

The bible. A library of sacred books. History, legend, poetry, music, biography, wisdom, law—secular and canon— drama, saga, romance, erotica- you mean you've never read the Song of Songs?- folk tales, letters, visions, and. Genealogies. Lots and lots of genealogies. Genesis has 'em. Numbers has em. Chronicles has little else. Even Matthew and Luke get in on the begat begetting act.

Clearly, genealogies are important to the Bible writers, otherwise they wouldn't be there: there is no such thing as filler in the Scriptures, no scribe paid by column inches just filling up his word count. The Bible books were first written to be read aloud and listening to a litany of someone's lineage is a really, really, really tedious experience and no author wants to bore their listener so clearly those family trees are so pertinent that the writers were willing to risk the restlessness of their listeners. Genealogies are clearly important to the Scripture scribes so, why? Why do genealogies matter?

Because... because your genealogy is the story of who you are, it's you, the culmination of all that went before, all your family history was just leading to the singular point that is: you. Even dogs get genealogies: my pooch came with a Kennel club pedigree which is pure comedy gold: it starts reasonably enough four generations back with great great grandparents like Harukahime and Tsukasa before degenerating into ancestors named Dumbledore, Pretty Woman, Ice Queen, Wotta Palave and It's Chillie Time. Dog breeders are *strange*.

Back to humans. Our family trees tell us how we got to where we are, how we got to be who we are, they tell us who we are.

There is a television programme which has run on the BBC for the last twenty years called 'Who do you think you are?' The idea is to take a famous person on a breakneck ride back through the branches of their genealogy, as far as research can get in time and sometimes taking them half way round the world and beyond in search of their origins and interesting TV. The format has been sold to many other countries: there are versions of it in the US, Russia, Romania, Australia and 15 or more other countries so clearly it makes for fabulous TV. Many of the great, the good and the notorious have featured as the programme's victim..., subjects

Ian McKellen, Judy Dench, Stephen Fry, Nigella Lawson, Boris Johnson, Tracey Emin, Gary Lineker these a small selection of those who are featured, but the best known of all episodes was not the one with the most famous of participants, but the one

featuring the Eastenders actor Danny Dyer, who even his biggest fans would admit is not quite top of the A list. However, Danny Boy is definitely king of the Who Do You Think You Are? castle since the programme discovered that the somewhat rough round the edges cockney thespian is descended from royalty, numbering as he does King Edward III among his ancestors. Who'd have thought it? Or cor blimey or by 'eck if you're from my neck of the woods; when Danny Dyer found out who he thought he was it was a real modern day DNA variant of the fairy tale where the poor peasant boy turns out to be a prince deposited with the woodcutter's wife to save him from his wicked stepmother. Or something like that.

What is truly remarkable however is not that Danny Dyer is related to Edward Plantaganet but that it was possible to trace the line back from one to the other. Because, probably most of us in this room are descended from royalty, it's just we don't have the crack research team behind one of the BBC's most successful franchises to dig up the family skeletons for us. You may not believe me. Though I am sure a little part of your heart knows that you are really a princess- I know a part of mine does- your grown up self is sensible enough to know that's there's no nobs in your family tree and that your progenitors as far back as anyone has ever been able to trace were respectable but unremarkable. You might have known otherwise. But, with family trees, it all depends on how you draw the line. In one sense genealogies are like lay lines- you're just joining up random points and creating a pattern of significance.

But royalty. Do the maths. Each generation you go back the number of ancestors doubles and it very quickly becomes a vast number of your predecessors, and it doesn't take that long before the number of ancestors you've had is many more than everybody who ever lived, and long before that moment is reached, we all find we have a common ancestor. Not back in prehistory, Some time in the middle ages. We are, indeed, family.

So, somewhere, if you know how to draw the line, you— yes you— are descended from kings and queens and bards and poets and whoever else is going to impress you and other people. And also chambermaids and peasants and ploughmen and priests and all the other people that nobody turns into when the fairytale princess kisses the frog.

So had our Bible writers got it wrong? Had they mistakenly bequeathed future generations with the pleasures, nay the joys of remembering and recounting all that

begetting for all the ages down to now? Are those long lists of bloodlines surplus to requirements in religion as they are in everyday life?

For the answer, let's look a little closer at the genealogy that should really matter to us, the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel, the first Gospel in our Bible starts with Jesus' family tree, starting with Abraham then tracing the generations to the exile in Babylon and from thence to the birth of the Messiah. Luke's Gospel put the genealogy in its chapter three and instead of working forward from Abraham, works backwards, all the way to Adam, the very first possible ancestor. Genealogies are in the very gospels, the scriptures so foundational to our faith we stand when they're read. So genealogies are important, right?

Well, that's Matthew and Luke. Mark's Gospel, the start of which we heard this morning, doesn't go any further back than Jesus in adulthood, starting at his baptism, when his public ministry began, traditionally about age 30. John's gospel begins right at the beginning itself with that mystical passage about the agency of Jesus the Word in the creation itself, but there's not a twig of a family tree to be seen.

And, if you look closer at the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, you'll notice, I hope, that they're both... different. So Jesus' grandad on his father's side was Jacob according to Matthew, Heli according to Luke; great great grandad was Levi... or Eleazar. In fact, the lists share little in common, other than both name in their list immediately before Jesus, Joseph the husband of Mary the *adoptive* father of Jesus. Oh. In fact, neither are the genealogy of Jesus, they are the family tree of *Joseph*, biologically unrelated to his adopted son.

So, while looking on the surface like your traditional line of descent, the standard pedigrees of piety, the genealogies of Jesus presented in the Gospels mark a radical break with precedent. They make it clear. Jesus was without a human father. He was adopted by a carpenter. Joseph could trace his ancestry to David, sure, but like Danny Dyer and Edward III, it wasn't exactly a novelty in 1st Century Palestine. So both those long lists of ancestors, just show that, actually they're irrelevant.

Jesus was without a human father. So all those fabulous scrolls tracing your descent from great heroes... they're pretty much like the pedigrees of your pets. Entertaining, perhaps, but not really important to who you are. The genealogies of Jesus, or rather, their absence, state quite clearly that, you are not your biology.

Genealogies matter to us, they do not matter to God. Look at who he chose to be mother of his son. God chose Mary; Joseph chose to adopt Jesus: You *choose* your family. Yes you do. All families have a chosen component: you choose your partner after all, or in some times and places they're chosen for you.

For all that family trees matter to us, what matters to God is not the bits of DNA you've received from your ancestors. It doesn't matter to God where you've come from: what matters is where you're going, what matters is what is in your heart, and that has nothing to do with your genes.

Perhaps then Mark was right to start his good news where he did, even if Matthew and Luke had to explain a bit later, that, you know, he didn't mention it, but we did and look! it doesn't matter.

You are not just a body. You have a soul. One day, the body you presently inhabit will be no more, but your soul is immortal. It will one day be joined to the resurrection body.

Who do you think you are?

If you do the maths, it's clear that we all have royalty in our ancestry. But far more than that, we are God's adopted children, we are siblings of that boy to be born at Christmas and whose future advent in glory we anticipate today; Christ is the beginning and the end of each of our family tree.