

THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM, PART 2: "THE BIRTH OF JESUS"
MATTHEW 1:18-25

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone!

If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor here, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 2 of our new sermon series called "The King and His Kingdom," where we're going through the Gospel of Matthew together.

And today's sermon is titled: "The Birth of Jesus."

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

When a couple first finds out that they're expecting a baby, almost all the attention goes towards the soon-to-be *mother*.

- How did she find out that she was pregnant?
- How is she dealing with morning sickness?
- Does she feel the baby kicking inside?

But very little attention seems to go to the *husband*. After all, his body *isn't* changing, he's *not* struggling with nausea, and he's *not* feeling anything inside his stomach.

So usually, when we think of pregnancy, we seem most interested in the perspective of the *woman*—and for good reason.

Yet, interestingly, when we turn to the birth narrative of *Jesus* and the events surrounding *Mary's* pregnancy, we get *two* separate accounts, giving us the perspective of *both* Mary *and* Joseph.

Luke's Gospel account focuses on the perspective of *Mary* (Luke 1:26-56), and *Matthew's* Gospel account focuses on the perspective of *Joseph*.

So today, as we look at the Gospel of *Matthew*, we'll look at a perspective that most of us don't think much about when it comes to pregnancy—what was the *husband* thinking and feeling during this time?

And as we'll see, there was much more going on with *Joseph* than we may have realized.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 1:18-25.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon. It will help you follow along much more easily.

I'd highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don't have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

Last week, we looked at the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to David, to the deportation (or exile) to Babylon, all the way to the coming of Christ.

And we found great comfort in knowing that...

- God *always* keeps his word,

- that God sovereignly came *through* sinners *for* sinners,
- and that God amazingly began a *new creation* in Christ.

And that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Matthew 1:18-25.

¹⁸ 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.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in *three* parts, focusing on the perspective of *Joseph*—as Matthew does here in his Gospel account.

- I. Joseph's discovery (vv. 18-19)
- II. Joseph's dream (vv. 20-23)
- III. Joseph's decision (vv. 24-25)

I. Joseph's discovery (vv. 18-19)

Look at verse 18.

[¹⁸ 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.]

To give more context, according to first-century Jewish custom, *betrothal* was both *similar* and *different* than *engagement* as we might understand it today.

It was *similar* to engagement in that, during their time of betrothal, they were *not* to have any sexual relations with one another, and they were *not* permitted to live together until *after* a public marriage ceremony, which was about *one year* later.

It was a time of *preparation* for the huge transition of spending the rest of their lives together.

But it was *different* than engagement in that, to be to be *betrothed* was *already* to be considered *married*.

At the betrothal, the bride and groom were legally pledged to be married in the presence of witnesses, and were, in fact, *then* considered to be husband and wife. And once betrothed to one another, they could only *end* their marriage covenant with each other by *death* or by *divorce*.¹

¹ "The custom of betrothal was different from "engagement" in modern society. Customarily the parents of a young man chose a young woman to be engaged to their son. A second stage of betrothal involved official arrangements and a prenuptial agreement before witnesses, which was a legally binding contract and could be broken only by a formal process of divorce" (study note on Matthew 18:1, in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]). R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers

<pause>

Now, we know from *Luke's* Gospel account that an angel had *already* appeared to Mary to tell her that she would conceive a son by the Holy Spirit. And *after* conceiving, she spent *three* months with her relative Elizabeth, and then she returned home (Luke 1:26-56).

So that's where we are here in verse 18.

Mary is now about *four* months pregnant, and starting her *second* trimester, so she's beginning to show a baby bump.

And so, *during* the one-year period of betrothal but *before* Mary and Joseph came together—that is, *before* they lived together and consummated their marriage—Joseph *discovered* that Mary was pregnant.

<pause>

This would have been a *shocking* and *scandalous* discovery.

Mary's been gone for the last three months, so he knows *for sure* that *he* didn't get her pregnant. So the *only* other option that he sees is that she committed *adultery* with another man.

Imagine what Joseph must have been feeling at that moment—betrayal, anger, confusion, panic, pain. I can't imagine the level of hurt he must have felt.

We don't know if Mary *told* Joseph that she conceived the child by the Holy Spirit, but *even* if she did, he wouldn't have believed her.

Joseph and everyone else in the first century were well-aware of how children are made—and it's always through one man and one woman.

So on top of the pain of *adultery*, Joseph would have felt the pain of being *lied* to by his wife.

That's how *Joseph* and *everyone* would have *seen* it.

<pause>

So for Joseph, the circumstances leading to Jesus' birth were *not* one of great *anticipation* and *excitement*, but we can assume that it was the cause of great *panic* and *crisis*.

That part never seems to make it into Christmas songs.

Joseph was struggling *intensely*, and he now had to make a hard *decision*.

