

We are getting oh so close to the moment where anticipation meets experience - where we enjoy time with family and rip open the presents under the tree! And the buzz leading up to it is almost deafening.

This week reflecting on the cultural acceptability of Christmas - that everyone celebrates - without regard to what they are celebrating - like going to a party and not knowing what it is for. All of the shiny things, the music, the food... 'wait a second, what is it really about?!' Would it be so acceptable if we knew what the party was really for? Would everyone be so quick to have the 'Christmas Spirit?'

This, all of the stuff of Christmas put in the context of Jesus' arrival as a babe, to a poor unwed couple from a long line of interesting people. I couldn't stop thinking about his outsider status.

Then I turned to Matthew's Gospel and how Jesus is introduced.

The promise of God is for and through the outsider.

We can notice this truth in looking at Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew's Gospel - bridging the Old Testament and accounts of Jesus - that Jesus is the fulfillment and expansion of what came before.

Genealogy is a fairly normal thing in the first century, the form would be used to prove the social status, to show that they were from good stock and a long line of superior people. Today we have resumes that tell of how great we are as individuals, then you would use your family line as the resume. Herod I would destroy the genealogies kept in Jerusalem to keep hidden that he was not from a prestigious line.

It is a regular thing in Scripture. The Bible is full of these types of lists and if we are honest, they can be pretty boring. If you read the Bible every day and you come to a genealogy you groan! But as we approach Christmas, there is some wonderful richness to be mined out of Matthew's genealogy.

It is not a text that calls us to a certain way of living, or that even describes a miraculous scene. Instead it presents us with things to notice, if we think about them, and a hero that is to be found. It is good news.

In this family tree is the declaration that Jesus is an outsider for outsiders and that God keeps his word... no matter how long it takes! And I can not think of two better truths to give us the 'Christmas Spirit.'

The promise of God is for and through the outsider.

1) Jesus is the outsider for outsiders

If you were to do an informal poll and just ask people on the street what Christianity is all about - how many do you think would respond that it was about living right, making God happy. Or better yet ask them what Christmas is all about - how does Santa play into it - and the answer will surely include being naughty or nice and earning presents based on our behavior.

Honestly that is our natural inclination - to earn - to behave just right to earn the nicely wrapped presents of life... but then the promised One comes into a manger and all of that is turned upside down.

Jesus didn't not come from or for well behaved, perfect people for perfect people. He came from scandalous people for scandalous people.

Here is the promise of God, the Messiah has come... and he has this as his resume, his credentials. This is his family name!

Some characters here. The line demonstrates Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David, his descent from Abraham. Three groups of fourteen names.

What should stand out though is the women. That might not seem strange in today's climate, but it was startling in a Jewish genealogy. In both Greek and Jewish culture a woman had no legal rights. She could not inherit property or give testimony in a court of law. She was completely under her husband's power. She was seen less as a person than as a thing. The Jewish man thanked God each day that he had not been created a slave, a Gentile or a woman. And yet here are five women in Jesus' genealogy.

So what of it... why the women? Why are these five "mothers of Jesus" included here? The Bible is not vague in its description of these women.

Tamar, an adulteress that has sex and a child with her father-in-law.

Rahab, a prostitute from pagan Jericho - Canaanite.

Uriah's wife, Bathsheba... the woman David seduced.

Ruth, a Moabite, a moabite and their descendents were not allowed near the assembly of the Lord.

Then Mary... pregnant before marriage.. Rumors.

...notorious women. To have women on the list is astonishing, even more so that they are these women. But everyone on the list has some scandal.

"Here, then, you have moral outsiders—adulterers, adulteresses, incestuous relationships, prostitutes. Indeed, we are reminded that even the prominent male ancestors—Judah and David—were moral failures. You also have cultural outsiders, racial outsiders, and gender outsiders. The Law of Moses excluded these people from the presence of God, and yet they are all publicly acknowledged as the ancestors of Jesus." Keller

Have you ever had family members that you try to hide from people?! Like at holiday meals... family you don't introduce to your spouse until your wedding!

Most of this list are these people. The questionable. The outsiders. So this is Jesus... the outsider...

What does it mean? ... it shows us that people who are excluded by culture, excluded by respectable society, and even excluded by the law of God can be brought into Jesus' family. Jesus is the outsider for outsiders. This is what Christmas declares. This is the joy to the world.

I don't how much you feel like an outsider today... what is it that keeps you from believing the promise of God, his word over you? Maybe it is your self-righteousness... Jesus didn't come to exclude you, he came to save you. And what good news that is!

