

# The Obvious Reason for Christmas

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[ 0 : 00 ] I would like you to turn your Bibles this morning to the passage that we are going to study! Matthew chapter 1. We're going to be looking at verses 18 through 25, which brings to us one of the pieces of the Christmas story. I go back and forth on telling you this in advance, but I suppose I will. I am a very, very poor secret keeper. My wife knows me well enough to know that if I buy her a present, I just can't help it. I've got to tell her ahead. It's so much fun to buy her presents. It's like, I can't wait. And so, Lord willing, should He allow, I, next year on Christmastime, am going to preach through the genealogies of Christ. That's actually an accurate response because there is not a single word in the Scripture that is not for our benefit. Is that not right? And what it says in

Romans, and I love the passage in Romans 15 verse 4, it says, these things are written for our encouragement. So, by the way, we will not get bogged down, Lord willing. I have a whole year to work on this, trust me. Prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer, lots of prayer. But when we look at the genealogy of Christ together, it is going to be a rich, a rich overview of the plan of God in bringing us redemption. That's what that is. By the way, no matter where you are in the Bible, ultimately, the path leads back to Jesus. Do you know that? Do you realize that? Because He is the center of the book that we love and are thankful for. And so, I want you to know in advance, Lord willing. That's what I intend to preach on next year. And I almost kind of bumped over there this year, but I thought, no, we've already got this far in the process, and I want you to be in prayer this morning. Now, a second thing that I will say to you is that preaching is an active and demanding responsibility, but also listening is an active and demanding responsibility. And I want to plead with you to do that which I have probably done more repetitiously than any other thing that I have asked you to do in the almost 27 years that I have served as your pastor, and that is that you pray for me. Pastor Saul and I are humbled by your kindness in thinking about us around this Christmas season. We are thankful for your generosity. You are a wonderful congregation to serve among.

And your gift is something that we are thankful for. But I know I can speak for my brother and companion in the gospel when I say that while we are thankful for that, the thing that we appreciate even more is that you are a persistently prayerful people for those who serve among you. We're thankful for that. And so, it goes without saying that if I'm going to open the book, you're going to keep your eyes open and you're also going to pray. And you can multitask, at least most people can. And so, I ask that as I am preaching that you pray that the Spirit of God would enable me to bring the Word with authority and with accuracy and with the affection of heaven and that you also would be affected by it. And you can do that, can you not? Please understand this. Listen to me carefully.

Prayer makes average preaching better. I don't have an intention of being average in preaching, but I recognize that as the Scripture says, we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

And so, please multitask that you might be enabled by the Spirit of God to be part of what He's doing. Let's pray. Our Father, we ask the power of the Spirit that You have given to us as believers to anoint my lips, that I may speak with unction, and that Your people may attend to the teaching of the Word of God with the enabling of the Spirit. For as Jesus rightly taught us in John 15, apart from Me, You can do nothing. And so, we ask that this morning we would hear carefully, we would allow the Word of God to make a difference in our lives, and as we listen to the Word of God, that it would have an effect that we would be different in the way we think and the way we act, that the unbelieving world might be drawn to the cross, and we might be a joy and a delight to You. We ask this in Your precious name. Amen. Let me have you look at Matthew chapter 1, verse 18. It says,

[ 5 : 21 ] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place on this way. When His mother Mary was 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 will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. I want you to understand that at the heart of preaching is really the wonderful responsibility of communicating what God has to say. Preaching is really not about being witty. It's not about having some sappy stories or poems that kind of resonate off the heart, and they sound good in and of themselves. Really, preaching is about being clear about what God has already revealed to you, and I trust that that is what you are looking for this morning, is to hear the Word of God stated clearly and with conviction and with a desire that you are formed by what you hear. I've got to admit that life is foggy. Do you understand what I mean by that? It's not as easy to have it all focused and in line, and there are so many dissonant little voices that are calling out to us and trying to have an effect on us, and life can be a little confusing. I was shopping the other evening, and I just couldn't help but notice that the retail culture really doesn't get Christmas. Do you understand that? I mean, you know, you can have a little baby Jesus in a Cretion. You can have a great big old jolly Santa Claus right next to the same setting, and you can have...so which is really Christmas? I took a walk around my neighborhood a couple nights ago, and I counted up in my proximity. That's just one loop of a little area. There were 33 houses, I think, that were decorated with Christmas. At least, that's what I say. They had lights hung all over the place, and I thought, AEP must love this season. You know, it's like cha-ching, and I mean, there were some houses that I thought should have their own transformer. It was pretty serious.

