

Ruth: The Gentiles At The Heart of Christmas

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[0 : 00] Well, let's begin by singing our first carol, and it's a carol that speaks of the coming of the long-promised Christ. The child born of Mary is the one through whom God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

So let's sing together. Let's sing together.

Let's sing together.

Let's sing together.

Let's sing together.

[2 : 29] Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together.

Let's sing together. Let's sing together.

Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together.

Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Well, we turn now to our first Bible reading, so do turn with me to Matthew chapter 1, and we're looking at verses 18 to 25. That's our first reading.

Does someone have a page number? 807 in the Blue Bible, 807, Matthew chapter 1, and reading from verse 18.

[3 : 52] Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Well, that's a passage all about Jesus, God's son, come to dwell with us and to rescue us from sin.

[5 : 21] And our next carol picks up these key aspects of Jesus' coming. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. And during this carol, we'll remain seated for the first couple of verses as we take up the offering.

So the baskets will come around, and we'll remain seated for the offering that is for, as I said, going towards our mission partners, Imran and Nagina Gil, to go some way to helping them to buy a home to live in.

So let's remain seated for the first couple of verses. And then once the offering's been taken, I will give us a signal, and we can stand together. So let's sing O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Thank you very well. Thank you very well. We'll be right back.

Thank you very well.

Amen. Amen.

[7 : 25] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Well, as we said, let's gather our hearts together and pray to our Heavenly Father.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we give you thanks that you are a God who speaks and that you have now in the person of Jesus Christ spoken fully and finally.

Thank you that at this time of year we can remember his birth, but not just his birth, but his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. We remember the very purpose for his coming and the

implications for frail folk like us, and they are staggering.

[10:32] That the Lord Jesus is our Savior, bringing hope and certainty because he is the promised light who has dawned on a dark world. How we can but praise you for the grace and mercy shown to us in Jesus.

And so help us, each of us here this afternoon, to submit to you, to turn to you, and so know the joy of sins forgiven and the certainty of life eternal.

So help us now, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We turn back to Matthew's Gospel for our next reading, and then we'll spend a bit of time thinking about the first part of Matthew's Gospel before we sing again.

So we'll read from the start of Matthew, chapter 1, and verses 1 to 6. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

[12:17] The king. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to us. Now, I've had conversations in recent weeks with folk who say that Christianity, well, it's not for me.

It's not my thing. I can see that it means a lot to the sort of folk that go to church, but it's not really for me. I wonder if that describes you, or perhaps someone you know, perhaps a close family member, or a friend.

Well, to think that is to completely misunderstand the whole message of Christmas, the whole meaning of Christianity. You see, the gospel message at the heart of Christmas is truly for all people.

It is a message that concerns the destiny, the destination of all people. It's a message that concerns all people because it concerns the God who made everything.

It concerns his plans and purposes for the world he's made, for the people he's made, for you and I. People that, according to the Bible, have rejected him and rebelled against him.

[13:30] People that, again, according to the Bible, have to face the consequences of that rebellion. Consequences we live with every day. Difficulty, disease, disappointment, and ultimately death.

And we live with these consequences of that ultimate rebellion. And one day, we will have to face God in judgment. And so, people, you and I, are in desperate situation if we remain alienated from God, who is the right ruler of this world.

The Bible tells us that our eternal destinies are at stake. But it also tells us that God does not stand at a distance. From the very opening pages of the Bible, God has declared his love for a rebellious people.

He's provided a way of salvation, a way of defeating the great enemy. He promised at the very beginning a serpent crusher, a child of the woman, who would defeat the great enemy himself and bring forgiveness of sin and life eternal.

Ever since then, ever since God made those promises in Genesis chapter 3, the world has been waiting for this promised child, this promised serpent crusher.

[14:55] And that is why these opening verses of Matthew are just so staggering. That child, that promised one has arrived. The child born to Mary, who was to be called Jesus, he came, verse 21 that we read earlier, he came to save his people from their sins.

The one God promised to mankind back at the very beginning, the one who would rescue people from the consequences of sin, the one who would bring about the restoration of everything that was broken back then, the one long promised has now come.

That is what is so staggering about Christmas, about these words we've just read. But Jesus' coming wasn't just for a religious group in the Middle East.

No, God has always had the nations, the whole world in view. We see that so clearly from these opening words in Matthew chapter 1, which at first glance don't seem to reveal much other than the long list of names.

But this list of names is a royal family tree beginning, verse 2, with Abraham, the one to whom God made great promises, promises of a great people, promises of a great land, but also promises that

his offspring would be a blessing to the nations.

