

Tracing the Family Tree

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 22nd of June 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, Tracing the Family Tree, and is based on Luke chapter 3, verses 21 to 38.

Please be seated. You may like to have open the passage from Luke's Gospel that was read for us. I bet every person who's on the reading roster was glad that it was Jennifer and not them reading it today.

Page 834 in the Pew Bibles. And today we're beginning a series just for a few weeks, five weeks, on Luke chapters 3 and 4 in the morning services. And there are no baby illustrations today.

Let's pray that God will help us to understand why there are all these names that are so obscure here in the Bible. Heavenly Father, you speak to us through the words of Scripture, and we pray now as we come to your word in Luke's Gospel, that you'll not only teach us so that our minds are informed, but we pray that your word will change our lives so that they are reformed more in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 22] Amen. My late grandfather was pretty much a teetotaler. So I was surprised one day many years ago when he suggested to me, told me, that I should go to a pub.

Now, not any pub. I was about to go with a friend on holidays to Tasmania, and he told me that I should visit a specific pub. I think it was called the Golden Feather, but I might be wrong about that.

It might be a lion or something. And it was in a little village just out of Launceston. And the reason why I was to go to this particular pub under the instruction of my teetotaler grandfather was because my great-great-great-grandfather was once the publican of this pub.

And so when we went up to this little pub, they had the plaques listing the names of every person who had owned and been the publican of the pub. And about the third or fourth, if I remember rightly, 1854, thereabouts, was one William Price, my great-great-great-grandfather.

Well, what an impeccable pedigree that is, to have a publican in your ancestry. And not only that, I've got on the other side of the family a butcher. In fact, a few generations of butchers.

[2 : 38] My great-grandfather on that side, who was a butcher, was actually shot by bandits in Mexico in 1921. There is a whole mixture of Irish and Scot and English ancestry, one of whom died of softening in the brain in one prison somewhere or other, if I remember rightly.

Sadly, my pedigree just misses out on the Bunnings fortune because I think my mother's mother's ancestors in the 1820s or 30s, I think, came from the brother of the Bunnings, who started Bunnings and made probably a fortune.

We didn't get that. And we hope, we think, I'm not sure, but I like to think that there is Huguenot refugees back in the 1700s who are part of our ancestry as well.

Well, no doubt, many of you, if not most of you, know something about your ancestry because it's such a pastime, a hobby for so many people, not least in Australia, in the last few decades, to trace back their ancestry, to see how far back we can go and what sorts of people.

We take a pride if there's a first leader and we're not that embarrassed if it happens to be somebody who is a convict in our strange upside-down world of Australia. In our line of family history, from what I know, which is little, I think we got stuck in the 1700s and haven't been able to go any further back.

[3 : 59] Unfortunately, there's a mixture of all the names that are so common and so on back in the mists of time. Now, ancestry, though, can be more than just a pastime or a hobby. It can actually be quite important.

Ancestry sometimes determines citizenship. Ancestry can determine issues of work visas. For example, it used to be the case that if one or more of your grandparents was born in England, then you as a grandchild could obtain some form of work visa to work in England.

I think that's now being limited. But sometimes ancestry can help you if you want to work in another country. Ancestry can determine your eligibility to play sport for a particular country.

Other than England, that is. They seem to take people from all over the world to play cricket for them because they don't produce any cricketers born in England, it seems to me. So if you're born in Zimbabwe, South Africa, New Zealand or Australia, you're probably eligible to play cricket badly for England.

And of course, issues of ancestry are often determined issues of inheritance. Who of us dreams of that long lost, never known maiden aunt who's left you a seven figure inheritance.

[5 : 13] You never heard of her, but you wait for the letter to arrive in the mail that you've inherited her fortune. Well, as we heard read today in that second reading, a long list of names, we read the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

It's a passage that's easy to skip over. The first few chapters of Luke's Gospel are very familiar. The story of the annunciation of Jesus' birth to Mary and then Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and so on.

