

# The Longing of the Ages

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] to his word. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you that your word is living and active. We thank you that you have spoken words of life into our darkness. And Father, we pray then this evening as we come to your word. And Father, a genealogy that perhaps seems strange and remote to us, that you would make it alive to us, that you would warm our hearts to your word, that you would soften us, that we might receive what you have to say, that you would give us understanding and illumine our darkened minds. Father, above all, we pray that you would lead us to Jesus the Messiah through these words. For this we pray and ask in his name. Amen.

Sorry. Well, I don't know if you have ever seen the program, Who Do You Think You Are?

If you don't know it, here's an overview. Each episode features a celebrity and a team of researchers kind of digs up this person's family history and shares one or two historical gems with this person and with us as viewers. This program first aired in 2004. And believe it or not, it's still running. It ran its 19th series earlier this year. I don't think many TV shows could claim that kind of longevity. But it does show, doesn't it, there's a kind of enduring fascination with this question, isn't there? Where do we come from? Because we have this deep sense that our family histories are not just dusty sheets of paper or old photographs, but in some way can reveal to us something of who we are today. Hence, I guess, the title of the show, Who Do You Think You Are?

The blurb on the BBC tells us the participants, quote, follow in their ancestors' footsteps with stories of bravery, loss, heartbreak, sacrifice, resilience, and joy filtering down through the generations.

And tonight we get a chance to delve back then into the family history of surely the best known person in the history of all the world, Jesus. Matthew begins his gospel with a family history, a genealogy, verse 1.

[ 2 : 4 6 ] This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah. And just like that TV show, Matthew is asking us, who do you think he is? What can we learn from Jesus' family about his identity?

Now, sometimes people, maybe with difficult family relationships and difficult family backgrounds, can feel uncomfortable coming into church for the first time.

I guess on the surface of things, looking around, we might think, oh, everything's kind of nice and uncomplicated in a room like this. I guess the worry maybe can be, knowing our background, perhaps we might not be welcome with God's family.

Well, if that is you here tonight, if you can relate to that in any way, well, we are so glad that you are here. I'm delighted that you are here tonight, because there is wonderful good news here in our passage for you and for all of us.

Because we're going to see tonight that Jesus was not from an uncomplicated family. His ancestors included murderers, adulterers, prostitutes, corrupt and evil kings, and lots of otherwise forgotten and overlooked and overshadowed people.

[ 4 : 2 0 ] Matthew's big point at the start of this book about Jesus' life is that the kind of family Jesus comes from is exactly the kind of family that Jesus has come for.

And despite what any of us might think walking into a room like this, this family that Matthew is writing about is us.

It is this family, the family of God, which should give us great hope, whoever we are this evening, that Jesus can save us and can welcome us as we are, bringing with us our sin, our brokenness, our histories to him.

How can he do that? How can he welcome us? Well, we're going to see not only does all the brokenness of the ages filter down the generations to him, but that he was born as the answer to that very brokenness and sin and history.

He is the longing of the ages. And I hope tonight as we spend time in these words that we see that he is himself our deepest longing tonight, whether we know it now or not.

[ 5 : 38 ] That as we go through this genealogy together, we see ourselves reflected back and see that Jesus came to answer the cry of our own hearts, to be made whole, to be put right with God again.

Hmm. So then, who do you think he is? Well, firstly, we are going to look at Jesus' family to see who he is.

Now, one thing just to point out straight away is that, of course, this isn't the whole of Jesus' family history. In the way that the presenters, I guess, of who do you think you are, might draw out a couple of significant threads or figures.

Well, that's what Matthew's done as well. So Abraham, there in verse 2, he had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but only Isaac is listed.

Isaac also had two sons, Jacob and Esau, but only Jacob is listed. Jacob had 12 sons, but only Judah is named. We could go on and on.

[ 6 : 43 ] So we can see, can't we, straight away, Matthew's tracing a single line through a family tree to show us some really significant things about Jesus that he does not want us to miss.

We're going to see what they are, but for now, it's just worth pointing out that everyone reading this genealogy back when it was written would have known that this wasn't a complete genealogy, that there are names missing.

It's been shortened in places. That was normal back then. And we could go back and fill in the gaps if we really wanted to. But the point of this genealogy is not to be exhaustive.

