

To Enter Our Messy Family

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[0 : 00] Good stuff. Well, folks, can I just say what we're all thinking? How well did he do at reading those names? If ever there's a guy in this church family who you need for the moment like that, we have one in Alistair.

But we're going to be thinking about that over the next 15 minutes or so. Here is a popular everyday sentence. I want you to complete it. We use it all the time.

In our culture, here it is. You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your what? Your family. That's what we're going to be thinking about over the next 15 minutes or so as we prepare our hearts for Christmas Day.

I think it's true, isn't it, that probably more at this time of year than any other that we are aware of our families. I think if you stop someone in the street and said, what is Christmas all about?

I think that would probably be one of the first things that people would say, isn't it? It's a time for family. Christmas is all about family. And I think actually when you come to the Bible, there's actually a lot of truth to that.

[1 : 15] Probably way more than people understand. Christmas is all about family. But in a much bigger and better way than we often stop to think.

Let me ask you, how are you feeling about spending time with viewers? Rhetorical question. How are you feeling about it? Because families are funny things, aren't they?

Best described as a mixed bag. And our families, we've got the success stories. We've got the shame stories.

We've got the trophies in the cabinet. We have the skeletons in the closet and everything in between. If you're here tonight and you think that you're unique with that, then can I plead with you to understand that you're not that special.

We all have our stuff in our families. And the family that we're going to spend time with tonight, getting to know them, really is no different. Full of mistakes.

[2 : 18] Full of incidents. Full of grief. Full of pain. Full of family fallouts. Full of quarreling. Full of tears. Here is a family, the one that we've just read, that's full of mess.

This is Jesus' family tree. And is given to us by this man called Matthew. Now, Matthew is a Jewish man.

Matthew is a man who has made some really bad calls in life. And those bad decisions have turned him into public enemy number one.

Right? Matthew was a tax collector. That was the bad decision that he made at some point in his life. What that meant was that he collected taxes. Already off to a bad start.

But he collected taxes from his fellow Jews. Even worse. And he gave them to the Romans. And he took a little cut of the proceeds for himself. I think that's what they call, isn't it?

[3 : 21] A full house. Why is public enemy number one? A man who got rich because he sold his soul to the enemy. Friends, we are not the first generation in history to really despise those kind of people.

But Matthew is a man who had an encounter with this man, Jesus. And that encounter flipped his life totally upside down and totally the right way around.

And what he did is he left the tax collecting behind and he decided to follow this man, Jesus. And he's written it all down so that his generation and every generation ever since would pick it up and read his story.

And about the life that messy people like you and like me can find in this Jesus. And he kicks it off, his account of Jesus, by telling us about the family that Jesus was born into.

Boys and girls, if you've got your sheets there, you are welcome to, as Peter said, draw your family tree and see how it connects with what we're going to be thinking about tonight. Matthew starts here. And that tells us that in Matthew's mind, we need to understand this if we're to understand who this man, Jesus, is.

[4 : 44] Now, this family tree, make no mistake that it roots Jesus in history. Right? So this is not Narnia. This is not us going into the wardrobe here. This is real history and real people.

It dates Jesus in history. But I think it does more than that. And if you remember one thing from tonight, I hope you remember lots of things. But if you remember one thing, remember this. That the kind of family that Jesus comes from tells us everything that we need to know about the family that Jesus has come for.

The people that Jesus comes from tells us everything that we need to know about the people that Jesus has come for. And whoever you are here tonight, whether or not you would call yourself a Christian, maybe this is the first time in a long time that you've been inside a church building. We love you. We welcome you. Let me say this is great news for all of us tonight. Because Matthew is declaring two things to us with all of these names.

Here's the first thing. He's declaring this is us. Verse 6. Matthew takes us to one of the most celebrated men in the Old Testament story.

[6 : 04] One of you picked it up as we read it through. This man whose name is King David. The man of whom God said, here is a man after my own heart.

You don't get much bigger in terms of compliments from God than that. Here's how Matthew could have written verse 6. Jesse, the father of King David.

David, the father of Solomon. Solomon, the father of Rehoboam. And so on and so forth. But that is not what Matthew does. And he does it deliberately. He writes, Jesse, the father of King David.

At which point every Jewish reader of this gospel is whooping and cheering. Give us more of David. Yeah, David. That's our boy. Go on, my son. Tell us more about David. Matthew.

And Matthew goes on and says, David, the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife. So what Matthew does is he makes a beeline for David's most shameful and the lowest moment in his life.

[7 : 11] Where God's chosen king desires a married woman called Bathsheba. Gets her pregnant. Tries to cover it up by encouraging her husband to sleep with her so that he could pretend that the baby was his.

And then have the whole thing arranged so that Uriah would be killed. That's something straight off the Jeremy Kyle show, isn't it? That's what David did. Before God outs him.

