

WHAT IS IN A FAMILY TREE?

Today's Text: Matt. 1-17; Luke 3: 23-38

Extracts:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac; Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers... and Jesse begot David the king (who) begot Solomon... and Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ [Matt. 1: 1-2, 6, 16].

Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph the son of Heli... the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, ... the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, ... the son of Adam, the son of God [Lk 3: 23, 31, 34, 38].

Recently, the FBI (the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations) arrested a man accused of kidnapping his seven-year-old daughter on Sunday, 27 July 2008, during a supervised visit.¹ He gave his name as Clark Rockefeller, supposedly from the famous Rockefeller family. Before his arrest, Clark had shown his pastor in Cornish, New Hampshire, a pocket knife with the inscription of 'Nelson Rockefeller,' the former US Vice-President and descendant of oil baron John D. Rockefeller. However, as police and the FBI soon discovered, Clark was not in any way related to the Rockefeller family of New York. Instead, he was an impostor who had used several aliases in the past to obtain undeserved favours or engage in criminal activities.

Clark Rockefeller is just one of numerous persons who attempt to pass themselves off as members of rich and famous families. They are not who or what they claim. They are impostors. On the other hand, there are majority others who are the real stock, that is, true descendants of the family names that they bear or answer. They may not necessarily be good people but at least they are authentic in their claims. So, what is in a family tree?

Many people claim to be Christians or born-again and drop the name of Jesus at the end of every sentence. Are they honestly part of His family tree? Let us find out from today's lesson.

¹ Story based on the following sources: Norm Schneider, 'Clark Rockefeller Arrested- The Newest Headlining Imposter?' www.associatedcontent.com/article/937321/clark_rockefeller_the_newest.html and 'Impostors Cash In on the Rockefeller Name,' <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=5474828>, July 30, 2008.

1. Ancestry.com- A journey to pride or shame?

Some of us may be familiar with an online web site called www.ancestry.com. It is reportedly the largest family history site that boasts of over 4 billion names in world-wide historical records, family tree services and genealogy learning materials. Interest in genealogical studies became heightened from 1976 following the publication of Alex Haley's famous book, *Roots*², which traced his ancestral roots back to a small village in the Gambia, West Africa. As a result of that book, and the televised series which received 37 Emmy Nominations, Americans, especially African- Americans, have developed a new pride in themselves and in their ancestral past. They have come to appreciate that they are linked to a long line of people from different parts of the world. Ancestral studies have in deed significantly contributed to the promotion of race relations in America.

When people search for their ancestral roots, the predominant feeling is to find something worthy or enhancing of their background. Some people may find that they have come from a line of the rich and famous or blue blood (royal line). Some others may find that there are crooks, criminals and perverts in their genealogy. What is important, however, is not what you find but how you react to it. Let us consider how some people deal with their findings:

a) *Some people are con artists*

Some people may find that there is nothing to be proud of from their ancestry. Since they are also criminally minded, they claim to come from respected families and use such connections to defraud gullible people. Take the case of David Hampton who had Hollywood aspirations.³ He was turned away from Studio 54 in New York. However, he got around security by telling them that he was the son of Sidney Poitier, the famous Oscar-winning actor. Thereafter, he began to use David Poitier as his name and got free meals in restaurants and to persuade Poitier's adoring fans to give him money or free accommodation in their homes! In 1983, he was arrested and jailed.

