

Unexpected Beginnings (1:1-17)

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to **Matthew 1**. So this morning we are stepping back into our Matthew series that we've been doing for a few years now. And if this is your first time joining us, again, welcome, we're glad you're here, but second this might seem odd to say we have been doing this for a few years but still seem to be in Matthew 1. We just really wanted to read through the book of Matthew reallllly slowly. Clearly that was a bad joke. The real answer is because when we first started this series back in the day we started with Chapter 3 and said we'd leave the Christmas story in Chapters 1–2 for covering during one of these Christmas seasons. And here we are...Christmas. As evident with all the decorations.

Now if you grew up in church, you probably have heard a version of the Christmas story. And honestly, even if you didn't grow up in church at all, you probably are at least aware of the heavy hitters right?!? Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, the evil king Herod, and the wisemen. You might have even seen a play or two or been in one yourself. But do you know the one thing that always seems to get left off in most plays or sermons for that matter? The genealogy. Somehow it always gets skipped over. I mean, we all know there's nothing like a good genealogy right?!? Doesn't every family go over there's at least once a week? No?

Ok, so I'm clearly joking, cause if we're honest: most of us tend to just skim or skip over these parts of our bible right? I know for me, I'm currently reading through first Chronicles. Any first Chronicles fans in the room? Yah, def can't humble brag about first Chronicles, cause everyone is gonna try and finish your sentence and say "of Narnia" right?!? But for real, there are so many ancient names that reading them is like reading the fine print at the beginning of the book. Yall know what I'm referring to? It's the place where they name the writer, editor, the graphic designer, and others who contributed to what you are reading. And while all those people are important, really you just want to read the book. And that is how most of us read genealogies right? "*Just get me to the story fam, I don't have time for all this small print.*"

And a lot of that I would imagine is because we believe that a list of ancient names doesn't really impact our lives today. And really up until this sermon I would agree with you. Today as we cover Jesus' genealogy, I want you to see how much his genealogy does impact your life and the lives of the people around you. Essentially I want to give us eyes to see something we might have glossed over or missed entirely. *And* if nothing else, maybe some of you who want to have kids one day can glean some ideas for unique baby names from this passage.

So let's read through the whole thing in its entirety, and then we'll circle back around and focus on a few things together. Sound good? Don't look so excited fam. Alright, Matthew 1, starting in v. 1:

*1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah **and his brothers**,*

"...and his brothers." Matthew didn't even name them. That was cold-blooded my guy. Verse 3:

*3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, 4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of **Salmon**,*

Now if you *are* here today and thinking through baby names, I'm gonna go ahead and say that branching out into names of *fish* might be an untapped market there. Might wanna keep that in your back pocket. Verse 5:

5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

Did y'all catch that? Matthew aint hiding anything huh. He leavin it all out on the table. Verse 7:

7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, 8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, 9 Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah [phew] and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

Okay, everybody still alive? Good...because we're not done. Verse 12:

12 After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, [Don't say that five times fast] Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel [y'all better not name your kid that. they'll have a lifetime of getting picked on. And if you already named your kid this. It's. A lovely name. Never change it.], 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 Azor the father of Zadok [who is obviously a Pokemon], Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, 15 Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, [here we go, the moment we all have been waiting for] the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. 17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

There's nothing quite like a random list of ancient names to get you in the Christmas spirit, right? So, now that you've gotten a glimpse at the whole passage, what in the world is this about, and what does it have to do with you and with me?

Well let's start things off with maybe the most obvious question: *why a genealogy?* Why start off the Christmas story, and not only that but an entire book of the bible, and not just any book, but the *first* book in the whole *New Testament*—with *this type* of passage? It feels very much like a Star Wars movie intro right. Black screen, yellow text that's titled. So why a genealogy? Well, it has to do with how people back then thought about themselves. Like for instance, *today*, if we want to convince someone of our legitimacy, our competency, or our *worthiness*, we tend to use our *accomplishments*. *When we're applying for a job, we bring a resume of the things we've accomplished. When we want to impress someone at a party, we try to ever-so-casually mention some of the things we're most proud of being involved in. Like reading first Chronicles. When we meet someone new, one of the first things we ask is "what do you [what church fam?]" Do.* In a lot of ways, for better or worse, we define ourselves by what we have accomplished.

