

Immanuel

Matthew 1:18-25
29 June 2003

Introduction:

Last week, we began a new series in the Gospel of Matthew.

- I showed you how Matthew presents the Genesis of Jesus Christ in chapter 1—
 - I showed you how he echoes the language of Genesis 5 where the first man is introduced to introduce Jesus Christ who is the Genesis of God's New Creation.

Matthew, in writing especially to the Jews,

- shows that Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ whom God promised to Israel from their beginning with Abraham.
- He presents Jesus as the fulfilment of promises made at the beginning of each of three distinct periods in their history:
 - The period that began with Abraham when a son is promised that will bring God's blessing to all.
 - The period that began with David when a son is promised that will reign forever and destroy all God's enemies.
 - And the period that began with the Babylonian Captivity in which forgiveness of sin and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit were promised
 - Jesus Christ fulfils all that was promised.
- We saw that in listing Christ's progenitors, Matthew goes out of his way to highlight their sins and disgraces...
 - showing that Jesus did not come because His people were righteous,
 - but because they were sinners...
 - He did not come to escape our disgraces,
 - but to bear them away!

Today we will look at verses 18-25.

- In this section, Matthew continues to write about the Genesis of Jesus Christ,
 - only now He focuses on Him as Immanuel!

I. Yes my brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is presented to you here as none other than Immanuel.

A. In verse 23, you are told clearly that Jesus Christ is that one called Immanuel that was promised of old!

1. Matthew is very clear about this—

- a. He has gone out of his way to identify Jesus Christ by naming all his descendants according to the flesh,
 - and now he points directly at Him, as it were, and says, “This one is none other than Immanuel!”
- b. And he makes sure that there is no uncertainty about the significance of this name Immanuel.
 - It is translated, “God with us.”
 - This is something too momentous to miss—
 - **This** child,
 - the one Matthew has traced from Abraham to David to Joseph that has now appeared in the world is none other than God with us.
- c. This is not something about which you should be uncertain.
 - Jesus Christ is God with us.
 - If you miss this,
 - you miss eternal life,
 - you miss the forgiveness of sins,
 - you miss the new beginning that God has for mankind.
 - You must come to the conclusion that Peter comes to about Him later on in Matthew’s gospel—
 - that this man Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God

2. In v. 23, Matthew reveals Jesus as the fulfilment of the promise made to God’s people in Isaiah 7:14 some eight centuries before.

- a. Notice that in introducing this prophecy,
 - Matthew says that it was spoken by the Lord through the prophet...
 - This ought to teach us something about the Bible—
 - It is not merely the words of men,
 - It is God Himself speaking to us through men.
 - Whatever you read in this book is the very Word of God,
 - to be received with all the reverence and faith and gladness as being spoken by Him.

- b. And in this book, God said that a virgin would conceive and bear a son—while still a virgin! and that He would be called Immanuel!
 - In this remarkable prophecy, two things are brought out about Jesus...
 - 1) That He would be born of a woman, and so would be true human flesh.
 - 2) That He would be God—God with us.
 - It is promised here that these two remarkable things would be true of the One person!
 - That One person would be both God and man!
 - In this prophecy of Isaiah these two seemingly incompatible natures—
 - the human nature and the divine nature—
 - are brought together in the Virgin’s offspring!
- B. Matthew has picked one of the clearest passages of all to demonstrate this marvellous truth—
- but if we look we will find that many other scriptures also point to the fact that the Messiah will be both God and man.
1. In Genesis 3:16, the promise is given that the woman’s seed will crush the serpent’s head...
 - Yet, the Bible tells us that even angels do not have the authority to rebuke Satan—
 - who then is this seed of woman that will crush his head?
 - Surely it can be no other than the Lord God Himself—
 - yet, He is to be the seed of the woman.
 - One person who is both God and man!
 2. To Abraham, a seed is promised in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed...
 - But it is God alone who is able to bless and curse!
 - Men may pronounce God’s blessings and curses when He calls them to, but it is He alone who ultimately blesses and curses.
 - Therefore, the seed of Abraham that was to bless the families of the earth must be God...
 - Once again, we have one person who is both God and man—
 - God in human flesh—Immanuel!
 3. Then there is the promise to David—that he will have a son...