So what did Joseph decide to do?

Look at verse 19.

[¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.]

It says that he "resolved to divorce her quietly."

Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "In Jewish law betrothal, which lasted about one year, was much more than our engagement. It was a binding contract, terminable only by death (which left the betrothed a 'widow') or by a divorce as for a full marriage. The man was already the *husband* (v. 19), but the woman remained in her father's house. The marriage was completed when the husband took the betrothed to his home in a public ceremony (v. 24; cf. 25:1–13); thus they *came together*, and sexual intercourse could begin."

And we're given the *two-fold reason* for Joseph's decision: "being a *just* man and *unwilling* to put her to *shame*."

First, "being a *just* man," he was going to act according to the *law*.

In the Old Testament law, the penalty for extramarital sexual activity was *death by stoning* (Deut. 22:13-21). But living under *Roman* rule, the Jews did *not* have the authority to carry out the death penalty (John 18:31). So it was understood that obedience to the OT law in such instances meant *divorce* (Deut. 24:1).²

So if Joseph believed that Mary had *indeed* committed adultery, then acting according to the law meant that he would *divorce* her.

Second, being "unwilling to put her to shame," Joseph was going to act *mercifully* towards Mary.

He *could* have divorced Mary *publicly* in a trial for adultery, which would have *maximized* Mary's humiliation and shame.

But instead, Joseph decides to divorce her *privately* outside of court before just two witnesses.³

<pause>

Now, we may not be able to necessarily relate with the *particulars* of what Joseph was going through, but perhaps we know what it's like to be in messy *crisis* situations where *hard* decisions need to be made.

And in such messy situations, how do we respond?

As you think back to those times, ask yourself:

- Would *others* who interact with me in the home and the workplace characterize me as being *just* and *merciful*?
- What set of *questions* do I ask myself in messy situations?

For Joseph, the *first* question he seems to ask is, "What is the *just* (or *right*) thing to do here—*not* according to what I *feel* but according to what God's word *says*?"

And the *second* question he seems to ask is, "How can I show mercy?"

Now, the *order* of those questions is important. A certain *priority* must be given to the *first* question.

We don't start with "How can I show mercy?" and then follow what *we* feel is the most loving or what *others* feel is the most loving.

But we start with "What does *God's word* say?" and once we have *that* part settled, *God's word* gives us the parameters of *how* we are then to show mercy.

Many people, in the name of "showing mercy" or "loving people" by their *own* standards or *other* people's standards, have ignored *God's* standards and disobeyed *his* word.

So for us, are *these* the questions we're asking, and are we asking them in *this* order?

I know that there are many other questions and contributing factors that must be accounted for in any messy situation, but are these our *controlling* questions? Are these the questions we keep coming back to?

² R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "In Old Testament law the penalty for unchastity before marriage was stoning (Deut. 22:13–21), but by this time divorce, based on Deuteronomy 24:1, was the rule (see further on 5:32; 19:3ff.)."

³ R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "Joseph, as a *just* (i.e. law-abiding) *man*, could, and perhaps should, have done so by an accusation of adultery resulting in a public trial, but his unwillingness to *put her to shame* (the same uncommon Greek word is used in Col. 2:15 of Christ's 'making a public spectacle' [NEB, NIV] of the principalities and powers) led him to consider the permitted alternative of a private divorce before two witnesses (Mishnah, *Sotah* 1:1, 5)."

<pause>

Also, notice how verse 19 is *worded*: “Joseph, *being* a just man.”

This is simply *who* Joseph *is*, and therefore he *acts* accordingly.

He *is* a just man, so he will *do* what is *just* (or *right*) according to God’s word.

Last week, we mentioned how God began a *new creation* in Christ, and how Christians are not just nicer, kinder versions of ourselves, but we are made *new* in Christ with new loves, new aims, and new desires.

As those who are made *new* in Christ, these are not things that are *extra* or *extraordinary*, but these are non-negotiable for us because it’s simply *who* we *are* in Christ.

- God has *saved* us by his word, so we continue to *live* according to his word.
- God has been *merciful* to us, so we continue to *show* mercy to others.

That’s just part of what it means to be a Christian.

<pause>

So first, Joseph’s discovery; and second...

II. Joseph’s dream (vv. 20-23)

Look at verse 20.

[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.]

After *discovering* Mary to be with child and after his restless *considering* of what he should do, Joseph finally “resolved to divorce her quietly,” and then he fell asleep.

But God now *intervenes* by sending an angel to appear to him in a *dream*.

The angel *confirms* that the child conceived in Mary’s womb is *indeed* from the Holy Spirit, and he *encourages* Joseph to take Mary as his wife.

And just like that, everything seems to be cleared up.