But back *then*, it was a little different. **People back then defined themselves less by what they *did* and more by *the family they came from*.** If you wanted someone to think you were impressive, you wouldn't give them a *resume*—you would tell them about your *family tree*. It was your way of saying “this is the stock that I come from.” So this would be the equivalent of someone introducing themselves to you as a Vanderbilt or as a Disney. That's all the resume you need.

So once you *know* that's how it works, **it might start to make sense of why, when we get introduced to the most important guy in the biblical story, Jesus, Matthew kicks things off by describing for us *the family that Jesus comes from*.** It's his way of saying “here's who Jesus is, here are his credentials, here's his legitimacy.” It's a list of names that is meant to convince us of the stock Jesus comes from, and therefore of his rightful place as the “Messiah”—the long-awaited king of Israel.

Here's how biblical scholar and pastor **N.T. Wright** describes the way that this genealogy would've read to ancient ears:

For many cultures ancient and modern, and certainly in the Jewish world of Matthew's day, this genealogy was the equivalent of a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets, and a town crier calling for attention. Like a great procession coming down a city street, we watch the figures at the front, and the ones in the middle, but all eyes are waiting for the one who comes in the position of greatest honor, right at the end."

This is **what Matthew was doing: he was giving a long, drawn-out, dramatic, royal introduction to Jesus, to show his readers just how legitimate Jesus was.** But—to be honest—that's where it starts to get a little *weird*. Because this is not your *ordinary* genealogy. There are at least a few things in *this* genealogy that are *very* odd for Matthew to include if he's trying to make Jesus seem legit. Things you wouldn't expect at all from a genealogy of this time period. For starters, there are *women* in this genealogy. Now, *I'm* a huge fan of including women in genealogies, and Matthew evidently is too, but you need to understand *most other* people in Matthew's *society didn't* feel the same way. In a patriarchal culture like the one Matthew inhabited, women were virtually *never* included in listing out ancestry lines. But Matthew includes *several* women in his genealogy—*five* of them, to be exact.

Now, what's even more peculiar is *which particular* women Matthew chooses to include. First off, the majority of these women were *Gentile*, not Jewish, in ethnicity. In a society that often prided itself on the ethnic "purity" of their family tree, people who were of other ethnicities were generally omitted from the genealogy because they didn't help your case. But Matthew doesn't seem to be interested in omitting them at all. In fact, he goes *out of his way* to *include* them.

But there's even more to this. For instance, you might be thinking, "okay, but why not mention the women in *every* generation? Why only mention *five* of them?" Which is a valid question...because if you know anything about biology, turns out it actually takes a man *and* a woman to produce a child in *every* generation. So why only mention five of them here? Well, it seems like it's because **Matthew is trying to draw our attention not only to these specific women's identities, and not only to their ethnicities, but also to their stories.** So let's find out who **the women in Matthew's genealogy** are:

- First, **Tamar** (in v. 3) is connected to Judah—that's what it says: "Judah the Father of Perez and Zerah *by Tamar*." Now fun little fact: Judah was not Tamar's husband or boyfriend. Judah was Tamar's *father-in-law*. So there's that. If you're not familiar with the story, there's this really odd, R-rated passage in Genesis where Tamar's

husband dies, and then her father-in-law Judah refuses to give her his youngest son in marriage (which was the widely-accepted custom of the day), so in order to get back at him, Tamar dresses up like a prostitute and seduces her father-in-law. Gross right?!? Some of y'all didn't know that parts of the bible read like an episode of Jerry Springer. Judah was definitely the father in more ways than one. (We'll just move on as quickly as possible from *that* story...)

