



WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE?

Over Advent this year, we're looking at Jesus' family tree. Now I know biblical genealogies don't float everyone's boat, so here are some tips for getting the most out of one:

- **Spot the Klingon.** Which name sounds most like an alien from a sci-fi movie? (My favourite is *Darkon*.)
- **Name that child.** Find the name you'd least like to give your offspring, e.g. *Maher-shalal-hashbaz* (!).
- **Gone in 60 seconds.** Read it loud, proud and fast (that way you sound confident, and it's over quick).

But perhaps the best approach is to ask, "God, what are You saying to me through this list?" Let's pray that prayer as we stand and read Jesus' family tree together:

Matthew 1:1-17

Christmas is renowned for being a family time (with all the pluses and minuses that go with that), so it seems apt that this Advent we should be looking at the people who make up Jesus' family tree. And today, we're going to concentrate on 5 individuals in particular. Because Matthew does something almost completely unheard of, not just in a Jewish context, not just in a Middle Eastern context, but in almost all genealogies from the ancient world.

He includes 5 women in Jesus' family tree:

- **Tamar** was the Canaanite wife of Judah's son, Er. After the death of Er then his brother Onan, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law, as he had failed to pass her to son no.3. Dubious behaviour, yes (but not just on Tamar's part).
- **Rahab** was a Canaanite shrine-prostitute from Jericho, who became a believer in the God of Israel. She hid the Israelite spies on the roof of her house, and as a result she survived the destruction of the city (all thanks to a scarlet cord hung outside the window).
- **Ruth** was a Moabite woman who dedicated herself to caring for her mother-in-law Naomi, even after the death of Naomi's son, and dedicated herself to the God of Israel, too. She ended up marrying an Israelite, Boaz, and became King David's great grandma.
- **Bathsheba** was the wife of Uriah the Hittite (one of David's top men), and David slept with her after seeing her bathing on the roof. Bathsheba got pregnant, Uriah got killed, and she lost her baby, but eventually David and Bathsheba had another child, Solomon.
- **Miriam** (or as we know her, Mary) was a Jewish girl, faithful to the God of Israel, who found herself pregnant while engaged to Joseph (a stoning offence). All she could say was, "It's a miracle." She was chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah – of Jesus.

5 women; 5 backgrounds; 5 different stories. But every one of them is a part of Jesus' family. What does the inclusion of these 5 women, in what was a male-dominated society, have to say to us? And why these 5?

The message is:

Jesus loves people. *All* people.

And that means He has equal space in His Kingdom for ...

1) Men *and* women. Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated – in word and in action – that men and women are of equal importance to God. E.g.:

- When Jesus gestured to His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers" (Matthew 12:46-50), that kind of implies female as well as male disciples.
- When Mary of Bethany is referred to as "sitting at Jesus' feet" (Luke 10:38-42), that was a rabbinic way of saying she was studying as a trainee rabbi.
- When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb (John 20:10-18), she became the first witness of the resurrection (Calvin's Apostle to the Apostles!).

In a world where women were often seen as sub-human and incapable of learning, this was nothing short of a revolution. And it still is today (unfortunately).

2) Jews *and* Gentiles. Of the 5 women on this list, only one of them is a confirmed Israelite – and that’s Mary. All the others are either Canaanite, Moabite or Hittite. What’s the point? That with Jesus there is no distinction based on race, colour, or culture. Jesus made all people, loves all people, and came to save all people.

That’s why, in the first book of the Bible, God makes this promise to Abraham, “Through you and your offspring all the nations (Hebrew *goyim* or ‘Gentiles’) of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 22). And in the final book, God gives John a vision of heaven, where he sees a crowd that cannot be numbered, “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”, standing before God’s throne and waving palm branches (Revelation 7).

I.e. what starts off with one family ends with every family on the planet! That’s why Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again – to make this vision an earthly reality.

3) Righteous *and* unrighteous. Of these 5, how many are sinners? Tamar? Rahab? Bathsheba? It’s a trick question, of course, because the answer is: all of them. Even Mary. Some are obviously messed-up, others less so. But all have sinned and need Jesus to save them.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made it clear that His priority, His emphasis, was lost people. He said it ...

- **In miracles** (He healed people who were regarded as spiritually unclean, like the leper in Mark 1:40-45).
- **In parables** (e.g. the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons, all in Luke ch15).
- **In lifestyle** (He often associated with outcasts, e.g. the tax-collectors and prostitutes in Matthew 9:9-13).

I.e. no-one is too unclean, ungodly or unrighteous to be a part of God’s family. It might seem that way, but Jesus is able to completely transform people. If they’ll let Him.

Adding It Up ...

What’s the point? Jesus was willing to become a part of *our* family so that everyone could become a part of *His*.

Some of us, we need to *hear* that message – because we’re still on the outside, looking in. And to us, God is saying, “I love you. Come and be a part of My family.” Equally, all of us need to *speak* that message – because we are surrounded by people who are heading for a Christless eternity; but they are also people with the potential to be God’s sons and daughters.

So, who can you adopt into your family that they might be adopted into His? And how are you going to do that?