

4. It's a reassuring birth - Bringing the wonderful reassurance of God's Ultimate Purpose

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[0 : 00] Well, do just open your Bibles again at page 807. And we're looking again at this passage. We've been looking at Matthew chapter 1 this Christmas and asking what's so special about Jesus' birth.

We've already seen that in the list of names, the genealogy that Matthew opens his gospel with, the family tree of Abraham and David, and we've already seen that Matthew is telling us this is a royal birth.

It's bringing at last the wonderful reign of God's Messiah, long promised. And it's a revealing birth. It's a supernatural birth, a divine birth, bringing a wonderful revelation of God's person so that we can know him.

All humanity, in every place, for all time, can know the truth about exactly what God is like. And last night on our Christmas Eve service, we saw also that this birth is a redeeming birth.

It's bringing a wonderful redemption for God's people. He came, says verse 21, to save his people from their sins. Not a political saviour, not an economic saviour, not come to save his people from the Romans, or from the Americans, or from the Europeans, or from anybody else.

[1 : 25] He's not come to be a psychological saviour, to save us from ourselves, but a saviour from the ultimate bondage, the ultimate captivity, which humans face.

And that is the bondage to sin, caused by a rebellion against God himself. He came to rescue human beings, men and women, and boys and girls, from their sins, and from the consequences of our sins, the estrangement from God that is our lot.

And that, friends, is the very heart of this world's problems, whether we recognise it or not. We see the symptoms, but the Bible tells us the true pathology.

But there's more. One more thing I want to point out about what Matthew is telling us in these verses. And it's there in verses 22 and 23. I wonder if you can see them on your Bibles or on the screens.

All this, all this, not just the details, but the whole events of Christ's coming, that is his origin, and his family tree, his birth, his naming, the purpose for which he comes, all this, says Matthew, fulfills the scriptures of the Old Testament.

[2 : 43] And this birth is so special because it's a wonderfully reassuring birth. It brings us wonderful reassurance of God's ultimate purpose for this world.

Because this world, and our own personal world, the world of our lives, this world is not just a random chance existence.

Not at all. It has a purpose. God has a wonderful purpose, of course, for every single thing that he's made. And he has acted, and he will continue to act, to make sure that everything he has purposed comes to its glorious and marvellous fulfillment.

And that means that we don't need to fear. Our world's full of fear, isn't it? Full of fear, and foreboding, and uncertainty. I guess at Christmas time, we try and thrust that aside, and we cover it over with festivities, and joy, and happiness.

And we can manage it for a little while, but not for long. My radio came on this morning, and the first thing I heard on the news, was of a suicide bomb, killing 40 people, in Pakistan, just this morning.

[3 : 59] We can't hide, can we, from the reality, the fears, the uncertainties. People this year are fearing very much, for the future, aren't they? For their jobs. Will it be there, in 2011?

For their homes, for their families. For their health. For the economy. Terrorism. All kinds of things, cry at our hearts and minds, because, well, that's just natural, isn't it?

But the birth of Jesus Christ, is so special, because it brings us, a wonderful, wonderful reassurance, from God, that God is, God is, in control of this world.

He has a plan, and he's going to bring, everything to its ultimate purpose, through Jesus Christ, his son. So, I want to briefly think, just about three things, very quickly this morning, that this birth of Jesus, brings us great reassurance about.

First of all, Jesus' birth reassures us, that God's promises, in scripture, have not failed. Verse 23, quotes from the very famous prophecy, of Isaiah, behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and they shall call his name, Emmanuel, God with us.

[5 : 13] Now, those words were written, some 700 years, before Jesus was born. It's quite staggering, when you think about it. And the context, then, was that, the land of Judah, was under siege, under threat of invasion.

The king, at that time, was Ahaz, and he faced, the joint forces, of the northern kingdoms, of Syria, and Ephraim, they were the superpowers, of the day. And their express purpose, was to come, and to remove, the king, from Judah, and to indeed, destroy, his whole dynasty, and put another king, of their own choosing, in his place.

In other words, their aim was to destroy, the promised line, of the sons of David, that God had said, would rule, on that throne, forever and ever. So, Isaiah chapter 7, tells us what they said.

Let's go, they said, and terrify Judah, and conquer it, and set up, one of our own kings, in place of their king. But God said, that will never happen.

