

Genealogy

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 15, 2024
PASSAGES	Matthew 1; Genesis 12; Genesis 22; Genesis 49; Genesis 38; Joshua 2; 2 Samuel 7
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:12:46 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Matthew's genealogy is not filler before the Christmas story. It is a carefully built argument — pivoting on Abraham, flagged at Judah and David, and stocked with people you would not put in a family portrait. God came into our space at our low points, because he never expected us to light the way for him with our perfection.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The genealogy runs backward and then turns around and runs forward, and it pivots at Abraham. That is Matthew signaling where the promise starts.
- ◆ The promise to Abraham was for a singular seed, and through him *all the families of the earth* — not Israel first with the nations as an afterthought.
- ◆ Matthew names four women where Luke names none: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and “the wife of Uriah.” Each one flags a juncture where God made a promise to a man who had not earned it.
- ◆ Judah fathered Perez by his own daughter-in-law after refusing to keep his word to her. That union sits in Jesus' ancestry, and Matthew put it in writing.
- ◆ Manasseh burned his own son as an offering and ran a fifty-five-year reign of terror. If God had a squeamish response to human beings, he would have picked another line.
- ◆ Jesus' perfection is not established by a perfect human lineage. It rests on the fact that he is eternally God the Son.
- ◆ God's plans are long in scope and multigenerational, which is exactly why nobody's family should be written off as too far gone.

- ◆ Secondhand knowledge of Jesus is not the goal. You knowing him firsthand is.

► 1:12:46

“I do want to preach from the genealogy of Jesus. It's not a joke.” Matt called it a privilege to dust off and polish the parts of scripture people find confusing, offensive or boring, and show them for the beautiful part of God's overarching story that they are. The point of doing that, he said, is not literary appreciation. It is that people would read the Bible for themselves — and behind that, that they would know Jesus firsthand rather than secondhand.

Start at the pivot: Abraham

► 1:14:38

Before opening Matthew, Matt went back to the man the genealogy turns on.

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

GENESIS 12:1-3 ↗

Abram responded in faith while still in Ur of the Chaldeans, called out of his father's household, carrying no covenants and no circumcision yet. He is, as Matt put it, a father to both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The promise came again after the near-sacrifice of Isaac ([Genesis 22:15-18](#)): offspring like the stars and the sand, and “in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Matt read that as singular — one particular descendant — and pointed to Paul's argument in [Galatians](#) for anyone who wanted to check him.

► 1:17:35

Then to [Matthew 1:1-2](#) — and the structure gives itself away immediately. The opening line runs backward: Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham. Then it turns around and runs forward from Abraham down. “It pivots at Abraham,” Matt said, “which to me shows that Abraham is an important figure in Jesus's genealogy.”

The lion out of Judah

► 1:18:49

The line to David runs through Judah, and Judah got a promise of his own — Jacob's deathbed blessing over his sons.

“Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

GENESIS 49:9–10 ↗

Matt noted the timing problem that makes it obviously forward-looking: at that moment the powerful brother is Joseph, running Egypt, not Judah. So the blessing is aimed somewhere down the line. And the imagery that follows — a donkey's colt bound to the vine, garments washed in wine, “his vesture in the blood of grapes” (Genesis 49:11–12) — gets picked up again in [Isaiah 63](#), where a figure comes from Edom in red apparel, mighty to save, having trodden the winepress alone because there was no one to help, and again in [Revelation 19](#). The Lion of Judah is not a worship-song flourish. It goes back a long way.

Tamar, and a story nobody would invent

► 1:22:46

Matthew did not have to write “Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.” Luke's genealogy names no women at all. Matthew names her — so Matt told the story from [Genesis 38](#), promising to church it up a little, then apologizing to the Lord for the offer.

Judah's eldest son married Tamar and died. The second refused to raise up an heir for her and died too. Judah told her to go live with her father until the youngest was old enough — and then never made good on it. Her own father was providing for her; Judah's family was not. So when Judah traveled to shear sheep, she sat by the road dressed as a prostitute and intercepted him, taking his personal effects as collateral. Months later, told she was pregnant, Judah wanted her burned — until she produced his own seal and staff. His answer was as close to repentance as the chapter gets: *she is more righteous than I*. The twins from that night are Jesus' ancestors.

“His genealogy is not this stained glass window of perfect people.”

Rahab and Ruth

► 1:27:40

Two more women cluster around Boaz. Matt allowed that scholars split on whether the Rahab named in [Matthew 1:5](#) is the Rahab of Jericho or a different woman, and said the likelier reading is that Matthew is skipping generations here just as he did in verse one — and means the Rahab we know.

She was a prostitute living in the city wall who hid Israel's spies, lied to her own people to protect them, and asked for mercy for her whole household ([Joshua 2:8–13](#)). Her confession was better theology than most of Israel's at the time: “the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” She let them out her window and tied a scarlet cord in it.

Ruth is the other — a Moabite widow who refused to go back to her people when released to ([Ruth 1:16](#)). Matt recommended reading the whole book; it is short.

“By the wife of Uriah”

► 1:30:36

The fourth flag is the strangest, because Matthew declines to use her name. Not “by Bathsheba.” Not even “David the king and Solomon the king.” Instead:

“[David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.](#)” Matt's read is that Matthew is deliberately leaving stories sticking out like a sore thumb, and this one points at David, not at her.