Rather, it is to be illustrative. It doesn't tell us everything, but it tells us what is important. And the very fact that Matthew has been selective in putting this genealogy together helps us because it means the names that he does choose to include signpost us to what he wants us to see, what he thinks is important about this history.

Now, Matthew loved Jesus. He followed Jesus. And so perhaps in the back of our minds, we're thinking, okay, well, if he's putting this genealogy together, well, surely he's just going to choose the bits that show Jesus in a really good light.

[ 8 : 10 ] Surely he's going to cover up the dirty secrets, hide the dark corners. But that is not what Matthew does.

In fact, he goes out of his way to bring the skeletons out of the family wardrobe and into plain ye. So what then does Matthew think we need to know about the world's most famous figure?

Well, four big things he wants us to know about Jesus' family. And the first is that it was a broken family. A broken family. Now, a lot of the story is actually told through four women Matthew mentions.

And we start with two of them who were treated really disgracefully by Jesus' forefathers. The first is in verse 3, if you just have a look there.

Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Now, Matthew's pointing us back to one of the really darkest points in the Bible.

[ 9 : 16 ] So this guy, Judah, had three sons. His eldest son, Er, got married to a girl named Tamar. But we're told that son was wicked and he died.

And back then, it was the responsibility of Judah's next oldest son, then, to marry Tamar, to care for her, to carry on the family line.

But the next oldest son, Onan, he wasn't up for that. And the Lord punished him for that. He was put to death. And so now, at this point in the story, Tamar has nowhere to turn.

So she goes to live with her in-laws. And Judah, her father-in-law, promises her, Don't worry, Tamar, because when my youngest son, Shelah, when he's grown up and ready to marry, don't worry.

He'll marry you. And you'll be taken care of, and you'll have a family. But this son, Shelah, grows up, and he doesn't marry Tamar either.

[ 10 : 19 ] So having married into this family, Tamar ends up completely helpless. But that isn't where the tragedy ends. Tamar concocts a plan.

Judah goes on a long trip. And Tamar dresses up as a prostitute and waits by the roadside so that Judah will go in and sleep with her.

Now, he doesn't have any money, so he gives her instead his staff and his belt. And lo and behold, Tamar falls pregnant. Now, this is a disgrace to the family.

Judah wants Tamar put to death for this. Until, that is, Tamar brings out the staff and the belt and says, Well, the baby belongs to the man who owns these things.

And when Judah sees them, he realizes that his sins have found him out, not only in sleeping with his daughter-in-law, but in neglecting her completely.

[ 11 : 21 ] These are his words. She is more righteous than I, he says, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah. Tamar gives birth to Judah's sons Perez and Zerah, as we read in this genealogy.

And it's Perez who God chooses then to carry on the line that leads to Christ. An unbelievable backstory, isn't it?

If that wasn't enough, though, the second woman treated terribly by this family is named Bathsheba. She's in verse 6, but you'll see there she's not named.

Instead, Matthew reminds us really pointedly that she had been Uriah's wife. What's the story? King David was on the throne of God's kingdom.

And one day he's home by himself in the palace, and a beautiful woman catches his eye. And he asks about her. And it turns out she's married to one of his soldiers, a guy named Uriah.

[ 12 : 24 ] So David summons the woman to see him, takes her to bed. And a few months later, she sends him a note to tell him she is pregnant. So what does David do?

David gets Uriah to come home from the battlefield in the hope that he'll go home, sleep with his wife, and figure that the baby was his all along.

But Uriah says no. He said God's law forbids soldiers to sleep with their wives while there's a war on. So Uriah chooses to sleep in the palace.

So David's cover-up has failed. So what does he do now? Well, when it's time for Uriah to go back to the war, David writes a letter and gives it to Uriah to give to his commander.

And the letter says, put Uriah in the place on the battlefield where the fighting is fiercest, so that he will be killed in battle and not come home.

[ 13 : 26 ] This time David's cover-up works. Uriah is killed. His wife is devastated. And David has her come to live with him as his wife.

And she became the mother later of Solomon. We see there the next in line that led to Christ. So why does Matthew, who loved the Lord Jesus, deliberately signpost us to these really grim backstories, dreadful moments in Jesus' family history?

Well, it is to remind us that this is not a clean and tidy family. It is not a family without sin. It is a terribly broken family.

