

Christmas; Oh I mean Easter

The Baby came to die

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Bible Text: Matthew 1:21

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Our Scripture reading for today is from Matthew chapter one beginning with verse 18.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.¹

I don't know about you, but I like the Christmas season. I find it to be a time of fun, a time of joy. I even, to some extent, like the flashing lights and the beauty that people will put outside their homes. I enjoy seeing a Christmas tree. There is something very exciting about the season. I enjoy giving gifts. And, to tell you the truth, I enjoy receiving them, too. There is something special about Christmas.

But when we think of Christmas it is important for us to realize that the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ would have little significance it were not for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important for us, I mean, when we consider Christmas, to think of Easter also because Jesus came with a purpose to redeem a people for his name.

¹¹ Matthew 1:18-25.

In Matthew chapter one in verse 21, the passage which we just read, we read these words.

“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”²

In this passage I really see three important things for us to understand. First of all, the Lord Jesus Christ in his birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. We need to look at that. He had names given to him and his names were significant. They spoke of his person and of his character. And then in the narratives about his birth we learn about the real purpose for his coming.

First of all, his birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. I could go back into the Old Testament and read innumerable prophecies that were fulfilled at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

I think of three of them that are really significant. First of all, in Isaiah chapter seven, the passage that we just had quoted to us in the book of Matthew, we read, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”³

I have lived many years on this earth, quite a long time and yet I have never met a virgin who had a baby. It doesn't work that way. It just doesn't happen.

So when God enabled Mary to have a child and had that child come by way of the Spirit of God, we know that this was a very special miracle. It was, as it says here, a sign.

You will remember back in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter seven, that king Ahaz was challenged by God. He had the prophet Isaiah go to him and challenge him to trust in the Lord and to ask for a sign to demonstrate the fact that this was truly the work of God that was going to be done.

He refused to ask for a sign and so God gave a sign himself, but not to Ahaz. He gave a sign that would be given to the house of David many generations after the death of Ahaz. And so when the Lord Jesus Christ was born, he was that wonderful fulfillment of birth of a child being born of a virgin.

That is the first prophecy we read of. Secondly, in Isaiah chapter nine and verse six we read this.

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”⁴

² Matthew 1:21.

³ Isaiah 7:14.

⁴ Isaiah 9:6.

In this wonderful passage in God's Word where the Lord is actually speaking about the land of Galilee, the fact that that area is what we might call a very dark place, a place where there was little learning, it was about as far away from Jerusalem as you could get and still be in the holy land and it was a place where there was very little learning from the Word of God.

And he said that he was going to bring a great light upon this dark land. And when the Lord Jesus Christ came, he was that great light.

Now what do we learn about Jesus from this passage? Well, first of all, we learn something about his very nature. It tells us here that a child is born and a son is given. The child being born, obviously, is the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born, just the same way that every one of us was born. He was born by a natural childbirth and so he was a human being.

But then it says to us a Son is given. And you notice it does not say that the Son was born. Here it is talking about the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a child he was born, but as a Son he was given that we might have in him the very nature of God and the very nature of man.

We are told in this passage the government will be upon his shoulder. I wonder what that could mean. If you think of it very carefully you realize that governing power means rule and the Lord Jesus Christ, in fact, is the ruler today. He rules over the hearts of those who have trusted in him and he has power over all that takes place in this universe.

And then we hear of the wonderful name that was given to him that we will look at in just a few minutes.

In the book of Micah in chapter five there is a prediction of the place where Jesus was going to be born. It says, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days."⁵

Interesting. The prediction is that He will be born in Bethlehem, but not just be born in Bethlehem. There was more than one Bethlehem. By the way, Bethlehem means the house of bread. I like to think about that that there is some significance to it. Bread is that which sustains us, isn't it? That which we eat sustains the body. And when the Lord Jesus Christ came in the house of bread, he was there to sustain the soul, to give us the blessing of eternal life and to lead us to serve and honor him.

So there is more than one Bethlehem. So God is very specific. It would be Bethlehem Ephrathah, Bethlehem in the land of Judea. And in this little, tiny town Jesus was born.

I have had the opportunity to visit Bethlehem and it is one of those places where, I don't know how else to put it, if you are driving in an automobile and you blink twice, you will

⁵ Micah 5:2.

be through it. I mean, it is a little, tiny town, insignificant. And that is the whole point, that the Lord Jesus did not come as we would expect him to come.

How would you expect a king to come? To be born in a place, living among royalty of his day, be one who would be honored and lifted up.

Jesus was born in a stable in one of the smallest, most insignificant towns in the land of Palestine. He came to be a Savior to man. He came to love and to lift up those who were his.

Something else in this passage is very interesting.

