

*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, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.*

*And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.*

*And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*

*So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. Matthew 1:1-17*

Well, this morning we begin our walk together through the gospel of Matthew. What we know about Matthew, who is also called Levi - is that he was of Jewish origin, born in Galilee, the son of Alpheus. Vocationally he was a tax collector, which would have caused his fellow Jews to despise him for working in what was seen as collaboration with the Roman occupation force, as well as tax collectors were known to collect more money than required in order to fill their own pockets. We also know that Matthew became a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ and ultimately one of the twelve apostles. He was one of the three apostles who also wrote gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, along with Peter (gospel of Mark) and John (gospel of John). The gospel of Luke was written by Luke, a Greek physician.

Each gospel writer gives a collaborative but unique view of Jesus’s life; each focusing on a separate aspect of who Jesus is - John focuses on Jesus as the Son of God; Luke on Jesus is the Son of Man; Mark (by Peter) on Jesus is the Suffering Servant; and Matthew on Jesus is the Sovereign King. We see Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as Sovereign King as the “*Christ*” (savior/messiah), and as “*the son of David, the son of Abraham.*” We will continue to see this *Kingdom* concept emphasized in the weeks/months ahead as Matthew will define the *gospel* as the *message* of the kingdom; *disciples* as *citizens* of the kingdom; *discipleship* as the *demands* of the kingdom; the *church* as the *outpost* of the kingdom; *missions* as the *spread* of the kingdom; *devil/demons* as *enemies* of the kingdom; and *hope* as the *coming* of the kingdom. One common theme that runs throughout all these concepts is that Jesus is the sovereign King who alone grants salvation. The Gospel of Matthew is an account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Sovereign King promised in the Old Testament.

We see this clearly in our text for this morning as Matthew opens his gospel by recording Jesus’ family tree. Our tendency, as we read through the Word of God, whether it be the Old Testament or the New Testament, is to skip over the genealogies because we tend to see them as boring - and also because it’s easier to skip by all the difficult names that are hard to pronounce in the Bible. But the reality is when we roll up our sleeves and make our way through a tedious list of a family tree in God’s Word – we always find some precious treasures that give us even a deeper look into God’s heart. In our text for this morning we will see that in how the faithful power of God’s grace is at work in Jesus’s family tree.

Matthew opens his gospel by writing: "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1). Why would Matthew start this list with Abraham rather than with Adam? Well for the Jew, your worth, place in life, and personal identity was intimately connected to your family tree. And since Matthew was a Jew, who wrote his gospel for Jews, he opens by referencing David, who was the greatest King of the Jews, in order to prove the legal right of Jesus to be the King of Kings as the heir to David's throne. The family line you were born into meant everything, so in Matthew's gospel we have the lineage and the genealogy of a King - and in those days whenever the genealogy of a King was given, it was always from the fathers down to that king. That's why when Matthew begins this list he starts with Abraham, who is considered the *father* of the Jewish faith. Jesus is the rightful King of all Jews because he was born into the greatest of all royal Jewish families.

As we first begin to look at the names in "*the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ*" we must first consider what if we, as contemporary Christians, would put together a list of names that would make up our spiritual family tree. For some of us that list might include someone from history like Augustine, Luther, Calvin or Wesley – or someone famous today like Billy Graham or John Piper. Closer to home it might be someone who impacted our lives for Christ like a pastor, evangelist, family member or friend. For each one of us, those names reflect our journey and our place into the family of God, and we would put those names on our list. Yet most likely those on our personal list would not be names that we would expect to be in the first chapter of Matthew or in any genealogy in the Bible - because they would not have had much more influence or impact than just beyond our own lives.

There are some names that just don't fit in well in certain places in life. The manager of a large office noticed a new employee and asked him "What's your name?" The new worker replied, "John." The manager scowled and said, "Look, I don't know where you worked before, but I don't call anyone by their first name here. It breeds familiarity and that leads to a breakdown in authority. I refer to all my employees by their last name only...Smith, Jones, Baker, whatever...you got that? Now that we've finally gotten that straightened out - what's your last name?" The new guy sighed and said, "Darling. My name is John Darling." To which his new boss replied, "It's nice to meet you – John."