Powerful. Hallelujah. Somebody must work for AEP. But I remember walking around, and I had to...I kind of...at the end of the circle, I noticed aside from fat little blow-up Santa Claus, I really didn't get any idea that Christmas had anything to do with any kind of religious focus. Aside from the festive mood and the lights and things like that, no indication. And it's not just in the stores.

My computer inbox is just filled, filled with help of messages of things that I really didn't know I needed to be warmer, to be happier, to be more productive, to be more satisfied. I mean, just an incessant delete, delete, delete, delete, because they just clog up the system.

And I'll admit, I get caught up in the flow a little bit, too. I was sitting there in the family room, Judith and I together, and I was sitting there on my laptop, and she looked over, and she said, hey, what are you doing? I was actually reading the news at the moment, and I admitted that, and I said, well, I just happened to be kind of flying through some of the news articles, and she says, oh, really?

[ 9 : 05 ] I said, why? She said, well, you never want to buy anything until right around Christmas, and then you buy things that other people were thinking about buying for you.

And she said, stop, don't do it. And so I thought to myself, well, what prompts me around Christmas time to begin thinking about things that I desperately need? And it has to be the advertisements.

So I admit, the tractor beam of retail draws me in just like the rest of you, and it's pretty easy to get caught up in what's going on with the season. And so I want to take the Word of God and lay it out like a compass and say, where's true north and what really is this time all about?

So I want you to turn in our passage here just to verse 21 in particular as we focus on this text, and let me make three points that rise out of the passage itself. First of all, it's undeniable that Christmas is about Jesus, isn't it? That's what Christmas is really about.

And so I trust that as you celebrate Christmas as a family, and that's a good thing to do, now listen to me, don't kind of read the Christmas story kind of out of obligation like, okay, when I get back to church, I'll be able to say, pastor, we read this Christmas story.

[ 10 : 35 ] We're good. Hey, listen, weave the Lord Jesus into the life of your family in more than just that particular thing. Make Him center, not just of that day, but of every day. And we look here at this passage, and as you look, you recognize verse 21, it says, listen, you'll call His name Jesus.

Now question, how many of you know what the name Jesus actually means? Just, you can have three options. Nod your head, that's one. Smile at me real big like you're kind of doing a dental thing, or just raise your hand. A, B, C. Some of you are going like this, and you need to stop, okay? Hey, listen, up here, up here. Here's what Jesus means. It means Jehoshua is salvation. Joshua, Jesus, the Lord is Savior. When Joseph was given instructions on what to name his son, he said, listen, you're going to call Him God is Savior, Lord is Savior, because that's what He's all about. No matter where you are in this wonderful book, Jesus is the recurring theme, and all things come back to Him. Now, in the Old Testament, the hints are a little harder to see on occasion.

Wouldn't you agree with that? You recognize in particular, let me give you a couple of illustrations. You remember when Abraham was called to sacrifice his only son, and up the hill he went, and remember, his son Isaac says, hey, listen, where's the sacrificial lamb? Where's the sacrifice? And what did Abraham say? God will provide. God will provide. And the New Testament becomes profoundly more clear when, as Jesus was coming, John the Baptist says, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The New Testament makes the issue of the centrality of Christ and the story of redemption much clearer, and both Matthew and Luke lay out some of the details of the first Christmas, and though each of the accounts give us a different set of facts, nevertheless, at the center of all of these facts is the Lord Jesus. Our text today explains the miracle birth. It explains how Joseph intended to respond and how the Spirit of God came to him, where actually an angel of the Lord came to him and pointed out that he was not to handle things appropriately. And the Old Testament, as we have just alluded to, really points towards Jesus with prophecies and symbolic imagery. I'm reminded of the fact that when in the Old Testament a believer sinned, the way in which to deal with that sin was through sacrifice, and as he sacrificed, he was not thinking that the blood of that bull or that goat or that lamb, whatever it was, was actually an adequate atonement for sin. But he was thinking forward to the day that God had promised would come when someone he would send would be the substitute and the sacrifice for sin.

