



Advent 3 – Jesus' Family Tree

December 14, 2025

Isaiah 11:1-10 & Matthew 1:6-11

## Find Peace in your Royal Family Tree

If you're on our email list, I sent out a little survey this week, asking for any interesting family tree stories. It was fascinating to hear about your families. Some of you have relatives who were martyred under Queen "Bloody" Mary in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There were war stories with connections to General Patton in WWII. There was a husband who met his wife because he saved her from a bear attack. One reply even talked about both of their parents being part of the CIA before they were married, but it took the husband and wife 40 years to figure out they were both in the CIA. It was just fascinating. But it was also interesting that all the stories were relatively good stories. Now I was trying to dig up family dirt, but it was nobody brought family skeletons out of the closet. Nobody talked about their version of Uncle Fester.

And, in some ways, that's what makes the family tree of Jesus even more noteworthy. Last week, Pastor W led us through the first fourteen names that Matthew records, highlighting what we would call patriarchs – people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The second chunk focuses on the royal line. Now you would think, listing kings in your ancestry would be something to be proud of. And there are some good kings listed here. People like Hezekiah – when I went through school, my teacher nicknamed him, "Good King Hezekiah." Or there's Josiah, not our former intern, but the king who rediscovered scrolls of Scripture and led a spiritual reform. There's Solomon, known for his wisdom. And David, the shepherd, the musician, the giant-killer. But there's also Rehoboam – the guy who said, "Who cares what the experienced advisors think! They think I should let up on my people. Far from it... If my dad scourged his citizens with whips, I'm going to scourge them with scorpions!" Jehoram who murdered his brothers to secure the throne. Or Manasseh – considered the worst of the worst as he sacrificed his son and set up pagan altars in the temple. But even the good king David who is described elsewhere as a man after God's own heart, look what Matthew reminds us. *"David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife."* One thousand years after he made a lustful look from his porch, adultery and murder followed David to this who's who list of Jesus' ancestors.

In other words, Jesus' family tree, even though it had royalty in it, wasn't always this flourishing oak that could stand loud and proud. In fact, at times it looked more like a stump than a tree, which is exactly how Isaiah pictured it. Specifically, he calls it the stump of Jesse, which is just like saying the stump of David, since Jesse was David's dad. How would you feel if I called your family tree a family stump? Or if my survey said, "Tell me about your family stump," how would you have taken it? 'Now this guy's trying to dig up dirt.'

Stump. Not that great of a word. Other than sitting on it, there's not much good about stumps. There's a reason people can get a job as a stump-grinder. People don't want them. Or think of the verb, "I'm stumped." That's not a positive word. It means you're confused. You're puzzled. Or in its most basic meaning, what does a stump signify? That a tree has been cut down. And that really describes Jesus' ancestors. When David and Solomon were kings, Israel was a thriving nation, but within fourteen generations, the grandeur had been cut down to basically nothing. Cut down spiritually, politically, and as a result emotionally and psychologically.

What about you? Have you ever considered yourself or your family background a stump? Where instead of flourishing, you feel like you've been cut down. You maybe feel like your purpose in life has been reduced to nothing except a place for people to sit? Your grandeur has been reduced to simply counting the rings of the past. "Oh, that was a good year. Oh yeah, I remember that one." But today you feel lifeless. Or maybe you're not reminiscing as you count the rings, rather you're re-living the pain of being on the receiving end of a sharp ax. All too often in the past, you've been cut down by sharp words and coarse actions. Or maybe you feel like a stump because you're just confused about life. You're stumped about when or where you should retire, whether or not to stay at a job. You're stumped about a family situation. What has you stumped today?

Or if you don't feel like a stump today because everything is going great -- you're in the prime of your life; every decision comes easy -- are you living in fear of the day when that's not the case? Are you afraid of the ax coming for you? If not physically or emotionally, are you afraid of the ax coming for you spiritually? We're in the season of Advent, which prepares us for two things: to celebrate first coming, but also his second coming. When we confess in our creeds that we believe that Jesus wasn't just conceived or born, but also coming back as judge, does that make our limbs go limp? If I'm alone, sitting on a stump for a chair, I can be driven to despair because I know there is enough bad fruit in my past to cause the ax of God's judgment to swing for me. And I doubt I'm the only tree in this forest of people that can say that.