There are some names that just don't fit in certain places – and we find that in our list of names this morning. And one of the problems with our genealogies is that they do reveal to us that some of our forefathers were not the best of people. We all have some skeletons in our genealogical closets. Even the best of those listed in this genealogy were far from perfect. Jesus' family tree in the gospel of Matthew reveals that the faithful power of God's grace worked through the lives of people who were *deeply flawed and unfaithful*. But by the faithful power of God's grace God sovereignly created all people and all things in such a way that directs everyone and everything toward the fulfillment God's divine plans and purposes. Thus despite the reality we are sinfully flawed, God providentially uses us.

It's been said that "families are like fudge: mostly sweet, with a few nuts." Matthew lists those who are the "nuts" in this family, as he makes no effort to spruce up the tree. In speaking of the genealogy of Jesus most people tend to skip over the scoundrels and focus on the saints, but Matthew doesn't hide the sorry spots or the twisted twigs. A good example of this are Rehoboam, Joram, and Manasseh who as wicked kings caused many to abandon God during their reign. We see no righteous pattern in this list, which includes not only the flawed and unfaithful but also wicked kings and blatant adulterers.

This family tree of Jesus reveals God faithfully worked through people who were unfaithful and flawed – but He also did so through the lives of those who are *forgotten*. There are some names here that we know nothing about. What about Hezron and Ram? Abiud, Azor and Akim? Zadok? We don't know if they were saints or scoundrels, yet here they are on the list. This could be any of us; few of us here will ever make a great name for ourselves. But I believe the future history of heaven will reveal at least some of the *forgotten* to be the most valuable servants in all the Kingdom of God.

The greatest place in the glory of heaven will be for the *forgotten who were* humble, faithful, Spirit-filled men and women - who labored in obscurity serving Jesus and others in small, unheralded ways - who were not derailed by the winds and waves of trendy spirituality, nor were they distracted by a need to be recognized and affirmed. They simply surrendered to Jesus and joyfully served him. There is one particular abnormality in the genealogy of Jesus that I would like to look at this morning. Matthew lists the names of five women here. Normally, Jewish family tree lists did not contain the names of women. In the culture of that day women were regarded as possessions, not persons. In his regular morning prayers a Jewish man would thank God that he had not made him a Gentile, a slave or a woman. The inclusion of women's names in this genealogy would have stunned the Jewish readers to whom Matthew was writing this gospel. So why did he do so? For an answer let's look at the names.

The first woman listed is Tamar, who was not a Jew but a Gentile, a Canaanite, who played the role of a prostitute. She was the daughter-in-law of Judah, and Judah fathered Perez and Zerah through her as a prostitute. She doesn't seem to be a good fit for the family tree of Jesus. The second woman is Rahab, another Gentile. She was probably the leading prostitute in the city of Jericho in her day. Yet she is also listed in this genealogy. The third woman is Ruth, who was not a prostitute, but neither was she a Jew. She was a foreigner, a Moabite and by God's law Moabites or their descendants were not allowed to even enter into the assembly of God's people. Yet here we find Ruth – in Jesus' family tree.

The fourth woman is not named but she is described as Uriah's wife. We know her as Bathsheba, and she also was not a Jew. Scholars believe she was a Gentile, and according to the Bible Bathsheba was the one who committed adultery with King David and became pregnant through him. Yet again we see her name included in this genealogy of Jesus. And the very last name we read here is Mary, the teenage girl who was the physical mother of Jesus. We do know she was a Jew, yet as we've already said her name is out of place here, as women were not listed in Jewish family trees. What makes these five names stick out even more is that the four great models of godly women in Jewish history – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah – are not mentioned at all. As the faithful wives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were faithful both to God and to their husbands; you would have thought if any Jewish women were listed, it would have been them for sure. Yet they are not listed in the family tree of Jesus.

What do these names mean to us? For us, the *inclusion* of the names Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary – along with the *exclusion* of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah – should give us cause for great joy and overwhelming hope. In this genealogy Matthew is revealing to us the faithfulness of God to His promise of salvation through a Savior is for ALL unworthy sinners – not just for Jews but also for Gentiles, Canaanites, Moabites, Canadians, Americans, Africans, Asians, and First Nations. In Romans 3:22-23 we read that “*there is no distinction: for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” which means no matter who you are or what you've done – or no matter who you are not and what you have not done, we all are in desperate need of God's undeserved mercy and sovereign grace.