Coming up to John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Then all of a sudden we get this atrocious list of names, most of which we've never heard before. And so most of us, if we are reading through Luke's Gospel, probably skip over it and carry on in chapter four where it gets a little bit more exciting.

There are obscure names, many of which are not found anywhere else in the Bible other than in this list, although there are a few that are well known. So what's going on here? Why does Luke take the time and effort to no doubt find out and then record for us this list of the genealogy of Jesus Christ?

Well, the passage that was read for us begins the adult ministry of Jesus. He's about 30 years old, we're told in verse 23. Presumably he's worked up until this point maybe as a carpenter stonemason like Joseph was, we believe.

[6 : 28] Maybe up in Nazareth for much of the time where he grew up or maybe just down the road in a town that was being built by one of the Herods, the town of Sepphoris that was being built in these early years of Jesus' life.

But he begins his adult ministry around the age of 30 by being baptised. Not all that common in ancient Judaism, though there were some baptismal practices and certainly if you went up to offer a sacrifice at the temple or something like that, then you may well have a mikvah, cleansing bath, by going down a few steps into a little bath.

But it's not quite baptism. John the Baptist had appeared on the scene, we're not quite sure for how long, and had developed certainly some form of following and crowds following him and he was baptising people in the River Jordan for the repentance of their sins and for their forgiveness.

John the Baptist announced himself with famous words from the Old Testament, from the prophet Isaiah, one of the major prophets of the Old Testament, and he used the words you'll see across the column in verses 4 and 5 and 6 of Luke 3.

Here is John the Baptist using words from the Old Testament to announce not so much himself, but the Messiah who is about to come.

[8 : 02] He announces himself as the forerunner of the Messiah, the herald of the Messiah. And that's what his job is as he sees it and proclaims it to be, to announce to the crowds around about him, to the Jewish society of Israel, that he is the forerunner for the long-expected Messiah from the Old Testament.

And he uses words from Isaiah the prophet that are very important because in Isaiah the prophet these words announce in about 600 or even earlier BC that God himself will come through the servant of the Lord to restore God's people not just to their land, because they were away from the land at the time, but actually to God himself in a spiritual return from exile.

And John the Baptist is announcing in effect that that is about to happen. And directing attention not just to himself as the proclaimer of that, but to the one who is about to be seen as the Messiah.

Now amongst other people he baptises Jesus, which may well and rightly strike us as odd. After all, John was baptising for the repentance of sins.

And throughout the scriptures of the New Testament, it's very clear time and again that Jesus was without sin, sinless, perfect, perfect in the image of God. Why then is Jesus baptised if John's baptism is for a repentance of sin?

[9 : 29] Well partly Jesus, it seems, was baptised or allowed himself to be baptised in order to validate John the Baptist's ministry. This is the right thing. Partly, he allowed himself to be baptised in order to identify with people who needed repentance, to identify with the need for sin to be dealt with.

After all, that's the key reason why Jesus came in the first place. And of course Jesus was baptised in order for there to be his own identification as the Messiah.

That is, when Jesus was baptised, as we read in verses 21 and 22, his baptism was unlike those others that John baptised.

For at the time of Jesus' baptism, or just after it, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove so that everyone could see, and a voice came from heaven speaking to Jesus, but in the hearing of everybody round about.

That is, Jesus' baptism led to his own public identification as the Messiah sent by God, announced by John the Baptist.

[10 : 36] The crucial thing is actually not his baptism. If you read verse 21 and 22, it's clear that the baptisms in a sense passed over. The crucial event is the Holy Spirit coming down on him like a dove, and the voice from heaven.

When all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, and here comes the important things, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven saying to Jesus, but obviously publicly so that others could hear, you are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.

What happens to Jesus is public, it is seen, the Holy Spirit coming on him like a dove, we're not sure why it's like a dove, that doesn't actually matter, and the voice from heaven, addressed to Jesus, but clearly heard by all those round about.

