

# Advent Meditation Week 1: What Does the Genealogy of Jesus Teach Us?

**Tim Keller**

This advent, I'd like to consider some of the passages at the very beginning of the book of Matthew. And first I'd like to read you a part out of the genealogy which you find at the very beginning of chapter one.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah: Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar; Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth; David the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife; Joseph the husband of Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus, there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.

Now this is Matthew 1:1-17, but I just took out some excerpts. There are two things we can learn from this genealogy. When you first read it, your eyes glaze over and you say, "Let me get to some action." But the genealogy at the very beginning of the book of Matthew is very important. It teaches us at least two things. The first thing it teaches us is that the gospel is good news, not good advice. **The Gospel is good news, not just good advice.**

Notice that the story of Jesus' life does not start off 'Once Upon a Time'. It doesn't say 'Once Upon a Time'. It starts with the genealogy. See, 'Once Upon a Time' is the way fairy tales start. But a genealogy says this is history. This has been rooted in history. What happened to Jesus Christ that we're going to tell you about actually really happened historically.

Now, there's a lot of people who say, "Who cares? So what if it's a legend?" "After all," they say, "what really matters is not doctrine and things like that. What really matters is that you're a good person. So, if you read the story about Jesus Christ, then you try to be like him. That's really what God wants. That's really what we need. Doctrine doesn't matter. It just matters that you're a good person living like Jesus Christ, whether or not he actually ever lived or not. He's a great moral example."

Well, now, you know, it's funny that the doctrine, well, to say the doctrine doesn't matter but just live a good life, that actually is a doctrine. We call it the doctrine of justification by works. It's a belief that it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you live a good enough life. But I want you to know that if you decide that what will make God happy with you or what will get you into heaven is living a good life you will either become an incredibly proud person who thinks, I'm better than everyone else. I'm living up to my standards. Or you're going to be a person always under guilt because you're not living up.

Jesus Christ actually came not to show us how to live so that we could save ourselves. He came to save us. He came to live the life we should have lived. In our place, and then die the death we should have died in our place, so that God could forgive us, so the penalty for our sins could be put on him. If Jesus Christ didn't actually live, then you can't be saved by grace. You can't be saved by God. You have to save yourself. And that's deadly. And so, the genealogy starts right off saying the gospel is good news, not just good advice on how to live. It's good news that not advice on how to save yourself, but it's good news, God has saved you. Here's the second thing though.

The genealogy also shows that the gospel turns the values of the world upside down. Now, you and I see a genealogy and we say, that's interesting. But in the old days, the genealogy was like your resume, because family was everything. And what you always did was you gave your resume by giving people your genealogy, and you always bragged about the people who were well known or were great, so you would say, "I, on my father's side, I was related to the Duke of Walford shire" or something like that. The one thing you always kept out of your genealogy was anybody who, you know, wasn't quite right, wasn't respectable, you just kept that out. But right here in Jesus' genealogy, you have four women. And women were almost never back in those patriarchal times ever included in genealogies. It was always father to son, father to son. There's four women. And look who those women are. Tamar, who committed incest, Rahab, who was a prostitute, Ruth, who was a Moabite, she wasn't Jewish, she was of a different race. And then what the text calls Uriah's wife, which of course was Bathsheba, who was married to Uriah, and David commits adultery with her and then kills her husband. And so why in the world would those people be in the genealogy? And here's what it's telling us. Even at the very beginning, the genealogy is speaking to us of grace. First of all, what we see here is Jesus is not ashamed of these people. These are his mothers. These are women, not men. These were, in some cases, people of a different race, not Jews. Some of them were immoral, not moral. And yet Jesus is saying, Anyone can be a member of my family. Anyone can be a member of my family. You're not saved by your pedigree and by your respectability. You're saved by grace. There is no sin so small that it doesn't deserve condemnation. So King David, who's in the genealogy, needs God's grace. But there's no sin so great that it can bring condemnation on those who truly repent.

And it also shows that in the gospel, the gospel turns the world's values upside down. It doesn't say men are better than women. Jews are better than non-Jews. It doesn't say even the moral are better than the immoral. It really says that all people are sinners and all people can be recipients of grace. So, pedigree and credentials and beauty and money and things like that should not matter to us as Christians because they don't matter to God. I don't care who you are or what you've done. I don't care whether you've camped out right near the gates of hell, you can be a member of Jesus Christ's family if you turn to him.

So, right here at the very beginning, the genealogies are just dripping with grace and giving hope to anyone. Amen.

**Kathy Keller**

And now here's Tim and Kathy Keller for a short time of Q&A on today's meditation. Matthew starts with a genealogy, and Luke starts with a genealogy, but they're different. And I know they weren't making things up, But why are they different? Why does Matthew highlight some people and not others, and then Luke highlights other people and not the same ones? Why are they different?

**Tim Keller**

That's a great question because it's actually a helpful question.

**Kathy Keller**

Inquiring minds want to know.

**Tim Keller**

Do they? It's also a helpful question because Luke's genealogy takes Jesus' line back to Adam, whereas Matthews takes it back to Abraham. Right there that's significant because it just tells us something about the fact that the book of Luke is thinking more about the Gentiles and thinking more about Jesus as the savior of the whole world. The book of Matthew is thinking more about how Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Israel. But the main thing to point out is that the genealogy is not just in Matthew and in Luke and in 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Kings, they differ from each other because they're selective and this is the key you have to understand. When it says Joe begat Sam. The word begat or the word, which is the old, the Hebrew word, which is translated begat, which means Sam is, well it says fathered basically, generated, literally. Right. When he says, when he says, Engendered. Engendered, yes. It doesn't necessarily mean the person, that's the person father, it could be their grandfather, their great-grandfather.

**Kathy Keller**

So if, Was the progenitor of.

**Tim Keller**

Yes, so if it actually, yeah, so it says, Tom is the progenitor of Dick, who is the progenitor of Harry. That doesn't mean that's father-son-grandson. It could easily be great-grandfather, etc. And the reason they did that was they would collapse the genealogies in some cases to either be short or just to be brief or in some cases, by the way, like Matthew, it points out that there was 14 generations, 14 generations and 14 generations from Abraham to Jesus, which of course is seven sevens.

**Kathy Keller**

So kind of like highlight reel.

**Tim Keller**

It was a way of making the case that Jesus was the 7/7, which was the perfection number, and also the number of the Sabbath, so that he's bringing the final rest. And so, it was a symbolic way to talk about who Jesus was. But it in no way actually is an error. It's not a historical error. There are people who say, "Ah, you see their Bible's filled with contradictions because this one says it's so-and-so begat so-and-so, but this one says that person didn't begat so-and-so, he begat somebody else." But it's just It's selective.

**Kathy Keller**

Can I just make a comment? It's kind of a cautionary tale because if you read through the Bible, any part of it, New Testament, Old Testament, and you think you've found an error or a contradiction, before you go rushing away and throw your faith out the window, have a little humility and say, maybe somebody besides me in the last 2,000 years noticed this and has thought about it, and there might be another explanation, or there might be something I don't know, like what you just told me about s genealogy kipping the generations that so-and-so was not the actual father. He might have been the grandfather or the great-great-grandfather. So, yeah, that's sort of a cautionary tale.

**Tim Keller**

Study and compare.

**Kathy Keller**

Slow down before you freak out.

**Tim Keller**

Amen. Okay.