

The People Before Christ
Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

What is it you look for in a good book? Enter a bookstore and you are instantly overwhelmed by the thousands of books that beg to be picked up. You may immediately bypass the finance or travel sections, unless you are looking for a book on investments or traveling to another country. You may even skip over the children's section, unless you are buying something for a young grandchild or you just like the brightly colored carpet.

Let's say you are interested in something fictional but don't have any recommendations, where do you begin? Romance? Science fiction? Drama? Crime? Mystery? Western? Maybe it's the cover or the title that initially appeals to you. Something about them draws your attention to remove it from the shelf and read the back cover or the endorsements. They may have enticed you to pick that book out of the many others on the shelf and after reading the story summary, you turn to page 1 and begin to read the opening paragraph. While there may be an initial allurements of the book to select it based on a picture or title, it is the first line that often determines whether you decide to purchase a copy to take home and read. Someone has said that "you can never underestimate the power of a good opening line."

Those opening words compel you to ask questions and keep reading because they draw you to know the who, what, when, where, how and why. They are crucial to pulling you in deeper to find out what happens to the characters in the story. The following opening lines are considered by many critics to be among the best in literature. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Jane Austen – *Pride and Prejudice*

"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." George Orwell – *1984*

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it

was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Charles Dickens – *A Tale of Two Cities*

"He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish." Ernest Hemingway – *The Old Man and the Sea*

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." L.P. Hartley – *The Go-Between*

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." J.R.R. Tolkien – *The Hobbit*

So it is when we open the book of Matthew and we immediately read "**A record of the genealogies of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham**" our mind and eyes begin to glaze over and we are compelled to skip this list of names considering it to be boring or we trudge through it mispronouncing many in the process.

A scant glance of Matthew's opening words do not capture our attention. Yet a closer look, and especially to Jewish readers, these words should draw you in like a magnet attracting a piece of metal or a vacuum drawing up that glob of pet hair.

The reader who has managed to get to the end of Matthew's book may have a different view of the genealogies after reading the words of Pilate as he stood before the crowds while pointing to Jesus exclaiming "behold your King". He is immediately compelled to return to the beginning of the story to find out why Jesus would be described by this Roman ruler as a king. It is in these opening words and this list of names that undeniably and irrefutably make the case for the accuracy of Pilate's remark and the claim that Jesus is Messiah.

Even while the crowd denied that Jesus was their king, boldly claiming that they had no king but Caesar, was a refusal on their part to acknowledge the clear evidence of the genealogies recorded in the Temple. We will see in a moment that Jesus truly was a King, and that He was their king, even though they were unwilling to admit it. The facts were indisputable.

While we may tend to skip over the genealogies, they are important for us to consider and that's why I have chosen to take a look at the people before Christ in our Christmas sermon series.

All names tell a story. Whether good, bad, or unknown, the names in these two genealogies are a part of history. They give us a window to peak through as we look to see what was going on during the time they lived. We come to understand that the names listed for us in the two genealogies found in Matthew and Luke are about the central figure of Jesus Christ. The first point I would like us to consider today is the importance of the genealogies.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GENEALOGIES

Only recently, say the past 20 years or so, has ancestry held any interest. Most people in our culture have little understanding of their heritage. We may not even know our great-great-grandparents, where they lived or what they did. Those who do investigate their past do so primarily as a hobby.

But not so for the Jewish people. Their genealogy was an important part of their lives. Land was based on family name. When the Israelites conquered Canaan, the land was divided into 12 parcels and your tribe determined where you would live within that parcel. Then those parcels were divided up by clans and families. The daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses with a legitimate concern because there were no males in the family to continue the family name and retain the land of their father. If they married, the land would be given to their husband and the women would lose their inheritance. Moses took the concern to God who said that their point was valid and made a ruling on their behalf so that they would retain their family right in keeping the land of their father.

Genealogies were important to determine if you were eligible to serve as a priest. When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem after their years of exile, some of the men couldn't verify they were descendants of Levi and were barred from serving

in the Temple.