Because these events are not just for the benefit of Jesus, they're for the benefit of the crowds who are around. To see the identification of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

For in those last chapters of the prophet Isaiah, the servant of the Lord is anointed by God's Spirit, and here, fulfilling those words as announced by John the Baptist, Jesus is that servant, here anointed by God's Spirit, and then the words of God spoken to him, quoting, firstly a psalm, you are my son, but then also, alluding to words again from Isaiah the prophet, in chapter 42, with you I am well pleased.

[12 : 09] What this is saying then, is that the long-awaited act of salvation by God, is now on. It's now happening. 600 or more years ago, Isaiah had prophesied this, and there are prophecies elsewhere in the Old Testament, from before and after Isaiah, that these things would happen.

So what is now happening, announced by John, validated by God's voice, and the sending of the Holy Spirit visibly, is that the Saviour, Messiah, has come, to restore the rebellious people of God, back to God himself.

God has rent open the heavens, something that Isaiah the prophet himself, actually yearns for, and cries out for in Isaiah 64. And that is symbolically showing us, that God, holy in his heaven, has now opened a way, through Jesus, for sinful humanity on earth, to be reunited with God.

Heaven's door is opened by Jesus, so that as the story of Jesus unfolds, the people of God following Jesus, can be restored to God, ultimately in heaven.

Not just a prophet is this, not just a king, not just a priest, but God's beloved, one and only, is one way of understanding, a strange word beloved here, one and only unique son.

[13 : 37] That's an impeccable pedigree, unlike mine, with publicans and butchers and so on. Here is one that, can say truly uniquely, I am the son, of God himself.

Now Luke then follows, these amazing events, with this genealogy of Jesus. Jesus, Jesus we're told, was the son, as was thought of Joseph.

Now Luke makes it very clear, in the first two chapters, of this gospel, that Jesus was born of Mary, who was at the time, betrothed to Jesus, but to Joseph, but Joseph was not, the father of Jesus technically, Mary was impregnated, in effect by the Holy Spirit, a divine and miraculous intervention, to bring about the birth of Jesus.

And we know that later on, it seems that Joseph marries Mary, and later on, they have other children. So we're told in the gospels, that Jesus had other brothers and sisters. I suppose technically, we might say, half brothers and sisters, given that Joseph and Mary, were their parents, whereas for Jesus, Mary alone, was in effect, his physical human mother.

This genealogy, seems though, to trace the line of Joseph, rather than Mary. Probably because, Joseph would have been regarded, as legally, the father of Jesus on earth, and probably many people, would have thought, as Luke says in the brackets there, many people thought, that Joseph was his father.

[15 : 01] The line is traced back, some people say, that this may be Mary's line, although it doesn't indicate that, but there are lots of differences, because in Matthew's gospel, there's another genealogy of Jesus, that has many similarities, and names the same, but lots of differences.

I don't think in the end, anyone's quite worked out, why the differences were there, but we know that Luke, was a very careful historian, he wrote not only this gospel, but also the book called, The Acts of the Apostles, and on all the little fine details, of history, that have been verified, from other sources, Luke is always accurate, and always right.

So here we have a list of names, of Jesus' ancestry, that many of whom, are not known from the Old Testament, he couldn't just look up, his Old Testament, and pluck them out. We know though, that in Jesus' day, people were very careful, about issues of ancestry, what tribe, or clan from a tribe, you came from, was important.

And we know that in Jesus' day, there were very careful, records kept in Jerusalem, by the priests, of who was born to who, and so on, not dissimilar, from to our births, deaths, and marriages department, in the major capital cities, of Australia, for example.

So quite possibly, Luke has got access, to this genealogy, and recorded it, carefully for us. Matthew we know, stylizes his, in various ways, to make a few points.