These are Jesus' ancestors, murderers, liars, adulterers in a word, outright sinners. Jesus comes from a family like that.

And so if Jesus' family history is so broken, so torn by sin, well, surely the message for us is that it's possible, surely, that his family today is a family of broken and sinful people.

[ 14 : 46 ] People with pasts and backstories that we are not proud of. People like me. People like you.

A broken family. But the second thing we need to see in Jesus' family is that Jesus comes from an open family, an open family. And again, Matthew tells this story through two women.

Look, verse 5. Both of them, Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Ruth and Rahab.

Two very different women. But they have this in common. Neither of them were born into God's family to begin with. Both were born outside of Israel.

So Rahab was a Canaanite. The Canaanites were people who lived in the land before Israel came in. And Ruth was a Moabite.

[ 15 : 45 ] And the Moabites kind of bordered Israel as their neighbors. And it's not as if Canaan or Moab were particularly great holiday destinations for God's family back then.

Both these countries were extremely hostile to God's people. They'd fought historic battles against them. They tried to stop God's purposes in the world.

But these two women, Rahab and Ruth, from these countries, well, they are included in this genealogy to remind us that God has always welcomed outsiders, even his enemies, into his family when they have turned to him and put their faith in him.

Rahab, the backstory. What is it? Well, she was a professional prostitute living in the city of Jericho when God's people invaded.

Some spies came into the city. Rahab hid them and cut a deal with them. She knew that nobody could stand in the way of God's purposes.

[ 16 : 54 ] And that he had promised to give her city, her land, over to his people. And so she offered to help the spies and asked only that when God's people came and invaded, that they would rescue her and rescue her family out of the city.

So when she had to choose, Rahab identified with God's people. She trusted in even what very little she knew of the character of this God, that he was one gracious enough to welcome even one of his sworn enemies, if she turned and pledged herself, her allegiance to him and his kingdom.

Now, true to where the soldiers did indeed find Rahab and her family and rescued them out of the rubble of the city when they invaded. And we read in that account that Rahab lives among the Israelites to this day.

So true then to his word, God did graciously forgive and welcome Rahab into his family for her faith. And more than that, remarkably, he gives her a place in the line of his family that would lead to his promised Christ.

Rahab gave birth to Boaz, who in turn would marry Ruth, another outsider, to carry on the family line that led to Jesus. I did wonder for the first time reading this, actually, whether for Boaz, God's kindness to his own mother might have played a part in his kindness, generosity, open-heartedness to an outsider like Ruth.

[ 18 : 41 ] We're not told. But the fact that God himself so clearly shown, his willingness, his gladness even, to welcome outsiders in, well, surely that tells us that his door is still open to anyone who would turn to him, put their trust in him, to forgive them of their past, to receive them into a new home, a new family.

Because Jesus comes from an open family. The third thing we need to see here is that Jesus comes also from an unruly family. An unruly family.

The dark history gets longer and longer. So this is looking at verses 6 to 11. It's that second block in this genealogy. And the important thing to know about these names is that they were all kings.

Kings in the southern kingdom of Judah, God's kingdom. So on the one hand, of course, Matthew's saying Jesus comes from a royal family. But on the other hand, Matthew's reminding us that this royal family was not always a good royal family.

He seems to deliberately choose not only the very best, but the very worst names in that family that ruled over God's kingdom. To point out that even the highest and the strongest figures in Jesus' history were not pure and perfect, but sometimes were very corrupt and evil.

[ 20 : 15 ] If you read about the lives of these kings in first and second kings in the Old Testament, two phrases seem to kind of struggle and fight for dominance.

For some of the kings, you read something like, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done. But for other kings, you have the very opposite.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He committed all the sins that his father had done before him. So two opposite kinds of king. He ruled over God's kingdom.

And Matthew has chosen from this line of kings a representative mix. But at the end of that section, verse 11, we read, at the time of the exile to Babylon, it tells us that in the end, it was the unruly kings who won.

The kings who did evil in God's sight. The kings who didn't know him and led his people to rebel against him. And we see today, don't we, that that is a kind of microcosm, isn't it, of our world, the world in which we live.

[ 21 : 23 ] That God's kingdom in Judah, that tiny patch of land a long, long time ago, was like a version in miniature of the history of our world played out over the centuries.