And he said, to Ahaz, and to the people, trust me, trust my promises, because they can never fail. Ask me for a sign, said God to Ahaz. Ask me for a mighty miracle, anything in heaven and earth, and I'll give it to you, just to show you, that you can trust me.

[6 : 33] But, King Ahaz, had, one of those strange fits, of false piety. He said, oh no, I'm not going to ask God, for a sign, I'm not going to put God, to the test. It's funny, isn't it, sometimes how even believers, can be holier, than God is sometimes.

pious ideas, instead of, what God actually says himself. Well God said, no Ahaz, I'm going to jolly, well give you a sign anyway, if you want to ask for one.

Here's one, here's a sign I'll give you. A virgin, will conceive, and bear a son. Have you ever heard, of a sign like that? And what's more, this son that's going to be born, will be called Emmanuel.

He himself, will be God, with us, on this very earth. And you see, what God is saying, he is saying, to his people, I will never, let my promise, of salvation fall.

No enemy, of my purpose, will ever, possibly, be able to thwart that. Even if every king, is dethroned. Even if it's necessary, for me to raise up, offspring from a virgin.

[7 : 39] That I will do, so that my promise, will prevail. And Isaiah goes on, in chapter 9, you can read it later on, these wonderful verses, to speak more about this child, who will be a wonderful counselor, he says, mighty God.

He will be, the everlasting father. He will be, the prince of peace. He will sit on David's throne, and he will establish it, forever and ever. Don't be any doubt, says God.

When I make promises, I keep them. And when Matthew begins his gospel, at the start of the New Testament, what he's saying to us, is that this has been fulfilled, in this birth, of a virgin, a king in David's line, who is the mighty God.

He is God with us. God's promises in scripture, have not failed. Every last detail, of what he said would happen, has happened.

What a wonderful, wonderful reassurance, about God's ongoing purposes, in this world. Let's just look at the Bibles again. It's not just, the prophecies of scripture, that haven't failed.

[8 : 59] The birth of Jesus, is also a great reassurance, that God's whole plan of salvation, has not failed. You see, the Bible isn't, with its prophecies, it's not like, Nostradamus, or something like that, just a whole lot of, of random, disconnected things, looking for some sort of fulfillment.

It's not that at all. The Bible is one great story. It has a beginning, and it has an end. And it's one great movement, of fulfillment.

That's what the risen Lord Jesus himself, said to the disciples, on the Emmaus road, after his resurrection. These words are from Luke chapter 24. Everything written about me, said Jesus, in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, must be fulfilled.

And then he, he opened their minds, so that they could understand, the scriptures, that is the whole story of scripture, from beginning to end.

And you see that in verse 23's explanation, of the name Emmanuel. It means, God with us. And God with us, is actually the subject, of the whole story of the Bible.

[10:13] It sums up, if you like, the whole plot line, of the Bible story. Let me tell you why, in just a whistle-stop tour, for this Christmas morning, of the Bible story.

The Bible story begins, of course, as you know, in creation. And God creates, everything for a purpose. And that purpose, is that he can dwell, with humankind, in a wonderful world, a perfect world.

And that's the picture, that you have, in the first two chapters, of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, if you ever read them. God and man, in perfect harmony. And in a perfect universe, of complete harmony. But it doesn't go on for long, does it? Because of course, by Genesis chapter 3, we have the rebellion, of human beings. Man is determined, to reject, the rule of God. And to have his own rule, autonomous rule.

And the story goes on, with the result of that, which is simply, one of tragedy. It's not freedom, as we all want, when we turn our back on God. It's disaster. And Genesis puts it this way, man is cast out, of God's presence.

[11:23] There's a great divorce, of terrible pain, and there is no way back, none, for rebellious human beings. But God hates, that, that kind of divorce, that kind of, rift.

And so even though, he is the wronged part, even though he's the abused one, he says, he will not let things, remain that way. And the rest of the Bible's story, is, a story of redemption, of recreation, of restoration, of that wonderful, relationship, that we were all created for, between God, and man. And God says, he will bring things, back together, to make them right, once again. He will restore, all righteousness. And he gives that, wonderful promise, of his redeeming grace, that at last, through his promise, through his great covenant, of redemption, the seed of the woman, at last, will come, and reverse, the tragedy of the fall, destroy, the evil one himself, and burst, the bonds, of sin, and death.

I will be, your God, and you will be, my people. That's the heart, of God's promise, all the way through, the Old Testament. It was a promise, to Abraham, first, and to his offspring.

