



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 1:18-25

“The Messiah’s Birth, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] Our theme in this series of studies is the New Testament revelation of the Messiah. And in our last study we looked at the Messiah’s birth, and we are continuing that today and our subject is the Messiah’s birth, our second study in that, and our texts are Matthew chapter 1 verse 18 through verse 25 and we’ll also look from time to time at Luke chapter 1 verse 26 through verse 28.

The Messiah’s birth, we are studying the birth of the Messiah as recorded by the Apostle Matthew in chapter 1 verses 18 through 25 of his gospel. We spent time in the consideration of some of the objections that have been made by scholars to the miraculous birth of our Lord. We looked at the mythological objection, namely that the birth account was invented by the early Christians to dramatize the origin of their Lord. We pointed out that the description of the birth of our Lord as a babe in the manger in the presence of a carpenter and a few shepherds cannot be put in the same category with the incredible myths of the origin of the gods of Greece and Rome. We took note of the biological objection, that is that the birth of our Lord violated natural processes. We saw that is no insurmountable problem, given the fact that it was brought about by supernatural divine being, almighty God with whom nothing is impossible. And we considered certain biblical phrases, suggesting that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph.

We contended that there is no real difficulty if we remember that in one sense Joseph was our Lord’s father. He was the legal father of Jesus of Nazareth and the phrases are perfectly understandable if taken simply and believingly.

We began an exposition of Matthew chapter 1 verse 18 through verse 25, dealing first with Joseph’s realization of Mary’s pregnancy, as recorded in verses 18 and 19, and then with the revelation by an angel of the Lord that Jesus had been conceived of the Holy Spirit, a fact stated twice in Matthew chapter 1. And we pointed out that there exists no theological problem regarding our Lord’s person if we remember several things. First, although our Lord is fully human, he had no common human parentage. His human nature came from Mary, by the conception of the Holy Spirit. And second, while fully divine in his personality, he was no new creation possessing a kind of camouflaged humanity, or something like a phantom. “He was truly a man,” John 8:14. And third, although the human nature is united to the divine nature in a personal union, he had and has no sin. The divine nature of course cannot receive pollution.

We continue the exposition at the point where the angel informs Joseph that the name of his son is to be Jesus, verse 21. He told Joseph, “and she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.” A great deal of stress is laid upon the name Jesus. It is the Greek from the Hebrew Joshua and means Yahweh is salvation or Yahweh saves. Others have suggested it means salvation of the Lord. At any rate, the name itself was and is a message. In fact every time Mary and Joseph called his name the gospel was proclaimed. Yahweh is salvation. While the genealogy might have suggested that he would be a political leader only, that is that he would be another Joshua to lead them again into the promised land of political deliverance from physical enemies, it is clear that much more is involved than political deliverance.

The great question which moves Matthew in his gospel is this; who will inherit the kingdom. And while it’s a mistake to deny that the ministry of the Messiah will have no

nationalistic and political aspects, he will perform an important ministry that is a prerequisite of political redemption namely, a ministry of personal spiritual redemption. Because he will save his people from their sins, he will have a spiritual people to whom he can give universal rule under him. The problem of Israel was not really essentially the problem of Roman domination; it was their estrangement from God, their sin.

That’s the problem in every age; the problem of the late 20th Century is not the emerging nations of the third world, the Middle East, the soviet communistic colonialism, nor the racial problem. The problem is sin. Our western civilization, a civilization is simply an experiment in social independence of God, is disintegrating in red ruin because we have not recognized and bowed to the doctrine of original sin. That doctrine was slain by human contempt. But the truth has lived on to document itself in subsequent history. And that we should have replaced this relevant and revealing teaching by the brainless babble of a [indistinct], and the like, is a colossal marvel. There is no idiotic imbecility beyond the ability of great modern psychologists and philosophers to believe. Was it not Marcus Tullius Cicero who said, “There is nothing so ridiculous but some philosopher has said it.” If we paid more attention to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and less to the gods of the philosophers and scholars, and yes of many of us theologians, we would be ever so much better off. Man’s greatest need is not time but salvation. And this salvation, our Yahweh saves, came to provide by the blood of Golgotha.

