

Son of God - Son of Man

Why Genealogies?

Whenever pastors get together to fellowship at least some of their conversation turns to the subject of preaching. You see, pastors are always thinking about sermons; sometimes their last but always about their next. There is hardly an hour during the week that I am not studying or praying or thinking about or writing my sermon. I am always asking, “How do I make the message meaningful and how do I help strengthen people’s faith?” You see I know the power is in the Word of God and I desire to remain faithful to God’s Word. When I get together with pastors we end up spending some time discussing sermons. We exchange ideas and illustrations and some share insights they had when they were digging into the passage of scripture we are discussing. As the discussion about a passage of scripture develops and ideas are shared the other pastors give their opinion as to what they think about the validity of these ideas and whether they will work if preached. When we want to communicate our belief that a certain idea or illustration will work and bring forth God’s truth, we say, “That’ll preach!” or some of us say, “That dog will hunt!” which gives you a hint of my family’s background. In all the times that I have met and talked with other pastors about sermons, I have never heard a fellow pastor say, “I am giving a powerful message this Sunday - I am preaching on the genealogy of Jesus in Luke and comparing it to Matthew’s.” I can guarantee you if, by some chance, a pastor did announce this, you would not hear from other pastors say “That’ll preach!” or “That dog can hunt!”

In general most people look at the genealogies in the Bible and think boring. Many people quickly grow tired of the “begats” in the Old Testament and the “son of” in the New that connect names that are hard to pronounce, especially for me, when one of my spiritual gifts is the ability to butcher any language. As Joyce and I worked all over the world I was convinced God has a great sense of humor to have me work with so many people of so many languages. Reading through those long lists of names seems about as exciting as watching paint dry. Let’s be honest, when most people come to these lists they skip over them to get to the good stuff. The problem is I am committed to preach expositively through the Word of God verse by verse, so I have to read these lists. It is hard enough for us to get excited about our own genealogies unless there is someone famous or infamous and then we focus only on those few. If you have someone famous in your background, well that is interesting, but the truth is it has little to do with who you are. In Jesus’ genealogies there are both the famous and the infamous, but they had nothing directly to do with Jesus or his being the fulfillment of God’s promise other than the lineage.

J. B. Phillips, an English Bible scholar decided, to write a translation of the New Testament in modern English language. He began the task in the early 1940s and finished in 1958. When he first published his translation of the New Testament he left the genealogies out of Matthew and Luke, thinking they were nothing more than boring trivia. However, he received so much criticism that he put them back in, and rightfully so because as Paul wrote to Timothy, “[All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.](#)” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) My advice is stay away from Phillips’ translation. God has given the Bible to us, it is his eternal truth and it is not ours to change. It

is my prayer for myself that as I preach about the genealogy of Jesus this morning when I am done you will say, “That preached” or “That dog did hunt!”

Let me pray for our time this morning.

Two Ancestries

It has become popular to trace your ancestry. Entire businesses and websites have sprung up dedicated to this. When I go on Facebook I often see ads pop up for the sites to research one’s ancestry. Joyce and I have been married for 45 years in September and I was wondering what to get her for a birthday a couple of years ago and decided to do the DNA test. The results were interesting, but that is another story, except to say she is more Irish than I am. My mom spent a great deal of time after she retired researching our family history. Among a number of interesting facts she found that we are direct descendants from someone who came to America on the Mayflower in 1620. Interesting, but really it has no impact on who I am, especially who I am in Christ.

Regardless of how you feel about this entire ancestry craze, in Jesus’ day a person’s ancestry was a source of how they fit into society. It was so important that everyone’s ancestry was kept in public records carefully maintained by the Sanhedrin. The Bible reflects this importance to the Jewish culture because it contains several genealogies. Genesis 5 begins with the family tree of Adam. Genesis 10 lists the “begats” of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Matthew begins his gospel account of Jesus with his ancestry. Writers desire that people read what they write and they work hard at capturing the reader’s interest so they will want to read what they have written. For you and me a genealogy does not determine our social status or our place in industry, so it has diminished importance for us and it would most likely be the last thing, if we wrote a book that

we would start it with a genealogy. However, Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy and Luke brings it in quickly because Jesus' genealogy is important and genealogies were of great interest to the Jewish people. There are several reasons that both Matthew and Luke felt that Jesus' genealogy was important. John MacArthur laid these out well in his commentary on Luke chapter 3.

