

## A GREAT PROMISE AND A GREAT FULFILLMENT

### Matthew 1:18-25

**Intro:** On Sunday nights recently we have been thinking about the promises of God, promises which the Apostle Peter called, “exceeding,” or *exceeding*, “great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4), promises through which God has promised to make His people “partakers of the divine nature.” Those promises have to do with salvation, and they are contained in what the Bible calls the Gospel. Surely no work that God has ever done can surpass what He does in taking sinful, self-sufficient, proud, corrupt human beings to make them like His Son. But that is what salvation is.

Many of those promises have to do with what God has done, and is doing, in our individual lives, saving us, and blessing us through His Word, that we might grow to be like our Lord. But, as we might expect, there could have been no salvation if God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, had not come into this world, as our text says, “to save His people from their sins.” This is a promise that extends back, not only into the OT, but back before there was any creation, before time began.

But in our text for today we actually have two expressions of the same promise. One comes to us from the prophecy of Isaiah who lived approximately seven hundred years before the fulfillment of that promise that was announced by the angel to Joseph. Joseph, as our text tells us, was “espoused” to be married to a young Jewish woman by the name of Mary.

Thus right here at the beginning of our New Testament we have two promises having to do with the same event, given seven hundred years apart. One thing this does is to tie the OT and the NT together. That which was predicted by Isaiah the prophet, was about to be fulfilled in the time when Joseph and Mary lived during the Roman Empire.

One thing this should do for all of us, is to confirm the reliability of the OT promises. That, in turn, along with all other fulfilled prophecies (which were promises), strengthens our faith in every promise that God has made. If the greater promises are proven true, then the promises given to us as individual believers must be true as well. If you and I are standing on the promises of God, we are standing on the time-tested, unshakable, irrevokable, Word of God! They are the promises of a God Who cannot lie because He is God!

But now let us get to the Scriptures. Let me call the first point,

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

The genealogy which is found in the first seventeen verses establishes the fact that Joseph as a descendant of Abraham. You will notice in verse 20 that the angel of the Lord who spoke to him, probably Gabriel, called him a "son of David."

He and Mary were what we would call, engaged. But engagement in those days was as binding as marriage. In fact, it led to marriage. According to Jewish law Joseph would have been considered to be her husband. But Joseph and Mary had not completed the marriage relationship at the time, and so when he learned that she was expecting a child, he could only come to one conclusion (as hard as it was for him to believe it), that she had been unfaithful to him.

As much as he loved Mary, he was "a just man" (the original text simply says, "being righteous"). This meant not only that he was a man of God, one who had truly been saved, and one who wanted to please God, but he wanted to do the right thing in the right way. He wanted to be "righteous" in his behavior. And yet as the verse goes on to tell us, he was not self-righteous. He was not hard like the Pharisees who in reality had no right to call themselves righteous. Joseph was, as all of the people of God should be, a gracious blend of righteousness and mercy. According to the Mosaic law, death by stoning was the penalty for what Mary seemed to be involved in (see Deut. 22), but it does not seem that this was being obeyed when our Lord was here on earth. However, Joseph loved Mary so much that he did not want "to make her a public example." That is, he did not want to disgrace her publicly. The Scotch have a way of expressing this idea. They would say that Joseph did not want to put Mary "in the mouth of the public." He did not want people "bad talking" Mary. But he felt that he had to break their espousal, but he wanted to do it secretly, or privately. The words at the beginning of verse 20 indicate that he was not going to be hasty in what he did, but that he was thinking carefully (and probably prayerfully) about how he could do it without causing a lot of embarrassment to her. We might feel that if Mary were guilty as it appeared that she was, she deserved to be embarrassed to the limit. But Joseph did not think that way. A real test of character is to be seen in how we handle a situation like Joseph felt that he was in. He wanted to please the Lord, but he also wanted to be careful to not to hurt Mary

unnecessarily.

As Joseph was considering what he should do, and how he should do it, a wonderful thing happened.

## **II. AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM (Matt. 1:20-21).**

It was the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias to tell him that he and Elisabeth would have a son (see Luke 1:19). And it was Gabriel who appeared to Mary to tell her that she was going to have a Son (see Luke 1:26-27). So I think we are safe in assuming that it was Gabriel who appeared to Joseph in a dream. And he told Joseph what had really happened to Mary. She was with child by the Holy Spirit.

