

MATTHEW'S FIRST CHRISTMAS



*A selection of Christmas sermons by
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Contents

- 1. The Fulfilment Of Truth In The Fullness Of Time - 3***
- 2. The Fulfilment Of Truth In The Foulest Of Times - 10***
- 3. The Fulfilment Of Truth In The Foggiest Of Times - 17***
 - Appendix A: Immanuel - God With Us - 25***
 - Appendix B: What Is Worship? - 30***
 - Appendix C: The Barren Womb And The Virgin Birth - 36***
 - Appendix D: Treasures In The Family Tree Of Christ - 43***

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Matthew's First Christmas - Chapter 1
***"The Fulfilment Of Truth
In The Fullness Of Time"***

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Perhaps we could at this stage read the Scriptures together, turning to the gospel of Matthew and chapter 1. I want you, in the weeks that lead up to Christmas, to look at the Christmas theme found in Matthew's gospel - I've entitled this three-week series "Matthew's First Christmas". We're going to look at verses 18 through to 25 from chapter 1 this morning. If you remember, I think last Christmas, I dealt with the genealogy that is found in verses 1 through to verse 17, so if you want to find out about that get the tape from last year - and give the folks in the tape room a bit of a challenge!

We're going to begin reading from verse 18 just through to 25 this week: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. 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" - and we end our reading at verse 25.

Under this title 'Matthew's First Christmas', we want to look in our first study today at the fulfilment of truth in the fullness of time, 'The Fulfilment of Truth in the Fullness of Time' - that is our title for this morning's message. Paul the apostle in Galatians 4 verses 4 and 5 said: 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons'. When the fullness of time was come, God fulfilled His word.

There is, I am told, a palace - I'll not even pronounce the name, an Italian name - in Rome which is famous for a painting by Rene that resides within it. The painting is entitled 'The Aurora', and the painting is in the high dome of the palace so that if you need to see it, visitors are often found standing gazing into the sky, looking up at the painting until their necks get stiff and their heads go dizzy. To relieve the strain they lower their heads and their eyes, and all of a sudden, startlingly, they see that same image in a mirror that is posted on the wall beside them. All the wondrous detail that they could never see by gazing up into the sky, they see all of it right beside them in that mirror. The Nativity story really brings us to a point in Jewish history where, for centuries, devout Jews - like the aged soul Simeon that we read of in the gospel of Luke chapter 2 - were looking skyward into heaven, waiting for the consolation of Israel. In other words, looking for the promise of Messiah to be fulfilled.

The wonder of the Christian gospel is that when the fullness of time was come, God honoured His word, and God sent forth His Son. Now there's so many things that I could share with you this morning from the

Nativity story, and we would not have time, we'd need more than three weeks - thirty weeks, especially if you know me! - to tell you about them all. But what I want to do for these three weeks is to home in on what is primarily, I would have to say, Matthew's theme. Matthew's theme, as he tells the Nativity story, is that no matter how long it takes, and no matter how many generations have passed away, and no matter how adverse present contemporary circumstances may seem, God always, always fulfils His word. His promises never ever fail.

We often hear quoted, rightly so, in the prayer meeting that other promise from Isaiah 55: 'So shall my word be', God says, 'that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it'. Matthew's account traces, primarily, the fulfilment of God's plan revealed in scripture. Now that study that I shared with you last year, the genealogy in verses 1 to 17 - we're not going to take time to look at it today - but all it proved to us, primarily, was the ancestry of Jesus the Messiah King. Now a modern reader, when you're doing your daily readings and you come to a chapter like this, you often think: 'Well, what a dull list of names that mean nothing to me - what a way to begin a book!'. But for Matthew, and for his readers, it was far from dull because it was all about the fulfilment of Israel's story. It was about the climax of their existence, where their true King had come, and it could be proved by His ancestry that He was who He said He was.

In this list, which begins with Abraham, we see the hero of the book of Genesis, the patriarch from whom Israel traced its origin and ascendancy. Then it leads down to King David, the King of Israel, to show that He was in the lineage of that great King. Matthew's desire is to show us that this Christ, and this word 'Christ' is throughout it all, He is indeed the true King of Israel in the line of David, the One who the people eagerly awaited. Incidentally, verse 1: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham', in Greek it is literally 'The book of Genesis', the Greek title 'The Book of Genesis'. So what God is doing here for the Jew is showing him: this is a new beginning, this is where I am fulfilling my words - and what a wonderful story it is.

We'll look at verse 18: 'The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise', and we begin to see Matthew's account of the birth and childhood of the Lord Jesus - but we would have to say that he gives us not an account of Jesus' birth and childhood, because he doesn't really talk about them at all in any specific sense, but rather he gives us a series of scenes designed to show us how God's purposes, declared in the Old Testament Scriptures, were coming to fulfilment in Christ's coming upon the scene. As we will see in later weeks, each of the subsections in this first two chapters of Matthew discussed focus on a prominent quotation from the Old Testament, and what theologians call 'a formula of fulfilment' - a prophecy that was made in the old day, and how that prophecy presently was being fulfilled in Matthew's day.

Let's show you the one under consideration for ourselves today, it's Matthew 1:22: ' Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us'. Now if you look at the margin of your Bible you will see that that is a quotation of a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, the prophecy that a virgin would conceive. What Matthew is doing for us is, he is taking that prophecy and he's showing us how in the birth of the Lord Jesus that prophecy is fulfilled to every iota. The second one in our reading today is how, in the end of verse 23, He will be called 'Emmanuel'. He tells us the scriptural prophecy, and the name that Jesus actually was called by that angel.

Now there are many other scriptural themes that run through the narrative of the birth of the Lord Jesus, but please see this today: the overwhelming theme of Matthew's gospel is 'God fulfils His word'. Now I want to share that with you under two headings: one, God always honours His word no matter how circumstances appear to oppose - have you got that? God always honours His word no matter how circumstances appear to oppose. Now if you're a careful reader you will see that Matthew's account of the birth of the Lord Jesus is

written from the point of view and perspective of Joseph, the Lord's earthly adopted father; whereas Luke chapters 1 and 2 is written primarily from Mary's perspective. So we look at Joseph in this passage, and we see in verse 18 that 'the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child', and there is an emphasis on 'found with child', not literally in the Greek but in our reading of it. I deliberately stopped at the word 'child' there and didn't read 'of the Holy Ghost', because I believe that is where Joseph's version of that verse would have ended - she was found with child.

Now I say that because Joseph was ignorant, Joseph did not have the knowledge that you and I have - why this woman was found with child in the years of her espousal, which was a bit more concrete than our engagement but wasn't fully consummated marriage - but they were still talked of, as we see here, as husband-and-wife. Why was she found with child? Joseph was completely in the dark. Mary knew about it, the angel came in Luke chapter 1, as we read, and told her that she was highly favoured, she had been chosen as elect to bear the Messiah into the world. We might say: 'Why did Mary not tell Joseph about the revelation that Gabriel had given to her?', perhaps it was simply because she felt that if God could reveal it to her, then God could reveal it to Joseph as well - and maybe she had more of a confidence in God fulfilling His word than you and I do today.

But I believe the great lesson that we will learn this morning from this passage is the lesson that is found in Joseph, for as far as Joseph is concerned - being in the dark - there could be only one explanation for Mary being with child, and that was that she had been unfaithful to him. What would you think? Come on now, we're not on some kind of high level or spiritual sphere here: this is dirty, earthly, Palestine. We can make, at times, the Bible into some kind of fairytale as we seek to relay it to our boys and girls: but what would you think in such circumstances? What would you do if you were in Joseph's shoes? I'll tell you, if Joseph had been as zealous as those Jewish men in John chapter 8, who dragged that woman caught in adultery to the feet of the Lord Jesus and were ready to stone her, Mary could have been stoned at that moment! But stoning wasn't as popular in that day, what they did was simply to divorce the person.

We read here that Joseph 'being a just man', Joseph 'was not willing to make her a public example, but was minded to put her away privily'. Now please don't - we miss so many gems because we're so familiar with this story we just want to get to the birth of Jesus, but there's so much more in it than that. Joseph, being a just man, he was a godly man! How could he be anything else to be given the responsibility of bringing up the Lord Jesus Christ? He was just on two fronts: he was just because he didn't put the apparent sin of Mary under the carpet and sweep it away, he was determined that she had to be dealt with, and she had to be dealt with in a lawful manner; but he was just in a righteous sense in that he wasn't wanting to make her a spectacle. Maybe his pride was hurt, he would have felt let down that she could have apparently done this thing, but yet it all didn't lead him to be unkind to her. He still loved her, he did not wish to disgrace her - which is what it would have been.

We see in him, let me say, the two sides of righteousness that there ought to be in every child of God - and let me say even further: the two sides of righteousness that were found in his own adopted Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I believe it was none other than the Spirit of God in Joseph. What else could make a man behave in such circumstances? I'll tell you what more it is: it is a perfect illustration of 1 Corinthians 13 that we have been studying in recent weeks on a Monday night - what does it say there about true love? 'It keeps no record of wrongs; it is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. Love is kind'.

He was in the dark, he didn't know what was going on, he didn't have all the facts, but in the midst of such confusion he behaved lovingly and righteously. A good question to all of us is: do we? Sure all of us are in the dark in one way or another, aren't we? We don't know why certain things happen to us in life, we say to God: 'Why did this happen? Why did it happen when it happened? Why did it happen the way it had to

happen?'. Sometimes aren't we people who have to nearly know the whole story before we can have faith in God? We need to know it inside out before we'll trust Him - and even putting it into the future, we need to know how it's all going to turn out before we'll say: 'Right Lord, I'll take Your hand and trust You'. Please see the greatness of this man Joseph here: he was in the dark, yet he must have trusted God for only that could have given him such a justice to deal with apparent sin, yet deal with it in a gracious way.

Harold Wilmington, the biblical writer, says this - and I think it's tremendous - about Joseph: 'Joseph must be considered by all standards of measurement as a truly just man with the spiritual maturity of a David, a Moses, a Peter, or a Paul. In fact, had it not been for Judah's sin Joseph would have been ruling from Jerusalem as the rightful King - now it was Herod, but Herod would not have been there, for Herod did not have the proper credentials for the throne - but Joseph did, not only in his lineage but in his character. He had a regal, royal spirit; he had the character of a King'. Sometimes I think we miss that.

Well, perhaps the faith of Mary was realised when the angel did appear to Joseph. We read on in verse 20: 'But while he thought on these things' - just pause for a moment: there's another sign of a godly man. He thinks before he acts! 'While he thought on these things', while he waited on God - and the scripture says it is never a vain thing to wait on the Lord and to call upon the Lord, we cannot be disappointed - but while he waited on the Lord, God showed him a sign, He sent an angel. Now you and I, in these circumstances, trying to apply it to ourselves, might say: 'Well, there you go, Joseph saw an angel - how could he not believe God? It's easy now for Joseph to believe everything that is being said by Mary, because an angel has told him! If an angel told me this I would believe it too!'. Please for a moment, don't get out of your human shoes too quickly! Remember what the angel is telling him! The angel is telling him that this child in Mary's womb is of the Holy Spirit - it had never been heard in all the history of humanity for a virgin birth to take place!

Can I ask you a question? Was the angel going to tell Mary and Joseph's family too? Was the angel going to tell the town? Was the angel going to tell the family Rabbi? It's alright us sitting here in the 21st century saying: 'Oh, it's easy for him to believe now, it's easy to obey God now'. They would conclude that the only reason why this woman was pregnant was because of unfaithfulness to Joseph, or on the other hand they would accuse Joseph of defiling her before the full end of that period was fulfilled whereby they were espoused to one another. It wasn't easy at all for Joseph. I was thinking, as I was meditating upon this, you would have thought that the parents of Christ would have had an easy ride - wouldn't you? I don't want to make a wrong illustration or comparison, but it is hard being a parent, especially in the age in which we live. But when you're associated with Christ there are sufferings, oppressions that come upon you because of the stand that you take. Because Joseph was going to be the adopted father of our Lord Jesus on earth, there was a stigma attached to him right from the very beginning.

You're not the only one who goes through trials as a parent - even the parents of the Lord did, for different reasons of course, but yet they went through it. Alexander Whyte says: 'Why is it that whosoever comes at all near Jesus Christ has always to drink such a cup of sorrow. Truly they who are brother, or sister, or mother to Him must take up their cross daily. These are they who go up through great tribulation'. It just testifies this great biblical truth that the greatness of privileges brings the greatest of sorrows, and who could have thought that the ones who would nurture and foster the very Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God of heaven, would have such an ungodly accusation thrown against them!

Let's be real about this - a sword was piercing Joseph's heart, just as it was going to pierce Mary's: the reproach of Christ! Maybe you're still saying: 'But an angel told him, an angel told Zacharias!'. John the Baptist in Luke chapter 1, you know it: 'And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years' - and he doubted the angel. Why? Because it wasn't an easy thing to believe, even if it was an angel telling you - maybe he was even suspecting: 'Am I seeing things? Am I hearing things?'. Angel or no angel, it was hard to believe! Here's the challenge: we have the

incarnate word of God in our hands today, and the big question is...how much of this do we believe? I'm talking about experientially, how much of it do we really put into practice? Then we can turn round to Joseph and say: 'Oh, he saw an angel, it ought to be easy for him to believe'.

