



Matthew 1:7-12

12 After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
13 Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
14 Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
15 Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,
16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the
husband of Mary, and Mary was the
mother of Jesus who is called the Messi-
ah.

17 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 Messiah.

Today we take a third and final look at the genealogy of Jesus and I think it's important to note that this story of Jesus doesn't start with 'once upon a time' – because it isn't a story in the fiction sense; it's a matter of historical record. It's history, and that's one of the reasons that Matthew and Luke's gospel both start with a genealogy, with the family tree of Jesus Christ – because they are recording history.

But to the modern reader of Matthew's biography of Jesus, this long list of names, from verse 1 all the way down to verse 17, can come across as a bit dry. For the ancient Jewish reader however, it would have been fascinating. Today, we aren't much interested in who your family is, or where you come from, we're mainly just interested in what you do, and what you've done – but for to the ancient reader, where you come from *is who you are* – it's your identity, your credentials, a bit like your CV, or your resume. And so for the original readers, the excitement would have grown as they read this genealogy, starting with Abraham, then moving to David and then on to king after king after king. It would have been kind of like reading the most impressive resume ever written, on and on and on it goes until you can't believe whose presence you're in.

But there are some twists, and some extremely unlikely people are included in this list of names – and that would have only made it all the more fascinating for the first readers. You can see in verse 16, at the climax of Jesus’ resume, that his mother, Mary, is mentioned twice. For the modern reader this might not raise an eyebrow, but in a patriarchal society men held all the power, so it was unusual to mention women in a genealogy – but this mention of Mary is now the fifth woman that Matthew has included, along with Tamar in verse three, and Rahab and Ruth in verse five, and Uriah’s wife – her name’s Bathsheba, in verse 6. This is quite extraordinary, but it isn’t all that stands out.

I don’t know if you’ve gone for a job recently and had to update your resume but when you

do, there's a temptation isn't there? A temptation to pad it out a little, perhaps to smooth over a rough patch in your career, to re-write history a little, or maybe even to leave out the details of a former job that didn't end well. But not Jesus, he's proud of everyone in his family – particularly the women. But it's not just the women that others might have been tempted to leave out, this isn't just about gender, there's also moral failure. There's Tamar who slept with her father-in-law, which according to Jewish moral standards is incest, and Rahab who was a prostitute before she came to faith. But, far from leaving them out, Jesus embraces not only, as one preacher put it,¹ 'gender outsiders,' like these five women; and 'moral outsiders,' like Tamar & Rahab; he even embraces 'racial outsiders.' You see Boaz and Ruth and Rahab weren't Jewish, they

¹ Here and elsewhere I'm indebted to Timothy Keller and his 2014 Advent sermon on Matt 1:1–18 that can be found at www.gospelinlife.com/sermons.

were foreigners, which again was a big taboo. These are all people that you'd leave out of your resume, but not Jesus, he's claimed them as his own and he's proud of them.

And then there's the guy that everyone would want in their family, the guy that everyone would want on their resume – the great warrior king, King David, and what's Matthew done there? Instead of rewriting history a little, he's shone the spotlight on David's most shameful moment, back in verse 6 where it says, 'David the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,' Matthew is shining the spotlight on the moment when David slept with the wife of one of his greatest soldiers, and then had him killed. Gender outsiders, moral outsiders, racial outsiders and then the one guy everyone would want in their resume, the religious moral person, the highly

successful person, the great leader – placed right alongside a prostitute; only her prostitution wasn't mentioned, but his adultery was.

And Matthew's brilliant in this because he's reminding us that even the most impressive religious person, the most impressive moral person, is no more worthy of the presence of God than a prostitute. All people are equally lost, all people are only saved through grace, and when saved, all people – no matter who you are, or what you've done – are equally loved by God, through the work of his Son, who's brought them into his family, and will stand by them forever.

Yet this genealogy has even more surprises and one huge emphasis. Did you notice, I mean, how could you not, the repetition of 'the father of,' 'the father of,' 'the father of,' 39

times – in old versions of the bible the word is ‘begat,’ – again and again until we get to verse 16 which says ‘and Jacob the father of Joseph, the *husband* of Mary, and Mary was the *mother* of Jesus’ – ‘the father of,’ ‘the father of,’ ‘the father of;’ building and building and then ... nothing ... a shocking admission ... a confusing admission ... which makes for a huge emphasis – Joseph didn’t father Jesus? But Mary was his mother? How can this be? Matthew builds the tension, builds the intrigue, and the reader can’t help but read on, especially when verse 18 starts with ‘This is how the birth of Jesus came about...’

A final reflection on this passage, and it’s in all those names. You know, most of them, we don’t have any idea who they are. They’re only mentioned here, nowhere else in the bible, and yet 2000 years later, here we are still

reading their names. Think of the countless names in history that have been forgotten, and yet these unknowns, they're here, these names haven't perished, they live on, because they're related to Jesus. If you're related to Jesus, if you've been adopted into his family by putting your trust in him, by accepting him into your life as your Lord and Saviour, then your name will live on, it'll never perish, you'll never perish, because Jesus looks after his own – and he'll stand by you forever.

The exile is over, the king is here, his kingdom is coming, and he's calling to himself a people of his own – are you one of his people? He's calling a people to himself, from every tribe, and every nation, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done; it doesn't matter where you've come from, all that matters is where you are going.

Why not take a moment now to reflect on this passage of Scripture, on Jesus' fierce love of his own, the kind of love that will never leave you and never forsake you, the kind of love that embraces prostitute and king alike? What might this love mean for your day today? Who do you know that desperately needs a love like this? What small thing could you do today to show someone the love of Jesus?

Why not take a moment now and speak with God, thank him for Jesus, thank him for the way his grace changes everything, thank him that the pressure is off, that your resume doesn't define you, doesn't measure your worth, and that it's not what you do that counts, but whose family you're a part of.

And if you aren't a member of God's fam-

ily, if you aren't in a living relationship with Jesus, then why not begin right now? Pray to him, lay it all at his feet, whether you're a prostitute or a king, you can't be too bad and you can never be good enough, because it's grace that saves, through faith, not what we've done, what he's done, even King David needed grace, and through faith Rahab inspired a nation. Ask for forgiveness, believe in Jesus name, and experience his love.