Such a thing had never happened before, and it has never been repeated since. But evidently Joseph, being a godly man, would have been familiar with the passage in Isaiah which we will come to in a moment, and he understood how it was that a virgin could have a child, and why that child could be called Emmanuel, which means *God with us*. But we will deal with that in a moment. What we need to realize here that it was actually the same Holy Spirit Who caused Joseph to understand the angel's message. The Holy Spirit is the only One Who can make us understand any part of the Word of God. So we must not give the credit to Joseph, but to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was working with both Mary and Joseph, although in different ways. And the situation here with respect to the agreement between what the angel said and what Isaiah had written about 700 years before, shows us that in understanding one passage of Scripture, we often are enabled to understand another passage that may have been a problem to us before.

But then in verse 21 we have the concluding part of the angel's message. There are three parts to it. Mary's child will be a Son. His Name will be Jesus. And the reason for the Name: "for He shall save His people from their sins."

But now we come to the third part of our passage:

## **III. THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE ANGEL AND ISAIAH (Matt. 1:22-23).**

I don't believe that these verses were a part of what the angel said

(although they could have been), but it seems to me to be more reasonable to think of them as having been added by Matthew, the writer of this gospel record.

But now, as we speak of what the angel said and what the prophet Isaiah wrote, let us ask a question: How could a mere man have the wisdom to predict with such accuracy an event that was totally outside and beyond normal human experience? Every child born into this world following the creation of Adam and Eve, had a human father and a human mother – no exceptions! Cain’s parents were Adam and Eve, and the same was true of his brother Abel. And you can go down through human history and that is always the case. How could Isaiah predict that a virgin would conceive and bear a son – just to consider that part of the verse? Did he come up with such an idea?

Some biblical scholars who do not believe in the Deity of Christ say that the Hebrew word translated “virgin” in Isa. 7:14 doesn’t really mean *a virgin*, but that it should be translated *a young married woman*, or just a young woman of marriageable age, but not *a virgin*. It is the word עלמה. They insist that the word the Hebrews used for a virgin was בתולה. But one reason for the word that was used is that there was a contemporary fulfillment of the prediction that was made. If you read the context of Isaiah 7 you will see that the Lord was giving King Ahaz a promise that the two kings which were threatening Judah at the time were Rezin, king of Syria and Pekah the king of Israel. And Isaiah was being told that Isaiah and his wife would have a son, which they did, a child which God named Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And King Ahaz was told that before that child knew the difference between good and evil, both of those kings would be gone! But the fact that there was to be another child called Immanuel, means, as was often the case, that there would be an immediate fulfillment of that prophecy, with the birth of Isaiah’s son, and a future fulfillment of the prophecy in the birth of Immanuel. This is often the case with prophetic utterances, as when Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, but all of the prophecy was not fulfilled at that time, although part of it was.

No Isaiah did not come up with the idea. He was speaking under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit Who is the Author of all Scripture. And the Spirit of God led Isaiah to use a word that would apply to Isaiah’s wife as well as to an unmarried virgin like Mary was at the time that the Holy Spirit came upon her.

But how did the angel know that that prophecy would be fulfilled in a young unmarried woman, a virgin? Well, angels are messengers, messengers from God. And God sent one of his chief angels, Gabriel, with the message to Joseph, as God had sent him to Zacharias and to Mary before him. And so there was perfect agreement between Isaiah and the angel Gabriel. And for the child to be called Immanuel pointed to the nature of Mary's son: He would be both God and Man, God the Son in human flesh. In this way He would be a man, able to die for men, and yet as God without sin, and able to present to the Father a perfect sacrifice. And it is just as important to believe that He was God in human flesh as it is to believe that He really became a Man, yet without sin. We have the very foundational truths of our salvation in this very familiar story concerning Joseph and how he learned about the nature of Mary's unborn Child.

Now there is one more point before I make some applications. The final point is:

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

Joseph woke up. He did what the angel told him to do, not to be afraid to go ahead with his marriage, but they did not have a relationship as a husband and wife until after the Lord Jesus Christ was born. And since it was the husband's job to name the child, Joseph, again in obedience to the angel and in obedience to God, named Mary's Son, JESUS!

And all of this is evidence of God's work in Joseph's heart. Joseph must have been acquainted with Isaiah 7:14; most devoted Jews were familiar with it. And he like other Jews who knew the Lord were waiting for the promised Messiah. Joseph was convinced that what the angel told him was in complete agreement with Isaiah's prophecy, and that his beloved Mary was not unfaithful to him after all, but she had been sovereignly chosen to be the mother of the promised Redeemer. All of the pieces began to fit together in the mind and heart of Joseph.