There's so much wrong, is still done, carried out, isn't it, under corrupt and evil rulers in our world. Whether that is world leaders, leaders in our workplace, our circles of friends, our homes, who lead in ways that are against God and his rule and who lead others against God and his rule.

And that reality left God's family then crying out for a king who would rule rightly, who would free them from their rebellion, who would not lead them into sin, but deliver them from the evil in their hearts, help them to live rightly under God and serve him.

See, Jesus comes from an unruly family of rebellious kings, which suggests to us surely that unruly rebels, people ruled by sin, people ruled by sin, can have a place in the family of Jesus when we recognize our great need to have God's king, his true and his right king reign over us, an unruly family.

And the final thing we need to see in Jesus' family is that it is a forgotten family, forgotten family. So this is the third block in Matthew's genealogy.

[ 23 : 05 ] It runs from verses 12 to 16. And I say forgotten because most of the names in that last block mean absolutely nothing to us. Okay, some of you here in the summer might remember the name as Arubabel.

Arubabel, we came across him, didn't we, in our study in Haggai. God strengthened him and others as they returned from the exile to build up his house. But after that, really, it is radio silence.

For 400 years, we have no word at all from God, no biblical record. Who came next? And that is largely because in those 400 years, these guys were really nobody.

God's plans were on hold. The world held its breath, just waiting for God's voice, God's hand, to break the silence.

The family faded into obscurity. They were conquered by different kingdoms, the Greeks, the Romans, other minor powers. They struggled even to keep a hold on their distinctive identity as the people of God.

[ 24 : 16 ] And that line of kings that had boasted of names like David and Solomon had shrunk into the shadows. Just think of Joseph, himself a great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson of King David and next in line to the throne.

But when we meet him in this book, what is he doing? He's a joiner, not a king. one in a long line of guys who no one knew, who nobody had ever heard the name of.

So much so that there's really no story to tell about any of these people. Their lives were lived out under the shadow of more important things going on. Jesus was born into a forgotten family.

And again, if this is who's in Jesus' family, then surely his family today is for forgotten people too. People left behind, left out in the world.

People who long to be known and to be loved, to be part of a family where they are more important than the stuff that fills our daily news feed.

[ 25 : 32 ] See, friends, in all the different longings that we have looked at, all the problems with Jesus' family, they tap in, don't they, to some of our deepest longings, our deepest problems.

We long, don't we, to be at peace with our past, to be forgiven of our wrongs, to be welcomed, to be whole, to be known and loved, to live rightly and to live in a world that is governed rightly.

It speaks to us, doesn't it, in our brokenness and outsideness and unrulyness and forgottenness. And the Bible takes all those cries of our hearts, all those longings of humanity and puts them together and tells us that what we are really longing for is someone to come and save us.

We are longing for the Messiah. God promised long ago to answer those great longings, those great problems of the human family in a chosen Savior.

And the wonderful good news of our passage tonight is that Jesus, Jesus the Messiah, was born into this family to be God's answer to the longing of the ages and the longing of our hearts to be saved and put right within.

[ 27 : 06 ] Because the kind of family Jesus is from is exactly the kind of family Jesus is for. So as we finish, I just want to linger on our second big point this evening.

That's Jesus' fulfillment. fulfillment. Because it is not only the longings that filtered down the generations to him, but also God's promises and his purposes in the world.

For as broken as this family was, Matthew has reminded us, hasn't he, right at the top of the headline of this genealogy in verse 1 that this is God's family.

Jesus is the chosen son. It is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham. And we read earlier in our service that God had made special promises or covenants to these men with his family.

And those promises were passed down through this family, through fathers, through sons, until a son would be born. A son of Abraham and a son of David who would take God's promises in hand and fulfill them.

[ 28 : 18 ] Who would take God's great purposes and carry them out for the world? See, that is what Matthew means by calling him Messiah, that Jesus himself is God's promised answer to our great human longings, our great human needs.

What are those promises that he fulfills there? Well, Rhiannon read them for us at the start of our service. How God promised Abraham in Genesis 12 in the face of a total human sin, a world gone completely wrong, that he would bless Abraham and his family and through his family would bring his blessing to all the families of the earth.

