

A Part of the Heritage

From the Bible

Matthew 1:1-17

So, what does this mean to me?

How far back can you trace your heritage? Who was in your family? What did they do? Where were they from? Were they great people, average, or were they wanted by the law for being not-so-good people.

At this time I am a Youth Pastor and a computer programmer. I have spent my entire life in Quincy, Massachusetts. My father is a business man and a contractor (he builds houses for people). He was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania and now lives in Concord, New Hampshire. His father, Willard, my grandfather, dropped out of school after completing 5th grade, to help his family on the farm. He then ran a successful business delivering coal to people's homes (back when people used to heat their homes with coal stoves and fireplaces). I don't know where he was born other than it was in Pennsylvania. My great grandfather, George, moved to somewhere in Pennsylvania from Germany, and was a farmer. That's all I know about George.

I don't even know how many brothers or sisters my grandfather had or their names. I don't know why my great grandfather moved to the United States (I never met him).

A long time ago, who you were as a person was defined by who your father was and your family tree. It was very important to know your heritage and it was used for legal purposes also. It could even effect the inheritance you would receive. Knowing your heritage gave legitimacy to who you were. It helped you to

prove you were who you said you were. It could give you other legal rights (such as the special rights that Paul received in prison because he was a Roman citizen). People took great pride in knowing their heritage. It was the duty of the parents to teach it to their children until it was memorized. To not know your family tree was to not know who you really were.

In most cases, where someone is introduced in the Bible it begins like this: this is [person's name] son of [the person's father's name]. You were not just James - a fisherman. You were James the son of Zebadee - from a line of great fisherman. And you were proud to be part of that lineage.

In today's culture society teaches us how to be individuals, how to stand out and be someone special, different, or independent. We are taught that regardless of who our parents are or what type of work they do, we can be our own person and do what ever we want. We don't have to be a farmer just because our father was a farmer. We can be a musician. We don't have to run the family business, we can become a nuclear physicist. Often times we are so caught up in being "me" that we forget we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are part of a family. We are each a part of the family we are born into. Even if you are adopted you are still a part of the family that has adopted you. Your families history and heritage become a part of you.

We are also part of God's family. All of us. To the Christian, (who is adopted by God), this passage is not just the family tree and heritage of Jesus - it is part of our heritage as well. Matthew's purpose for including this genealogy of Jesus was to show that:

1) Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, and

2) that God can use all sorts of people, good and bad, to complete his will.

Have you really looked at Jesus genealogy? Look again ... Abraham was a great person with great faith, Rehab was a prostitute as well as not a Jew, Abajah was a wicked father, Jehosaphat was a good king who was the father of a bad king, Ruth was another gentile woman, even King David was an adulterer and a conspirator to murder. Matthew has made it clear to us that God can and will use anyone. Using men and women alike, He can bring about good results from bad deeds - like in the case of Joseph. Joseph's brothers beat him, then sold him as a slave. Later on in life there was a great famine and Joseph was able to save his entire family because God had brought him from slavery to freedom and given him the power and resources to help others.

Words to Actions

Take some time this week to try becoming an "un-individual" in your family. See if you can create a family tree. Find out who your relatives were, where they lived, and what type of work they did. If they are Christians, and still living, ask them to share the impact that God has had in their lives. According to a relative that researched the family tree on my

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mother's side, I am related to a Duke of England who was hanged for treason. However, out of that same heritage came a line of pastors ... me, my grandfather and my great grandfather (that's as far back as I know, there may have been others.) You may not have a perfect family tree but I imagine that if you study it closely you'll find that God is in it - even if you are the beginning of the first branch to serve Him.

By doing this you will find your place, not as an individual that stands out alone, but as an individual that is part of something much bigger. You might not be the star of God's show but you are an important cast member. If you're interested in finding out information about your Judean-Christian heritage as an adopted member of God's family, just ask your Youth Leader or Pastor for lessons about people in the Old Testament. They are "relatives" that we all have in common, you and I together.

Reflections

Dear Lord, help us to be the branch that bears fruit in our family tree. Help us to stay close to you so that you can nurture us and bring us to our fullest potential in your family.

-Based on John 15:5.

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