

Joy To The World

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

To Make His Blessings Flow

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Matthew 1:18-25

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone – and Merry Christmas! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 1:18-25 – that’s on page 807 in the pew Bibles. We’ve been taking our cues this Christmas season from the four verses of that old Christmas Carol, Joy To The World. This morning we are being guided by verse 3 which says:

“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found”

Which raises the question: how far had the curse of sin spread and what did Jesus do to fix it? That’s what we’re going to be talking about today - because understanding that takes us to the heart of the heart of the HEART of the true meaning of Christmas. Hopefully you have your Bibles open now to Matthew 1:18-25. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18–25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now, just before you close your Bible, I want you to take a second and look at it. The story we just read is on the FIRST PAGE of the New Testament – but as I said a moment ago, it’s actually on page 807 in your pew bible, which means of course, that it is not THE BEGINNING of the story. It’s 807 pages INTO the story, so if we really want to understand why page 807 in your Bible is such a big deal – then we have to go back and remember some of the things that happened before.

You see, Jesus came into the world as the solution to a problem that had become VERY obvious to everyone; and the problem was that it is HARD for a holy God to bless a sinful people.

Moms and dads, you understand that. Would you want to put MORE money into the bank account of your college or university student who was away from home and who was spiralling out of control and wrestling with a growing addiction to drugs?

Of course not!

You would be understandably nervous about that. You would be concerned lest your gift end up bringing harm to your beloved child - and so you would insist that they go to rehab first and get healthy BEFORE you turn the taps back on to fill up their account.

That is exactly where we are at the end of the Old Testament story. The disease and corruption of sin has been spreading – so much so that it has effectively SHUT OFF and BLOCKED the

blessing of God. That's why the climax of the Christmas story in Matthew's Gospel is phrased the way it is in verse 21. Matthew says, speaking of Mary:

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**” (Matthew 1:21 ESV)

By the end of the Old Testament story, people had figured out what the problem was. The problem was sin. It was everywhere and it had changed everything about them. That's why the announcement of Jesus' birth and mission was so exciting – because Jesus was going to fix what was wrong with them. That's what verse 3 in Joy to the World is talking about.

“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.”

So in the few minutes we have this morning I just want to ask 2 questions:

How far was the curse of sin found?

And what did Jesus do to fix it?

How far was it found?

In terms of mapping out the spread and creep of sin in the Old Testament era, I think it might be helpful to start with the story of King Solomon because his story, perhaps better than any other, shows us what happens when sin infects our desires.

1. It was found in their desires

It all starts there, doesn't it? In the Bible, the decline of Israel as a nation is traced back to a turn in the heart of King Solomon. That story is told in 1 Kings 11:1-4:

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.³ He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. (1 Kings 11:1–4 ESV)

That really is the TSN Turning Point in the story of Israel. Things were on the upswing in the time of King David and they were on the upswing in the early days of Solomon – but then right here – in Solomon’s heart, you can identify the turn. It happened when he began to LOVE in the wrong direction.

We don’t often question the goodness of love in our culture, do we? We just say: “love is love” and “love is all you need”.

Hmm.

But according to the Bible the wrong LOVE can lead you astray. The Bible says:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

Sin can cause our hearts to lean in the wrong direction – and if we give in to that, it can set us on a bad trajectory. That’s what had happened to Israel and it would have been reckless for God to continue to bless them while they were going down that path.

If the story of Solomon illustrates how sin had corrupted the DESIRES of God’s people then the story of Asa illustrates how sin had affected their emotions.

2. It was found in their emotions

Just like wrong desire can lead us away from God so too can outsized emotion, as it did in the life of King Asa. He started off as one of the most promising leaders in the history of nation. The Bible says about him:

And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. (2 Chronicles 14:2 ESV)

Asa started off so well! He was brave and he followed through on his convictions - he even FIRED his mother when she engaged in idolatry. In 2 Chronicles 15:16 it says:

Even Maacah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made a detestable image for Asherah. (2 Chronicles 15:16 ESV)

Wow! Can you imagine firing your mom because she engaged in false worship? That's impressive. I hope that I would have the courage to do that – not that that would ever be necessary mom – I'm just saying, that's impressive. Asa was on track to become the greatest king in the history of Israel – but then something funny happened. He made a bad decision and God rebuked him for it. He sent a prophet to tell him what he had done wrong and Asa didn't like that. The Bible says:

Then Asa was **angry** with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a **rage** with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time. (2 Chronicles 16:10 ESV)

Asa had a bit of a temper tantrum. He was angry at God – his pride was wounded, and he took that anger out on his people. Asa's anger led him into a really dark place and he never recovered. When he was old, he got sick, and the Bible says:

Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. (2 Chronicles 16:12 ESV)

Asa died nursing his wounded pride – how sad!

But also, how common. Sin makes us emotionally unstable! When we're doing well – we are tempted to pride. When we run into some trouble – or receive a rebuke, we can spiral into depression. And that makes us dangerous, to ourselves and to others.

Once desire and emotion are tainted by sin, then inevitably that corruption will show up in action and behaviour – and no story illustrates that progression better than the story of King Manasseh – one of the very LAST kings of Judah in the Old Testament era.

3. It was found in their actions

In 2 Chronicles 33:6 the Bible says:

And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. (2 Chronicles 33:6 ESV)

By the time of King Manasseh the people of God are actually behaving WORSE than the unbelieving people around them. 2 Chronicles 33:9 says:

Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. (2 Chronicles 33:9 ESV)

That's pretty bad. And that's where things had come to by the end of the Old Testament story.

The people of God were corrupted – root and branch.

They had been deceived, diminished and destroyed by the spreading curse of sin – and it would have been wrong, unwise and unkind for God to have continued blessing them in that condition.

That was the problem. So how did Jesus fix it?

How does he fix it?

Well, according to the Bible, he did it, first and foremost by removing the clog.

1. By removing the clog

The Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:13 says that:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

Think of it this way, on the cross Jesus summons to himself all of the sin and contamination of his people. He uses the analogy of “drinking the cup”. If you confess your sins then it is as though Jesus takes them into himself - drinking them from a cup. He becomes a sin sponge – the Bible uses this sort of language. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him **to be sin** who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

So Jesus GATHERS TO HIMSELF all the sin of his people – he ABSORBS the CLOG – he BECOMES the CURSE and he attracts the fire and wrath of Almighty God. Like lightning from heaven JUSTICE LEAPS FORTH and sin is consumed. It drives Jesus down to hell and death – but thanks to God, death could not hold him and the grave could not keep him.

He rose again – leaving our sin forever behind.

That’s what the Bible says – as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us – thanks be to God.

That's how Jesus removes the clog and contamination of sin – but there's more. Not only does he remove the clog, but he cleanses and renews the entire system by releasing the Holy Spirit of God.

2. By releasing the Spirit

According to the Bible, Jesus rose bodily from the dead and then 40 days later he ascended into heaven and on the Day of Pentecost he poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church.

That's the 1-2 punch of redemption and that's what everyone was waiting for by the end of the Old Testament era. The prophets had diagnosed the problem and published the prescription.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 mapped out the entire process. In that passage God says:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

So there it is! God promises to remove the clog and release the Spirit so as to heal our hearts and lead us back to the path of blessing.

That's why the birth of Jesus is such Good News! Because he came to do it all! He came to fix exactly what was wrong with us!

He came to extract and obliterate the curse and stain of sin.

He came to strengthen and renew us by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He came to make us the people we were created and intended to be.

He came to put us – and all creation with us – back on track before the Lord.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow – far as the curse is found.

Joy to the world, brothers and thanks be to God. Let's pray together.