

God overcomes our limitations

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[0 : 00] And first to Matthew chapter 1, and then we'll be turning to Luke chapter 1. A few verses out of each account. So Matthew chapter 1, beginning at verse 18.

And we'll read all the way through to verse 25.

To now hear God's word. 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 just a man, and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

[1 : 26] For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

Which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.

And he called his name Jesus. And we'll pick it up at verse 26, and we'll read through to the end of verse 38.

Luke 1, verse 26. Now hear God's word. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

[2 : 55] And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you shall conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom there will be no end. Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, also has conceived a son.

[4 : 08] And this is in the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. Well, we certainly ask God's blessing upon both those readings, that with the readings, God would open our mind, enlighten our mind, with a view of changing our heart.

And of course, bringing us to the wonderful truth of what this means for us, because it really is a wonderful truth. You can see from the two readings, before we come back to them, that the account is to Mary and Joseph.

And for that reason, we have the two readings. Let's pray, before we sing, that God would make this true to us this morning. Father, we ask in Jesus' name, that the truth of the incarnation, the truth of God the Son coming, and not just for Joseph and Mary, and for the people in their time, but also for us in our time as well, that this would not seem like a distant truth.

Truth, but not a distant truth. That, Father, we recognize here, in time, it is recorded for something that changes us as well.

[5 : 38] So, Father, warm our hearts, renew them with this truth, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. At this time of Christmas, rest may be the furthest thing from your mind, but the coming of Christ is really about you sitting back and letting God do the work.

We saw last week that David, a man of great riches and of great wealth on all kinds of scales, had nothing to offer God. He had plenty to offer God in the sense that he had riches to offer God with the building of a new temple, but he had nothing to offer God because God is in need of nothing and he's not in need of something being provided for him by us.

And that's really the essence of Christmas. You know, we serve God, we pretend or perhaps that we do all these things for God, but it's not directly for God, it's we do them in light of God's lordship, in light of the fact that God is king, but they benefit the people down here on earth.

So when we serve God, we're serving God by serving others. And that's something that Jesus Christ sets out from the very beginning as we saw last week. He didn't come for you to serve him.

He didn't come for you to work. He came so that he could work for you. He didn't come so that you could then do something for him. He came so that he could do something for you.

[7 : 12] So right at the very beginning here, you ought to have a deep sense of rest. You ought to have a deep sense that if you truly have come to Jesus Christ, that there's nothing for me to do.

That I have been put right with God because of something that God himself has done. And the reason why that's important is because we need to take God's promises seriously.

When God makes a promise, he fulfills them. When we make promises, we do our best, but life circumstances and perhaps a whole number of other things means that it becomes incredibly difficult to keep even the best promises that we make.

Even when at the time of making those promises, we think we could never break them because we take them so seriously. Last Sunday evening, that wasn't on the subject of the nativity, we saw how the gospel produces a people that work hard.

The gospel produces a people that work hard, but this is something that God has done for us. The gospel ought to produce a people that should just say, let your yes be yes and your no be no.

[8 : 20] And this is not always the case because we cannot maintain the kind of faithfulness that God does. So we can get one thing clear reading this passage, that when God makes a promise, he keeps his promise.

And we are to live in light of the promises of God, okay? God makes a promise, God keeps a promise, and we are to live in the light, trusting in the promises of God.

Now the promise here was made back in Isaiah's day, God made it through the prophet Isaiah, that a virgin shall conceive. Now that's something incredibly strange because I've often said to you that virgin births are pretty normal, okay?

Every mother who has a child for the first time has a virgin birth. There's nothing unusual there. But a virgin conceiving, how?

Virgins don't conceive. And so the promise is extremely difficult to believe. Well, it's not difficult to believe when you understand that the person making the promise is God, okay?

[9 : 30] When God makes a promise that sounds impossible to us, then it cannot be impossible if it's been made by God. The promise is that a virgin shall conceive, bear a son, you shall call his name Jesus, you shall call his name Emmanuel, which means that God is going to be with you, okay?

