



WHAT KIND OF MISSION?

Over the years, Kellie and I have known several young people who discovered that they'd been adopted, and they all felt they needed to know who their biological parents were – in spite of the fact they had adoptive parents who loved them and cared for them.

Why is this?

Perhaps it's because, in some way, our biological back-story helps us to understand where we've come from, who we are, and where we're going. And that's why family trees were so important in Bible times – and none more so than the family tree of Jesus.

So, let's each read a line of the genealogy, remembering that each of these people were individuals just like us, with their hopes and dreams, successes and failures.

Matthew 1:1-17

Thanks to decades-worth of genetic research, scientists are now able to take a person's DNA – either Y-chromosome (from dad), mitochondrial (from mum) or autosomal – and compare it to samples of people groups from all around the world, to look for overlaps, similarities. This is usually done with a saliva swab on a cotton-bud. They can then make links and trace your DNA family tree across cultures, going back centuries, sometimes further.

And what we have in Matthew ch1 is Jesus' own DNA history, His saliva swab.

Or is it?

You see, there's a problem with this family. It's cursed.

Now ordinarily I don't buy the idea of 'generational curses' (where punishments get passed from one generation to another). "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their fathers", says Deuteronomy 24:16 (see also Ezekiel 18:20). To quote King Solomon, "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest" (Proverbs 26:2).

But when God makes a promise, He means what He says. And there's a character in this family tree, in the line of David, who is cursed by God Himself (which is why he gets mentioned twice – for emphasis). His name is Jeconiah, he was an evil 'fill-in-the-blank', and he was the King of Judah at the time of the exile (vs11-12).

The curse goes like this (Jeremiah 22:30):

"Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule any more in Judah."

I.e. none of Jeconiah's descendants could ever be King of Israel. Which is something of a problem if Jesus is supposed to be the Messiah, the King of Israel, right? Right.

So, what's the answer? Take a look at Matthew 1:18-25.

The answer is: the virgin birth (or better, conception).

You see, Jesus is not the *biological* son of Joseph, only the *adopted* son - which means He breaks Jeconiah's curse. He's still a descendant of David through Mary, according to Mary's family tree in Luke ch3. But Mary's line of ancestry is different – it bypasses Jeconiah. And herein lies an incredibly powerful lesson, for all of us:

Blessings trump curses. Because curses are a result of sin, and that's what Jesus came to save us from (e.g. Galatians 3:13).

Breaking it down, He saves us ...

1) From the penalty of sin. Jesus is the judge of the whole world, and has every right to be – because He's perfect, and we're not. But when Jesus was born in that stable in Bethlehem, the judge was coming to pay the price for our sins – and He did it by dying on a cross. And if we trust in that, we can all be declared "not guilty" before God – why? Because Jesus has taken the punishment *for* us.

2) From the power of sin. The world is in slavery to sin, but Jesus came to set us free from it – which makes the birth of Jesus nothing short of a rescue mission. And when we put our trust in Him, the power of sin is broken. Now that doesn't mean we don't get tempted, nor does it mean we don't screw up sometimes. But sin no longer has to have the final say in our lives – Jesus does.

3) From the presence of sin. One day, when Jesus returns, the whole world will be rid of sin, for ever. But the process started when Jesus came the first time. When Jesus was born, He wasn't just reversing *Jecooniah's* curse – He was reversing *our* curse, the curse of sin that has existed throughout the human race, ever since we first decided to go our own way and do our own thing.

And that's why the angel Gabriel gave Him the name 'Jesus' or *Y'shua* in Hebrew, *Iesus* in Greek, *Yasu* in Arabic. It all means the same thing.

'Salvation.'

Adding It Up ...

So, what is the point that Matthew is making here?

That in Jesus, blessings are more powerful than curses. Just as good is more powerful than evil and love is more powerful than hate.

Sometimes, we can have this picture of God as a vengeful Being always looking for an excuse to hurt us – but the picture the Bible paints is very different. In fact, from Genesis 1 onwards (where the Hebrew word *barakh* or 'bless' is used for the very first time) God is a God who delights in blessing, and judgment is a last resort.

But what does this mean for us, in the 21st century?

- We might think we can never escape our past; that we are bound to make the same mistakes as we've made before, or that others have made – and feel like giving up. But Jesus came to make all things new.
- We may have been betrayed, abused, abandoned, and may feel that it will affect us negatively for the rest of our days. But nothing is impossible for God. Jesus came to break every chain – even the deep ones.
- We may live in fear that our parents' or grandparents' issues are destined to be ours, whether that's health issues or family issues or personal issues. But Jesus came to deliver us from all such fears.

So, this Christmas time, may you be reminded that in Jesus, blessings trump curses – *every* time.

May you come to realise that your past doesn't have to define your present, that with God, all things are possible, and that you, your life, can be made new.

And may you help others to realise that, too.