It says he is to be ruler in Israel whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days.

Now this can be translated a couple of different ways. It can possibly mean eternity, but it doesn't necessarily mean that. All it actually means is from a time way before.

But think about that for a moment. Here was one who was born a little baby and yet it says his goings forth, his activities were from ancient days. In other words, he preexisted his coming to earth as a child. He was, in fact, the eternal God and the one who came to give to us the blessing of everlasting life.

And so Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. She will bear a Son and you will call his name Jesus.

Secondly, his names speak of his person and character. Names are not all that significant to us today. Every one of you has a name and if you go back in history you can find out what your name means. But if you look at the meaning of your name you are going to say, "That is not me. That is not what I am like, but that is my name."

Names in the Bible were very significant. You take a man like Abraham. His name means the Father of many nations. And so he was the father of many nations.

You know, we were looking not too long ago on Wednesday night at a passage in Isaiah and it spoke of one of the name of one of Isaiah's sons. He had two sons. Shear-jashub was one of his sons and Maher-shalal-hashbaz was the other son. And we were looking at Shear-jashub which means a remnant will return. The child was a prophecy. The child's name indicated something that would happen in the life of the people of Israel. Names are significant in the Word of God.

And so we have three names that we can look at for the Lord Jesus Christ that are significant for us and are found within the passages that we have been studying.

First of all his name will be called Immanuel. Now, Immanuel literally means God with us or God is with us. It could be translated either way. The point is that that name tells us

that the Lord Jesus Christ was, in fact, very God of very God. The Lord Jesus Christ was God himself. He is God with us.

When that baby was born the people who were there were in the presence of a little baby, but also in the presence of the eternal God.

And so he came to earth with a purpose. He came to earth and God was among us.

The next name that we find is the one that we read in Isaiah chapter nine. He is called, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”⁶

If you were to read this verse in the translation put out by the Jewish Publication Society you would find that it is not translated this way at all. In fact, it is not even translated. It is transliterated. You take a look at that passage and it will read, “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given. The government will be on his shoulder and his name will be called Pele-yoetz-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom.”

All they have done is taken the Hebrew words and made them into a name. Their idea is this is a name. And so we keep it in the original language.

I don’t think that is its significance at all. It tells us about the person and the work of this individual. What does it tell us, first of all?

It speaks of him as the wonderful counselor. The word translated wonderful, (peh’ - leh) is a word that in all the Scriptures is only used speaking of God or the works of God. And so we could not translate it this way, but interpret it as meaning that he is the divine counselor. He is the one who is God who counsels us and provides us with what we need to live our lives for him. He is a wonderful counselor.

He is the mighty God. That is certainly clear enough, isn’t it? It says he is the everlasting father. Just as we read, he was from ancient days, from eternity, he is the everlasting father. And then he is the prince of peace. And do you know? If the Lord Jesus has come into your heart he has brought peace to you.

If you know him, there is a sense of peace that will exist in your heart regardless of the circumstances around you. For he is the prince of peace.

The third name that we find is the very name Jesus.

“You will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”⁷

The word Jesus in the original Hebrew is the equivalent of a name that means salvation or Jehovah saves. Words, names are significant in the Word of God.

⁶ Isaiah 9:6.

⁷ Matthew 1:21.

Jesus is called salvation. Jesus is called Jehovah saves. Why? Because he came as a Savior. That was the purpose of his coming.

So we see that his birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. His names tell of his person and his character and then thirdly in the narratives about his birth, we learn about the purpose of his coming. Why did Jesus Christ come? This is one thing that has always concerned me, that so many people when they think of Christmas think only of a little baby who was born in a stable. They think only of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know, if the birth of Christ were the end of the story there would be no salvation for any one of us. But because he came with a purpose, we who have trusted in him can be saved. The purpose is simply stated in the verse that we read.

“He will save his people from their sins.”⁸

Jesus paid an incredible price to buy our salvation. It wasn't only that he came as a little baby and we should give each other gifts because this was a great event, but he came with the purpose of saving a people.

In 1 Peter chapter one we read:

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.⁹

In 1 Peter chapter two we read, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”¹⁰

What is this telling us? It is telling us that Jesus Christ after coming to earth and living for approximately 33 years, went to the cross of Calvary to buy our salvation. He shed that precious blood that we might have and be assured that we have everlasting life. That is what he came for. That was his purpose. The little baby was there, but some day he was going to die that men and women might live.

The purpose was that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. The purpose was not just to give to us a salvation, but that that salvation would mean a change in our lives. And everyone of us who truly knows the Lord knows what that change means, that before we came to Christ we lived for ourselves. But the moment that Christ came into our lives and into our heart, well, we didn't become perfect, but we gained the desire to serve him and to live a righteous life. He came to die for us and that was in order to make us a people for his name.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1 Peter 1:18-19.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:24.

