

The Promised Son and Saviour

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading, and we're going to read together in Matthew's Gospel. Paul is going to be leading us these next three Sunday mornings, leading up to Christmas, through some of these passages right at the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel that speak to us of how the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ came to be.

And we're going to read this morning from Matthew chapter 1 at verse 18, and the little section down to verse 25. It comes after the genealogy.

You'll see there are three sections that tell us about Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And verse 18.

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.

[1 : 29] 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. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

[2 : 35] Well, good morning. And please do turn back to Matthew chapter one, which we'll be thinking about this morning. So Matthew chapter one from verse 18.

Now, we are very much into the Christmas season, aren't we? We have succumbed in our household. We bought our tree in November, which I think is a first.

And I don't think we're alone in that. I think half our streets had their Christmas trees up last weekend. And I think everyone's getting fully into the swing of things. The kids are certainly embracing all the hype.

And there's still quite a way to go. It's only, was it the 6th of December today? So all the lights, all the excitement. And of course, it's not just the children, is it? That get caught up with all the hype. For many, Christmas is a time of escapism, of pushing reality to the sides.

[3 : 36] And perhaps more so this year than for many years. 2020 has been a year to endure. A year of real hardship.

And for many, loneliness. For loss. And also a year of much fear. But we have the prospect of the easing of restrictions for five days for the simple fact that, well, it's Christmas.

We can pretend away the reality of the last nine months for a few days. We spend more than we ought to. Because, well, it's Christmas.

But January comes. And so do the bills. We spend time with people that we perhaps ought not to spend so much time with in close proximity.

Although the strict bubbling rules this year could come in handy in that regard. Family strains. Difficult friendships. We try, don't we?

[4 : 39] We try to paper over the cracks when it comes to Christmas. But the wrapping paper is barely off the presents. And in the bin. Before old tensions bubble to the surface.

Perhaps it's in the routines. The traditions. The entertainments. That we happily lose ourselves. We look forward, don't we? To our favorite films. And our favorite food.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with these things. In themselves. They're good things to enjoy. But we invest so much hope in them, don't we? We lose ourselves in the revelry.

And wake up in January. And reality meets us. Unmoved. As will, no doubt, some form of lockdown. Christmas has, for many, become a means of escaping reality.

But the true meaning of Christmas, far from being a matter of escapism, is about as real as it gets.

[5 : 46] For many, this year has been a dark year. Physically. Emotionally. Mentally. Financially.

People have lost loved ones. Their jobs. Their security. Their health. And Christmas, rather than being, for those folk, a way of escaping, it may well just be a prison of fear.

Does this mean that Christmas should be cancelled? Well, no. You see, the real Christmas happens in the darkness.

The real Christmas, the Christmas of the Bible, is as real as it gets. There's no escapism here. And rather, what we have is hope springing from fear.

That's what we see in these opening pages of Matthew's Gospel. Reality's faced. Fear's banished.

We see here, in Matthew's account, the real person at the center of Christmas.

[6 : 55] We see the real purpose at the center of Christmas. It's not about escaping reality. It is facing reality head on.

A real person with a real purpose. It's a very carefully put together account. It's a well-ordered account, Matthew's Gospel, about his life.

And it's written by Matthew, the former employee of the Roman Revenue and Customs local tax office. He was a man with the eye for a detail. If you've ever encountered the tax man, you'll know that.

But here's Matthew, a former tax man. And he gives us a very carefully recorded account of the life and work of Jesus.

But not only does he give us account of what happened, not only does he record real events, but he also gives us the explanation of those events.

[7 : 51] He tells us what they mean. And we see these two perspectives very clearly in our passage this morning. Events as they seem from a human point of view, but also the events as they really are from God's point of view.

We have the accounts themselves, but also the meaning. What's really going on? Now, from a human perspective, this is a pretty disastrous beginning.

We all know, whether we like it or not, that Jesus Christ is the most influential figure in all of human history. And he continues to be so.

Christianity remains the largest religion on the planet. And it continues to grow. That may surprise us as Western secular folk living where we do.

But the thing is, Western secular people are in an ever-shrinking minority globally. They're becoming fewer in the grand scheme of things. Over 70% of Christians live outside of the West.

[9 : 02] Christianity is the dominant worldview today, but things got off to a pretty unpromising start here. You wouldn't think, reading these words at the start of Matthew's Gospel, that what we had here was the beginnings of what would prove to be the biggest, fastest-growing religion in the world today.

