

## JOSEPH AND HIS DREAM

Matthew 1:18-25

**Intro:** In the past God has had many ways in which He has spoken to man. Sometimes it has been through a vision. Sometimes it has been through a dream. Often God spoke to the prophets, and then they proclaimed the message of God to the people to whom they were sent. Sometimes He actually spoke in an audible voice. We know that whenever God appeared visibly, such as in those appearances of the angel of the Lord, it was Christ Who appeared because the Apostle John has told us that

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 1:18). But the writer of the book of Hebrews has put the period, so to speak, on what God has said in the words we find at the very beginning of that epistle. These are the words to which I am referring:

- 1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
- 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

And so this passage tells us that after Christ came, God no longer spoke in those “divers manners,” or *different ways*. Those different ways came to an end after Christ came. Now God speaks to us through His Word. That is the reason we have the Bible. It is there that God speaks to us. We firmly believe that the Bible is the completed Word of God and that in the Bible we have the full message of God to man.

Today God does not speak through dreams, but he was still speaking through dreams when Joseph, the man our text speaks of, was living on the earth. And so we read in Matthew 1:20 that “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream.” I have often wished that our guidance was as clear today as it was in Bible times when the Lord spoke audibly from heaven, or when a vision was given, or when a direct revelation was given in some way to a prophet, who then would give the message to the people. We know that God still leads, and that He providentially works in our lives, but mainly we are dependent upon the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in seeking and finding the will of God. Be careful of any guidance you seem to get from any other source than the Word of God, and especially any guidance that is in conflict with the teaching that God has given us in His Word. When we say that we walk by faith, we do not mean that it is like a person groping his way in the darkness. It is that we walk in the light of the Word of God that God leads us.

It is obvious that this incident related to the birth of our Lord followed the two events which we have already considered in this series:

- 1) The angel's message to Zacharias concerning the birth of his son, John, who is known as John the Baptist.
- 2) The angel's message to the virgin Mary that she would be the mother of a Son Whose Name would be Jesus.

The account begins by telling us of:

## **I. JOSEPH'S PROBLEM (Matt. 1:18-19).**

This verse does not give us what Joseph understood at this time, but it is Matthew's understanding of what had happened. And this, of course, was written after the birth of our Lord. What Joseph understood at this time was simply that Mary was "with child."

Mary was espoused to Joseph, similar to what we call engagement, but much stronger than our engagement. A legal representative (or simply a friend) of the man would meet with the parents of the prospective bride, and an agreement was entered into indicating a definite intention to marry. Breaking this agreement was more like what we would call a divorce even though the man and the woman were not yet married.

We are told here that "Joseph was a just man," meaning that he was saved, that he was a believer in the OT promises of a Redeemer and of salvation. In Luke 1 we learned that Mary was "highly favored" by the Lord. And when she accepted the message of the angel Gabriel, we are told in Luke 1:38 that Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to thy word." So it is very clear that we have here a betrothal that would be pleasing to the Lord. A person, man or woman, who knows the Lord, is only free to marry a spouse who also knows the Lord. So everything was in order here regarding the will of God.

But we can understand why Joseph was both astounded and grieved to discover what he thought was Mary's unfaithfulness to him. It is certain that some communication passed between them. It may not have been that he had actually talked to Mary, but somehow he learned from a reliable source that she was expecting a baby. Just what the situation was between Joseph and Mary at this time we do not know. But what we do know is that Joseph felt that he could not go ahead with the marriage. However, because of his great love for her, he was "not willing to make her a public example," but "was minded to put her away privily."

In the Mosaic Law, Deut. 22 beginning with verse 23 we are told that if a

man and a woman who is betrothed to marry another man, are guilty of adultery, both were to be stoned. But in the case where the guilt was on the man's part, only the man was to be stoned. Joseph evidently felt that the second case would apply to Mary, but still he felt that he could not go on with the marriage. And so, not willing to disgrace her anymore than he felt she already was disgrace, he was going to break the betrothal in private. We can imagine what an agonizing time this was for Joseph.

As we come to verse 20 we have:

## **II. THE APPEARANCE AND MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL (Matt. 1:20-21).**

We are not told who this angel was, but I think that we are safe in assuming that it was the same angel who appeared to Mary, the angel Gabriel. He was the one who appeared to Zacharias, and he also appeared to Mary, and it would appear that it would be his responsibility from the Lord to appear to Joseph although with him it was in a dream.

Twice in chapter 2 of Matthew we are told that "the angel of the Lord" appeared to Joseph, and both times it was in a dream. Cf. Matt. 2:12-13 and 19-20.

But our text here in Matthew 1 continues with the statement, "While he," that is, Joseph, "thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream."

Brown, in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, said,

Who would not feel for him after receiving such intelligence, and before receiving any light from above? As he brooded over the matter alone, in the stillness of the night, his domestic prospects darkened and his happiness blasted for life, his mind slowly making itself up to the painful step, yet planning how to do it in the way least offensive -- at the last extremity the Lord Himself interposes.

And then he was given the most amazing message. He did not need to be afraid to take Mary to be his wife because the child that she was going to have had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. This was exactly the same message that the angel Gabriel had given to Mary earlier when she asked how she could have a child when she was not married. It was to be the cause of humiliation to Mary, and presumably to Joseph, since both of them would have been under suspicion of not waiting until they were married.

In addressing Joseph as “thou son of David,” the angel was reminding Joseph that he was in the Messianic line, the family from which the Messiah would come. And we know that Mary was in that same family line. *But never before in the history of the human race had such a thing taken place, that a virgin would have a child who had been conceived by the Holy Spirit.*

It may have been that the angel’s words in verse 21 convinced Joseph of what had actually happened.