Yet, the remarkable thing about Joseph was he wasn't like I would be, or maybe some of you would be if you're honest: he didn't question, he didn't argue - in fact, if you look at verse 24 and verse 25, the angel only gave him one command and Joseph obeyed instantly! Look at it: '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', there's self-control, 'till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS'. He did everything, he took a wife, he didn't know her, he called Him by the name that he was told - in an instant! Now here's my application to your heart today: do you find yourself in circumstances that appear to be the opposite of what you think God promised you, of what God should be bringing into your life? It's the whole antithesis of everything that you ever imagined or dreamed. Do you feel that everything is going wrong? 'It's not meant to be like this!', you say, 'How can God sort out a mess like mine?'. Listen to what the angel said to Joseph in the midst of circumstances that appeared to oppose everything that God's word was saying: 'Fear not!' By the way, there are 366 of them in the Bible, one for every day and one for a leap year! Fear not.

What else did he say? 'This thing is of the Holy Ghost'. Around the Table the sovereignty of God was the theme - do you believe in the sovereignty and providence of God? That He is leading and directing your circumstances? Whatever you're going through, I know you can't make sense of it, but it's of the Holy Ghost - and here's the promise that was to Joseph: that in the fullness of time you will have a new beginning too! Why? Because God always fulfils His word! Amen.

Here's the second thing: God never fails His people, no matter how much time passes - have you got it? The first thing was: God always honours His word no matter how circumstances appear to oppose; but the second is: God never fails His people no matter how much time passes. In verse 21 to 23 the Lord spoke these words through the prophet in Isaiah 7, it's a quotation of Isaiah. Now please let this sink in, let's get past all this bibli-speak where we talk about dates and figures as if they were something that weren't real: this was spoken 700 years before this event. Now let me illustrate that to you in ways that you can understand. Sir William Wallace lived in an age 700 years from today - William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, the King of Scotland; the parliament that we have in London, the first ever representative parliament that was summoned by Edward I was 700 years ago - that is when God gave this promise to the Jews, in the time of King Ahab. Now, who would not have been saying: 'God has forgotten us - 700 years? Come on!'. If we don't get an answer to prayer in a week we're starting to have doubts about our faith - 'God has given up on us, He's left His people. Either that, or He doesn't exist and we believed a lie and a fairytale'. Perhaps the people were starting to get to a situation, through the passing of time, where they were beginning to have no hope.

Is that you? You feel you're in a hopeless circumstance and situation? One man has rightly said that if you could convince a man there was no hope he would curse the day he was born. Hope is an indispensable quality of life - but can I let you into a secret? There was more time passed than 700 years. You see the first promise of a deliverer that was given, if you look at Galatians 4: 'Born of a woman'; Isaiah, quoting here from chapter 7 of Isaiah: 'A virgin shall conceive' - it's all about a woman. You have to go right back to Genesis 3 and verse 15, where God said right at the fall: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel' - the prophetic word about the Redeemer, way back then, and yet it hadn't been fulfilled!

We often read in prophetic word, God saying: 'I Am He'. The Jews often took that word 'He' to be a divine name, and Mary was this 'she', this elect woman, a virgin, from whom this One, this 'He' would come. It was the long-awaited promised Messiah, the Deliverer and the Saviour - and as Joseph prayed on his knees, as a righteous man would do, it says that an angel appeared unto him. Now please be careful when you're reading

the word of God: over and over again we read in the Old Testament that 'the angel of the Lord' appeared unto them, 'the angel of the Lord' did this and did that - and He was the one, in the Old Testament, who appeared as a mediator between God and man, He came as God's representative. In fact, we learn in the Old Testament that He had the divine name, and He was even attributed God's attributes. He appeared in the form of a man to Hagar, to Abraham, to Jacob, to the children of Israel at once, to Joshua, Gideon, Menoah and his wife. Jacob calls him, in the Old Testament, 'the angel, the Redeemer'. In Isaiah 63:9 He is called the angel of God's face, indeed all through the Old Testament Jehovah and His glory is revealed in this one who is called the Angel of the Lord. Exodus 23:20 says that the name of God was in Him! The One who had appeared in the Old Testament as the Angel, is now being born of this woman Mary the virgin. Notice that the angel that comes and announces it is called what? 'An angel' - isn't it wonderful that even a little word like 'An' brings out how God's word is fulfilled perfectly, completely and without an error?

The angel bade Joseph not to fear, and told him that the boy would be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. The word 'Jesus' taken in Hebrew is 'Jehosua', which is the word 'Joshua' in the Old Testament, and it simply means this: 'Jehovah is the Saviour'. A precious name in which the whole history of salvation is contained, but not only was it a precious name - don't miss the import of it! It was as common in this day as the name 'John' or 'David' is to us today - it was a name by which this Christ was identifying with His people. He was coming to His people as one of them, and even as the angel gives this child a name he is fulfilling how He would save His people, because He would be one of His people. They are His people.

'Why was He baptised?', is always the question that comes - do you know why? Because He was coming to save His people. Why did He have to take flesh? Because He's identifying with His people! He took the name of His people; He was coming to suffer as they suffered - no wonder we sing at Christmas: 'O little town of Bethlehem...in thy dark streets shineth the Everlasting Light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight'. Now listen: where do you find yourself today? Is it hard for you at the moment to believe His promises? Are you finding it difficult to trust His providences, how He is leading your life? Do you feel that your whole life at this moment is a dark bleak winter horizon, and there is no hope, there is no life, there is no light?

An artist once drew a picture of a winter twilight, and he portrayed the trees heavily laden with snow, and a dreary dark house was in the background, lonely and desolate in the midst of what was beginning to be a storm. It was a sad, depressing, dejecting picture - and then, all of a sudden, the artist, with just a stroke of one yellow crayon, put light into a window. The effect was magical, it changed the whole scene! The entire portrait was transformed into a vision of comfort and cheer! This is what God is doing here: He is fulfilling His word and He's saying 'The One that I'm giving to you is Emmanuel - God with you!'. Her life wasn't going to be easy - whose life is easy? But God would be with them!

One of the most interesting cemeteries - if you count them interesting at all - is London's Bunhill Fields Cemetery, where Charles Wesley is buried, Isaac Watts, Daniel Defoe who was the author of Robinson Crusoe, and many other great names were laid to rest. But opposite that graveyard is the chapel of John Wesley, the great founder of Methodism and an evangelist; also is found beside it the house in which he lived and died, and a monument that is erected to his memory. Just before his death on March 2nd 1791, Wesley, for a moment, opened his eyes and looked around him to his friends and loved ones, and in a strong clear voice spoke these immortal words: 'The best of all is: God is with us'. Do you believe that? Without God in the world is the most wretched state imaginable, to be against God is terrifying! But to have God with us is to have everything - and if God is with you, my friend, what or who can stand against you; for to have God with you is to be in the midst of defeat and all of a sudden the cry goes up: 'The General has come and the fortune of the day has changed!'.

He is the Captain of our salvation, He is the Everlasting Father, He is the Omnipotent Companion, He is the

One who draws beside the sick, who comforts the elderly, who companions the lonely, who retrieves the deserted, and who travels with those who are going down the very valley of the shadow of death - He is Emmanuel, God with us! Emphasis on 'us' - He became man, God incarnate, so that He could be with us! Our nature He took, God with us. His condescension: in form of God - and He stayed as God - but He came into the world in the form of a man and as a servant of God. God with us: He came as God in the form of man to be at our side - Hallelujah!

And if that doesn't tell you anything, it tells you what you find in 1 Kings 8:56, and with this I finish: 'Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised'. God's word never fails, whatever circumstances seem to oppose; and God's word never fails whatever time transpires - though heaven and earth pass away, Jesus says: 'My words will never fall to the ground'.

Our Loving Father, we thank Thee that the best of all is that He is with us, and one day very soon we will go to be with Him, and we shall be forever with the Lord. Lord, may His presence guard us, guide us, and keep us now and always, in the name of Emmanuel we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - December 2003

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Matthew's First Christmas - Chapter 2
***"The Fulfilment Of Truth
 In The Foulest Of Times"***

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I want you to turn with me in the word of God to Matthew's Gospel chapter 2 for our reading this morning. You remember we began a three-week series last week on a Christmas theme, 'Matthew's First Christmas', looking at the Nativity story from Matthew's Gospel - and we looked at the first study, verses 18 of chapter 1 through to 25. Now this morning we're going to look at chapter 2, and verses 1 to 12, let's read the word of God together beginning at verse 1:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way".

If a man was suddenly to appear on the scene of this world and claim to be the King of the people, or even the King of the universe, the public would immediately ask for proof of his claim - was it credible, and could he present evidence for those claims? Probably some of the questions they would ask of him are: what is your background? Who pays homage to you? Who follows you? What country do you lead? What credentials can you present to say that you're qualified for this great job of leading a nation, and even - as Christ claimed - to lead the universe? Anticipating these questions, Matthew particularly in his gospel, opens his book with a careful account of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ - but he approaches it specifically to show that the Lord Jesus was born in absolute fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophecies that were given of Him many thousands of years before His birth. So in a sense, Matthew doesn't really give us an account of the birth of the Lord Jesus, but rather a series of scenes designed to show us how God's purposes, declared in the Old Testament Scriptures, have been intrinsically fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus into this world.

Of course, we saw that in His genealogy in verses 1 to 17 that we looked at last Christmas time. Then we saw that last week, the various verses from Isaiah's prophecy which Matthew quotes to show that the Lord Jesus would be born of a virgin, and His name would be called Emmanuel - He would be 'God with us', and a Saviour to His people. So we saw last week, laying the foundation, that Matthew's gospel primarily traces the

fulfilment of God's plan that has been revealed within the Scriptures. Was that not what was in Paul's mind when he said in Galatians 4: 'When the fullness of time was come, God sent for His Son, made of a woman'.

So last week our title was: 'The Fulfilment of Truth in the Fullness of Time', but as we enter into the second chapter of Matthew's account I want to give you this morning the title: 'The Fulfilment of Truth In The Foulest of Times'. Last week we saw that God always fulfilled His word, verses 18 to 25 of chapter 1. We took it under two titles: God always honours His word no matter how personal circumstances appear to oppose. We saw it particularly from Joseph's perspective, how God honoured His word even in the midst of Joseph's confusion and turmoil at the conception of this baby and later the birth to his betrothed wife, who he had not known in a sexual way. Then secondly we looked at how God honours His word, because God never fails His people no matter how much time passes. We saw that since Isaiah give his prophecy in Isaiah 7, that Christ would be born of a virgin, His name would be called Emmanuel, 700 years have passed until the actual event had come to fruition. Then we went right back to Genesis chapter 3, to the very first promise of a deliverer to a sinful world, thousands of years before Christ came - and we saw that no matter what our circumstances may be, no matter how much time passes, God always honours His word.

But this morning's title is: 'The Fulfilment of Truth in The Foulest of Times'. I want us to look specifically at the contemporary situation, both nationally and also regally, that was in the land of Judah when the Lord Jesus Christ was born. But not only that, religiously the state that the people of Israel were in, and also we want to look specifically at those - in fact, the only ones - who at this particular time were found to come and pay homage to the Lord Jesus Christ in all of the land.

So let's look at our first point: God honours His word, even when kings and countries blaspheme. Have you got that? God always honours His word, even when kings and countries blaspheme. If you look at verse 1 of chapter 2 for a moment, you will see that 'when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king', that is Herod who was called Herod the Great. He was called king because the Roman Senate had appointed him as such on the recommendation and influence of Mark Anthony. He wasn't the rightful King of Judah, he wasn't in the Davidic line, as we find the Lord Jesus was in chapter 1 of Matthew, but he was a wicked man - great in wickedness, and that's about all he was great in! He was a cruel man, he was a crafty man, and as we read of his history we find that he permitted no one - absolutely no one - to give him any advice or to interfere in the affairs of state. He did everything his own way, even his family were not allowed a say in anything that he did.

In fact, when they began to influence his decisions, or at least tried to, and prevent some of his evil desires and satisfying of his own lusts - as a ruthless murderer he had his own wife murdered, and her two brothers slain, because he suspected them of high treason. We know from history that he married at least nine times in order to fulfil his lusts and strengthen his political alliances. So it ought to be no surprise that as we read verse 1 we find that the king who is trying to kill the true King of the Jews, the Lord Jesus Christ, is such a cruel and crafty wicked man. He wanted to kill the Lord Jesus because he knew that the Lord Jesus rightfully owned the title: 'The King of the Jews' - and he was afraid of losing the title himself. But there is another reason why he bayed for the blood of the babe Christ: he himself was not a Jew, he was an Idumean, which was a descendant of Esau. You remember in Genesis chapter 25, that right before these two brothers were born - Jacob and Esau - they were fighting in the womb of their mother. There was a great battle that has gone down all the ages that even began before these two brothers were born - Jacob and Esau. This great king, Herod, so-called, is a descendant of Esau.

Now in the light of that we need to see this morning that what we have in the birth of Christ to a nation which was ruled by a wicked non-Jew who descended from Esau, is none other than the great universal struggle that has always existed in this universe. The struggle between the spiritual and the carnal, the struggle between the worldly and the godly, the struggle between - if you like - God and the devil. In fact, as

we read through the rest of this gospel account, we find that this first chapter, and indeed the reaction of Herod the king, it mirrors the response of official Judaism to the Lord Jesus Christ - how they would reject Him, how they would resist His reign in the nation.