Look at how Matthew begins his account there in verse 18. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

It's a matter-of-fact statement. This is how things happened. And it gives us great certainty about what we're about to read. This is really what happened. And what we read at first is a little unsettling.

What we're about to read is very much the stuff of Jerry Springer or Jeremy Kyle. If you ever managed to have a sick day at home and watch daytime TV, you will have bumped into these programs.

I'm not asking you to own up to watching them, but perhaps you know what I'm talking about. And what we read about here would not be out of place on Jerry Springer. What we read about is a scandalous pregnancy.

[10 : 18] Matthew makes it abundantly clear that Mary, this young woman, she became pregnant out of wedlock.

Okay, she was betrothed to Joseph. They were engaged to be married. But even he wasn't the father. Look at the second half of verse 18. It says there that before they came together, she was found to be with child.

Now imagine how Joseph would have felt in light of that revelation. You can imagine young Mary pulling him aside, trembling with fear, telling him that she's pregnant.

Joseph's draw, no doubt, would have dropped. This was utterly scandalous. In verse 19 there, we read that he would have been absolutely within his rights to publicly shame her, divorce her.

But he doesn't do that, does he? He's a just man, and he resolved to deal with it quietly. Quite a thing for him, don't you think? For Joseph, put in this position in those days.

[11 : 41] He wasn't yet in possession of all the facts. He wasn't in possession of that astonishing reality, which we can read about there at the end of verse 18, that Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit.

But, Joseph's in a tricky spot, isn't he? He considers this mess, verse 20. As he considered these things, he had a lot to think about.

What do I do? Just think of him for a moment there. The thoughts running through his head.

Seemingly betrayed.

Hurt. The shame and the loss. The fear. What would people think? But as he's thinking about these things, the reality of all that is happening suddenly comes to light.

Fear is banished. From an earthly point of view, these things are a complete mess. A scandalous mess. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and reveals what was really going on from God's point of view.

[12 : 49] And as the Lord reveals the reality of the situation, he reveals the reality to us as we read. Here's the true meaning of Christmas. Here is the reality of this baby to be born to Mary, Jesus.

Here is why this first Christmas is history changing. Here is why the first Christmas is seismic in its implications. Here is why hope banishes fear.

Here is why the light pierces the darkness. So two key things to see this morning. Two key realities about this apparent scandalous pregnancy.

There's much more going on here than appears to the human eye. So the first thing we see is that this baby, this scandalous pregnancy, this is Jesus, God's son, come to dwell with us.

This is the real person at the center of Christmas. Jesus, God's son, come to dwell with us. Look there at verses 22 and 23.

[14 : 03] This is the angel speaking to Joseph, telling him what's really going on. Here's the real meaning. Verse 22. Jesus, the son to be born to Mary is to be called Emmanuel.

God with us. This reality explodes the perception on the ground that this was a small scale scandal. If you were there at the time, you might read about this out of wedlock pregnancy in the Nazareth Daily Express.

But today's scandal becomes tomorrow's fish and chips graphics, doesn't it? Fuel for the fire. It would have been quickly forgotten. But this was no local scandal in a place nobody had heard of. No, this was the central event in all of human history. Because this was no ordinary baby, was it? Twice we're told that Mary was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit.

Not only was Joseph not the father, but no other man was a father either. Mary was a virgin.

[15 : 37] And this was a miraculous conception. This truly was God come to dwell with man. That God himself comes to dwell with his people.

That really is the central subject of the whole Bible. What we have here is the central event in God's revelation to mankind. You see, God created the universe, the world, so that he could dwell with his people.

That's how the Bible begins. With God's people in his place, the Garden of Eden. And there they dwell with one another. God with his people.

But as the story unfolds, we see that wonderful dwelling together is utterly ruined. It's made impossible, isn't it? God is no longer able to dwell with his people because his people rebelled.

The great and insurmountable problem of sin entered the world, entered the human story. And his people were banished from his presence.

[16 : 48] But since then, since the beginning, God has been at work to bring about a great restoration. The great recovery of all that was lost in Eden.

So how does God invite us back into relationships so that he can dwell with us and we can dwell with him? How is that possible?

All that was there at the beginning lost, how is it found? Well, we see here in Matthew. He delivers that invitation in the only way that we can fully comprehend it.

