

Genealogy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 December 2016

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Once upon a time, there was a young boy who mounted a campaign just before Christmas to get a new bike for Christmastime. The incessant badgering of his parents annoyed his parents so much that one day they said to him, listen, why don't you go and write a letter to Jesus and tell him why you deserve this bike?

So he kind of mixed up there, Jesus and Santa a little bit. And so the lad goes upstairs, grabs himself a pen and a piece of paper and he starts to write, dear Jesus, I've been good all year. You know, that's not true. So he screws up, starts again, dear Jesus, I've been good this whole month. And actually, that's not quite right either. He's a realist, if nothing else. And a third attempt, dear Jesus, I've been good this whole week. And he just stops and he's frustrated because he remembers that incident with the cat. And so he screws up the piece of paper and stomps downstairs and he walks up to the side table and he goes to the nativity scene and grabs Mary out of the nativity scene, stomps back upstairs, whacks her down on the desk and starts writing, dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again. You know, he had a couple of things right about Christmas. He worked out that Mary was Jesus' mother. I suppose that's a start. But in terms of how to relate to God, well, he kind of was trying to relate to God a bit like a terrorist.

[1 : 30] He was trying to force God's hand to give him a gift. This is the reason why you should do this good thing for me. Christmas is one of those times of the year where it helps us to understand how it is that God relates to us and how it is that we relate to him.

And at first glance, that list of names that was read out to us doesn't help us a whole lot in terms of the Christmas story. And yet, in amongst all those names there and the structure of those verses, we get to the very heart of Christmas.

We get to the heart of the Christian message. We get to the heart of God himself. So there's three things I want to see from that list tonight. Three things. Number one, Christmas is good news, not good advice.

Number two, Christmas turns all of our values of our world on their head. And thirdly, Christmas is the promise of ultimate rest. So first of all, Christmas is good news, not good advice. It doesn't open up there with once upon a time. That's how fairy tales start. That's how my story started. That's how legend starts.

[2 : 38] It's how myth starts. It's how Star Wars starts. Once upon a time sends the signal that this probably didn't happen. Sort of like, I know this guy.

You probably don't. Matthew begins, this is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. So what Matthew does here is he grounds who Jesus is and what Jesus has done in history.

That is, Jesus is not a metaphor. He is real. And the biblical accounts of Christmas are about what actually happened in history. The birth of the son of God into the world is a gospel.

It's a good news. It's an announcement. The birth accounts of Jesus are not telling us what we should do, but in fact, what God has already done in history for us.

And it says that Jesus is the Messiah. He's the son of Abraham. You see, centuries before the birth of Jesus, God made a promise to a bloke named Abraham that all the people of the world would be blessed through a descendant of his.

[3 : 46] And this descendant, through this descendant of Abraham, God would reverse all the devastating impact of sin for all time and all eternity.

And what Matthew declares at the very beginning of his gospel, the very beginning of his announcement, is that that time has come. And it's in Jesus. He's the long awaited one.

And so that's what makes this news good news. Jesus is the Messiah. He's the fulfillment of all of God's plan of salvation that's been worked out for centuries.

And the heart of the Christian gospel is that you don't save yourself. God came to save us in the person of Jesus on their first Christmas night.

And so that makes Christmas. Christmas, what it does is that it tells us that Christianity is unique. I would argue that all the religions and all the philosophies of life give advice.

[4 : 48] The founders of the great religions of the world, in one way or another, say, I'm here to show you what spiritual reality is. And you do all this stuff that I tell you, and you will find spiritual reality.

That's advice. And a whole bunch of it is really helpful advice. But it's advice. Christianity is not primarily about self-improvement.

We begin with Jesus, not by adopting an ethic or by turning over a new leaf or even joining a community. You begin by believing the report of what happened in history.

Did God really come as a human being? Did Jesus really live and suffer and die for you? Did he really rise triumphantly over death? All historical questions.

Christmas shows us that Christianity is not good advice for your life. It is good news. That's the first thing. Secondly, we see that Christmas turns all of our values on their head.

[5 : 54] We live in an individualistic culture in the West. And in an individualistic culture, we commend ourselves through our performance and our accomplishments.

That's how we get approval from other people, from a performance and accomplishments. But that's not how it was done in the first century in the Middle East when these words were written.

A family tree operated much like a resume operates for us now. In the first century, it was your heritage, your clan, your family, your pedigree, which constituted your resume.

And as they do, as when I say they, I mean we do now, people adjust their resumes to leave out the parts that don't sort of help us.

The bits that are a little bit more embarrassing that we'd kind of want to cover over. The things that make us look a little bit less impressive. For instance, we know historically that Herod the Great rubbed out many names from his family tree.

[7 : 01] I mean quite literally he rubbed out many names from his family tree. But he also did it historically, rubbed them out. Because he did not want anyone to know that he was connected to that unimpressive individual.