- Next in the lineage is **Rahab** (in v. 5). Rahab was an *actual* prostitute, like for a living. And not only that, but she was from a wicked city that was under God's judgment.
- **Ruth** (also in v. 5) had a decent reputation as far as we know, but she was a Moabite, which means she was a descendent of a guy named Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughter (also gross).
- And then we have a woman who is only referred to as "**the wife of Uriah**" (in v. 6). Now, we actually know this woman's name, right? We covered it in our David series not that long ago. Anybody know what it is? Yeah, *Bathsheba*. So why would Matthew not use her *name* here? Well, it's because by calling her "the wife of Uriah," he is calling people's attention to quite possibly one of the most *shameful* stories about one of the most *notable* kings in Israel's history: where King David sleeps with his leading military commander friend, Uriah's wife. And when you take into consideration the cultural context, it's far more likely that it was *sexual assault*: David uses his power and position and force himself on her, gets her pregnant, and then has her husband Uriah murdered to cover it up. So Matthew calls her "the wife of Uriah," not as a slight against *her*, but as a slight against *David*. To make sure nobody glosses over that particularly unacceptable moment in Israel's story.
- And lastly we have **Mary** (in v. 16). Mary (as in the eventual mother of Jesus) has been *elevated* and *admired* in many ways—especially in certain church traditions—but it's worth highlighting that in *her day*, she was simply a young unwed pregnant girl in a hyper-conservative society. Not exactly admired or revered like she is today. Quite the opposite, in fact. Mary and her pregnancy would've been the subject of quite a bit of gossip in her day.

So in summary, **when listing out Jesus' family tree—the lineage that the long-awaited Messiah would come from—Matthew has highlighted for us: a vengeful seductress, a sex worker, a descendent of incest, a survivor of sexual assault, and a seemingly promiscuous teenager.** Interesting, right? And again, Matthew's purpose is not really to slight or fault any of these women for what happened—several of them obviously did nothing wrong. Rather, Matthew's intent is to leave no stone unturned when it comes to some of the worst moments in Israel's history. In Jesus' family, it would seem, *nothing* gets swept under the rug.

So the question still is *why?* Why *do* that? If the *goal* of a genealogy was to make the person's family look as impressive as possible, why include these very *unimpressive*, and even outright *shameful* details about Jesus' lineage? **Because that's *not* what you do with a *resume*. With a resume, you include the very *best* things about you and leave out, or at least downplay, the not-so-good things. In a resume, you don't say "I work really slow," you say "I'm detail-oriented." You don't say "I'm inexperienced," you say "I love new challenges." With a resume, you often figure out a way to *tweak* the details in your *favor*.**

And we know from history that people took a *similar* approach when it came to their *genealogies*. What people would do is that they would "edit" their family tree a little to highlight the people in their family who would *help* their cause, and take out or gloss over the people in their family that *wouldn't*.¹ You know, like that aunt or uncle ya'll don't mention until Thanksgiving or Christmas. Well, Matthew has made some edits to *this* genealogy too, but none of *his* edits make Jesus' family tree look any *better*; they kind of make it look *worse*. In other words, **this was a somewhat self-destructive genealogy. In all likelihood, this would've led to just as many people *questioning* Jesus' legitimacy, as it would to people *accepting* it.**

So what's the deal here? What is Matthew trying to do? Well honestly, he's trying to do a lot of different things. There are enough things going on in this genealogy that if I tried to explain all of them, we'd have to have some sort of intermission. So for time's sake, I'll point out just two of them to you. **Now remember: the fact that there *is* a genealogy is supposed to show us that Jesus is somebody special—that he's the Messiah. But **the type of people in the genealogy shows us the type of Messiah Jesus is.** It's supposed to help introduce to us who Jesus is and the types of people and he *associates himself with*. So if that's the case, I think **there are at least two types of people that Jesus *includes in his story***, based on this genealogy. First...**

Jesus includes the *flawed*.