[13:54] The theme of God's provision is the lone bright star against the incredibly dark background and backdrop of what took place in Genesis chapter 1. I want you to think just for a moment back to Genesis chapter 1, chapter 3. Actually, I said chapter 1, I meant 3. 315, where remember after Adam and Eve had sinned and God comes to them, he makes this statement. He says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, talking about Satan, the serpent, and he says, between you and your offspring, and he will bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. It's called the proto-evangelism or evangelism, but it's the first reference to the fact that God would provide a sacrifice for our sin.

We see throughout the Old Testament sacrificial system the reference to the fact that God would provide, and when in the temple people would come and offer their sacrifice, they were thinking of the day that God would provide His Son to be the sacrifice.

I want you to look at two more texts in which we see things a little more clearly, particularly in the New Testament. If you will, turn to John chapter 5. John chapter 5, verse 39.

Very interesting statement that Jesus makes to His detractors, who were specialists in the Old Testament. They prided themselves in knowing what the Bible had to say, the Old Testament. And by the way, Jesus had a lot of fun with them. One of the things that He would say was, have you never read? What was their attitude towards that? It was like, duh. I mean, the supreme insult to say to a Pharisee, now listen to me, the Pharisees were so well versed in the Bible, the Old Testament, that you could have them, you could give them a reference and they could recite the whole thing, or you could start a sentence and they could finish it.

[16:05] We can do that with a couple things. Here's an illustration. For God so loved the world. See, you can do that, but how many of you can go much beyond that one? The Pharisees had it down cold.

And Jesus loved to point out to them that while they heard the Scriptures, the Scriptures didn't make any difference to the way they lived. In John chapter 5, verse 39, He says, You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to Me.

If you were to walk into my office, and you were to sit in the chairs that are in there, behind you would be the verses that I see when I study.

One of them is John chapter 5, verse 39, and it is written out, and then it says this, How does this sermon testify to Christ?

You see, the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus. Let me have you look at another one in particular, and this is over in the book of Luke, just a brief comment on this.

[17:27] And I, for one, am inclined to think that probably Hebrews, a wonderful book, is the more complete unpacking of what Jesus taught on that road and the little sermon that He gave to those two grieving disciples.

Look at Luke chapter 24, verse 25. And He said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things

and enter into His glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

So when Jesus came that first Christmas, He who was God's gift to a broken and wicked world was and is also the central figure of it.

And I cannot help but wonder this morning, as we gather and we sit under the teaching of the Word of God, whether or not Jesus is really central in your life. Do you understand that? Is He at the very center?

[ 18 : 47 ] Or have other things crowded Him out? I'm reminded of what it says over in the book of Revelation where Jesus, as He writes to the church, He says there at Laodicea, you have lost your, what?

Your first love. Can I tell you something about love? It doesn't do well unnurtured and uncared for. Do you realize that? It can fade and lose its power. And so this morning, as you sit and listen to the preaching of the Word of God, ask yourself that practical question, how connected is my heart to the beauty and the glory of the Lord Jesus who came to be my Savior.

Second thing that I want you to see going back to that passage in Matthew is that Christmas is about salvation. Christmas is about salvation. And I've got to tell you, I can understand why the world gets so bent out of shape when we, with any level of clarity, declare what Christmas is really all about.

You look at the passage there in Matthew chapter 1 and mark what it says. It says that Jesus came to be our Savior.

[ 20 : 09 ] And so we recognize, as you look at the passage and think about it here just for a moment, it says He came to save. The Bible is crystal clear that men cannot save themselves.

