Who Do You Think You Are?

Matthew 1:1-17

Who do you think you are? Perhaps you know and perhaps you are fans of the BBC series of the same name? Perhaps you have taken one of these DNA tests??! Knowing the rock from which we were hewn seems more important at certain times in our life like now, yet often as we delve into our past, we find things which are painful and sometimes quite embarrassing. I heard of someone once who spent months and over £500 trying to uncover his past and then five times as much to suppress it! But there is no suppression of the genealogy of Jesus. 46 people whose lives span 2000 years. All were ancestors of Jesus, but they varied considerably in personality, spirituality, and experience. Some were heroes of the faith like Abraham, Isaac, Ruth & David. Some had shady reputations like Rahab & Tamar. Many were very ordinary – like Hezron, Ram, Nahshon & Akim. And others were just plain evil like Manasseh. God's work in human history is not limited by human failures or sins, and He works through ordinary people. Indeed, the inclusion of five women (in a list that should have been exclusively male) shows that the gospel of grace provided through their descendant Jesus would be for all genders, all races, and all backgrounds. The gospel is for both male and female, Jew, and Gentile, rich and poor, even the vilest of sinners Jesus can and will save. The inclusion of these women in Jesus' Family Tree shows the overwhelming grace of God. Let's think about how many details came together in the birth of Jesus: the arrival of our Saviour on planet earth. And Matthew's genealogy is a Family Tree like no other. It as it were, connects the dots for Matthew's Jewish readers.

It shows us that firstly that <u>God's planning is perfect</u>! God lined up the generations exactly so that Jesus would be born 14 generations after the exile, which was 14 generations after David, which was 14 generations after Abraham. Abraham - promised the land, David - ruled the land & the Exile - lost the land. But Jesus - fulfills the promise, rules the land, and

redeems the people lost in the exile. Matthew's version of the Family Tree begins with Abraham as the Father of Faith and traces the legal descent of the house of David. It follows the line of Joseph, Jesus' legal Dad. Whereas Luke begins with Adam and relates the line to the whole human race and unusually puts the emphasis on Mary (Jesus' blood relative). Looking from the Mums side was strange but so come to think of it was the virgin birth!

Now those of you who are good at counting may have spotted that the 14/14/14 thing is not quite what it seems! To be fair Matthew is not lying. When he says that Jotham is the descendant of Uzziah, that is true, but he skips two generations to get to Jotham. So how does Matthew, Holy Spirit inspired writer of the first gospel in the NT get his history wrong? And by some counts the numbers of the generations go 13/14/13 or 14/15/14 so was he a bad historian and mathematician? Now there is no lack of answers to these questions. Evidently the Hebrew culture was not particular in its use of inclusive and exclusive counting. Which means you can count 13 generations, by not including the first person in the chain. Or you can get the number 14 by counting the first person. As to the people left out, it was probably a tool used by the teachers of the day to make it easier to memorize. Genealogies are often compressed history, and this is clearly an example. But regardless of how you account for it, it's messy. And to be honest, I find this to be refreshing. There are times in my life when I submit to God, and I ask that He use me, and I fully commit my plans to him, and when it's all said and done it doesn't quite work out as I'd thought it would. And I say to myself – why did that not go according to God's perfect plan! Were there errors in my calculations or understanding? How could that have happened? Wasn't God using me? Wasn't God working in me? And what I find here is Matthew, filled with the H.S. and making mistakes, and God using it anyway, and getting glory from it!

So secondly, <u>God's plan allows for human error</u>. And this is not just found in this text, but also in the content. As mentioned already there are 5 women included which is unusual, and therefore attracts our attention. Each one brings us back to the Biblical record.

1. The story of Tamar (Genesis 38) – it is not a nice story. A couple of months after Tamar's husband dies, she pretended to be a prostitute. In this disguise she fooled her father-in-law Judah into going to bed with her and got pregnant by him. Though Tamar was a seducer and pretend prostitute Matthew includes her (a Canaanite and a Gentile) in the family tree of Jesus.