In Luke 5:31-32 Jesus said: “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*” What Jesus meant here is that if you think you are good enough to be forgiven; if you have done enough good to earn the right to go to heaven; if you think you are basically a good person and on that basis God will let you walk through the pearly gates – *you are deceived about who you are and sadly mistaken about who God is.* Jesus is telling us here that if we refuse to admit the reality of how sick we are in our sin, we will never fully know the full reality of the healing and restoration of God we are offered through Jesus Christ. It is only by the sovereign work of our most loving and holy God on the cross of Christ, that we are forgiven of our sin and restored back to the relationship with God we were created for. The good news of the gospel for those of us like Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba and Mary and Nancy and Jordan and Sandy and Tanya and Debbie and Trish and Judy and Lynell and Pam and Marian and Alice and Darlene and Joni - and all women and all men and all children and all kinds of people just like us.

This genealogy of Jesus reveals the faithful power of God's grace *over our fallen sinful nature*. There are a number of people on this list *who could have* negatively and radically affected the outcome of God's plan to send a Savior into the world to die on a cross and save us from our sins. No amount of human planning could have put this list of people together and come out in the end with the name of Jesus. The liars, cheaters, murderers, adulterers, and idol worshippers on this list had no earthly idea God was using their flawed and unfaithful lives to bring about the birth of our Lord and Savior. In Romans 9:15-16 God graciously declared: "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*" Praise God for the faithful power of His mercy and His grace over our fallen, sinful nature.

The faithful power of God's grace over our fallen sinful nature is also revealed in *how the names are arranged in the genealogy of Jesus*. In Matthew 1:17 we read: "*So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*" The first 14 generations can be seen as *ascending upwardly*, because for God's people the time between Abraham and David, though there were times of great pain and struggle, became the pinnacle in their history under King David and his son Solomon. But after David's time, the next 14 generations head *downward*. The kingdom divides, the northern kings are consistently evil, the southern kings are a mixture of good and bad, and they end up exiled into captivity. But in the next 14 generations things *go back up*, as God delivers His people from Babylon and restores them back to Israel, which ultimately ends with the birth of Jesus.

What is most significant in all this is that Jesus' genealogy is intentionally structured in 3 sets of 14 to focus on Abraham, David, and Jesus - each who were bearers of the covenantal promise God made in the Garden of Eden right after humanity's fall into sin, that God would send a Savior into the world to rescue and redeem us from the fatal effects of sin, so we might be restored back into the relationship with God we were created for. More than merely demonstrating Christ's right to reign as King over God's people, this genealogy declares Jesus to be the promised Savior in whom all before had hoped. Christ's lineage demonstrates He is the fulfillment of God's promises to bless His people and all nations through Abraham, and to provide a perfect King for God's people through the line of David.

In this Jesus' family tree reveals that God is sovereignly in control of all history, assuring that His promises, His purposes, and His will for His people will be fulfilled. While this genealogy list is somewhat less than one would expect would lead to the birth a Savior - it is a great blessing beyond compare to know that *our futures are not dependent upon our faithfulness, but rather upon God's faithfulness* to His will, purposes and plans for our lives. In 2 Timothy 2:13 we read that, "*if we are faithless, he (God) remains faithful—for he (God) cannot deny himself.*" This does *not mean* God remains faithful *to us* when we are "*faithless*" - as much as it means when we are "*faithless*" to God, He remains faithful *to Himself* in His plans, purposes and will - "*for he cannot deny himself.*" The Bible tells us that our part in all of this is simply to joyfully and obediently "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:12-13).

