

In the Shadows

The Ancestors

Matthew 1:1-17

December 3, 2023

HDBC

How many of you know the names of your great-grandparents? How many know the names of your great-great grandparents? A few genealogy enthusiasts will have lists of those names, but most of us have no idea once we get past a couple of generations. With some effort and an online DNA test you could probably find some of that information. But I doubt you could draw a clear line back forty generations! Unless you are royalty.

The current royal family in England can trace their lineage back thirty-five generations through many Georges, James's, Williams, Fredericks, Edwards, Henrys and Johns. For royal families genealogy is critical because power is not achieved through elections but through birth. That is an important part of the Christmas story.

This morning we are kicking off a 4-part sermon series for Christmas. It will focus on some of the lesser-known characters who are part of the Christmas story. They don't get top billing, like Jesus, Joseph and Mary. They are not even as well-known as the shepherds and wise men. They don't show up in any nativities or Christmas plays. They remain ***In the Shadows***, but they are important characters in the story of the birth of Jesus. Because they are included in the Bible's account of the birth of Jesus, they deserve some time in the sermons of Christmas. So, this year, they get their due.

The first involves a small group, rather than an individual. Their names are woven into a long list of names recorded by Matthew as he began his account of the life of Jesus. Matthew begins his gospel with a bold and even audacious statement. Right from the start he was telling his readers that Jesus, the itinerant preacher who was condemned by the Jews, crucified and buried by the Romans, and who was declared resurrected by His followers was indeed the Messiah. To quote Daniel Darling, **Matthew was declaring that he had the receipt to prove it.** That receipt was the lineage of Jesus.

The Old Testament prophets made it clear that the Messiah would not only come from Abraham but would be a descendant of King David. Matthew proves that both were true of Jesus. **Read the text. Matthew 1:1-6**

During the entire history of the human race God was providentially preparing for the coming of His divine son. In this genealogy, Matthew is showing God's hand in weaving together his plan for the coming of the Messiah in choosing just the right people to be in that line. He was in the lineage of the greatest king in Israel's history, King David.

There are actually two genealogical lists for Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew and Luke. Interesting differences:

1) **Different Chronological Views**

Luke goes present to past. Matthew goes from past to present.
Luke goes back to Adam. Matthew begins with Abraham.

2) **Differences in Names**

Luke traces Jesus to David through Nathan (3rd son of Bathsheba).
Matthew traces Jesus through Solomon, David's firstborn.

Luke identifies the grandfather of Jesus as Heli.

Matthew identifies him as Jacob.

Explanation: Matthew's list is paternal. Luke's is maternal.

By the way, the Pharisees did everything they could to discredit Jesus as the Messiah. Not one time did they point to his genealogy as proof that he could not be the Messiah. They would have gone over it with a fine-toothed comb. So, their lack of using it, gives further evidence to its truthfulness.

The thing that interests me is that the list includes the names of four women. That was almost unthinkable in a Jewish lineage. And more surprising is that three of the four committed gross sins, and the fourth was not even Jewish.

In his book, *God With Us*, John MacArthur calls them ***knots on the family tree***. But more than that, they are indications that the **grace of God** can be seen throughout the entire unfolding of the plan of redemption. The first glimpse of

grace was not seen at the healings of Jesus, or at the crucifixion of Christ. It is seen the kinds of men and women who were in the lineage of Messiah.

Furthermore, we see Jesus' identification with sinful humanity. Connection with some pretty sinful characters. But Matthew is careful to preserve the sinlessness of Christ. ***To Jacob was born Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus.*** Clearly indicating that Joseph was the legal father, but not the natural father.

Look at these four women who linger ***In the Shadows*** of the Christmas story.

1. Tamar (3)

What kind of woman was Tamar? Her story is found in Genesis 38. Tale of incest, prostitution, and deception.

Judah had chosen her as the wife of his oldest son, Er. Er was not a good guy. Don't know what he did, but God struck him dead. His brother, Onan became Tamar's husband, as the law required. He refused to father children with Tamar, so God struck him dead, also.