A good example of a con artist in Scripture was Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon (also called Jerubbaal). God had used Gideon to subdue the Midianites in the days of Judges in Israel. At the time of his death, Gideon had 70 sons from many wives [**Judg. 8: 29**]. Knowing that he was not qualified to succeed his father, Abimelech went to his mother's people in Shechem (who were under Israel's control) and said to them, "Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign

² 'Roots, the book that changed America,' 30th Anniversary Edition, <http://www.rootsthebook.com/index.html>

³ Norm Schneider, 'Clark Rockefeller Arrested- The Newest Headlining Imposter?' www.associatedcontent.com/article/937321/clark_rockefeller_the_newest.html

over you, or that one reign over you? Remember that I am your own flesh and bone.” They willingly sided with him because “he is our brother.” So, with the help of “worthless and reckless men” that he had hired from among his mother’s people, he came to Gideon’s house at Ophrah and killed all his sons except the youngest who had escaped [**Judg. 9: 1-5**]. Three years later, Abimelech himself died in the hands of a woman [**v. 53**]! He was out conned.

b) *How about the gold-diggers?*

A gold-digger is a person who seeks intimate relationships with others for material gains. There are some people who wear their ancestry like a necklace simply because of the material gains that they get there from. Sometimes, it manifests as race, creed or gender. Most times, it is in the family. Look at the teenage actors and actresses who get by in Hollywood in spite of their unacceptable conduct? Invariably, they are the wards of the rich and the famous. Those teens are not rich because they are hardworking or productive. In most cases, it has to do with their names. They are gold-diggers.

Take the example of the conduct of Absalom, King David’s son, after he had been brought back from three years’ ban from his father’s presence for killing his brother, Ammon. The young man provided himself with chariots and horses and 50 men to run before him. Each morning, he would stand by the palace gate to interview those who had come before King David to settle their lawsuits. He would tell such people that they had good cases but that the king did not have a deputy to hear them speedily. Then, he would offer himself, saying, “Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me, then I would give him justice.” That way, Absalom stole the people’s hearts [**2 Sam. 15: 1-6**]. Can you imagine another person without royal blood in his veins doing a similar thing? They would kill him at his first attempt at insurrection. Absalom was a gold-digger!

c) *Some may choose to be builders*

Some people may find out from their ancestry that there is nothing to be proud of. Their genealogy may be filled with crooks, or murderers or whoremongers, and it is a past that they would rather forget. However, instead of playing the con artist or continuing in the family tradition that they find unedifying, they may choose to build a good and decent dynasty from that point on.

A good illustration is the case of Alfred Nobel, the founder of the Nobel Foundation.⁴ Born in Stockholm on 21 October 1833, he was the third son

⁴ Alfred Nobel, from Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Nobel

of his parents who were in armament-making business (torpedo works). Alfred studied chemistry, and in 1859, the factory was left to the care of Alfred's older brother, Ludvig Nobel who greatly enlarged it. Alfred devoted himself to the study of explosives. In 1864, several explosions occurred at their family-owned factory in Heleneborg; one of which killed Alfred's younger brother Emil and several other workers. That changed his attitude and his future. In 1895, Alfred Nobel wrote his last will, leaving much of his wealth for the establishment of the Nobel Foundation... Since 1901, the prize has honored men and women for outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and for work in peace. The man of war became the builder of peace.

In today's study, we shall look at the genealogy of Jesus. Why have the gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, brought it to our attention? We know that He was not a con artist or a gold-digger. He came as a man to do His Father's will and to fulfill the Law. Therefore, there must be much more to His genealogy that God wants us to know.

2. The genealogy of Jesus Christ

To the Jews and Gentiles (Romans), Jesus was an enigma, that is, somebody that is not easily explained or understood. For example, when Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they mentioned John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then, He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus blessed him for that but added that that knowledge was revealed to Peter by His Father, not by man [**Matt. 16: 13-17**]. But did that solve the puzzle of His human ancestry? Did the Jewish leaders not hand Him over to the Romans to die for proclaiming Himself to be the Son of God, a claim that the Jews considered blasphemous?

That brings us to Christ's running dispute with the Jewish leaders during His earthly ministry. They scornfully said of Him, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" [**Jn 6: 42**]. They considered Him unlearned, "having never studied" [**Jn 7: 15**]. Since He was seen as a Galilean, many people questioned His ancestry, saying, "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" [**v. 40-42**]. Clearly Matthew and Luke wanted to set the records straight once and for all.

