

Matthew 1:18-25 PM

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Date: 08 December 2024

Preacher: Rev. Will Gray

[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open our ears to listen, open our eyes to see, plant the seed of your word deep in our hearts and make it bear good fruit in our lives. Amen.

You may be seated. If we've not met before, my name's Will Gray. I'm one of the ministers on staff here. I'd love to meet you after the service or chat about any questions that the sermon or text raises tonight.

As Jacob's already mentioned, we're approaching Christmas and the season of Christmas is very much upon us and upon our city and culture.

And Christmas is a time and a season when we spend a lot more time than usual thinking about what we want. Sometimes this searching is very superficial.

When I was a kid, me and my sisters would write a letter to Santa together every year around the end of November. I'd spend days agonizing over what to ask for.

[1 : 0 3] This is a big deal as a kid. There was a lot about the situation I didn't necessarily understand. The efficiency of travel, how Santa's people communicated a budget to my parents.

But I did understand that this was my blank check gift-getting moment. And I didn't want to waste it. So I thought long and hard about what to ask for.

In college, my Christmas wishes shifted from wants to needs. So Christmas was the time when I got to exchange my worn-out ratty van sneakers for a new pair.

Let me tell you, I know there's some college students here. That cycle repeated more than one year, for sure. And then there's also been years when my Christmas wishes were less superficial. There were years when all I wanted at Christmastime was a whole family, a quiet, peaceful mind, and something to look forward to on January 1st.

[2 : 0 6] And here's my point in sharing these stories. Whether our desires are superficial or deep longings or something in between, the Christmas season has a way of revealing what we really want.

And the question, what do you want, is actually quite an important question. I mean, it's not that important when we're putting together our Christmas list, no matter what 10-year-old me thought. But it is very important when we start thinking more deeply about our lives, the world, and our relationship to God. In just a few weeks, at Christmastime, we'll hear the story of Jesus' birth when angels announced to lowly shepherds, Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Now, I don't want to assume anything, but for many of us here tonight, the idea that Jesus is a Savior, or even the Savior, may not be new or challenging.

But I think our text tonight confronts us with a more searching question. What do we want from Jesus? And, more importantly, what did Jesus actually come to give us?

[3 : 2 8] The first question is a question about our desires and longings. And the second question is a question about Jesus and the promise of his incarnation.

So we're going to dive into the passage, but keep those two questions in mind. What do we want? What do you want from Jesus? And what did Jesus come to give you?

So let's get into it. Matthew 1, 18 to 25. You can follow along. Page 807, if you've closed your Bible. And in this passage, our Lord is given two names.

Two names. Jesus and Emmanuel. And these two names teach us two essential things about our Lord. The name Emmanuel reveals who our Lord is.

And the name Jesus reveals what he came to do. And so those are the two things we're going to focus on together. Who Jesus is and what he came to do.

[4 : 29] So first, who is Jesus? Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is very short. It's not the classic account we get from Luke with the visits from many angels to different people and shepherds and all of that.

Matthew's account focuses on Joseph, actually, more than Mary. And if we start looking at verse 18, we read, 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. Now there's a lot happening in that one sentence.

First, we learn that Joseph and Mary are betrothed. This is more serious and binding than an engagement would be today. The kind of thing that we understand as an engagement.

Being betrothed meant that their families would have already agreed on all the aspects of their marriage. All the legal bits and bobs, as our friend Mark Ashworth would say, would have been completed, signed off on, done.

[5 : 38] So Mary and Joseph were already legally bound to each other. But Mary wasn't living with Joseph. And evidently, they hadn't consummated the marriage yet.

Matthew tells us that. And so I think we can cut Joseph some slack for his shock at finding out that Mary was pregnant. It's a tough thing for that guy.

I mean, you don't need ultrasounds, paternity tests, or modern biological sciences to know how these things worked. They knew back then. And Joseph knew that something was amiss.

Something was different. But his response actually shows the quality of his character. Matthew says he's a just man. And his response shows this.

Of course, he assumed that Mary had committed adultery. That was the only thing he could have assumed. But he didn't want her to be publicly shamed. And so Matthew tells us he resolved to divorce her quietly.

[6 : 39] And given the utter uniqueness of the situation, God graciously speaks to Joseph. He sends an angel in a dream to tell Joseph what Mary already knows, which is that her child is from God.

So Mary has not betrayed Joseph. She's not committed adultery. Her child was conceived miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in verses 22 to 23, Matthew gives us his inspired interpretation of these events and their meaning.

He says, All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. That's Isaiah. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now, as a bit of a sidebar, miraculous births actually play a really important role in the biblical story. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, all have miracle babies that continue the line of God's promise.

You might remember Hannah is barren and gives birth to Samuel. Zechariah and Elizabeth, we read in Luke, give birth to John the Baptist in their old age. But Mary's pregnancy is completely unique.

[8 : 05] It's one of one, not only in the Bible, but the history of the world. This child born to Mary was not simply from God. This child was God.

Her child was and is Emmanuel, which means God with us. This is what Christians throughout history have called the incarnation.

To incarnate something literally means to give it flesh or to give it a body. And so what we believe in as Christians in the incarnation is that the eternal and invisible God, who is spirit and has no body, in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit became flesh.

He took on a body. And more than that, He didn't just take on a body. He actually became a real human being. He took on our human nature.

We actually just said this. We confess this every week in the Creed. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

[9 : 18] This is actually the central claim of the Christian faith. That the one true and living God, the eternal creator of all things, has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

That Jesus is truly God and truly man. Two natures, human and divine, perfectly united in one person.