- And that this son:
 - “shall build a house for My name and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever.”
 - Only the eternal One is suited to have an eternal reign—
- David therefore calls this son, “My Lord,” in Ps. 110.
 - If He is David’s son, how is it that David calls Him Lord?
 - It is because this son is none other than David’s God!
- The prophet Isaiah confirms that the son God will give to rule on David’s throne forever is God:
 - Of Him he says, “He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...”
 - Likewise, Micah says that the One who shall be ruler in Israel is the One:
 - “Whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting.”

TRANS> Time keeps me from saying more—

- But I trust that you can see that the Bible is clear!

C. The Messiah that God promised to His people was to be both God and man—

- He was to be Immanuel in the fullest sense by actually coming in human flesh!

1. In Colossians,

- Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the One by whom all things were created in heaven and earth who is before all things and by whom all things consist,
- Then he adds,
 - “it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.”
 - In Him is the fullness of divinity!

2. In Timothy Paul says that He is “God manifest in the flesh.”

3. And John in the opening of His gospel says:

- John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

TRANS> Now you can see the brilliant way that Matthew chooses Isaiah 7:14 to show that Jesus Christ is God with us!

- This is the text that he expounds as it explains how all this came about in the person of Jesus Christ.

II. And here in our text—v. 18-25—Matthew shows you how it was that Immanuel was brought into the world.

A. Jesus could not be born in the normal way for two reasons:

1. First, because He was a pre-existing person.

a. When a person is born in the normal way,

- a new person is brought into being who did not exist before.

1) The Bible does not teach the pre-existence of the soul—

- like Mormonism that teaches that there are spirit children born to the gods who are waiting for women to conceive bodies so they can come and inhabit them...
- They teach that every birth is an incarnation of a spirit child.
- Hinduism also teaches the pre-existence of the soul, but for them it is re-incarnation—
 - In this doctrine, the soul leaves one body at death only to pass to another body.

2) Although there is some question about just how it happens, the Bible clearly teaches that when a man and a woman conceive a child,

- a whole new person is brought into existence.
- It is really quite a marvellous thing!
 - Some teach that God creates the soul at that time—
 - They are called creationists, but there are two problems with this teaching—
 - It suggests that God did not finish His creation in the beginning and that he did not truly give man the ability to reproduce anything but the physical body...
 - It requires that God either create a sinful soul or a righteous soul that is nevertheless immediately cursed, both which seem unacceptable.
 - Others teach that the soul is somehow formed by the union of the man and woman—
 - They are called traducianists.
 - The main objection to this doctrine is that the soul is not a material substance and cannot be divided, so how can it be passed on from parent to child?
 - The answer is that God is able to do this.

TRANS> but there is no debate among bible believers about the pre-existence of the soul.

- Somehow, marvellously, a new person is brought into existence for all eternity every time a child is conceived!

- b. But Jesus' conception had to be different because as the Son of God, He had existed from all eternity.
 - 1) There was no need for a new person because there was already a person.
 - The Son of God came down from heaven to live among us...
 - He certainly did not begin to exist at conception!
 - By an act of His gracious will, he forsook the glories of Heaven and took to Himself human flesh.
 - What condescension that the babe in Mary's arms was the very one who hung the galaxies in space!
 - That the one who fed at the breast was the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills!

 - 2) There was no need for a new person, but only for a human body and soul for Him to acquire or take to Himself as His own.
 - Thus in Psalm 40 He says, "A body you have prepared for me."

TRANS> So you see that Jesus could not come in the usual way because He existed before His conception.

2. Secondly, Jesus could not be brought into the world in the usual way because it was necessary that Jesus should be born without original sin.
 - a. The problem is that when God created us, He created us to produce after our likeness.
 - 1) Of course this is a good thing in itself!
 - Can you imagine if Adam and Eve conceived and bore a tree—
 - then a rabbit—
 - then a stone?

 - No, God made us to reproduce after our own likeness.

