

The Coming King

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[0 : 00] Okay, for a few moments this morning, I want to look at the passage that Jenny read for us in Matthew chapter 1 from verse 18, the birth of Jesus, and the title is The Coming King.

We're looking at the King, the coming of the King over these number of weeks. And I'm pretty sure you all know this story very well.

The nativity stories that we hear about and that are read, and there's probably, you probably will have an opportunity to go more carol services this year than you've ever had in your life online because that seems to be what's available and that's great.

But I think sometimes because of that, the nativity information, particularly the nativity information, maybe becomes stylized.

We're so used to hearing it or reading it, particularly this time of year, and for so many people it is just fable, isn't it? It's fable. It's myth.

[1 : 00] It's legend. It's cultural. It's just part of what they read and hear about and learn at this time of year.

But we remain firmly convinced and we continue to remind ourselves that what we have in Scripture is historical truth.

It's not myth, it's not legend, it's not warm and fuzzy emotional imaginations for this time of year.

And it's actually very earthy and it's very gritty. And if we allow ourselves to consider the truths that lie within the historical facts that are recorded for us, we see a great tension.

A tension between our reality and God's reality. And that really, that goes through the whole of life. That just doesn't just happen in the nativity story.

[2 : 01] It happens throughout Scripture and it happens throughout our understanding of us and our understanding of God. There's a tension. There's always that danger, I think, of trivializing the birth of Jesus with one big almighty, oh, isn't it lovely?

Because that's what we do with the birth of children. We saw the photograph of Emma, that's what we all did. That's lovely. And that's absolutely right, of course. But it's something much, much greater and much deeper than simply the birth of a child.

There's theological, historical and spiritual truth that is absolutely life-changing and foundational for us. So I want to look a little bit at God's reality and then through Joseph's experience as a person, how that affects, what's that like for our reality and what it means.

So God's reality that comes through this passage is very clear, isn't it? He makes clear to us, not just then but now, that there is an indisputable spiritual world that we can't see today.

As it was then. You know, we're told there in verse 20 that as Joseph, Mary had told Joseph about what was going to be happening and he was going to put her away, divorce her quietly.

[3 : 31] But as he considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him that what was conceived in Mary was from the Holy Spirit. We just kind of scam over that, don't we?

And yet what we have there is the reality of God's indisputable revelation of a spiritual world, something that's totally real but not physical so that, you know, there's a world that is not measurable by our standards, not empirically provable, not easily defined beyond our finite understanding in many ways but real.

And we sense it, and we sense its shadows in our longings, in our consciousness, in our creativity, in our love, in our fears, in our relentless search for meaning, for discovery, for origins.

We find it in what we call our soul, in the unexpected and in the unexplained. And it's the spiritual reality, it's the spiritual world that God reveals to us as real as the person sitting next to you, more real maybe in some ways.

So there's an indisputable spiritual world, and God's reality within that gives us His own self-revelation.

[5 : 02] So God reveals Himself as God of the spiritual world, as a spiritual God. He is a spirit. He says that, that He is a spirit, a spirit who is real, a person, creative mind and word.

God who, as He reveals Himself in the Word, is the author of all life and all love. A triune God. Can you understand that? No, I can't. Can you?

A triune God. A God who created a spiritual world, who created the angelic beings who were good, some of whom became evil and rebelled against God and became demons.

Reminding us of the reality of where the angels came from, their heavenly home, and of the reality of being separated from God in an everlasting hell of demons.

That spiritual reality where we're immediately uneasy, where we're immediately out of our comfort zone. But I would challenge anyone that I spoke to that however suppressed it may be that deep down we know that.

[6 : 13] We know that world. We know that spiritual world. We made, people may deny it and resist it and ignore it.

But if we do so, we will always be lost until we face up to and live in the reality of the spiritual world that God reveals.

Reveals in His Word and reveals through this birth. Where something new, which something special, which something never to be recreated or where we talk about turning back the clock.