<pause>

Now, perhaps a question that comes to mind while reading this is, *Why* didn’t God send the angel to speak to Joseph *at the same time* as when he spoke to Mary?

That would have resolved *a lot* of these issues that arose in him.

Both Mary and Joseph would have had the *same* revelation from God *at the same time*, so that when she became pregnant, he would have *already* known that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and he *wouldn’t* have had to go through this immense inner turmoil.

That would have made it *much easier* for him... but it would *not* have refined his *faith*, which is more precious than gold in God’s sight (1 Pet. 1:7).

Especially in the midst of difficulty, we may think that God is *late*, *absent*, or even *mistaken*.

But he’s doing *exactly* what he intends to do in *us* and *others*—and it is *ultimately* for *our* good and *his* glory.

His purpose is *not* for us to have an *easy* life, but for us to *trust* him, *love* him, and *become* more like him (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:16-18; Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 5:17-21).

<pause>

Little children often *don't* understand this. They want *what* they want *when* they want it—and any hindrance to that is interpreted as either their parents' lack of *love* or lack of *wisdom*.

Such little children are *convinced* that *they* know what is best for themselves, and they cannot fathom a parent who would *withhold* or even go *against* what they want.

No matter how much the parent tries to explain, the child doesn't understand and, *convinced* that *they* know better, they throw tantrums to try to get their way.

It's only when the child *matures* that he begins to understand that, though it was painful at the time, what the parents did was actually for *their* good and *their* best interest.

If we can understand this principle from our *imperfect* parents, how much more true and perfect is this with our *heavenly* Father?

And just consider how *patient* and *gentle* God is with us amidst our many childish tantrums.

We're not meant to stay as spiritual babes, but God intends to *mature* and *refine* us in our faith.

If our purposes *don't* align with God's purposes, then we'll be constantly *frustrated* and, like little children, we'll find ourselves throwing tantrums against God when our lives are not as *easy* as we *know* that he *could* make them.⁴

But as we *mature* and our purposes are *more* aligned with God's purposes, then anything we go through that will help us to *trust* him more, *love* him more, and *become* more like him, even if it isn't *easy*, we'll *willingly* accept it, knowing that the testing of our faith is producing in us steadfastness, so that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

<pause>

Look now at verse 21.

[²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”]

In Joseph's dream, the angel now reveals to him the *name* for this child and what he will *do*.

The name “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves,” or “The LORD saves.”⁵ And that's what Jesus would *literally* do; “he will save his people from their sins.”⁶

Notice, the angel *doesn't* say, “he will save his people from *difficult situations*, *difficult people*, or *difficult feelings*.” But he says, “he will save his people from their *sins*.”

Church, stop and think about this for a moment. *Why* did you first put your faith in Jesus?

⁴ It's foolish to “kick again the goads” (Acts 26:14); we only hurt ourselves when we fight against God.

⁵ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 66) writes: “‘Jesus’ (Iēsous) is the Greek form of ‘Joshua’ (cf. Gr. of Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8), which, whether in the long form *yēhōšua'* (‘Yahweh is salvation,’ Exod 24:13) or in one of the short forms, e.g., *yēšua'* (‘Yahweh saves,’ Neh 7:7), identifies Mary's Son as the one who brings Yahweh's promised eschatological salvation.”

⁶ R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “*His people* will be in the first instance the Jews (Matthew uses this term *laos* particularly for the chosen race), but the man who wrote 28:19 must have expected a wider application ultimately. Salvation *from sins* is an element in the Old Testament hope (e.g. Isa. 53; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–31) and in later Messianic expectation (Psalms of Solomon 17:28–29, 41; etc.), but not the dominant one. Its isolation here warns the reader not to expect this Messiah to conform to the more popular hope of a national liberator, and sets the scene for the unfolding understanding of Jesus' mission in the Gospel.”

Was it because Jesus was just filling some “felt need” in your life?

- Were you longing for *acceptance* after years of rejection from family or others around you?
- Were you longing for *love* after a fallout with friends or a break-up with your boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Were you longing for *meaning* after realizing that you can’t find true joy and purpose in your job or accomplishments?

I think it’s so easy for “felt needs” to capture our attention.

- Our health problems.
- Our demanding job.
- Our lack of finances.
- Our relational conflicts.
- Our marital status.
- Our family issues.
- Our unhappiness and discontentment.

And we can so easily make *Jesus* all about filling our “felt needs,” which we’re *convinced* are the *biggest* and most *pressing* problems.

But the *truth* is that our *biggest* problem is that we are *sinners* before a holy God and we will one day face *eternal judgment* for our sins against him.

That’s *not* to say that Jesus doesn’t care about our temporary sufferings. He cares for *all* that we go through, but Jesus did not come *primarily* to save us from *temporary, earthly* sufferings, but to save us from *our sins* for all *eternity*.

<pause>

Think about it this way.