 - 2) But there is a down side to this...
 - After the fall, we were corrupted in our very nature.
 - In Genesis 5, we are told that Adam begot a son after his own likeness, and that likeness was now a fallen likeness.

- Adam's son was a human being, just like Adam,
 - but he was a sinful human being, just like Adam!
 - Now as fallen men and women,
 - we produce sinful children—still the image of God, but now the image of God corrupted.
 - This is probably one of the main reasons that Adam and Eve hid their reproductive organs after the fall—
 - Their great glory at creation was that they could produce children in the likeness of God—after His image—
 - but after the fall their great shame was that only corrupted children could be brought forth by them.
- b. Now you see that Jesus could not be made in the sinful likeness of Adam.
- Somehow, as a pre-existing person who was perfectly holy—
 - Jesus had to be provided with a human body and spirit that was not sinful by nature.
- 1) It would not be at all appropriate or even possible for the Son of God to be sinful.
- It was possible for Him to stoop to become human flesh,
 - and to identify Himself with us covenantally so as to be charged and cursed with our sins...
 - But He Himself could not personally become sinful...
 - because then He would have had to be another person—a sinful person.
- 2) Moreover, if He had been sinful it would have made it impossible for Him to save us.
- As a sacrifice for our sins, He had to be a holy, spotless lamb without blemish.
 - Otherwise, He would have had to die for His own sins and could not have died for ours.
 - If He was charged with sin, where could we find our righteousness?

TRANS> So you see what the two reasons are that prevented him from being born in the ordinary way.

- Let me summarise them for you:
- 1) First, Jesus could not be born in the ordinary way because He already existed, and in ordinary conception, a new person is brought into existence.
 - All that was needed was a human body and a human soul, not a new person.
- 2) Secondly, Jesus could not be born in the ordinary way because He could not be born in sin.
 - As the Son of God who was to redeem us, He must have a holy body and soul, not a sinful one.

B. Matthew tells you how Jesus was born in such a way that both of these problems were overcome.

1. In verse 18, he simply states that his mother Mary “was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”
 - a. In verse 20, he reports how the angel told Joseph when he was thinking of divorcing her,
 - “Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”
 - b. And in verse 23, he says that all this was done to fulfil the prophecy that a virgin would conceive and bear a son.
 - Clearly, he was not conceived in the ordinary way!
2. The Bible is very clear about how it was that the Son of God was brought into the world.
 - a. It was the work of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
 - Surely, if God could create man out of nothing, He was able to create a human body and soul for His Son.
 - The Holy Spirit was able to prepare a body for Him that was made of Mary’s human substance,
 - but did not possess her corruption.

TRANS> Here is the perfect wisdom of God, at work for our salvation!

- b. Yet, there are those today who call themselves Christians that deny the doctrine of the Virgin birth and say it is not a necessary part of our creed as Christians.
 - 1) They do not believe that God the Spirit was able to cause a virgin to conceive!
 - 2) These deniers are nothing more than social Christians—

- They only use Jesus as an ideal person that they set up in their own imagination as an example to show their disciples how to be better people.
 - They do not really believe in God as the personal Creator of man,
 - nor do they believe that the Son of God Himself died on the cross, and that this is the only way we could be saved!
 - Unless they repent and believe, they will be brought to their place in Hell with all other unbelievers.
- 3) Brothers and sisters, if you take away this virgin birth, you take away Immanuel!
- If there is no virgin birth, then there is no pre-existing person who is the Son of God, but just another ordinary human being.
 - And if there is no virgin birth, then there is no sinless person who is able to redeem us, but just another sinner like you and me.
 - You can't just pull the virgin birth out of the Christian Creed without destroying everything else!
 - Anathema! to all who teach such a wretched doctrine!
 - The wisdom of God has found a way to bring His very own Son to us as Saviour,
 - to bring Him into our very own nature to live and die and rise again for us!
 - And these fools would try to take Him away from us!
 - Let them perish with their doctrine!

TRANS> Our wise God found a way to accomplish His gracious purpose in saving sinners!

- That Christ be born of a virgin!
- But interestingly, the virgin birth created another problem.