But we go further, because it doesn't just show us a microcosm of Judaism in the contemporary day in which Jesus was born, but it shows us a microcosm of the whole of the Christian age. The principles that have abided from the birth of Jesus, His death and resurrection, to the very day and hour in which we live: Christ is rejected still in our world today. So what we have here in both the political and regal scenario of Christ's day when He was born is, if you like, the whole gospel age in a nutshell. He came, as John says, unto His own, and His own received Him not. From the hour that Christ was born, at the selfsame time both homage and hatred have existed for Him as the Son of God - and it is no different today than it has ever been. Ask yourself: where is the King today? Where is He in the eyes of men, in the eyes of nations and states, in politician's eyes, presidents, rulers and potentates? The fact is, as you can clearly see with just a week of watching the news and reading the papers, that He is still hated!

Whilst there is a remnant of people, and thank God for them - some of you today - who come and bring homage to the Lord Jesus, and bring your gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh in worship and lay them at His blessed feet, the fact of the matter is that Christ is still today rejected as He ever was from His birth. He is still exiled from the hearts and homes of men and women. I think it is very telling to us today in our society to realise that as it was in the day of great Herod, so it is today, that the highest in society seem to still have the lowest regard for the King of kings. I read this week a quote by the great C. H. Spurgeon on this matter of how kings so seldom regard the King of kings in their lives. Here is the quote: 'Too often do they serve themselves or Satan, and forget the God whose sufferance permitted them to wear their mimic majesty for their little hour'.

What does Proverbs 21 and verse 1 say? 'The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah, as the water courses he turneth it whithersoever he will'. The fact of the matter is today, as it was in the birth of Christ, that even though kings and countries may reject Him and blaspheme His name, our God is still in control and our God still honours His word. From the very nativity scene that we are reading from today we can illustrate it in Luke's gospel and chapter 2. You remember all the non-Roman world was called to be taxed, and everybody had to go back to their hometown - and it was a ruling of Caesar Augustus. But do you realise that if Caesar Augustus had made that ruling a little bit later it would have been too late for the Lord Jesus Christ to be born in Bethlehem? Do you realise if he had made it a little bit earlier, Joseph would have still been residing in his town of Nazareth where he lived, but it was made in the nick of time, in the fullness of time - and even as that godless, pagan dictator made his decisions, ignorant of God, God's hand was in it because God always honours His word.

In verse 3 we read that not only did Herod reject the Christ child, but it would appear that the whole nation did so as well. Now we can understand how such a wicked king that we have just been portraying could be troubled at the birth of one who would take away his title. But it seems strange that at the end of verse 3 we read: 'and all Jerusalem with him' was troubled. So much of the time we're led to believe that the nation of Israel was just waiting for Messiah, they'd waited for so long, suffered so much, and they were just waiting for this Christ who would deliver them - and to some extent that is true. But the fact of the matter is: that when Christ was born and the announcement of His birth was made, the people themselves were troubled - which seems to indicate that they didn't really want the Saviour either.

I wonder can we as Christians take an application from that today? For we read in Matthew chapter 2 of His first coming, and all the people - with lip service - were looking for it, they were crying for Messiah, they were longing for the consolation of Israel and the deliverance from the Roman bondage. But the fact of the matter was, when He actually came, they didn't want Him! We are God's people today in this dispensation,

we are looking for His second advent, we are wanting the rapture to happen and the Lord to come - but could it be the same for us? That if He did come today, many of us wouldn't like it? Perhaps we would want to stay?

I love to see here in this passage how God overrules kings and countries to fulfil His will, and isn't it wonderful that we can take the word of God and so accurately apply it to ourselves today and say: He still does! He still does! We live in a terrible nation, the United Kingdom, the mainland which was Great Britain - no longer any more. I was listening to the radio just the other week about a woman who, I think, has been appointed now by our government to oversee the abortion laws, and probably in the long run revise them. I could describe her as nothing but a feminist fascist - she was advocating that abortion should be given on demand to every mother that requested it. The father had no say, and the newscaster asked her: 'Well, are you trying to say that if a child was seen in the womb' - if it was possible - 'to have only nine toes, that that would be grounds enough for the mother to request an abortion?', and she said 'Yes'. That is the nation in which we are living, we live in a kingdom that espouses to pluralistic political correctness, where there is a tolerance of everything except the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ of the Bible.

One of our members give me a newspaper clipping from the Daily Mail just the other day, that told of Tessa Jowell, who's the culture secretary in our government, and she has ceased now from sending out nativity Christmas cards, but is sending out neutral cards with the message: 'Season's Greetings', rather than 'Happy Christmas' - she doesn't want to offend the ethnic minorities. This is the age in which we are living, and the Queen's speech has announced that we may need to have licences to sing carols in our streets in the years that lie ahead! We have a Prince of Wales who espouses to be defender of 'faith', rather than defender of 'the faith' - and all he is is an habitual adulterer, yet he wants to stand as the epitome of religious belief for all men. I think Isaiah's words are so true, as they were in his day, in Isaiah 5 verse 20: 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!' - and that is exactly what is happening today. The laws and principles of the Christ child are still rejected!

Think of it for a moment: the law will imprison you, most likely, if you kill a badger; but if you're a doctor and you kill children they will employ you. Is that not true? Politicians are trying to bring in legislation that makes us frightened of setting a child on our knee, or putting an arm around a child that is distressed and crying, yet they want to presently bring in laws that will lower the homosexual age of consent to child level! They are pushing at the minute for a ban on tobacco smoking in public areas, yet they're also bringing into vogue legislation where cannabis will be available on every corner legally! Now if we really allowed these things to penetrate our minds hearts and emotions there could be reason to despair, we could think: 'What is going on? All hell seems to be let loose! Chaos seems to be reigning, anarchy seems to be on the horizon!', but even in the midst of such blasphemy of kings and countries God still honours His word!

Can we take that today? I love to look at the prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled in Daniel's prophecy chapter 2, where there was a great image that represented four kingdoms that would dominate the known world in that day. By Herod's time, Herod that we're reading of here in Matthew 2, they had all arisen successively and had each replaced each other, and the greatest of them, the last, fourth, Roman Empire was now reigning. But Daniel pointed forward to a day beyond great Herod's day, when that Roman Empire would be revived again, and all the forces of antichrist would be let loose across the world - but then there would be a kingdom, Daniel says, when the God of heaven will set up His kingdom 'which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold' - and that stone is Christ! Hallelujah! God honours His word even when kings and countries blaspheme.

Secondly, God honours His word even when the righteous apostasize. 'Apostasize' just means to stand aloof from truth, to stand afar, to disown it, to reject it. We read in verses 4 to 9 that by order of the King the scribes and the priests were called together, and it wasn't a special session of the Sanhedrin, but it was a larger gathering. If you look at verse 4 you will see that the priests, 'the chief priests and scribes of the people', now that was different than the ordinary scribes - these were like lay-preachers of the people who knew the word of God. They were all called together in special session, and they were commanded to show themselves from the Scriptures, produce the scrolls of the law, the prophets, and the writings, where Christ should be born. There they are gathered, can you see them? And Herod points his question point-blank: 'Where is the Christ to be born?'

All of them, it would seem, start to look up in Micah's prophecy, the fifth chapter, and right away the answer comes: 'Bethlehem in Judah'. Now please note there was no dissenting voice, there was nobody saying: 'Oh, I don't agree with that, that doesn't fit in with my doctrine. I don't agree with that interpretation, I apply it differently' - none of them! They all with one voice were orthodox, they had a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, but it was only a knowledge that they had in their head! Do you see it? Their consciences were not touched by the knowledge that the word of God gave to them. And Herod, once he'd got his answer, dismissed the meeting and all of the chief priests and scribes of the people went about their daily business in the usual way, and not one of them went to pursue the Christ! None of them followed the wise men in their homage to the King of kings.

I'll tell you, there's a lesson in that for every believer gathered out here this morning, and it's simply this: head knowledge means absolutely nothing unless there's something in your heart of the light of God's revelation. Have you got it? It doesn't matter how much you know, you may know every word that's in the Bible, but you may not see the light of heaven as these wise men did. You may not actively be following the Christ! Andrew Murray once said, and how true it was: 'How pathetic is much knowledge of the Scriptures stored in a carnal mind'. In verse 10 it says the wise men, when they reached the Christ child, were filled, rejoiced with exceeding great joy - yet all of Jerusalem was troubled about this thing, yet they were joyous, they had a spring in their step. What that simply revealed was the way their heart was in relation to Christ.

You see, our attitude towards the Lord reveals the condition of our spiritual lives. Maybe you're not saved, and you aspire to everything that Christmas is, or Christianity is, or this book says, but you've never had an experience in your heart of the grace of God in salvation. Maybe you're a backslider, maybe you're starting to deny some of the truths within God's word - and you can quote the verses, you can point out the prophecies, but the life of God is devoid from your soul! James said: 'the devils believe and tremble', didn't he? But a Christian is not just someone who believes, or someone who knows, a Christian has the chief characteristic of the Christ - and that is love, love for brethren, but love for Christ! Do you love Christ? For if you love Christ you will follow His word, if you love Christ you will worship Him, you will pay homage to Him - and it won't just be a head knowledge, but you will see the guiding light of the star of Christ and you will follow it wherever it goes.

Isn't it very sobering that these chief priests and the scribes of the people were able to quote Micah 5 and verse 2, but they did not obey it? Yet five miles away from where they were standing was the fulfilment, bodily, of our prophecy - but it didn't matter one iota to them. My dear friends, I think we can see very clearly that Christ came at a time when kings and countries were blaspheming His name, He came at a time when the righteous were apostasized, when the religious establishment was crumbling - and we could say to summarise both those things, that Christ came when He was most needed! In the sense that He was needed then, He is needed now today. These were dark days, the nation was sick at heart, the religious establishment was rotten to the core, and the only solid hope left was cherished in the breast of some very few devout Jews who were looking, like Anna and Simeon, for the consolation of Israel, for the Messiah from their hearts.

Oh how they needed Him then, and I'll tell you: how we need Him now in our land and in our churches, because all that is so-called true Christendom - what is it like at this present time? It is filled with religiosity, with rituals, with ceremonies, creeds of men, but all of them without exception almost honour Christ with their lips but their hearts are far from Him! Sin is being sanctified, sodomy is being solemnised, one day soon I could be locked up for saying that! Maybe not soon, maybe now! This is the time that we're living in, there's no interest within the churches to the coming again of our Lord, just as there was no interest in His first coming among the scribes - there is indifference, there is even opposition, there is apostasy, and do you know what happened to the Jewish nation right after they rejected the Christ? He died and rose again, they were sacked and destroyed in AD 70! Their judgment came, and their house was left unto them desolate - and I'll tell you, this nation has ripened for God's judgment. As it was then it is now, and we are hastening day by day to that wrath of God - unless our people repent, and unless the church repents!

But isn't it very comforting that even in the midst of such apostasy and despair, God was still honouring His word. They couldn't thwart the sovereign purposes of Almighty God. Let me leave you please with the final thought that God honours His word often in unexpected ways from unexpected sources, especially in times like these. These wise men that we often talk about, some people say: 'Three wise men' - were there three? Well, I don't know, and certainly their names weren't the ones we sing in the carols; but when the cavalcade arrived in Jerusalem, all the people were troubled - and I wouldn't imagine they would have been troubled if there was only three of them. But nevertheless, when they came it says the whole city was shook - probably because they were foreigners, they were Gentiles, they were mighty, wise and rich men, maybe from Mesopotamia which is our modern day Iraq - and the name is literally 'magi'. What these magi were were astronomers, they were men who spent their time stargazing. They were engaged in sophisticated astronomical observation, and they were extremely important in the life of the court and kings and potentates, because they were come to as counsellors and guides with regards to what they saw in the stars and how they saw god - their god - leading them.

Many Eastern heads of state were advised by these kings, and you can read about it in the Old Testament. Daniel was one of this number, you read about it in Pharaoh's day that he called them all together when Moses was doing his great miracles. But what I want you to note, please, is that their insights were derived from astronomical observations combined with a sort of interpretation that you would get today in the horoscopes of the media. Now those are facts - now please note what I'm not saying, this is not how they found the star nor the Christ child, because we read that God gave them a miraculous sign of a star which was Christ's star. It wasn't just an ordinary star, even though there are many reasons given for this, such as comets and constellations of various kinds and so on. This was a special sign, but the whole point was this: no matter what these men's background was, magic - hence the word 'magi' - magicians they may have been, they were seekers after truth and God rewarded their desire to find the light in the light of the Christ child, and they got it!

Now I know this is surprising and maybe doesn't fit into all our little pigeonholes of how we understand spiritual things, but the fact of the matter was the Jews who had all the Torah, the writings and the prophets, were standing in the midst of their Messiah and didn't even travel five miles to see if it was Him. Yet from the East came these magicians who were genuinely seeking the truth of God, and God rewarded them! Oh, there are so many lessons there - and I know there's many dark areas: the Bible doesn't explain explicitly how they knew about this star. They were Gentiles, and we know that Balaam was a Gentile and he prophesied that there would be star come out of Jacob; Daniel of course was in a Gentile land of Babylon, and he made the prophecy of the 70 weeks - so they may have interpreted that and known when the Christ child was to be born. I don't know, but the fact of the matter is that a little light was followed and soon the increase came.

