THE GENEALOGY OF GRACE

December 16, 2018

Matthew 1:1-17

Key Verse 1:1 “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

A genealogy is a list of a person’s ancestors, showing their family tree. The Jews were very meticulous about keeping their genealogy like Koreans. My family has a genealogy going back to 20 generations. Matthew started his book with the genealogy of Jesus in order to show that he is the rightful king to reign. But he was not a king like any other kings. He was not a king who ruled by force. He was a king who ruled by grace. He is a king of grace. When we examine his genealogy, we see that it is full of grace. The genealogy is not just a bunch of names. Behind every name is a story. Behind each story, there is God’s amazing grace and faithfulness. There are some people in the list we would rather not talk about. But God revealed his amazing grace, and used them to accomplish his purpose. When we look at all these names, we can only come to one conclusion: God works through ridiculous people to accomplish his will. God went to ridiculous lengths to keep his promise to save us. Let’s learn the faithfulness of God who sent his Son to this world according to his promises. Let’s learn his grace upon undeserving sinners. Let’s also please God by faith so that we too may be a part of God’s history.

Look at verse 1. “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” When the world was first created, it was good; it was paradise in which man lived for the glory of God and enjoyed utmost happiness. But through one man Adam’s disobedience to the holy command of God, sin and death came into the world (Ro 5:12). Since then, man lost paradise. The world became like hell. What did God do in this situation? God, in his great mercy, made a new plan of world salvation. God promised to send a Savior from the offspring of a woman (Ge 3:15). He is Jesus. Before his coming, God established two ancestors of faith, Abraham and David.

**First**, God chose Abraham to be a blessing. God called Abraham with a great purpose for him. God wanted to make him into a great nation. Even if Abraham had 120 sons, they would not be enough to make a nation. But God promised Abraham to make him into a great nation when he did not have even one son to inherit his name. What a difficult promise to believe! When God called Abraham, he also wanted to make him a source of blessing so that all peoples of all nations would be blessed through him (Ge 12:3). At that time Abraham was very fatalistic due to his childless problem. Because of his burden of life he could be a burden to others, not to mention be a blessing to others. But God promised to make him a blessing. He was also a man of fear. He lied about his wife, Sarah being his sister out of fear for his life and lack of trust in God. He did it twice.

In the time of Abraham, there were so many people who burdened others with their selfishness and ego-centricity. At that time, the power of sin ruled the world. In that hopeless time, God called Abraham and said, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing” (Ge 12:2). To Abraham, who was already 75 years old, it was too great a promise. Anyway, God promised to give him so many sons that they would eventually establish a nation. Abraham had no idea to have that many sons; he just wanted one son to inherit his name. As his name, “Abram,” “noble father,” suggests, he only wanted to be an ordinary man, never be a great man. Even though God’s promise did not match his calculation, he did not have any second thought. He simply accepted God’s promises, because he honored God as God.

Since then, ten years had elapsed and God had not given him even one son. To Abraham, living a life of faith seemed to have been only for the sake of suffering. After living by faith for ten years, he was weary and tired. One day Abraham was sitting crouched in his tent in despair. God visited him and took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them...So shall your offspring be” (Ge 15:5). Wow! This time God’s promise was too big to believe. But Abraham simply believed God’s promise because he honored God as God. God recognized him as a man of faith who had a right relationship with him (Ge 15:6) and established 12 patriarchs of faith through one man, Abraham. After 25 long years had elapsed, finally God gave Abraham a son, Isaac, as his heir. God also changed his name from “Abram,” meaning “noble father,” to “Abraham,” meaning “father of many nations.” God made him a blessing to all peoples of all nations because he simply believed God’s promises. Abraham’s simple faith was the quality that made him the ancestor of faith.

**Second**, God called a shepherd boy David. Around 1,000 B.C. God called David, a shepherd boy, who was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse. When God called David, he had a great purpose for him. It was to establish through him a kingdom of priests, that is, a shepherd nation, and a model of the theocratic kingdom of God. 2 Samuel 7:12b says, “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.” In a time of prosperity, David should have maintained God’s blessing. But he could not. He got lazy. Once, when everybody went to war, he stayed in the palace. He watched TV all night and went to bed late. He got up late in the afternoon. After getting up, he went to the roof and saw a woman bathing. He should have turned away immediately, but in his laziness and desire for excitement, he lusted after her beauty. Soon his desire became deed. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal general. Of course, Bathsheba cannot escape the blame. In order to cover up his sin, David destroyed General Uriah, the woman’s husband. Since a king was above the law, David could have justified his sins. But he realized that he was not right with God. He realized that he had sinned greatly against God (Ps 51:4). David confessed his sins and repented his sin of adultery and murder with many tears, asking God’s mercy and forgiveness (Ps 51:1,2). God was pleased with his repentant heart, and made him the second ancestor of faith. In this country where everybody justifies his or her sins, David’s faith in God’s forgiveness is shining brightly.