God is going to be with you forever. As Romans says, who can be against us the moment God joins us? Okay? The moment God comes and joins us, if God is for us, then who can be against us?

Okay? I'm not afraid of you. I'm not afraid of anyone. Why not? Because God is for me. God is a God who sits me before a table in the presence of my enemies.

I can sit back and know that everything is under control because God is for you. The incarnation, the fact that Jesus came, the fact that we can, it is Emmanuel, God is with us, that's what it means.

God's for you. Not that just God is with you and that he sits beside you or that you get to enjoy his presence. That is true. But God is actively for you.

[10 : 42] Okay? That means that nothing in this world can come against you and prevail. Okay? It may look as if it's prevailing in this world, but it cannot prevail ultimately because of this very promise kept.

God is with you. Now, here's the issue. Mary and Joseph knew the promises of God. Okay? We know the promises of God. What Mary and Joseph had to come to understand is that God is going to keep his promise through them.

Okay? It's one thing to understand God keeping his promise through Mary and Joseph like we do. It's altogether a different thing to understand that Mary and Joseph had to come and understand that God was keeping his promise through them.

Okay? That's completely different. Okay? We can understand it far easier than perhaps Mary and Joseph did for the simple reason it didn't happen to us. We ought to point out that Mary is a favoured one here and that is highlighted clearly.

And Joseph too had to come and understand his position in all of this. But when God makes a promise and people are waiting for promises, okay, Mary and Joseph had to be told that God is going to fulfil his promise and he is going to use them to do it.

[12 : 01] And that's the striking thing here. And it's fair to say that both Mary and Joseph, hence why we read Matthew and Luke, need for God to explain this to them.

They need a special revelation. That where there is exceptional circumstances, you need an exceptional revelation. How am I supposed to get my head around this?

Now look at it from Joseph's point of view. He is betrothed and this is something that I think we should bring back, especially since I've had three girls. We're going to bring this back. I'm going to mandate it in the church that if you have a girlfriend, she is, or a boyfriend, he is your future husband.

So be careful how you choose him. Okay? She is your future wife, so be careful how you choose her. I think this is good biblical practice and something that you should get behind me on because Scripture's promoting it.

Okay? Mary and Joseph do things properly. They don't date. Okay? They don't have a series of boyfriends and girlfriends. They get betrothed and betrothal is like an engagement period that is taken as seriously as marriage.

[13 : 13] Okay? This means that Joseph, though not yet married to Mary, is betrothed and that is taken seriously that when he considers to divorce her secretly, you think, well, why would you be divorcing her?

You're not even married. Well, that's because we don't understand the seriousness of what they call betrothal. Okay? We've downgraded betrothal to dating and this is something the church should never promote.

Okay? I don't want to get on to parents and how to bring up your children should they date. Let's just be fairly clear no they shouldn't. Okay? Fairly clear why they shouldn't as well. The issue here is betrothal is you're choosing a life partner and this is what Joseph has done.

Mary is going to be his future wife. Now imagine that when you have both parties taking a relationship like that so seriously that now you find that the woman that you're about to marry is pregnant.

Now humanly speaking, what would you think? She's messing around. But then you'd question how could she be messing around? We're betrothed and she's not that type of girl.

[14 : 29] So you could, right? Now you've got two things to struggle with. You know that women can't be pregnant unless there's a man involved. You know that to be the case but at the same time Mary's a godly woman.

Okay? She's portrayed as a godly woman favoured by God. So how do you reconcile these two things? Of someone who is godly and yet at the same time found pregnant.

Well Joseph rightly can understand this all on his own. I don't think any man could come to understand this all by himself. Men are insecure enough and they are petrified of women most of the time.

Okay? This is a truth universally acknowledged I'd want to point out. So Joseph needs a special revelation.

And so in a dream the angel of the Lord comes to him he's been thinking about how does he how does he separate from Mary and as he's thinking these things an angel comes upon him in a dream and tells him that he is to take Mary as his wife because the child in her is of God.

[15 : 35] Okay? It's not of another man Joseph. This is God's doing. Joseph had to come to understand that the promise God made of sending a son and a virgin that would conceive that it just so happens to be the very woman he's going to get married to.

