

The True Message of Christmas

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[0:00] I would like you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Matthew chapter 1 and pick up with me! as we begin reading there in verse 18. Matthew chapter 1 beginning with 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 away 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.

Let's pray.

Our precious God and Father, this morning as we take this passage of Scripture in hand, we recognize that it represents your revelation to us.

[1:37] It is the truth. It is of eternal worth. It's the words of life.

And as we hold it, as we read it, we recognize that we are dependent this morning upon your spirit to work in us as your children to allow the word to have free course and make a difference in our thinking and our affections.

We recognize that as we come together this morning, there are many things that would distract us from the significance of our time in your word.

And so we ask, as Paul prayed, that we would cast down every imagination and every vain thing that exalts itself against our Savior, and that this morning, by your enabling, we would appreciate your word, that we would find it to be a thrill to our souls, an encouragement to us in our anticipation of seeing you face to face, that it would be part of your process in shaping us as your children to be more like Christ, and stirring our hearts that we would be faithful in our high and holy calling of being your representatives in this world in the time that you give us.

And so we are going to say thank you in advance for what we ask you to do in us for the glory of our Savior.

[3:18] We pray this in his name. Amen. Well, as you look at this passage here in Matthew, I want to stop just for a moment and have you think with me about what the Christmas season represents to all of us.

And as I think about Christmas, I recognize that we are here together in many, many different mindsets. There are some of us here, actually, when we think about Christmas, as we come towards the last week, our life becomes a little more anxious.

How many of you find that to be true? Because you're thinking about the list you have and the things you haven't done yet that should be done by the 25th, right? Yesterday, I was out on an errand and I happened to stop in a store and it was just packed.

And I have to confess that I thought to myself, self, aren't you glad you shop on Amazon? If I can't hit Amazon and get what I need, the idea of going out and braving the traffic is just beyond my imagination.

Others of you are thinking with anticipation. You've given your little list to your parents and you're hoping that at least some of the things that you asked for, you get.

[4:38] I mean, you didn't put socks or underwear and you know those are coming, but there are a couple things that you said, right? You're thinking, well, Christmas morning and that's going to be a wonderful thing and I'm looking forward to it.

Let me ask you this. How many of you that are older kind of find your approach to Christmas to be a little less enthusiastic than when you were like five? How many of you here used to wake up and had your parents put that wet blanket across your enthusiasm of saying, don't be making noise until I get up?

How many of you are in that space? Yes. You know, it's like, and so you were trying to think of ways that you could kind of waken your parents within a reasonable frame.

You know, before it was like 11, 30 or 12 and the presents had all kind of dissolved under the tree. But you spent your time doing what? Shaking the boxes?

Double checking to see whether or not it sounded and weighed about what you thought you were going to get? We all had a certain amount of enthusiasm for Christmas earlier on. And this morning, as we think about the subject of Christmas, here is the thing that I appeal to you in advance.

[5:58] I want you to consciously and deliberately ask the Spirit of God to give you, through His enabling, just a wonderful sense of appreciation for what the Christmas story really is.

Because I know that every one of us here have heard it many, many times. And sometimes the things that we've heard many, many times, because they're not novel and they're not new, can kind of fade away to become things that are just kind of routine and redundant.

And that is not the purpose of opening the Word of God. His mercies are new every morning, and the sweetness of His Word is new every morning. In particular, when we ask the Spirit of God to do something in our hearts.

So as we take this passage and think about it carefully, I want you to say at the outset, I need God's help to think carefully and with sweetness about the truth that God's Word has here for us.

Now we look at the passage, and it reminds us here, in verse 20, I do want you to know that this evening, when we come together again to study the Word of God, the focus on this evening's message is going to be particularly on the matter of the incarnation.

[7:24] Jesus Christ, all man, and all God. A mystery that we accept by faith, and yet there is benefit in thinking about it very carefully.

We'll do that tonight. What we want to do this morning is look more particularly at the statement that is made there in verse 21. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will bear His, He will save His people from their sins.

Now here's what I want you to think about as we start into this passage. Here is the Holy Spirit saying to Joseph, here's what you're going to do. You are going to, you're going, and not the Holy Spirit, but an angel, okay.

It says, here's what you're going to do. You're going to call your child by a particular name. So I want you to think with me just for a moment about the purpose that names had in the ancient world. In most cases, when people in the modern age decide that they're going to name their children, they really don't go about it the same way the ancient world did.

[8:31] I remember when Judith and I, and we were in the pre-internet phase of life when we named our children, and I remember when we started thinking about naming children.