That's really actually pretty offensive. Do you understand that? I mean, for one, we'd like to believe that God grades on the curve, at least the curve that works for us. And we don't mind the way He treats other people.

I mean, they're scoundrels and they deserve what they've got coming. But us? Hey, cut me slack. I'm doing my best. The truth of the matter is is that all mankind is in a predicament that He's eternally dangerous.

In the face of that, we have a tendency to be a little bit like the rich fool over there in Luke chapter 12, verse 16 through 21. Remember the rich fool? He had it all happening. It was good. He was gathering just beaucoup.

It was coming in. In fact, he had so much that, you know, he decides, he reaches the point and says, hey, I am kicking back because I've got enough to kind of coast on towards the sunset.

[ 21 : 18 ] You know, I'll buy myself a third vacation home. I'm going to have an RV and a yacht and I'm in. I'm on. It's a good, good thing. Remember what Jesus said to him, thou fool, tonight your soul will be required of you.

When we read the remainder of that lesson, we realize this self-focused man really was not thinking about eternity at all and in consequences, he was doomed.

Others are amazingly pleased with themselves and their relative goodness. I had a wonderful chance earlier, well, it's actually last week. I keep forgetting.

Sunday is the beginning of a new week, right? Gotcha. Okay, yeah, it is. But last week, I had the chance to share the gospel with a guy. We had a little extra time. We're sitting in a hospital and so how we drifted left of center, I don't know how it happened.

But anyway, he got to talking about spiritual things and he shared with me that he was a very generous and kind man and he didn't judge other people.

[ 22 : 28 ] And so I followed up and asked him the logical question. I said, so Hitler's in heaven? Do you follow the logic there?

I mean, he doesn't judge and God doesn't judge and everybody's okay. And I said, well, is Hitler in heaven? Well, he got a little flustered but he says, no, I don't think so. I said, well, if Hitler's not in heaven, how far down the line do you have to come with being nasty and naughty to get to the point that God cares about it?

You know what the answer is? The Bible tells us all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that are righteous, no, not one. And I didn't give him the reference.

You know, sometimes, how many of you figured out that sometimes the reference is like sticking a finger in a guy's eye is like dingbat, boom, Bible verse, boom, you know, not to be done.

Okay. I said, you know, truth of the matter is is if God's holy and perfect and his mother was in surgery, I said, you know what, I bet you you're hoping that the doctor is exercising all due caution and you want a bug-free environment for your mother's surgery right now, right?

[ 23 : 43 ] Well, yeah. I mean, I remember when my father would scrub for surgery and I thought, you know, hit it a lick with water and leave it go. You know, go on in. You know, timer running, ding, ding, ding, you know, and there was this protocol of putting on gloves and gown and it's like, oh, but you know what?

If what you want to do is come out of surgery without an infection, do those kind of things make a difference? And the answer is yes. Well, heaven has zero infection.

I'm reminded of what it says over in Hebrews chapter 9 where it says, it's appointed unto man once to die and after that, the judgment.

It's really surprising to tell people that there will be no do-overs. Do I get a second chance? No. And if you have not trusted in Christ and you are planning to face the judgment on the basis of your own self-righteousness, the answer from Scripture is you are doomed.

The truth of the matter is is that the Bible makes it clear that all mankind is utterly unable to save themselves. It's one thing to be told that we need to be saved.

[ 25 : 11 ] It's another thing to be told that you can't do it yourself. And when we read here in this passage, He will save His people from their sins.

The supposition of the text is that we can't do it. We need someone else to do it. Think with me just for a moment to another passage. And so if you want to follow along, I want you to turn in your Bible over to Ephesians chapter 2 where the apostle in the second chapter of Ephesians does just a phenomenal job of explaining some of the details of salvation.

and look what He says there in Ephesians chapter 2. It says, for by grace... Now what does grace mean? It means I get something that I didn't earn. I am amazed...

