

Genealogy

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[0 : 00] I remember the first job that I ever got was as a counter worker at KFC. It was an exciting first career step. But I remember when I was applying for that job, I got really focused on developing my resume to hand in, to convince them that they should employ me.

The difficult thing about writing a resume when you're about 14 is that you don't really have a whole lot you can put on it. I had no previous employment, and so instead, once I got the first bit with my name and address and date of birth and all the really official things down, I set about filling my resume and padding it out as best as I could with all the mad skills that I had that I could think of, some of which didn't completely apply to working at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

I was sure to notify my future employer that I drank close to a litre of Coke a day because I thought that was impressive. I was sure to alert him also that I had a gift for watching movies and then being able to quote key lines at appropriate moments in conversations and then laugh at them regardless of if anyone else knew what I was talking about.

I also informed him that I had two brothers and two sisters, as if that would somehow make me a better employee. But as if that wasn't the worst, just to make sure he knew what a valuable asset I would be to the company, I also told him exactly how many grand finals I'd played in as a junior footballer playing Australian Rules football.

Now, none of this, in pretty much everything on my resume, had absolutely nothing to do with working at KFC. Luckily, not a lot has to do with working at KFC, so I think you hand in your name and you'd get the tick. No offence to anyone who works at KFC.

[1 : 32] But the point is, resumes are supposed to include information that is appropriate or pertinent to the job that you're trying to get. You know, had I maybe liked chicken, then that might have been a tick on my resume.

I did, but just forgot to mention it. But the point is, you include things that are going to convince whoever you're handing this piece of paper to that you are the right person for the job. Now, the reason I tell you that is because this exciting bit of Scripture that I have just worked my way through in the reading here is actually more like a resume.

It's not a simple genealogy where we just go, this person's son and their person's son and so on and so on. In the ancient world, genealogies are more like resumes.

They're designed to tell you a little bit about the credibility of a person. Now, this one traces all the way back to Abraham, which is a huge chunk of human history, and there's actually not enough generations for this to be a full, complete one.

But that's okay, because that's not how genealogies worked. The point was to give you the highlights or the important people that showed you that Jesus is qualified for the job that he's applying for, if you like.

[2 : 45] This is a resume to give us Jesus' credentials. Not every detail, not every person is in there, just the ones that matter, just the ones that are important.

And a little bonus bit of information that I didn't mention this morning, but someone asked me a question about it. Why the 14, 14, 14? Well, this, when it was originally written, would have been designed like an acrostic poem.

And the 14s, that would have been in really simple language, in Greek and in Hebrew when it was written, it would have been designed to be something memorable so that you could have just spat it out like a memory verse, because they thought this was so important, they wanted it to stick in people's minds.

So it's not a complete genealogy, it's a highlights reel to tell us something about Jesus. And so straight away we know that even though deep down we're hoping I'm going to jump to verse 18 and

the bit they come after and the bit we can understand really easily, that we should pay attention to this.

Because of everything that happened from Abraham to Jesus, Matthew, when he was inspired by God to write this gospel, thought that this list of names was a good place to start.

[3 : 55] With everything that Jesus had done in his life, all the miracles, all the excitement, all the teaching, everything that happened, Matthew thought this would be a good first interaction for people with Jesus.

And you've got to ask yourself the question, why would you start with that? If you were writing the gospel, if you were going to be informing people about this incredible person Jesus that you'd met or heard about, why would you start with something which, let's be honest, doesn't come up in anyone's favourite Bible passages?

It is the bit we skip over. It's the one day in our quiet times where we're motivated to read more. So why start with this? Why is this a good spot?

Well, I was reading this week a story about a missionary who worked in Papua New Guinea. He was doing some work with some translators and they were translating this particular bit of scripture, all of Matthew's gospel, but they'd given it to the locals to start reading.

They were just in early stages. And the locals came back with this page open with a look of wonder and amazement on their face. And they showed it to the missionary and the translator. They're ready to ask questions.

[5 : 08] And the translator apparently confessed that he was ready to flip them over to chapter 2 so that they could get into some good and exciting things. And they said, no, no, no, no. This is amazing. And he's like, maybe we've translated it wrong.