Note the certainty expressed in verse 21:

- 1) “She shall bring forth a son.”
- 2) “Thou shall call His Name JESUS.”
- 3) “He shall save His people from their sins.”

As was the case with John the Baptist, those were days when it was impossible to determine whether a woman would give birth to a son or a daughter. But the angel Gabriel told Zacharias that Elisabeth would have a son, that his name was to be John, and that he would “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” How much of all of this Joseph had been informed of, we do not know. But since in this series we are considering the Names and Titles of our Lord, let us turn our attention now to the Name, JESUS.

Joseph had only one option in naming the child that would be born. It was his prerogative to name the Son, even though our Lord was not actually his child. So to have named the Lord any other name would have been utter disobedience on Joseph’s part.

One writer (Barnes) said that “JESUS” is actually synonymous with salvation. This was the purpose behind the birth of this Child. He was coming to “save His people from their sins.”

The “He” in “He shall save,” is emphatic. It indicates that the work of salvation would be His, and His alone. And the verb “save” must be taken in its most comprehensive sense. He would save His people, those whom the Father had given to Him, His elect, “from their sins.” He delivers His people from the judgment of God they are under because of their sins. And this statement should make us realize how hopeless we are without the divine Savior, and what a terrible death He died when He took upon Himself the full penalty for our sins.

But He delivers us from sins power. This means from temptation, not that we cannot be tempted, but the power of temptation has been removed for

those who know the Lord. He keeps us in times of trial and testing. He protects us from all that the enemy of our souls would do to defeat us. Sins power over us is broken by our Savior.

But salvation would not be complete if it did not mean that some day we will be delivered from even the possibility of sinning. The child of God hates sin. A person cannot be saved and still continue on in the same way of living afterwards. And he looks forward to heaven when sin and the shame that goes with it will be a thing of the past. What a marvelous statement verse 21 is, and the more we think about it, the more truth we see in it.

But we must move to verses 22 and 23 where we have:

### **III. THE QUOTATION FROM ISAIAH'S PROPHECY (Matt. 1:22-23).**

What this quotation meant to Joseph, we cannot say for sure. It does not seem that it was a part of the angel's message, but that it was added by Matthew to show the relation of the angel's message to the Word of God through Isaiah. I don't think that it is beyond the realm of possibility that Joseph knew this prophecy, and it may have come into his mind as he listened to the message of the angel of the Lord. But whatever may be the relationship of this prophecy to Joseph, Matthew wanted his readers to know that this very thing had been predicted by Isaiah some 700 years before.

And even in the first prophecy in the OT concerning a Redeemer we are told that the Redeemer would be *the seed of a woman* in a book where genealogies are traced through the men, not the women. We can see now that even that prophecy in Gen. 3:15 was a prediction of the virgin birth of the Messiah, but that feature was not made clear until the days of Isaiah.

But in this prophecy we learn that the Lord would be called, "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

We have no record that our Lord was ever called "Emmanuel" while He was here on earth. Perhaps someday that Name will be used for Him. But the point here is that the birth of the virgin's Son would only be explained by *the meaning of that Name!* "God with us."

In the first place, this signifies that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. He was made in our likeness, but He continued to be God. His humanity did not take away from His Deity in any way. He was the God-Man, the

divine and the human in one Person.

But also contained in this Name is the idea that God is on our side. God has come in human flesh to take our part, to meet our need. It is really explained for us in Isa. 41:10:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

We have the same idea in Isa. 43:1-2:

1 But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimate testimony that God is with us, on our side, has come to meet our need, and to accompany us all through life.

In Barnes commentary he gives this poem which I am going to read to you. I don't know if he wrote it, or someone else did, but it conveys the idea, at least in part, of the Name, Emmanuel:

"Till God in human flesh I see,  
My thoughts no comfort find,  
The holy, just, and sacred Three  
Are terror to my mind.

"But if IMMANUEL'S face appears,  
My hope, my joy, begins.  
His grace removes my slavish fears.  
His blood removes my sins."

(from Barnes' Notes)

The last words of our Savior recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, are, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," or *until the consummation of the age*.

*Be sure to drink of the sweetness of these two names, "Jesus" and "Emmanuel." They not only spell complete salvation for us, but they assure us that throughout life we can always count on the Lord being on our side, meeting our needs, granting us victory, and keeping us in peace*

*throughout all of the trials of our journey here below.*

The Puritans used to say, “If God is our Friend, it makes no difference who our enemies are.” The Apostle Paul put it this way, “If God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom. 8:31b).

Our final two verses tell us of:

#### **IV. THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH (Matt. 1:24-25).**

He married Mary, but did not live with her as a husband until after the Lord Jesus was born. And when our Lord was born, Joseph “called His Name JESUS.”

God ministered to Joseph through the angel, giving him faith to believe the unbelievable. And it seems from the quotation of Isaiah’s prophecy that we have an illustration of what the Apostle Paul said about faith in Rom. 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

**Concl:** What a remarkable story this is! How amazing are the works of the Lord. And what assurance there is in the birth of JESUS, as the Apostle Paul said in Rom. 4:20-21 about the time when Abraham and Sarah faced an impossible situation of their own:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief;  
but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he  
was able also to perform.

What encouragement should the birth of Christ be to us that God is always faithful to His Word. You and I could never have devised a way of salvation that would be like our salvation is. And if we could have, we would not have the power to do what was necessary, to bring Christ down from heaven. But our God has done it all, providing full and free and eternal salvation for His people.

But let me remind you that those who are the chosen of God can be identified because they express true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, not a faith that comes and goes, but a faith, although it may be stronger at some times than at others, yet never fails completely, but grows strong and stronger until that perfect day when all shadows will forever flee away, and we shall stand before God, perfected in the righteousness of our Savior Who bears the sacred Names, JESUS and IMMANUEL.

