

Text:

Matthew 1.1-17

Big Picture:

Matthew introduces his gospel by letting his readers know the genealogy of Jesus. Through the retelling of Jesus' lineage, we discover that Jesus is not only the son of Joseph, but also the son of David and of Abraham. Matthew will also introduce us to the fact that this son is also the Messiah.

Key Verse:

Matthew 1.1 – This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham. (NIV)

Materials Needed:

If you wanted to get creative, you might design or find a family tree for people to draw out their family tree. This might be especially helpful for the children.

Preparing for the Lesson:

Today's lesson has less text than the typical lesson, but it is no less important. In fact, it may be more crucial to the entire story than any other just because of the way it sets up everything to follow.

Beginning a story of someone's life with a genealogy was a common occurrence in antiquity (as it is still the case today). What is unusual about Matthew's list is who he includes. We find five women listed, four by name, within Jesus lineage. This fact *is* highly unusual and so we immediately ask why this divergence from the norm. A brief overview of these women reveal that their pasts are not always pretty Tamar acted like a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law, Rahab was a prostitute, and Bathsheba was involved in an affair with King David. One begins to wonder if their tawdry character is somehow a reason for their inclusion.

It can certainly be said that God uses sinful people in salvation history, but there are men within this list who are also considered poor characters. (Manasseh, for instance.) So, it would seem that we should not assume the inclusion of these women are simply because of their sinful character.

Perhaps a better place to look is in their national origins. All were foreigners (except Mary). Perhaps the inclusion of women (again, highly unusual) would create enough of a start in Matthew's readers that they would remember the nationalities of these women and understand that the story of the Messiah is a universal story—it includes all nations. Matthew 28.19 seems to echo this thought as Jesus tells his disciples to go into all nations to make disciples.

Even this, however, may not be a full explanation of Matthew's purposes. For this, we need to include Mary, who is listed as the mother of Jesus. She is not a foreigner and not a woman of questionable character. In fact, she is the exact opposite, as we discover later in Matthew's gospel. This is a woman of faithfulness, betrothed to a man who would prove to be righteous. (In next week's passage, we discover he wanted to divorce Mary quietly, so as to not disgrace her. Doing so with much shame would not have been outside the boundaries of the law, by the way.) This idea of righteousness may also be why Bathsheba is never mentioned by name, but is listed as the wife of Uriah. If you remember the story, you cannot help but be

reminded, as some have said, that Uriah proved to be a more righteous man drunk than David was sober. It is Uriah's righteousness that stands out.

As we continue to look at the stories of these women, we discover Tamar acted righteously (yes, we have a difficult time seeing how her actions were right, but if you read the story, you discover that Judah actually vindicates her actions.) Same with Rahab. She is listed as one of the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11. Regardless of her past occupation, she acted in a righteous manner. Ruth follows a similar pattern. She could have very easily remained in her home country, but chooses to follow her mother-in-law and support her.

What do we make of all of this? Right living is important to Matthew, both in the genealogy of Jesus and in his gospel as a whole. Those who live righteous lives will be commended in the gospel of Matthew and at times, they are people from whom we least expect it, including people who are not the religious leaders or who are foreigners, or non-Israelites.

The second major point that should be seen in this genealogy is this: Jesus is the Messiah, son of David and son of Abraham. Both of these men were promised generations to come and Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment to these promises. Regardless of what you think about Jesus' biological origin, Matthew wants you to have no doubts of his Messianic origin.

Possible Lesson Outline:

If this is your first group meeting of this new group year, be sure to spend time getting to know one another. Make sure everyone knows everyone else. You might spend a couple of minutes of your initial discussion letting people share where they are from, how they got to South Plains and the like. Obviously, if your group has the same roster as last year, this becomes less crucial, but make sure to spend a few minutes doing this just to ensure everyone starts off on the same foot.

I would use as an ice-breaker question: Tell us about someone famous in your family tree. You may also want to share those who are infamous. You could also ask people to share the person in their lineage who might be considered the "spiritual giant" of the family.

Go through the discussion questions together.

Close with a time of prayer.

For the Kids:

If you have children in your group, you might work with them to draw a family tree, either biological or spiritual (that is, individuals who have helped shape faith from generation to generation).

Another option would be to have the children tell about their parents and grandparents. What is important to them about these individuals? In what ways have these individuals helped you learn about God?

Discussion Questions:

How would you expect a description of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, savior of the world, to begin? How does your understanding compare to what we read in the first 17 verses of Matthew? Why the differences?

Why does Matthew start with a genealogy? What is unique about this genealogy? In what ways do we talk about our heritage of faith? In what ways can we do a better job of celebrating that faith heritage?

What do we already know about Jesus after just one verse of the book of Matthew?

Five women are listed here in Matthew's genealogy, which was highly unusual. Why do you think these women were included?

How do you deal with ancestors who do not quite fit in the nice, neat story of your faith? In what ways do they tarnish your family's story? In what ways do they strengthen it?

What does this section tell us about Jesus, the Messiah? What does it tell us about God?