And they're like, no, this is amazing. They explained that up until that point, up until they got to Matthew chapter 1, they'd always thought that Jesus was kind of like a fairy, imaginary.

Good stories, impressive. But now they could look at his lineage, they could look at his ancestry, and they said, so Jesus is real. It totally changed the way that they had to re-engage with every other thing that they'd heard about Jesus.

See, it matters that we start at this particular point because if we don't, there's always the possibility that people hear the story of Christmas, Easter, whatever, the miraculous birth, and file it away under stories like Santa or the tooth fairy.

It's nice. They're good. They sound impressive. But it's just imaginary. And so it's important that we start here.

[6 : 23] The senior minister from a church down the road, down at Roseville, John Dixon, who is a fairly esteemed historian, has a quote, and I could be misquoting him, so I need to put a disclaimer on this. But he says something like, and he does this publicly, online, regularly, if you can find me a credible historian who denies the existence of Jesus, I'll eat a page of my Bible.

And this is a guy who has thousands of Facebook friends, many of whom are atheists, and try to argue with him regularly, and no one has found a credible historian who will try and say that Jesus didn't exist.

And that might be really comforting for us as Christians, but the reality is, every single one of us has had a conversation with somebody, a work colleague, a neighbour, someone we care about, a family member, who does believe that Jesus didn't exist, who does believe that it's all just a nice myth, it's just a comfortable thing for us to hold on to, and so the gospel begins here, because this is really important.

Before we hear about what he's done, what he's going to do, who he is, anything else, we need to understand, Jesus is real. The point of these generations, the point of this list, is to say that there's ancestry, he's human, he's a person.

It's not just magic, it's real. It's like in the end of Luke's gospel, when Jesus has died and he's risen, and he appears to his disciples, he does something really strange. He asks them for food.

[7 : 54] And he does it for their sake, so that they can realise he's a person. He's hungry. He says, touch me. It's not a vision. I'm not a ghost. I'm a human.

And the same goes here. Before we move into the rest of this gospel, and we're going to over the next few weeks, we need to start by understanding, Jesus is real.

Because if he's not real, then everything we're going to read becomes kind of unimpressive and unimportant.

We need to know he's real when we open up to a passage like Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14 and read this. Since the children, that's us, have flesh and blood, he too, Jesus, shared in their humanity so that by his death, he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

For what Jesus does later in his life to matter or be powerful or significant, we need to have as a starting point, he's real. He's human. He's flesh and blood.

[9 : 07] He's like us. He's tempted like us. He suffers like us. Why start here? Because we need to start from a place where we recognise who is lying in that manger.

It's a human baby. It's a real person. The second question we need to ask as to why this genealogy is, why would you include these people?

Remembering this doesn't cover every generation from Abraham to Jesus. It's a highlights package. Why choose these names? And the answer to that is going to tell us a whole lot about how God works.

A whole lot about what we should expect to see from Jesus as we continue to walk through Matthew and even now in our lives. Earlier this week, Sal and I were having a conversation. Bailey is a little over three and a half now.

And so we're getting to the point where we're trying to explain more to him. You know, Christmas comes up. We're trying to talk about how God came as a baby and stuff like that. And I don't know if you've ever tried to do that to a three-year-old, but suddenly you start doing these backflips and U-turns because you realise you're getting into really convoluted and complex language.

[10 : 15] And look, it is amazing and complex and beautiful and majestic, but it's hard to explain to a three-year-old. And Sal and me were chatting about it afterwards and she was just kind of sitting there going, I just can't imagine Jesus as like a three-year-old, as Bailey's age.

But he was. Like, it is actually a really ridiculous thing for us to process that the God who is infinite, the God who created everything, the God who sustains everything, we sung it just a second ago that while he's lying on the hay, he's maintaining the stars and the planets and everything.

It's an illogical story that an infinite God could be packed into a little baby, but that's actually kind of the point. This genealogy, this story of this beginning of Jesus' life reminds us that God's plans and our plans are often not the same thing.