He brings it literally in a person. That is how he brings that invitation for us to come back to him, to dwell with him again. God, through all of history, has been calling his people to himself to return to him.

But he does so fully, finally, in the person of his own son. God the Son, Jesus Christ, comes to earth.

[17 : 57] That's what we're seeing here. He's born to Mary. God the Son, Jesus Christ, comes to earth. He's born to us. He's born to us. The big story of the Bible is of a God who urges us, who appeals to us to come back to him, who steps into the story in Jesus Christ.

He is God with us. And yes, the relational chasm between us and God is vast.

Yes, the pain for him is unspeakable. But God himself bears the cost of that huge chasm so that we can, once again, truly be in relationship with him.

Truly in relationship with one another. That's what you and I were created for, to know him and to truly know each other. And only when that relationship is restored can the deepest longings of our hearts be fulfilled.

And so as God steps into the human story in this child, he's calling out to us to return, to come back to him. And that is the true hope held out to all humanity at Christmastime.

[19 : 21] As we remember Jesus stepping into our worlds. And that is the true and only hope for you in the midst of a confusing and perplexing and very disappointing world.

In Jesus Christ, God is again with his people. And he came to overcome the great obstacle of sin. There is a way back. Because Jesus Christ is God's son. Come to dwell with us. But not only that. Not only does God's son come to dwell with us. But the great promise of Christ's birth is that through the spirit, our hearts become the dwelling place of God's son.

God dwells in us by his spirit. That is the extraordinary meaning and reality of Christmas. That is the true significance of this seemingly scandalous pregnancy.

[20 : 29] This is God come to dwell with man. A great promise fulfilled at last. Stepping into our story so that we can truly know him.

That is who Jesus is. God's son come to dwell with us. That is who he is. That's the person at the very center of it all.

But we also see in these verses what he uniquely has come to do. That's our second point this morning. We've seen the person at the very center of it.

But we also see his purpose. What he's come to do. So our second point this morning. Jesus is God's savior. Come to rescue us.

The real purpose. At the center of Christmas. So not only does this angel tell Joseph who Jesus is in this dream.

[21 : 29] But he also tells him what he's come to do. He tells him right there at the very beginning of Matthew's gospel. The whole purpose of his coming. Look again at verse 21 there.

The angel appears to Joseph. End of verse 20. 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.

You see that is Jesus' key task. He was a savior. That is what the name Jesus means.

It derives from Joshua. A name which means the Lord saves. See Jesus was the one who was from the very beginning promised.

[22 : 33] The great serpent crusher who would rescue his people from their sins. And that great rescue is the great rescue that was needed then.

And is still needed now. The greatest problem. The greatest need for all people. In all places. All times.

Is the forgiveness of sin. Every human being that's ever walked this planet. Is by nature. A sinner. And we desperately need.

Salvation from our bondage to sin. And salvation from the consequences of it. Sin enslaves us. So much so that we don't even realize it.

Only when God works in us. Are our eyes opened. To the reality of our slavery to sin. Sin enslaves us. And Jesus came. And Jesus came.

[23 : 31] To rescue his people from the bondage. And he also came to rescue his people from the consequences. Of sin. The wages.

Of sinners death. Says the apostle Paul. In Romans. We deserve to be found guilty for our sin. To face the consequences of it.

But there is nothing that we on our own can do to fix it. Nothing at all. We desperately need a savior. And with the birth of Jesus.

That savior. That promised savior. Has now arrived. What we are seeing here is extraordinary. New life. Life. Restoration.

Peace. Joy. All now possible. Because Jesus comes to deal with sin. You see this child we read about here.

[24 : 31] At the start of Matthew's gospel. This baby. He would. Three decades later. Die on a Roman cross. A man who never sinned.

Died a death. That we deserve to die. Paying the price. For our sin. Paying our debts. Taking our judgment. And three days later.

He would rise again. To new life. Jesus. This child we read about here. Defeated death. He rose again.

Then. But this wasn't a one-off. Freak event. His resurrection. Where Jesus has gone.

All who belong to him by faith. Will follow. He's like a needle. That pierces through the dark shroud of death. He emerges on the other side.

[25 : 30] Pulling. All who are his with him. To new life. Eternal life. We receive that gift of eternal life. As we trust in him.