The simplicity of the name of the savior’s also remarkable. Men call their world rulers by names which make extravagant claims for them, as for example, Alexander the Great, Charles the Bald, Richard the Lionhearted. How different is the simple Jesus. Genuine believers however, revere none of his names and titles more than this one, which so definitely underlines the office that he holds, Savior. The same note is prominent in the words of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior” that is a Jesus, “which is Christ the Lord” Luke 2:11.

And Paul, at the climax of his great message on the humiliation of Christ, stresses the same thing, “Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him” the apostle says, “and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” Was it not Bernard of Clairvaux who said that the name of Jesus was honey in the mouth, a melody in the ear, and joy in the heart. The church sings it this way, “Jesus oh how sweet the name, Jesus every day the same, Jesus let all saints proclaim its worthy praise forever.”

It would not do justice to the name of our Lord were we to pass on without further reflection on the name Jesus. And first let us remember that it was a name divinely dictated and expounded. It is a superbly appropriate name, for the Father chose it. It is true to his person and to his office, and when we use the name in our petitioning of the Father, we have the assurance of his attentive listening, since we are bringing him back to his own word to us. Mr. Spurgeon thinks the name is tantamount to Emmanuel, “Indeed brethren,” he says, “he is Jesus the Savior because he is Emmanuel, God with us. Being God he is able to save, being God with us he is abundant and loving kindness and mercy.”

And second, he was called Jesus by men, chapter 1 verse 21. It was God’s name for him and accepted by men instructed in divine truth. He is not only Teacher, Leader, and Lord, but Jesus the Saviour.

And thirdly, it’s the name typically worn by the Old Testament captain of the Lord’s Host. Joshua, the son of Nun, for he lead the children of Israel in the conquest of Canaan, slaying Amilech, overcoming Jericho, and routing the Canaanites. Later it was typically worn by the high priest Joshua, symbolically crowned in Zachariah’s vision to represent the one King Priest, the Messiah, who is to come. Look at Zachariah chapter 3. It was a common name, because men looked for saviors but found none until he came. Now the name is reserved for him alone.

And fourth, it’s the name that identifies him with his people. He would not be Yahweh is salvation if he had no people to save. And all his elect ones cannot get along without his salvation. The first link with him is not our goodness but our sin, not our merit but our misery, not our righteousness but his grace.

And fifth, it’s the name that indicates his chief work. To know him as a great teacher alone is not to know him in his principal work. To have known Milton, but not as a poet, is not to have known him in his greatest accomplishment. To have known Einstein, but not as a scientist, is not to have known him in his greatest calling. To know Jack Nicklaus as a man alone and not as one of the greatest golfers who ever lived, is not to know him in his greatest work. In fact, only golfers who have seen Nicklaus hit a golf ball can really know Nicklaus in his greatest work. Bruce Barton once wrote a book about Christ entitled *The Man Nobody Knows*. That would be true of all men if none knew him as savior. To know him as savior is to know him in his greatest work, to know him as he really is there. To miss that is never to have known him in just that which distinguishes him from all.

And sixthly, Jesus is the name that is completely justified by the facts of his ministry. Mr. Spurgeon said that he once saw the grave of a child which had this inscription on the grave stone, “Sacred to the memory of Methuselah Coney who died age six months.” The infant had a name to which he did not attain.

And finally, it’s Christ’s personal name forever. In the final book of the New Testament, and in its final chapter, he gives this testimony in his risen life, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” Revelation 22:16. In the glory of his risen status he is still Jesus by his own testimony. In a moment the apostle adds one justifiable addition when he prays in response to our Lord’s promise, “Surely I come quickly, even so, come Lord Jesus.”