Do we follow the light God has given to us? You see in a day and an hour like Herod's day, like our day, I

almost hesitate to say it but: God can perform His will from very unexpected sources, and in very strange ways. These were Gentiles, they were magicians, that hymn would go well underneath this in your Bible: 'God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform'. Who would have thought that the seekers of the Christ Messiah would have come from Mesopotamia? Now listen, let me apply this in the closing moments of our meeting because it's easy when we live in a day like the day of Christ's birth, a day when kings and countries blaspheme, a day when the righteous apostasize, it's easy in such dire and dark circumstances to get down, to get discouraged. Elijah lived in such a day - the wife of Ahab was after him, Jezebel, and she was going to kill him for he had killed her prophets. But before that event, you remember he was starving because of the judgment of God on the nation, and God promised him that He would provide for him, and He took him to a Brook called Cherith in 1 Kings, and we read there that he was fed by that brook. Do you remember the way that he was fed? He was fed by ravens - what are ravens? They are scavengers, they eat meat, but he was fed by ravens! He was fed by a poor widow - a widow who is poor usually doesn't have enough for herself in those days let alone for a stranger. He was fed from empty bowls that God kept filling full of meal and oil. It wasn't the usual means of provision, but in fact God was providing in an unnatural way through unnatural circumstances to prove that all that matter was that He had promised it!

Regardless of these things God still honoured His word, yet what happened to Elijah - 1 Kings chapter 19 - he is under the tree depressed, and he says: 'I alone am left, I have been zealous for the Lord God of hosts, and I am fearful now of my life and I wish I could die'. What did God say to Elijah? 'There are yet 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. It's not just you, you know - I will honour my word'. Do you remember how God took him up like a little baby, and God was going to speak to him, and He didn't speak to him in the wind, He didn't speak to him in the earthquake or the fire, but He spoke to him in what? The still small voice, the unexpected way.

The means may not be sure, in fact it may be absolutely unnatural and implausible, but one thing is for sure: if God has promised it, it will come to pass. In verse 12 we read that they were warned of God, these wise men had a dream that they should not return to Herod, and they departed into their own country another way. As Watchman Nee says: 'Those who have seen the Lord cannot go back to Herod', isn't that it? Can I ask you: what is your Herod? What is the cause of your darkness? Is it fear? Is it doubt? Is it anxiety? Despair? Is it a besetting sin that pulls you down time and time into temptation? Here's the answer: go to Christ, see how God honours His word in Christ - and what will happen? All your Herod's will never ever get an upper hand again, why? Because all the promises of God are yea and Amen in Him.

Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy Son who came, if we can say it Lord, in the nick of time, who came at a time when man needed Him most. Lord, we say today that we need Him, we need Him in our lives, we need Him in our churches, we need Him in our circumstances. Lord, we need Thee in Thy return. There's so much to do, so many to be saved, but Lord yet from our hearts there comes a genuine cry: 'Come quickly, Lord Jesus'. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - December 2003

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Matthew's First Christmas - Chapter 3
***"The Fulfilment Of Truth
 In The Foggiest Of Times"***

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If you're a visitor with us today, or perhaps you haven't been out in the last couple of weeks, we began three Sundays ago today a series called 'Matthew's First Christmas' - and we looked specifically at the Nativity scene that we find in Matthew's gospel, and what he's trying to teach us from it. We've reached verse 12 now, the end of verse 12, beginning to read at verse 13 of chapter 2 of Matthew's Nativity scene.

So chapter 2 and verse 13: "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah", it says here Jeremy, but really it means Jeremiah, "the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene".

Now you will remember that two weeks ago we looked at the beginning of these verses, verses 18 to the end of chapter 1, under the title: 'The Fulfilment of Truth in the Fullness of Time'. Then last week we looked at the first 12 verses of chapter 2 under the title: 'The Fulfilment of Truth In The Foulest of Times', and we looked particularly at the contemporary situation to which the Lord Jesus came to this world. Then this week we want to look at the remaining verses of chapter 2 under the title: 'The Fulfilment of Truth in the Foggiest of Times' - and hopefully it will be made clear, not too foggy, as we go through this study this morning what I mean by that.

Of course I laid down several weeks ago, and of course last week, that what we have here in Matthew's gospel is not really an account of the birth and the early childhood of the Lord Jesus, but rather what Matthew gives us as the editor of the truth of God in this gospel is a series of scenes specifically to show us God's purpose, how God declared in the Old Testament Scriptures that there would be a Redeemer, a Saviour, a Messiah, and how in Matthew's day all of those Old Testament prophecies were coming to fulfilment before the people's very eyes. So what Matthew does for us specifically, perhaps more than any of the other gospel writers, is he traces the fulfilment of God's plan that has been revealed within the Scriptures.

Of course we have quoted that verse so often in the last two studies, Galatians 4 verse 4, that: 'In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman'. What Matthew's chief end is in giving us these first few chapters of his gospel, is to show us that God always honours His word. No matter how difficult personal circumstances in Joseph and Mary's life may have been, God was going to honour His word. No matter how much time had passed since these Old Testament prophecies have been given, some 700 or so years had passed, God honoured His word no matter how much time had transpired. We saw last week in the specific situation of the country that God honours His word even when kings and countries blasphemed it. We saw that God honours His word even when the religious establishment apostasizes. We saw in the wise men that God always honours His word, and sometimes He honours it from the most unexpected and unnatural sources.

Now chapter 2 that we're looking at this morning, the second half, focuses specifically on the geographical movements of the infant, the Lord Jesus Christ. As you look at the story from verse 13 to verse 23 you see that we follow His movements, His birthplace of course we know was the town of Bethlehem, the City of David; but we find that He moves from there to the land of Egypt. Then as we follow the story He then moves eventually back to the land of Judaea, and then from a dream given to Joseph the angel tells him to move on to Galilee where eventually he resides in a town called Nazareth - hence, that is why we have the name 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

Now I want you to remember that, that this portion of Matthew's nativity scene is specifically geographical. Another remarkable fact about it is the many Old Testament quotations that we find in chapter 2. Verse 15, if you look at it: 'And the child was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled', there's that formula, 'which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son' - and in the margin you have Hosea 11 and verse 1, where God prophesied this in the Old Testament Scriptures. Then in verses 17 and 18 another fulfilment: 'Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not' - your margin tells you that those two prophecies really were found in Jeremiah 31:15 and Jeremiah 40 verse 1. Then we look at verse 23, the final prophecy: 'And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene'. Remarkable fulfilments of Old Testament prophecy!

Another remarkable factor in chapter 2 is also the recurrent dreams by which Joseph, the Lord Jesus' earthly adoptive father, was guided from place to place geographically. Look at verse 13, he has a dream: 'And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt'. Verse 19, another dream: 'But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child back to the land of Israel'. Then verse 22, as he's on his way he gets fearful and he reasons that because Herod's son Archelaus is now reigning that it may be troublesome and dangerous to go back to Judaea, so the angel appears again to him in a dream in such a remarkable way.

But all this, the fulfilment of Scripture and the dreams that Joseph was given by these angels, were all moving the Christ-child geographically from one scene to another. Each of these Old Testament quotations that are fulfilled in this text have a place name in them. Look at them, look at verse 13, he is told to move to Egypt. In our previous study you saw that it was Bethlehem, verse 6, in the land of Judah that was to be His birthplace. Born in Bethlehem, moving to Egypt, you move further down and in verse 18 you find that Rama is mentioned, and Judaea is mentioned, and then in verse 23 in this prophecy the town of Nazareth is mentioned. All of this suggests to us that Matthew's concern now in these remaining verses is to show that these changes of location of the Christ-child were in no way haphazard - have you got that? That everywhere the baby Jesus went in these early days of His childhood was directed by God, but more than that: was foreshadowed in the Old Testament writings, and God was fulfilling and honouring His word as this little

family moved on their journeys.

Now we could sum that statement up by saying simply this: geography matters to God - now some of you young people might be saying: 'Well, geography doesn't matter to me!'. I was caught on one occasion falling asleep in my own geography class, so I can't say anything to that! We could contemporise it to ourselves today and apply it to our own Christian experience by saying this in a sort of paraphrase: 'It matters to God where all of His children are'. Do you understand that? It matters, it even matters in a geographical sense where you are as a human being.

It would be easy at a casual reading of this nativity story, or whatever Gospel you care to open, to think that this exciting story is filled with surprise and the unexpected - it's filled with shock and emergency - and we could be forgiven for thinking that. Yet the fact of the matter is, what Matthew wants to get across to us is, all that happens in this story is in fulfilment to God's word - even the details of geography! Now let me bring this right down to your level just now, because there are times in our lives - at least in my life, I don't know about you, I imagine you're the same - when things may appear to be out of control, when chaos has been let reign, anarchy seems to be ruling, yet we can take comfort from a story like this. This little child is in danger of its life, it's father doesn't know what to do, he's being guided from one post to pillar by dreams of an angel; maybe questioning them at times, thinking is it his own imagination. His son's life is at stake in all of this, but behind the scenes we are given by the inspiration of the Holy Scripture in Matthew's gospel to know that God is in absolute control of this scene and therefore, Matthew wants us to know, God is sovereign in our lives as well. No matter what is going on in the land, in our family, in our domestic scene, in the political realm, in the regal realm, in the ecclesiastical realm, God is always in control and God will always fulfil His word.

God has given a promise, God will honour that promise - why? Because this God is our God, and as Ephesians 1:11 says: 'In whom', in that God, 'also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will'. That is our God! What comfort that should bring to us! Maybe there is someone here, and I haven't really started to get into this study yet, but this is so important: maybe there's someone here and you just don't understand what is happening. There have been times in your life when you have been able to decipher and discern, perhaps, what God is doing in your circumstances - but just now you're blinded to it all! Well know, my child, that God is still in control! If you're His child, He has predestinated the purpose of your life to work always after the counsel of His will - isn't that wonderful? I think that's the sentiment in that hymn that we often sing:

I am not skilled to understand
 What God has willed, what God has planned.
 I only know at His right-hand
 Stands One who is my Saviour'.

There we are anchored! Now we really get to know our Saviour's ways and workings when we see how He came in quiet defiance of the circumstances that prevailed in His age in order to fulfil God's word. Let's look at a further three this morning for our comfort and exhortation. Here's the first: God's word outlives His most vehement enemies. I hope you're taking notes on these, I think they're rather good - if I say so myself - God's word always outlives His most vehement enemies. We read in verse 15 that they departed and they fled, of course, from the threat of Herod, and the Lord through an angel told them to take the young child, and when he arose they went to Egypt and eventually they heard that Herod had died, and they were enabled then to bring the child back to Judaea. But we see in Herod, and we looked very specifically last week at his awful character, but we see in Herod I believe an anti-type of Satan himself.

In John chapter 8:44 the Lord Jesus tells us that Satan is a liar, he is a thief, and he is a murderer, and he

comes to destroy God's people and indeed all people. We read in verse 3 of this chapter 2 that Herod was troubled at the news of the birth of the Lord Jesus. Then he inquired of his wise men what the time and place of this birth should be, by pretence that he was going to go and worship the child. We know that he wasn't at all, verse 7. Then we find that he makes a decree that all the children under two years of age should be slaughtered in verse 16, and what we see is Satan moving in the midst of a man, in a real human being, disguising himself as an angel of light wanting to worship the Christ-child when all he wants to do is slaughter Him.

We have that scene in Revelation chapter 12 you read there about a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and a woman with twelve stars around her head gives birth to a child. Of course the woman signifies Israel, the twelve tribes, and as she gives birth to that child it says that that great red dragon sought to devour the man child - and that is exactly what is happening here. Satan in Herod is trying to wipe out the King of kings and the Lord of lords on the earth, but the fact of the matter is that God's word always outlives His most vehement enemies, and death removed this king just the way it removes all kings.

It was Job who said: 'The triumphing of the wicked is short'. Oh yes, David could say in Psalm 37 that at times the wicked seem to be like a green bay tree, they seem to be always extending their influence, their tentacles of iniquity - but praise God, in a relative sense, to the God who is the eternal one from everlasting to everlasting it is short lived! Ask yourself this morning: what has happened to the Pharaohs of Egypt that opposed God? What has happened to the Herod's and his dynasty? What has happened to the Nero's? On your TVs this week you'll see a great film epic of the downfall of the Roman Empire, you should watch it because it is fulfilment of the whole of the Holy Scriptures, and what the Lord Jesus said when the cities would be left unto them desolate - Jerusalem - but how also Rome would fall one day, and will fall another day again. Diocletian, the Emperor who wiped out the early Christians, what about Bloody Mary who put to death all those great reformers of the Protestant faith? Every one of them fearlessly and fiercely persecuted God's people and God's church, but where are they today? They are rotting in their graves, but the truth of God that they tried to uproot rises again and again from the blood of the martyrs - and it still reigns, it still exists, it is still here, we still have our Bibles! Thank God for them! Voltaire, that atheist philosopher and opponent of the Gospel, you may know that on one occasion he predicted that Christianity would be dead in a generation, and after he died do you know what happened to his house, where he had written all his proliferation of blasphemy? It was turned into the first printing press of the Bible Society, and sent the word of God all over the world! Why? Because God's word always outlives His most vehement enemies - the Lord liveth forever and ever, and no one can outlive Him. The Lord Jesus said: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away'.