**Third**, five women of faith. It is highly unusual that women are included in the genealogy. It is more astonishing that one of them, Rahab was a prostitute and two of them, Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles and two of them, Tamar and Bathsheba committed adultery. By human standard, they were terrible women. They were social outcasts. Matthew could have skipped them or replaced them with noble women such as Sarah. But Matthew could not but include five women of faith in the genealogy of Jesus because he was moved by their faithfulness, and God’s amazing grace upon them.

Firstly, Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah (3a). Judah had three sons by a Canaanite woman. Er, his first son, the husband of Tamar, died. Judah’s second son, Onan, married the widow Tamar. But he also died. Then Judah sent Tamar to her father’s house to wait for his third son, Shelah, to grow up. When Shelah grew up, Judah reneged on his promise, for he was afraid that his third son, Shelah, might die too. Then one day Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and conceived twin sons by Judah, who was seeking comfort after his wife died. Tamar bore twin sons, Perez and Zerah. In this way she bore heirs for her dead husband, Er. If she could pass on her husband’s name, she didn’t mind sacrificing herself. She was truly faithful to her dead husband. Her faithfulness moved Judah’s heart to make him come back to his father’s house and became the covenant son. Otherwise Judah could have been cut off from God’s blessing and lived like a Canaanite. If you or I have an ancestor in our families who did something like this, we don’t talk about it. We probably leave his or her picture out of the family album. But God honored her faithfulness and included her in the genealogy of Jesus.

Secondly, Rahab was a Gentile prostitute who lived in the walls of Jericho. But by faith she welcomed the spies of Israel when they came to Jericho to spy out the land (Josh 2:1-21; Heb 11:31). It was because she had heard that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. She had the absolute fear of God, the God of Israel, whom she believed to be the Creator of heaven and earth. Because of her personal faith in the Creator God, the army of Israel could conquer Jericho, the first invincible fortress in the promised land. Later, Rahab became the mother of Boaz and the great-great-grandmother of King David. She was also included in the genealogy of Jesus.

Thirdly, Ruth was a Moabitess, a Gentile woman, and the second daughter-in-law of Naomi. Moabites were descendants of Lot through his older daughter. So they are children of incest. Naomi went to live in Moab in the time of famine and there her two sons died young. Naomi said to the two daughters-in-law, “Orpah and Ruth! I am too sorrowful even to look at you. Go back to your family and remarry.” But Ruth gave up her second chance to marry and decided to follow her mother-in-law back to the foreign country Israel, while the other daughter-in-law Orpah went away to remarry. It was indeed a difficult decision. Going into a foreign country where one would be despised is really difficult. Moreover, who would marry a foreigner? But Ruth had a faith in God of Israel. Ruth 1:16 says, “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’” God honored Ruth’s faithfulness as a precious factor in the history of God and made her the great-grandmother of King David. God also included her in the genealogy of Jesus.

Fourthly, Mathew recorded Solomon’s mother as one who “had been Uriah’s wife,” exposing David’s great sin. Bathsheba was Uriah’s wife, who committed adultery with King David and later bore him Solomon.

Fifthly, Mary was a country girl who became Jesus’ mother. When she heard of God’s great purpose for her (Lk 1:26-33), by faith she gave up her beautiful dream of marriage and obeyed God’s words (Lk 1:38). God was pleased with her obedience, and she was included in the genealogy of Jesus. Mary trusted God even when it meant becoming pregnant before marriage by bringing misunderstanding from her fiancé and from her village people. God used her faith to bring Jesus into the world.

The Savior of the world came from people whom we would not even have anything to do with. The Savior of the world came from people whom we would ridicule. Why? Matthew recorded these women in order to show that God’s people are sinners who have received God’s grace of forgiveness. God used them to accomplish his purpose because of their faith. They pleased God with their faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” We praise God for sending Jesus as a baby through many men and women of faith. May God help us to be faithful even if it means a loss of many things so that we may please God with faith and be used by God to accomplish his will, and be a part of God’s history.

Lastly, I want to mention Jeconiah. Look at verse 11. “…and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.” Jeremiah 22:30 says, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.” That was the curse on Jeconiah because of his wickedness. Indeed, after Jeconiah, none of his descendants became kings. Joseph, the husband of Mary, is a descendant of Jeconiah. If Jesus had been the real son of Joseph, he would be under the curse, and could never have sat on the throne of David. But Luke 1:32-33 says that Jesus would sit on the throne of David: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever.” How could we solve this riddle? Jesus would need to be the legal son of Joseph in order to inherit the rights to the throne of David, but he would not be in the line of David descending through Jeconiah. God did it by the miracle of the virgin birth, bypassing the actual blood line of Jeconiah. Mary is a descendant of David through another son Nathan. Jesus is the real son of David through Mary. This is why the virgin birth is important. We will study it next week. It is amazing how God guarded every single detail.

We can say that the story of Christmas is the Divine Conspiracy. In his grace Jesus the Son of God entered human history, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin. God will intervene again when he sends Jesus again to call an end to history. This time Jesus will not come as a baby in a manger. This time Jesus will return to earth as a triumphant King, bringing judgment on all sinners. Until then, God wants us to be faithful and be a part of God’s history.