It's like the story I heard once upon a time where the children of a prominent family were assembling a book of the family's history for the patriarch of the family for her birthday present. And they commissioned a professional biographer to do the work for them. And particularly pointing out to them that Uncle George was a problem. He was the black sheep of the family. You see Uncle George was a convicted criminal who had been executed on the electric chair for murder.

And the biographer said, not a problem, I can take care of Uncle George. He won't be noticed. And this is what the biographer wrote about Uncle George. Uncle George occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution.

He was attached to his position by the strongest of ties and his death came as a real shock. You see, we do the same in our life.

[8 : 09] We cover over the skeletons in the closet. We do it so that people will value us. And Matthew does the exact opposite with Jesus.

He does nothing to hide the skeletons in the closet here. Notice, there's a few things I want to point out about this genealogy. Notice there are five women that are listed here.

They are all the mothers of Jesus. In ancient patriarchal societies, a woman was virtually never named in a list like this unless she was royalty.

Let alone to name five of them in a list. Women in this culture were gender outsiders. They had no legal rights.

They weren't allowed to inherit property. They weren't allowed to give testimony in court. And yet, they are named here in Jesus' genealogy.

[9 : 08] And what's more, three of these women are Gentiles. Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab. To the ancient Jews, these women were regarded as unclean.

They weren't allowed to participate in Jewish religion, in temple worship or anything like that. And so, they are racial outsiders as well, as well as being religious outsiders and gender outsiders.

And yet, Matthew deliberately includes them in the family tree of the long-anticipated Jewish Messiah. And by deliberately including them, Matthew recalls some of the most sordid and nasty and immoral occasions in the Bible.

It says, for instance, in verse 3, that Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah. And the mother was Tamar. Tamar was, in fact, Judah's daughter-in-law.

And she managed to trick him into sleeping with her. And that was an act that was against the law of God. And even though Jesus was a descendant of Perez and not Zerah, Matthew includes both of them in the family line here.

[10:29] And also includes both Judah and Tamar. So that we would remember that whole sordid incident. Deliberately revealing the skeleton in the closet.

The saviour of the world came to us through a dysfunctional family. Like yours. And mine. Remember also Rahab.

She's mentioned in verse 5. She wasn't just a Canaanite, a Gentile, outside of, you know, an outsider in terms of being a Gentile.

She was also a prostitute. But the most interesting story is in verse 6. It mentions King David. He's royalty. That's good. You think that's fantastic. That's a tick.

Not so much. Except in one of the great and, I think, ironic understatements of the Bible, Matthew adds that David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

[11:30] It doesn't even mention her by name. Her name was Bathsheba. And by not naming her and mentioning her instead as being Uriah's wife, Matthew is calling us to remember this tragic and terrible chapter in Israel's history.

Before he was king, David was a fugitive running from the guy he would replace as king, a guy named Saul. And a group of 37 men were loyal to King David.

They went on the run with him, and their job was to surround David and protect him. They put their lives on the line for David. And Uriah was one of the 37.

And when David was finally made king many years later, he saw Uriah's wife. He wanted Uriah's wife. He took her, got her pregnant, and then arranged to have Uriah killed to cover it all up.

And so it was out of this dysfunctional family and this deeply flawed man that the savior of the world came. The list of names includes moral outsiders, cultural outsiders, racial outsiders, gender outsiders.

[12:47] And rather than excluding them and covering them up, they are all here publicly acknowledged as ancestors of Jesus. What an unusual genealogy.

Why do that? What's he doing? I think there's a verse in the Bible that gives us at least a clue. It reads, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That is, the savior of the world jumped right into the middle of the sin, the sordid evil and unjust affairs of human existence, in order to rescue us out of it.

He identifies with our weakness and our brokenness and our sinfulness in order to rescue us from it. You see, the Christian message is that if you repent and you believe in the historical Jesus, his grace covers your sin and it unites you with him and his saving work.

There's not a single great individual who doesn't need his grace, and there is not a single rotten individual who can fail to receive his grace.

[14:03] All the gifts that we receive at Christmas are symbol of the greatest gift of all, God's grace to us in Jesus.

Some gifts that we receive, by their very nature, cause you to swallow your pride.

Some gifts are just benign, some gifts are fantastic, but some gifts, by their very nature, cause you to swallow your pride. Imagine tomorrow morning, you open up a gift under your tree, and it's a book.

And the book is titled, Ten Easy Steps to Lose Weight. Okay. And then you think, I'm a little bit offended by that.

Let's put that book down, and you pick up another gift someone gives you, and there's a different friend, and you open it up, and this one says, Overcoming Selfishness.

[15:03] You see, if you say, Oh, thank you for those gifts, you are, at some sense, acknowledging, admitting that you are overweight and obnoxious.