Genealogies were also important when there was a question about being a legitimate heir to the throne. The Pharisees challenged a lot of what Jesus had to say or what He did, but one thing they could not dispute was His lineage. Records were meticulously kept in the Temple. So when we read in Luke that Joseph was the supposed father of Jesus, sometime after Jesus was born, even though He was not the blood father of Jesus, he went to the Temple to draw up the documents to adopt Jesus making him a legal heir in the eyes of the Temple. He therefore, had the right to be named in these genealogies. It gives Jesus a legitimate path back to Abraham in Matthew's account and back to Adam and essentially to God in Luke's account.

Now keep this in mind when reading the genealogies that they go back some 4000 years. It is, as Matthew points out throughout his gospel, the fulfillment of prophecy going back to the passage we considered last week in **Genesis 3:15** and not just that promised prophecy of a redeemer, but also promises made to Abraham and David.

If it is true that all Scripture is God breathed, then even the genealogies that appear throughout scripture are important. Let me give you five reasons why the genealogies are important.

1. They help substantiate the Bible's historical accuracy. They are real historical people who give us an understanding of how we should live our lives. Their historical fact validates the authenticity of Scripture. Adam was not a fictional character or merely an allegorical idea who only provides a moral compass. He, like all the names, was real. Because of its historical accuracy, it also establishes the consequences for sin.

2. They confirm prophecy. Isaiah 11:1 prophesied that the Messiah would come through the line of David. These genealogies confirm Jesus' legitimate claim to the throne because the accurate records in the Temple would verify it. In a moment, we'll look at both the legal and regal right of Jesus to be the King. Old Testament prophecy is

confirmed in the genealogies.

3. They demonstrate that God is detail-oriented and is interested in individuals. He isn't just biding His time, waiting for the end to happen. From beginning to end He is actively engaged in our world with us and has a plan. As we see in the genealogies, that plan is centered on Jesus Christ and in that plan about Jesus, God includes people in that plan. He had a specific plan for an individual named Abraham who would father a nation, from whom would come the Messiah, who would impact all of history for the purpose of saving many from sin. If nothing else, it shows that God is not in some corner of the universe uninterested in what happens on this third planet from our sun. He is directly involved. Even just a cursory glance through **Psalm 139** reveals how important each of us matters to God and how intimately He is acquainted with us.

4. We can learn from the example of different people listed. When we read their story in the Old Testament, we see their view of God and we can learn valuable lessons from them. Some are worth emulating while from others we learn what not to do. Something I'll touch on here and mention later is that these genealogies show us that God doesn't limit Himself to using only the super spiritual people or even those in the Jewish blood line. As we'll discover there were some wicked people in Jesus' family tree as well as some Gentiles. It goes to show us that God uses ordinary people, even when they fail.

5. It formed the basis of the kinsman redeemer. We see that when Boaz brought the right to buy Elimelech's property, which included marriage to Ruth, to a closer relative who refused to claim the right of kinsman redeemer, giving it instead to Boaz.

When we think about the importance of these two genealogies and the people who came before Jesus, I want to consider two important truths. We will look first at Matthew's account, for it is here that we see Jesus' legal right to be the Messiah. Then we will look at Luke's account where we see Jesus' regal right to be the Messiah. Matthew takes us

through His lineage from Joseph's family tree. Luke takes us through His lineage from Mary's family tree. Their connecting point is with Abraham up to David where they separate and take two parallel paths until we come to Joseph and Mary where they reconnect. It is important to note that with Jesus those two lines end fulfilling the promise to David that the Messiah would sit on His throne forever. Turn to Matthew where we look at the legal lineage.

A. The Legal Lineage – **Matthew 1:1-17**

We begin by noting that this is the record or book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew establishes two important points that would be relevant to his Jewish audience. Now when it says that Jesus was the **"son of"** doesn't mean that He was their physical son born to them. In that sense it would be impossible for Jesus to be physically born to both Abraham and then to David as well. Using the term **"son of"** was a way of saying that Jesus was related to them through the family tree.

That Matthew refers to David and Abraham is important because it was to these two men that God made covenants.