Whatever has you stumped today, whatever has sapped your strength – whether it’s physical, emotional, or worst of all spiritual – let the Word bring you hope today. If we just look at this royal section of the family tree, hope doesn’t seem to be there as it fades with each king. David symbolizes the height of Israel’s reign. Jeconiah the end of it, as he’s hauled off into captivity. But I wonder if Matthew’s original readers found some comfort in that name. Yes, Jeconiah (nicknamed Jehoichin) was the last guy to sit on throne as an earthly king in Jesus’ ancestry, but there’s a little known detail about Jeconiah that is often forgotten, including by me. Before studying for this sermon, I forgot how Jeconiah’s life ended. Yes, he was hauled off into captivity. Yes, he was imprisoned. But after being there for 37 years, the new king of Babylon released Jehoichin, *“spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king’s table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived.”* Point, God’s people weren’t wiped out. They were cut down to a stump, but there was still life in that stump. And as Isaiah puts it, came a shoot. *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.”* A shoot that would bring life and hope and relief for Isaiah’s readers, the people in the Babylonian captivity. A shoot that would bring life and hope for Matthew’s readers. And it’s also a shoot that brings life and hope and relief for you because this shoot is Jesus. That’s what Jesus does... he brings relief when there’s pain. Hope when there’s despair. Life when everything looks dead.

How does he do that? Let’s spend the rest of our time in Isaiah. Within a verse, Jesus grows up as shoot becomes a branch. The little shoot that we are about to celebrate being born in the town of David would grow up to be a *“Branch that would bear much fruit.”* In other words, Jesus would live a perfect life in our place. With the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, every day Jesus was able to distinguish between the right way and wrong way to live. With the Spirit of counsel and might, the perfect plan and power to overcome the devil’s schemes. With the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, he knew exactly his Father’s demands for justice and how to meet those demands. We say, *“One rotten apple spoils the whole bunch.”* With Jesus, the opposite is also true – one good apple purifies the whole bunch. For all the bad fruit we’ve produced in life, Jesus produced enough good fruit so we don’t have to fear the ax of God’s judgment. *“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”*

And what’s the result when we are judged according to Jesus’ righteousness? We basically see Isaiah illustrate the theme of this year’s Christmas Eve service: the King of kings brings peace. The peace that Jesus, this little shoot, brings, first and foremost brings us peace with God. When this little shoot had barely sprouted, the angels sang, *“Peace to all people on earth.”* But Isaiah doesn’t want us to stop there. Yes, that is the greatest peace that we could ever enjoy. But don’t sell short the peace and safety that this Shoot brings. The wolf and the lamb, the calf and lion, the cow and the bear, the infant and the snake –will all get along. In other words, Jesus doesn’t just bring peace with God. He brings peace with each other.

Think about that as you gather with squabbling siblings over Christmas. Perhaps you can’t even imagine being at peace with them. The wounds are too deep. Not for Jesus. The One who can make the lamb live with the wolf, can bring peace between the two of you. As your decade-long feud with your neighbors is fueled once again by their Christmas light display, know that the One who can bring the calf and lion together, can bring you together. Or you might find yourself at odds with yourself as your personal vice bites you at a holiday party this year. *‘How can I ever be at peace with myself and not give in to temptation?’* The One who keeps the infant safe at the cobra’s den can do that.

That is the peace and safety – that total peace and total safety – that you and I have to look forward to because of this shoot. The shoot, who’s also the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. Nations will rally to him. And you and I are part of those nations. By God’s grace, we have been grafted into this royal family tree. Don’t miss that comfort when you hear Christmas carols sing about Jesus as King of kings. Jesus is King. But we are kings. We are royalty. Are there broken and flowed stumps in our family? You bet. But there’s also a shoot named Jesus who brings peace for you. And that’s the best family tree story there is. Amen.

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*Eyedrop Preview Devotion: When you look at your life, do you ever feel like a stump—cut down, worn out, or stuck in the past? Jesus’ own family tree was full of failures, scandals, and broken branches. Yet from that stump came a shoot—a Savior—who brings life where everything once looked dead. Isaiah promised that this Shoot would bring peace: peace with God, peace with others, and peace within ourselves. Whatever has you “stumped” today, remember this—Jesus grows hope where hope seems impossible. And because of Him, your story doesn’t end in the stump. It begins in the Shoot. Join us tomorrow @ 9:30AM to find peace in this Shoot.*