

Jesus: Son of Scandal

Advent Midweek #3 – 12/16/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Matthew 1:1, 3, 5-6 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ Shannon LaNier is a television news anchor in Houston; the 7th-largest television market in the United States. He is also known for being the 5th great-grandson of Madison Hemings, a son of scandal. Yes, like so many family trees, LaNier's family has a scandal in its past and this one just happens to be a skeleton in the closet of one of our nation's founding fathers.
 - On July 4, 1826, 50 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, its author, Thomas Jefferson, died. His contributions to our nation were many. He would bear the titles of governor, congressman, secretary of state, vice president, and eventually president.
 - Both the Louisiana Purchase and Lewis and Clark's expedition would not have happened as they did without his influence and support as president. His gravestone makes note not only of his authorship of the Declaration of Independence but also the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, both of which we find principles which remain as important legacies to this day.
- ✘ But in recent years, Thomas Jefferson has also been remembered for scandal. After the death of his wife, Martha, Jefferson began a relationship with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. Their relationship yielded four children who lived into adulthood, one of whom was Madison Hemings, Shannon LaNier's ancestor. All of Sally Hemings's adult children were eventually freed by Jefferson, the last two at the time of his death.
 - So it is that the author of the most famous document defending freedom, kept his own blood-children enslaved for years. Yes, as we have heard revealed numerous times since the social unrest this summer, in classic American form, Thomas Jefferson is hero with flaws; remembered for both his great accomplishments and this salacious scandal.

I. Matthew records scandals in Jesus' family tree.

- ✘ As we continue our series tonight, looking at Jesus' genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, one of the most striking features is the inclusion of women.
 - New Testament scholar D. A. Carson writes, "Most Jewish genealogies did not include women. More important, the choice of these particular women, instead of such great matriarchs as Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, proves Matthew was giving us something more than merely biological information" (God with Us: Themes from Matthew [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009], 12).
 - By including these four women Matthew's genealogy shows us what kind of God our heavenly Father truly is. The fact that God specifically chose these four women to be part of His Son's lineage is significant; especially since He chose to have it recorded in Scripture for all of history to hear and see. After all, the Bible is God's special revelation about Himself, His Son, and His plan of salvation. So, by intentionally including these four women, God is revealing for all people of all time that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.
- ✘ Here's a quick review these family scandals to bring everyone up to speed:
 - Tamar's husband had been killed by the Lord because of his evil ways. Her father-in-law, Judah, did not keep his promise to Tamar to provide another husband after his son had been killed. So Tamar took matters into her own hands, disguised herself as a harlot, seduced her

own father-in-law and conceived twins by Judah. One of those twins, Perez, would be an ancestor of Christ.

→ Rahab, whom we heard about in our Old Testament Reading earlier, was the prostitute in Jericho who kept the Israelite spies safe as they scouted out the city before the people of God took possession of the Promised Land. She also became an ancestor of the Savior to come.

→ Ruth was from Moab, a non-Jew; that is a Gentile, who became grafted into the Messianic line, which doesn't seem like any kind of scandal to our modern ears. But in that day it was quite unacceptable.

→ And then there is David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba whose second son, Solomon became the descendant that pass down the bloodline that would eventually lead to Jesus.

✘ In each of these cases, what the world looks at and judges to be a scandal was actually used by God, in His eternal wisdom, to bring about His perfect plan for the salvation of all people from sin. It's quite a family tree: incest, prostitution, adultery, and murder; a family that has it all!

II. The scandals of our lives raise questions too.

✘ Thomas Jefferson's descendants were plunged into controversy when it was revealed that Sally Hemings's children were fathered by the former president. When the family gets together, who's welcome to come? Who's legitimate? Who should be considered illegitimate?

→ Yet the Jefferson family isn't the only family plagued with those questions, is it? Ultimately it means that every person has to wonder whether she or he is worthy of being called a child of God; worthy to be a part of His family.

✘ But you see, the women included in Jesus' genealogy speak volumes to all of us about our merciful God; far more than they do about the women themselves.

→ As the great Lutheran New Testament scholar, Martin Franzmann wrote, "They are firmly enmeshed in the history of God's chosen people, and their presence speaks eloquently of the fact that this history is not the story of man's glory but of God's grace" (Follow Me: Discipleship according to Matthew [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961], 11).

✘ And let's be honest with ourselves this evening folks, scandal is not something that we only find among the deeds of our ancestors. Your own actions and mine have alienated us from God as well. We are all prodigal sons and daughters who have rejected our Father and our family of faith.

→ Like Esau in the Bible, we have sold our birthright for our insatiable appetite for sin (Gen. 25). We have not hungered and thirsted for righteousness as God desires of us, but instead, we have sought to fill ourselves up with the temporary pleasures of all that this world offers.

→ Yes, as Paul references in Romans 5:10, before coming to faith; from the moment of conception, we too were once enemies of Christ. Our gods were our bellies as he says in Philippians 3:19, and we did not serve the true God, but our own sinful appetites. We were no better than Judah or Tamar; Rahab or Ruth; Bathsheba or David, for we share just as much in their humanity and sin.

III. But God has adopted us as His children.

✘ But here's the great Advent and Christmas news: like those ancestors of scandal, we too have received the gift of adoption as sons, through the power of God's Spirit, so that we are children

of God. “And if children,” Paul says in Romans 8:17, “then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”. We are heirs with the One who was born King of Kings and “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

→ As Paul wrote to Titus, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared” – by the way that is the same goodness and loving kindness that led Jesus to go to the cross – “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit. 3:4–7).

- ✘ It is an astounding miracle of grace that the same thing that God the Father said of Jesus when He was baptized in the river Jordan, our Father ultimately declares to us and all of His children in the waters of Holy Baptism today: “You are My beloved Son; (my beloved daughter;) with you I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11).

IV. Therefore we look to our family reunion in heaven.

- ✘ I don’t know about you, but as I was growing up, I used to look forward to the annual family reunion on my Mother’s side of the family. Why? Because a family reunion meant a time to celebrate with loved ones. And it always included a feast of great food, shared with loved ones from far and near.

→ Well, by the grace of God, you and I have been invited to the greatest of all banquets, even though we deserve to be among the outcasts and abandoned because of our sin.

→ 1 John 3:1 says, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”. Therefore, God welcomes us to the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end; our eternal family reunion, where we will be gathered together with people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages – all of us one family; all of us connected together by blood to Jesus!

- ✘ Oh what a family reunion that will be – like no other when you consider who is included in this family: liars, cheats, thieves, adulterers, murderers, and meddlers; con-artists and addicts; the arrogant and the ignorant; the hardheaded and hard-nosed; the greedy and needy; college students paralyzed by fear of the future and grown adults haunted by the ghosts of the past.

→ Yes, this family; Christ’s family of believers takes all kinds; all kinds of people with all their warts and bruises and scandals and skeletons and other things from their pasts. We are all one family in Christ; united through Jesus’ death and resurrection and looking forward to His coming when He will take us to the blessed reunion in heaven.

- ✘ Studying genealogies can be fascinating, but learning about Jesus’ family tree means so much more. It means life; life as heirs of the glorious inheritance of eternal life, because when you get down to it, our family tree is Jesus’ family tree. It is the tree of Calvary where our life out of sin real took root and began to grow.

→ This is what the scandals of Jesus’ family tree show us tonight; that we too are children of God by His grace; redeemed from the scandal of our sin just as Jesus redeemed the likes of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. And now our family prayer; our cry of faith is this, “Come Lord Jesus, we are Yours forever, by Your grace. Amen.