

**Date:** December 17-18, 2022

**Title:** *The Great Inclusion*

**Scripture:** Matthew 1:1-17

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

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Good morning. Today we have the privilege of partaking in something that's become an Orchard Hill tradition. We call it the Message and Music of Christmas, where the message in the music is interspersed. And in a few moments, you'll also get to hear from some of our excellent ministry leaders and staff as we explore the Christmas story by either taking a song and looking at the various verses and talking about it or a passage that tells the story.

And today, we're going to take the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and consider it with fresh eyes. I'm not going to read this today, in part because to be honest, when I come to this text in the Bible, I usually fast forward to where the genealogy is done. My guess is that's how most of us approach genealogies. When we come to it, we treat it a little bit like we've recorded something on our DVR and it's the commercials and we say, click, click, let me get on, because whatever this is, I'm just going to get to the next thing.

But what we'd like to suggest today is that the two genealogies Matthew tells one, Luke tells one, one from Joseph, one from Mary's lineage or pathway. And the genealogy in Matthew highlights something with four names, four women who are included in this genealogy. And that may not strike you or me as particularly odd, but in those days, women's names were not included in the genealogy. And so, it's almost as if this is being highlighted to say, I want your eyes to come to this.

Why these names? What's the point? Because most of the genealogies of that day and even the ones we have in the Bible read just like this one starts. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac, the father of Jacob. Jacob, the father of Judah. And it goes on and on. But four times a woman appears. And their stories aren't just unique because they're included or important because they're included, but because the stories themselves highlight something.

And in a way, this would be like going to a funeral today and somebody saying, oh, we're not just going to make nice statements about what's been, we're going to air the dirty laundry of the family at the funeral. That's a little bit of what's going on here.

I was seeing about a funeral recently, and this is what a daughter said to eulogize her dad. She said, "You dad, we're a racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, cis white man, and that's all you will ever be to me." That was how she eulogized her dad. It reminds me of a story about a pastor who was asked to do a funeral for a man there in a small town. The man had a brother and the two of them were notorious for being dishonest businessmen. People who maybe in older times we would have said were womanizers.

They ran around a whole lot, weren't particularly faithful, and were given to some public outbursts and scenes in the town. And this one man came to the pastor. He said, listen, I will make a very large donation to your church, if you will call my brother a saint at his funeral. And the pastor accepted the dare. And then the day came for the funeral and the town was gathered.

He stood up, and he said, "You know this man. He's been dishonest in business. He hasn't really been faithful to anybody. He's been given to public outbursts. But compared to his brother, he's a saint." This, in a sense, is the way that these names jump off the pages, and we get the story of Tamar, the story of Rahab, the story of Ruth, and the story of Bathsheba.

And Tamar's story is told in Genesis 38. And her story is really a tragedy. She marries and her husband did evil in the sight of the Lord. And so, the Lord took his life. And according to the Levirate laws of marriage of those days, the second son would need to marry her and raise a child for his brother to be an heir to the family. This was all outlined in part of the culture.

The second son, when he married her, said I don't really want to raise a child for my son so every time he would go into his wife, he would avoid impregnating her. And the Lord also struck him down.

And then there was a third son. This one was young by modern standards. We would say that he didn't make the rules of cutting the age in half and adding seven. And so, they were going to have to wait a little while in order to have a moment to have him get married. And as she was waiting, she began to realize that it was never the intention of the family to really give this son to her in marriage. She wouldn't have an heir.

Judah, the father-in-law, his wife died, and he went up to town one day. Tamar went ahead of him and dressed as a prostitute. And he went in to her. And as part of the exchange, he gave his signet ring to her. And in the weeks and months that followed, she began to show, and Judah was outraged and said she should be killed.

And she brought out her ring, his ring, and said, I'm pregnant by this man. And when she brought this ring out, he said, you've been more righteous than me. And in the course of time, she gave birth to a son. And at the end of Genesis 38, we see this. It says in verse 30, then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was named Zarah.

And this pre figures or pre shadows Jesus with the scarlet thread. And now in Matthew, we see her name, Tamar, a woman who the men in her life took advantage of and who did something desperate. And what this highlights is that the genealogy of Jesus is something that has its arms open wide. To say that there is an incredible inclusion, a great inclusion, even, of those who have done desperate things that maybe even were offensive to God.

Have you ever done anything offensive to God out of your desperation? Tamar stands as a reminder of God's great inclusion of people who've done desperate things and didn't necessarily fit the perfect mode that you would expect.

