

Isaiah 7: 14 & Matthew 1: 18 - 25; “Immanuel, A Sign to be believed”
(Part 2), A Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on November 30th, 2014,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

This morning I brought to your attention the name Immanuel, which is, I believe, used as a part of the sign which was given to Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah. I laid before you that the name is a sign of the depths and heights; the depths of stubborn unbelief in Ahaz, and many people alive today as well; but it was also given as a sign of the heights of the faithfulness of God. I then proceeded to apply to you this application; that the name Immanuel is also an encouraging sign of our solemn responsibility to believe in the Son who was born a Savior. The land of Israel was called Immanuel's land in Isaiah chapter 8. And even when many enemies tried to conquer it, God's purpose to bring salvation through the line of David in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ was not thwarted. But I want you to see something further this afternoon; that the name Immanuel is a sign to us in another way yet. It is an amazing sign of the great wisdom and power of God, when Christ was formed in the womb of the virgin Mary. It shows us that God was doing something that could not be done by any man. It shows us that God was at work to bring forth a person who would be sinless; a Person who would combine in Himself all that was necessary to bring fallen men and the Holy God together. This is why we are given the words, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." This is a most amazing sign. Let's take a look at the meaning of this sign from the standpoint of Joseph and apply it, not only to his situation, but to our own conversion and growth in sanctification as well.

1st of all – Let's look at Joseph's skepticism and his faith in relation to this sign.

Joseph and Mary were betrothed. This means that they were engaged. But in that day, being betrothed meant that they were already seen as a legally married couple, even though the marriage was not yet physically consummated by their becoming one flesh. Joseph was a righteous man. He was a man who was going to do the right thing, even when his feelings might be deeply involved with Mary; the person he loved as his wife. This dear man found out that his betrothed was with child. He didn't know that God the Holy Spirit was involved in this. He thought that it was unfaithfulness on Mary's part. We are not told whether Mary had told him of the angel's visit to her and of his words, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" We are not told whether she related to Joseph that fact that the angel had said that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowing her. We are not informed whether she was able to relate the prophetic words of the angel that this Jesus would be great and would be called the Son of the Highest, and that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. We just don't know, but I believe that Mary did tell him. But it was such an amazing thing to Joseph that as he pondered it, it seemed to be too much for him to believe. He was skeptical. How could he understand whether he was doing the right thing?

Our text says that he was minded to put her away secretly. But God, knowing his thoughts, sent to him an angel to tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." God's wisdom is very great. Nothing is too difficult for the Almighty. But many things seem impossible for us. And there is, even in righteous men a tendency to doubt and skepticism when they cannot see what God is doing. God was about to do something new, something that he had not done from the foundation of the world, and something that He would never do again. He was going to join the Essence of the 2nd person of the God-head, His only Begotten Son, who had been with Him from all eternity; with a true and sinless human nature. And He would so unite these two natures that they would exist side by

side and yet the person and personality would be one, in the mind and heart and will of the Divine person being formed in Mary's womb.

I would like you to think of this now in terms of the person whom God intends to save. In God's giving the gift of salvation, the regeneration of the sinful human heart must take place. Christ must be formed in you, and a New Birth must take place for you to see and to enter the kingdom of God. God the Holy Spirit must come and do a work of spiritual conception in your heart. It is not a work that any man can do. Your attempted obedience to God's holy law cannot produce this good work in you. You are married to the law before conversion, legally so as a sinner, but you cannot bear fruit unto God unless you become married to Christ. The law would condemn you as sinners, but God would give you Christ. Turn with me over to Romans 7: 2-4. It says here: "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives." "But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband." "So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."

In the sacrifice and sufferings of Christ, His laying down His life for every sinner who trusts in Him for salvation, all of the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled on your behalf. When you believe in Jesus you "die to the Law through the body of Christ". You become "dead to the law" through Christ's having suffered on the cross for you. Christ satisfied all the righteous requirements of the law on your behalf. When you believe in Him, you are no longer under law but under grace. Since you have been crucified with Christ it is no longer you who lives, but Christ who lives in you. You have been crucified with Him, and therefore you have died this death to the law in your conversion. You can now begin to see yourself as married to another; even to Christ. This death to the law, which Christ purchased by His perfect obedience and His substitutionary sufferings, takes you out from under the jurisdiction of the law, and places you under the jurisdiction of Christ. You become in-lawed to Him as it says in 1st Corinthians 9: 19-21 – "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law."

You see, when you are justified, dear believer, you are set free from the law's condemning power, but you should understand that this does not mean that you are without law toward God. You are under law toward Christ. You are rightly related to Him, so that all the righteous requirements of the law have been met; they have been satisfied in Christ. And now by grace you will learn a better way to keep God's commandments than from the self-principle; the "I can do" principle. In order to glorify God now as a Christian, you must learn to keep God's commandments from this greater principle; the principle of dependence upon Christ's grace. That is, that in all of your going about to obey God's law, you will remember that you are "in Christ" now. You are no longer doing what you do in your own strength and wisdom and self-determination. You are obedient, to whatever extent you are obedient, by the grace of Christ. "Without Me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing."