Now for some concluding words.

**Concl:** We have two names to consider. The one is Jesus; the other, "Immanuel." Our Lord was called "Jesus" over and over again. We still speak of Him as "Jesus." But, as far as we know, He was never called "Immanuel." This is not to say that the time will never come when He will be called by that Name, but, if so, we are not there yet. It is used

twice by Isaiah (7:14; 8:8) and once by Matthew (1:23), and that is all. But both of these Names convey very important truth for us. Let's think about "Jesus" first.

We are told why He was to be named "Jesus." It was because "He shall save His people from their sins." Most Jews in our Lord's day, including His own disciples, believed that their greatest need was political – to be saved from Rome! But their greatest need was not political; it was spiritual! They needed to be saved from their sins – from the penalty of their sins, which was eternal death in hell. But they needed to be saved also from the power and control of their sins. Saving them from Rome would not have prepared them for heaven. The nations of the earth come and go, but the spiritual needs of Jews and Gentiles alike in every generation are the same: the need for a Savior, the need for forgiveness, the need for eternal life!

This past week Tony Morrell sent me a news item he had gotten from Fox News telling how young people in our colleges are turning to witchcraft and other pagan practices. And one reason they find it attractive was expressed by a college graduate who said that it "appeals to some college students because 'there is no sense of sin.'" I have heard from several different sources just this past week that a growing number of young people don't want to be told what they can't do, or what they should do. They want to be able to do whatever they want to do. And this attitude is to be found among many adults. And yet we have many people saying that what our country needs is education. Let me say this morning that one of the best ways to ruin your child is to send him or her to almost any of our schools of so-called "higher learning." Young people who get involved in witchcraft are playing with moral and physical ruin. We have said as a nation that we don't like to have God in our knowledge, and so what Paul wrote 2,000 ago is happening before our eyes is just like he said it would be: as a nation we are turning to fables. A fable is something that is not true, but more than that it will lead to ruin now and ruin in the life to come. Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins, and there is no other remedy for sin. And if you think sin is not a problem, just listen to the news, or read your newspaper, or open your eyes to see what is going on in our country today.

But how does Jesus saved us from our sins? What did He do? He came as a Man in this world, a perfect Man, untouched by human sin. But God placed upon Him the sins of His people. He was made sin for them that

they might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He shed His blood, paying my debt and yours that we might be forgiven and be assured of heaven some day. Don't believe people who would have you believe that there is no sin. The birth and life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's message to the whole world that sin is everybody's problem, and it is a deadly problem, and there is only one remedy, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the Cross.

But did you notice that the angel of the Lord said, "His people." We are all so spiritually blind and dead to the truth of God, that none of us would have come to Jesus Christ for salvation, if God had not chosen the people He intends to redeem. Yes, I am talking about an elect people, a chosen people. When the Lord prayed His great prayer which is recorded for us in John 17 He talked about His people. Here are some of His words as He prayed to His Father:

2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do (John 17:2-4).

And then a couple of verses later the Lord said this:

6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine (John 17:6-9).

In verses 11 and 12 of John 17 we read these words:

11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:11-12).

And then toward the end of the prayer, our Lord offered this petition to

His Father:

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

Earlier in John's Gospel we read that the Lord said this in His teaching:

37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

And then He followed it with this:

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

We who are the Lord's people are His, not because we sought Him, but because He sought us, and brought us to Himself. And He is still seeking His own. That is why we continue to preach the Gospel. God's work is not going to fail. People despise it because they don't understand what His work is.

The message of the coming of Christ is clearly stated in 1 Tim. 1:15 where Paul said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ."

But what about Emmanuel? "God with us." God is "with us," on our side, because of what He has done for us. And He continues to be "with us" throughout our lives, providing for us, guiding us, protecting us, blessing us in more ways than anyone can say. He saves us, and then He keeps us, and He will not lose one of us, so that all of the glory for our salvation belongs to Him, none of it to us.

I trust that the Lord has given all of us an understanding of these great truths. If not, perhaps the Lord brought you here to know what the coming of Christ really means. And I trust that the Lord has opened your heart so that you will believe the Word of God, and come to Christ today, acknowledging Him as your Savior.