And David pens that psalm that we get. Psalm 51. And you can look at it in your own time if you like. Where David lays his soul out before God. And he says, God, against you alone have I sinned. Pleads with God to forgive him and create in him a new heart. But Matthew brings this up. As if to say, let's remember that little episode in David's life, shall we?

But the thing is that Matthew could have easily airbrushed that whole thing out. Like some kind of Google camera where you can change people's faces from sad to happy, right?

[8 : 11] Could have done that with this. But he didn't. As if to say, do you see what kind of people we are? And when you start to read this list of names through that lens, you come to see that Jesus was born into and through a family full of mistakes and questions.

Of liars like Isaac. Of family feuders like Judah and his brothers. And that musical has been in town, hasn't it, over the past few weeks? I was about to say George Osborne, but it's Donny Osmond in that one.

But that musical, isn't it? Why is it that it continues to grip our hearts every time it comes to town? Because these brothers are gripped with envy and they sell Joseph for money.

There's something about that family that we connect with. Of deceivers and of doubters like Tamar. Of womanizers like Solomon.

Of arrogant pride that exists in the kings like Rehoboam and Ahaz and Manasseh. And the horrendous choices that they make down the line. And at the end there he drops it in.

[9 : 16] The nation that was sent into exile because of the rebellion against God. And on and on and on we could go. Matthew is saying, Do you see how badly wrong we've got this?

Do you see how much we've messed this up? And I'm not writing this from my ivory tower looking down. I'm writing as one who knows how much I have horrendously failed in my life.

Which is why I feel right at home in Jesus' family of faith. Let me ask you. Do you ever feel that in your own life? As you sit in bed at the end of the day.

And you think back on the day that's gone. And the things that you said. The things that you did. The thoughts that went through your mind. And the full weight of that sits in you like some kind of sumo wrestler.

And you think, Man alive, what on earth was I doing? And all of a sudden you realize here is a family that all of us could fit into quite easily. Matthew is saying, This is us.

[10:22] In the words of Puritan Thomas Watson, Till sin is bitter, Christ will not be sweet. Because I consider how amazing is it that, Says Matthew, That Jesus would step right into our sinful, Warts and all, Messy, Flesh and blood, Human existence.

That Jesus would be willing to step into our mess. Into your mess, Into my mess. That Jesus was willing, As God, To take on a human body.

And that is why he is a saviour who is able to sympathise with us in our weakness. And he is a saviour who can help. Because he knows, And because he loves.

Matthew's saying, This is us. But here is the second thing that he is declaring to us with this family tree. He is saying, This is him. Who is this Jesus?

Matthew calls him, If you notice it there, The Messiah. God's anointed rescuer. The one who would deliver his people from their enemies. And whose rule would be seen by all and be established forever.

[11:40] That's what God had promised. Right back at the beginning of the Bible story in Genesis 3. That he was going to send someone who would go to battle with the devil.

Who would undo the effects of sin and death. He would put it into reverse. And Matthew is saying, He is here. Jesus is the son of Abraham, Says Matthew.

Now you hear that name, And the original leaders, You think blessing. In the early chapters of the first book of the Bible, God had taken Abraham, And he promised him a people.

And he promised him a place. And he promised that not only would he bless Abraham, But actually through one of Abraham's offspring, Someone down the family line, God was going to bless the nations and the peoples of the world.

And it's amazing when you read that list of names, Because what it includes, Are disreputable outsiders. People like Ruth, Who's from Moab, Who's from the kind of enemy over across the street.

[12:46] She's from those people. She's welcomed into God's people. You get people like Rahab, Whose life was full of question marks. She is welcomed into God's people, Because she makes the decision that she wants to follow this God.

And Jesus is the son of David. God makes another promise as you follow the Bible story, That through David's line, God will establish the kingly rule of his son forever.

This king who's going to come down this line, Is going to build the ultimate temple, The ultimate place where God lives and dwells. So here's your Christmas scented candle from this.

Abraham, Blessing, David, King. And both of those promises find their ultimate and glorious fulfillment In the one who's born in the stable in Bethlehem.

Matthew's declaring to his generation, Would you see how badly long we've got this as a people? Look at the ways we've messed it up. But praise God, It was never about our abilities.

[13:57] It was never about us. It was all about him being faithful. Now maybe just to help us see this just as we close. Can I tell you something cool about a member of my family?

See, When the Commonwealth Games was in Glasgow back in 2014, My cousin was chosen from his school To carry the Commonwealth flame on part of its journey to Celtic Park.

Right? I was expecting a little bit more enthusiasm than that. I thought that was cool. But here's the thing. His leg that he had was only about half a mile.

It might have even been less than that. But he had one job that he needed to do. One job. Really simply. Do you know what it is? Don't drop it. Don't drop it.

Now can you imagine if this promise that God had made Was contingent on human beings, Not dropping it. The baton would have been dropped within hours, Let alone hundreds of years.

[15:07] This is not about mankind's ability to behave well enough To get this promise all the way to the starting line. This is about God's Being faithful despite mankind's catalogue of failings To be a God who keeps his promises.