When we like to turn back the clocks from 2020? Yeah, in many ways we probably can't turn back the clock, can we? And we certainly can't turn back the clock nor would we want to on this unique birth.

Where the physical and the spiritual realms are fused together hugely powerfully. And nothing from that moment on, from that conception on, nothing will ever be the same.

[7 : 15] The coming of the King in this way has changed the universe forever. That is the greatest and most life-changing event that has ever occurred.

And we see that this unique birth, God prophesied in unfolding history.

We saw that, Thomas spoke about that last week, the fulfillment of many centuries of promise. And it's mentioned here in verse 22, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken to the prophet, behold the virgins who will conceive and bear a son.

They shall call his name, Emmanuel. So we know that this unfolding history has been preparing for this unique coming together of the spiritual world and of the physical world.

It's the unseen overarching pattern of history. It's God-shaped. History is God-shaped. And history is spiritual, breaking into our physical universe.

[8 : 21] And so we see that in the unfolding history that's spoken of here. But we also see it in his unique birth, don't we? Now this is a really vital truth.

What is conceived in you is, it's conceived of the Holy. What is, what is, you've come together and he says, the angel says to her, do not fear.

What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. This great vital truth that God the Son, Jesus the Savior, becomes flesh and blood through the mysterious touch of God, the Father.

Through the Spirit, He is born into the womb of Mary, conceived into the womb of Mary, the God-man, spiritual, physical coming together.

Now I can't explain that. As beyond my comprehension, probably I suspect beyond yours. But it's very important.

[9 : 26] It's not to be rubbish. It's not to be mythologized because there's deep theological truth that God enables us to recognize the importance of this.

He's breaking. And is clearly breaking the hereditary, sinful nature of human birth. He's breaking into the ordinary will and physical and physiological union of a loving couple in bringing conception to bear.

And He is breaking into that with His own infinite Son who takes on flesh, a human nature along with His divine nature in one person, in utero, the remarkable truth of the incarnation.

And so God is breaking in both through history and the revelation of prophecy, both through the unique birth of Jesus in this unique way which has never, ever been repeated nor will it be, but also in His names, in the names that He gives and that are declared of Jesus.

You know, we talk just for a moment about names with the kids, and I'm not sure how much names mean to us or how much effort other than, well, I really like that name or that name is important in our family or something like that.

[10:59] And I certainly think in our context we don't weigh names in the same way that it would have been in the ancient Near Eastern culture, but we see often in the Bible that names help to describe the work or the character even of an individual.

And the Christ has many names, but He is giving the name Jesus. All His names are very significant, and again last week Thomas looked at a number of them from Isaiah that are very well known to us, wonderful counsellor and so on.

But He is called Jesus. They're both very significant names, Jesus, the Savior, Joshua, the Savior of sinners, the Savior, and Emmanuel, God with His hugely significant names that are declared to Joseph, who will be His earthly father as it were, although not genetically or physically.

And they explain, don't they, right from that early, right from the very beginning, they explain why Jesus is here. He's not called the woodworker. He's not named the carpenter. He's not named the preacher.

His name doesn't mean any of these things, particularly here, because what God wants Joseph and us to know is that He has come to be the Savior of sinners.

[12:34] That's His role. He will be called Jesus because He is the one who will save His people from their sins. That's us. That's every one of us.

And He will be called Emmanuel, God with us. These names tell us a great deal about what we would casually call the reason for the season.

They remind us of the significance and the importance that we need to be redeemed. We need to be... We need a Savior. And the most important person we need in our lives is God, God with us, which is promised through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So we have this unmistakable spiritual reality, God breaking into our physical world to reveal our spiritual bankruptcy before Him with this astonishing commitment to gift us His Son.

And that is huge because it has turned the world upside down, but I hope and pray it's also turned your life upside down. Not just 20 years ago when you professed faith, or five years ago, or 40 years ago, or last week, but every day that our life is transformed by this knowledge of who God is.