The opening of the gospel of Matthew reminds us that the purposes of God can not be frustrated by our fallen, self-centered, sinful choices in life. We also see that in that *Matthew's genealogy does not follow the normal pattern one might expect for a Jew*. Normally, the genealogical line passes on to the next generation *through the oldest son*. But Esau was the first-born son of Isaac, not Jacob. Those of you who know the story know that Esau gave up that right by trading it away for personal, selfish pleasures. In Jacob and Esau we clearly see that God is faithful to His sovereign eternal purposes and plans for our lives - in spite of what we might expect or do. In Romans 9:11-13 we read that by the faithful power of God's grace, God set in place what would happen Esau and Jacob's lives: "*Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call . . . 'The older will serve the younger.'*"

*"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* The very first thing we should notice in this family tree is the emphasis Matthew puts on one person: *"Jesus Christ."* This book is not about Matthew, it's not about Paul or Peter or John or any of the other apostles, or any one else we read about in the Old or New Testament. It's about Jesus. All of history is about *his-story*. Everything that has happened in the past, what takes place today, and what is yet to come, is about God and *His* plan to send a Savior into the world to rescue us from our sin and restore us back to God. The faithful power of God's grace is at work regardless of who we are or what we do.

The reality of all of this is that you and I are here today because God has sovereignly ordained it be so. The Bible tells us that God created each one of us in His image for the purpose of giving God glory – which means we all were created to reflect and reveal who God is in all that we say and do. Yet sin has warped God's image in us and continues to selfishly divert our hearts and lives away from God and away from His created purposes and plans. That is why Jesus came into the world. By the work of the cross our sins are forgiven, and by the reality of the resurrection we are set free from our selfishness to truly enjoy the fullness of the beauty and power and love and grace and truth of God in all that He is. You and I are here today because by the faithful power of God's grace - Jesus' death on a cross and resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven has restored the deep hunger and yearning of our hearts *for God* that was lost when our ancestors rejected God right after the beginning of creation.

Jesus said: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:44). The faithful power of God's sovereign grace has been drawing fallen, sinful people to the purpose and plan of His will from the beginning of time - and through all generations of unfaithful, flawed, and forgotten sinners up to this very moment. It is God who works in our hearts, both to will and to work for God's good pleasure, not the flawed hands and hearts of fallen, sinful human beings. The apostle Paul wrote: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life"* (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Jesus' family tree was filled with not just the good but also with the bad and the ugly. And I know my heart, and like the apostle Paul, I often count myself as the *"foremost"* of all sinners. Yet in His sovereignty and by His grace - God continues to be faithful. Jesus came to save bad and ugly like me, like you, like us. Zig Zigler puts it this way; "On the planet earth there are many kinds of people. But in God's sight, there are only two kinds. Not rich or poor, old or young, tall or short, fat or thin, black or white -- *only saved or lost*. In God's Kingdom the mighty and the humble join hands when all of them become the children of God."

John 1:12-13 tells us that: *"To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* Children of God are not people who are faithful and successful, who have great position or many possessions, who go to church and who live good, clean lives. Children of God are those who have fully surrendered their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, no matter who they are, where they've come from, or what they've done. 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* In the very next verse Paul tells us that this is all a sovereign work of God: *"All this is from God"* (2 Corinthians 5:18). In John 6:37 Jesus declared: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."* Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is a victorious declaration of God's faithfulness to that purpose. This is the good news we need to hear and hold onto when circumstances can get heavy and hard, as we try to live out our lives in a world which often feels chaotic and out of control. Yet just because everything in life isn't going according to our plan, doesn't mean it's not going according to God's plan! In fact, everything *is always* going according to God's plan. At times it may seem like sin and struggle and the world and the devil may have the upper hand - but God is faithful, and by the power of His grace God's providential plan is always sovereignly at work – even at this very moment.

Our family trees not only tell us where we've come from, it also tells us who we are today. Some of you may even know something of your own genealogy. Though I've never knew my father, I do know that the earliest church records tells us that the Botzet family originally came from the small village of Lieser, near the town Bernkastel-Kues in north central Germany. Lieser began as a farm in year 1086; it's in a valley surrounded by mountains both to the north and to the south. Because of its placement and rich soil, Lieser is best known for its farming, principally for wine making, even today. I think it is providential that my full first name – Leland – literally, in German, means “a valley meadowland.”

History also tells us that the Botzets lived under the Baronship of Trier for hundreds of years until the French Revolution, and thence under French occupation which began in 1794. When the French left in 1814 they left Germany a bankrupt land, which became even worse when Prussia took over in 1815. As a result of those hard, poverty stricken times, a number of Botzets immigrated to America, and came first to Chicago and then to Milwaukee - and then most seem to have settled in Wisconsin or Minnesota. Most worked as farmers, some as blacksmiths and butchers, and others – you may have guessed it, as wine makers. My great, great-grandfather was Nicholas Botzet, who was born in Lieser on April 17, 1835. He and his brother Henry emigrated to America in the 1850's to Milwaukee, where Nicholas married Mary Ann Schmidt and settled down in Wisconsin, until the late 1860's when he moved his family to Belle River, Minnesota. The Botzet family is still prominent there today.

