

What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?

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[0 : 0 0] The other week I sat down to watch TV and while flicking through the channels, I came across one of the best films ever made, It's a Wonderful Life. Now, I'm sure most of you will have seen the film It's a Wonderful Life, but the basic storyline, not to give any spoilers, the basic storyline is that of a man whose business goes belly up, and he is absolutely desperate and on the point of killing himself until he's shown what would have happened if he had never been born. The town he lived in would have become a seedy place. The children he had would never have been born. The woman he loved and married would have been an old maid. The man soon realizes that his life really is worth living. And it made me think of a question.

What if Jesus had never been born? What if Jesus had never been born? What if we did not have a Christmas? What if there was no child born in Bethlehem, lived in Galilee, died on a cross, and rose from the grave? What difference would it make if Jesus had never been born?

Well, in Matthew 1 here, Mary's fiancé Joseph discovers that she's pregnant, but because he's a righteous man not wishing to expose her to public disgrace, he decides to quietly sever the engagement.

But an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him that Mary hadn't sinned, but that the baby conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. The angel goes on to describe to her who this child would be and what he would achieve. But what if this baby had never been born?

As we look through these verses together, we learn that if Jesus had never been born, three things would not have happened. First, the Bible would not be true. Second, we would not know who God is. And third, we would not be saved. We would not be saved. I hope that by the end of this short study today, we may all be able to say not, it's a wonderful life, but rather Jesus is a wonderful Savior. So, if Jesus had never been born, first of all, the Bible would not be true. The Bible would not be true. In Matthew 1, 22, we learn that all that happened in Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through his prophet, saying, behold, the virgin shall be with child, and she will bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel. The prophet to whom Matthew was referring here was Isaiah. In Isaiah 7, 14, the birth of a child called Emmanuel was prophesied. Now, these words in Isaiah were written nearly 700 years before Jesus was born, and yet see how perfectly they are fulfilled in the events in Bethlehem.

[3 : 30] God spoke through his prophet Isaiah all those hundreds of years before, and true to his word in the fullness of time, God brought forth Jesus of the Virgin Mary. True to his word, a child was born, and he was called Emmanuel, God with us. If Jesus had never been born, if there was no Matthew 1 and no New Testament, the whole Bible would not be true. Everything that makes this book reliable, authoritative, and living would be destroyed. The God of the Bible would be a God who makes promises but does not keep them a false, untrustworthy God whose word cannot be relied upon or trusted. You would not be able to trust God's word to tell you the truth about yourself or the desperate position you find yourselves in because of our sin. We would not be able to trust God's word to tell us the truth about the world in which we live and how to relate to other people. We would not be able to trust God's word to tell us the truth about who God is, how we can be saved, and how we can know Him. If Jesus had never been born, the Bible would not be true. Now, of course, many people today insist that the Bible is not true. But how can they explain events like this one, where 700 years before something happens, someone predicts it perfectly? The fact that

Jesus was born in the way He was proves that the Bible is true. It is true when it says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is true when it says, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is true when it says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Because Jesus was born, we can trust the Bible when it speaks of Him rising again from the dead and of His heavenly exaltation and glory. We can trust the Bible when it says that a day is coming in the future, no man knows the date, when Jesus will return from heaven in judgment to condemn those who have not trusted in Him and to vindicate those who have. Because Jesus was born in this way, we can trust the Bible when it speaks of our relationship to God and Christ as being like that of children to a father. So, the events of Bethlehem, the story we remember at Christmas, is proof that the Bible is true, reliable, and authoritative. Do we want to know what to believe concerning God? Do we want to know what duty God requires of us? Then read, study, and understand the Bible.

