

May 12, 2019 (Mother's Day)

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**Matthew 1: Son of The Comeback**

Scripture: Matthew 1: 1-16

There are five women mentioned in Jesus' family tree. If you want to know more about them:

Tamar—Gen:38

Rahab—Josh: 2

Ruth—Ruth 4: 13-22

Uriah's wife, Bathsheba—2 Sam. 11-12

Mary—Luke 1:26-38

**Why does Matthew include these five women in the genealogy of Jesus?** This isn't typical at all. In fact, there is only one other example of this in the entire Bible. It's not just that he's including women,

- but in at least two cases he's including *non-Jewish* women (gentiles!).
- He lists two women reputed to have been prostitutes.
- There's another born and bred in the nation most hated by Israel;
- And there is one woman who is part of a Stormy Daniels Style cover up—so scandalous that she isn't even mentioned by name—all these years later she still only referred to indirectly through her husband.

Now remember, this is supposed to be the Impressive, Pure-bred Pedigree of the Messiah. But Matthew is having none of it. Matthew will not be implicated in cover-up a single black sheep or crazy uncle in the family tree.

Matthew includes the names of these women because he wants to make it clear that God works out his plan in strange and unimaginable ways. At the same time, I believe he's also saying, if you thought God took some unexpected turns and made some unconventional choices in the past, then "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet. Wait until you get a load of the last name on the list—**Jesus**, the son of Mary and Joseph, a carpenter from the Galilee."

**Let's take a quick look at these women**, and again I apologize to you who haven't spent much time in the Old Testament. I put together a little handout with some scriptures on each of these women if you want to go back and read the somewhat steamy stories behind them.

**Tamar**, [Image] was a widower, had to disguise herself as a temple prostitute in order to get the child she was promised.

**Rahab**, [Image] was an innkeeper in Jericho, betrayed her own people only to be live among the Israelites who would have been considered her as an outcast, spy or at least someone with mixed loyalties.

**Ruth** [Image] was also a widower, a despised immigrant to Judah from the crappiest of the ‘crap-hole countries’ in and around Israel. Take our historic hostility and proximity to communist Cuba and mix in a large dose of those part of the Central American caravans and you get a pretty good sense of how Israelites felt about Moabites like Ruth.

**Bathsheba**—[Image] though essentially seduced or coerced into sex with the king—would have been branded an adulterer if it came out that the child that came out of union was not her husband Uriah’s. Caught between a ambitious King, his unborn baby, and her love for her husband—Bathsheba truly was wedged between a rock and a hard place. And yet David ends up “a man after God’s own heart” while Bathsheba is vaguely referenced as “Uriah’s wife.”

**And Mary**, [Image] of course, we all know her story through and through. An unmarried teenager who is asked to consider a pregnancy that will bring her shame and most likely push her beloved away. Mary who, much older now, stands at the foot of the cross watching her son pay the ultimate price for the fickleness of the crowd and a willingness to speak the truth.

These women certainly aren’t the five most likely to appear on your typical who’s who Heroines of the Bible list.

**Over the years I’ve become close to a lot of very different women who have been part of the congregations I’ve served throughout the state of Indiana and North Carolina. I learned early on that none of them had a typical story.** They too struggled with the cards they’d been dealt. Many of them had hardships I never knew about until after they were gone and I met with their families to plan their funerals.

**There were the women who didn’t really come into their own until their husbands passed away.** There were always different reasons why, but I always thought it was bittersweet that they weren’t free to be who they wanted to be because of the one they loved most in the world.

**Some women didn’t get the education they would have excelled at,** but the money for higher education—when they grew up—was usually reserved for sons with ambition. Though I can think of a set of twins who got a world class education in spite of the expectations of the people around them. They had a Mother who believed education and she never let her girls back down from the challenges they faced.

**Some of those women would have been nurturing and wise mothers but never married** because their true love wasn’t deemed ‘good enough’ for their family or because it was their designated role to live at home and care for her parents in their old age. Some married but weren’t able to have children of their own.

**There was the woman whose husband who was deeply moved by an Ash Wednesday service.** Something about facing his own mortality radicalized

his heart, but not in a good way. He went home that night and told her that he wanted a divorce. He wanted a new job in a new town with new possibilities with new people and he would be gone as soon as he could work out the details. She was not only furious then with him, but with the church as well.

**There was a young woman I was taken aside and whisper-warned about.** A young woman who was rather wild in high school but after she got married, started a family and came hungrily to Jesus wanted to be able to help some of the girls in the youth group learn from her mistakes. Those who knew her from back in the day thought it would make more sense to disband the youth group than to let something like that happen.

**These women have been grafted into my faith family tree. They have been Grandmothers, Mothers and Aunts to me in Christ.** And that Jesus DNA of theirs now expresses itself in every cell of my body, mind, and spirit. You know why? Each and every one of these women had **chutzpah**. **Shameless audacity; impudence** because of their faith in the living God.