One thing that should be obvious from this genealogy is that God includes anyone, no matter how incredibly and unacceptably *flawed* they might be. Rahab is a sex worker by trade. Tamar seduces her father-in-law as an act of revenge. David is guilty of sexual assault. So to be honest, the word "flawed" is kind of soft-selling it. **There's no getting around the fact that Matthew goes out of his way to highlight some of the most destructive, ugliest moments in Jesus' family history.**

¹ In fact, we have record of King Herod's genealogy from around the same time as this one, and that's what he does—he leaves out any of the questionable characters in his family, and highlights the most awesome ones.

Think with me for a second about David specifically. David is, from a human perspective, the most “royal,” impressive person in this lineage, by a long shot. He was the most revered, beloved king in Israel’s history. And *yet*, the way that Matthew presents him *here*, he makes sure we remember the most despicable thing that David ever did. What David did was far worse than what any woman in this lineage did. **It’s as if Matthew is saying that even the most “impressive” person in Jesus’ lineage is only in it by sheer grace.** Because no way would a person guilty of these kinds of things get in on merit. But in Jesus’ family, it’s not the good people who are in and the bad people who are out—however you personally want to define good and bad. In God’s family, everyone gets in by grace and grace alone.

And by walking us through the brokenness and moral trainwreck that is Jesus’ lineage, Matthew is showing us that the person at the *end* of the lineage—Jesus—is in a category all his own. No one else in the lineage is perfect—or really, anywhere *close* to perfect—but *Jesus is*. And the good news that Jesus comes to proclaim is that his *perfection* stands in the gap for our *imperfection*. His obedience stands in the gap for our disobedience. When this Jesus goes to the cross at the *end* of his life, what he is doing—by his own admission—is becoming a “ransom” for our sin. He is rescuing us out of our sins—however bad they might be. To where now, the final word on those in Jesus’ family is not “sinner,” or “screw-up,” or “flawed,” but rather “son or daughter of the king.” That’s how Jesus includes the flawed.

And part of the reason I think that’s important for us to realize is because I meet people all the time who think that somehow their past sins and failures *disqualify* them from God’s grace. People who think “I’ve done too many things wrong to be a Christian.” “I’ve done too many things that I can’t take back.” “I’ve run too far and for too long.” People who say things like “if I walked into church, I bet lightning would strike me.” But this genealogy from Matthew would seem to say otherwise. It would seem to indicate that there is no such thing as being beyond the reach of God’s grace—that’s not a category that exists. So the truth according to Matthew is not only that God “puts up” with you, but that he desires to include you in his family. Isn’t that beautiful?

And we can gather that not just from this genealogy, but from the entire story of the bible. One other prime example is *Paul*, the guy who wrote most of the New Testament. That guy, before Jesus rescued him, personally oversaw the execution of likely hundreds of Christians. And then Jesus intervenes and sets his life on an altogether different trajectory. To the point that in 1 Timothy, he reflects on all that and says essentially, “you know what? I think one of the reasons God saved me was to show the world that *no one*

is beyond saving.”² ‘If God used me, surely he can use anybody.’ So one thing we see *throughout the bible*, and in this *genealogy specifically*, is that there are no limits or boundary lines around the type of people God can and will use to carry his story forward. So listen, I don’t know what you came in here believing about yourself and how bad it is or how far gone you think you are, but I can promise it’s not too much for Jesus. Because Jesus includes the flawed. Second...

Jesus includes the *excluded*.

Second, by the people and stories he chooses to include in this lineage, Matthew is trying to communicate to us that Jesus associates with those who have been most shunned, scorned, and forgotten by the society around them. Rahab was shunned by society because she was a prostitute. Ruth was excluded because of her family’s shady history. Mary was excluded because she was pregnant and unmarried in the middle of a hyper-conservative society. Even Tamar, who was *morally culpable* for her actions, did what she did in response to being shunned and excluded by her husband’s family. When you read through this list, you see that Jesus ongoingly, repetitively, tends to *include* the *excluded*.

