel back to the land and all would be full of prosperity but none of that happened when the people went back it didn't happen life was a struggle they were not a nation they were a struggling province of Babylon then a struggling province of Persia then in 333 when Alexander the Great stormed the area a province of Greece when Pompey the Roman emperor ruled and defeated the Greeks they became a province of Rome never were they an independent nation never with a king and the promises of God seemed to be unfulfilled and indeed in Jesus' own day it seems that people recognised that the exile had not totally ended even

though people had come back to the land even though a temple had been rebuilt even though the people now in Jesus' day had some some rule in the land and sacrifices and so on in effect the exile was not ended the people had not really come back to God and that's what Matthew is saying here the exile which began in the beginning of the third bracket of names ends with the Messiah that's where the exile ends with Jesus the Messiah the one whom God promised would bring the people back to God to restore God's rule and kingdom and to reign over them forever Matthew is saying that Jesus is the one who brings about the end of the exile even though it's nearly six nearly over 500 years after King Cyrus allowed the first Israelites to return to the land even though it took all that time now at last Jesus the Messiah is here the one who will bring the true restoration of God's rule for the Jews of Jesus' day by and large recognised that they still needed to be delivered Matthew lays his cards on the table at the outset he doesn't keep us in suspense about who this Jesus is he begins the very first verse of his gospel by making three claims about Jesus son of Abraham son of David Messiah and then he gives a three part genealogy to support and validate that claim that Jesus is the son of Abraham that he is the son of David and he is the Messiah the one in whom the exile will finish Matthew is claiming that the long history of God's of Abraham's people will climax with a new David who will come and lead his people out of spiritual exile and indeed that's what

Jesus or Matthew means when later on in this same chapter as I preached on Christmas morning the angel said to Joseph you shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins it's that salvation from sins that will bring about the end of the exile and the restoration of God's people to himself we may object that one of the troubles with this genealogy is that it traces Jesus' line through Joseph Mary was the mother Joseph was not his father possibly Mary was also of Davidic descent but we do not know that we're not told but at the end of Matthew 1 Joseph obeys the angel's command and he names the baby Jesus in the naming of the baby by Joseph a legal claim is made Jesus now belongs legally to the line of Joseph maybe not biologically though as I say we can't be sure with Mary where she comes from but certainly legally

Jesus belongs to the line of David and the line of Abraham the new testament begins with these verses it makes it clear that it's not beginning a new story it's not the very beginning of all things but it's actually showing that the new testament story is a continuation of the old testament story the new testament is the right conclusion to the old testament the old testament looks forward to is directed towards and finds its goal and fulfillment in Jesus Christ the Messiah the son of David and the son of Abraham Matthew is saying that all the world's history all the purposes of God are directed to and focused in Jesus Christ the Messiah hail to the Lord's anointed great David's greater son hail in the time appointed his reign on earth begun he comes to break oppression to let the captives free to take away transgression and rule in equity the words of the hymn exhort us to hail this great

[27 : 24] David's greater son and in effect that's what Matthew is wanting us to do as well not just to have a history lesson but to hail him Jesus the Messiah the son of David the son of Abraham the one in whom all the promises of God find their fulfillment Amen