It was reiterated, in the promise, to Moses, at the time of the Exodus, from Egypt. And God was with them, in the Exodus, wasn't he? In the midst, and all the way through, in the wilderness, in the tabernacle, the tent that was pitched, right in the very middle, of the camp, of God's people.

[13:05] He was with them. And yet, there was still a barrier, wasn't there? Nobody could actually go in, to the heart, of that tent, where God dwelled, except the high priest, once a year, only with, blood, of sacrifices, to cover, the people's sin.

There had to be, constant sacrifices, all the time, so that the people, could remain alive, even outside the tent, even anywhere near, the presence of God. Because sin, sin, sin was still, the great problem.

And so, as you read through, the Old Testament, all the prophets, are constantly, calling the people of God, away from their sin, to repent, to obey God, to be pure in heart. To reject their sin.

But of course, they knew fine well, the prophets, as did the people. But by themselves, they couldn't possibly, overcome their sin. And the prophets, kept pointing them forward, with reiterations, of that great promise, from the beginning.

Calling them to trust, in that promise. That God would, at last, come and do something, ultimate, to reverse, the tragedy of sin.

[14:25] To deal with their sin forever. The prophets began to call it, a new covenant. When they said, God would come, and circumcise, the inside of your hearts, to make it pure.

Cleanse you, of your sin forever. Sprinkle you, with clean, fresh water. Put a new heart, right inside you. Put his own spirit, right within them.

So that at last, it would be fit, for his presence, that he might be with them. And his dwelling place, would be with them forever. The great prophet, Ezekiel, at the end of his prophecy, has a great vision, of a city.

And the name of the city, is called, The Lord is there, with his people, forever. See, that's what the whole Bible, is about.

It's about God, coming back, to be with his people, restoring everything, that was lost, by man's sin, but doing so, forever, and ever, and ever.

[15 : 27] And that's the goal, of God's whole plan, of salvation. But how would that, be fulfilled at last? That was the great question, that rang, all down the centuries, of darkness, of God's people.

They trusted, that God would do it, but the time, and the place, and the person, who would it be, when, and where? And now, says Matthew, the beginning of his gospel, now is the time, now is the place, and this is, the person, revealed at last, in this birth, a birth according to promise, and according to plan.

God's plan, of salvation, has not failed. It must have seemed, for all the ages, to so many, that it had failed, so persistently, all down the years.

But no, you see, in Jesus, in God's last word, his promised seed, has come, to save his people, from their sins. To remove, forever, that barrier, that curtain, that separated them.

The flaming sword, of the fiery seraphim, that kept people, from God. God, now, he is, at last, Emmanuel, properly, and forever.

[16 : 48] God, with us. Not separate, not kept away, but near. A wonderful, wonderful reassurance, in the birth of Jesus.

There is, a way back to God, from the dark paths of sin. There's a way back to God, even for the very darkest, and worst, sinner imaginable.

And there's a way, into that world, that we've only ever dreamed of, in our innermost thoughts. A world without, all the evil, and hatred.

A world without, all the lies, and the greed, the selfishness, the war, the sickness. Even without, death itself. Now, ye hear, of endless bliss, Jesus Christ, was born for this.

He has opened, the heavenly door, and we are blessed, forevermore. Wonderful reassurance, that God's plan, of salvation, hasn't failed.

[17 : 53] One more look, at the Bibles. The birth of Jesus Christ, means, wonderful reassurance, for us all. God's promise, in scripture, has not failed.

God's plan of salvation, has not failed. But more than that, Jesus' birth, gives us a wonderful reassurance, for the future. Because it means, that the pledge, of the Savior, shall not fail, and cannot fail.

Jesus is Emmanuel, he's God with us. But he's not just, God with us, for a time. Not just, for the, the short period, of 30 years or so, of his life, here on earth.

No, Jesus comes, as Emmanuel, to be God, with us, forever. And what, Matthew tells us, right here, at the very beginning, of his gospel, comes to ultimate fulfillment, in the very last verses, of his gospel.

After Jesus' death, and resurrection, when everything, is accomplished, and as he is about, to return, to the Father's sides, on the clouds, he says, behold, I am with you, always, even, to the end, of the age.

[19 : 09] And then, at the end, of the age, when, as he promises, in Matthew chapter 25, he will return, in power, and glory, on the clouds of heaven, to judge the world.

After that, he will remain, with us, forever. Now, we're still waiting, for that great day. Jesus said, that we must. He prepared us, for that day. He said, there's a time coming.