**Speaker: Emily DeAngelo**

Good morning, everyone. I'm Emily D'Angelo, and it is an honor to be able to share God's word today. And I'm here to tell you all about Rahab, a red rope, and a rescue. Long before this day, since the very beginning of the first sin of mankind, God had a plan to rescue his people from sin and destruction. And he used a woman named Rahab and her simple red rope for his rescue. God chose Rahab, a sinful woman to be a part of his family line, the family line of Jesus, and he has heralded her and honored her in the Bible for her faith and good deeds.

So, about a thousand years before the birth of Christ, the people living in Jericho are described as melting in fear because they had heard about the conquering Israelites and the favor of their mighty God. They had heard how God rescued the Israelites when he parted the Red Sea when the Egyptian army was pursuing them. God brought them to safety. It is likely that they had heard about how God saved them from death when they obeyed him, and they painted blood on the door frames of their houses. They were reasonably afraid because the fame of the Israelite victories had made its way to this little town in Canaan, and the people of Jericho were melting in fear that there was a woman living among them who was choosing faith over fear.

Now, Rahab. She lived in Jericho in a home along the stone wall that surrounded this city. She lived a shameful life with her parents and her siblings. Some historians say that they were innkeepers. But since the Bible describes Rahab as a prostitute, it is

very likely that she was taking money by offering more to her guests than just a room in there.

One day, Rahab's life was changed when two Israelite spies knocked at her door. They had come to Jericho to scope it out for a future invasion, and the king of Jericho and his armies were pursuing them. So, when they knocked at Rahab's door, she let them in and let them hide on her roof. Then she helped them escape through a window of her home with a red rope.

And they told Rahab that if she would hang this scarlet thread from that window, when they came back to annihilate this city, they would first return the favor and rescue her and her family in faith. Rahab had joined this rescue mission. We read in Joshua six that the spies kept their oath to Rahab. They came back and rescued her and her family to the safety of the Israelite camp before they burned down the city of Jericho.

Perhaps you've heard this famous story of the march around Jericho with shouts and trumpet sounds, and the miraculous crumble of this massive stone wall. Well, God saved Rahab from that death and destruction for his purpose, for her to become the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, and they continued the lineage of Jesus.

I believe the red rope is significant for several reasons. I think it serves as a visual reminder for us of Rahab's role, and her privileged position in the family line of Jesus. She was a significant member of his family. God had a plan to use Rahab to rescue his people. And then he honors Rahab's faith by placing her in the Faith Hall of Fame of Hebrews 11.

Now, Rahab's faith was in the savior to come. And the Christian faith is in the one who has already come. This red rope represents the very lifeline for those of us who have placed our faith in the completed work of Christ, who shed his blood on the cross to rescue us from our sins. So, God included an unlikely prostitute Rahab. She was nothing more, nothing less to be in the family line of Jesus.

And He invites us, sinful people, to also be in his family. What if the desperation that we have over our own sinful nature drives us to desire Christ at Christmas? We won't know the sweetness of our Savior if we don't recognize first that we need to be rescued.

So, I end with the same invitation the Apostle Paul gave to the Church of Colossae in Colossians one, 12-13. I believe this is the same invitation for us today. We are invited

to share in the inheritance of God's holy people in the Kingdom of Light, for He has rescued us from a dominion of darkness, and he's brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. So, what does God ask of us? Faith. Faith in the shed blood of Jesus.

**Speaker: Katie Thomas**

Have you ever moved before? Or maybe you have helped a friend or a family member move? Moving is a lot of work no matter how far you travel. During a really busy period of my life, I moved eight times in eight years. Yeah, I don't recommend that.

If you personally have moved before, have you ever had to move to an area that was an enemy of your country of origin? I would guess that most of us have not had this experience. The closest we might get to experiencing something similar would be if we are a diehard Steelers fan and have had to move to Baltimore or Cincinnati or Cleveland. But found in Scripture, though, is one of these examples of someone who willingly moves into enemy territory.

In the Old Testament story of Ruth, a family moved from Bethlehem to Moab. After all of the men in the family die, Ruth, a Moabite, decided to return with her mother-in-law, Naomi to Bethlehem. In chapter one, verse 16, Ruth told Naomi, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you where you go. I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God."

Ruth went to Bethlehem with Naomi and met Boaz, who became her family's kinsman redeemer. Boaz and Ruth got married and had a son, Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, who is the father of David. David was an ancestor of Jesus. And Jesus, of course, was the promised Messiah and Son of God. God used Ruth, a Moabite immigrant, to be an ancestor of Jesus. Ruth was not an Israelite and part of God's chosen people.