C. Let us now look at that problem and how it too was overcome by our wise God.

1. The problem is this:

- If Jesus were to be born of a virgin, how could He be the legal heir of David?
 - a. True enough, Mary was a descendant of David,
 - but David's line was not determined by the mother, but by the father.

- Although it was wrong of them to do it,
 - many of David's descendants took pagan wives.
 - Yet, their sons continued to inherit the promise given to David because the line was traced through the men, not through the women.
 - b. So if Christ is born of a virgin, how could He be the seed of Abraham or the seed of David?
 - If He is without a father, whose descendant is He?
2. Once again, God's wisdom found a way to overcome this problem!
- a. He brought His Son not merely to a virgin, but to a betrothed virgin!
 - 1) In verse 18, it says:
 - "After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child."
 - 2) Betrothal was the standard practice of the Jews at this time—
 - Usually about a year before the marriage ceremony,
 - a man and a woman would exchange vows, promising fidelity to one another.
 - From this time they were called husband and wife, although they did not have sexual relations (or even much social interaction) until after the marriage ceremony.
 - As you can see, betrothal was a greater commitment than an engagement in our society...
 - Divorce proceedings were required to break the betrothal,
 - And it was considered adultery if there was sexual union with an outsider during the betrothal period...
 - Deut 22:23-24 shows that such adultery during betrothal was punishable by death—for both the man and the woman who committed the adultery.
 - This, of course, was not practised under Roman law in the time of Mary and Joseph because the Romans did not give the Jews the authority to execute.
 - b. But how does the fact that Mary was betrothed solve the problem of Jesus and the need for Him to be the legal heir of David?
 - 1) In this way...
 - Matthew shows in our text that God made Joseph to be the legal father of Jesus.

- And because Joseph was the legal father, Jesus was the legal heir to the throne of David.

2) How did God do this?

- a) First of all, He told Joseph to take Mary as His wife even though she was with child.

- Joseph, in pondering Mary's pregnancy, had three options:
 - 1) He could go on and marry her since he was not required to divorce her even if she had committed adultery.
 - 2) He could publicly accuse of her adultery and make her an example to others before the law.
 - 3) He could quietly write her a bill of divorce and send her away.

- Matthew tells us that Joseph had pretty well decided on the third option—he would put her away privately.

- It may be that he thought she had committed adultery—perhaps being very surprised since he thought her to be a woman of godly character.

- Or it may be that she had told him of her visitation by the angel telling of her miraculous conception (recorded in Luke) and of her visit to her cousin who confirmed the miracle...

- And it may be that Joseph even believed her...
 - but did not think it would be appropriate for him to have her as his wife when God had chosen her to be the virgin that would bear His Son.
 - How could he presume to be his father!

- But whatever the case, God's angel comes just at the right time and says:

- v. 20 "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

- Here is God's instruction to go ahead and take this woman to be his wife,

- and the assurance to Joseph that she has not been unfaithful, but that the Holy Spirit has formed the child in her womb.

- b) Then the angel goes a step farther and tells Joseph not only to take Mary, but also the child as his own.

- In verse 21, Joseph is instructed to name Him Jesus.

- In being told to name him, Joseph is told to take him as his own child.
 - We do not name a stranger's child, but our own children.
 - How would you like it if you had a baby and one of the nurses came named him?
 - You would say, "What do you think you're doing? That's not your baby, that's my baby!"
- c) Verse 24 and 25 tell us how Joseph did both of the things the angel told him to do.
- READ> v. 24-25
 - Here you see Joseph's faith and obedience!
 - He believed what the angel told him, and did exactly what the angel told him to do—
 - Even though it was an incredibly intimidating thing to take responsibility to be the guardian of the infant Jesus Christ,
 - Joseph obeys.
 - And what we see after this is Joseph taking responsibility to lead his family...
 - Taking them to Egypt at the angel's command (not an easy thing to do—no easier than it was for Abraham to leave his home-land at God's command)—
 - Bringing them back and following God's directive in going to Nazareth—
 - And seeing to it that Jesus was taught in the law of God and taken up to the temple at the appointed time.
- c. And I want you to consider that it was necessary for God to choose such a man to be the adopted father of His Son.
- 1) God could not have a father for His Son who would hesitate to obey his directives...
 - Or a man who would not be responsible to lead his home in God's ways.
 - 2) For Jesus to be without sin as a child, it was necessary for Him to have parents that would follow God's law—
 - in having Him circumcised and taught in the word.