God's blessing, his gladness, his approval was going to come to one chosen family and through that family to every family so that people of every tribe and nation and people and language could know God's blessing through a chosen son of Abraham.

And we've seen how that was foreshadowed in part in Rahab and Ruth's inclusion in God's family. We've also seen how that family took God's promise for granted.

They took his blessing for granted. They thought it was theirs to keep and they lost it. But God did not go back on his promise to bless the world through a son of Abraham.

[ 29 : 50 ] He sent Jesus to be the promised chosen son to bring his blessing again to a lost and a sinful world. And he is the son of David also.

Remember, God promised David in those words that one of his sons would sit on the throne of his kingdom forever so that there would always be a son of David ruling over his family and over the world.

And similarly, we've seen, haven't we, how David's sons, that line of kings, failed. They misruled God's kingdom. They did evil. But again, God did not break his word.

He did not forget his promise. But he kept his promise to his people by sending Jesus to be the chosen son of David. He would sit on that throne and rule rightly over his kingdom forever.

And so, by being born into this family, God's family, this line of promise, Jesus has inherited all God's promises to his people and all of God's purposes in the world.

[ 31 : 05 ] Which is, of course, friends, how we can be part of this family today. You wonder, have you been able to see yourself reflected in the family of Jesus tonight?

Have you seen in yourself the brokenness, the sin, the rebellion, the sense of being on the outside or forgotten?

Matthew wants you to see yourself reflected back at you out of these names and to know that whoever you are, you can be part of this family because of Jesus.

He holds out God's forgiveness and favor to every family of the earth. He can do that because he came to die in place of this family.

How does he bring God's blessing and favor to us tonight? Because he carried the guilt of our shameful past and our sinful present and our unruly future to the cross.

[ 32 : 12 ] And there he paid for all of our sins. And he lived a perfect life in place of his family so that he could not only take our sin but cover us with a perfect rightness with God.

And today he invites us to come and live under his perfect good and loving rule. He did that and he can do that rather because he not only died but he rose again from the dead to be the forever king who does rule his family rightly, who breaks the power of sin in our hearts, who will one day return to rule over everything perfectly and to set our world right once and for all.

This is how Jesus comes to hold out to us tonight everything that we have ever longed for to be saved, to be put right with God, to have his blessing and approval, to live under his rule and be part of his family because this son of Abraham, this son of David lived and died and rose again to welcome anyone who would turn to him in faith and put their hope in who he is and what he came to do.

And so friends, who is it that you think he is? Who do you think he is? I hope that we can see that this is the most important question we could ever ask because the world's greatest longings were not answered until he came and the greatest longings of our hearts will not be answered until we come to him.

I hope you've seen tonight, even for the very first time, that Jesus is God's answer to our deepest needs. So, if you are not already, come.

[ 34 : 14 ] Come and be part of his family. Put your trust in him. Enter in. It is open to you. It is open tonight. And if your trust is in him tonight, keep your hope then fixed in him.

You are our own families, and we ourselves, we are not enough, are we? We are not enough to satisfy our deepest needs.

We are not enough to fix our great problems. ones. So, do not let your hope this Christmas drift onto the other things that our world offers us at this time.

Do not put your hope in your family. Do not put your hope in yourself. When the lights come down and our families go home and life kicks in again, we will still long for God, and we will still long for the one who came and who he sent to fulfill his promises.

We still need Jesus the Messiah tonight. Whoever we are, wherever we come from, we need him, for he is our only hope for wholeness and forgiveness, for blessing and peace.

[ 35 : 35 ] Let's pray together now as we put our hope in him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. God, our Father, how we praise you that we can come to you as our heavenly Father and call you by that name because you have so graciously made us part of your family through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, how we thank you that he welcomes even broken and lowly and sinful and darkened people like us.

Father, people with pasts, too shameful for us to really tell. Father, we thank you that we can tell you that we can bring all our past to you, our present and our future, and trust it to the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that he has paid for our every sin through his death, that he reigns over all things in his resurrection life. And how we pray, Father, that you would grant us the faith to trust in him.

Lord, whoever we are this evening, that by your Spirit you would grant us a new and a living faith to cling to him, to hope in him, and to love him, our promised Son who gives us life and welcomes us back to you.

[ 37 : 05 ] We thank you. We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.