Even though we take great delight in that fact, maybe where you are in your life you can't see God bringing to fruition His word in your circumstances. The reason why that is, is that God's ways are not always our ways, His plans do not always peter out the way we would expect - and believe it or not that is exactly the way it was for His only begotten Son when He came to the world. Have you ever read this story and thought to yourself - maybe you haven't - 'Why didn't God provide a miracle? Why didn't He miraculously hide the Lord Jesus from Herod? Why didn't He wait until a time when Herod was dead? Why didn't He do something supernatural?'. But we see that God provided no miracles to protect His own Son - oh, He gave them a dream, Joseph got instructions - but he wasn't carried there on a chariot like Elijah, no, he had to walk. They had to stay in the squalor and poverty of Egypt, and then after not long move back and then move on to Galilee and a place called Nazareth - which we'll see a little later was not the Hilton hotel by any measure.

We read in the gospel called a spurious gospel, the gospel of the Infancy of the Lord Jesus Christ - it's an apocryphal writing - that there are many who believe that on the Lord Jesus' flight to Egypt as a child that there were a great many miracles performed. When you read it you read that wherever this child was meant

to go idols and false gods were broken to pieces and fell on their face. You read in this gospel that a three - year-old child of an Egyptian priest who was possessed by demons and devils put one of the swaddling cloths of the Lord Jesus on his head and the demon fled. You read of a woman possessed by demons too, who was healed by looking at the Virgin Mary. You read about robbers who fled in terror before the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. You read about all sorts of diseases that were healed, including leprosy - and it goes on and on and on and on, but that is all nonsense! We don't read of any of that in the Scriptures, in fact we see no miracles with regards to the dealings of God with His own Son when He was in the most vehement danger from His most vehement enemies.

How simple our story is before us today, when we think for a moment that God could have transported His Son by a miracle. He could have called 10,000 angels, but the fact of the matter was this: Jesus had to come as a man, and now He had to enter into everything that it was to be a man, He had to go along the long weary road. It says that the Son of God had to flee, no miracle for Him. What does that say to us today? Do you ever get on your knees and say: 'Lord, I need a miracle'? Now I know God can do miracles, praise God we believe that, but sometimes we feel it's our right to have a miracle, don't we? The Son of God didn't get a miracle here, but what I want you to see is that even in the lack of a miracle God still honoured His word. You don't need miracles for God to fulfil His promises. In Hosea 11 verse 1 about how they would flee to Egypt was fulfilled, it was prophesied about 700 years before this. The original setting of Hosea's prophecy was Israel's deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus to the promised land - but Hosea, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was giving a double meaning: that there would come a day when Messiah would be closely paralleled to His nation Israel, and He would move from Judaea to Egypt.

Now if you look at the Old Testament history of the Jews, you will see that it is a continuous cycle of sin, disobedience, apostasy, and shame. But what Hosea's prophecy was saying was: when the true One comes He will be the absolute epitome of true obedience to God, and He will go through the history of His people all over again and correct it all to the glory of God! He had to go down to Egypt to the house of bondage. Jesus had to go through the Red Sea, isn't that what Peter says baptism is like? You look at chapter 3 of Matthew's gospel, after He comes out of Egypt, where is He? He's going through the sea of baptism. What happened to the children of Israel when they came through the Red Sea, they went into the wilderness and wandered about for 40 years of what? Temptation - where was Jesus in chapter 4 of Matthew's gospel? Forty days and nights in the wilderness being tempted of the devil - but out of it all He comes through victorious, glorious, and all conquering...and without sin! But there was no mighty miracles - oh, the miracles came, but there was no miracles to deliver the Lord Jesus out of the hardships and the sorrows and the humanity of it all. In fact, from His very infancy death hung over His head because he was born to die - we know that, but it wasn't God's appointed time! This tells us that anyone who walks in God's will is immortal until God's work in them is done. Isn't it?

God's word outlives His most vehement enemies - here's the second point: God's word survives the most rampant evil - verses 16 to 18. Now we have learned and got to know this old rogue Herod over the last couple of weeks, but we find that in the last years of his reign he became increasingly paranoid, and he sought always to defend his throne which led him to execute many imagined claimants including three of his own sons and his favourite wife - he thought that they wanted power. Herod was like himself when he made the order to slaughter all these boy children in Bethlehem and the coast roundabout under the age of two. He was showing his cruel and crafty character as we know him. Now let me just give a word of caution, because some people when they read this story envisage that there's hundreds of little boys being killed here - the probability is, most scholars think there was about only twenty or so children that were killed in Bethlehem alone, because if you go to Bethlehem today there is only approximately 20,000 people that even live there now. The fact of the matter is, no matter how few or how many there were, it doesn't minimise the horror of it all - the horrendous crime of infanticide.

Now I'm not going to start to get into a philosophical debate about the problem of evil and why it exists, because I couldn't even start on that one or answer any of those big questions - I'm not sure if any of us can. But imagine the evil of infanticide here - these little babies being slaughtered, now I'm not suggesting that it was God's will that children should die in this manner, don't misquote me on that. But the fact of the matter is that even out of such a dark occurrence, God's will was being fulfilled. In Jeremiah 31:15, 600 or so years before this actual event, Jeremiah prophesied that these children would be killed. Now to understand that prophecy you have to review Jewish history to find the first mention of the city of Bethlehem, and it's found in connection with the death of Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel. That's why you have Rachel crying in verses 17 and 18. Now do you know the story of that? We read it in Genesis 35, that Rachel was in childbirth and she gave birth to a son, and she died in giving birth to that son - but just before she died she named that son Benoni, which means in interpretation 'son of my sorrow'. Now after she died Jacob renamed that son Benoni 'Benjamin', which means 'son of my right hand', and erected a pillar near to Bethlehem as a memorial to his wife that had died.

Now mark this please, this is all prophetic: 'Benoni' means 'son of my sorrow', and then he renames him 'Benjamin' 'son of my right hand' - could anything point more towards the Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of such rampant evil, surviving, suffering, going through it all, enduring victoriously, and then coming out the end as the great conqueror, the man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the true Benoni, but also the Benjamin because Peter said as he addressed those Jews: 'Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins' - isn't it glorious? That was the original prophecy.

Now in Jeremiah's time, looking back to Rachel's death, he would have been thinking how many wept on that day - but looking to his own situation he was thinking how the women were weeping as their sons and their husbands went into captivity in Babylon. That was Jeremiah's day, but it's also now looking forward to a day when Rachel would be weeping - i.e. Israel - would be weeping, Bethlehem would be weeping, for the little baby boys that are slaughtered. Now listen: whenever somebody mentions Bethlehem to you, what do you think of? Is it death? Is it weeping? Is it slaughter? Is it mourning? Is it crying? Is it infanticide? What is it? It is life! And the Lord Jesus coming and being born in Bethlehem turned everything around, and made Bethlehem from a place of death to a place of life - and that is what He has done for us all, isn't it? He has come into our darkness and He has shed abroad His love in our hearts!

Praise His wonderful name, and I'll tell you Herod, you aren't just mocked by the wise men - you remember they were to return to him, and they never bothered - but all Herod's, all those who oppose God's will, are mocked by a higher than mere wise men, for the word of God says: 'He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh at thee, the Lord shall have thee in derision. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong' - and there's some in this meeting would do well to take note of that! Jesus will die, but He will die in His time, for His purpose in God's will, and through death that He might destroy him that has the power over death - that is the devil - and deliver them who, through the fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage - glory to His name!

Thirdly and finally: God's word is fulfilled in the most humblest of homes - isn't that lovely? We've read an awful lot in these couple of weeks about kings, wise men, astronomers, nations, kingdoms, dynasties, histories etc etc - but this tells us, verses 19 to 23, specifically verse 23, that even these great prophecies of Scripture can be fulfilled, and are, in the most humblest of ways. Now certainly Joseph and Mary would have prayed and sought God's will, they were told to leave Egypt and go back to Judaea - verse 15, 16 - and then later on they're told to go back to Judaea. When Joseph hears in verse 22 that Archelaus, that's Herod's son, reigns in Judaea he starts to get the collywobbles and he's afraid to go there because he knows what will happen. In fact, we know from historical records that Archelaus was even worse than his father Herod.

Now this is just a thing to note on our journeys here: they had prayed about it, they waited on God, but commonsense came into the equation. Joseph hadn't got the word from God, he was just fearful when he heard that Archelaus was there, and he realised that this wasn't the right thing to do - it doesn't make sense, it's not reasonable. Now in this chapter alone you have four factors of God's guidance in the life, and you would do well to mark this: one, the knowledge of Scripture - all these Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled; two, revelation from heaven - the wise men saw the star. The Scribes and the Pharisees knew the Scriptures, but they never saw the star - they didn't see God's revelation speaking to them. Three, the commonsense that God had given Joseph was exercised - I wonder at times do we exercise our commonsense? These three things in communion together with Joseph and Mary's faith, and waiting and praying in obedience to God, brought together God's will and God answered it, and God gave them a dream and told them to go to the town of Nazareth.

That's just interesting, but let's look at this place called Nazareth - the last fulfilment of prophecy, verse 23: 'And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets'. Now please circle that 's'. Right throughout this passage 'prophet' is mentioned, but here you have 'prophets': 'He shall be called a Nazarene'. Now you can look until your thumbs wrinkle, licking it that many times going through Scripture, until your pages are dog-eared - you will not find one prophet that said these words: 'He shall be called a Nazarene'. There isn't one. Prove me wrong! There isn't one. So, many scholars will say: 'Well, 'nezor' (sp?) is the Hebrew word for 'branch', and Zechariah talks about Christ the Messiah coming forth as a branch, or the sprout of the Lord found in Isaiah, or in Isaiah 11 He's talked about as the branch of David's roots'. I think that's a bit far-fetched, personally, that 'nezor' could be related to 'Nazareth' - but when you look at the town of Nazareth you find that Nazareth was called 'Nazareth of Galilee', and Galilee was called 'Galilee of the Gentiles' because there were so many Gentiles that lived in the area. In fact, so many were there, that the Pharisees and the Scribes looked down upon it - you remember Nathanael, when he was sitting meditating on spiritual things, said: 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'. It was a despised place.

In fact, the inhabitants were called in Hebrew 'amhoretseen' (sp?), which means 'ignorant men' - we would call them 'eejits'. The Jews in Jerusalem hated them, they were despised, all of Galilee - but even those who lived in Galilee despised people who lived in Nazareth. Now what did it mean to be born in Nazareth? It meant to be despised, it meant to be rejected, it meant to be a man of sorrows, and what we have here is the Christ of God who was rich for all eternity being made poor and finding His abode in an awful place called Nazareth. You say: 'You're not answering the question of who spoke the prophecy' - well, I think all the prophets spoke that prophecy, didn't they? Go through them all and you will find about the rejection of Messiah, how that His hands would be pierced - David in Psalm 22; how Zechariah says Judaism will look on Him who they have pierced - you can go on and on and on, and you find that their major theme is the rejection of the man of sorrows, the servant of Jehovah. They all spoke about it! God was fulfilling His word.

But just think about it for a moment, what it meant for the Son of God to come to a place like Nazareth! In Nazareth, all that we read is that He was subject to Mary and Joseph - what a humiliation for the sovereign God of heaven! We assume that He worked in his father's carpenter shop, and we know mathematically - now mark this please - that 5/6 of the time that the Saviour lived in this world on the earth was spent in Nazareth among the poor, and He passed away 30 years of His days in complete obscurity. What humility is that!

He shall be called a Nazarene, and then when He eventually comes forth at the age of 30, where does He start it? He started in Galilee, and then He's rejected again, and He ends up at last being cast out of Jerusalem, outside the camp. The early Christians, after His death, His resurrection and ascension, were themselves called Nazarenes because they were called to take up the cross and follow Him, they were called

to suffer His reproach with Him outside the camp, despising the shame.

Listen, I have to finish, and I haven't a clue where you are today, but can I just say: this is just the type of Saviour that the suffering and the sorrowful need. You are here with whatever burdens you have: He knows all too well what that means. When you tell Him in prayer about your troubles, and maybe you think: 'How could He understand this?', He sympathises, He emphasises. When you go through cruel persecution and cry from the depths of your soul, He understands - and therefore I urge you: keep nothing back from Him, go to Him and pour out all your heart for that's what He wants, and that's what He did when He was on the earth. He was heard in that He feared with strong crying and tears, but isn't it wonderful today to comfort our hearts that there is not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one, no not one. He knows all about our troubles, He will guide till the day is done. There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one, no not one.

Don't shoot me down as being a wimp, or a romantic, but I was watching 'Anne of Green Gables' the other night. Anne wanted a friend - you might know the story, I can't tell you it all, I don't know it all - but she called the friend that she wanted 'a bosom friend'. When she was asked what she meant by that, she said: 'I want a friend that is a kindred spirit'. There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus - and you see if you're His friend, one day that Messiah that suffered the contradiction of sinners will be exalted and given a name that is above every name, and you will be beside Him as He is beside God, the Son of His Right-hand - Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Father, we unite and say glory to the new-born King. We thank Thee that the Lord Jesus did die, and He did rise again, and He is at Thy right-hand, and one day we will be with Him because now we are in Him. Father, we thank Thee for the wonder of all of our salvation, it's just boggling to our minds to think that the God of all glory became a baby, that we should be called the sons of God. We thank Thee, and we pray that this Christmas time from our hearts would ascend the gratitude and these lessons that we have learned, looking at Matthew's first Christmas, will not be lost - but like Mary we will ponder these things in our hearts, and they will help us, encourage us, and strengthen us for the way, for our journey where You are leading us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - December 2003

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*Appendix A:**"Immanuel - God With Us"*

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Perhaps you could turn again to Isaiah and chapter 7 and verse 14, we'll just read verse 14, and Isaiah said to Ahaz: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel".