In the 22nd verse we’re introduced to the first of the quotations avowedly introduced by the author of the gospel with the impressive formula, “This is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet.” There are ten of the fulfillment quotations in Matthew, which if isolated tell us considerable about the author’s purpose in writing the gospel. But the principal point the evangelist wishes to make here is that the birth of Jesus was the subject of Isaiah’s great Emmanuel prophecy. In that memorable prophecy Isaiah, the eagle among the prophets, and the evangelist of the old covenant, writes of a child born of a virgin, to be called Emmanuel who shall come into the midst of the degradation of his people Israel, but ultimately overcome all his enemies, chapter 9, verse 6 and 7. The male child of the virgin, born and given to Israel, Isaiah calls the “Mighty God,” whose shoulders are broad enough for the Davidic government to rest upon them.

In the facts of the birth of Jesus the evangelist Matthew sees several things that link the history with the prophecy. In the first place, there is the stress on the virgin birth. And there is note of Messiah’s divine origin in the phrase, “born of the Holy Spirit.” And finally, there is the note of victory in his assumption of the throne of David. The sweep of Isaiah’s argument demanded that the child of chapter 7 verse 14 be the Son of chapter 9 verse 6. Although born of a lowly virgin in Israel, because it’s “a child is born unto us” “a Son is given unto us” he would be Emmanuel, the Mighty God, the universal King of kings and Lord of lords. It’s not surprising therefore, to find that Matthew links the prophecy with the history of the birth of Mary’s son, because each of these elements is found in the history also. Of all the elements however, the greatest stress lies upon his deity, or upon Emmanuel. He is with us by virtue of the virgin birth, but let us never forget that he is God with us.

Contemporary Old Testament scholarship finds it difficult to affirm that the virgin’s son is God with us. For example, Gerhard Delling, the German scholar from Halle, in the notable theological dictionary of the New Testament, thinks that the decisive point of

Isaiah 7:14 is simply, I'm quoting him, "That the son of the young woman is the one who is commissioned by God to bring salvation as the bearer of God's Spirit, Isaiah 11:2. The name God with us" professor Delling says, "emphasizes the fact that Yahweh is acting through him." That's the close of his quotation. That of course could be said of almost any mere man. The opinion is refuted by Isaiah's statements in Isaiah 9:6 and 10:21 and elsewhere. The divinely given sign is the birth of a God-man through a virgin by the power of God the Spirit; that Isaiah makes plain.

The two names of the Messianic Son given here have often been contrasted. The first, Jesus is the name that stresses his office, he saves. The second, Emmanuel, underscores his essence or nature, he is God. One is the believer's comfort and consolation in suffering and trials. The other is his assurance and hope of victory in the suffering.

It's note worthy that Jesus is never called Emmanuel in the New Testament. Which at first site seems strange, however this very gospel concludes on the triumphant note, "Lo, I am with you always" Matthew 28:20. Is that not after all Emmanuel, God with us? For Jesus is with us forever. It's hard to put it more appealingly than in this way. God, there lies the majesty, God with us, there lies the mercy. God, therein his glory, God with us, therein is grace.

The fact that the Christian church has believed that our Lord is one person with two natures, a human and a divine one, has unnecessarily puzzled some believers, although even the wisest and most theologically astute Christians admit that given the fact that the matter touches the most intimate aspects of the divine being, the full understanding of the incarnate Son is a mystery.