If you are suffering from a *painful disease* and you go to the doctor, and the doctor’s *only* concern is to relieve you of your *pain*, then he’s *not* a very good doctor.

Your *pain* is a *symptom* of your *disease*, so no matter how much the doctor may try to numb you of the *pain*, if he doesn’t treat your underlying *disease*, your pain will only persist and worsen.

A doctor’s *primary* concern ought to be discovering and treating the underlying *cause* of your pain.⁷

And that’s exactly what *Jesus* does.

He goes after the underlying *disease* of *sin*.

The New City Catechism gives a helpful definition of sin.

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law—**resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.**⁸

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000]) writes: “Think of a man who is suffering from some painful disease. Generally the one desire of such a patient is to be relieved of his pain, and one can understand that very well. No-one likes suffering pain. The one idea of this patient, therefore, is to do anything which will relieve him of it. Yes; but if the doctor who is attending this patient is also only concerned about relieving this man’s pain he is a very bad doctor. His primary duty is to discover the cause of the pain and to treat that. Pain is a wonderful symptom which is provided by nature to call attention to disease, and the ultimate treatment for pain is to treat the disease, not the pain. So if a doctor merely treats the pain without discovering the cause of the pain, he is not only acting contrary to nature, he is doing something that is extremely dangerous to the life of the patient. The patient may be out of pain, and seems to be well; but the cause of the trouble is still there. Now that is the folly of which the world is guilty. It says, ‘I want to get rid of my pain, so I will run to the pictures, or drink, or do anything to help me forget my pain.’ But the question is, What is the cause of the pain and the unhappiness and the wretchedness? They are not happy who hunger and thirst after happiness and blessedness. No. ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.’”

⁸ New City Catechism Question 16, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/new-city-catechism/what-is-sin>.

Therefore, all that is wrong in *us* and in the *world* are *consequences* or *symptoms* of *sin*.

<pause>

Even though God created us and we owe everything to him, all of us has sinned against him and are rightfully deserving of his eternal punishment in hell. *That's our biggest problem.*

But the gospel—or the good news—is that God came in the person of Jesus Christ to do what we could never do on our own.

- He lived the perfect life on *our* behalf,
- he died on the cross in *our* place to bear God's wrath for *our* sins,
- and he resurrected three days later to confirm *who* he is and *what* he has done for us.

So whoever repents of their sins and believes in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior is now forgiven of their sins, declared righteous in God's sight, and given new and eternal life in him.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV).

This was the *mission* that Jesus came to accomplish.

He came to save us from the *penalty* and *power* of sin; and he will one day *return* to save us from the *presence* and *consequence* of sin as well.

That day is coming.

But that day will *only* be enjoyed by those who are fully *convinced* that our *sins* against *God* are our *biggest problem*—and who truly *repent* of our sins and who truly *believe* that Jesus came to save us from *our sins*.

<pause>

Look now at verses 22-23.

[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).]

Most English versions will have the angel's speech quotation marks *end* at verse 21, but those quotation marks aren't there in the original text, so it's actually a judgment call.

I'll spare you the details—and in the end, it doesn't affect much either way—but I think there's good reason to think that the angel's speech continues until the end of verse 23.⁹

⁹ D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 76-77) writes: "Although most EV conclude the angel's remarks at the end of v. 21, there is good reason to think that they continue to the end of v. 23, or at least to the end of the word 'Immanuel.' This particular fulfillment formula occurs only three times in Matthew: here; 21:4; 26:56. In the last it is natural to take it as part of Jesus' reported speech (cf. 26:55); and this is possible, though less likely, in 21:4. Matthew's patterns are fairly consistent. So it is not unnatural to extend the quotation to the end of 1:23 as well. (JB recognizes Matthew's consistency by ending Jesus' words in 26:55, making 26:56 Matthew's remark!) This is more convincing when we recall that only these three fulfillment formulas use the perfect *gegonen* (NIV, "took place") instead of the expected aorist. Some take the verb as an instance of a perfect standing for an aorist (so BDF, par. 343, but this is a disputed classification). Others think it means that the event "stands recorded" in the abiding Christian tradition (McNeile; Moule, *Idiom Book*, p. 15); still others take it as a stylistic indicator that Matthew himself introduced the fulfillment passage (Rothfuchs, pp. 33-36). But if we hold that Matthew presents the angel as saying the words, then the perfect may enjoy its normal force: "all this has taken place" (cf. esp. Fenton; cf. also Stendahl, Peake; B. Weiss, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1898]; Zahn). R.E. Brown (*Birth of Messiah*, p. 144, n. 31) objects that nowhere in Scripture does an angel cite Scripture in this fashion; but, equally, nowhere in Scripture is there a virgin birth in this fashion. Matthew knew that Satan can cite Scripture (4:6-7); he may not have thought it strange if an angel does.