Everybody look up and smile at me so I know you're with me. Like this. I'm amazed at how many people go to church and at the end of the day really believe that the reason they're getting into heaven is because they're pretty good people.

Now I admit there are some churches where the gospel doesn't have a floating chance. But don't deceive yourself. It's only by the grace of God that a person comes to faith.

[ 26 : 29 ] There it is in verse 8. It says, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of your own... What? Doing. Knock, knock, knock.

Hi Tim. How are you getting in? Well, I've been a pretty good person. Ha! You know, anybody that knows me knows that is a lie. And it's the same thing for you.

Now aren't you glad everybody doesn't know all the things about you that God does? But the truth of the matter is you're not getting there because of who you are. You're getting there because God sent His Son to die for your sins.

I want you to go back with me now to Matthew as we recognize the third point. Christmas is about saving us from our sins.

Looking at Matthew chapter 1 verse 21 and picking up again on that theme there in the text it says, for He will save His people from their sins. God has ordained agents such as our families to help us with that.

[ 28 : 01 ] Our conscience that bears witness. And the government. I was driving in a particular area the other day and I happened to notice that people were being exceptionally prudent in their driving skills.

And I thought, hmm, what is all this about? And then when I rounded the corner I discovered what was prompting their conscience. It was an officer of the law sitting over in the berm and kind of sitting there happily waiting for someone who was brain dead to go by.

So, you know, and I, everybody and I kind of rolled the traffic and you know what happened after we were out of sight? Guess what happened? Does anybody know what happened? Does anybody know what happened?

Everybody just burned the petrol like they had no thought in their mind of what was dangerous. And off they went and I'm sitting there going, ooh, okay. Here's the truth.

all men are sinners. Even with the restraints in place the heart of man is a dark place and a factory for every imaginable sin.

[ 29 : 11 ] I want you to understand that sin harms man in this present life and it condemns in the life to come. Turn back in your Bible. I've referenced Genesis a number of different times and so we're going to take a couple minutes.

You can keep your finger in Matthew if you wish or not but go to Genesis chapter 3 as we look at what God has to say about sin in Genesis chapter 3.

And by the way let me tell you a little secret about Bible study. It's always good to get it right from the beginning. Would you understand that? How many of you have done math problems that rely upon you getting the starting facts right?

And if you get the starting facts wrong what happens as you go down the line? Do you understand that it only gets worse? Okay. Well Genesis 3 I've been talking so let me get there.

I want you to recognize as you look at Genesis chapter 3 that first of all sin leads man to be self-deceived. Look at Genesis chapter 3 verse 7.

[ 30 : 16 ] It says then the eyes of both were opened after they had sinned and they knew that they were naked. Okay. Now the reasonable thing to do when you recognize you're naked is say hey God I have sinned and I desperately need your help.

Right? What'd they do? Oh look at the passage. It says what they did was they grabbed fig leaves and sewed them together and made themselves loincloths. Hey what do you think?

Looks good right? Did I fool you with my fig leaves? Listen to me carefully so you don't miss this. Sin leads mankind to be self-deceived.

Instead of recognizing and admitting the broken and helpless state that sin produces we try to cover ourselves one way or another with fig leaves.

Second sin leads mankind to have broken relationships with God. Verse 8 they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.

[ 31 : 34 ] prior to sin Adam and Eve welcomed their communion with God.

They enjoyed it. They found pleasure in the presence of the Almighty. And do you know something? Listen to me carefully. in the heart of every believer is a longing for the day when we will have complete whole unfettered unrestricted communion with the Lord of hosts.

I love Psalm 16 11 where it says in thy presence is the what? The fullness of joy and that your right hand are pleasures evermore. And here in Genesis we find that man and woman incredibly deceived by sin thought that they could actually hide from God and he didn't see them.

Third thing is that sin leads mankind to have broken relationships with one another. It was really interesting in this conversation that I referenced earlier the man let me know that he was fully persuaded that all wars were the consequences of religion.

How many of you figured out that sometimes arguing is not a good idea? You know? In the presence of a man who's fully persuaded you know it's just you just have to kind of wait for the opening such as since God doesn't judge is Hitler going to heaven?