And that's why Matthew calls him Emmanuel, God with us. The implications of this are, I mean, we could be here a very long time.

But one thing is that if you are here tonight and you're wondering what God is like, that's an important question, right? What is God like? This means that you just need to look at Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus because he is God with us. He is God in human form with a human body. It also means that if you feel tonight like God is far off or distant, if you feel like God is comfortably removed from the grimy messes and intolerable suffering of our world.

[10:39] Once again, look at Jesus. In Jesus, God knows all of our trials and temptations. This is a bit of a mind-blowing thought, but a human being is currently enthroned in heaven as the Lord and judge of all.

A man who was beaten, mocked, betrayed, and killed. A man who had parents and siblings and friends and enemies.

A man who lived a real human life with one very notable difference, that he never sinned. So, who is Jesus?

Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. This is why we worship him. This is why we acclaim him as our Lord and God.

He is our great high priest who is exalted above the heavens and he is God with us in all of our suffering and weakness. This is who he is.

[11:44] He is God with us. That's point one. But point two, what did he actually come to do? And we see this in verse 21, if you want to look there.

The angel tells Joseph to name Mary's child Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. He says, you shall name him Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now, William Shakespeare famously wrote, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But in this case, a savior by another name would actually not quite be the same.

Not quite as profound or helpful for us understanding who he is. And that's because Jesus is actually the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means Yahweh saves or Yahweh is salvation.

salvation. So God gave Jesus this name to help us understand why he came. To help us understand that this child born to Mary is not only Emmanuel, God with us, he is Jesus, God with us to save us.

[13:00] God with us to bring his salvation. salvation. And so God didn't become one of us out of curiosity or simply to identify with us.

It wasn't like a field trip for God to see what it was like to be a human down here in the grit and grime of the world. He came with a very specific mission and purpose, which was to save his people from their sins.

And I wonder if you picked up on the specificity of that statement. In some ways, it would have made more sense given Jesus' name for the angel to say, you shall name him Jesus for he will save his people or for he will bring salvation to his people.

But the angel's more specific. God did not come among us to bring salvation in an abstract or vague sense. Speaking personally here, there's a part of me that would actually prefer that.

There's a part of me that would prefer if the angel had simply said, you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people. Blank. I'd like this for a couple of reasons.

[14:16] One, I don't like to confront the fact that I'm a sinner and that my deepest need is actually to be forgiven. That I'm, as C.S. Lewis said, a rebel that needs to lay down my arms and come back to the king and repentance and faith.

I would also like it because that way I could fill in that blank with whatever I felt like I needed or wanted that particular day. So things like, you shall call him Jesus for he shall save his people from poverty.

For he shall save his people from injustice. For he will save his people from sickness and suffering or depression or public disgrace or sleepless nights and unruly children.

I pray that last one for a friend of mine. My point is, I'm sure it wouldn't be difficult for you to make your own version of that list.

Jesus came to save me from blank. It might even change day by day, week to week, month to month. And I do want to be clear, God cares about all these things.

[15:28] He cares deeply, more than we can imagine, and he will do something about it. When Jesus returns, he will make all the wrong things right. He will reconcile all things to himself.

Wars will cease. Wickedness and injustice will be judged and dealt with. As we read in Revelation, there'll be no more tears, no more sickness, no more death or mourning or trouble or pain.

God's people will lack nothing and know only his perfect peace and joy. But, and this is the key thing, before we can enjoy any of these blessings, God has to deal with sin.

God has to deal with sin in our hearts and he has to deal with sin in the world. Sin is kind of like a terminal sickness that we're all born into.

And if our sin was left alone to grow and multiply, it would eventually destroy us and everything that is good and true and beautiful in the world.

[16:31] And so Jesus came to save his people from sin because he is the physician of our souls and he's very good at what he does. As you probably all know, a good doctor isn't simply satisfied with symptom management.

That may be part of what they do, but a good doctor will look at your symptoms and try to figure out what the underlying sickness or cause of those symptoms is so that they can treat that sickness and actually make you well again and whole again.

And sin is the underlying sickness that plagues us and the world. It's the root cause of all the things that cause us so much grief and pain.

And so until that is healed, until our hearts are forgiven, redeemed, made holy, and the sin that we see all around us in the world is dealt with once and for all, we will never know true peace or joy.

And so I asked at the start two questions. What do you want from Jesus? And more importantly, what did Jesus come to give you? And if we're honest, we probably want all kinds of different things from Jesus.

[17:52] This is perfectly understandable because we live in a world where all kinds of things aren't the way that they should be. Some of the things we want might be superficial or selfish, like my Christmas list as a ten-year-old, and others will reveal deep, deep longings for good things that God will one day bring about, things that God would want us to pray for, like peace and wholeness and healing.

But tonight, we can be absolutely sure of one thing, that God wants to save you from your sin. He wants to forgive you. He wants you to know the peace and joy of being forgiven and freed and cleansed and whole in Christ.

And this is very good news. It means that God has not only seen our greatest need and not only wants to do something about it, but he actually has done that in Jesus.

That God came to save his people from their sins. That he took those sins to the cross, bearing all the penalty and guilt and pain and rose again from the dead so that we could rise again with him to new life.

And if you're worried about this, if you're feeling burdened or condemned tonight, know that this gift of forgiveness is available to anyone and everyone.

[19:22] Hear these words from 1 John, someone who knew Jesus well and loved him deeply. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So friends, this is the promise of the incarnation.

God became God with us to save us from our sin. And he will come again to make all things new.

And all we need to do to receive that gift is to come to him in repentance, to confess what's true about ourselves, our heart, the world, and receive that which God has already accomplished in his son, Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.