If so, then the angel of the Lord tells *Joseph* that “all this” (the events leading up to Jesus’ birth) was for the *purpose* of fulfilling Scripture.

What Joseph is going through is *not* a meaningless accident, but it is in *fulfillment* of what God *said* would happen about 700 years before the coming of Christ.

Just think how *comforting* this would have been to Joseph.

Verse 23 quotes from Isaiah 7:14, which says, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

And a couple chapters later, we’re told exactly *who* that child would be in...

Isaiah 9:6: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This would be no ordinary child, but he would be born of a *virgin*, and he shall be the *Mighty God* himself.¹⁰

Broadus’s objection, that the angel would in that case be anticipating an event that has not yet occurred, and this is strange when cast in fulfillment language, lacks weight; for the conception has occurred, and the pregnancy has become well advanced, even if the birth has not yet taken place. Joseph needs to know at this stage that “all this took place” to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The weightiest argument is the perfect tense.”

¹⁰ Regarding how we are to understand Isaiah 7:14 in its relationship to Matthew 1:23, D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 79–81) helpfully writes: “The most plausible view is that of J.A. Motyer (“Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 [1970]: 118–25). It is a modified form of the third interpretation and depends in part on recognizing a crucial feature in Isaiah. Signs in the OT may function as a present persuader (e.g., Exod 4:8–9) or as “future confirmation” (e.g., Exod 3:12). Isaiah 7:14 falls in the latter case because Immanuel’s birth comes too late to be a “present persuader.” The “sign” (v. 11) points primarily to threat and foreboding. Ahaz has rejected the Lord’s gracious offer (vv. 10–12), and Isaiah responds in wrath (v. 13). The “curds and honey” Immanuel will eat (v. 15) represent the only food left in the land on the day of wrath (vv. 18–22). Even the promise of Ephraim’s destruction (v. 8) must be understood to embrace a warning (v. 9b; Motyer, “Isaiah 7:14,” pp. 121–22). Isaiah sees a threat, not simply to Ahaz, but to the “house of David” (vv. 2, 13) caught up in faithlessness. To this faithless house Isaiah utters his prophecy. Therefore Immanuel’s birth follows the coming events (it is a “future confirmation”) and will take place when the Davidic dynasty has lost the throne. Motyer shows the close parallels between the prophetic word to Judah (Isa 7:1–9:7) and the prophetic word to Ephraim (9:8–11:16). To both there come the moment of decision as the Lord’s word threatens wrath (7:1–17; 9:8–10:4), the time of judgment mediated by the Assyrian invasion (7:18–8:8; 10:5–15), the destruction of God’s foes but the salvation of a remnant (8:9–22; 10:16–34), and the promise of a glorious hope as the Davidic monarch reigns and brings prosperity to his people (9:1–7; 11:1–16). The twofold structure argues for the cohesive unity between the prophecy of Judah and that to Ephraim. If this is correct, Isaiah 7:1–9:7 must be read as a unit—i.e., 7:14 must not be treated in isolation. The promised Immanuel (7:14) will possess the land (8:8), thwart all opponents (8:10), appear in Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1) as a great light to those in the land of the shadow of death (9:2). He is the Child and Son called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” in 9:6, whose government and peace will never end as he reigns on David’s throne forever (9:7). Much of Motyer’s work is confirmed by a recent article by Joseph Jensen (“The Age of Immanuel,” *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 220–39; he does not refer to Motyer), who extends the plausibility of this structure by showing that Isaiah 7:15 should be taken in a final sense; i.e., Immanuel will eat the bread of affliction in order to learn (unlike Ahaz!) the lesson of obedience. There is no reference to “age of discretion.” Further, Jensen believes that Isa 7:16–25 points to Immanuel’s coming only after the destruction of the land (6:9–13 suggests the destruction extends to Judah as well as to Israel); that Immanuel and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, Isaiah’s son (8:1), are not the same; and that only Isaiah’s son sets a time limit relevant to Ahaz. The foregoing discussion was unavoidable. For if Motyer’s view fairly represents Isaiah’s thought, and if Matthew understood him in this way, then much light is shed on the first Gospel. The Immanuel figure of Isaiah 7:14 is a messianic figure, a point Matthew has rightly grasped. Moreover this interpretation turns on an understanding of the place of the Exile in Isaiah chapters 6–12, and Matthew has divided up his genealogy (Mt 1:11–12, 17) precisely in order to draw attention to the Exile. In 2:17–18 the theme of the Exile returns. A little later, as Jesus begins his ministry (4:12–16), Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1–2, which, if the interpretation adopted here is correct, properly belongs to the Immanuel prophecies of Isaiah 7:14, 9:6. Small wonder that after such comments by Matthew, Jesus’ next words announced the kingdom (Mt 4:17; cf. Isa 9:7). Isaiah’s reference to Immanuel’s affliction for the sake of learning obedience (cf. on Isa 7:15 above) anticipates Jesus’ humiliation, suffering, and obedient sonship, a recurring theme in this Gospel. This interpretation also partially explains Matthew’s interest in the Davidic lineage; and it strengthens a strong interpretation of “Immanuel.” Most scholars (e.g., Bonnard) suppose that this name in Isaiah reflects a hope that God would make himself present with his people (“Immanuel” derives from *’immanū’ ēl*, “God with us”); and they apply the name to Jesus in a similar way, to mean that God is with us, and for us, because of Jesus. But if Immanuel in Isaiah is a messianic figure whose titles include “Mighty God,” there is reason to think that “Immanuel” refers to Jesus himself, that he is “God with us.” Matthew’s use of the preposition “with” at the end of 1:23 favors this (cf. Fenton, “Matthew 1:20–23,” p. 81). Though “Immanuel” is not a name in the sense that “Jesus” is Messiah’s name (1:21), in the OT Solomon was named “Jedidiah” (“Beloved of Yahweh,” 2 Sam 12:25), even though he apparently was not called that. Similarly Immanuel is a “name” in the sense of title or description. No greater blessing can be conceived than for God to dwell with his people (Isa 60:18–20; Ezek 48:35; Rev 21:23). Jesus is the one called “God with us”: the designation evokes John 1:14, 18. As if that were not enough, Jesus promises just before his ascension to be with us to the end of the age