They believed in God and believed that God believed in them. They believed that no matter what the world threw at them with God's help they could Comeback, that the living God was a God of Forgiveness and Second Chances. These were women who refused to let life's failures define them. They let the strength of their hearts mix with a little of the shameless audacity that lies at the heart of Jesus Christ and the result was...how did we put it? **Lives lived in Strange, unimaginable and wonderful ways.**

We honor Mothers today, and rightly we should, but Matthew picks these five mothers because he wants to make a statement about what women and men can expect from this very unexpected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. And what we can expect is two things: Plenty Chutzpah and Plenty of Second Chances. Jesus is the direct descendent of women who leaned on God to receive the **Positive Power to Turn Mistakes and Misunderstandings Into Comebacks and Celebrations.**

If you were to read say, *Genesis 38*, you'd discover that the reason **Tamar** disguised herself as a roadside prostitute was only because her father-in-law failed to fulfill the law *and* the vow he made to her. After her husband died—Judah's oldest son—Judah promised she would marry another of his sons when he was older. When Judah reneged on the deal, when he failed to return Tamar's calls, she had no power and no choice if she wanted to carry on her husband's name and lineage. So she turned to trickery and deceit to get what she was promised. Judah himself later admits that Tamar had been more righteous than he.

Poor **Rahab** almost always described as *Rahab the Prostitute* may not have been a prostitute at all. The word in Hebrew for innkeeper and prostitute are very close, and considering the fact that she clearly owned the home in which she

offered shelter to Joshua's spies, she was either the owner of an inn or a brothel—which may have been basically the same thing in the pagan world.

In any case, Rahab was stuck having to honor the sacred responsibility of hospitality to the two strangers who came under her roof—the two whom she found out later were Hebrew spies. She also felt fear or spiritual reverence for Israel's God. She had no trouble believing that the God who delivered His people from Egypt would defeat her people in Jericho. She ends up working out a deal in which she helps the spies escape in exchange for saving the lives of her entire family.

**Ruth** was a victim of life's most difficult circumstances. Not only does her husband die but the only other family that might support her, her brother-in-law dies as well. Yet even as a destitute widow, Ruth has the empathic heart to see that her mother in law, Naomi had it even worse. She'd lost both her sons, and as a Jewish woman in a foreign land, Naomi had nothing to keep her in Moab, and yet very little to go back to in Israel. Ruth's christ-like love and commitment to Naomi is astounding. Her courage to tempt scandal and go lie down at the feet of her distant relative Boaz—to spend the night where “good girls” didn't go—is the virtual definition of Chutzpah, and it makes all the difference for both women.

Yes, **Bathsheba** really had no voice and no choice when approached by King David, but once she had a son by him that could be an heir to her husband's throne, she took hold of her voice and made careful the choices she needed to see that her son Solomon would be the next king.

And **Mary**? The scandal of Jesus' out of wedlock birth followed him and followed her all her life. She saw him die with her own eyes and yet she also saw him alive again with those same eyes. Maybe more than any of the other women, any of the other mothers or grandmothers who make Matthew's list, Mary knows a little something about come backs. She may have seen her son crucified on Calvary but she also saw him alive again near the tomb in the garden.

Think about it. Who is this Jesus but the **Son of the Comebacks**? If you want to Come Back from the oppressive weight of guilt and shame, Jesus says, let me take it off your shoulders.

You want to comeback from some incredibly stupid decisions you made in the past, Jesus can't even remember what those dumb choices were. He's already inviting you forward toward something radically new.

Want to start over in a relationship that seems beyond saving? Jesus has been bringing second chances to broken and dying relationships for the last 2,000 years and more.

Maybe all you need is a little dose of Shameless Audacity in your life.

Maybe it's time to really believe God. Time to believe that God really believes in you, and that no matter what the world throws at you, with God's help you can and will always come back.

**Jesus might be the end of Matthew's family tree, but the good news I'm here to tell you about this morning is that he is at the head of yours and mine.** When we say that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, it also means that we are sons and daughters of **the King, you know, the King of Comebacks.** You're born with a natural aptitude for getting and giving Second Chances. And I hate to be the one to have to tell you this, but you've also inherited the family predisposition for Forgiveness. Be careful because you've also got a very high susceptibility to grace. And because of rare genetic mutation you've got no effective defense against love.

**So you Moms who still have kids at home, the next time you have to fill out paper work at the Doctor's Office where you check boxes if anyone in your family has ever had symptoms or has been hospitalized for the following**—remember that Jesus is at the head of your family spiritual/medical history and his DNA courses through you and your children. Just a heads up, you have to check Yes to all of the following symptoms:

**Extreme patience**

**Uncontrolled outbursts of kindness**

**Refusal to envy,**

**Resistant to most forms of boasting,**

**Absence of self-seeking behaviors,**

**Difficulty in being able to maintain anger,**

**Failure to keep record of wrongs.**

**Inability to delight in evil**

**Compulsive rejoicing with the truth.**

**Always trusting (Complete Doubtectomy)**

**Hopefulness lasting for more than two weeks at a time**

**Perpetual Perseverance Disorder (PPD)**

**Love that Never Fails**