If the opening chapters tell us about what is to come in the rest of the book, what should we expect from Matthew's gospel after having read the first 17 verses? What themes do you think we will see in the rest of the book?

Spiritual Formation & Worship:

One thing that might help you reflect on those individuals who have been a blessing to your faith is to go home this week and write a letter to that individual thanking him or her for his or her influence. This may simply be a letter you write and never deliver (for some, that person may have already passed away so it would be impossible to deliver), or you may want to actually send the letter. The point, I think, is the time you take to reflect on just what it is they did that was such an influence to you. As you come up with these things, reflect on how you may or may not do these same things in your life. How can you do a better job being this person for others?

Prayer Ideas:

I think it would be appropriate to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the men and women of faith who have influenced us in our own faith journeys. You might have each person share the person for whom they are most thankful because of their instruction and encouragement in faith. Better yet, prayer around the circle asking each person to prayer his or her own prayer of thanksgiving. It may be as simple as "God, I thank you for Mary," or it may include the reasons they are thankful for this person.

What's Next:

Next week's text is Matthew 1.18-3.12.

Text:

Matthew 1.1-17

Key Verse:

Matthew 1.1 – This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham. (NIV)

Summary:

Matthew introduces us to Jesus, not only as the son of Joseph, David and Abraham, but also as the Messiah.

Key Points:

Introducing a person through their ancestry was not uncommon for authors in Matthew's day. Matthew, however, does a couple of interesting things with the genealogy of Jesus. First, he discusses the legal rather than biological lineage of Jesus. Joseph is the adoptive father of Jesus (we do not, however, discover this fully until the verses following our section today). Joseph is actually hardly mentioned, referred to simply as the husband of Mary. As the husband of the mother of Jesus, this qualifies him as the father of Jesus.

The second thing Matthew does is include women in Jesus' genealogy. This is highly unusual. Much has been written about Matthew's reasons for doing this. The scandalous nature of some of these women (Tamar pretended to be a prostitute, Rahab *was* a prostitute, Bathsheba—not even mentioned by name—reminds us of David's indiscretion) leads some to claim Matthew is showing God includes even the sinners in the story of salvation. While this is certainly true, it may be better to assume that these women, most of them foreigners, show God's intent in including all nations in salvation. This sets up what we read in Matthew 28.19, where Jesus tells his disciples to go to “all nations” to make disciples.

What is without question in this section is this: Jesus is the Messiah and has a rightful place in the lineage of those who had been promised their descendants would be a great nation (Abraham—Genesis 17.5) or have a descendent on the throne forever (David—2 Samuel 7).

Possible Reading Schedule:

In future weeks the readings will be divided into a schedule that will allow you to read a portion of each section every day. Because this week's section is so short, this will not be done for this week.

Discussion Questions:

NOTE: These questions will be geared toward discussions with your family during your studies. They are intended to help you to continue to think about the text throughout the week. Feel free to adapt them as you see fit for your specific family situation.

- Before we ever read about Jesus in Matthew's gospel, what do you know about Jesus? How would you describe him to someone who asked you about him?
- If you were going to write a story about Jesus, where would you begin? What would be your first story?

- Who was David? Why is it important that Jesus is listed as the “son of David?”
- Who is Abraham? Why is it important that Jesus is listed as the “son of Abraham?”
- Why do you think Matthew would include all of these people in his account of Jesus’ genealogy? Do you know any of the names on this list? What do you know about them?
- Matthew divides Jesus’ genealogy between Abraham and David, then David to the exile, then the exile to the Messiah. What do you know about the exile? Why would this event in the history of Israel been significant to Matthew readers? Why would the coming of the Messiah been an important aspect of the exile?
- If you were going to write a story about your family history, what would you want other people to know? What family members would you want people to hear about?

Things to Do:

NOTE: Each week within this section, there will be a list of activities that will help you and your family better process the story of that particular week. The activities will be focused on including the entire family, but can be done by individuals as well. The idea is that you pick and choose an activity that best fits your situation.

- Draw a picture of your family tree.
- Draw a picture of your spiritual family tree, that is, the people who influenced you to faith and the people who influenced their faith and so on...
- Interview an ancestor about their faith. If you can do this face-to-face, great. If not, come up with a list of questions you can mail or email this individual.
- Talk to your child about your dreams for them as a parent or grand-parent of faith. If you were going to write out their lineage for generations to come, what would you want to see?
- Research someone you do not know in the lineage of Jesus.
- Research the concept of “Messiah” for the Jews, especially those who experienced the exile. When they heard that the Messiah had come, what would they have been thinking?
- If you do not know it, research the heritage and history of South Plains. Find someone who can share with you the history and where we have come from.
- Pray for individuals within your faith heritage, both thanking God for their influence and praying for their continued faithfulness.
- List any famous people you may have in your lineage. Do you have any infamous people, as well?
- Memorize this week’s key verse, Matthew 1.1.

Other Resources:

If you will recall, when we went through *The Story* together, each age group had a version specifically geared toward their age level. If you do not already have a children's Bible that is age appropriate for your child/children, consider getting one for this study. It is helpful to your children to hear these stories written on a level they can best understand.