

From brokenness to blessing \* Matthew 1:1-17

December 1, 2019 \* Advent 1 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

NIV Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,

5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,

6 and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,

8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

9 Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah,

11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

12 After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor,

14 Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud,

15 Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob,

16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ (Mat 1:1-17 NIV).

At first glance, Jesus' genealogy seems pretty dull, doesn't it? To us, as 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerners, it can feel like just a big old list of hard to pronounce names.

Go a little deeper though, and you'll very quickly realize that Jesus' family tree is not just a list of names – it's a testament to the way that God works in the lives of ordinary men and women. Each of these people have their own story – their own story about the ways that God worked in their lives – and as I thought about them the last few weeks, it struck me that by and large, they all point to the same truth - God specializes in bringing good things out of bad situations. God consistently brings blessing out of brokenness.

As you look through this list of people, there are some really great stories here, but some really bad ones too, and yet time and again, their stories testify to the fact that God brings good things out of bad situations.

Now admittedly, I could spend all day unpacking this family tree, but I think we're probably better off to focus our attention on just a few stories. If you're interested in digging a deeper, I spent a bit of time pulling together Scripture references and a few notes about the people in this list and I've posted a handout online that will point you to places in the Bible where you can learn more about each of the people – that we know of at least – in Jesus' family tree. That's up at [langfordcommunitychurch.ca/resources](http://langfordcommunitychurch.ca/resources) and I've printed a few out that will be up here if you're interested.

This morning though, I want you to imagine that you're sitting at home on the couch, flipping through channels, and you come across one of those reality TV shows on the Home network or whatever and it's called 'From brokenness to blessing.' And you think 'that sounds interesting' so you stop to watch – here are some of the stories you might see on that show, pulled straight from Jesus' family tree. I'm going to focus on three.

First is Rahab, the mother of Boaz, who appears in verse 5.

Rahab did not have an easy life. Her family worked hard to make ends meet but even so, Rahab turned to prostitution to raise some cash. Yes, she may have started out as the housekeeper at the inn, but in time, she found herself making money by selling her body. I don't have to tell you how degrading that is.

To make matters worse, word around town was that a foreign army was encroaching on their territory. (Joshua 2). Rahab lived in Jericho, which was really the gateway to Canaan, and if someone wanted to invade Canaan, they'd be sure to hit Jericho first.

So a siege mentality took hold in the city. People began to hoard food and water. Plans were put in place for rationing. And Rahab must have been terrified. Imagine what it must have been like to be in Jericho, just waiting for the enemy to attack.

And then one night, there was a knock on the door. She opened it up and found herself face to face with two enemy spies. What was she to do? Call out for help? They'd probably slit her throat. Take them in? Well, then she'd be guilty of treason. What do you do?

Used to acting with discretion, she thought, maybe I can sneak them in without drawing attention, and so she let them in. Of course, not long after that, there was another knock on the door - soldiers from the king, asking about the spies that she now had hidden on her rooftop. What should she do? Admit that she had harboured enemy spies and risk the king's wrath, or say nothing and compound her guilt? She chose the latter and sent them away. And then went up on the roof to work things out.

And here's where we get a sense of why she risked so much – she says to the spies on the roof – 'we all know that your God is powerful and we fear for our lives. I am only harbouring you in the hope that when this city falls, you will protect me.' So they promise to spare her and then hightail it out of town.

Now, Rahab has a moment to stop and think about what she's done. She's a prostitute – the lowest of the low in social standing. She's harboured spies and blatantly lied to protect them; now they're coming back with a formidable army and a terrifying God – who knows if they'll keep their promise? What has she gotten herself into? This is not a good situation.

Well, before long, the army showed up, but instead of laying siege to the city, they walked around it once and then retired to their camp. That happened on the second day and the third day and the fourth day and Rahab I'm sure started to think that maybe she hadn't made the best call helping this army who seemed to do nothing but parade around. And that red cord hanging out of her wall front window was starting to look suspicious.

Finally, the seventh day came, and the army marched around the city seven times. They blew their trumpets and gave a cry and suddenly the walls began to crumble, from the bottom up. Israel stormed

in and took the city and the spies went straight to Rahab to bring her out. She and all her family lived in the midst of this ordeal.

And Joshua 6:25 tells us that 'she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.'

25 But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho--and she lives among the Israelites to this day (Jos 6:25 NIV).

That means that the person who wrote the book of Joshua was familiar with Rahab and her story. They knew that she had come out of that difficult situation and into a new chapter of life, living in Israel.

And not only did she LIVE in Israel, Jesus' genealogy tells us that she married into a very important Israelite line. The promise to Abraham went through him to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to Perez and ultimately through her.