To make progress in living the Christian life to the glory of God, you must not only be aware that you have been forgiven of all of your sins. You must not only understand that you have been declared righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness, having believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must also come to know and to realize that the seed of Christ's imparted righteousness has been formed in you in the New Birth; and that He will be formed more and

more in you in your pursuit of righteousness and holiness, according to the working of His mighty power. It is resurrection life of our Lord Jesus that is the basis for all of your progress in living the Christian life. Christ's death purchased life, but it is His life given in the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives spiritual life to you day by day as you live your life to God. God comes to you first, in salvation. His Holy Spirit comes to your heart; and He, according to the sovereign will and purpose of God, gives spiritual conception. He plants the seed of righteousness in your heart. This is what Mary had when the Holy Spirit gave her conception, in the placing of the Lord Jesus in her womb. She knew from the word of God to her through the angel, that she was a "highly favored" person. But as she thought about the reality of her own sinful heart, she was troubled. She needed the assurance of the Lord that all was well. You too, dear believer, are seen by Him as one of His highly favored ones, and yet you yourself and others around you may be troubled when you begin to tell them of what the Lord by His Holy Spirit has done for you. They may be skeptical of the Lord's work. You yourself may not understand it, and you may be troubled. But there is no need to be troubled or afraid. God is at work. His righteousness will be satisfied. His law will be fulfilled. But it will not be fulfilled by human strength, human nature, or human expectations. It will be God's work. Salvation is God's work. The law is all fulfilled in Christ. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in you through Christ, and all is well. Michael W. Smith's hymn says it all - "All is well all is well

Angels and men rejoice." "For tonight darkness fell, into the dawn of love's light." "Sing Alleluia." "All is well, all is well, let there be peace on earth." "Christ is come, go and tell, that He is in the manger." "Sing Alleluia." "All is well, all is well, lift up your voice and sing." Born is now, Emmanuel, born is our Lord and Savior." "Sing Alleluia, Sing Alleluia, All is well." Another older hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem, tells of the greatness and glory of the work of God's grace. It says - "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given; when God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of his heaven." "No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in." (Trinity Hymnal - # 152)

This leads us 2ndly to look at what Joseph did when God made it plain to him that Mary's conception was of His Spirit.

It says that the Lord gave Joseph this revelation concerning what He was doing in Mary's womb, while Joseph was asleep. It came to him in a dream. It says that, "He did as the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, but he did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son." Now we know that Joseph was a good man. He was a righteous man, and he well represents the Law in relation to our being converted to Christ. He stood back from the work that was going on in Mary's womb. He was not going to take to himself Mary in any sexual way, because if he did, it might be claimed that he was the father of this Savior of the World. I hope that you understand that it is an essential part of our faith that we have a sinless Savior. And in order for us to have a sinless Savior, there absolutely had to be a conception in the womb of Mary that was brought about by God, while she was still a virgin. The Savior of the World, the Son of God could not come into being by the seed of man which would transmit to His nature the fallen likeness of our first forefather Adam. It must be a perfectly holy seed penetrating Mary's ovum by the work and power of the Holy Spirit; a holy seed that would not only create a person who would be both God and man, but a conception which would show Joseph and all the World that salvation comes not from man, or the law, or man's works. God must save, and God alone. So Joseph took her to wife, but he did not know her, he did not have sexual relations with her, until she had brought forth her first born Son, the Divine Son.

And this shows us the relation of the law to the work of grace in our hearts, in both conversion and sanctification. When you come to realize that we are a sinner, you should also realize that the law cannot save you. It can condemn you, and think of putting you away, but it has no ability to save you. We love the law. It is holy and righteous and good. It shows us the

righteousness of God and the perfection that he requires of any person before they can be accepted and pleasing to Him. But the law must stand back and wait before it can have any relationship with us that will bear fruit. No person can be saved by the works of the Law. God himself by the Holy Spirit must come and do a work in you based upon what Christ has purchased by His death. All that is done for any sinner to be saved, was done by the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the World. Christ's virgin birth was an essential part of His Incarnation. Christ died so that all the work of redemption from first to last would be justified and accomplished. But the work of redemption could only be accomplished by His having been sinless. In being both sinless and perfectly righteous, He would, as it says in Isaiah 42: 21, "magnify the law and make it honorable." The law and all of mankind, and especially righteous Joseph, must stand by and watch on. True believers look on with love and admiration. The 2nd person of the divine Trinity voluntarily condescends to be joined together with a helpless human nature and to be born as a babe in Bethlehem. And so a sinless Savior is born to live so perfect a life that the Law would rejoice at His perfect love, perfect words, and perfect actions in regard to both God and man. And then the justice of God in relation to His holy law would be satisfied fully; not only by obedience, but by sacrifice and punishment in which the holy Jesus would give Himself on our behalf to bare the wrath which we so richly deserve.

The Law, if we could personify him here for a minute, saw something in Jesus which went far beyond even what it required. It was this; that a Divine Person, whose value exceeded the value of all of the people who have ever lived, would Himself become a man, and take the place of sinners. He alone would live perfectly to the glory of God. He alone would suffer such anguish on the cross that the atonement rendered would satisfy for a world of lost sinners. It is truly mind-boggling. Are you one of those sinners? Then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. For "it is not by works of righteousness which you have done, but according to His mercy He saves you, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He has poured out abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that you should become an heir according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3: 5-7) This can be you today; this can be you this moment, if you look to Jesus.