For this is God's true, faithful, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, living Word. The Bible would not be true if Jesus had never been born. Second, if Jesus had never been born, we would not know who God is. We would not know who God is. You'll notice that this child to be born, the baby of Bethlehem, is given two names. The name Jesus, which means the Lord saves, which we'll look at in a moment, and the name Emmanuel, which means God with us. In ancient days, the names people were given had specific meanings and were more than just what that person was known by. The name also described the personality of that person and what they would do in life. So, to call this child Emmanuel wasn't just to give him an unusual name, which would linger in the memory, but to describe his personality and his life mission. The child born in Bethlehem isn't just called God with us, but his character is God with us, and his mission is God with us. The baby's got a name that's going to take a lot of living up to, and yet this child throughout his life will grow up to be a man who shows us what God really is like.

By his thoughts, his words, his deeds, both by the things he does and the things he doesn't do, Emmanuel publicly declares the character of God. He truly is God with us, experiencing everything we experience, but with the purity and love and holiness of God. As we read through the four gospels, which are the accounts of his life, we hear him speaking to social outcasts and cultural misfits. Here he's speaking compassionately to a Syrophenician woman. There he's speaking wisely to a woman caught in adultery who everyone else wants to stone. Here he's speaking to an outcast leper whom no one will go anywhere near, and there he's lovingly talking to a tax collector everyone else hates. Again, in the gospels, we hear his electrifying sermons and parables. Here he's speaking about a sower going out to sow some seed and the power of the Word of God. There he's speaking of lost sheep and the love of the farmer and leaving the ninety-nine behind and going looking for the one. Here he's preaching about the foolishness of the man building his house upon a foundation of sand. And there he's preaching about loving your enemies. We hear him speaking, and we know that these are the words of God, God with us. We hear

God speaking to people just like us. Again, in the gospels, we see him living in purity and love. Here he is treating a sick child with compassion and love. And there he's resisting the temptations of the devil. Here he's spending time alone with his heavenly Father in prayer. And there he's showing extreme generosity to the poor. Again, in the gospels, we see him performing mighty miracles of power.

[10 : 34] Here he's calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. There he's feeding five thousand with just two fish and five loaves. Here he's raising a widow's son from the dead. There he's casting forth a demon from a demented man. Most poignantly, we see him on the eve of his crucifixion. He's taking off his outer garments, and he's wrapping a towel around his waist, and he's filling a basin with water, and he's washing his disciples' feet. We see him living in purity and love. We see him performing mighty miracles, and we know that these are the works of God, God with us, and we see him working with people just like us.

Jesus himself said, he who has seen me has seen the Father. You want to know what God is like? Then look at Jesus and hear Jesus. No one who has access to the Bible can ever say that they don't know who God is or what God is like, for God has been with us. Emmanuel born in Bethlehem, and he spoke to us the words of God and did among us the works of God. If Jesus had never been born, we would not know who God is. We wouldn't have access into the loving heart of God in the way Jesus reveals Him through word and work. We wouldn't be able to identify with God in the same way because He has experienced what we experience. For many people, Christmas is the loneliest and most painful time of year. For one family in our congregation, it's a time of great grief. For husband and father died on Christmas Day 2010. For them, the festival of Christmas is filled with painful memories, not just joyful happiness. But God knows all about grief, for He has been with us, and He has wept the tears of loss. He knows about loneliness, hunger, thirst, temptation, rejection.

If Jesus had not been born, we would never have known who God is or what God is like. We would not have had the comfort of knowing that He understands and sympathizes with us. But now we have Jesus.

We have knowledge, comfort, meaning, hope, and joy. If Jesus had never been born, the Bible would not be true, and we would not know who God is. But then thirdly, if Jesus had never been born, we would not be saved. We would not be saved. Ultimately, we know that this baby born in Bethlehem, of whom the angel speaks and of whom the Bible prophesies, we know Him by the name Jesus. Jesus is a modern version of the Old Testament Hebrew name Joshua.

And both names mean the same thing, literally, the Lord saves. Now, the most famous Joshua of the Old Testament was the man who was Moses' successor and brought the Israelites from their 40-year wandering in the desert after their deliverance from Egypt into the promised land of Canaan. But now a New Testament Joshua is born. Jesus, whom the angel explains, will save His people from their sins.