That's what's happening here. He knew that God would always fulfill his promise. He didn't think it was going to be to the woman he was about to marry. The trouble is it is exactly to the woman that he is about to marry.

Mary on the other hand is also surprised and rightly so that here she is as a young girl how young we're not so sure but her question in Luke 1 verse 34 is an obvious one well how can this be since I am a virgin?

Now two things are going on there is she no doubts understand the promise that a virgin shall conceive but it's one of those things where you can believe a promise at a distance until the promise comes home.

Okay? It's one thing for Joseph to be surprised it's altogether another thing for Mary to be surprised and so the angel has to say to Mary that this also is God's doing or he says the same to Mary this is God's doing.

- [16 : 53] Mary you are to understand that the promise God made long ago he is keeping but through you. Now Mary understood that if God was going to keep his promise that he had to keep it through someone but again Mary and Joseph would never have imagined like you would imagine that God would do it through you but if you think about it it had to be someone at some point.

Okay? If God made a promise that he was going to send someone to the world and that a virgin would conceive somewhere in the world to a certain people group in the world at a certain time in place then that had to happen at some point.

And this is everything that Joseph and Mary are now having to consider that all the promises God made concerning sending his son are being kept through them.

Now that is something very difficult yet wonderful to get your head around. That I am being used by God to bring God into the world.

Think about that. I am being used this is what they had to consider. This is what went through the minds and hearts of Mary and Joseph. I am being used by God for God to keep his promise.

- [18 : 13] The way God is keeping his promise is by using Mary and Joseph. So I have a few things to mention. Here's the first.

We need to come to believe that the promise is fulfilled. And this is something that Mary and Joseph had to come and understand. That God was always going to fulfill his promise when was going to be the surprise.

Now is even more surprising that it was through these two people. Now God takes care of the belief of Mary and Joseph by the use of an angel.

The question is how does he take care of your belief? Okay. Extraordinary measures requires extraordinary revelation. The reason an angel is needed.

Wouldn't it be great if you could go around to your neighbor's house and says believe in Jesus? Why should I believe you? And then all of a sudden an angel would turn up flaps his wing a couple of times.

- [19 : 09] You go that's great. Take me to church. We don't get right? Why not? Well I don't know. But the point is is that you can understand that when there are great things to believe a greater amount of revelation is needed.

A greater amount of convincing is needed. But I want to propose the point this morning as we see here that God always takes care of your belief.

God always gives you enough to bring you to the belief that he wants you to have. And there's enough here for you to understand that if the promise is going to be kept it's going to be kept through one person not many and it's going to be kept at a certain point not many points in time that this is the point and time which God keeps his promise.

And there's enough here in the word of God for you to come to believe and to trust that. And that means that God has to overcome the limitations that we have in the same way he had to overcome the limitations of Mary and Joseph.

Now the way he overcomes their limitations is by sending an angel and the angel telling Joseph and the angel telling Mary that this is what God is doing.

- [20 : 28] But here's the point that even after you've experienced the angel that even after you've heard all this good news that even after you have been told that God is keeping his promise through you at the end of the day it's still down to you to believe it.

I said on Wednesday night that faith is supremely important and it says in scripture that without faith it is impossible to please God. It doesn't say without understanding it's impossible to please God.

It doesn't say without a PhD it's impossible to please God. It says without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is supremely important. And what God is doing is he is readjusting your mind and your heart and your sight through what you read and what you hear on him in order that you believe.

God takes care of our limitations. I'll give you a couple of illustrations. A summer's day. Aren't the stars beautiful? Well, I can't see the stars on a summer's day.

I can see them on a summer's night. And we use that phrase don't we that the sun rises and the sun sets and the stars come out at night. Now you know and I know that that's just not true.

[21 : 48] It's a turn of phrase but the sun is always there and the stars are always there and the moon doesn't just come out at night the moon is always there. Okay?

But you can appreciate as you sit here this morning that simple illustration that by the use by the very creation of evening and morning by the very creation of day and night God is able to overcome your limitations.