The name “Jesus” specifies what he will *do*; “he will save his people from their sins.”

And the name “Immanuel” specifies *who* he is; he is *literally* “God with us.”

[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).]

Jesus is God who has come down into *our* mess.

Even though we ought to be separated from him because of our sin, *Jesus* came to bear our sin and shame, to share in our suffering and pain, so that we might boldly approach a holy God by faith and *know* him as *our* loving *Father*.

I hope we never take this truth for granted. The *God* we have grievously and repeatedly sinned against wants to be in *relationship* with *us*.

In the midst of our sin and shame, Jesus shows us that God *is* with us.

In the midst of our suffering and pain, Jesus shows us that God *is* with us.

And Matthew *bookends* his Gospel account with this truth.

- Here, at the *beginning*, we see that Jesus is “God with us.”
- And at the *end*, Jesus will *again* tell us, “I am with you *always*, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

When we enter into a *relationship* with Christ by faith, he will *never* forsake us. Jesus *stays* with us from *start* to *finish*.

<pause>

Now, one more important observation here.

The fact that Jesus was born from a *virgin* shows us that salvation *ultimately* must come from the *Lord*—*not* from human effort, but from the *supernatural* work of *God*.

The virgin birth is a *powerful* reminder that salvation can *never* come through human effort, but it *must* be the work of *God alone*.

If it were up to *us* to *stay* in a relationship with God, we would be without hope. Like Adam and Eve, we would be thrust out of the presence of the holy God the very next moment we sinned.

(28:20; cf. also 18:20), when he will return to share his messianic banquet with his people (25:10). If “Immanuel” is rightly interpreted in this sense, then the question must be raised whether “Jesus” (1:21) should receive the same treatment. Does “Jesus” (“Yahweh saves”) mean Mary’s Son merely brings Yahweh’s salvation, or is he himself in some sense the Yahweh who saves? If “Immanuel” entails the higher christology, it is not implausible that Matthew sees the same in “Jesus.” The least we can say is that Matthew does not hesitate to apply OT passages descriptive of Yahweh directly to Jesus (cf. on 3:3). Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 7:14 is very close to the LXX; but he changes “you will call” to “they will call.” This may reflect a rendering of the original Hebrew, if 1QIsa^a is pointed appropriately (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, p. 90). But there is more here: The people whose sins Jesus forgives (1:21) are the ones who will gladly call him “God with us” (cf. Frankemolle, pp. 17–19).” John Calvin (“Matthew 1:18–25” in *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31/calcom31.ix.xv.html>) writes: “But granting all that they ask as to the meaning of the word, the subject demonstrates, and compels the acknowledgment, that the prophet is speaking of a miraculous and extraordinary birth. He exclaims that he is bringing a sign from the Lord, and not an ordinary sign, but one superior to every other. “The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive” (Isaiah 7:14). If he were only to say, that a woman would bear a child, how ridiculous would that magnificent preface have been?”

So praise God that, from start to finish, from *conception* to the *cross*, salvation is by God's *grace* alone through faith in *Christ* alone. He does it all!

<pause>

So first, Joseph's discovery; second, Joseph's dream; and third...

III. Joseph's decision (vv. 24-25)

Look at verses 24-25.

[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.]