How many of you have been through that process? You're deciding on what you're going to name your child. In our case, our first one, I was fully convinced, I was fully convinced that it was going to be a boy.

Hi, Heather. In fact, I was so fully convinced, I was rather full of myself back then, struggled with it still, but I remember thinking, I wouldn't even let my wife talk about girls' names.

It wasn't going to happen. It wasn't on the agenda. It was all planned out, boys' names, and we worked through them. You know, never choose a girl's name until the last day we're in labor and delivery, and Judith says, well, just as a matter of chance, why don't we think about a girl's name? I said, really? Okay, Heather. It wasn't that simple.

[9:35] We had a friend who had a daughter that was named Heather. In those days, when you decided you were going to name a child, what you did was you went and bought a little book, you know, in the grocery store, you could, Mary Ellen, you remember that.

You're my age, kind of. You go through the grocery store, and there was a little book there, 100 top boys' names, 100 top girls' names. Now what do you do? I knew it.

I knew it. I did actually do that earlier this last week. I just said, okay, let me check what is out there on Google, and I figured out here are the top 100 boys' names in America. By the way, did you know that they're the 100 top Jewish names and the 100 top Muslim names and the 100 top Hindu names, and if you want to break it down to the state of Ohio, they'll tell you what the best names are in Ohio.

It's very neat, and people choose names largely on the basis of popularity and what sounds good at the moment. It really is true, and some of you are teachers.

You walk into a classroom, and you have six of them that have the same name. Are there any Jaden's in here? Raise your hand if you're a Jaden. Okay, you walk in, and there are six Jaden's.

[10:43] What you know is that about five or six years ago, Jaden was a top-end name, and everybody picked it. Why? Because it was on Google. And so, in the contemporary world, we go about picking names for a completely different reason than they did in the ancient world.

The ancient world tended to choose names for a completely different idea. Names were chosen to reflect a truth, a particular feature, or a purpose.

When Isaac and Rebecca had their little twins, they used very interesting features of the two little boys to give them names.

How would you like to be called Harry? Harry. That's what Isaac means. I'm not Isaac. I'm sorry. That's what Esau means. And the reason is, when he came out, he was, how many of you look at a baby and say, whoa, there was Esau.

I mean, he was one hairy little dude. And so, pop, there he is. We'll call him Esau. And guess what little Jacob was doing?

[12:00] Jacob had clutched a hold of the heel. And as a result of that, I mean, here is the dad and mom thinking, well, we don't have Google yet and we don't even have books that we can check.

So what are we going to do? We're going to call him Jacob, which means what? Supplanter. Or another thing that it means is one who trips. The idea is, there's that little Jacob still in the womb, grabbing onto the heel of his brother and insisting on having the preference.

And sure enough, according to the choices that these names were given to the boys, they ended up being a lot like what was being said about them. And so, you find this idea that names were used to communicate particular features or particular purposes.

As a result of that, you will find a lot of people that were named with kind of some prefix or suffix according to God's name. That's why you have names like Jehoshaphat or Joshua or Joash.

Do you know where the J comes from in Hebrew? What's the idea behind J? Jehovah. Right? So, you don't want to say, you don't want to call your boy Jehovah.

[13:13] Right? I mean, that's a little over the top. But you just stick a J on the front and it's safe. It's a good idea. It communicates that you've got some kind of Bible interest. How many of you have bumped into people and there you are, you're shopping or whatever else and the lady at the checkouts, you ask her, so what's your name?

She says, Grace. Well, why did you get that name? I don't know. My mom, you know. What does that tell you? It tells you something about the person when you pick up on the name and you find out they don't have any idea what it's about or they communicate, yeah, I understand what my name's all about and here's what it communicates.

In the old days, they used names to tell you truth about the person or something you wanted to emphasize. And so, as a result of this idea of using names to communicate truth, one of the very popular names in the Old Testament was Jesus.

Does anybody know what the alternative name for Jesus was? Joshua. Joshua. And what does the name Joshua or Jesus communicate?

How many of you know up front that the name Joshua or Jesus communicates the idea Jehovah is salvation? Who's the one? And so, when you named your little boy Joshua or Jesus, you were in essence saying God's the one who saves.

[14:42] It was a theological statement. It was a statement about who you believed in and who you were dependent upon. So now here, when we stop and realize that in the ancient world, names meant a lot, you find God saying something about what he wanted Joseph to name his son.

So what was God's purpose in naming his son Jesus? You look there, and in verse 21, we find that the angel says, here's what you are to do. You are to call this little boy Jesus.

And then we find an explanation why. Going back to the verse, it says, you shall call his name Jesus for, for he will save his people from their sins.