The reason you're able to see the stars is because it becomes night time. You can't see them during the day because your natural human eye cannot overcome the brightness of the sun to be able to see beyond the sun to the stars.

Even though you know that they're there you can't see that they're there. It takes night time to see the stars and it takes day time to see the sun. Because of our limitations we can only see them at those times.

And so God in his glory in his creation creates both morning and evening creates both day and night and overcomes our limitations. Now we're able to see the stars.

[22 : 53] Now we're able to see the sun. But we're only able to see them when the conditions are right. We're only able to see them when other allowances have been made to deal with their limitations.

And once those allowances have been made once everything becomes reset and align so that we can see them suddenly they're not hard to believe that they're there. And in the same way this is exactly what God has to do with Mary and Joseph.

Natural human understanding wouldn't have got them there. They needed in order to see the star for it to be night time. They needed in order to see the sun for it to be night time.

The only thing is it's not the sun and the moon and the stars that they're looking at it's God the sun coming. And what they needed to be brought to that what they needed to understand that was fairly simple.

That they needed a special revelation. Angels are a special revelation. It is God proclaiming a supernatural event in supernatural ways because the natural medium just won't get there.

[23 : 59] And this is what we are to come to believe. God takes care of our limitations. He takes care of yours and that's why you have faith in Him.

You know and I know that you can live your Christian life and sometimes faith looks pretty implausible. Faith looks like how am I going to get through this?

What am I, right? But you know that it's better to trust in God who can do all things and the only reason you know that is because you have the faith to know it.

God takes care of your limitations and He takes care of it by giving Himself to you to have the faith you need to live the life that He has called you to live. It doesn't make sense any other way than you cannot do this without God and the only reason you can do it is because God has given Himself to you.

So God takes care of our limitations and He takes care of Joseph's and Mary's limitations by overcoming them in the way that He chooses to do so. The Word of God in us produces faith.

[25 : 05] Okay? The Word of God produces faith. You say, well, I struggle to believe. I've read all these books and, okay, have you read Matthew? Have you read Mark?

Have you read Luke? Have you read John? Have you read the very thing that can produce faith? Oh no, I've just, I've skimmed over it. Well, take a better look.

The next thing then is to realize that God really has come to be with you, Emmanuel. You'll notice that Jesus is given two names or Emmanuel is given two names.

Okay? Mary will conceive a son and bear a son and you shall call His name Emmanuel which means God is with you. It also calls Him that you shall call His name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.

I want you to put the two names together and come up with a sentence and the sentence would be this, that God is with us to save us from our sins. Emmanuel Jesus, to put it together, Emmanuel Jesus, to put it together in a sentence would mean this, that God is with us to save us from our sins.

[26 : 19] Christmas is about you being made perfect for God. Christmas is about the extent that God goes to to make you holy.

Christmas is the extent that God goes to to make you perfect and blameless and to make you His forevermore. God doesn't want anything else.

He wants you. Just think about that for a moment. The one thing that God wants is you. That God wants to come into relationship with you.

He's not interested in a long distance relationship. He wants proximity to be very close. He wants the relationship to be real. He wants it to be tight.

He doesn't want it to be distance. Let me try and think about it in a slightly different way. God decides to join us.

[27 : 16] God decides to position us with us. You think, how, why? Well, the only way you can know the Creator is if the Creator comes and introduces Himself to you.

Okay, the only way you can get to know the Creator is if the Creator Himself comes to you Himself and introduces Himself to you. If He, for want of a better way of putting it, writes Himself into the storyline of history.

Let me give you an illustration. One of my favorite stories is Oliver Twist. I like several different stories, but Oliver Twist is a great story.

But I want you to ask yourself this question. How could Oliver Twist ever know Charles Dickens? Charles Dickens, by the way, wrote Oliver Twist. How could Oliver Twist ever know Charles Dickens?

You say, well, Oliver Twist is a fictional character, he can't know anybody. Well, all right, let's just pretend for a moment that the limitations of the illustration. But how could Oliver Twist ever know Charles Dickens?