In fact, the Moabites had been a long-standing enemy of Israel for years. The Moabites worshiped false gods and disregarded the true God. The origins of the Moabites begin in the book of Genesis, chapter 19, with a man named Moab. Moab was the eldest son born from an incestuous and deceptive relationship between Lot and his eldest daughter.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Moabites grew to be a powerful enemy of Israel. In the Book of Numbers, the Israelites, led by Moses, pass through the plains of Moab on the way to Canaan. The Moabite King Balak was intimidated by a large number of

Israelites passing near his territory. So, he hired a pagan seer Balaam to curse God's people.

As in times past, God intervened and protected the Israelites from the curses. Shortly after this, the Moabites struck the Israelites in a different way, but with insidious results. The Numbers, chapter 25, the Israelites were at their final encampment before crossing the Jordan River, while their Moabite women engaged in sexual immorality with the Israelites. The Israelites were also led to worship false gods and break sacrificial laws given to them by God because of their sinful sexually immoral choices.

24,000 Israelites died by plague. Unfortunately, the Israelites hardship with the Moabites didn't end there. Moab still had a stronghold against the Israelites in the book of Judges. Judges, chapter three, shows how the Israelites had once again disobeyed God. So consequently, God strengthened Eglon, the King of Moab. King Eglon defeated Israel, took possession of their land, and forced the Israelites to serve him for eighteen years.

And yet God still chose an ordinary Moabite woman to be an ancestor of Jesus. Throughout the Book of Ruth, Ruth's Moabite heritage is highlighted over and over. She is named Ruth, the Moabite five times throughout the entire four-chapter book. When she is not referred to as Ruth the Moabite, she is often referred to as the Moabite Woman or the Moabite. Ruth's origin is intentionally mentioned, so it is unforgettable.

Her heritage was also probably unforgettable to those living near her in Bethlehem. Although it's not mentioned in Scripture, it's not hard to imagine the stares Ruth would have received or the whispers she may have heard as people suspiciously glanced her way. She was a Moabite. Perhaps they wondered if she was a Moabite spy or if she was manipulating Naomi.

But God saw Ruth's heart. He and his divine nature looked past Ruth's Moabite appearance and her heritage and saw her willingness to honor the true God. He saw her turn away from her people's tendencies for pagan worship and sinful practices in pursuit of a more God-honoring life. He also saw Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law and the care and compassion she had for the widow.

God used a childless widow from Moab with scandal and sin in her people's history to be in the direct line of Jesus. The truth is though, all of us have sin in our lives. Just like the Moabites. We too have at times ignored and disregarded God. But because

of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, dying, defeating death, and returning again, we too can join Jesus' familial line.

We can become children of God by believing and declaring this truth. The Bible is full of true stories where God shows His compassion and His grace and His forgiveness for those who call him Lord. Ruth's story is no different today. Immigration looks a lot different than it did in Ruth's time, but God's faithfulness to his people remains the same as it did thousands of years ago.

**Speaker: Jenna Bajusik**

I heard a speaker say recently that Advent is a stubborn storyteller who refuses to look past pain on her way to peace. And we see that in the story of the fourth woman in Matthew's genealogy, Bathsheba. But he doesn't write her name, just the wife of Uriah.

Which has led me to joke with a friend that he must have been the parent of an elementary school student because I cannot tell you how many people are in my phone as Ben's mom from soccer, or I have Katie's mom, and then I have blonde Katie's mom because those are two different people. But I have so many people where I've sat next to them for hours at sporting events or school things. I know half their life story, but it takes me entirely too long to go from Ben's mom to oh, your name is Christina.

And that's a little embarrassing for me to admit. Maybe I shouldn't be doing it into a microphone with cameras on me. But I'm going to work on getting better at names. But it stinks because these people are whole people. They have a whole life and a whole meaning outside of their role within their family. And Bathsheba was a woman whose life was very much defined by the relationships that she had, Uriah's wife, one of David's wives, and Solomon's mom.

Her story is irrevocably intertwined with these men. She had been married to Uriah, one of David's mighty men, which is a group of elite warriors. But we don't meet with Bathsheba as a young bride. We meet her as David met her while she was taking a bath on a roof which sounds weird until you realize that homes at that time didn't really have separate bathrooms for privacy. So, the roof was about as private as she could get for her monthly purification baths in obedience to Moses's laws.

So, there's David taking a stroll outside and being unable to rest in his own bed. He saw Bathsheba, recognizes that she was beautiful, and made some incredibly stupid and life altering decisions. He calls one of his aides and asks who she is. And upon

finding out that she is married to an incredibly fierce warrior, he sends men to bring her from her home to his.

