

Advent Genealogy: Tamar

Matthew 1:1-3

Matthew 1:1-3 *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,*

Advent & The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

This week we begin our Advent sermon series. Advent is a time of looking back on Christ's coming in the flesh and looking forward to Christ's promised return. When the Son of God took on humanity he did not just take on the appearance of man, but took on all that it means to be human. He did not spawn full grown in the middle of the desert. That is not where humans come from. Humans come from humans. We all have a lineage and so too does our Lord. The one who is eternally existent having no beginning and no end has taken upon himself an origin story. Matthew, therefore, begins his gospel with a genealogy.

Matthew 1:1 *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

The phrase "Book of the genealogy" in Greek is βιβλος γενεσεω. So Matthews Gospel begins with the phrase *Bible Genesis*. This pattern of referring to Genesis takes place in Mark and John's gospels as well. The only true analogy for the story of Christ is the story of creation itself. He is a new beginning and yet he incorporates the first beginning into his story. The argument of Matthew's gospel is that Jesus is the Christ, the promised messiah. He is therefore the son of David, the King who was promised the eternal throne. And he is the son of Abraham who was given

the promise of the covenant that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. And like Abraham's promised son Isaac, Jesus too would be sacrificed to the father.

Matthew's Genealogy is laid out systematically beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus, in three stanzas, containing fourteen generations each. The three groups of fourteen might be thought of as two weeks of generations. The first fourteen from Abraham to David is like the waxing of the moon into the full glory of a king. The second fourteen is like the waning of the moon to exile in Babylon. And the third fourteen is like the waxing of the moon again with the arrival of the true king, Jesus Christ. Each generation is described with the refrain, "was the father of," with only a few exceptions to this pattern. You can see the pattern in verse two.

Matthew 1:2 *Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,*

Therefore it is all the more interesting that Matthew includes four women in his genealogy adding a flourish to his refrain. The very pattern of the list causes these four women to stand out in our minds and in a sense prepares us for the culmination of the list in the announcement of Mary. There are many levels of analysis by which we could approach this genealogy. The strangeness of the last fourteen generations only having twelve, the movement from no king, to all kings, to no kings again. The Moral state of the line of Israel. The numerical significance of 14 and the line of David. This advent we will seek to discover what Matthew means the four women and the fifth. Each week of Advent we will look at the story of one of these women, the mother's of our Lord, so that we might see how their stories find their highest story in Christ.

The Four Women: Gentile and Crisis

The four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Why is it that Matthew mentions these four women?

This is something I'm hoping to figure out this Advent. Matthew is obviously being selective because he doesn't include other famous women such as Sarah, or Rebekah, or Leah.

The main commonality we might find between the four women referenced by Matthew is that none of them are Israelites. These four women are gentiles. Tamar and Rahab are both Canaanites, Ruth is a Moabite, and Bathsheba is a Hittite. Jesus is the promised king of the Jews yet his very lineage is gentile.

Secondly across the four women we see active intervention for the preservation of the line of the king or the kingdom itself. Judah's line nearly dies were it not for Tamar's intervention. Rahab preserves the spies at their first conquest into the promised land. Ruth returns to the promised land reestablishing the line through Boaz in Bethlehem. And Bathsheba secures the transfer of the kingdom from David to Solomon.

It is common to tell the story of these women through the lens of "look how God uses such messy people in his story." Although this is true it does not seem necessary that Matthew include these women to make that point. Judah, and David, and basically the whole line of kings in the second stanza would have been sufficient. I understand the temptation because 50% of the women participate in that oldest of professions, yet it does not make sense of Ruth or Bathsheba. The real similarity is that in each story a gentile preserves the line of the king in a moment of Crisis. In these women's stories we see that the kingdom cannot be established without the inclusion of the gentiles.

Tamar: introduction

Let's spend the rest of our time this morning looking at the story of Tamar. If our year has a recurring character it is Tamar. At the beginning of this year I preached through Tamar's story in Genesis 38. Then on Palm Sunday part of our consideration of the palms was the recognition that

Tamar's name means palm. She is a gentile associated with the king. Then a couple of weeks ago in Mark we looked at the triumphal entry so a revisiting of Palm Sunday, and here we are again returning to Tamar. Tamar is the first woman mentioned in Matthew's Genealogy.

Matthew 1:2-3 *Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron,*

Tamar is the mother of Perez and Hezron by Judah. Judah is the son of Jacob who receives the promise of the king. It is the lion of the tribe of Judah that we see fulfilled in David and ultimately in Christ. Therefore Tamar is the mother of the king.