They cause you to swallow your pride. To receive some gifts, it means that you have to actually admit you've got flaws, that you've got weaknesses, that you need some kind of help. And the message of Christmas, the message of Christianity, is that there, if there has, there's never been a gift, that has ever been offered, that makes you swallow your pride, to the depths, that the gift, of Jesus Christ, requires us to do.

Christmas means, that we are so lost, we are so unable, to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death, of the Son of God himself, can save us.

And to accept the true, gift of Christmas, we have to admit, we have to admit, that we are sinners, we have to admit, that we are unworthy of the gift, and in need of us being saved by grace. And that, frankly, is a descent, that most of us, just will not go to.

[16:19] And yet, the greatness of Jesus, is seen in how far, he came to love us, to lift us up. Life and greatness, comes to us, by following him, along the same path, of humility.

We can get God's approval, the very thing, that we desire in life, he's approval, despite all the flaws, and the sin, through Jesus, and what he's achieved for us.

He bore the cost, we get the benefits, if we admit, that we are deeply flawed, in need of it. He turns our values, on our head.

Thirdly, if we accept it, Jesus' grace, gives us ultimate rest. At the end of that list, there's this obscure verse, verse 17, it says, and there were 14 generations, in all, from Abraham to David, 14 from David, to the exile of Babylon, and 14 from the exile, to the Messiah.

And you go, who cares? You know, that is, what it's saying there, is three lots of 14, right? In case you, you know, I know it's late, three lots of 14, or, six lots of seven.

[17:37] Six lots of seven. Now, what's happening here, if you're a Jewish person, you read this, in the first century, you go, you know exactly what they're saying. For us, you know, yeah, it's not so clear.

Six lots of seven, with Jesus, what's signaling here, is Jesus is the beginning, of the seventh seven. That doesn't mean a lot to us, but it's pretty big, for first century Jews.

In the Bible, the number seven, is very significant, because as Genesis tells us, God rested from his work, in creating on the seventh day. And in another part of the Old Testament, we are told, that the last year, of the seventh period, of seven years, the 49th year, is the Jubilee year.

And in the 49th year, the Jubilee year, it was very, very significant, for the nation of Israel. It was the year, when all slaves, were set free, when every single debt, was cancelled, when no work was done, and everyone rested.

All, people's burdens, and weariness, was lifted. And verse 17, he's saying, that what the year, of Jubilee, foreshadowed, that ultimate rest, that we long for, comes to us in Jesus.

[19:02] If we grasp, that Christmas, is not, a once upon a time story, but that Jesus really broke, into time and space, and that he has, accomplished our salvation, so that prostitute, and king, are equal in him, then we can have, that rest now.

Total, enduring, final rest, is what we all need. The rest that Jesus, secures for us, is a rest, that we get to enjoy, both now and forever. See, Jesus, gives us rest, for our souls.

He said to us, in Matthew 11, come to me, all who are weary, and burdened, and I'll give you rest, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle, and humble, in heart, and you'll find rest, for your soul.

Many people today, speak of a hunger, in the human heart. People hunger for love, and for security, and for significance, and for meaning, and Jesus said, I'm the bread of life, feed on me, and you will never hunger again.

Many walk in darkness, and disillusionment, and despair, and Jesus says, I'm the light of the world. If you follow me, you will never walk in darkness. Instead, you will have the light of life. Others are fearful of death, and Jesus said, I am the resurrection of the life.

[20:14] He who believes in me, will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives, and believes in me, will never die. You see, what Christmas declares, is that you, can have rest, in the deepest parts, of your being right now, if you come to Jesus.

The rest of unspoiled love, between you, and the creator God, what a gift. You see friends, Christmas, is not a once upon a time story, that shows us, how we're to live our lives, a little bit better, and tweak a few things, and just love people generally.

Christmas is news, and news calls us, to acknowledge something, that has already happened, and to respond to it. The saviour of the world, has broken into time, and space to save us.

And so Christmas, is good news, not good advice. Christmas turns all of our values, of what's important, on their heads. And Christmas is the promise, of ultimate rest.

And so he calls us, to look to him, to come to him, to trust him, to believe him, to follow him, and to find the rest, that we all desperately long for.

[21 : 25] Christmas nicknames, for sure, that we all ■■■■ have been. The song song came, to discover what he has been, to 1974. That we all came, to glorious light on earth, and we all Rodman, to have the word thousand ogres, to want to have a view of ■■■■ win, ready to Major Hallset, in chapter 19, could be our faith, and some inauguration Quorum, to be the matter mutual, with how she loves it.

when we all september, there is the nation, of the periantee, and from kind with a country, the mother■■■ on earth, of our esc janggan clerk on earth, to be the prevend in shoulder,