

5 Mother's: Matthew 1-17

I was sitting in my office Monday afternoon contemplating and planning for another series of messages and noticed that over the next six weeks, 5 out of the 6 Sunday's are what I would term "special focus Sunday's". In other words, today is Mother's Day. Next Sunday is Ascension Sunday. Then Pentecost Sunday followed by Trinity Sunday and ending on June 18 with Father's Day. The only Sunday where there is no identified focus is June 11. I thought it would be interesting to have a look at the significance of each of these special days and provide messages which I hope will draw you closer to Jesus and help you grow in your walk with Him. So, if you prefer to view these as a series, I guess we can call them the **Special Sundays of Spring**.

Turn with me to Matthew's Gospel. Just go to the first chapter because we are going to start at the beginning and read a passage of Scripture which commonly gets second class treatment when we sit down to read and study our Bible's. How many of you love to read through genealogies? Genealogies are usually cumbersome and seem to serve as place holders in Scripture. After all, it's just a list of names, and mostly men too because it was not common practice in those to include women in genealogies. Show your hands if you've memorized any of the genealogies? Ha! That's what I thought. Most of the time we just skip over these lengthy lists of names because we want to get right to the meat; the good stuff, if you will. But that's us. The Jews however, loved genealogies and considered them important pieces of writing **Why?** They were consulted on various legal matters such as land purchases, marriage rights, property rights, etc. Perhaps more important than these though, genealogies were crucial in determining heirship to the throne as well as in determining the Levitical priesthood. Let's get to it then:

Read Matthew 1:1-17. As I read this passage, if you like to mark things in your Bible, I suggest that you circle or underline all the women mentioned.

Exciting stuff, right? But why is Matthew's genealogy of Jesus important today? The Jews would have read this and understood exactly why Matthew would have started his account in this manner. They would have understood the historical importance of such a listing. And while they weren't necessarily expecting the Messiah, every Jew lived life with this yearning based on their knowledge of the prophecies concerning His coming. These verses tell us that Jesus had human, historical roots. He had a father and a mother, was born a Jew, and was a literal descendant of King David. Which brings me to another major point concerning the reasoning for Matthew's list. Matthew wanted to show that Jesus qualified for Kingship. Yes, indeed, the Messiah was to come from the lineage of David. Jesus' right to the throne is determined by His family history. But why include the names Matthew chose? Why include the women? I understand Mary, right? But why Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and "the wife of Uriah"? That's Bathsheba, by the way. What was

significant enough about them? If you study this list carefully, you'll discover that it's not loaded with stellar examples of morally righteous people.

I mentioned earlier that women were normally not included in genealogical accounts, but here we find five women, five mothers mentioned. Four of them are surprising, wouldn't you say? But the reality is each of them were a part of Jesus' family tree. Except for Mary, four of them had moral imperfections and are very much like many of us. They were not perfect, they made numerous mistakes, and had questionable pasts. However, if you read their stories, you'll see that each of them puts faith in God and as a result, God forgave them and used them as key members in His plan to save the world.

Tamar – The first woman mentioned is Tamar. You can read all about her in Genesis 38, so I'll just give you the highlights. Tamar was the gentile daughter-in-law of Judah (Abraham's grandson) and was married to Er. Er died and by tradition, his brother Onan took Tamar as his wife. Soon afterwards, Onan also died. These events left Tamar with lots of questions and caused her to lose patience with God. Her desire for children and desperation to remain in the family led her to follow her own will instead of God's. Basically, she devised this horrible plan where she disguised herself as a prostitute and tricked Judah into sleeping with her. From this incestuous union, she conceived and had twin sons; Perez and Zerah. The reality of this story is that no one looks good. Judah, nor Tamar. Their story is filled with greed, deception, illegitimacy, prostitution, and sexual immorality. What we see is just how weak and sinful the flesh can be. But there is a better ending to the story, thanks to God and His Sovereignty, Tamar ends up as a minor character in Biblical history but plays a major role in bringing Jesus into the world.