If you turn to Matthew, Matthew's gospel and chapter 1 and verse 23: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us".

Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, we thank Thee for this time that we can spend around Thy word. We pray, our Father, that as we turn to Thy oracles of truth, we pray that we would see Jesus - the Author and Finisher of our faith. Lord, we ask that by the Holy Spirit of the Living God, that He would be manifest to us in spirit and in truth today. Fill us we pray with the Holy Spirit, in Jesus name. Amen.

Someone has said that if you could convince a man that there is no hope, he would curse the day that he was born. You see, hope for humans - all human beings - is an indispensable quality of life. Years ago an S4 submarine was rammed by another ship and quickly it sank to the bottom of the ocean. The entire crew was trapped within that vessel. Various ships that were in the ocean at that time rushed to the scene of the disaster, but no one really knew what that crew went through on those few hours underneath the water. Men bravely clung to all the oxygen that they could get until, slowly, it gave out. One diver who came to the rescue placed his ear to the side of the vessel and listened, and there were various tapping noises that were heard - someone was tapping in Morse code. The question that was brought to that man who put his ear to the side of that vessel was this: 'Is there any hope?'

That, if you like, is the cry of all humanity. Is there any hope? Throughout various circumstances, and in various situations, that cry can be heard: 'Is there any hope?'. One of the most interesting cemeteries - if you're interested in cemeteries - is one in London called Bunhill Field (sp?). It's a place where many famous people are buried - Charles Wesley is buried there, Isaac Watts the great hymnwriter, Daniel Defoe the author of Robinson Crusoe - but opposite that great graveyard is the chapel of John Wesley and a monument erected to him. Also across that road is John Wesley's house, where on March 2nd 1791 Wesley opened his eyes and exclaimed for the very last time, upon his deathbed, these words: 'The best of all is this: God is with us'. He could have said various things, but he said that the best of all is this: God is with us.

Now I want to speak to you this morning for a few moments on the meaning of 'Immanuel'. The meaning of Immanuel, of course, we know from the passage that Immanuel means 'God with us'. As Charles Wesley, John's brother, said: 'Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man' - God with us, God come to dwell in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to ask three questions of us all this morning - the first question is this: what did Immanuel mean to Isaiah? The second question is: what did Immanuel mean to Matthew? And the third question is: what does Immanuel mean to you?

So let's deal with the first question first all: what did Immanuel mean to Isaiah? Well, if you turn to Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14, you find that Isaiah is speaking to the King of Judah, King Ahaz. King Ahaz was an evil man, King Ahaz was a man who was known to sacrifice his own children to false gods. So when you

know the character of the man that we're dealing with here, we read this story and we realise that the Assyrian Empire, which was one of the superpowers of that day, it was increasing in its world influence and world power. And because that, Syria and Israel - those two nations which were different from Judah - Syria and Israel wanted to form a coalition with Judah in order to oppose the onslaught and the growing power of the Assyrians. They made a proposition to King Ahaz, but King Ahaz wavered. He wavered to and fro, he didn't know whether to join this coalition or not, and because of his hesitation Syria and Israel turned against him - they decided that they were going to punish him for his lukewarmness, they were going to depose him, they were going to put another King upon the throne of Judah so that they could have their way. Hearing the news that Syria and Israel were against him, King Ahaz trembled in his boots - and because of that Isaiah the prophet was sent to the King to calm him down, to give him a message of comfort, and we read that message in chapter 7 of Isaiah.

Isaiah said to him: 'Look, if you would only trust in God, Ahaz. If you would only put your faith in God, give everything into His hands, then you would be alright and God would look after you, He would take care of you'. Isaiah commanded Ahaz, he commanded him to actually test God, to actually ask God to prove this message that he was bringing, to confirm it with a sign. But Ahaz in all his pride, in all his stubbornness, he refused - he went his own way. He trusted in his own wisdom and he decided that it would be better to use men, and he went and made a treaty with another nation, with the King of Assyria - the enemies of the whole of that continent - only to have the King of Assyria break that covenant and Ahaz, as we would say today, ended up with egg on his face. But Isaiah announced to Ahaz, in verse 14, what would happen - that if he only trusted in God, if he only put his faith in God, if he ceased to move the nations like pawns on his face of the earth, as if he owned it, and he just trusted the one - as we were telling the children this morning - who has the hand that moves the world, if he would only trust God, God would send a sign. That sign would be a baby, and that child that would be born and would be conceived would be called Immanuel, he said, and he was given his name even before the child was born or even conceived. And if Ahaz would wait, and if Ahaz would have faith, when the age came that that child was able to discern right from wrong then all the bother, all the pressure, all the threat, all the onslaught from the other nations around, it would all pass away and all would be peace.

Ahaz refused to listen to the voice of God. Because of that - listen, and this is beautiful - God did not withdraw his promise just because of a King's unfaithfulness, just because of a leader's unfaithfulness. God was faithful to the remnant of those people in the nation of Judah who were faithful to Him, and He said: 'I'm going to send this child, I'm going to send this baby - whether Ahaz fails Me or not - and this child will be born, a virgin will conceive, and his name will be called Immanuel'. And there was a child born in Ahaz's day - it wasn't the Lord Jesus, but it was a child that was the sign. And when that child grew - we don't really know the name of the child, but we know that there was a child - and that child was simply this, listen: that child was to signify that the God of all grace is with His people. Have you got that? Amidst all the trial and tribulation and pressure that the nation of Judah faced, even though their King betrayed them, even though their King buckled under the pressure of human men and kings and politicians, God remained with His people. That's what Immanuel meant to Isaiah - it was a child that would be born in his day that would signify judgement upon Ahaz, judgement upon Assyria, Israel and Syria, and would signify deliverance of God's people, it would signify divine hope, God's grace, God's faithfulness in the midst of failure.

Now, this name 'Immanuel' is only found three times in the word of God: it's found here in Isaiah, then it is found again in chapter 8 and verse 8, and then it's found in Matthew 1 and verse 23. It can have two meanings in Isaiah - it can either mean that 'the birth of this child signifies God's hand on us', simply that God is looking after us, simply that God was caring for His people - or the second meaning of the word could be this: that God is not just looking after us, that God doesn't just have His hand on us and is caring for us, and is planning our greater good, but God within the birth of this child, God's very presence had come to actually dwell within the body of this child. Which meaning is it? Well, if you turn to Isaiah chapter 9 and

verse 6, you see that it says: 'For unto us a child is born' - speaking of this child, Immanuel - 'unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God'. El-Gibbor, the mighty God! And the birth of this child was not simply to signify, like a badge or like a licence to God's people, that He was with them and they could produce it, they could show this child [to prove] that God was with them - but this child was more than that, this child actually signified the living presence of the eternal, mighty God with His people. And that child was born in Isaiah's day - that's what Immanuel meant to Isaiah.

The second question that I've asked is: what does Immanuel mean to Matthew? If you turn to the second reference of 'Immanuel' in Matthew's gospel chapter 1 and verse 23, you read that very famous verse: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us'. What did this name 'Immanuel' mean to Matthew? What did it mean to the Jews whom Matthew was writing to? An artist once drew a picture of a winter twilight, the trees within the picture were heavily laden with snow, there was a dreary, dark house in the background that looked lonely and desolate. Right there, in the midst of the storm, all that could be seen was a dark black house shadowed with the silhouette of these trees. It was a sad picture, but then with a quick stroke - just one quick stroke - with a yellow crayon, the artist simply put in a streak of light coming from the window. The effect, it was transforming, it was magical, because the entire scene was translated into a vision of comfort, a vision of cheer. Listen this morning: that is what the name 'Immanuel' meant to Matthew, that is what the name 'Immanuel' meant to God's people, the Jews, at this time. It was like a streak of light, just into the darkness - and Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, Immanuel, another child, the second child that would be born would be the Light of the world.

The point of it is this, the point of the name Immanuel, the only time it's mentioned in the New Testament here is this: to show that - just as the first Immanuel in Isaiah chapter 7 was to signify the hope of Israel, was to signify judgement on their enemies, and deliverance and grace - so the birth of Christ, He would be Immanuel, He would signify deliverance, He would signify God's saving act among His people. The birth of both Immanuels, the first and the second, signify that God's presence is with His people through a child...a child. Was it not one of old said: '...and a child shall lead them'? Isaiah's child points to the Christ child. Isaiah's Immanuel is a picture, is a type, is a painting if you like, simply pointing a big arrow to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the child that was conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, that child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit that overshadowed her, that holy thing - the word of God says - that was conceived within her. It is indescribable, so much so that the Holy Spirit, when writing it down, had to say a 'holy thing'. Titus put it like this: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men'. My friend, can I say to you this morning: if you're not born-again, if you've never met Jesus Christ in your life, if you've never had Him revealed to you by the Holy Spirit, if you've never been saved or if you're backslidden today - listen: do you not see your Immanuel? Do you not see that out of the darkness of your life, or your depression, or your illness, or your weariness - whatever it is - the pressures of the world that are coming in upon you, can you not see that God in His Son, in that little baby in Bethlehem, has sent Immanuel? He is testifying that He is with you! That God is for you! That He wants to save you! That His grace, His saving power, His deliverance, His act of redemption is in the midst of us today by His Son!

That's what it meant to Matthew. It was the good news - we all know it - but can we not revel in it this morning? That Christ Jesus came into the world, Immanuel, God with us, to save us from our sin! He came to save His people, didn't He? But because of the grace of God that we cannot enter into, His grace came toward us Gentiles and we have been brought into the commonwealth of God. Oh, Immanuel, what that name should mean to us this morning! What it meant to Isaiah: the deliverance of this child. What it meant to Matthew: the deliverance of the Son of God into the world. But what does it mean to you? What does Immanuel mean to you? Did not men desire a God that they could sympathise with? Do we not desire a God that we can empathise in, and we know that He sympathises with us? Do we not want to love a

representation of Him - and that's why we have some people in our world that want to fix their affections, want to fix their spiritual feelings, upon objects like pictures and idols and so forth, because they want to lavish and direct their spiritual affections toward things - they want to see something! But God is invisible, and through all the eras of time men couldn't do that, they couldn't direct their spiritual affections towards an object, so God stooped. Listen - and I speak reverently, and I have to be careful this morning - but God stooped to become an object! God, who was not an object, became substance that we might see Him, as John says: that we might touch Him, that we might worship Him, that we might hear Him. What a wonderful stoop this was! Yet He took upon Himself form, He took upon Himself nature - yet that was the desire of man: to have an object to vent their affections upon - yet they rejected Him! They'd got what they wanted really, but they rejected Him.

Did men not get tired of worshipping invisible things? For the Bible says, in the book of Romans, that: they changed the glory of God into an image made like corruptible things. In order that He had an outward form, He became man - so that He could be seen of us, so that He could be touched and our hands could handle Him. But the Bible says that He was the express image of the Father, He was like the rubber stamp of God, He was His image, He was His expression - if you could take a photograph of God, it would be the Lord Jesus Christ, Immanuel would be what you'd see! He was the living form of God, yet man shut their eyes to Him. They wanted to see God, but when they saw God they shut their eyes to God, they refused to acknowledge the glory that shined from Him to them.

Do men not want to converse with God? What is a priest? A priest is a person that goes to God for men. And that's what had to happen: they had to have a special man, a holy man, to go to God for them and to worship God for them and to offer sacrifices for them - they couldn't go to God directly, they couldn't talk to Him, they couldn't give Him gifts or worship without someone in between. And man just... did he not want to speak to God? So what did God do? God put Christ, His Son, the word of God, into human flesh [so] that we could speak with Him - yet we rejected Him. To be without God in the world is to be in the most wretched state imaginable. To have God against us in the world is to tremble - surely it is to be fearful! But listen this morning, believers and unbelievers alike take joy in this: to have God with us is to have everything!

You see the army today, the army - perhaps the last stand - and they're going into the battle, and one by one those young men get struck down by cannons and by bullets, by explosions and by the bare hands of men - and still for their country they run into battle, one after one continually falling. They're failing, they're losing - but suddenly from the back, from the camp there is a cry that is shouted across the field and it's this: 'The General has come! The King is with us!'. There's many a battle where the tables have been turned because of a voice such as that. Can I ask you this morning, Christian friend: are you a Christian soldier? Are you weary, are you tired? Do you feel the pressure and the pain of the world and the temptations that the world brings, and all of the pressure that we have in this age that we live in? Do you feel it roughly? Do you feel it when you see the gospel of Christ trodden into the ground? When we see less movement nearly than ever, when we see a church that disregards the place of prayer - saint, old soldier do you feel the pressure? Listen this morning: there is the cry of a King among us - for God is with us! God is with us!