Gone were the days of prostitution, gone were the days of exploitation – she married into Abraham's line and little did she know, became the great great great grandmother of King David.

Rahab was in a very difficult situation and yet God brought her through. She had her fair share of scrapes and battles along the way, but in the end, God had brought things out of that bad situation. She rescued her family. She got a new life. Ultimately, her life contributed to the birth of Jesus.

God brought blessing out of brokenness.

And He did the same in our next lady's life too – Ruth – again in verse 5.

Now like Rahab, Ruth was not an Israelite either. She was from Moab, the line descended from Abraham's brother's incestuous relationship with his daughters. If that makes you wrinkle your nose, good, it should, but that also gives you a sense of how Israelites felt about Moabites. Ewwwhhh.

Which is why it was really weird that this Israelite family showed up in Moab one day. (This is Ruth chapter 1). No self-respecting Israelite would come to Moab, and yet here they were – mom, dad, two sons and the family gerbil – all looking to settle down in Moabite country.

One day, they came to Ruth's family looking for a wife and to be honest, Ruth had her doubts. I mean, they wanted her to marry this guy - Mahlon – whose name literally means 'sickly' and his brother Chilion was named 'destruction' – that's not a great sign – but, culturally speaking, Ruth needed a husband to support her and so she (her father) agreed. Ruth married sickly and destruction married Orpah.

So that when on for a while, but then, Ruth's father-in-law died.

Leaving her mother-in-law, Naomi, a widow.

Then Chilion died, leaving Orpah a widow.

And then, true to his name, Sickly died, leaving Ruth a widow.

Well, now what? In a culture where there is no welfare, where women have limited rights beyond what their husbands provide, what are they to do?

Naomi decides to cut her losses and head back to Bethlehem and insists that her daughters-in-law remain in their homeland. Orpah agrees, but Ruth clings to Naomi and says 'Naomi, I will go wherever you will go.' And Naomi says 'don't call me Naomi – call me Mara, or 'bitter,' but that's what the LORD has made me.'

Put yourself in Ruth's shoes right now. This is not a good situation. I know that some of you have lost spouses – you know what Ruth is feeling. Now add to that that she has no husband to support her, no children to support her and no obvious means to supporting herself. This is not good.

And yet, Naomi just happens to hear that there's food again in Bethlehem and when they return, Ruth just happens to find herself gleaning barley in the field of a just and godly man and that just and godly man just happens to be perfectly situated to marry Ruth and give her a good life.

God brings blessing out of brokenness.

And what's more, the man that Ruth marries, Boaz, was actually descended from Rahab. Who had married into the line of Abraham. And that line would continue through Ruth and her great great grandson would be king David. And her great great great great great great grandson would be Jesus.

God specializes in bringing good things out of bad situations.

Now having said that, let's skip ahead to that great great great great great great grandson and consider our final person – Jesus' mother Mary. She appears in verse 16 – and if you look really really closely, Mary's appearance here breaks the genealogy's pattern. Up to this point, it says that 'this guy fathered that guy' and 'that guy fathered this guy' and 'this guy fathered guy' until here at the very end it says Joseph was the HUSBAND of Mary and Mary was the mother of Jesus. Jesus is born of Mary, the wife of Joseph. It's a very subtle way for Matthew to say 'yes, Jesus belongs to Joseph's line, but the LORD is truly His father.'

But that's a theological aside – think about Mary, wife of Joseph, mother of Jesus.

She's this young girl minding her own business over in Galilee, looking forward to the day when she marries this good man named Joseph.

And all of a sudden, an angel appears to her – to her alone – and says – 'you are going to have a baby who will inherit the throne of His father David (Davidic covenant – 2 Samuel 7) and He will reign forever' and Mary says 'Let it be to me as you have said.'

And then the angel leaves, and Mary's standing there all alone in her house, and the weight of what's just happened hits her.

She's like 15. Nobody else saw the angel. And if your daughter came to you and told you that an angel appeared to you to say that she was pregnant by the power of God – what would you say? Yeah right. We gotta get you fitted for a chastity belt!

Now, I jest a little but this is serious stuff. Technically speaking, under the Law, Mary could have been stoned to death for her apparent infidelity (See Carson on Matthew 1:19). At the very least, she would be divorced from Joseph and if he did that loudly and publically, who would want to marry her then?

And then she'd be in the same boat as Ruth – depending on her father, as long as he lived, and as long as he'd take her back.

This is not a good situation.

Now, I do need to add the one caveat that out of the three women we've seen today, Mary had far and away the best reason to be confident in God. She was an Israelite and so she grew up learning the Scriptures. She herself had seen this angel, heard his promises of God and seems to have legitimately believed that anything *was* possible with God.