You know, all cultures throughout history have looked down on certain people, in order to feel better about themselves. Whether it’s people from certain races, people below a certain income level. Maybe it’s people with certain physical or mental conditions. People with lower levels of education. Or maybe, like in this story, simply because of the family they come from. And to a degree, we all do this: we draw boundary lines to decide who’s “in” and who’s “out.” But Matthew seems to be telling us through this genealogy here that **God is not interested in operating by our boundary lines.**

Think about Jesus’ *own* life—he shows up on the scene, and starts spending a lot of time hanging out with the people that nobody else wanted to hang out with: prostitutes, tax collectors, immoral men and women alike. Now we’ve mentioned this before, but you and I see that pattern in Jesus’ life and we *love* it. We think it’s the coolest thing ever. But I can assure you: it was not *cool* in Jesus’ day to do that. Hear me say, Jesus didn’t get killed because he was cool. Jesus got killed because he went against the grain. He outright *rejected* his culture’s social categories. He looked at those who were most *excluded*, and he *included* them when nobody else would. That *bothered* the people who were invested in the status quo.

So if you’re here today, and ***you* have experienced *exclusion* in your life, Matthew wants you to know that Jesus sees you, and he *includes* you.** Chances are there

² See 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

are many of you in this room that have never quite felt like you belonged. Whether it was due to your ethnicity, your gender, your sexuality, your education level, your personality, your past—for one reason or another, you feel like the story of your life is that you have been on the outside of society, peering in. If that's you, I want you to know that in God's kingdom, you've found a different kind of society. One that operates on a completely different premise. In God's kingdom, the first are last and the last are first. In God's kingdom, the strong are weak and the weak are strong. In God's kingdom, you, the excluded, are now included through Jesus.

And listen, not only does Jesus *seek you out*—he actually *identifies with you*. Jesus *himself* was excluded. The prophet Isaiah tells us that he was “despised and rejected by men,” and “one from whom men hide their faces.” John 1 tells us that “he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” If anyone knows how it feels to be an outsider, it's Jesus. So for those of you in this room who have experienced *rejection*: the scorn you've faced, the passing glances you get, the murmurs you feel happening behind your back—Jesus has been there too. And it's from that place that he is able to *include us*. **Jesus includes the excluded.**

//

So there we have two things Jesus' genealogy does that are precisely *not* what you'd expect from a genealogy of that time: it includes the *flawed*, and it includes the *excluded*.

//

So lastly, before we close things out today, Eric and Jackie, you can come on up, I just want to leave you with one last question for us to consider: **does our family look like Jesus' family?** What I mean by that is does our *church* family actively include the same types of people that *Jesus'* family did? Is this—our community—a place where the flawed and excluded feel at home? When a person walks through these doors, or wanders into the home where your LifeGroup meets...and they've messed up more times than they can count...when they've made a thousand horrible decisions that have blown up their life and pushed away everyone they love...when a person comes in worn down and broken by a past that seems to haunt them everywhere they go...**does that type of person come into contact with people in this community and think to themselves, “yeah, I feel at home here”?**

And also, when a person comes around our community...who has felt nothing but *rejection* in their life...when they've always felt like the odd one out, the one that nobody wants...when they've felt like awkward fifth wheel in every scenario, or worse—like people despise them because they're different...**does that type of person come into contact with the people here and go** “these people don't exclude me like everyone else does. I'm desired here, I'm valued here, I'm *wanted* here”?

I just want to leave us with that this morning. And I'll be honest: I think in many ways we *do* embody that here. I'm not asking that question as a sneaky way to suggest that we suck at it. I think we *do* strive to be that type of place, and God has made us that kind of place in so many ways. But there's always room for self-reflection, right? There's always room for considering where we *haven't* embodied that and to ask the Spirit to generate it in us more and more. Because I want us to be the type of community that Jesus' family was. I want us to include the people Jesus includes. And every bit of it starts with realizing that *that's what Jesus did for us each on the cross*. And as we transition to communion, that's exactly what it's about, a reflection of Jesus' body broken for us. Moving us closer to looking like him. Reflecting him to the world. So if you are a Christian, as you look to take communion, let's do just that. Let's remember what the Lord has done for us. Let's thank him for rescuing us from our sin. Let's thank him for welcoming us into his family. And let's remember to welcome the flawed and excluded into this beautiful family as well.

Let's pray.