*First, a person's ancestry determined their **CLAIM ON LAND**. This came out of the original tribal allocation of the land of Palestine. Numbers 26:52-56 records the fact that when the Israelites first settled in the Promised Land, God divided it into parcels for each tribe. In order to prove one had a right to a particular piece of land they had to know their genealogy.*

*Second, ancestry determined claims to the **RIGHT OF INHERITANCE**. If a person said he had a right to property, an estate, crops, or other material possessions from a deceased relative, the validity of such claims had to be determined by the genealogies of all who were involved. It even determined who got first dibs when it came to marrying a widow. You may recall that there's a great example of this in the book of Ruth. Boaz became her second husband when her first died but had to give his next of kin the first opportunity to marry Ruth.*

*Third, in Israel genealogy established the basis of **TAXATION**. In Luke chapter 2 it tells that when Mary and Joseph went to be taxed, they traveled to Bethlehem, because that was the hometown of David and they were both part of his family tree. Like any self-respecting Jew, I'm sure that Mary and Joseph were very aware of their lineage because from childhood their parents and other older relatives would have described how their family heritage went all the way back to King David.*

*Lastly, and most important, any claim to the **PRIESTHOOD** or **ROYALTY** had to be verified by genealogy. To be a priest you had to be of the tribe of Levi. I guess you could say you had to prove that you had Levi's genes and they weren't denim! In the same way, any claim to be king and ultimately Messiah, would be rejected if the one making the claim could not prove he was a direct descendant of the king David himself. In 2nd Samuel chapter 7 God promised that He would establish a throne from David's lineage that would last forever and everyone in Jesus' day knew that promise was to be fulfilled in the Messiah.*

For these reasons genealogies were important. The Jews took great care in keeping these records. They were stored and where available to the public. People traveled to the synagogues or the temple to research these genealogies. The fact that Matthew and Luke use these records demonstrates they were not only guided by the Holy Spirit in their writing, but that they were careful in their facts and had access to these genealogical records.

Credentials

If Jesus was to be validated as the Messiah and David's Son who would rule forever, then his lineage to David had to be proved. Both Matthew and Luke's genealogies prove this.

You may not of thought of this – but if the Pharisees and Sadducees could have disproved Jesus' lineage directly to King David it would have been the easiest way to prove he was not the Messiah. However, we never see this, they never attacked Jesus from this direction. This proves Jesus' genealogies found in Matthew and Luke are correct. Jesus' lineage to David was confirmed on Palm Sunday as he entered Jerusalem when the people waved palm branches and laid their cloaks out on the road as they cried out, "[Hosanna to the Son of David!](#) Blessed is he who

comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9) Jesus’ genealogy was accepted and showed his right to David’s throne, by both his supporters and enemies.

I have chosen not to read the genealogy of Jesus found in Luke this morning, partly because I do not want to butcher many of those names in public and partly because I want to focus on just a few key things.

The genealogies of Matthew and Luke vary in several ways. Critics try to use these variances to show the Bible is not accurate and therefore not trustworthy. But, as usual they are wrong. Let me explore these variances or differences with you. These differences actually support Jesus’ credentials as the Messiah.

The first difference is the order that the genealogies are presented. Matthew’s begins with Abraham and moves forward in time to Christ. Luke begins with Christ and goes back in time to Adam, and to God, Jesus’ true Father.

Second, there are differences in the names found in these two genealogies. Luke traces Jesus’ lineage back to David through Nathan and Matthew’s genealogy is traced through Solomon. Both are sons of David.

Third, and the most important difference is it appears that Matthew and Luke disagree about who is the father of Joseph, Mary’s husband. It appears Luke is saying Joseph is the son of Heli (**hay-lee**) and Matthew is saying Joseph is the son of Jacob. Which is correct? Critics immediately say, see, here is a contradiction. Therefore, the Bible is flawed. But, there is no contradiction, what we have is two different genealogies. Matthew gives Jesus’ adopted father, Joseph’s genealogy, thus Joseph is the son of Jacob. Luke gives Mary’s and I will explain why he is

also correct also in a minute. What we have here are two genealogies, one paternal and one maternal. You and I also have two genealogies through our two parents.

Reading Luke 3, verse 23, “Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli (hay·lee).”

It might be easier if I reworded this verse, “Jesus was the son, so it was thought of Joseph his adopted father, who is the son-in-law of Heli, who is married to Heli’s daughter Mary.” Luke was not saying Heli was Joseph’s father, but Mary’s father. Luke did this to hold to the tradition of not using female names and in so doing identifies Jesus’ grandfather without using Mary’s name.

It is amazing how these two genealogies work together. Both demonstrate Jesus is the rightful heir to David’s throne. Through Mary, Jesus was a blood descendent of King David. Through his adoptive father, Joseph – Jesus received the legal right to the throne. If one examines Matthew’s genealogy they find out if Joseph had been Jesus’ biological father he would not had been in line for the throne of David. One of Joseph’s ancestors found in Matthew 1:11, is Jechoniah (ee-ekh-on·ee-as) the son of Josiah. Why is this a problem, you ask? Let me tell you. According to Jeremiah 22:30, God said this about Jechoniah, also known as Coniah, king of Judah, “Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, **for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.**” If Jesus had been the physical son of Joseph he would have been ineligible to be the Messiah. But, as the adopted son of Joseph, Jesus inherited the legal right to the throne. So Jesus is the Messiah and rightful King legally through Joseph and by blood through Mary. Jesus’ scriptural credentials are irrefutable. Jesus is the “**only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords!**” (1 Timothy 6:15)

The same God who inspired the writing of the Bible works in us today as God the Spirit to show us truth and resolve the difficulties found in parts of the Bible. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to answer God's critics and enemies.