[16 : 25] But for Luke, all it is, is simply a list, of 77 names, one after the other, tracing Jesus, all the way back, to the beginning. 77 generations, covering, probably a little bit, well, more than 2,000 years, maybe, much more than that, 2,000 years, to Abram, and perhaps, a few thousand years, back, beyond that, to Adam, as we'll see.

Many of these names, are obscure, unknown, from anywhere else, the only time, we see them in the Bible, is here, in this list. But, embedded throughout, are some of the heroes, of faith, or the significant characters, of the Old Testament.

And though Luke, makes no comment, about any name, from beginning to end, we see here, the sweep of history, that leads up to Jesus. Take, Zerubbabel, for example, the first name, that's mentioned, that's, in one sense, well known, from the Old Testament, in verse 27.

Zerubbabel, is mentioned, in the book of Ezra, and Nehemiah, and he was the governor, of the people of God, at the time, when they came back, from exile in Babylon, in about 520 BC. He was significant, as the leader of the people, at the time, when the temple was rebuilt.

A good guy, an important character, a governor, in difficult times, facing indeed, quite a lot of opposition, from the people's roundabout, who didn't want, the temple of Jerusalem, to be rebuilt. We'll move on, to verse 31.

[17 : 53] Nathan is mentioned, not Nathan the prophet, who's another Nathan, in the Old Testament, but the third son of David, from whom, the line of Jesus, is traced. Although in Matthew's genealogy, the line of Jesus, is traced through, the son called Solomon.

A bit hard to know, exactly why the difference, although, of course, there are always situations, where one man might die, and so his wife, is taken by his brother, as part of the care, for widows in the society.

So, who knows, there could have been, some of those, sort of technicalities, in history, that explains the differences, between Luke, and Matthew's genealogy, of Jesus. And also in verse 31, one of the most famous names, of the Old Testament, David, the second king, at a time of greatness, in the history of Israel, God's people.

David was king, for about 40 years, from about 1000 BC. Under him, Jerusalem became the capital, and the foundations, were set in effect, for building the temple, by his son Solomon, who succeeded him, as king.

But maybe more importantly, David was the recipient, of the promises of God, that David's line, would be an eternal, kingship or dynasty, over the people of God.

[19 : 05] And many times, in the Old Testament, the promised Messiah, is told to be a royal character, descended from David. So it's crucial, that the line to Jesus, comes through David.

And after all, that is why, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the town of David, because Joseph, being descended from David, had to go to Bethlehem, for the census, which was due at the time, when Jesus was born.

Go back a bit further, verse 32, Boaz mentioned, a lovely man, from the book of Ruth, an ancestor of David, he cared for, his kinsfolk's widow, Ruth, though she was a Moabites, not an Israelite, in that lovely story, in the book of Ruth.

Or verse 33, Judah, one of the 12 sons of Jacob, a bit of a scoundrel in a way, not a particularly good person, but from him, came the key tribe, of the people of Israel, a tribe of Judah.

Go back another verse, verse 34, Jacob, the father of Judah, the one who had the 12 children, favoured, of course, Joseph, with his, technicoloured dream coat, and so on.

[20 : 14] Jacob was a scoundrel, as well, a deceiver, he ripped off his twin brother, Esau, in various ways, he was a mother's boy, and his twin brother, was his father's favourite, and then, of course, you get the father, Isaac mentioned in verse 34, as well, the one who favoured his, twin son, one of his twin sons, Esau, but he himself, of course, so nearly sacrificed, in Genesis 22, by his father, Abraham, who's also mentioned, in verse 34, and like David, Abraham is probably the other, of the most crucial characters, of the Old Testament, again, like David, one to whom promises of God, were made, that would stand the test of time, so to Abraham, in Genesis chapter 12, we're almost at the beginning, of the Bible already, God had promised, that Abraham's name, would be great, that he'd be the father, of a great nation, and that the whole world, indeed, would be blessed, through him, and his descendants, and indeed, before Jesus was born, his mother Mary, sang a song, a famous song, in Luke chapter 1, and there she said, amongst other things, that God was keeping, his promises to Abraham, and that's why she was going, to give birth to the child, so here is Luke, tracing the genealogy, showing that God's promise, to Abraham is coming true, that Jesus the descendant, will bring blessing, to the world, as indeed the promise, to David would come true, because this is the eternal king,