A few years ago Nancy, Jennifer and I traveled there and I met some of that family I've never known before. We had a great time. It was a wonderful and fascinating experience to see both the similarities and differences we had; it seemed to be the same for them. One of the differences was that of faith; the Botzet klan has historically been Catholic folk – and the tribe I come from still are. Relationally it wasn't a problem for us; we simply focused on what we have in common. But what we didn't have in common was my being a pastor, and a Baptist at that, along with a great deal of education and lots of experiences (prison ministry, missions field of Philippines and Brazil, living in Canada, etc.). That's most likely true for most of us. No matter who you are, if you were to take a hard look at your family tree, you would most likely find at least a few who just don't fit into the normal flow of the family identity. For some of us that's not such a bad thing. The history of my life in growing up under my mother's and my step-father's family tree – is pretty broken and painful and filled with struggle. And while my life may have started out that way, by the faithful power of God's grace, my heart and my life and our new family tree have dramatically changed for the better. Thank you Jesus.

You see not only does our genealogy tell us where we've come from– it also reveals to us the faithful power of God's grace in where we are today. I saw this in the life of my Grandma Helen, a poor, gentle German woman of little means, who struggled and suffered the effects of abuse for years - but who, in coming to know Jesus as her Lord and Savior, was the happiest person I've ever known. And when she saw that old family pattern developing in my own life, she began to *faithfully* pray for me, and lovingly came along side Nancy and I until over time we also surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus. Today the dark side of our genealogy has now faded into the mist of the light of God's grace. By the faithful power of God's grace, our personal family of Botzets is now part of the bigger genealogy of the family of God in Jesus Christ. This is the family tree we belong to together with you here this morning.

The Bible tells us that by the faithful power of God's grace all that things occur in this life are part of God's grander scheme. Every person, every event carries within a definite, God initiated movement. History began with God molding the universe out of nothing, and even though God's perfect creation was corrupted by sin, He has been and is still at work redeeming and restoring everything back to Himself. In Jesus Christ, God entered human history to redeem us. This is the human history we read of in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. But this is also the history of my life and your life and our life together at Arrowsmith. God is working today at this moment to bring about our good and His glory in our lives. Jesus is calling us to surrender to him and put him at the center of our lives.

When you look through the list of characters that make up Jesus' family tree, it's not hard to recognize some deeply troubled roots here. These are our roots too – as individuals and as a church. Both the hard truth and the good news is that God uses unfaithful, flawed and forgotten people to accomplish His greater plans and purposes. And so it doesn't matter who you are now - or what you've have done or what you will do. What does matter today is this: Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If not, I pray you would open your heart to him this morning. You are not here today by chance or by accident. By the faithful power of God's grace Jesus brought you here to join together with a family of flawed, imperfect people who have been rescued and restored back to God.

What *also* matters today is this: If you *do know* Jesus as your Lord and Savior – What is God doing *in your* life and what are you doing for God *with your* life? If we are a flawed, imperfect people who have been rescued and restored back to God – we *will have* a deep hunger and yearning within our hearts for God, and we will not be satisfied with anything or anyone else than joyfully and passionately living with Him and for Him. God's Word tells us that we are to "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:12-13).

At the end of the day, we need to remember that life is short and precious – and we've been rescued and redeemed from the effects of sin and death by the faithful power of God's sovereign grace. This is at the heart of Jesus' family tree. The question we face is: How we will respond? The bottom line is this - as we move forward in the book of Matthew, we are going to see three distinct groups of people: 1) The religious leaders who deny Jesus, 2) the large crowds of people who follow Jesus, as long as he attracts their interest and gives them what they want, and 3) the very small group of disciples who end up following Jesus - loving him, learning from him, and eventually giving up their lives for Him. As we walk through the gospel of Matthew together, each one of us will find ourselves in one of these groups. I pray, by the faithful power of God's grace, we all would choose to sacrificially follow King Jesus.

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