Judah had another son, but was afraid he too, would die, if he married her. He told her to go to her father's house while his third son grew up. No intention of giving him to her.

When Tamar realized what he had done she disguised herself as a prostitute and positioned herself along the road where Judah was traveling. She seduced him, without his knowing who she was. That encounter resulted in twin sons, Perez and Zerah being born. Perez carried on the Messianic line.

Shocking tale of betrayal, deception and seduction. There are no redeeming characteristics stated about her. She represents true depravity. Yet she is found in the lineage of Christ. If God would continue the Messianic line through a woman like Tamar, He must surely be a God of Grace.

2. Rahab (5)

Rahab, the harlot. Her name means *pride, insolence, or savagery.* She was a Canaanite, and they were the mortal enemies of the Israelites. When we first encounter her, she was in the city of Jericho and part of the

people who were enemies of God and His people. Furthermore, she was a prostitute, corrupting lives and destroying families. Joshua tells her story.

After 40 years of wandering, Israel entered the promised land. First battle would be in Jericho. Spies sent into the city. Happen upon Rahab, who hid them in her home. When city officials came looking for the spies, she lied to protect them.

They agreed to protect her if she would hang a scarlet thread outside the window of her home on the city wall. She did, indicating her new faith in the God of Israel. She not only left the gods of Canaan but became the great-great-grandmother of King David, and more importantly a part of the Messianic line.

3. Ruth (5)

Just one generation removed, we find another Gentile woman in the Messianic line. Unlike Rahab and Tamar, Ruth was not a harlot or adulteress. But she was a Gentile.

She was a **Moabite**. Entire Moabite race was the product of incest. Genesis 19:30-38. Lot was living in a cave with his two daughters after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The daughters were fearful that they would find no husbands, so one at a time they got their dad drunk and seduced him. These incestuous relationships produced two sons. One was named Moab, the father of the Moabite race.

The very existence of the tribe of Moabites was repugnant to the Jews. In fact, the Moabites and Ammonites (the other race of people which came from this episode) could not enter the assembly of the Lord. (Deut. 23:3). Yet, Ruth was led to the truth of God and received his grace, becoming another part of the lineage of the Messiah.

4. Bathsheba (6)

Matthew 1:6 mentions a fourth woman, without naming her. She is simply called *the wife of Uriah*. We know her name, Bathsheba. Hers is not a pretty story.

2 Samuel 11. On rooftop bathing, when David saw her. He lusted after her, sent for her, and had a sexual affair with her. This secret affair was not to remain secret for long. Their union produced a child.

Rather than confess the truth, David tried to cover it. A decision that ultimately included the murder of her husband. David then took Bathsheba as his wife. The child died soon after his birth. David was confronted by his sin and repented. Bathsheba again conceived and this son, Solomon became the next link in the Messianic line. She was involved in a scandalous affair with King David yet was part of the lineage of Jesus.

What a genealogy! Here are two harlots, a cursed Moabite, and an adulteress. Only four women mentioned in the list, and **each one has a mark on her life that should have excluded her** from such a lofty genealogy. And most of the men listed were not much better. This list is tainted by sinners from the front to the back.

This genealogy underscores the truth that **Jesus identifies with sinful people**. That is what the incarnation was all about. Jesus Christ become as we are, in order to provide salvation for us. It is Christ stooping to be like those who are unworthy of His fellowship. About Christ touching the untouchable. But that's the point.

Jesus' lineage is not about how good these people are, but about how gracious God is.

Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of NYC during dark days of depression and WWII. Often ride with firemen and policemen just to stay in touch with the people. He would sometimes take entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he would go on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving.

But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. *It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor.* the man told the mayor. *She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.*

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said *I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail.* But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying: *Here is the ten-dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.*

So the following day the New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren, fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced grocery store owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

That's a pretty good picture of one human's act of grace. God's actions of grace of even more wonderful.

This is a marvelous way for Matthew to introduce the Christmas story. By including these four women in the list, God was making a point. ***I am a God of Grace.*** That is the theme of the entire Christmas story. It is God's grace on display.