[28 : 25] Well, there's one way, isn't there? And that is if Charles Dickens wrote himself into the story of Oliver Twist and says, this is what I'm like. This is who I am.

This is what I can do. Then the character gets to know the writer. Well, he's fictional. Just suspend your literalness for a moment.

The fictional character can come to know the writer only if the writer writes himself into the story. And in exactly the same way, the creature, us, gets to know the creator because the creator writes himself into the story.

That's Christmas. The way we know God, the reason we know that God is with us, is because he's written himself into the story. Here I am.

This is what I am like. This is why you should believe in me. This is what I have come to do. The only reason we can know the creator, the only reason we can know God truly, is because he's written himself into the story through the person of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 38] That is the only way the creature can get to know the creator. That is the only way us, the characters in God's story, though we're not fictional but real, can get to know the writer of all history, God himself.

That's just another way that God overcomes our limitations. It's not just about overcoming our limitations, but it is about coming into contact with the person who created us.

In the same way Oliver Twist is a creation of Charles Dickens, though not real, you can see the parallel. We are a creation of God, yet real. that God enters into in order for us to come into relationship with him.

So finally, as we sort of wrap this up, I want you to understand that here we see the promises kept. The background to all of this is that God makes a promise and God keeps a promise.

promise. And the first promise of Jesus Christ is all the way back in Genesis. Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. You think, well, wow, how did you make a promise so far back?

[30 : 49] Right back then, this is what it says, that there will come one who will be born of the seed of a woman. And again, that doesn't make any sense. Okay?

Because no child can be born of the seed of a woman. Okay? It involves two. God, when God said go forth and multiply, God didn't just say it to the woman. He didn't just say it to the man.

He said it to them both because God even understands that it takes both. But the moment sin entered into the world, God had to make a promise. And God had to keep the promise and he does so through the coming of Jesus.

That Jesus would be born of a virgin. You shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. You were brought into relationship with God because of Jesus.

The only reason you know about God is because of the promise God made to send Jesus and keeping that promise of sending Jesus. So here's the exhortation.

[31 : 54] The promises of God tell us what God would do and the coming of Jesus is God keeping that promise. Mary and Joseph are to understand that God is using them to keep his promises.

And where extraordinary circumstances are there, extraordinary measures are required and God takes care of both. But the Christian story would not be complete.

The Christian truth would not be complete without reminding you as you sit here this morning that Jesus is in you. Jesus hasn't just come to you but Jesus has taken up residence in you.

And you may find that as difficult to believe as Mary did as she carried the Lord Jesus Christ in her womb. You may find that incredibly difficult to believe that in the same way Mary carried Jesus that you have Jesus in your life at this very moment here.

but you know that if you trust the word and not your feelings that if you trust God and what he says and not how you feel day by day you know that it's a truth that cannot be challenged.

[33 : 06] You know it to be true despite what you feel. You know it to be true because God has proven himself time and time again that he keeps his promises and if he keeps his promises then why isn't that promise true for me?

So despite how you feel this morning you need to know that God is in you. God is in you. Christ is in your very being and that's why you have life in him.

As we close think about it this way. I've used this illustration before but I think it's valid enough to use again. As a child I used to look through the fence over to what the neighbours kids were doing on the other side of the road wondering why I couldn't go out and play with them.

My mum didn't want me to play out on the road so I understood. But I had to look through the fence and that means that if someone was behind a fence post I had to readjust. We've all done that right?

I can't see through and so you're trying to do this to get the angle through. Or perhaps someone drives past your living room window or wherever it is or you're in an office suite and someone walks by and you've got blinds there and the blinds obscure your view.

[34 : 16] There's two things that you can do. Either you can remove the blinds or readjust where you're standing. Okay? God here is enabling us to move our feet.

Okay? God is enabling us to move our feet to be able to see through the natural limitations that are in front of us to see the promises of God. And the promise is this, that despite how hard it is to believe, if you readjust ever so slightly, you will see that God keeps his promises.

And if he's kept this promise, he's kept all of them. And because of that, you can come to Jesus. And so come. Amen. Amen.