[13:55] So we've seen God's reality. What about God's... Just briefly, what about God's reality for us? How that... We take that and apply it into our own hearts and lives on a regular basis.

And I'm just going to focus on one thing. I'm just going to focus on Emmanuel, God with us, and what that means. Not all that it means, just a little bit of what it means in the person and work of Christ.

And at one level, Emmanuel, which we sing about and which we believe and which we rejoice in, at one level it's the most inconvenient truth that we are ever faced with as sinners before a holy God. It's not the most comforting truth in many ways for us in our natural sinful condition because we've rebelled against God and we're not really that keen on God, even in His love.

And if we are challenged by the spiritual reality which is unseen and which therefore is easy to avoid, our lives will be turned upside down.

[15:03] And that's ongoing tough for us as Christians. In many ways, He's the most troublesome and uncomfortable challenge, at least to our self-absorbed independence where we want to go alone and we want to be on our own.

We're not really that keen on having God in our lives. We know there's much more to it than that. But coming to Christ and being in Christ, it doesn't make life easier, does it? Can we testify to that this morning?

Can we be honest enough to testify to that this morning? We're spiritually alive, and I'll go on to talk about that briefly, but we're battling evil and deadness and remaining defeated certainly, but intoxicating blindness and deep spiritual opposition to God because of what remains of sin to be defeated and not to be defeated but to be destroyed in us.

I think of the battle that I have with God in my heart and life sometimes. I think of Tom Jones' great song, Did Trouble Me. When I close my eyes and would not see, my Lord did trouble me.

When I let things stand that should not be, my Lord did trouble me. Did trouble me with a word or a sign, with a ringing of the bell in the back of my mind.

[16:23] Did trouble me, did stir my soul for to make me human, to make me whole. And there's this wrestle, isn't there, with us in our lives when we come to know the spiritual dimension and the spiritual realm and the reality of God in our lives.

Let's look briefly at Joseph. Matthew speaks more about Joseph's side of the event. Luke looks more at Mary's side of the event.

Think of Joseph for a moment. His life was literally turned upside down, wasn't it? Firstly, with that conversation from his fiancée, as we would say, but it was his betrothed.

It was almost like marriage in his own culture, saying she's pregnant. Ah, a dream from God she'd had.

Sure, Mary, sure you're a dream from God. Can you imagine how devastated he was in that culture, at that time, at his position?

[17:27] But, you know, he was a righteous guy. He loved her and he didn't want her disgraced. Let's not try and put 21st century lenses on what's happening here with a self-righteous judgment on how he's dealing with this.

He loved her and didn't want her disgraced. He was going to divorce her as was necessary quietly in these days. But then he is a life-changing dream. A spiritual reality comes into his experience. And all is well again. He feels honored. This remarkable truth has happened. Something unique is going to happen with him and with Mary, and he's going to be involved in the coming of the Messiah and the Savior.

And so he resets his life and it's brilliant. It's future with Mary, there's joy again, it's turned out well as God is coming to his life. And then there's the census where he has to move to Nazareth. And he's homeless because there's no room in the inn for them. And the child is born. A cousin for John.

[18:42] Well turns out good. And then there's shepherds more breaking in from the spiritual realm, more dreams, more messages. Then there's wise men from the east with amazing expensive gifts.

But then he has to go. He has to leave everything because his life is in danger. And there's assassins that want his child dead along with all the other children, male children, desperate killings, desperate death, desperate annihilation, moves to a foreign country.

He eventually returns to family life in Nazareth. Many unrevealed joys and battles. And we're not told anything really about that upbringing except that when he's Jesus 12 years old, he goes missing in Jerusalem.

Pretty little story. But 12 years old, three days lost. Image of previous assassins who wanted their child dead.

There not being great terror and great fear. It wasn't a casual event in his life. His life again turned upside down.

[20:03] And then sometimes within the next 18 years he probably died. Probably young, we presume. So you know, it's not the easiest of life that we have recorded for Joseph.