- 3) Now parents, God has entrusted you with covenant children and He calls them “My children.”
 - He has made you responsible for them, to bring them up in His nurture and discipline!
 - You are to treat them as you would treat Jesus if He were you child—
 - Did Jesus Himself not instruct you that whatever you do for the least of these His brethren, you do for Him?
 - Your children are members of His body,
 - and it is worse for you if you should cause one of these little ones to stumble than if a millstone were hung about your neck and you cast into the sea!

TRANS> Behold the wisdom of God in ordering all things in such a way that He might bring His Son to be with us—to be Immanuel, God with us!

III. Yes, brothers and sisters, God the Son truly did come from Heaven to be with us!

A. But why did He do it? Why did God Himself come into this world?

1. If you asked people today what God would do if He were to come among us, what would they tell you?
 - a. Well, one would say, “He would put an end to world poverty,
 - He would feed the hungry.”
 - b. Another would say, “He would put an end to all oppression against women and children and stop injustice everywhere.”
 - c. Another, “He would put an end to all war.”
 - d. Yet another: “He would heal all our diseases—give us a cure for cancer and for heart disease.”
 - e. Yet another, “He would straighten out all our social problems”
 - f. Still another—“He would save our environment and stop hurricanes and floods and tornadoes.”
2. Everybody has things that they would think God ought to do if He were to come among us...
 - And it is very interesting to see that Jesus did in fact do many of these things!
 - Matthew’s gospel will tell us how He:
 - fed the hungry,
 - healed the sick and even raised the dead!
 - cast out demons,

- calmed storms,
 - brought righteousness,
 - brought peace,
 - warned oppressors and the unjust of their impending doom,
- The Jews, of course, had many things that they expected the Messiah to do for them...
 - And many of these were also things that Jesus did, though not always in a way that they would have expected or in the time they expected.

TRANS> Everyone has his own ideas about what God would do if He were to come among us.

B. But Matthew tells us what His main focus was when He came...

- and it is not something that most people think about as something that God needs to do in this world!
1. Matthew records Immanuel's main purpose for coming in verse 21 when he records the angel's words to Joseph:
 - v. 21: "You shall call His name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins!"
 - This is Jesus' main reason for coming!
 - He came to save His people from their sins.
 - a. Later on in Matthew's gospel, Jesus Himself will tell us this when He says:
 - Mt 18:11: "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."
 - Mt 20:28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
 - b. And at the end of Matthew,
 - we have his final commission to his disciples in which He tells them to go into the all the world and make disciples of all the nations.
 - He wants people from all over the world to be saved from their sins!
 - His main reason for coming into this world is to save sinners!
4. And notice that Matthew (or the angel he quotes) says that Jesus will save **His people** from their sins.
 - a. Clearly, this is a reference to the seed of Abraham—
 - 1) God had promised to be their God, and if He is their God and they are His people, He must save them from their sins!

- If not, He could not be their God because of their guilt...
 - And they could not be His people because of their rebellion.
- 2) The problem was that when Jesus came, many of the Jews were self-righteous and did not think they needed to be saved from their sins!
- They had many things that **they** wanted the Messiah to do,
 - but saving **His people** from their sins was not on the list.
 - They figured that having God's law, they were already righteous.
- b. But you see, it was the covenant people that Jesus came to save first and foremost because there was not one among them—not even Abraham—who did not need to be saved from his sins!
- Every one of them had come short of the glory of God.
- 1) And so every one of them needed...
- to have his sins removed from his record...
 - and to have his heart changed by the work of the Spirit.
- 2) And this is exactly the work that Jesus came to do for His people:
- To die on the cross that their sins might be blotted out from their record—that they might be forgiven...
 - And to pour out His Spirit upon them so that they might repent and believe the gospel and then begin to grow more and more into what He has called them to be—to deliver them from the dominion of sin.