So when God chose to name Jesus with the name that he gave him, he was announcing that salvation would be through Jesus from the very beginning.

Little boy comes, born in a manger, born in human form, taking upon himself humanity. And here we have an angel telling Joseph, when you name the son, what we want you to do is we want you to make it clear that this little boy is going to be the savior of the world.

[15:56] And when God sent his son into the world, he did not make it something that was unclear and uncertain as to what his purpose was going to be. He came to be our savior. That's why he came.

And I want you to understand that in his first coming, he did not come to be the judge of the world. He came to be the savior of the world. Turn in your Bible. You're there in Matthew and we'll come back there later.

But I want you to turn over, if you would, to John chapter 3. John chapter 3, verse 16 and 17. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, his only son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Explanation of Christ's purpose and coming. And then look at verse 17. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. And so when you look at this passage, going back there to Matthew, you recognize that at the very beginning, when the announcement of Christ's birth was made and his name was attached to that little baby, what God wanted everyone to know is that from the very beginning, the purpose of Christ's coming was for our salvation.

[17:17] I want to stop just for a moment and have you think, how important is that to you really? How important is the reality of your salvation to you? How important is it?

The importance that you attach to the significance of your salvation when you stop and think about it is reflected in, for one thing, the emotional sensation that comes with that thought.

How many of you understand what I just said? If your salvation does not mean much and you stop and think about your salvation, it's like, yeah, no big deal, right? What does that say about the value you attach to your salvation?

It indicates that there's something missing in your thinking. Not only that, but when we stop and think about our salvation and along with that thought of salvation comes an interest in living appropriate to our salvation, that's an indication also of the value that we place in it.

Why do I behave the way I do? Why do you behave the way you do? It should be because we regard the salvation that we receive and our interest is in reflecting the value that we have in Christ.

[18:32] So let me have you follow along with me here in the passage and you think about this statement. It says, He will bear a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people.

He is coming to be the Savior of the world. God sent His Son, Jesus, first of all, to make the way of salvation through His blood. And even though at this moment in the passage, we do not find reference directly to Christ coming to be our Savior by dying on the cross, what you need to understand is that behind the reality of the incarnation, why did Jesus come in the flesh?

It was for one, to live a sinless life and two, to be a sacrifice in my place and your place and satisfy the debt that our sin had created.

So I want you to stop and realize that as you look at this passage, it says, He is coming, He came to be our Savior, to save us from our sins. So let's think together of what does it mean to be saved from our sins?

Jesus came to save us from our sins. Let me stop just for a moment and ask you this question. How many of you in this last week have found yourself pretty irritated with sin in somebody else's life?

[19:55] How many of you have been irritated with sin in somebody else's life? Happened to you? Illustration. I remember yesterday driving and I happen to have not been as quick in responding to a light as I should have been.

How many of you have been in that moment? Right? And someone about one, two cars back just, I mean, laid on the horn and just let me know that I had been dozing or whatever else thinking about something else.

I was like, and I just thought to myself, bless him, Lord. No, that's not really your thought. How many of you this week got frustrated with sin in your own life?

Got frustrated with other people's sin, but how many got frustrated with sin in your own life? I want you to understand that when we stop and think about why Jesus came, one of the incredible blessings is this, is that he came to free me from my sin.

He came to free you from your sin. And as you look at this passage, one of the things that really stands out is that salvation really is the exclusive work of God in the lives of broken and ruined sinners.

[21:08] Look at the passage. Jesus will save his people from their sins. The fact of the matter is that we cannot save ourselves. How many of you have ever given a shot at trying to do a little bit of self-improvement?

We've all done that, right? Oh, I need to work at this, I need to work at that, and there are some things that we can make reasonable progress in, but at the end of the day, when it really comes down to changing the heart attitudes that we have and really growing to be the person that we need to be, is that something that we can do on our own initiative?

What's the answer? I want you to think with me just for a moment of something that we find over in Jeremiah. I want you to turn to Jeremiah chapter 13. Go back, if you will. Jeremiah chapter 13, verse 23.

Jeremiah chapter 13, verse 23. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

What's that saying? How many of you understand that your genetic code is your genetic code and you may wish that it would be different, but it's not going to change? Furthermore, the reality of the matter is that the sin that is in your life is not something that you can arbitrarily choose to change.

[22:35] You may make some improvements in your behavior, but the attitudes of your heart remain the same apart from the grace of God. And we need to recognize that this business of self-improvement is beyond us, and that is the reason God sent His Son to be our Savior.