We are called some wonderful things in the Word of God. In 1 Peter chapter two we read these words.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.¹¹

What a marvelous position God has placed us in as the saved of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says we are a chosen race. The word "chosen" is an interesting word. It speaks of God's action in eternity past where it says he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. We were known to him as his people way before the earth was created.

That amazes me. I think of this. You know, each one of us, of course, is very special, but when I think of myself, what do I have in me to make me worthy? And the answer is: Absolutely nothing.

But before he created the world He knew me and He loved me. That is incredible, isn't it? Think of that for yourself, that if you are a child of God, he knew you in eternity past. He loved you. What a marvelous blessing.

We are a chosen race. We are a royal priesthood.

You know, back in the Old Testament you will remember that there were priests who offered sacrifices to God and the people of Israel would go through the priest to reach to God. That is not necessary today.

We don't need priests. For every one of us is a priest before God. Every one of us is included in this royal priesthood.

If we know the Lord Jesus we have the privilege of going to him any time, 24 hour a day, seven days a week. He hears us. He understands us. He loves us and he answers us. We are a holy nation and we are a people for his own possession.

So we see that he died with a purpose. The purpose was to redeem us, but also to make us to be a people for His name. And one of the greatest blessings is that God tells us that if He died that we might be saved and if He, in fact, has saved us and made us a people for His name, He will also keep us that we can have the security of knowing that the Christ who died for us keeps us close to Himself that we can never be lost, that we are secure in Christ.

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Paul in Philippians said, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”¹²

In other words, is it God who began the work of salvation in you? Yes, it is. He is the one who gave you faith. He is the one who enabled you to trust. He is the one who took you out of that miry clay and lifted you up to life eternal. If he began a work in you, he will finish it.

I have to be honest. I haven’t always finished everything I started. God finishes everything he starts. You, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, are secure for eternity.

The Lord Jesus in very much the same way said this and we read it in the book of John.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.¹³

What is he saying to us here?

He is saying that if we are the people of God, the sheep of God, we will hear and we will understand the message of God’s Word. It says you will hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

We will follow him. We will trust in him and he says he will give us eternal life.

Now how secure does that sound to you? Eternal sounds pretty secure to me. The fact is that it lasts forever. But he doesn’t stop there with just that one Word. He in a few different ways says the same thing. He says, “I give them eternal life.” And then he says, “They will never perish.” And then he says, “No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

In other words, they are secure. They have the blessing of eternal life.

What a wonderful God we have and what a blessing he gives to us that we might be called the children of God.

For us to really understand the depth of this we need to understand what we came from and where he brought us.

In Ephesians chapter two says you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Dead means without any life at all. We had no ability to do anything to earn the salvation with God.

But he goes on to say this:

¹² Philippians 1:6.

¹³ John 10:27.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.¹⁴

He made us who were dead to be alive spiritually with Christ.

What is the result of that? The result is basically what we read before, that we who could do nothing to honor him are now given the privilege of serving him and honoring him.

Listen to what it says.

All of us, I am sure, have read Ephesians chapter two verses eight and nine. Somehow we tend to miss verse 10. We read this.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [And then he says] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.¹⁵

What was the purpose of God in having the Lord Jesus come as the little baby born in the town of Bethlehem? That he might grow up living a perfect life, that he might die that horrible death on the cross of Calvary and in so doing buy for us a salvation. And part of his plan was not just to save us, but to change us so that as it says we are his workmanship. He is working on us. He is not finished with me yet. I know that.

“Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that should walk in them.”¹⁶

He made a change in our lives that we can now live for him with the fervor and zeal that we once lived for the world. What a blessing Christmas is in the light of Easter.

He came, he loved, he died and he gave to us the blessings of everlasting life.

I ask you two questions. First of all, do you know him as your Savior? Well, if you do, praise God. If you have never come to know him, I challenge you to turn from sin and to turn to him in faith believing that you might have everlasting life.

You are a child of God? Wonderful. What are you? And I point to myself as well. What am I doing to serve the Lord? What do we do from day to day to bring out the message of God’s wonderful salvation that men and women, boys and girls, can hear it, believe it and know him as Savior and Lord.

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:4-5.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-10.

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:10.

We are his witnesses, saved that we might tell others. Let us get about the work that God has told us to do.

Our Father, we thank you for your wonderful love for us, the great joy that we have being the children of God, children who love you and want to share your love with those around us. Help us, Father, to be faithful to that calling and share the message of salvation with the people that we know in our world today that many might hear and believe and the Word of God might spread throughout the world. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.