Tamar is a gentile a woman from Canaan. And there is a sense in which she is an embodiment of the gentiles. Her name Tamar provides us this insight. Tamar is the word for Palm. Palms are associated with gentiles especially in Exodus 15. The first well watered place the Israelites camp at is a village called Elim which had 12 springs watering 70 palms. 12 is of course the tribes of Israel and 70 is the number of gentile nations as laid out in Genesis 10, the table of nations. Therefore the palm picks up its association with Gentiles, and then by Tamar its association with Kings which we see on Palm Sunday.

Line in Crisis

Tamar's story is recounted in Genesis 38. Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, ventures away from his brothers and marries a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua. Judah has three sons by the Canaanite woman Er, Onan, and Shelah. While living among the Canaanites Judah marries his firstborn son Er to the Canaanite woman Tamar. This first son Er is so wicked that the Lord puts him to death. The now widowed and childless Tamar has the right to be provided an heir by the next of Judah's sons. This custom for preservation of the people of God is laid down explicitly in

Deuteronomy 25.

Deuteronomy 25:5-6 *"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.*

6 And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

But when Judah's second son Onan received Tamar he refused to conceive with her. His refusal was wicked in the sight of the Lord and the Lord struck down Onan. Tamar is now twice widowed and still without an heir. Judah ought to have married her to his youngest son, Shelah, but instead he sent Tamar home to her father's house. Judah's reasoning is shown in Genesis 38:11.

Genesis 38:11 *Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house.*

When Shelah is of age Judah still refuses Tamar the right of a husband. In fact by Judah's fear his own name is nearly blotted out of Israel. Over the course of time Judah's wife dies and his only remaining son is rightfully committed to a woman he refuses allow in marriage. This is the end of the line of Judah were it not for the intervention of the gentile Tamar.

Tamar's Intervention

After the death of his wife Judah heads towards Tamar's home to shear his sheep. On the road Tamar disguises herself as a cult prostitute. Such was her confidence in the moral looseness of Judah she need only position herself on his way. Judah lay with Tamar unaware of her true identity, and leaves his signet, his chord, and his staff with Tamar as a

pledge of future payment of a goat. Yet when he sends the goat to her for repayment the temple prostitute he owed is nowhere to be found.

About three months later news reaches Judah that Tamar is pregnant by immorality. It is necessarily by immorality because she was technically betrothed to the younger brother. Judah calls for her to be brought out and burned. Judah perhaps thought he could finally be rid of this Tamar problem and simply marry his final remaining son to someone else. But Tamar has the evidence in hand, and sends the signet, the chord, and the staff saying it is by the owner of these things that she has become pregnant. Judah is exposed.

Genesis 38:26 *Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again.*

Tamar's Son's: Inclusion (Gentiles) & Exclusion Brothers

Tamar gives birth to twins (it runs in the family). The pattern of their birth shows us what we saw in the beginning of the story, the replacement of the older son. While she is giving birth one of the son's, Zerah's, hand emerges first, and a scarlet thread is tied on his wrist. But the other son, Perez, is born first. There is a sense in which the younger replaces the older that consistent theme throughout scripture. A scarlet thread will likewise make an appearance in our next story. It is through Perez, in one sense the younger son, that the line of Judah continues. The line of Judah is the line which leads to Christ.

Tamar is the mother of twins who by deception preserves the line of the king. We should be reminded of that other mother of twins, Isaac's wife Rebecca, who understands the importance of the word of the Lord more than Isaac and employs deception of Isaac in order that the word of God might be fulfilled. The promise is given to Jacob over Esau by Rebecca's

deception and the line of Judah continues by Tamar's deception. I don't really know what to say about that other than, weird huh?

Conclusion: What does it mean that Jesus' makes Tamar a part of his story?

1. In Tamar's story we see the line of the king is restored at the inclusion of the gentiles. Jesus is the true king and in his own story he is king of the Jews and the gentiles. Jesus' kingdom from the line of Tamar means he is bringing all nations to himself.

2. Tamar is scandalous and her mode of deception is not to be copied. Yet in this crooked story we see a glimmer of righteousness shining through. She is perhaps not righteous in an absolute sense, but Judah is right to see the glimmer of righteousness in her as he states she is more righteous than I. Is this not the righteousness of Mary, who having conceived by the Holy Spirit appears as an adulterer? Such was her care for the line of Judah that she was willing to be counted as a prostitute that the promised line might continue. Like Tamar, Mary is willing to be counted as an adulterer that the line of the king might be preserved.

3. Is this not a picture of the righteousness of Christ? Who although being truly sinless is counted as sinful so that we might become the righteousness of God?

2 Corinthians 5:21 *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

4. And just because it is a typical point in these Genealogies does not mean it is a point not worth making. If you stand in the midst of a situation as sin stained as Judah and Tamar, the work of Jesus Christ is sufficient to sift it for righteousness. Jesus is willing to bring you into his story, that is why he brought himself into ours.