David saw, desired and took — the same three verbs as the garden, with the same fruit: death and chaos. Uriah was too honorable to sleep in his own house while his brothers were in the field, which made him inconvenient, so David had him killed to cover his tracks and then took his widow. That is Solomon's mother. And it is to this same David that God says:

“I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 SAMUEL 7:12–16 ↗

Solomon builds the temple. But “forever” outruns Solomon, and the man being promised it here is Jesus' ancestor many times over.

Manasseh, and the rest of the list

► 1:34:24

Matthew keeps going, and Matt let the names carry their own weight: Hezekiah, who led quite a renewal movement, fathering Manasseh, who led quite a counter-movement. Fifty-five years of religious terror in Jerusalem — pagan altars inside the house of God, Baal, Asherah, the host of heaven, fortune tellers and mediums, and his own son burned as an offering (2 Kings 21:1–6). The line runs on through the deportation to Babylon “because of their unfaithfulness,” through Zerubbabel the governor, down to Joseph the husband of Mary (Matthew 1:11–16).

“If God had like this *ew, yuck* disgust response to humans,” Matt said, “you would have expected him to have gone through a different lineage.”

What the four women actually mark

► 1:40:06

Matt worked through the usual explanations and found them wanting. That the women represent our sinfulness? Manasseh does that far more efficiently, and with Uriah's wife the blame plainly lies with David. That they were assertive women who sought Israel's God when they did not have to? True of Ruth and Rahab, not of her. That they were all Gentiles? Possibly not all of them. And there are five women, not four, once you count Mary.

His answer was to look at where the flags land rather than at what the women have in common. Tamar marks Judah. Rahab and Ruth cluster around Boaz, David's great-grandfather. Mary marks Jesus. Judah and David are the two men in this list who were handed an unearned, everlasting promise — the scepter that would not depart, the throne established forever. The flags are Matthew nudging the reader: *check this out. Remember Judah. Remember David.*

And Abraham is the pivot for the same reason, one size larger. This was never Israel first with the nations tacked on later; Abraham inherited the promise long before any of these men were born, and it was always about all the families of the earth.

Why we needed a plan that big

► 1:41:53

Matt reached for an odd illustration and it landed. In December 1986, and again in 1987, groups gathered at what they considered special sites — tens of thousands of people — convinced that if enough of them released enough positive energy and performed the right rituals, war and ethnic strife

and national boundaries would give way to humanity's true loving nature. "I guess it didn't work," he said.

"There's something more wrong with us than *they were mean to me and that made me mean*. There is something more deeply wrong with us than *I didn't have quite all the advantages I needed growing up*." Sin is not a deficit you can scrub out, discipline away, or wall off behind good habits. Which is why the answer had to come from outside us — and did, in a genealogy full of people exactly like us.

"He came into our space precisely in our low points and in our darkness, because he — the light of the world — wasn't expecting us to light the way for him with perfection."

So run to the rock

► 1:43:13

Matt's invitation used Jesus' own image: the one who falls on this stone will be broken, but better that than to have it fall on him (Matthew 21:44). Fall on the rock. Take refuge in him the way Rahab ran to the God of Israel from inside the wall of a doomed city.

Three things he said this genealogy taught him. No person, family or family line is too far gone or too disgusting for Jesus to involve himself in. Jesus' perfection is not established by a perfect human lineage but by the fact that he is eternally God the Son. And God's timing is long and multigenerational, which is precisely why we should have hope for the lost, the broken and the supposedly too-far-gone.

► 1:45:14

He closed with the objection he has heard from people more than once — *this is for my kids, my relatives, the good people; I'm already too far gone*. "No. This is for you. This is for you." Especially, he said, when you are feeling confused, insecure, broken, creepy — let me introduce you to some people in Jesus' lineage. By faith in the God of Israel you qualify for an inheritance with the saints, and the love of God is shed abroad in your heart. Don't think of him as somebody else's Lord. Go to him yourself.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Genesis 12:1–3](#)
- [Genesis 22:15–18](#)
- [Galatians 3:16](#)
- [Matthew 1:1–2](#)
- [Genesis 49:9–10](#)
- [Genesis 49:11–12](#)
- [Isaiah 63:1–5](#)
- [Revelation 19:11–16](#)
- [Genesis 38](#)
- [Matthew 1:5](#)
- [Joshua 2:8–13](#)
- [Ruth 1:16](#)
- [Matthew 1:6](#)
- [2 Samuel 7:12–16](#)
- [2 Kings 21:1–6](#)
- [Matthew 1:11–16](#)
- [Matthew 21:44](#)
- [Romans 5:5](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which parts of scripture do you skim past as boring or confusing? What would it take to read one of them firsthand this month?
2. Matthew could have left Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah's wife out, and Luke did. Why do you think Matthew wanted them there, at the start of a Christmas story?
3. Matt distinguished secondhand knowledge about Jesus from firsthand knowledge of him. Where does yours actually come from right now?
4. Judah and David were both given promises they had not earned and did not live up to. What does that do to your idea of how God deals with you?
5. Who in your life have you quietly filed under "too far gone"? If God's plans run multigenerational, what changes about how you pray for them this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2JzHzXP42o&t=4366s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.