The way God works and the way we expect him to work are often not the same thing. We just don't think the way he does. If by some weird twist we could end up in the driver's seat and our job was to plan a way to save people by using a specific nation in history, there is no way that our plan would look anything like his did.

At any point. Just time after time through this list of names, he does it different. Let's pick a couple. Rahab.

[11 : 40] She's there in verse 5. She's the mother of Boaz. So there's a few women in here which is strange in itself. In an ancient genealogy, women did not get a run. But Rahab gets a mention.

Rahab is not even an Israelite. She's not even one of the nation that God chose. She's not even technically one of the pure breeds, if you like, from the bloodline that he chose out of all creation. She belonged to the city of Jericho. The way she comes into the story is by protecting a few Jewish spies who were in there scouting out her city to conquer it.

Basically, all we know about Rahab is she was a prostitute, she betrayed her city by protecting the spies, and she was the mother of Boaz.

That's about all we know. If you were designing a lineage for your king and saviour of the world, would you give the prostitute a run?

[12 : 38] If you had countless generations to choose from, this isn't even everyone's in there so you've got to include her, would you pick her out? And so I want everyone to know that she was part of the story.

She was part of the journey to get to Jesus. There's no way we would pick this path, but God does. Let's pick another name. Verse 7.

Sorry, verse 6. Jesse, the father of King David. David, the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife. This one doesn't even get named. She's Uriah's wife.

This is Bathsheba. For those who are familiar with the story, David is the king. He's wandering on his roof. He spots an attractive woman taking a bath. Finds out she's married, doesn't care, sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, has a baby, kills her husband, takes her as his wife.

Not exactly a high moral point in David's life, let alone Israel's history. And yet, this woman, this wife of another man, is not only part of the bloodline, she's included in the highlights package.

[13:52] Again, that's just not how we would write the story. Can you imagine a politician's PR team including this sort of history in the election campaign? We don't think like this.

We don't function like this. And God is saying, before we get to Jesus' life, before we get to the way he acts, the teaching, the miracles, anything else, we need to be reminded that God doesn't work the way we do.

His plans are not our plans. He has unique ideas about the ways that things, the ways things, the way things should work. But there's something really encouraging about that.

Not just these women, plenty of the men, are people that we wouldn't choose. but they are people that God chose. It tells us a little bit about the fact that God is somebody who chooses people who don't belong.

Chooses people who maybe society doesn't like. Chooses people who are broken. Chooses people who maybe they're full of shame. And draws them not only into the nation, not only into that group of people that he's chosen, but gives them positions of prominence, lifts them up, includes them in the story, in the bloodline, in this resume for his saviour.

[15:17] One other one that comes up there. Verse 11 and 12. Josiah, the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. Now the exile is in there almost like it's a person.

The exile is the time when Israel was at its lowest. The exile was the time after it had its high peaks with Solomon as king and everything was great and suddenly now in judgment they get carted off in slavery to the Babylonians.

They lose their national identity. They lose the temple where they used to worship God. They lose confidence in God himself, confidence in his goodness. They lose confidence in his promises.

It really is the point where for many God's plans start to fail. Many in Israel gave up and improvised their own version of who God was. Many began to doubt that he could actually deliver on the things that he had promised at that point.

So why would you include that in this highlights reel in this resume of getting to your saviour? Isn't that the bit you'd try and skip over and try and pretend never happened? Well again, God is saying I don't work like you.

[16:34] even in the bits that we don't understand, the bits where it feels hopeless, he was still marching towards Jesus. Everything that happened throughout all of Israel's history was building up to Jesus.

Even the bits that they thought were failures or wrong bits, he was still using them. And now at the end of this somewhat unique and colourful family line, we meet the Messiah, the descendant of David, the chosen one, the promised one.

And so God is saying to us before we get into his life, before we see what he does, be excited that he's here, be expectant for what he's going to achieve, but just remember he might do things differently to how you would have him do them.

He might have a plan that is slightly unique compared to your plan. How he'll work, what he'll achieve, all that will come next, but before we get there, there's this sense and this reminder that God has a unique wisdom, a unique perspective on the world that we live in.