Jesus Christ, now unlike Matthew, Luke doesn't stop, the genealogy with Abraham, he keeps going, most of the names, that follow, not all, but most, we know from the early chapters, of Genesis, he goes back a bit further, to Noah, the hero of the flood, in Genesis 6 to 9, in verse 36 here, the verse before, verse 37, Methuselah, the man who seems, lived the longest of all, 969 years, which would be pretty daunting, to anticipate, but at least you might see, a Richmond premiership, and then in the next, and last verse, Seth, the replacement for Abel, killed by his brother Cain, and then back one more generation, in verse 38, to Adam, the first man of all, well what a line, imagine if you could, trace your family history, all those generations back, probably add on 2,000 years, a few more generations, but maybe, well we can't do that, we can't go that far, maybe there's, the point of going back to Adam, is to make a little contrast, between Adam and Jesus,

Adam you remember, with his wife Eve, in the garden of Eden, sucked in by the deceit, of the serpent, and fell for the temptation, of the forbidden fruit, in the very next verses, Jesus is taken into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil, but he doesn't fall, for the deception, of the devil's trickery, and deceit, and temptation, Adam did, and so the human line, from Adam, is a fallen line, it's not an impeccable pedigree, there are scoundrels, David was a murderer, and an adulterer, the line of Jesus, is not a pure human line, it's just a normal, human line, there's good and bad, scoundrels, and noble people, kings, but failures as kings as well, that's the line of Jesus, a fallen line, because of the sin of Adam, with his wife Eve, in the garden of Eden, but the contrast, is hinted at, because in the next chapters, we'll see next week, Jesus resists the temptation, he trusts God's word, and God's promises, unlike Adam, and unlike humanity, what we see here, without comment by Luke, is the sweep of history, from the creation, when God made everything, including humanity, as the pinnacle of his creation, but then we see, that humanity fell, and then through Abraham, through David, and through the characters, in between,

God made promises, that he would restore, fallen humanity, to himself, and so this line of Luke, of Jesus, recorded by Luke here, is hinting at, that very history of God, coming to fulfillment, in Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, God is going to restore, fallen humanity, as a whole, not just the Jewish people, from Abraham, but people of all nations, from Adam, God will restore, to himself, through the door, opened in heaven, by Jesus Christ, now the genealogy, ends son of God, we've already heard, in verse 22, God saying, you are my son, and here at the end, of the genealogy, Jesus we find, is traced back, to be the son of God, but you see, if you and I, could trace our genealogy, all the way back, through the mists of time, we'd also end up, in the same sort of place, son of Adam, son of God, so one level, this is not making, any statement, about uniqueness, and specialty, except for the fact, that when the voice, came from heaven, at Jesus baptism,

God said, you are my son, my beloved, or my one, and only son, that is, there is a uniqueness, about Jesus, as the son of God, that does not apply, to any other person, ever in history, so what's the point then, of this genealogy, what is it saying, it is saying, that Jesus is of royal descent, from David, that's important, and essential, if he is to be the Messiah, it is saying, that Jesus is descended, from Abraham, to whom promises were made, that the descendants, or the seed of Abraham, would be the means, of blessing for the world, that too then, falls to Jesus, as the one, through whom blessing, to the world will come, this genealogy, is telling us, that Jesus is fully human, he comes from, a really human line, good and bad, all mixed up, in his ancestry, but, and then it's also saying, though, in verse 22, that Jesus is God's, beloved son, so while the genealogy, is showing us, yes he's fully human, there is just, the hint at least, made more explicit, elsewhere, in the New Testament, that Jesus is more, than human, he's actually, fully divine, as well,