[16:29] The nations are in view, the world is in view. And that was always God's plan from the very beginning. God is going to extend his rule to the ends of the earth.

And he calls all people everywhere to enter his kingdom, to seek his mercy, to serve him. And his global purposes are so clear in some of the names that are mentioned there in those early verses. In these Wednesdays before Christmas, we've been looking at three names in particular, three women mentioned there in those early verses. Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth.

All of them outsiders. They're all pagans, Gentiles. All of them in various ways are marred by real hardship and mess. They're the sort of people that you and I would never choose.

But they are the sort of people that God, in his grace, reaches down to and includes in his purposes. Each of those women are ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:38] Each bear children that carry by their very existence the great hopes of the promised serpent crusher. Now we're focusing in the first part of our talk this afternoon on Ruth.

We've looked at Tamar and Rahab in recent weeks. But this afternoon it's Ruth. And we see in the story of Ruth, the Gentiles at the heart of Christmas.

Now Ruth lived many, many hundreds of years before Christ, but she is one of his ancestors. She was in fact the great grandmother of David, the great king of God's people.

The one in whom God promised to establish his kingdom in this world. And the one from whom would eventually come the king of kings, Jesus the Messiah. But as you read about Ruth, it's a short book near the start of the Old Testament.

As you read about Ruth, as you read her story, as it's recorded there, you realize how astonishing it is that she is included in this great story. These great purposes of God through all history.

[18:46] It's astonishing that she's there. You see, Ruth was a Moabite. Like Tamar and Rahab before her, she was an outsider, not from Israel.

But not just that, as a Moabite, she was from a nation fierce in its opposition to the people of God, a nation known to be one of the great enemies of God's people.

And so that's not a good start for Ruth, is it? But she married one of the people of God. She married one of the sons of Elimelech and Naomi, a couple from Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah.

But within a decade, disaster had struck that small family. Elimelech and his two sons had died, leaving Naomi, Ruth, and the wife of the second son, all widows.

And so returning to Bethlehem with Ruth, Naomi seeks to eke out a living and to reestablish some sort of life back amongst her own people in the land of Israel.

[19:55] But what she can't see is that the Lord is working all things out according to his purposes, not just in the lives of Naomi and Ruth, but the great plans, his great story to bring about his promised king, the promised child of the woman.

God is at work carrying that out, even in the life of Ruth, the Moabite. As you read her story, you see God wonderfully at work to bring her a new husband, to bring stability and safety to her life and to her mother-in-law.

But not only that, we read these words in Ruth chapter 4, words that for those who've been here the last few weeks might ring a few familiar bells.

Listen to these words in Ruth chapter 4. These are words spoken to Boaz, Ruth's new husband.

May the Lord make this woman, referring to Ruth, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

May you act worthily and be renowned in Bethlehem. And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

[21:19] The focus there in the book of Ruth is again on offspring. Offspring born to a Gentile woman, a woman like Tamar before her.

And as we read on in the book of Ruth and on through the Bible, we know that Ruth becomes the great-grandmother to David, the king. And it was from David's line that the Christ himself would come, Jesus born to Mary.

That is how God works. He works through unlikely people, people we'd never think could have a place in his plans and purposes. That is how God worked then and that is how he works now.

And that should give all of us great encouragement, shouldn't it? None of us is beyond the pale. None of us is too much of an outsider to be brought into God's family and used for his purposes.

And so we see in the story of Ruth, another woman who saved Christmas. We see in her story that God delights to save and work through Gentiles.

[22 : 28] And that's a truth that is self-evident today, isn't it? The Christian church is global. Even this afternoon, as we look around this room, there are people from different nations, all sorts of backgrounds.

The vast majority, I'm sure, are Gentiles. And so don't miss that this Christmas. Don't think that Christianity is just for religious types or a certain class or a certain intellect.

God calls all sorts of people, people just like you, to himself. At the heart of the Christmas story is Jesus, the descendant of those Gentile women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth.

And he came to save not just those of the nation of Israel, but the Gentiles. He came for global purposes and to rescue unlikely people.

And we'll think a little bit more about that after we've sung our next carol. And so you'll see it appearing on the screens. Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight, O all the earth, ye who sang creation's story now proclaim Messiah's birth.

[23 : 52] Let's sing together. Let's sing together. We hope to program how snow you Lord.

Come on. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[26 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[29 : 12] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[34 : 12] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[36 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[39 : 12] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[42 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[45 : 12] Thank you.