He first notes that Jesus is the son of David. The covenant with David was made in **II Samuel 7** where God told David that someone from his royal family would sit on the throne forever. Matthew refers to Jesus as the son of David. That's a significant designation because it tells us two things. The name Son of David was a term used to refer to the Messiah. So the first point Matthew is making is that Jesus is the Messiah. Son of David is also important because it establishes Jesus as part of the royal line who had legitimate title to the throne.

Matthew then says that Jesus was the son of Abraham. In **Genesis 12:15** God made a covenant with Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. This pointed to the promised redeemer coming through Abraham's offspring. Where being the son of David gave Jesus the royal right to the throne, son of Abraham gave Jesus the racial right to the throne. Only a person of Jewish descent through Abraham and David could a

person lay claim to being both the Messiah and the King. So by referring to both David and Abraham Jesus was a Jew who was also in the royal line. Noting these two covenants showed that Jesus was part of the rightful line and pointed to Him being the Messiah.

Now when we follow Matthew's genealogical line, which gives Jesus the legal right to the throne, we discover a problem.

Jeremiah 22:28-30

Here's the problem. **Matthew 1:11-16** records the names of Jeconiah and his offspring, but **Jeremiah 22:28-30** tells us that God cursed Jeconiah so that none of his offspring would sit on the throne, that it would be as if he was childless. That's a problem. How could Jesus fulfill the promise to David when God said someone from his lineage would sit on the throne especially when we consider what God said in **Jeremiah 23:5-6** **"The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In His days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.'"**

How can this curse be made into a promise fulfilled through Jesus?

The curse related to the actual occupation of the throne. None of Jeconiah's sons ever sat on the throne because they were deported to Babylon. The kingship did not pass through them. If Jesus had been a physical descendant of Jeconiah fathered by Joseph, He would not have had a legitimate claim to the throne because of this curse. What we will see is that Luke's genealogy makes it clear that the right to the throne didn't come through Solomon but through one of David's other sons, Nathan.

So while Matthew shows us the legal lineage of Jesus from Joseph, His adopted father, back to David, Luke shows us the regal lineage of Jesus through the actual blood line of Mary who also was related to David but not through Solomon. Her lineage went back to David through His son Nathan which gave Jesus the royal and legitimate right to

sit on the throne, thus bypassing the curse on Jeconiah. It is in **Luke 3:23-38** that we see the regal lineage.

B. The Regal Lineage – Luke 3:23-38

This passage not only establishes the royal right of Jesus to sit on the throne, it also substantiates the importance of the virgin birth that we read about back in **Luke 1:34-35** where the angel informed Mary that she would conceive a child even though she was a virgin. If Jesus had been a blood offspring of Joseph, He would not have had the right to the throne because of the curse, but because He was only the blood offspring of Mary, the genealogies would clearly show His claim to the throne and point to Him as the Messiah. You can hopefully see how important the genealogies are as the virgin birth protected Jesus from disqualification.

The accuracy of these genealogies shows us that Jesus was not some self-appointed Messiah, a delusional reformer, or just a good teacher. Matthew showed the Jews that Jesus clearly was who He claimed to be. Luke showed the same truth to all of humanity. How wonderful the news must have been to Mary when the angel told her that she would be the mother of the One who was to be given the throne of David. The genealogies fulfill the promises to David and Abraham and to the world that the Savior has come. That's how important the genealogies are.

For a moment now, let's look at the identities within the genealogies.

II. THE IDENTITIES WITHIN THE GENEALOGIES

There are a couple of things I want you to see here in this list of names. The first is the sovereign grace of God in choosing people who are a part of His plan and second, God uses ordinary and broken people, people who are imperfect, people who are flawed, people who make mistakes, people who repent and even people who are unrepentant. He even uses others we may think couldn't or shouldn't have a role in God's plan but He uses even them as

He does with four Gentile women.