But from a human point of view, this would not be easy. Yes, God spoke to Joseph too and so he would come along for the ride, but Mary would risk the stigma and carry this baby to term and literally carry Him in the final weeks of pregnancy ninety miles on foot up and down the hills from Galilee to Bethlehem.

This is not a great situation.

And yet God brought good things out of it, didn't He?

Because of Mary's faithfulness, our Saviour was born. God worked through her struggles and carried her along and she gave birth to the Saviour of the world. She was right when she said in Luke 1, all people will call me blessed because of what the Lord has done.

48 ... From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name (Luke 1:48-49 NIV).

God brings good things out of bad situations.

That's true of Rahab; that's true of Ruth; that's true of Mary. If I had more time, I'd love to dig deeper into this list – verse 2 – Judah and his brothers – that includes Joseph, who was sold into slavery, falsely accused of adultery and wrongly imprisoned; Tamar in verse 3, who did an end run around her father-in-law Judah who wouldn't give her the husband she legally deserved; Uriah's wife – Bathsheba – whose husband was murdered when David got her pregnant; Shealtiel and Zerubbabel in verse 12, who ought to have reigned as kings and yet were exiled away in a foreign land.

In every one of those circumstances, God brought good things out of difficult situations. Joseph became prime minister of Egypt and delivered his family from death – if Joseph hadn't suffered the way he did, Judah wouldn't have lived and Jesus would never have been born (humanly speaking); Bathsheba gave birth to the next king, Solomon, and played a major role in David's administration/policy decisions; Shealtiel and Zerubbabel came back with a remnant of Israelites and they re-established Jerusalem – and largely rebuilt the temple that Jesus taught in.

And speaking of Jesus, look at Him on the Cross. That's a bad situation. That's brokenness writ large.

Everyone insulted Him, thinking He was cursed by God. His life slipped away with every drop of blood.

And yet it was by His wounds that we are healed. His blood bought us back for God. And then God raised Him to life again, to rule with Him in Heaven and Earth for eternity, sitting on the throne that God had promised to David, to bless with nations with salvation by faith that God had promised to Abraham.

If God can bring good things out of Jesus' death, He can bring blessing out of your brokenness.

If you're going through something right now and you can't see God at work, that doesn't mean that He's not at work. HE IS. And He is working for good! God consistently brings good things out of bad situations. And you can trust Him with that. If you are relying on Jesus, following Him, then He will make your paths straight and ultimately lead you to green pastures.

Now that being said, we should probably learn from Rahab and Ruth and Mary that God doesn't always bring good things out of bad just like that. They had to wait, patiently, expectant, trusting that God knew what He was doing.

And it's true - God's schedule is different from ours. Sometimes His purposes require a little longer than we would like. Sometimes we need to learn certain things about Him, about ourselves, about how to rely on Him – but you can be absolutely sure that He is working for good.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

That is a foundation you can stand on.

And it's also true that when God brings good things out of bad situations, it doesn't always mean that He puts everything back the way it was before. Sometimes, the good that God brings will mean a new situation, new living circumstances. We need to be open to that possibility – trusting that in God's providence, it will be as good, if not better, than before.

So let's think this through so that we can apply it in our lives. I know that we all have various struggles and real significant things that are weighing us down.

First, I would say, are you following Jesus through them, eyes fixed on Him and trusting Him as a good Shepherd? If not, you're probably going to focus on the struggle and get discouraged in it, but if you are trusting in our Saviour, then you will know that He is ultimately leading you to a good place.

And I think that we can really benefit from – looking back to these ladies – looking at the testimony of Jesus' family tree – look at our Saviour – God consistently brings good things about of bad. If you are struggling with something – I don't want to take anything away from that – because you alone know the pain of it – but the stories of those who have gone before show us that God consistently works for good and we can trust God in the midst of it. We can know with certainty that even if we don't understand what's, God does and He is working for good. He is working to make things right. And His plans for us are not to harm us, but to give us hope and a future.

As we wrap up here, I just want to give you a case study in how I've seen this has work in my life. Before we had kids, I thought a PhD might be in my future and so I started an MA to get ready. It was a really bad experience. My supervisor and I did not get along; I really felt unsupported and unsure of what I was supposed to be doing and it was a real mess.

And yet it was that very mess that led me to finish my Master of Divinity degree at a different school, which led me to my last church, which was really good.

Until things got really messy again – we left over personality differences and theological differences and it really hurt to leave friends and ministry behind. It was a bad situation. But it prepared me for this. And this is good. Out of that brokenness, God has brought me here and I feel truly blessed.

I'm guessing that you have similar stories – ways God has transformed circumstances to bring good out of bad. It might not happen just like this and things may not be the way they were before, but God brings a new goodness, every time.

#### BENEDICTION

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you overflow abound with hope (NIV/ESV).