

Sunday School 8 November: A perfect plan (Matthew 1:1-17)

Recently many people have taken up the hobby of researching their family tree (perhaps when they were stuck at home because of Covid 19). Do you know anyone who has done this research? Do you know anything about your family tree?

If you open your Bible to the very beginning of the New Testament you will see that the very first chapter (Matthew 1) has a family tree – a whole list of Old Testament names.

We are often tempted to skip this chapter because we can't pronounce the names and lots of them we have never even heard of, but the Jewish people that Matthew was writing for would have been impressed. Most of them could also trace their history back for many years. However Jesus's family history proved that he was "royal" because he was descended from the famous King David.

The Jews knew that God had promised King David that his family would rule "forever" (2 Sam 7:16). But they also knew that for over 400 years the king had not been from David's family. They believed that one day God would send his special messenger, the Messiah, and then God would put David's descendants back on the throne. So Matthew is actually boasting about Jesus's family history to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. God was keeping his promise – David's descendant was back on the throne.

But of course, Jesus wasn't the earthly king that the Jewish people had been expecting. They thought they understood exactly what God was going to do and they were waiting for him to send a king to beat the Romans and to set up a Jewish kingdom where they would be the most important group in all the world, God's people!

Matthew wanted his readers to recognise that God's ways of doing things are different from ours (see Job 42:1-3, Isaiah 55:8-9). The Romans were still there. Jesus was crucified (not very king-like!). But Jesus was the King of kings for ever and ever!

And if we look at the list of names there were even more surprising aspects of God's plan:

1. The list contains the names of 4 women! Shock! Horror! Jewish men thanked God every day that they were not women. But God values men and women equally.
2. The list contains the names of people whom Jews looked down on because they had broken God's law – prostitutes (Rahab & Tamar). It also mentions David's adultery. Shock! Horror! But God forgives and uses us even though we are not perfect.
3. The list contained the names of foreigners. (Ruth, Rahab, Tamar) Shock! Horror! The Jews thought God was only interested in them. They had forgotten that God promised to bless all the earth through Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3).

So Matthew begin with the message that Jesus is special but that God works in surprising ways to complete his perfect plan.

God still works like that. He keeps his promises but he enjoys surprising us. The good news is that we can trust him thorough the good and bad surprises.

Readings

Monday: Genesis 12: 1-3 (God's announcement to Abraham)

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 7: 13-16 (God's announcement to David)

Wednesday: Matthew 1:1-6 (Some names we know)

Thursday: Matthew 1: 16-17 (Joseph the legal father of Jesus)

Friday: Isaiah 55: 8-9 (God's great 'ways')