When Joseph awoke from his sleep, he does a complete 180.

He was previously resolved to *divorce* Mary quietly, but now, he *decides* to take her as his *wife*, and he *names* their son Jesus—just as the angel told him in his dream.

To say that Joseph “knew her not *until* she had given birth to a son” means that they did not *consummate* their marriage *before* then—that Jesus *really* was born of a *virgin*.

But *after* Mary had given birth to Jesus, they had *other* children together by normal means.

That's why Jesus has half-siblings that are mentioned later in the Bible, including his half-brothers James and Jude, who each wrote a book of the New Testament (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3; James; Jude).

<pause>

Now, by taking Mary as his wife and naming their son, Joseph was legally *adopting* Jesus as his own son—and thereby giving him the royal status as a “son of David.”

[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.]

Notice what the angel calls Joseph in verse 20—“Joseph, *son of David*.”

We mentioned David last week in Jesus' genealogy. David was *the* king of Israel. God made a covenant with him, saying that he would *always* have a son on the throne and that his kingdom would be established *forever* (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

And throughout the Old Testament, there were prophecies made about a certain son of David, who would be the Messiah King or the Christ, who would rescue his people and reign in righteousness over his kingdom *forever* (e.g., Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

But if you go back to the genealogy of Jesus, we notice something very odd in verse 16.

[¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.]

Given the pattern of the genealogy, you would *expect* it to say, “and Jacob the *father* of Joseph, and Joseph the *father* of Jesus.” But that's *not* what it says.

Instead, it says, “and Jacob the *father* of Joseph the *husband* of Mary, *of whom* Jesus was born, who is called Christ.”

So the genealogy makes it clear that Joseph was *not* the *biological* father of Jesus.

So *how* was Jesus a “son of David”? Through his mother Mary’s *marriage* to *Joseph*, who was a son of David.

<pause>

I also want us to notice that, by taking Mary as his wife, Joseph was *choosing* to endure *shame* with his wife for the sake of *Jesus*.

[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.]

If people didn’t *already* notice Mary’s baby bump, they would surely be able to do the math once Jesus was born—“Wait, how did you two have a kid just *six* months after your public marriage ceremony?”

And so, by Joseph taking Mary as his wife, people would *assume* that *he* impregnated her *before* their wedding, and it would bring great *shame* upon *his* name along *with* hers, and shame upon his *whole* family.

He could *try* telling people that Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit and that they did *not* sleep together *before* their wedding day, but nobody would believe him.

Perhaps they would start to believe 30 years later when Jesus began his public ministry (Luke 3:23), but Joseph probably didn’t live long enough for that.

The *last* mention of Joseph in the Bible is when Jesus is 12 years old (Luke 2:41-45). And later, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, he entrusted his mother Mary to the apostle John’s care (John 19:26-27), which implies that Joseph her husband had probably already passed away.

So Joseph would *never* be vindicated *within* his lifetime. He would go to the grave bearing public shame for the sake of Jesus.

<pause>

It’s astounding to consider all this.

Joseph’s *faithful obedience* to the Lord was a *fulfillment* of who *Jesus* was to be—from the royal line of *David*, and the rightful *King*.

Joseph was just a poor carpenter with little status in the world, but he was now being *included* into God’s redemptive plan in such a privileged way.

Many people think that they’ll be remembered and most praised for what they accomplish in their *careers*. But nobody remembers Joseph for his excellent carpentry skills, his scaling of his business, or his unique contributions to the industry of carpentry.

Even though he was scandalized in his own lifetime, what Joseph is most remembered and praised for in the grand scheme of redemptive history is simply his *faithful obedience*.

<pause>

The one who is great in *God’s* kingdom is *not* the one whom the *world* considers great.

Success, beauty, approval, money, possessions, status, intellect, eloquence—none of that will last and none of that matters as much as we’re prone to think they do.

Look closely and you won’t see a single word recorded from Joseph in this narrative or in the entire Bible. He’s known as “quiet Joseph” because he doesn’t speak a word.

The only thing that Joseph is really known for is simply obeying by faith—and that's what made him great in God's sight.

<pause>

Now, again, we may not be able to necessarily relate with the *particulars* of what Joseph went through, but we go through the same *root* issue every day: Will obey by faith or not? Will we be driven by faith or by fear?

Joseph was given *God's word* to not fear to take Mary as his wife and to trust that her son would be Jesus, the one who would save his people from their sins. That's essentially the *gospel*.

So would he be motivated by *fear* and the prospect of shame, or would he be motivated by *faith* in God's revealed *word*—the *gospel* of Jesus Christ?

Some of us will have this battle in our hearts *even right after* this Sunday Celebration.