Hope beyond death. Life. Forever. And this is the real hope. That all of us need.

Isn't it? A hope. That we've been driven to find perhaps. This year. Given all the events. Of these past nine months.

Realities. That we've been forced. To reckon with. Because. Our mortality. Has felt just a little closer. Our fears. Have risen to the surface.

We do need. Answers. To life's most fundamental questions. And in Jesus. We find those answers. Because he deals.

[26 : 32] With our biggest problem. He deals with our sin. He deals with death. And he provides eternal life. That is what is held out. Here. In these opening verses.

Of Matthew's gospel. You'll call his name Jesus. For he will save his people. From their sins. That is our greatest need. That is what we need.

More than anything else. God. That is our greatest need. That is our greatest need. That is our greatest need. And grasping the fact. That Jesus' key purpose. Is to save people from sin. Is incredibly important.

If you do not grasp with that. This Christmas. Then we fail to miss the very heart. Of what's happening here. Understanding his purpose. Drives the very core mission of the church.

That we are by nature sinners. Is humanity's greatest. Most pressing problem. And it is the solution to that problem. That the church.

[27 : 32] Is here to proclaim. That is our task. That is what we are here to do. To proclaim. Christ. The one who would save his people from their sins.

That is our job. At this Christmas time. Is to proclaim that news. See the church. Has good news. That far exceeds. The news. About a COVID vaccine. You see the church. Holds out good news. For all eternity. There is nothing more important.

Than that is there. But not only. Is understanding Jesus purpose. Key. To the church's message. And purpose. It's also incredibly personal.

You see Jesus came to save his people. From their sins. And so that means for you. For each person listening. Here this morning. Or online. Jesus came to save you.

[28 : 34] From your sin. And as you respond. In obedient faith. You can know. The salvation he offers. That is what is being held out to you.

Here this morning. You can know. Freedom. From the bondage of sin. You can know. With certainty. That you have been rescued.

From the consequences of your sin. You can know hope. In the face of fear. You see Jesus Christ.

This baby. Born in the midst. Of scandal. He is the great. Promised one. The one that all. The Old Testament.

Was looking forward to. And waiting for. The great hope. The great savior. He comes. He is the great fulfillment. Of all that God promised. Jesus.

[29 : 32] Is. God. With us. He stepped down. Into our story. So that we can know. With certainty. The salvation.

That he brings. Jesus is God's savior. And so. This Christmas season. Which we're just entering. Far from being.

An opportunity. An excuse. To plow head first. Into escapism. And unreality. It's the opportunity. It's the opportunity. To face reality. To face our plight.

To look. For the solution. In the one place. That we're guaranteed. To find it. Only in Jesus. Only in this baby. The one who would save his people.

From their sins. Do we find the answers. To all our greatest problems. Our greatest hopes. Our greatest questions. Only in Jesus. Only in him. Do we find answers. To the fear.

[30 : 31] That has gripped our nation. This last year. The answer is not. In a vaccine. The answer is not. In the lifting of lockdown. It's in Jesus Christ alone.

Only he. Gives us hope. Through death. Which is coming to us all. Only he. Can release us. From our sin. Only in him.

That is why this story. This reality. Is so important. This Christmas time.

Because we see here. The real person. At the center of it all. We see here. Why he's come. The son of God. Come to dwell with man.

And he's come. To save his people. From his sins. This is the very heart. Of the Christmas message. Don't miss it.

[31 : 29] This Christmas time. In God. Come to earth. The savior. Jesus Christ. In Christ alone.

Our hope is found. In the face of fear. This Christmas. Well let me pray. And then we'll sing our final hymn together. Let's pray.

Father God. We. Thank you for. Great clarity. And certainty. In the face of so much confusion.

This Christmas time. So much noise. So much to take our attention away. So much to fill us with fear. But Lord we thank you for the great clarity.

Of your word. And the great person. At the center of all of history. The Lord Jesus Christ. Born in scandal. But come to bring us real.

[32 : 29] Hope. And eternal life. So Lord help us. Each one of us. To face reality this Christmas. And would you help us.

To respond in. In trust and faith. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And so no real hope. That fear be banished.

And that we rejoice. Rejoice. Because. We know. The person. The center of Christmas. The Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope.

Our light. Our strength. And our song. Amen. So grant each of us. Faith. In the Lord Jesus. This Christmas time.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 34] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.