William G. T. Shedd in an illuminating paragraph has thrown a great deal of light on the matter. Listen to his words, "A man can have two forms of consciousness," Shedd points out, "yet with only one self consciousness. He can feel cold with his body while he prays to God with his mind. These two forms of conscious experience are wholly

diverse and distinct. He does not pray with his body, or feel cold with his mind. Yet this doubleness and distinctness in the consciousness does not destroy the unity of his self consciousness. So also Jesus Christ as a theanthropic person, that is a God-man kind of person, was constituted of a divine nature and human nature. The divine nature had its own form of experience, like mind in an ordinary person. And the human nature had its own form of experience, like the body in a common man. The experiences of the divine nature were as diverse from those of the human nature as those of the human mind are from those of the human body. Yet there is but one person who is the subject ego of both of these experiences. At the very time when Christ was conscious of weariness and thirst, by the well of Samaria, he also was conscious that he was the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the second person in the Trinity. This is proved by his words to the Samaritan woman, ‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. I that speak unto thee am the Messiah.’ The first mentioned consciousness of fatigue and thirst came through the human nature in his person. The second mentioned consciousness of omnipotence and supremacy came through the divine nature in his person. If he had not had a human nature he could not have had the former consciousness of thirst. And if he had not had a divine nature he could not have had the latter; that sense of omnipotence and supremacy. Because he had both natures in one person he could have both.” That concludes Mr. Shedd’s citation. I made just a few explanatory comments as we went along.

Well now we turn back again to Matthew chapter 1 and in verse 24 and verse 25 we read Matthew’s account of the response of Joseph to the words of the angel. The text reads, “Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called his name Jesus.” Joseph then, following the angel’s appearance, obediently brought Mary home, publicly acknowledging her as his wife, and formally legalizing the

connection of her son with the Davidic line. Mary of course, was of the Davidic line as well, but the heir ship to the line rested with Joseph. But normal marriage relations awaited the birth of the infant, as the evangelist says, “Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and took unto him his wife” and Matthew adds, “and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.”

When in the course of time the son was born, God’s age long purpose became his accomplishment and prophecy became gospel. He was given the name Jesus; the best, truest, and most appropriate name for him in the days of his flesh since it was divinely ordered and expounded. And when believers plead this name, as I said earlier, they bring God back to his own word. It’s the name that identifies him with his people and the name which indicates his principal work.

A few words by way of conclusion now; there is one final point that may be made. In the Lukan account of the announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel of the birth of her son, Gabriel said, “Fear not Mary, for thou hast found favor with God, and behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus, he shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end” Luke 1:30-33.

The clause I’m interested here is this one, “he shall be great.” That he surely was and is. He is great in his cognomen, for his name is the Lord’s salvation, for there is no other salvation offered by the Lord God than that through the cross and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Peter says, “There is none other name unto heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

Further, he is great in his character for he is the divine Son of the eternal Father, possessing his nature and attributes and he is great in his calling, for he is destined as David’s greater son to have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth. But it’s almost foolish for an unglorified man to extol his greatness, for when

reach heaven and see him and understand how great he really is, we would half wish we could come back and rewrite our greatest expressions of praise for him.

Let me simply say this; he is great in the atonement for his elect ones. And great in the innumerable multitude he shall save through that atonement. And great in the glory of heaven, as he himself puts it in John 17:24, he longs that we shall share that understanding with him. Enhance his glory now, by trusting him for deliverance from sins, guilt, penalty, and dominion. Enhance his glory by longing for communion with him. Enhance his greatness by crying out with the apostles, “Unto him that loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in his blood and hath made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

The only appropriate response to the greatness of the Son of God is to kneel before him in one’s heart, confessing one’s sin and guilt and the worthiness of ourselves for eternal condemnation to acknowledge that the Son of God has offered the atoning sacrifice by which sinners may be saved, and to cast ourselves upon him and upon the merits of the blood that he has shed. As an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, I call upon you at this very moment, right where you are, if you have never believed in him, to bow your head, acknowledge him as your Savior and Lord and trust him forever. His glory will be further enhanced by the sinners that lean upon him for time and for eternity. Come to Christ, believe in him, trust in him, at this very moment.

Well next week, as we continue our study of the New Testament revelation of the Messiah, we’ll look again at the Messiah’s birth and deal with the question of the virgin birth...

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