Unheralded and unrecorded faith generally. And undoubtedly there were good times. But there's also poverty, wasn't there? And there was fear and there was doubts and confusion, illness and ultimately death.

But yet God. God was in him and with him. And when we look at that life, God's reality and the challenge of the spiritual reality of God breaking into Joseph's life, what's the counterbalance for us?

What's the counterbalance for that life of challenge and difficulty and unremarkable battles?

He was declared righteous. You know, we're told there in verse 19 that this Joseph was a just man. Righteous man. There's a declarative emphasis behind this term biblically that applies to him.

[21:19] He had received the great gift of salvation. He was one who trusted in the coming Messiah who happened to be his son at that level.

And that's the great... It's not even a counterbalance. Overbalances overcompensates a million times for anything that we will face in this life.

However difficult and challenging and overcoming, it is the biggest deal. Because trusting that God is the Savior and that God is with us is the most...and committing our lives to Him is the most powerful counterbalance we could ever have.

It's a presence, isn't it? Your ordinary mundane run-of-the-mill life is touched by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the presence of God in our lives.

Wherever we go, wherever we are, we are one with God. His essence is in us and with us through the Holy Spirit. And by the powerful work of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 31] We have meaning, joy, purpose, assured victory, promises, fulfillment, forgiveness. That nothing in this world can match that our pursuits and our...what we chase for in this life can only ever be a shadow of what we have in Christ.

There's no human security, ambition, wealth, health or long life that can replace us being able to say, my Father in heaven.

Our Father in heaven. Nothing can replace that. There's nothing more significant than being able to say that. The privilege and the blessing of knowing...being reunited with our God through Jesus Christ, through Him breaking into our experience, living the life we couldn't live, dying the death that we deserve and being raised as the first fruit of our resurrection.

Nothing changes in that. And I know you've heard that before. I know you know it back to front. But the challenge is for it to allow the Holy Spirit to work that into...to moat, to just work that into our hearts and to allow our heart of stone to be replaced by a heart of flesh which knows and loves the living God as a...as an appreciation of the gift that He has given to us.

Because along with that we have the great anticipation of heaven and all that heaven is, the anticipation of reunions and restoration and renewal, not just of our existence but of the existence of this universe.

[24 : 25] And that is our hope. And in that light I don't think our lives are easy in Christ because you know that spiritual realm is woken up, is awoken both for our salvation but also in opposition as well as the battle we face in our own hearts.

And I think it's easy to lose sight of that. And I hope you don't lose sight of that because He promises to be with us through these things not always to deliver us from them.

And if today you're struggling with what you see, what you experience or what you can't see and what you wish you could see spiritually, if there's much you don't understand about your sufferings and your soul pain, and if you're tired and weary, which I am and I'm sure you are too in these days. And that just please pray that you will see Jesus and that you will recognize the gift He is in the very complexity of your day to day life and of mine.

And see the shalom, the peace that He brings in order to be reunited with our Father. And I hope that transforms our lives and that gift that is promised to us is the most precious one that we have and not one that we treat with disdain, which is so easy for us to do isn't it, with our flesh and blood, lives and thinking, mentalities which Christ has come to redeem and renew and transform.

[26 : 10] Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we thank You for Your Word. And we know it's a battle for us and we know that often we don't see things and how easily we fall under the deception of thinking that God is rough and bad and unfair and mean, and that we deserve better.

And ignoring this remarkable event which brings on the remarkable reality of a life of obedience and then a death of huge and incomparable and unimaginable suffering and judgment in our place so that we might live, so that we might breathe Your air and that we might know You, to know as whom to know as eternal life.

For help us not to live in the shadows, keep us from bitterness or pain that separates us from You. Help us to know Your victory and understand that victory even in the midst of battle and difficulty and we rejoice genuinely, be able to rejoice genuinely for the reason for this season.

Amen. Amen.