2. The story of Rahab (Joshua 2/6) – She is the prostitute who hid the two spies Joshua sent to Jericho. We are told nothing of her marriage to Salmon but knowing her occupation we are left to assume she snared him with her body, but Matthew includes her (a Gentile, prostitute, and part of a doomed race) in the family tree of Jesus.

3. The Story of Ruth – The Israelites had nothing but contempt for the Moabites because they had their origins in incest (between Lot and his oldest daughter) and considered their offspring impure to the tenth generation (Deut 23:3). Furthermore, Ruth was very forward and perhaps a little improper in the way she pursued Boaz at the barley harvest while she was under the influence of alcohol. But Matthew includes her (an aggressive Moabite) in the family tree of Jesus.

4. The Story of Bathsheba (2 Sam.11) – Just alluded to as Uriah's wife (they couldn't even bring themselves to name her!) in v6, her story is well known: Adultery, Deceit, and Murder. But although she was an adulteress and an accessory to murder Matthew includes her too in the family tree of Jesus. Finally,

5. There is Mary, the mother of Jesus – Whichever way you package it, she got pregnant under suspicious circumstances. Yes, she was engaged to be married, but she and Joseph were not living together as husband and wife. In fact, it was known that Joseph was not the cause of her pregnancy! So, we have four Gentiles and one Jew. Three of the women were openly sinful; the other two practiced a religious lifestyle. They all came from different nationalities but with all their differences they shared two things in common: they are mentioned as ancestors of Jesus and they were all sinners and in need of a Saviour. I think we would have sanitized our family tree by now or simply ignored it, but Matthew is brutally honest. Under the leading of the Spirit, he includes five women of ill repute in the Family Tree of Jesus. These five women – like a lot of the men that are also listed – may be seen as a blot on the purity of the Messiah but the Lord is not embarrassed by their reputation. In fact, He is not ashamed to pose with them all for a picture that would be spread out on the first page of the New Testament. The stories that come to mind as we read this Family Tree are messy to say the least and from this, we can I think drawn two conclusions: God is not afraid of messy stories, in fact, he includes such messy people in his family tree and in doing so honours them & we are left with a sense of awe that Jesus would descend from Heaven to be part of our very human family!

Which leads onto my third and final point: <u>God exceeds all our dreams and expectations if only we would allow Him to</u>: Abraham expected Blessings but in Genesis 12:3 God promises Abraham that his descendants would bless the whole earth. He repeats the promise in 22:8. David expected to be King and ruler, but God promises David that the Messiah (the anointed one) will descend from Him (2 Samuel 7:12, Psalm 89:3, 132:11). The exiles expected redemption and these promises are all met in Jesus, but it takes time and it's messy (42 generations and 46 people)

So, what about us: Gods Plans for me and for you.
Are Perfect (14/14/14)
Allow for human error (not the best family tree)
But in the last analysis exceed all our dreams and expectations
(more than you can ask or even imagine Eph.3:20)

Regardless of anything in your life that you perceive as a hindrance, Jesus can and will save you today! He is not concerned with: Your Origin, Your Ancestry, Your Station in Life, Your Past Sins, Your Future Plans or Your Present State. The Incarnation was the hinge of human history and when seen in the light of the cross we can restate our Family Tree. Grace grafts us into the Family Tree of Jesus: we become His and our identity is secure for all eternity. So never ignore genealogies for they are a faith-filled record of God's gracious fathering of us, but don't be constrained by your own genealogy either as from the moment you put your trust in Jesus the future is planned by Him! You have been Born Again!! *And just one postscript – your decision to follow Christ and your continued following of Him has mega implications for the generations that will flow from you – grafted into the Jesus Family Tree, there is a promise for all who love Him and keep his commandments in Exodus 20:4 (it's part of the ten commandments) – that the Blessing of God will flow for a 1000 generations.*

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