[26 : 36] Luke, by tracing the genealogy, back to Adam, is making another point, that Jesus has come, not just for the Jewish people, descended from Abraham, but he's come to be, the saviour of the world, for Jews, and what are called Gentiles, that is non-Jews, as well, he's the saviour, not just of Israel, but the saviour, of the whole world, now the importance, of what this passage, is at least implying, cannot be, overestimated today, this is showing us, that God, is superintending history, from the beginning, to the end, that the promises, he made way back, with Abraham, and then with David, he's fulfilling, in Jesus Christ, that God is sovereign, over the history, of the world, which he made, in the first place, and though it fell, through human sinfulness, at the beginning, God is working, through Jesus Christ, to bring about, the restoration, of God's people, to God, through the saviour, of the whole world, the door of heaven, opens, for Jesus, and no other, now that's not, what our world believes, much of our world, thinks religion, is nonsense anyway, but even when it doesn't, think that, our world thinks, that there are, lots of paths, through heaven, to God, and that Jesus, is not unique, he might be a good person, but not unique, as the fully human, fully divine mediator, that brings God, and fallen humanity, together, which is what this passage, is at least implying, and the rest of the gospel, goes on to make more explicit, in fact, what our world thinks, that all religions, are okay, equally valid, so long as they don't, make any exclusive claims, you have that,

I'll have this, they're equally valid, but as soon as anyone, in our world, makes an exclusive claim, about Jesus, or about anybody else, for that matter, then our world, wants to dismiss it, but we have no room, for doing that, we've got no grounds, for such compromise, at all, for what this passage, is saying, in announcing, the coming of Jesus, and the beginning, of his ministry, which is filled out, in all the rest, of the chapters of Luke, culminating, in his death, and resurrection, is that God, has acted to save, one way, all people, for all time, not a plethora, of ways, but one way, and Jesus Christ, is he, God's, beloved, one and only, son, son, and this passage, may not prove, that he's fully human, and fully divine, that we find, more clearly, elsewhere, in the New Testament, but it is showing, at least, the hints of that, fully human, through his human, genealogy, but fully divine, by being God's, beloved, one and only, son, you see,

Jesus bridges, humanity, and divinity, perfectly, the door of heaven, is open, to bring God, and fallen humanity, together, in Jesus Christ, and him alone, it's not what our world thinks, and sadly, it's not what heretical, Christian leaders, think today, sadly, the church is riddled, with people, who have given up, on the biblical, true, and exclusive claims, of the uniqueness, of Jesus Christ, there was an American bishop, who before Easter, in his so-called, pastoral letter, said that Jesus, was a sinner, in need of forgiveness, like you and me, 400 years ago, he would have been, burned at the stake, for such heresy, sadly, he even remains, a bishop, in the Episcopal Church, of America, he's not alone, although he's probably alone, in saying something, as stupid as that, but sadly, within all denominations, of churches, there are heretics, who play down, degrade, downplay, displace, the place of Jesus, as the unique, saviour, of the whole world, such people, deceive people, and in fact, lead them down, the path to hell, the battle, that believing Christians, face in our world, and in our church today, is over the uniqueness, of Jesus Christ, fully human, fully divine, unique, and exclusive, saviour, of the world, we cannot afford, to give up, on that truth, that is the battle, we face, from our non-Christian friends, and sadly, from heretics, within the church, it is a battle, we must fight,

Jesus Christ, is unique, he has come, as God's, beloved son, fully human, to bridge, full in humanity, with God, to reconcile, rebellious people, to God, in himself, and by his death, and resurrection, and he is the one, that each, and every person, in our world, of any race, or culture, or gender, or socio-economic place, needs to meet, and needs to heed, he is the saviour, of the world, there is no other way, heaven opens, for Jesus only, and for those, whom he ushers back, into heaven, Amen.

Amen.