He said to his disciples, when you'll fast, because the bridegroom, will no longer be with you, and you're awaiting, his coming again. He told them parables, so that they wouldn't give up, like the foolish virgins, remember, whose lamps went out, and so they weren't ready.

They gave up, on the bridegroom's coming. No, says Jesus, you'll have to wait, but you won't wait, forever, because he's coming. Be reassured. The pledge of the Saviour, to come again, will never, ever fail.

Just as the promise of Scripture, didn't fail. Just as his plan of salvation, didn't fail, in one iota, as his birth, on Christmas Day, proves to us.

[20 : 15] So, none, of the promises, that Jesus has made, to us, as his people, will ever, ever, ever, fail. Not his promise, to guard, and to keep, to the very end, everyone, who trusts in him.

That's a pledge, that can never fail. Not his promise, to be with you, and to strengthen you, and to help you, through every trial, and temptation, in your life, as you follow him.

That's a pledge, that can never fail. Not his promise, to those, of us, who have lost, loved ones, who love the Lord Jesus, who have fallen asleep, in Christ.

Not his promise, that at the last coming, those dead in Christ, will rise first, and together with them, in a glorious reunion, we will meet them, in the air.

That promise, can never fail. Isn't that a precious promise, at Christmas time, for some of us, when we remember, those who have gone, to be with the Lord, before us?

[21 : 21] That great, great day, of reunion, with them, and with him, is a promise, that can never, fall to the ground. Every pledge, of our wonderful Savior, will be fulfilled.

Listen to these last words, from the last few paragraphs, of the Bible, as John, on his island, in Patmos, sees the great vision, and he hears this voice, Behold, the dwelling place, of God, is with man, and he will dwell, with them, and they will be his people, and God himself, will be with them, as their God.

You see, in this birth, at Christmas, according to scripture, according to plan, all God's story, finds its end. I don't mean its end, in the sense of its termination, but, in the sense of its goal, its fulfillment, its purpose, its destiny.

It all comes to being, in the birth, of the Lord Jesus Christ, where it begins. A week or so ago, we went as a family, to see, the film, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.

If you haven't been to see it yet, I recommend it to you. I've even been there, before Bob File. You been yet, Bob? Not yet. That's amazing, isn't it? I hope the films keep going, until the very last one, The Last Battle, because that book contains, some of the most wonderful lines, of all.

[22 : 53] There's a bit, where Aslan says to Lucy, as she's entering, the new Narnia, he says to her, Lucy, the term is over. The holidays have begun.

The dream has ended. This is the morning. And the whole of the, the whole of the chronicles of Narnia, those seven books, they end with these words, in the very last paragraph, as the children are going further up, and further in, into the new Narnia, which fulfills all their dreams, and wonders. It ends thus. It was only the beginning, of the real story. All their life in this world, and all their adventures in Narnia, had only been the cover, and the title page.

Now at last, they were beginning, chapter one, of the great story, which no one on earth has ever read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter, is better, than the one before.

See friends, this birth, the birth of Jesus Christ, is just the beginning. It's just the beginning, of the real story, a story of joy, and gladness, and fulfillment, and destiny, that will never, ever end.

[24 : 10] And that is the pledge, of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. And we can trust him, to do as he's promised. Because his birth itself, is a pledge, of the faithfulness of God, who is true to his promise, and true to his plan.

He is Emmanuel, God with us now, as Savior, to save us from our sins, and to bring us, to be with him, forever, in a world of glory, and wonder, and never ending discovery, of joy, and of peace, and of love, and of grace.

And that's the wonderful reassurance, about our future, that we celebrate at Christmas, in the birth, of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's ultimate purpose, is that we should be, with him in glory forever.

And we shall be, with absolute certainty, if we trust him, and if we receive, that marvelous revelation, of him, that comes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christmas message, invites us, to join that story, to come in, and to become part, of the greatest story, ever told.

[25 : 34] A story, which will go on, forever and ever. And in which, when we join it, we will discover, that every chapter, is better, and more wonderful, than the one, that has just gone before.

So let me invite you friends, join the joy, this Christmas. Do as Joseph did. Wake up from your sleep, and go and do, as the angel commanded him.

Make the story of Jesus, your life story. And you'll know, the joy of God with you. Not just now, but every day of your life, and forever, and ever, and ever.

Amen. I wish I was perdrated.