He works in ways that we don't expect. And even this beautiful, miraculous birth that we're going to get to over the next couple of weeks will end in a bloody execution.

[18:03] And that will be good. That will be part of his plan. It could be that right now in your life, the challenge you are feeling, the wrestle that you're having with God is that he's not doing what you want him to do.

He's not answering that prayer that you keep bringing to him. He's not delivering on what for you is just the obvious good that he should deliver on. And the encouragement and the challenge of this passage is just because he's not working the way you want him to doesn't mean that he's not working.

Even in the situations that you might not choose, he's still at work. even in the bits that you might have been ashamed of, like Israel and its exile, God is still at work.

And just because he's not working the way you want, it's actually okay. Even though he might not be doing the things that you wish he would, that's actually okay.

Because God's plan is always bigger and better than your plan. A couple of weeks ago, a week ago now, I went away on holidays with my family, with Bailey and Hudson and Sal's, the first family with the four, first holiday with the four of us.

[19 : 33] And it was really fun. We stayed in a caravan park, and caravan parks have got this whole holiday thing sussed. Keep the kids happy, which keeps the parents happy, which keeps people coming back. And the caravan park we went to had more kids equipment and activities and stuff than I've ever seen in like a theme park.

This one had a jumping pillow. If you don't know what that is, it's like a jumping castle that's somehow been buried into the ground. Very entertaining for kids. Bailey would have stayed on it for hours. It had play equipment, it had putt-putt golf, it had trampolines, it had go-karts.

It also had a water theme park in the caravan park. This is all just free. Just wander in there whenever you want. There's slides, there's a tipping bucket, there's a whirlpool, there's water pistols to shoot at each other, there's waterfalls.

It was amazing. Bailey thought that he was in heaven on earth. Every morning he would wake up at 6am and be like, water park? I said, it opens at 9, mate. He would ask me every five seconds for the rest of the day.

He loved it. He had a fantastic time. He was pretty emotional when we had to come home, I won't lie. We really had to break it to him easy that we weren't turning around at any point and returning. Every day since, just about, he said, can we go to the water park?

[20 : 37] No, no we can't. It's a six-hour drive. Now that he's starting to understand holidays and understand that they're good and they're fun and that we as a family get to do some fun things, we thought we'd let him know that we've got a big family holiday plan for next year, something special, something unique.

We're actually going to go overseas. And we said, are you excited for holidays? And he said, will there be a water park? I said, no, but that's okay because we're going to Fiji and they're going to have afros and pools and we can go snorkeling.

And he just looks at me and says, water park? He hasn't quite got it yet. He's so obsessed with his thing, with how good it was, that he doesn't even comprehend that there might be something better, that Fiji might be an improvement.

As good as the caravan park was, that there might be something that is even more fun and more exciting than what he's already experienced. And often we do this with God. We come to him and say, God, please do this.

And we get so obsessed with whatever this is, give me a job, fix my health, give me a partner, whatever it is, that we can't possibly imagine that there's a better, that God has a plan other than ours that is still good for us.

[21 : 48] And so we start Matthew's gospel, we start looking at Jesus, we start to meet our saviour by being reminded that God works different to us and his plan is always better.

We get to Jesus and we meet our saviour. His name itself means saviour. Jesus means God who saves.

Christ means the chosen one. He's the chosen saviour. It's his job description. It's his name. It's what he's here to do. The challenge for us is to trust him to do it his way.

This newborn king, this humble baby, will identify with his subjects, will bear their shame, take their punishment, offer them love instead of judgment, and he'll do it in a way that none of us would have chosen.

We wouldn't have sent our king to the cross. God's plan was always bigger. This genealogy starts with Abraham.

[22 : 58] The promises that God made to Abraham way back in Genesis chapter 12, right near the beginning of the Bible, was that he would give him land, that he would give him lots of descendants, that they'd be a nation, and that he would be a blessing to Abraham and through Abraham.