If the Ethiopian can't change His skin color and the leopard can't change His spots, nor can I, nor can you, ultimately bring about change in our own behavior and attitudes, that is something that will not take place apart from Christ who came to be our Savior.

And so I want you to look at this and recognize salvation is something God has to do, and that is what we find announced in the text. Yes, salvation is the work of God. Now I want you to think with me a little bit more of what it says here.

He will save His people from their sins. Think with me about what salvation does in regards to the matter of sin.

For one, salvation saves us from the penalty of sin. Salvation saves us from the penalty of sin. Now think with me of what it says in Romans 6, verse 23.

[23:51] It says this, For the wages of sin is death. The wages of sin is death. Why is it that people die? They die because of sin.

They eventually die, and it is an undeniable reality that death in every case is a reminder that sin came into the world, and with sin came death.

And when God says the penalty of sin is death, He made it undeniably clear that that is the consequence of sin from Adam on.

And yet, we find here in the passage that God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die in our place. And when He did that, He's paid our debt, He's satisfied the debt that you and I have because of our sin.

You look first of all at Romans chapter 6, but I want you to turn now, if you will, to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 3. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 3.

[24:52] Why did Jesus come? He came to be our Savior, and that involved His dying for our sins. You look at 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 3, and let me read the passage to you.

It says, I love having conversation with individuals, and in the course of conversation, asking them the question, well, why did Jesus come?

People don't have a great deal of trouble yet, still, in admitting that, well, yeah, Jesus did come. He was a wonderful guy. He was here. My question then is, okay, so why did He come? Well, I suppose He came to show us how to live good lives. Well, do you believe that He died on the cross? I mean, you know, our culture celebrates Easter and all those kind of things about the resurrection.

Do you believe that He died on the cross? Well, yeah, I suppose. Why did He die? He did not die for His own sins. He died for mine. He died for your sins.

[26:02] He died to satisfy the debt that sin creates. And so here it says in 15.3, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture because God had ordained His death for our sins.

Christ came to do that. So come back again. Salvation saves us from the penalty of sin and because Christ died for our sins, then we can say with what Paul says in Romans 8.1, there is now therefore no condemnation to them who are what?

In Christ Jesus. How many of you ever had those moments when your memory brings back things from your past that you just prefer you forgot? Ever had that?

Yeah? When that happens, those of you who are here today and know Christ as your Savior have the undeniable privilege of being able to say, Christ died for my sins.

He died for all of my sins. He died for the sins that I committed in the past. He died for the sins of the moment and He died for my sins in the future. Therefore, I can say with Paul in Romans 8.1, there is now therefore no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

[27:24] Salvation saves me from the penalty of sin. Salvation also saves me from the power of sin. Prior to salvation, we were absolute slaves to sin.

Now, it doesn't mean that we did everything always invariably. In every case, we immediately sinned. But lingering in our heart was that desire for sin and the readiness to sin and ultimately, we were slaves to it.

Now, what is a slave? A slave is a person who is under obligation to do what his master says to do. And prior to our salvation, you and I were absolutely in bondage to sin.

There are many of you here this morning that actually grew up in Christian homes. And one of the things that's hard for you to understand to a certain degree is growing up in a Christian home, a lot of the major, the big-time sins, you know what I mean by big-time sins?

The filthy five, the nasty nine. Oh, we didn't do all those things. You know, our parents kind of coached us against those. And we, what does it mean to be a slave to sin?

[28:36] Others of you here did not grow up in a Christian home and your youth and your adulthood in many cases just absolutely clouded with the wickedness of your heart and you have no trouble remembering what it was to be an absolute slave to sin.

The truth of the matter is, is that all people apart from the grace of God equally enslaved to sin, obligated to do what it says and as a result of that, salvation delivers us from that slavery and leaves us in a state where we're no longer obligated to sin.

Now, is that a blessing? Undeniably so. It is something that you and I who know Christ no longer have to behave the way we used to behave.

Does that make sense? We don't have to be that way. I want you to think with me just for a moment to what it says in Romans. You're there in Matthew but turn over to Romans chapter 6.

Romans chapter 6 verse 20 and 21. For when you were slaves of sin you were free in regards to righteousness. You could hear the expectations rattling around there but ultimately I mean you were a slave.

[29:53] You know what I find kind of curious is that sometimes we as believers we get quite frustrated when sinners act like sinners. It's like so?

What do you expect? Sinners act like sinners. But when a believer who is no longer a slave to sin misbehaves sins he is going against the freedom that he has received he's falling back into the old patterns and not only that but the word of God the spirit of God the prompting of his conscience works to draw him away from that and convicts and brings him out of it.