And he let his other wives sleep in their own beds while he brought Bathsheba to his. This was no courtship, no drawn-out affair. She returned to her home and nothing more was done about it until she sent word to David that she was pregnant. So, David makes some more stupid decisions, and he decides he's going to bring home Uriah from war so that the baby could be passed off as his.

But Uriah was a soldier of duty and honor, and he refused to enjoy his trip home while his men were still on the battlefield. David sends him back to the battlefield with sealed orders for his commander that the other men would draw away from Uriah so that he would be killed in battle after he dies. David brings Bathsheba home to the palace, marries her, and her son is born. A few days later, he dies.

In the midst of this, the prophet confronts David. And at this point, David finally figures it out. It dawns on him that he has been doing some very sinful things. So, here's Bathsheba. Her dignity was forcibly taken. Her husband left to die in battle. Her child gone forever. Her womb is empty and her heart had to be broken in so many ways.

In this part of her life, she resembles so many people that I know who have had the life that they thought they were going to have just ripped out from underneath them. She's included in this lineage of Jesus. But why? To point out David's most famous sin. Perhaps it's part of it. But this woman, whose name is remembered by how she was used, has a purpose all of her own.

You see, she's more than an anecdote of David's brokenness. She's more than Solomon's mom. She's a person whose life mattered all on its own, whose heart yearned to be made whole by the God that she worshiped. Bathsheba, like so many in her time and so many in ours, was looking for a way for her story to be redeemed past the brokenness that she had experienced.

One thing that I see, a misconception I see a lot of people having about Jesus, is that he can't handle our mess. They think that Jesus is like that one neighbor that we all somehow have. And if I'm about to describe you, God still loves you. Everyone has that one neighbor where you're at their house, and they have one pillow that's like slightly askew and they're like, I'm so sorry for the mess. And I always make a mental note. I'm like, I'm going to need a week's notice and several professionals to come into my house before you're allowed to look in the windows because we are different people.



And I think sometimes people think that Jesus is like that neighbor, very well-intentioned, but just can't handle the mess of our lives. And that is entirely untrue. And I know that because like I said, David had many wives. He had many children. God could have chosen any of the other rest of them to carry on the lineage that his son would be born into.

But he chose Bathsheba because our redeemer comes as Emmanuel, God with us, to rescue us right where we're at. Chaos and all mess and all brokenness and loss and grief and sin right in the midst of who we really are and what we're really experiencing. He comes to us.

### **Speaker: Kurt Bjorklund**

So, these names that appear or three names and one person that appear in the genealogy serve to highlight the reality of Jesus' family line is that it isn't clean and neat and pristine, but it's messy. And it includes stories and accounts that most people of that day would have preferred to keep out of the account.

And here it is preserved so that every time we read the genealogy, were drawn on to say that the line of Jesus includes a woman who was mistreated by the men in her life and made desperate choices. A woman who was a social outsider to the people of Israel, and was engaged in the sex trade. A woman who socially and spiritually wasn't part of the line. And then one who had been marginalized and seen her life torn apart. And yet, here their names are as a stark reminder that the Kingdom of God includes those of us who are broken and messy, and our stories don't make a lot of sense.

But there's one more name of a woman. It's the name Mary. It's the most familiar female name associated with Jesus. She was the one who was highly favored. And certainly, we may look at her name here and say, well, her name reminds us just that God came through one who was highly favored. But maybe her favored status isn't because of her morality or her goodness.

In fact, we know that the way that Jesus came into the world without sin wasn't because of Mary's spinelessness, but because of the virgin birth. Maybe her inclusion reminds us, yes, that not all of us have stories as stark or needy as everyone else, but that if we try to ignore our loneliness, our neediness, that we maybe ignore the part of us that ultimately Jesus came to save.

I remember years ago I was part of a baptism service and there were several people who had big stories of all of the things that had gone on in their life before they came to Jesus and how Jesus had worked. And then there was a boy who was being baptized, maybe 11 or 12 years old, and he didn't have much of a story. And jokingly, when it was his turn to talk, he said, yeah, I used to do drugs and a lot of bad things, but now I'm a selfless servant of the king. And it was his way of saying, I don't have much of a story.

And here in the story of Jesus, although the contemporaries of Mary may have seen a story, an unwed mother, a scandalous pregnancy, here it is just saying anyone, everyone can be included in the kingdom of God. And this is what this genealogy points to. And it is good news to celebrate and to remember this Christmas.