“There is no one, then, not even the greatest human being, who does not need the grace of Jesus Christ. And there is no one, not even the worst human being, who can fail to receive the grace of Jesus Christ if there is repentance and faith.” Keller

At the beginning of the Gospel the all-embracing love of God is emphasized. Nothing can stand in its path. There is nobody who does not need it. And nobody too far gone for it.

This first piece of news makes the Jesus story all the more real, the rejection he faced, the anger toward his claims of being the I Am... of hanging out with the lowly sinners. He is the outsider for outsiders. The ultimate gift to those who believe. But there is something more to warm us this Christmas.

“God is greater than our sin. He used all that sordidness, stupidity, and sin to bring about his promise. With God there is no second best. Christmas means that God is working out his purposes. He will fulfill his promises.” Keller

2) God Keeps His Word

1:1 “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Matthew is tying three main characters here in the genealogy, Abraham, David and Jesus and really it is proof that the promises to Abraham and David have been kept in Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of all history, and in particular of God’s promise to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, and of his promise to David that his throne and kingdom would be established for ever before the Lord.

Genesis 12:2-3 “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

2 Samuel 7:14-16 “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son... [16] And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

These are promises that the people cling to, that faithful remnants hold out hope for, to witness their fulfillment with eager anticipation. But there are countless more promises all pointing to the One whose genealogy is listed here.

From the first gospel proclamation in the garden - the promise of offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

Balaam’s Final Oracle: **Numbers 24:17** “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”

Isaiah 7:14 As a sign, a virgin will give birth to a son and call his name Immanuel... God with us.

Micah 5:2 “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

Peace coming on the heels of a great king. The suffering servant taking on the burden of his people. The child born unto us. The One to redeem Israel. To work justice and mercy for his people. Their songs repeated the promise... and every scandal, act of faithfulness, good kings and stories of sacrificial (bloody) worship, all point to this One character... to the overarching promise of redemption, full and final redemption at the hands of God.

Even the reminders to hold on are kept by God. **Habakkuk 2:3** “For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”

Mary’s prayer **Luke 1:54-55** “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, [55] as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

God has kept his word. His promise has come. It takes time but it is fulfilled. At its appointed time, it has surely come.

Galatians 4:4-7 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

This is where the outsiders (us) meet the promise of God. Not only is this adoption in Christ amazing news for us but it is on the backdrop of God’s faithfulness, his trustworthiness to his word. And because this promise of Christ is fulfilled we can trust all of his promises of help, completion and eternity.

Not only can the outsider be saved, but we can trust God.

As surely as God is faithful, the word of the good news of Jesus, his coming to save and his promise to return is true, for all the promises of God find their yes in him.

In the genealogy we notice God keeps his word - his promise is a sure thing. Christmas is then a reminder of his faithfulness. And I am holding onto it!

The promise of God is for and through the outsider.

Can we squeeze any application out of the genealogy?

Know he is for you - Jesus came into this world to save sinners. His life, death and resurrection was for you. Believe in him.

Hold on for his promises - because in the fullness of time, Jesus came and worked adoption for you through faith in him - you can trust his word. You can trust all of his promises as they find their yes in him [that God will strengthen you; that he will provide for every need according to his riches; that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you; that there is no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus; That he will finish the work he began in you; that he is returning to end suffering]

“If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”

“God’s grace virtually never operates on our time frame, on a schedule we consider reasonable. He does not follow our agendas or schedules. When Jesus spoke to the despairing father Jairus, whose daughter had just

died, he said, "Believe" (Mark 5:36). He was saying, "If you want to impose your time frame on me, you will never feel loved by me, and it will be your fault, because I do love you. I will fulfill my promises." Keller

Let's hold on for his promises together. Let's rejoice in his promise together.

Close - Gift baskets and all that is in them exposed. They have to wait. Even sitting and staring at the box in anticipation. There is absolutely no surprise as to what they are getting and they bubble over with joy for the coming day when they get to open and fully enjoy the gifts.

This is Christmas... the present was disclosed, it was written into the Scriptures and cherished... when the people misplaced the promises the anticipation waned, but when they studied it the longing was stoked within them. Now that the gift has come, that Jesus has been opened for the outsider, we can bubble over with joy for what is coming next.

May we live like the kids - may Jesus be our shiny gift that never dulls, may our excitement in him never wane as we celebrate Christmas and wait on the final promises of God to arrive.