Some years ago when train travel was still the best way to cover long distances there was a pastor on the train. He went to the dining car for dinner and a man came and sat down across from him. He saw the pastor was reading the Bible while he waited to be served dinner. The man revealed that he was an atheist. When the pastor's dinner was served the atheist launched into an attack saying the difficulties he found in the Bible proved it not to be true. He began citing verses he found in error, yet, the pastor enjoyed his dinner of New England Cod, which is a very bony fish. As he ate he separated the bones and pushed them to side of his plate. Finally, when the atheist was finished he said, "Well, what do you say now that I have proved the Bible wrong?" The pastor looked up, saying, "I do with the difficulties just as I am doing with this cod. I eat the meat, and I put the bones aside for some fool to choke on." One might say the pastor's response was not very "grace-driven", but the truth is that there are no contradictions in the Word of God and this is evidenced when one spends the time to dig into the meat and separate the bones. There are some things we do not fully understand, but God has proven Himself to be true and trustworthy, so we can trust those things in Scripture that we will not fully understand until heaven. We are to take the Bible and build our pattern of living upon it and this will glorify God.

In the time remaining I want to point out two more lessons; Jesus' genealogy shows God's love and sovereignty.

God's Love

These genealogies show Jesus loves all people, not just Jews, but Gentiles also. Matthew's record includes non-Jews; like Ruth, a Moabite and Rahab the harlot. Luke's genealogy goes beyond Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, to Adam, reminding us that Jesus is the promised Savior for the entire human race.

These two long lists of names show that God's love is bigger than the Jewish race. Jesus is the Savior of all people; he is the light to the Gentiles and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham found in Genesis, ["in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed ... all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him."](#) (Genesis 12:3, 18:18) The Apostle Paul summed this up for believers by writing, ["Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh ... ¹² separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel ... having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."](#) (Ephesians 2:11-13)

Jesus' genealogy included women. So Jesus' genealogy shows that God's love extends to Jew and Gentile, and to both men and women. As Galatians 3:28 says, ["There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."](#)

Jesus' ancestors include well-known sinners; Abraham doubted God and lied a number of times. His grandson Jacob was deceitful. Jacob's son Judah fathered 2 boys with his daughter-in-law Tamar and sold his brother Joseph into slavery. David and Bathsheba, parents of Solomon and Nathan were adulators and conspirators in her husband's murder. Rahab was a prostitute. And the list goes on. Even before Jesus was born he had a kinship and love with sinners and as he

said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17)

God’s Sovereignty

These genealogies are texts we should not pass over - for if we do we miss a powerful verification of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The whole of the Bible, including genealogies, is filled with God’s sovereignty and love.

These genealogies make it possible for us to look at thousands of years of history and this overview gives one a perspective that helps to see that nothing can thwart God’s purposes. Man’s sin and rebellion obviously cannot stop it. Even with what we would consider some pretty big sinners as ancestors, the last name on the list is Jesus. The truth is these genealogies are not a record of man’s biological productivity as much as they are a demonstration of God’s order and movement toward the great goal of salvation through His Son because of his agape love for his creation.

This is an important principle for us to grasp. In fact I think one reason God placed the genealogies in His word is so that we could see this fact that He is sovereign over all. He knew that you and I would watch the news most nights and hear about all the bad stuff, all about the evil people who seem to have so much influence in this world. He knew we would fret and worry about where history is going. God put these detailed genealogies in Scripture and these are part of the overview histories of His involvement in our world, so that we can know that even when the world seems to go from bad to worst, God is still in total control.

In these long lists of names God is saying to you and me, “Look, the famine in Egypt couldn’t starve My plan. Four hundred years of slavery in Egypt couldn’t shackle My plan. Wilderness wanderings couldn’t lose My plan. Babylonian exile for seventy years couldn’t stop My plan. Murderers, adulterers, prostitutes, cheaters, idolaters, liars, in the very line of My Son couldn’t thwart My purpose.” God is sovereign and He is bringing forth His plan even when our near-sightedness makes us think otherwise.

Despite men like Hitler and Osama Ben Laden, God is working out His sovereign plan of salvation, even when history looks like an incomplete jig saw puzzle. You see, the truth is history belongs to God, not man. Nothing stops His message of love for His creation; nothing can stop the gospel from getting out his truth. Nothing will stop His purpose from being completed.

You know, whenever preachers use the phrase, “that’ll preach” they are saying, “That hit’s home...it speaks to people’s life.” It is my prayer that in some way the content of this sermon has done that for you. Perhaps looking at these genealogies has helped you to see your need for Jesus. Maybe you have understood for the first time how much He loves you and you see your need to respond to His love. If this message has hit home – come and visit with me after the service – so we can pray together.

Now, let us close by worshipping our amazing God in song.