TRANS> This is what Jesus came to do for His people—to save them from their sins...

- You might have thought His people were the ones who least needed this!
 - For they are a people brought near to God to serve Him and to represent Him in the world...
 - But you see,
 - the whole thing that made them His people was not that they were righteous,
 - but that He was going to come into the world to save them!
2. Now I think I hear someone saying, but what about the rest of the world?
- Did He only come to save His people—only the seed of Abraham?
- a. And the answer is yes, only His people—

- but the good news is that others can be added to the seed of Abraham by faith.
 - That is the message to the world—that God Himself has come to save His people from their sin—
 - And that He has done so...
 - And that you can come and share in this great salvation by faith!
- b. In Galatians 3:26 Paul tells non-Jews that they have become the Sons of God by faith:
- He says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - It’s by believing in their Christ, their Messiah, that you are saved.
 - He was sent to them to save them from their sins,
 - And He did save them—all of them who had the faith of Abraham their father...
 - And we can rejoice in their salvation because it is extended to us if we believe...
- C. You all have your ideas about what God ought to do in coming among us, but I am here to declare to you what He **did** do...
- He saved His people from their sins!
1. Whatever you might think, this is the principle thing that is needed in this world!
 - Sin is the most serious problem we have,
 - It the most offensive, despicable, contemptible, vile problem in God’s eyes and so in truth...
 - It is the reason that God Himself deigned to come into this world in human flesh.
 2. You see, all the other problems in this world are real, but the root of all the other problems is sin.
 - When sin is removed,
 - there will be no poverty or war or storms or oppression or abuse or sickness or sorrow or death.
 - God will take all these away when He takes sin away.
 - God has visited our world with these problems because of our sin—
 - He is a righteous judge who judges sin.
 - Nevertheless, Jesus showed clearly as God the Son that He had authority to take away all these problems...

- And He promises that He will for all the people He saves!
 - Not one of these problems will remain for His people!
3. But you must first humble yourself and stop looking at all these other problems as the principle problem when the principle problem is the sin that is at the core of your heart.
- a. Do you hear the false message of the church today!
- “Come to Christ and be happy and fulfilled”—
 - As if our problem is that we are not happy and fulfilled!
 - I know, and God knows, that is a problem, but that is not what is the root of our problem—
 - the root of our problem is sin and that is the principle thing that Jesus came to save us from.
 - If we come to Him to be happy and fulfilled and we do not come to Him to be saved from our sin,
 - then we are still lost and will never be happy and fulfilled!
 - On the other hand, if we come to Him to be saved from our sin, we will—at least in time—be happy and fulfilled.
- b. Brothers and sisters, I have been distressed to hear Christians give their testimony of how they were supposedly converted to Christ and never even mention salvation from sin.
- One says, “I found love in this church and it was so wonderful just know that God loves me...”
 - That is just a person who found a good friend—but is it the Saviour who saves from sin?
 - Another says, “I had looked for peace all my life and now I have finally found it—Jesus gives me peace and picks me up when I am down...”
 - That is just a person who found comfort—but is it the comfort of the Saviour who saves from sin?
 - Another says, “My life was going nowhere, but then I found direction—now I am busy for Jesus.”
 - That is just a person who found something to do, but has he found the One who came to save His people from their sins?
 - Don’t misunderstand me, these are all good things and things that God will bring to His people...

- It may be that such persons have come to Jesus to be saved from their sins!
- But more and more today the gospel of Jesus is truncated and presented as something that addresses our felt needs rather than our sin.
- It is a sad statistic of a recent survey that found that the majority of evangelicals believe that man is basically good!

c. Who are Immanuel's people?

- 1) They are those who come to Him to receive what He came to give—
 - Salvation from sin!
 - On Him they believe for the forgiveness of sin...
 - To Him they come to receive the Holy Spirit.
- 2) This is the reason Jesus, who is God, was given a body of human flesh...
 - Let us therefore rejoice in Him and in His salvation and give thanks to His name for the great things He had done!