When you see the child on the boat, he's sailing on the sea - and a storm comes on to the ocean, and that boat is tossed to and fro, and people are hanging over the edges, feeling sick and even fearing for their life, and the captain doesn't know what to do - but this little child is calm, this little child is at peace. Why? Because the child has its Daddy with it. My friend this morning, are you going through the storms of life? Are you going through the storms of sickness or bereavement or pain? Are you going through the storms of loneliness or desertion? Whatever storms you're going through, listen today: God is with us! God, Immanuel, He has come not just to put His hand on us, not just to say 'Well done' and give us a pat on the back and push us forward - but He has come to stay, He has come to dwell, He has come to reside with us!

Many a man has emigrated, left these shores to Australia, or South Africa, or America - and we often think, when we hear of one who emigrates, how lonely it must be to leave family, to leave friends and loved ones, perhaps never to see them again. But what it is when we hear that: no, he's not going alone, in fact his whole family is going with him, in fact everyone, all his relations are all emigrating to that place - that's different, isn't it? It would be lonely to be on your own. Maybe you're on your own today, maybe you're on your own in life, you've been left on your own - but listen my friend, no matter where you are, no matter how lonely you are, no matter how you feel, no matter where you are in your life, listen: God is with you! For the soldier in the battle: Christ Jesus, Immanuel, is the Captain of our salvation. For the fatherless child, for the orphan: He is the everlasting Father. For the lonely one: He is the omnipotent Companion that is with us wherever we go, whatever we do. For the sick, for the lonely, for the deserted, for those going through the valley of death - listen to this word my friends today: Immanuel...God...with...us! He is with us! Us! He took upon Himself our nature, He took upon Himself our being, our feelings, our emotions so that He would know what we go through. So that He could empathise, so that He could sympathise - He was God with us, but He was God! He was God with us! You think of His condescension, that He had such glory, such beauty, such splendour - yet He came down and He left it all, He was true God yet true God became true man...and he became God with us! He became God at our side.

There's a picture in Milan of a little cherub - you know, a little angel - who is feeling one of the points of the crown of thorns with her finger. There is a look of wonder and amazement upon her face. She has been told that it means agony, it means pain, but she cannot feel it. To her it's so incomprehensible, because she belongs to a different world, she belongs to a world that has never experienced pain, she was never born into the conditions in which the Son of Man was born, where there was sin, where there was suffering, where there was sacrifice. But Immanuel is God with us - and God did not send an angel, but He sent His Son, He sent Himself and He took upon Himself our flesh, that He might suffer that when we suffer He might know what we go through, He might empathise, He might comfort, He might succour us.

Benjamin Warfield (sp?) - and I finish with this - said these words: 'The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze, not a humanised God or a deified man, but a true God-man - one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is - and that means this: one on whose almighty arms we can rest and to whose human sympathy we can appeal'. Your wife can sympathise with you, but oh what it is to have the Almighty God to sympathise with us. Whatever your need is this morning, let this word sink into your mind and your heart: Immanuel, God is with us.

Our Father, we thank Thee today that Thou didst not send us an angel, Thou didst not send us a message but Thou sent us Thy only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and clothed Him in human flesh that He might suffer with us, that He might empathise in our sorrows and in our testing - and Lord, that He might save us and deliver us from our sin. Lord, we thank Thee for Him today, we rejoice in Immanuel - that God is with us - and if God be for us, who can be against us. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - November 2000

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*Appendix B:****"What Is Worship?"***

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel and chapter 2. We have been in Matthew's gospel for some time now, studying the Sermon on the Mount, and then last week we were in Matthew again looking at the birth of the Lord Jesus and comparing the barren wombs of the Bible with the virgin birth of our Saviour. This morning what I want us to look at together, this Christmas Sunday morning, is 'Worshipping With The Wise Men', and we're looking at chapter 2 of Matthew and verse 1.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way".

Let us pray together: Our Father, we have not come into the Lord's house today, we are the Lord's house - a temple not made with hands. Our Father, we have come together gathered to the name of this Lord Jesus Christ, and we have come with the same endeavour as these wise men of the east, we come laden with the question 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him'. Our Father, help us to worship through the word of God, and help us by Thy Spirit to be drawn in adoration of Him who came into the world to save sinners. Amen.

'Worshipping with the Wise Men'. I wonder if I was to ask you today what would you say the primary activity and application of a Christian ought to be, what would your answer be? Is it to preach the gospel? Is it to serve the Lord in some capacity, whether every day in your workplace or on the mission field? Or is it to do good works, try to obey the Scriptures and the teachings of the Lord Jesus - after salvation of course? What is the primary occupation and activity of a Christian? Well, I think if we had to narrow it down to one specific activity, the Holy Spirit would guide us to John chapter 4 and verse 23 where we read these words: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him".

The Father, the Holy Spirit tells us, seeks worshippers. Surely as we scour right throughout the whole Scriptures we must find that, primarily, worship is the primary activity and occupation of the child of God

here. In fact, it will also be our primary occupation, I believe, in heaven. If you think about it, we will probably not pray in heaven because we will be in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Probably we will not read the Scriptures, or not be given the privilege again of studying them in any depth, because we will be with the Word of God incarnate in glory. There will be no need to preach the gospel because all those there will have believed the gospel and will have entered into that true eternal life in all of its glorious realisation. We will not need to go to the mission field because everyone there will be a child of God, and will worship at the feet of the slain Lamb who has died for their sins.

Many things, we would have to say, that the church of Jesus Christ on the earth at present engages itself in down here will of necessity cease when we are translated to glory into eternity in heaven. But one thing that will remain is worship. If you like, down here now we are in an apprenticeship school, learning and practising what it will be to worship around the Throne - eventually, if you like, to graduate around the Throne of God and say with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing', and what a day that will be! So worship, then, is not part of the Christian life, it is the Christian life.

So how do we fare? How do we measure up with regards to worship? What condition is our worship in? In fact, we would have to ask the question: what is worship? Is worship the singing of a hymn? Is worship singing choruses for an hour before we get a five-minute or ten-minute epilogue of the word of God? Is worship coming to a Sunday morning church family service like this? Is worship meeting around the Lord's Table and remembering Him in His death? Well, I would say that none of those things are worship. True, they can be done worshipfully, but they can also be done without worship - and therefore they are not the definition of worship, but things that you do perhaps when you are worshipping.

Perhaps the reason true worship is scarce in the church today is because we have mistaken it for these expressions of worship. People think that to worship is to sing: 'Let us worship together', and then they begin to sing - that is not worship. The preaching of the word of God is not worship. Meeting around the Lord's Table, intrinsically, of itself, does not equate with worship. Could it be that we have substituted outward rituals for what God says is an inward reality and expression called worship? We have to ask today, as we sing these carols, as we pray, as we praise God through the choirs and through the readings and in so many ways: how is our worship? Have we lost worship among all the trappings of expressions of worship? If we have lost her, where is she to be found? Would we recognise her if we saw her again? Perhaps it's that long since we met her that we have accepted a poor substitute for her without realising it?

What is worship, true meaningful worship? I looked it up in the Oxford English Dictionary, and it falls short. It defines it as this: 'Worship is homage or reverence paid to a deity, especially in a formal service. To attend public worship'. Now it does go on to say that it is an expression of adoration and devotion, which is a little bit nearer - but worship is much much more than a formal service, it is more than to attend public worship. This bad definition of the Oxford English Dictionary is probably because dictionaries tend to change in their connotation when words change. When the definition of words change, the dictionary has to change also. If I give you an example: your Authorised Version of the Scripture uses often the word 'conversation', now we in our day and age in the 21st century understand 'conversation' to only mean a verbal expression, a communication. If you look it up in the dictionary it will clearly state that it is only understood as a verbal expression, but yet in the Authorised Version of the Scriptures it describes a manner of life, your way of life. But that has ceased to be the meaning of the word, so the dictionary has changed in its meaning; the connotation of the word, the definition of the word has changed - and I would put forward to you today that the definition of the word 'worship' has changed in the Oxford English Dictionary because the church of Jesus Christ has lost what it is to worship.

It's hard to find her, worship has changed. True worship is hard to find. A W. Tozer, who wrote a very

famous book called 'Whatever Happened to Worship?', says this: 'I say that the greatest tragedy in the world today is that God has made man in His image and made him to worship Him, made him to play the harp of worship before the face of God day and night, but he has failed God and dropped his harp. It lies voiceless at man's feet'. Worship is hard to define simply because it is a spiritual thing, you can't draw worship, you can't describe it with language, it cannot be analysed by the human eye or mind. It is hard to describe, and therefore the antithesis of that is: counterfeits are therefore very easily taken for the real thing.

If I was to define, or try to define, worship, I would say that it is adoration of God from our spirit. The body is sense conscious, it is what we communicate with the outward world with. We touch things, we feel things, and sense, smell, and look, and hear. The soul is your personality, if you like, it is the seat of your affections, made up of mind, emotion, and will - and that is where you are self-conscious, you know who you are and what you are. But the spirit is God-conscious, the spirit is that part of us that communicates with God and was created to communicate with Him in His likeness, for God is spirit. That is the part of you that is dead, cut off from God, severed from God by sin if you're outside of Christ, and that is the part of you that God's Holy Spirit has quickened and has brought to life in Christ - 'Ye who were dead in your trespasses and in your sins are made alive in the Spirit'.

It is to adore God from your spirit, the part that relates to God. A brilliant definition of it is given by Thomas Carlisle, he says: 'Worship is transcendent wonder'. Being caught up - 'transcendent' means 'above us, beyond us' - being caught up in wonder of someone that is beyond our capacity to understand and to grasp, to be taken up with the glory of God. Worship, my friend, that which we can do from redeemed hearts and from quickened spirits, is the highest occupation and function and activity known to man. The best, the most divine and holiest spiritual thing that you and I can do is to be worshipping God, overwhelmed by God, the thought of God, the greatness of God, the attributes of God - to be saturated in God is to worship God!

But yet words and definitions fail, and for that reason God gives us many pictures within the Scriptures of what true worship is, and one of the best I feel is found in the Nativity story that we've read together - these wise men from the east. There are three things that I want to leave with you today that teach us, lessons if you like, from the wise men on how to worship our Lord Jesus Christ. The first thing is this: the distance of worship. What I mean by the distance of worship is: there is a long journey from knowledge to worship. A long journey - some would say it's a very short journey, perhaps only 18 inches, from the mind to the heart - but really, you will know if you're saved that it's sometimes very difficult to get along that long journey from the mind to the heart. Therefore we have to say right away that worship is not knowledge. Worship cannot be knowledge. I'm sure that knowledge helps worship, I'm very sure that it aids in worship because the more we know and find out about God the more our hearts will be filled with adoration of His revelation to ourselves - but there is a long journey from knowledge to worship. There's a big distance, indeed a big difference.

Now, we know from Matthew chapter 2 that these wise men travelled from the east, but we know very little about them. We know this much: they must have known about the promise of a Saviour from heaven, they must have known that. They must have known that the King of the Jews was expected. If you look at verse 2, the first part, they said: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him". They had some type of knowledge, biblical knowledge perhaps of the Old Testament, of a promise of One who would come and deliver His ancient people Israel. So they had biblical knowledge. The second part of the verse tells us: "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him". They had astronomical knowledge, they were astronomers probably, and they knew by the constellations in the sky for that time of year that there was a promised King coming. They knew when they saw His star in the east that this spoke of a great deliverer, and indeed the King of the Jews, the Messiah of Israel. They recognised that particular star from the east.

But do you see, it wasn't enough? The knowledge wasn't enough, the biblical knowledge wasn't enough, the

astronomical knowledge couldn't satisfy. It wasn't enough for them to know about it, or to know about Him. I'm sure, very sure, that when they saw that star they were thrilled, they were excited - and then when their mind rationally worked out that that star spoke of the fulfilment of biblical prophecies, they were so enthused and excited and overwhelmed! But that wasn't enough. These wise men wanted - yes, needed - to go further. They had to come to where He was, they had to see Him, they couldn't stay out of His presence any longer!

We're blessed today in the church of Jesus Christ with an abundance of biblical wealth. We know more about Christ and the Bible today than any previous generation, and perhaps even the generation of Christ Himself, we perhaps know more than even it. Yet, my friend, where is worship to be found in its truest sense? That knowledge is vital, and I do not decry it, but it is not worship. Your vast knowledge of the Scriptures brings no joy to the heart of God, no joy! John the apostle could tell us in his third epistle, chapter 1 and verse 4, he said with the Spirit of God inspiring him: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth". Knowing the truth is good, but what will bring true joy to the heart of Almighty God is when His own children, knowing the truth, walk in the truth - and the truth of God is this: God seeks worshippers.

That knowledge can give you a buzz, and I know all about that when I study day-by-day, and you know about it too. It can even lead you to an intellectual appreciation of God in some capacity of His great sovereign purposes and His economy in time, but please mark: that is not worship. Worship has to go the distance to be with Christ, to fall at Christ's feet, to adore Him in person. Their knowledge led them to the Saviour, I feel at times our knowledge has the potential of keeping us from the Saviour.

'Beyond the sacred page,
I seek Thee Lord.
My spirit longs for Thee,
Thou Living Word'.

You notice they weren't taken up with the biblical prophecies. They weren't titillated by the miraculous star in the skies, by the supernatural, but they wanted to worship. Now here's our question today: do we stop at the knowledge, or do we go on to the house of the child and worship? The distance of worship, there is a long journey from knowledge to worship.