And pretty much right up to Jesus, the biggest picture that anyone had about that centred around a piece of land that's now in the Middle East, centred around as many great grandchildren as Abraham could muster, and centred around them being kind of rich.

And Jesus turns up and says, no, there's always been a better plan. God walks them through things like the exile to say, no, I've always had more in mind for you.

The whole nation thing is now open to anyone who would follow Jesus, open to people like Rahab. The whole land thing is not just about some country somewhere on the earth, but it's heaven. It's a perfect creation for us to enjoy. And the blessing thing, that's more than we can even begin to comprehend.

[24 : 12] One of the things I love about Christmas at the moment is as a dad I'm rediscovering how to talk about Christmas in really basic language. Like I said, I struggle when I'm trying to do it, but thankfully some gifted people have written kids' books about it.

And one of the books that we read with Bailey that goes through the nativity story, it's one of those great textured books that's full of glitter, so you don't scratch your hands over it. Anyway, recommend it. for your summer reading. I love the line in it, when the angels appear, and we're sitting there with Bailey, I've read it so many times before I even paid attention to what I was saying. This textured angel was talking to the shepherds in the field and says, tonight Jesus has been born, a saviour has been born, and he will bring all of God's blessings to people on earth.

All of God's blessings, forgiveness, mercy, hope, comfort, provision, everything found in Jesus. These small plans that we have for our life where God might fix a circumstance here or a difficulty there. Before we see what he does, God is calling us to lift our eyes and understand that he can and will do more than we've begun to dream of.

[25 : 43] This is not a message from God to come and fix our problems. The baby in the manger is God himself, showing up, drawing near to people like us, people who have ignored him, treated him like he didn't matter.

So why start here? Why include these people? Why this particular resume for Jesus? Well, last week I got to meet my nephew for the first time.

My older brother had a little boy called Xavier. He's tiny. He was born, well, he's relatively tiny compared to my boys, but he was born at three kilos, he's now about 3.7 and that's smaller than my boys were even born.

So when I was holding him, I was really nervous. I'm like, I'm a dad, I've had two newborns, I've held many of your newborns and I was freaked out that he was going to break. He had the tiniest little arms and legs and when they're newborn and they just have that squeaky cry and you just sit there and go the slightest thing and this could be all over.

He's so helpless and he was really cute as well but there was a big bit of just nervousness whenever I was holding him because he's not even mine so I can't even sort out the mess later in life if I do something wrong so I kept giving him back to my brother and saying thanks for the short hold.

[27 : 05] the reason that we start here the reason we find out who Jesus is going to be the reason we find out his credentials before we meet that little baby in the manger is so that we don't look and see what I saw when I met my nephew.

We don't look and see a helpless little baby. When we come to Christmas when we come to Jesus even as the baby in the manger we need to look and see the one who brings hope.

We need to look and understand that even in a baby God is still in control. Even though we would have sent a warrior this baby is the means by which God will bring blessing.

This baby is the means by which God will provide forgiveness and love to people like Rahab, people like you, people like me.

we start here because we need to know this Christmas and every Christmas the baby is real.

[28 : 18] It's not just any baby. This is the baby that brings hope. This is the baby that changes everything. this is the baby that brings all of God's blessings to people on earth.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father God, we want to just thank and praise you for all that you have done throughout history, for the way you have persevered and been patient with your disobedient people, for your commitment to and your faithfulness to your promises.

promises. We want to thank you that even though we sometimes have different plans or different ideas of what should be, that your plan is always better.

That in spite of our complaining and whinging sometimes that you're not doing what we want, you continue to give us better than we deserve. Father, please open our eyes so that this Christmas and every day of our lives we see not a helpless baby, but we see a significant act where you entered our world.

We see hope on offer. We see the beginning of your work to ultimately take our shame and our punishment. Father, this Christmas we pray for ourselves and we pray for those who we know and care about who don't know you yet.

[29 : 57] Help them to see you in the manger. help them to see the love that you offer. Help them to recognize that Christmas is an invitation.

It's an opportunity to taste your blessing, your goodness, to know your incredible love. Father, may we taste afresh this year.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.