[14 : 27] The mission of Jesus will be that of saving His people from their sins. The Lord saves, and He'll do it through Jesus. Along with terrorism and cancer, sin is one of the most feared and hated words in the English language. People don't want to hear about sin because it convicts them on the inside of all the wrong things they do and the wrong ways they think. Of all times of the year, they say Christmas isn't time to be talking about sin. It's a time to be talking about how men and women are essentially good. But in the last analysis, the consumerism, the selfishness, the worldliness of this time of year give a lie to the truth that we are all essentially good. Let's face it, we're all out for ourselves. It may be very simplistic to say, but sin is the I in the middle of the word sin. Sin is when we put ourselves before others and before God. It's when we live our lives as though nothing else mattered except ourselves. Everyone else is a planet revolving around our sun. We're the center of our own universes, the kings upon the throne of our own hearts. But at the end of the day, sin is rebellion against the love, the faithfulness, and the rule of God. It is our stubborn defiance of Him and our saying to Him, I can get along fine in life without You, God. I don't want You, and I don't need You, so leave me alone. The problem is that we can't get along without God. Left to our own devices, our world would descend into hell. We would rip each other apart in thought, word, and deed.

Unless God and His grace and mercy restrained us, our world would be the worst of all places. Each one of us, in the headlong pursuit of personal fulfillment and pleasure, would end up mindlessly despairing of meaning in life. Worse still, God's judgment would rest upon us. His righteous justice would demand our punishment. The main problem with sin isn't its impact upon us in terms of our misery, but its impact upon God in terms of His righteousness, holiness, and justice. Left to ourselves, there can be no salvation. There can be no avoidance of God's righteous condemnation, and His verdict will always be death.

The wages of sin is death. How we need a Savior from our sins and from ourselves. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. God gave us a Savior, and His name is the Lord saves.

In love, God sent us a Savior to take away our sins. Jesus grew up in perfect purity, always doing the right, never doing the wrong, always putting God first and others before Himself. He was perfect in every way, a lamb without spot or blemish. At the end of His life, He was falsely accused, He was betrayed, He was betrayed, and He was crucified. But as we know, in His death we have life, for He took our sins and transgressions upon Himself. He paid the penalty before God for all the wrong things we do. He brought our selfishness in His own perfect body and soul to the cross, and He took the condemnation that was right for the hours. We deserve death. He died.

We deserved condemnation, and He was condemned. We deserved punishment, and He was punished in our place. Jesus, our Savior, paid the price of our sin, and now because He has done that, we are free from God's wrath and God's judgment. We have been forgiven. Jesus is our Savior. The Lord saves.

[18 : 54] Most of us put up a Christmas tree at Christmas, but let's remember that our Savior Jesus died on a tree to take away our sins and to save us. He didn't have to do it. He did it because God loves us with an intense, infinite, and wonderful love. You see, if Jesus had never been born, we would still be in our sin facing the righteous condemnation of a holy God. It would be a terrifying prospect if Jesus had never been born. Most of us here have seen the film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, where a man messes up his life and gets shown what would happen if he had never been born. But today, we've seen that Jesus is a wonderful Savior because He was born to deal with the mess that we have made of our lives, and ultimately, that is the greatest Christmas story of all, not how good we are and the goodness of the brotherhood of man, what good gifts that we can give to each other, but how good God has been to us in giving us His own Son, Jesus Christ, as our sacrifice for sin. And in conclusion, this gift becomes yours today, not according to how good a person you are or how much you can do for God, but according to faith. Do you believe that what Jesus did on that cross He did for you? Do you trust your life and forgiveness to Him and to Him alone? The greatest joy on earth and in heaven is when one sinner comes to place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ because He alone is the most wonderful Savior.

Let us pray.