[ 33 : 17 ] You know you just give him enough rope and then what happens is there's kind of a tripping process that takes place and I remember this person going on about the subject of all wars being the consequences of religion and I said hmm I let him talk and I said I'm wondering what religion led Mao Zedong to slaughter 50 million Chinese you know that right?

I said or while we're talking about it I'm thinking about Pol Pot how many of you know Pol Pot? or I said what about the Hutus and the Tutsis? you know no that's about religion that's because of the heart of darkness the heart of darkness and when we read what the scriptures have to say we understand that when Adam and Eve fell into sin it affected their relationships in a millisecond now here was the man who just moments earlier was doing cartwheels because God had given him a wife and now he turns like a brute and he's willing to sacrifice her on the altar if it'll get him off the hook you know what he says you know this sin problem I wouldn't be having if it wasn't for that girl you gave me I mean what a boor that's a polite word are there any boors here I don't think so you see here was

Adam by the way listen Adam was the one who had been given the operating instructions for the garden do you understand that and he had stood by as he watched Eve trundle over and listen to the snake and he listened and heard what was happening and he let her go right ahead and do it by

the way all of you who are out here are men God is not in favor of you being a passive low life he's not asking you to be an ayatollah but buddy he expects you to protect your wife by providing a little bit of Bible help on issues let's come to one more thing Christmas is about great news that's what Christmas is now let's be honest great news is always prefaced by terrible news do you follow that and let me tell you something you can't get to good news without dealing with the bad news first everybody smile at me so you understand where

I'm going you can't get to good news without accepting bad news how do I want to say this this last week has been quite a little dust up over ill advised comments made in questionable environments I thought about the passage that says don't throw your pearls to swine lest they turn again and rend you that's one thought that I had but another one is this is hey listen I could regardless of the environment recite Romans chapter one and I tell you what if people understood what Romans chapter one said they'd want to crucify me in this contemporary culture do you understand that so here's what Christians get to do kind of shut up and act like you don't care and by the way does that make Jesus happy what's the answer smile at me because you're going to hate me for this no I mean at the end of the day you have to choose which side you're on can you be a little more discreet and a little more gentle and the answer is yes but let me tell you something about truth it makes those who don't want to hear it upset now here's the truth bad news comes before good news here's what

Jesus said remember the Pharisees they were all lit up all the time I mean they walked around with a perpetual grunt a groan grumble forget they they were unhappy people they were looking like some of you this morning you know it's like why come to church you can frown at home okay and and Jesus really was merciless on them and Jesus made it clear they are all stewed and steamed and he says hey let me tell you something the only people who need a physician are those who are sick and so the truth of matter is is that beloved we cannot save ourselves we stand justly condemned before a holy God and there are every one of us in here that do not know

[ 38 : 23 ] Christ are just a heartbeat from hell but the good news is this Jesus came into the world to save sinners that's why and those who cry out to him for salvation will be saved does it get any better than that well what do I have to do just accept the reality the undeniable clear evidence that you are a scoundrel and hopelessly unable to save yourself and God seeing your condition sent Jesus to be your savior doesn't it count that I went to a good church grew up and knew all the Sunday school lessons even was baptized let me tell you something there will be lots of baptists in hell how can

I say that well there will be Presbyterians there too and there will be Methodists and there will be other people here's the deal you don't get to heaven by being a member of a church or wearing a particular label you get to heaven by having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in him alone and faith in Christ means coming to the point where you with all humility say I am a miserable wretch justly condemned before God who is holy and I cry out to Jesus and ask that he save me do you know what it says in the Bible I love this I like saying it to everybody whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved how should I end a Christmas message I should end it this way by saying that the gospel is something that to every believer is profoundly sweet because when you hear what Jesus has done for you that makes you say that's my Jesus and for you who do not know Christ that sit this morning under the preaching of the word of God have an opportunity to cry out and say I am a sinner and I need Christ to save me and the Bible says whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved let's pray a Thank you.