John Phillips gives us an important lesson we should all consider and take to heart when he writes: **“The genealogy of the Lord Jesus demonstrates the fact that in spite of human failure, God pursued His perfect plans down through the long centuries. Never once did He drop that purple thread.”**

John MacArthur adds: **“A careful look at the descendants both of Abraham and David reveals people who were often characterized by unfaithfulness, immorality, idolatry, and apostasy. But God’s dealings with them was always characterized by grace.”**

Folks, that should encourage each one of us. That should give us hope that God isn’t just looking for the perfect, He’s looking for the available. This list of names also shows us that no matter how hard Satan tried to circumvent God’s plan for the redeemer to come through the line of David, God’s plans always won out. While Satan was attacking the line of Solomon, God was preserving the Messianic line through Nathan. In these lists we see men who were wonderful, but we also see men who were wayward and wicked. And included in Matthew’s account is something unheard of in the listing of genealogies. It is the names of women.

We see men of faith like Abraham who had been called out of a pagan culture to follow God by faith. We read how his faith was challenged and while at times he came up short and trusted himself instead of God, we see in the end that his faith had grown to the point of complete faith and obedience to God. **Romans 4:20-21 “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.”**

The promise of a great nation through whom the other nations of the world would be blessed rested in his only son who lay on an altar about to be sacrificed, but God saw that Abraham fully trusted Him. In writing about faith, James identifies

Abraham as an example and makes this claim about the patriarch: **“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend.” James 2:23**

David is another example of someone wonderful in the lineage of Jesus. After Saul was rejected as king for his willful disobedience, Samuel told the first king that God was seeking a man after His own heart. David, the shepherd-king, made a conscious effort to follow God and though there were times of blatant sin, yet he still had a heart for God evidenced in his heartfelt repentance and desire to seek after God as we see in many of his psalms.

Jehoshaphat was another king who sought the Lord and although he aligned with wicked King Ahab, he endeavored to seek the Lord. At one point when Assyria marched against Jerusalem, he cried out to God **“We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.” II Chronicles 20:12**

We could speak about the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah that directed the nation back to worshipping God.

And of course, we should mention Joseph who is described by Matthew as a righteous man.

Luke includes names beyond Abraham the likes of which are Noah and Enoch and Seth. **Genesis 6:9** describes Noah as a **“righteous man, blameless among the people of his time.”** Peter calls him a **“preacher of righteousness” (II Peter 2:5).**

From **Genesis 5:22** we learn that Enoch walked with God. **Hebrews 11:5** notes that Enoch pleased God. **Verse 6** tells us that faith is what pleases God. So Enoch had faith in God, a faith that pleased God. Enoch believed God existed and believed that God rewarded those who by faith walk with Him. Enoch’s reward was that God took him before the judgment of the flood so that he did not see death.

But before he was taken, he fathered Methuselah, who fathered Lamech, who fathered Noah.

Seth is another wonderful name. He fathered Enosh. **Genesis 4:26** says it was “**at that time men began to call on the name of the Lord.**”

There are some wonderful names in these genealogies, people whose faith, obedience, and character we would do well to emulate.

But there are also those who were wayward and wicked. Some returned to the Lord, others did not. Judah was an adulterer.

Many of the kings led the nation away from God. Beginning with Solomon, while he had some good qualities and gave wonderful wisdom, he, at times, didn't heed his own advice. Through many of his wives his own heart was led into idolatry which in turn moved the nation to pursue false gods. Time and again, Satan moved in the hearts of kings to turn the nation away from God. Satan almost succeeded in snuffing out the line of Solomon when Queen Athaliah seized the throne and murdered the kingly line, with the exception of Jehoash, who was hidden by King Ahaziah's sister.

Then of course there is Manasseh who was considered the most wicked king in Judah's history.

It's important again to note that God used people who were flawed and people who had failed at following Him, but for His sovereign rule and His significant grace His plan prevailed down to the birth of Jesus.

Matthew also records the names of four women. On the one hand it is a demonstration of His grace and on the other hand it struck at the nationalistic pride of Israel to think that they alone were God's chosen because God elected to use four Gentile women in His plan of redemption through Jesus.

Three of them were women of tarnished character. Two were prostitutes, one was an adulteress. We know the story of Rahab who was a Canaanite living in the city of Jericho at the time of Israel's conquest. She is introduced to us as a prostitute. Some have tried to soften her reputation by

translating a similar Hebrew word as hostess or inn keeper. In any case, even if that is the case, she still lied, deceived and committed treason. Regardless of what her reputation was, she was still a Canaanite woman who developed faith in God after hearing about Him. Sometime afterward she married into the tribe of Judah and subsequent lineage of David.

Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. According to culture, when a husband died, the next oldest son was to marry the widow to raise up offspring for the deceased brother. Two of Judah's sons died, and Tamar was promised the third son by Judah. When he was old enough, Judah failed to give that son to Tamar. She took matters into her own hands and dressed up as a prostitute. Judah saw her and not knowing who she was, had sex with her and she became pregnant. Her son became part of Judah's lineage. Tamar was also a Canaanite with a checkered reputation.

Ruth is the only one who appears to have a good character. She shows kindness, loyalty, faithfulness and other admirable qualities, yet she was a Moabitess. Moab was the son of Lot and his oldest daughter. They were less than hospitable in allowing Israel passage. But the sin which grieved the Lord and caused them to be cursed from being allowed into the Tabernacle for several generations was that they along with the Midianites conspired on how to defeat Israel. King Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel who instead blessed them. Balak was none to happy, but fueled by greed, Balaam gave them a plan that would serve to jeopardize Israel's separatism from the other nations. He told them to introduce their women to the Israelite men, they would intermarry and so be destroyed from within because the women would introduce them to idolatry, which would dilute their people and their worship. And that's what happened. God judged Israel and purged those who had broken the covenant by marrying outsiders and also cursed Moab for its role in the debauchery. Yet out of that people, God had His hand in the life of Ruth who in time would meet and marry Boaz who would be the great-grandfather of David.

The fourth woman mentioned in Matthew's account is Bathsheba. She was a Hittite, not an Israelite and even though she and David sinned through an act of adultery, it was her son Solomon who had been promised the right to the throne.

We should thank God that He uses people with flaws. We should be thankful that His plans can never be overthrown, but will accomplish His purpose in His timing.

We have seen the importance of the genealogies and the identities within the genealogies. Let me close with a couple thoughts about the impact from the genealogies.

III. THE IMPACT FROM THE GENEALOGIES

Within these two genealogies we see not only the legal right and royal right Jesus had to the throne, we also see **His humanity** and **His deity**.

A. His Humanity

B. His Deity

In **Matthew 1:16** it says that Joseph was the husband of Mary, **"of whom was born Jesus."** The phrase **"of whom"** clearly indicates that Jesus was physically born to Mary, but was not the physical child of Joseph. His miraculous conception is explained in **verses 18-25** and point us to His deity. The Messiah was to be a son, therefore He had to be born. And Luke takes all the way back to God, showing us His deity that God became man as **John 1:1, 14** tells us.

There is one more point revealed in the names noted in these genealogies. I said earlier that the central focus of the genealogies is Jesus. The genealogies also speak to **His purpose**.

C. His Purpose

His purpose is revealed in His name.

Jesus was the name given to Joseph by Gabriel. It's a name that tells us He would be the Savior, that He would save us from sin. It's a name that speaks to the promise God gave Adam and Eve that He

would send a redeemer, someone to rescue from sin.

Christ is not a name but a title. It is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word **Messiah**, which means anointed one. He was the One chosen by God for the God-ordained purpose to save us from our sins.

The list of genealogies is important not just because it validates the person of Jesus in history as someone who really lived in time and space, but because it points to the purpose of His coming – to seek and save the lost.

J. Vernon McGee notes **"The New Testament rests on the accuracy of this genealogy because it establishes the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is of the line of Abraham and of the line of David. The line of Abraham places Him in the nation, and the line of David places Him on the throne."**

Warren Wiersbe writes **"God in His providence ruled and overruled to accomplish His great purpose in bringing His Son into the world."**

Names are worth noting. The names in this genealogy point to Christ whose birth we celebrate along with the angel who announced that **"in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."**

Rightly do we sing:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus

There's just something about that name.

The more I think about the genealogies, the more I am glad that God uses the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary. If He can use people like them, He can use people like us. And because people matter to God, He made it possible for us to become His children through belief in Jesus Christ.

John 1:12 "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

So don't skip the genealogies. They are important because they tell a story. These are about Jesus Christ.