Rahab – In another story from Jesus' family tree, we find Rahab. Rahab was an enemy of Israel because she was a Canaanite. You can read about her in Joshua 2 and 6. Rahab was not from a family that believed in God. She lived in the dark part of the city of Jericho, working as a prostitute and became a key player in Joshua's conquest of the city. I'm sure most of you know this story better than the previous one. She hid Joshua's spies in her house in exchange for her and her family's lives. Why did Rahab really help Joshua. She had become a believer in God and put her faith in Him. It's hard to think that a prostitute, who was also a liar, would be found in Jesus' family tree. Don't focus on her past though. Focus on her actions after putting her faith in God. Hebrews 11:31 says this. *“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”* God used the faith of a new convert to accomplish His plan.

Ruth – Next on our list is Ruth. Now, it’s difficult to think negatively of Ruth. Especially if you read her story and see how dedicated she was to Naomi and the rest of her late husband’s family. Ruth, however, was a Moabite, another evil gentile nation, born out of lies, deception, and yes, more sexual immorality. By rights, Ruth should have been an enemy to a Jew. But, because of God’s providence, Boaz and Ruth married, and out of that union was born Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered David. Yes, Ruth, the dreaded Moabitess, was the great-grandmother of King David.

Bathsheba - The fourth woman is not mentioned by name. She is however identified as the woman “who had been Uriah’s wife.” The story of Bathsheba’s adultery with King David is so well-known that it need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that adultery was only the beginning. Before the scandal was over it included lying, a royal cover-up, and ultimately murder. As a result, the child conceived that night died soon after birth and David’s family and his empire began to crumble. Eventually David married Bathsheba and they had another son—Solomon, who is known as the wisest man to have ever lived. Quite a story and quite a result of a union that began in the manner it did. But don’t miss the point: Bathsheba made the list of mothers in Jesus’ family tree.

****Four women. Four mothers. Four shocking members in the family tree of the Messiah. Two involved in prostitution. Three Gentile enemies of Israel. Three involved in some form of sexual immorality. One adulteress. But all four in the line that led to Jesus Christ!**

What should we learn from this?

Perhaps God wanted to send a strong message to the self-righteous leaders of Israel. What a shock it would have been when they read Matthew’s list. I can see it now, the Pharisees, with all their self-righteousness and propensity to judge others, saying something like this: Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah. There’s no way the Messiah could ever come from such an imperfect family tree. Perhaps God uses this list to rebuke anyone, not just the religious leaders of Jewish history, but anyone who possesses that kind of judgmental and self-righteous attitude. Christian, we need to make sure our attitude is in check.

It would be very hard to boast about a family tree such as this. Jesus’ ancestors included important rulers and powerful kings, but as we’ve seen today, they were also great sinners. When you read the stories of these men and women, it’s easy to focus in on their sins. Guess what, we do the same thing with people today. It’s too easy to point out the sin in someone’s life. That’s why we do it. Truthfully though, the only thing we should be pointing out is the saving grace of God through Christ Jesus! The hero in all these stories is God. It’s His grace and forgiveness that shines in the darkness.

Matthew's list shows the grace of our loving God and serves as a perfect example for the results of redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, and transformation. Think about it. This list is full of liars, cheaters, fornicators, adulterers, a polygamist, and Israel's most evil king. (Manasseh) All these people, men, and women are who make up Jesus' family. He was born innocent and has never sinned, but His lineage is filled with morally corrupt individuals.

Answer me this... Can a prostitute go to heaven? Can an adulterer? Can a murderer? Can a liar? Absolutely! But only because of the grace of God, through repentance from sin, and by putting one's trust in Jesus as their Savior.

Hidden in this boring genealogy is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. God used Matthew to point sinful people to Jesus. No matter what your past may be. No matter what sins may be present in your life. Jesus is willing to save you. He understands where you're coming from. He knows exactly what you are going through. In these often-overlooked names from Jesus' past we see the power of God's holy grace applied to fallen men and women, and through their stories of redemption and restoration we see what God can do. Great news this morning! Jesus didn't come because of your goodness. He didn't come because you're good at religion. He didn't come because He thought you would make a good member of the team. Christ Jesus came to save sinners! He came to save you from yourself. He came to give you eternal life. The same grace extended to these women is the same grace available to you. I invite you in the name of Jesus to come forward, repent, and ask to be forgiven. Want you come?