- Will we be motivated by *fear* of people and awkward conversation and choose not to talk to anyone that we don't already know well?
- Or will we be motivated by *faith* to initiate conversation with people that are different than us because we believe that the gospel is for *everyone* and that God's chosen instrument for bringing the gospel to others is through *us* as his people?

Some of us will have this battle in our hearts when we *sin*, and God convicts us of it.

- Will we be motivated by *fear* of shame and of what people think of us, and choose to ignore, cover, and justify our sin?
- Or will we be motivated by *faith* in the gospel, that Christ died for our sin and that he calls us to confess our sin to one another?

Some of us will have this battle in our hearts when we are faced with Jesus' command to *get baptized* as a believer.

- Will we be motivated by *fear* of what our family and friends will think, say, or do to us, and choose *not* to obey Jesus?
- Or will we be motivated by *faith* in Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us, and publicly profess our allegiance to him as his disciple in the fellowship of his church?

Will we be motivated by *fear* or *faith*? Will we *obey* or *disobey*?

This is the dilemma that we *all* face on a *daily* basis.

But in each of those daily dilemmas, we have the *same* comfort of the *gospel* that the angel gave Joseph but with even *greater* clarity: "*Because* your hope is in *Jesus*, who has saved you from your sins, do not fear to obey God's word. Though you may bear shame, this is an *opportunity* to identify with Christ and glorify the *greatest* name there is."¹¹

<pause>

One last important note here is that in calling them to bear *shame*, God was *blessing* Mary and Joseph.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the *beatitude* that Jesus expands on the most is, "*Blessed* are those who are *persecuted for righteousness*' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:11).

And throughout the rest of this Gospel account, Jesus says that *if* we are his disciples, we *will* go through much suffering and persecution *for his name's sake*.

¹¹ If you're struggling to obey God right now, let me be clear that the solution is not to simply try harder in your own strength but to remember who Christ has made you to be and rely on his strength at work in you. Remember that the Holy Spirit indwelling us *enables* us to obey. Remember that Christ has *died* for us and made us *new* us from the inside out. Remember that our *old* selves have been *crucified* with Christ. Remember that Christ *loved* us *first*, and obeying by faith is how we love him in return. We do not obey to be accepted by God, but rather, *because* we are accepted by God in Christ, we therefore obey.

Matthew 16:24-25 = Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life **for my sake** will find it.

Matthew 24:9 = “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations **for my name's sake**.

Church, following Jesus is *not* a call to *comfort*, but a call to *suffer*, to bear *shame*, and even lose our lives *for the sake of Christ*—that is, for the sake of trusting in him, loving him, and resembling him.

The early disciples *rejoiced* that they were counted *worthy* to suffer dishonor for Christ's name (Acts 5:41).

When we suffer for Christ's sake, we bear witness to the world ...

- that Christ's power is at work in us through our weakness,
- that Christ is worthy to suffer for,
- and that our hope is not in this temporary life but in our resurrection and eternal life with him.¹²

When we are in Christ, he completely transforms how we view our suffering. Rather than seeing them as *curses* to *endure*, they become *blessings* for us to *steward* for his glory.

<pause>

And church, God doesn't call us to suffer *alone*, but he saved us into his *people*—his *family*—and we go through the ups and downs of life *together* as *his church*.

[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**).]

Notice that *every* reference to Jesus' *mission* and *identity* earlier in the passage was in the *plural*—“[Jesus] will save his *people* from *their* sins” and Jesus is “God with *us*.”

That means that the Christian life is never just about you and God, but it's always about you, God, and his *people*.

By God's good design, we learn, experience, and glorify Jesus *best* as a whole church.

Conclusion

As we close, especially as we've been looking at this passage from *Joseph's* perspective, I think it's very easy for us to leave thinking that *Joseph* was such a good guy and how we should be more like *Joseph*.

But that's *not* the main takeaway of this passage.

Rather, *Joseph* *points* us to Jesus—because Jesus is the true and better *Joseph*.

Joseph, who was just and merciful, resolved to *divorce* his bride whom he *thought* was adulterous.

But *Jesus*, who is *perfectly* just and merciful, *keeps* his marriage covenant with *us*—his *bride*—whom he *knows* are adulterous.

¹² Matt Rhodes, “Why Suffering for Christ Is More Than Just a ‘Necessary Evil,’” January 5, 2026, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-suffering-for-christ-is-more-than-just-a-necessary-evil>.

Joseph obeyed by faith, bearing shame for the rest of his life.

But *Jesus* obeys his Father's will all the way to the cross, suffering not only shame but the worst humiliation and death.

Jesus did *not* humiliate *us* for our very real sins against him, but he *himself* was stripped naked and humiliated in our place.

He was “unwilling to put *us* to shame,” so he *bore* all our shame upon *himself* on that cross.

There is only *one* who came to save his people from their *sins* and who is literally *God with us*—and his name is *Jesus*.

Let's pray.