Salvation frees the believer from being a slave to sin and makes him a servant of God. Finally I want you to recognize this morning when you think about what we receive in our salvation in relationship to sin we're freed from the penalty we're freed from the power of it but we're also eventually promised that we will be freed from the presence of sin.

Salvation does much more for the believer than just free him in this life it frees us in eternity. In the resurrection those who are believers and who have died in Christ and will rise again rise incorruptible.

Now when it says incorruptible it's talking in part one is the flesh we are not going to see corruption but why does corruption come? What's the cause of corruption in life?

[31:26] It is sin. And so what it tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 52 it says we will rise incorruptible we will no longer be under the influence of sin.

Furthermore I want you to understand that in eternity we are going to be in the presence of Christ and his presence assures us that we will not ever be influenced affected choose to sin.

I want you to turn if you would to a passage in 1 John 1 John chapter 3 how many of you look forward to the fact that there is coming a day when you will no longer sin period complete end you look forward to that?

How many of you on periodic moments find yourself man I am so disgusted I remember a couple days ago just thinking to myself man I'm 67 what is the deal with this?

And I thought to myself you know when I get to heaven I will not have to mess with that anymore why? Look at 1 John chapter 3 there in verse 1 see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him beloved we are God's children now that's pretty good isn't it?

[33:05] We're God's children now it doesn't get any better than that but then he goes on and he says this we're God's children now yet what we will be has not yet appeared for we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is now what is Jesus like?

look forward just for a moment if you will into verse 3 and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself because he is what?

What is Jesus like right now? He is absolutely sinless and the day is coming when I and you as believers in the presence of Christ are no longer going to have that ongoing battle with sin come back to understand the Christmas story the angel said to Joseph here's what I want you to do I want you to call your son Jesus why?

because he not you he is going to save his people from their sin from the penalty there's no condemnation from the power I am not a slave from the presence and the reality the day is coming when you and I who know Christ are going to be in his presence and the truth of matter is is that you will have no more battle with that struggle that you know today so when you read the Christmas story whether you read it in Luke whether you read it in Matthew I trust one of the things that happens is this is that you stop and am incredibly blessed that God sent his son Jesus to be my savior and I am thankful in the power of the Holy Spirit I am incredibly thankful and I'm joyful because of who Jesus is and what he's done for me let me encourage you if you are here this morning and the thought of

Christ coming and the blessing that you have received in your salvation does not resonate with your soul there are probably a couple reasons that you need to think carefully about for one it may be that you are here and you do not know Christ it's not impossible that you grow up in a!

[35:35] home you hear all the you do I am fully persuaded that in the day to come when we all stand to give an account there are going to be some who are ultimately surprised by the reality of their salvation not being what they thought it was remember when Jesus said not everybody that saith to me what Lord Lord shall enter the kingdom I don't want you to be surprised and so I want you to stop and consciously think this morning is the coldness of my heart towards the sweetness of my salvation a reflection of the fact that

I really don't know Christ as my Savior and if that's the concern of your heart this morning I would plead with you right where you sit call out on God and say listen I can't save myself but your spirit is prompting me to be concerned for the well being of my soul and I ask that you drive me towards

reality convicting me and bringing me to faith there are some of you here today that know Christ you can think about times where there's been sweetness and joy and satisfaction in the Holy Spirit and your heart has grown cold I think about the church at Laodicea remember that you have lost! your what? your first love well you can't gin it up on your own can't do that but you can come with a humility and a brokenness and say Lord I have lost my sweet affection for what you've done in saving me and I ask that you by your grace would rekindle that in my heart that my satisfaction and my delight would be with you do you know what it says in the scriptures prayer of the contrite and the humble he hears when the broken hearted cry out and if you are here this morning and you know Christ but man that joy is gone don't let this Christmas season pass and allow that spiritual mediocrity to just continue creeping on down the road you cry out and say do whatever is necessary rekindle in my heart and affection for the Lord Jesus Christ a thankfulness for my salvation and that the spirit will do let's close in prayer our father God this morning as we think about what the scriptures tell us about you sending your son the Lord Jesus we recognize that the announcement that was made by the angels to the shepherds and the word that was given to Joseph about Jesus being the savior of the world are undeniably true and supremely valuable and prized we recognize the frailty of our flesh and our affections and so we ask that this morning your spirit would be the one that would kindle in us a true thanksgiving for our salvation and a readiness to live a life that displays the glory of the cross help us this Christmas season to reflect our thankfulness in an unbelieving and broken world that Christ be glorified we ask in Jesus name amen