So, what have we learned from Christ's genealogy? The following should be noted:

- a) *Christ is the authentic heir to Abraham's promise and David's throne*

Matthew's gospel opens as "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, *the Son of David, the Son of Abraham*" [Matt. 1: 1]. That is a profound statement of Christ's human identity. As the Son of Abraham, He is the inheritor and transmitter of the promise of Abraham, the father of all people of faith [Rom. 4: 1-16]. Through Abraham, God founded a nation of His chosen race through which the Seed of the woman promised in the Garden of Eden would come to earth as Immanuel, God with us! That nation was Israel that was founded by the 12 sons of Jacob (later called Israel by God Himself), the grandson of Abraham.

In due course, David, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, became king of all Israel. He had the zeal and the means to build God's temple but God refused and told him that his son, Solomon, would build it. But God promised David an everlasting kingdom, saying, "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. *Your throne shall be established forever*" [2 Sam. 7: 16]. Centuries later, when archangel Gabriel came to announce the conception and birth of Jesus to Mary, he said of Jesus, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the *Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end*" [Lk 1: 32-33]. That puts to rest any doubts about Christ's legitimate claim to the throne of David and He is the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for.

b) *Christ skipped the Jeconiah curse*

Luke began the genealogy of Jesus by saying, "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (*as was supposed*) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli" [Lk 3: 23]. In this genealogy, the son of David that is mentioned was Nathan [v. 31], whereas Solomon was mentioned in Matthew's genealogy [Matt. 1: 6-7]. Is there any contradiction? Not at all.

The link to both genealogies is Zerubbabel [Matt. 1: 12; Lk 3: 27]. You will recall in an earlier study⁵ that God told Zerubbabel, "I will take you, Zerubbabel, My servant... and will make you like a signet ring for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts" [Hagg. 2: 23]. A signet ring links and seals two branches together. If you look at the two genealogies of Jesus, Zerubbabel is linked on one line to Solomon and Joseph, Christ's earthly foster father [Matt. 1: 12]. Jesus received the throne of His father, David, through that link [Lk 1: 32-33]. Zerubbabel is also linked on another line through Nathan, another son of David [Lk 3: 27], to Mary, Christ's mother, through whom Jesus avoided the curse that God had put on Jeconiah (also called Coniah), that his descendants would never prosper sitting on the throne of David [Jer. 22: 24, 30]. The signet ring removed from Jeconiah before the exile [Jer. 22: 24] God handed over to

⁵ Volume 9, No. 23: 6 July 2008; p. 6

Zerubbabel after the exile. Therefore, he was the signet ring linking the lineage of Solomon and Nathan, the sons of David [**Matt. 1: 6; Lk 3: 31**] to Christ! That way, Christ avoided the Jeconiah curse.

c) *Christ is also a descendant of sinners!*

Matthew's genealogy refers to Judah's sons by Tamar, his daughter-in-law that he married after the death of his son, Onan [**Matt. 1: 3; Gen. 38: 1-27**], Rahab the harlot [**Matt. 1: 5; Josh. 6: 25**] and Uriah's wife, the mother of Solomon [**Matt. 1: 6: 2 Sam. 11: 26-27**]. So, Jesus is not only a descendant of kings and people of valour but fellow sinners like us—fornicators, adulterers, liars and murderers who later gave their lives to God. You can see why He is able to empathize with us!

3. Conclusion: You are grafted by faith into Christ's family tree!

Jesus told His disciples, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me, you can do nothing*" [**Jn 15: 5**]. The vine is organically linked to the root which supports the plant and its branches. From today's study, we know that Jesus is a direct descendant of Abraham but we are not. Therefore, unlike the Jews, you are not a natural branch. God the husbandman grafted you in when the natural branches, the Jews, disobeyed Him [**Rom. 11: 17-31**]. So, by faith in Christ Jesus, you have been grafted into His family tree.

There is something in that family tree!