The second thing that we learn from these wise men is the cost of worship. Simply that worship must be precious, in fact worship is costly. If you look at verse 11 you read there: "When they were come into the house", and you notice the difference between the account of the shepherds, because the shepherds came to the stable and the child was in a manger, but now two years - probably - have expired. The child is a little toddler, they are living in Joseph's house, not like the Nativity story that you know and see on the television and at schools today - this child was two years of age. They came to a house, not a stable. But as they come they fall at the Saviour's feet, and verse 11 says: "They presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh". What I believe the Holy Spirit is saying to us today is that the worship of the wise men was something that cost them. Worship costs you.

I think it's a common rule, and I think you would all agree with me when I say that which does not cost you anything is worth nothing to you. If it doesn't cost you anything it's not worth anything. But this worship of the wise men, it cost them, it was precious to them. The spirit of David can be seen here, I believe, when he said: 'I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing'. I want you to picture this in your mind, these men are from the east - they weren't from down the road a few doors in Bethlehem. They had seen the star in the east, they had said to their wives perhaps: 'I've seen the star, I must go and worship the King of the Jews'. They perhaps kissed their children goodbye. After packing their bags, and getting on their camels, and journeying for two years perhaps, long days, long nights - and that cost them.

But that wasn't all, for worship is not just costly because you have to leave something, but worship is costly because you have to bring something to the Lord that costs you. It's not just leaving something, but bringing something. The wise men came to the Lord, but they brought a gift, a precious gift, a costly gift - and this, in the truest sense, is worshipping and ministering unto the Lord. Like Mary, as she breaks that spikenard and anoints the Lord's feet, and dries His feet with her hair - it is worship, ministering, serving the Lord. Can I ask you: do you bring something for the Lord with you when you come to worship? Do you give to the Lord that which costs you nothing? And, just a moment, I'm not speaking of money. Do we think we're doing God a favour by coming to church on a Sunday morning, or coming twice on the Lord's Day and singing the hymns, and listening to the sermon? My friend, worship is much more than that.

Imagine, if I asked you entering today in through the front door, or coming down from the Breaking of Bread: 'Now, what have you brought for the Lord today? What have you brought in your heart for the Lord Jesus Christ that is precious to you, that is a thought that He has given to you that is precious and that will well up your heart in worship?'. You might protest and say: 'Well, how can I give anything to the Lord? How can I possibly add in any way to the Almighty who is rich, the one who owns everything? He cannot be given anything He has not already, he cannot be added on to!'. Do you think the wise men, when they brought the gold and frankincense and myrrh, were bringing it to make the One who is infinitely rich even richer? Do you think that's why they were bringing it? Were they bringing the frankincense and the incense to make Christ an even sweeter savour to the nostrils of His heavenly Father? He could not be, so why were they bringing these gifts? They were bringing gifts that were suitable for a King!

Isaiah says: "The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD". That's why they brought them, because they were gifts worthy of Him, they were to show forth the praises of the Lord. Here's the key of worship: our worship and our praise to God doesn't add anything to God who is the recipient, but what it does is it shows forth the greatness of who He is! That is our chief occupation: to worship God, to praise God for who He is and what He is, that He will be precious to us - that will be precious to us, and it will be precious to Him.

Can I say to you: it will cost you. It will cost you time, it'll cost you energy, it'll cost emotion, it'll cost you feeling, it'll cost you tears and sorrow, it may even cost you pain - in fact, it will cost you your life, it will cost you everything! "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service", or as another translation says "which is your expected spiritual worship". It costs us everything, but it brings great joy to the heart of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The distance of worship, the cost of worship and then finally: the focus of worship. In verse 11, at the very tail end of the verse it says: "and they fell down and worshipped him". When they saw, coming into the house they saw the young child - mark that - and then they saw Mary His mother, but they fell down and they worshipped Him. They saw Mary, the blessed mother of Christ, and she was the blessed virgin Mary - but they didn't worship her! They fell down and they worshipped Him. Oh, we can be so taken up with doctrines, with methods and mechanisms, and diagrams and all sorts of theological toys. Programmes of worship, programmes of all sorts, projects, building or building the church physically bigger - the people within it - we can be taken up with evangelism, we can be taken up the children's work, we can be taken up with singing and choirs and all sorts of things - but they came, they fell, and they worshipped Him! Peripherals and incidentals were pushed out where they ought to be, and they worshipped Christ. Mary's conception was miraculous, unique, unsurpassed, but it was nothing to the One whom she gave birth to - they worshipped Him.

Why did they worship Him? For as the ancient law said: 'Thou shalt worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God'. If this was a mere man they would have been rebuked as John was, as we've already heard today, as he fell before the angel in the book of Revelation, and the angel said: 'See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus' - that's the One to worship! You remember Paul and Barnabas as they went to Lystra, and they were preaching and they healed a man, and all of a sudden these Gentile pagans came and they started to bow down - they called Barnabas 'Jupiter' and Paul 'Mercury'. Then the high priest of Jupiter was going to come and make a sacrifice, and Paul and Barnabas rent their clothes, and said: 'We are but men of like passion with you, worship God!'. Worship God, adore. Worship is to adore and focus all our energies upon Christ, and the best way that we can worship God is to focus our spirits on the One whom God the Father has declared the Saviour, the One who being the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person and upholding all things by the word of His power - worship Him!

Are all our services centred on Him? Are all our daily lives lived for Him? Are all my sermons - God forgive me - focused upon Him? Is the crescendo of our song Him and Him alone? Does our life send out an incense, drawing all the glorious names of wisdom, love and power that ever mortals knew, that angels ever bore - all are too mean to speak its worth, too mean to set my Saviour forth. What do you think God sees when He looks down here today? As He sees into your heart, does He see worship as He did in the hearts of the wise men? There ought to be more than knowledge, there ought to be a pure, precious, costly savour ascending to heaven as we focus our sight and our spirit upon Christ, the Son of God, and Christ alone.

J.H. Baumberger (sp?) told the story of a man who was carried in a dream into a church. In his vision he saw the organist vigorously playing the organ, but no sound was heard in the vision. He saw the choir and the congregation beginning to sing, but their voices were not heard. Then the Minister began energetically to pray, but no tones came from his lips. The man then turned in wonder to his angel guide, and the angel said: 'You hear nothing because there is nothing to hear. These people are not engaged in worship, their hearts are not touched, and this silence is the silence that is yet unbroken in the presence of God. But listen now...', and listening the man heard a child's voice clear and distinct in all that silence. While the Minister seemed to pray, and these people seemed to join and sing and pray too, only the child's voice could be heard because only the child's heart was touched. 'That', said the guide, 'is the only true worship in all this great church today. All the others are concerned with are but the appearance of worship'.

We sang Martin Luther's carol 'Away in a Manger, No Crib for a Bed'. History tells us that Martin Luther, during the Reformation period, had prayer meetings and he would only admit children into them. How many worshippers will God find here today? How many worshippers in spirit and in truth will God find in our homes this Christmas time? We have worshipped Him today, I hope. I hope we will come tonight and worship Him again, and the rest of this year, and the rest of our lives - remember: the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

Our Father, we pray that Thou wilt make us worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth, and that when we come together and when we shut the door upon our closet in the home, that we will come like the wise men saying through the Holy Spirit: 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have come to worship Him'. Lord, we thank Thee for the prospect that we are learning down here for a day that is yet to come in a heavenly country bright, where there need be no created light, for Thou art its light, its joy, its crown, Thou its sun which goes not down - and there forever may we sing 'Hallelujah' to our King. We thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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*Appendix C:****"The Barren Womb And The Virgin Birth"***

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Matthew chapter 1, and we're taking a break from our current series on Lord's Day mornings in the Sermon on the Mount. The fact that it is Christmas, and also the fact that I believe I have a message from the Lord for you all, I want to share with you today.

We're beginning our reading in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. 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".

Let's bow our heads and pray together as we come to God's word: Our Father, we thank Thee for the name that is above all other names, the name of Jesus. We thank Thee, our Father, that He was called and is called Emmanuel, God with us. Our Father, if the truth be told, all of us - no matter who we are or where we find ourselves today, whether we are among the converted or the unregenerate - all of us need God with us. We pray that through Thine eternal Word that Thou wouldst minister Christ through the Spirit to us. Oh, send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me, that He may touch our eyes and make us see. Show us the truth concealed within Thy Word, and in Thy book revealed. Let us see Thee, Lord. Amen.

The title of my message today is: 'The Barren Womb and the Virgin Birth', the barren womb and the virgin birth. It has always fascinated me, the great deliverers that God brought forth from barren wombs - both in the Old Testament and in the New. At a casual glance you will learn that there was Abraham and there Sarah. Abraham was 100 years of age, and Sarah not far behind at 90 years of age. In Genesis 11 verse 30 we read that Sarah was barren, yet of course the plan of God and the story of God's word is that it was that barren womb of Sarah's that brought forth a deliverer in Isaac. Read further through the book of Genesis and we find Isaac, Abraham's son, married Rebekah. In Genesis 25 verse 21 we find there too that Rebekah's womb was barren. Yet, as we read through, we find another miracle taking place, and Jacob - who later became Israel, the father of the nation - he was born to Rebekah's barren womb.

Then Jacob, he married, he married Rachel. In Genesis 29:31 we find that her womb also was barren, yet it was from her womb that Joseph was born - another deliverer to the people of Israel. We go into the book of Judges to chapter 13 and verse 2, and we read of a man called Manoah, his wife is unnamed. We find in that time when there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in their own eyes, and they needed a deliverer, that Samson was born from Manoah's wife's barren womb. In 1 Samuel chapter 1 we read of a man called Elkanah, a woman by the name of Hannah - she too possessed a barren womb. Again a time

of great sin and depravity in the nation, again a void of a deliverer - they needed a man to lead them - and we find that from that barren womb of Hannah, Samuel was born.

We read on, we find another barren, widowed womb. It was owned by Ruth. Ruth found mercy in the eyes of the Lord, and we read also that she bore Obed, who begat Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. Great deliverers born from barren wombs. We go into the New Testament, and we find exactly the same thing - not to the same extent, but we find in the beginning chapters of the Gospels a man by the name of Zacharias and a woman by the name of Elisabeth, also past the age of childbearing with a barren womb. We find that the greatest prophet ever born of woman, John the Baptist, was born of her womb.

It has always fascinated me, but as I have been meditating for messages to bring to you over this Christmas period, whilst I was meditating on this - not specifically, but as I was pondering what I should preach to you today I sensed, I can't tell you how, but just in my mind that the Holy Spirit was causing me in some way to compare these births from barren wombs to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ from the virgin's womb. Essentially, in doing this, it has brought me to two questions - really one question: what are the similarities between the births from the barren wombs and the birth of our Lord Jesus, and what are the fundamental differences that we must lay down today?

Bear with me today, we must understand what barrenness meant in the Old Testament. When you read through the Old Testament it's not long before you gather that barrenness was considered to be a curse, it was seen by women in Israel to be an affliction, and they believed that it was an affliction sent by God. You remember the story of Abraham and Sarah, remember Abraham lied to King Abimelech about Sarah, he didn't tell him that she was his wife, but he said: 'She is my sister'. Because of that, to save the nation from sin and to save Sarah, it says: "The LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife". It was the Lord did it, and therefore people in Israel assumed that it was the Lord who took away this ability to procreate. Because God had given this gift of procreation it was considered to be both a commandment and a blessing of God, if it was taken away it was seen to be a curse and an affliction of God. It was commanded to procreate in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth". We find that when Noah landed the ark there on Mount Ararat, that he too and his family was told the same thing: "Go forth, and multiply, and replenish the earth".

Right through the Old Testament, in Psalm 127 especially verses 3 and 4, we can see how it was considered a blessing. He says: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth". So in Israel fertility was one of God's blessings on His ancient people, on His ancient nation. So how else could these people interpret barrenness? Only as a curse and an affliction from God.

In the light of that let me make a short digression, because this is extremely important - and I get more and more distressed with the confusion that is made between the Old Testament and the New Testament today in Christendom. A great deal of doctrinal confusion, and more than that, a great deal of personal pain is caused because people - whether they be preachers or the ordinary people in the pew - wrongly apply the Old Testament principles to New Testament believers today. We are not Israel, we are the church. We are not a physical people, but a spiritual people. You must realise in your mind that in the Old Testament Israel's blessings are concerning a physical land, the promised land, that physical land would bear for them physical blessings - but we are not Israel. We are a spiritual people of God, we are the church with spiritual blessings.

What I mean is this: yes, children to us, even as God's people today, are still blessing from the Lord to any Christian - but it should not be interpreted to be the opposite, that without children it is because of disobedience and God's displeasure toward us. Get that out of your head! We are God's spiritual people

today, it was the blessing of being in the land that meant fruitful wombs in Israel, but we do not live for physical blessing of the grapes in clusters falling down, for the riches of the promised land, we live for a heavenly home. Paul says: 'We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. He says in Philippians: 'Our conversation', a better translation, 'Our citizenship is in heaven; from there also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. We are a heavenly people.

Even though that is the case, childlessness is still an awful burden for anybody. You can see that from the case of Hannah. She is one of the most poignant characters in the whole of the word of God. It says that she was greatly distressed because of her predicament, she was in bitterness of soul, she wept and would not eat, and she cried continually out to God because she couldn't have children. For her it was a cause of embarrassment, it caused feelings of failure within her soul, like it does for 10 to 15% of marriages affected by the same predicament today. It can breed feelings of inadequacy and guilt, it can even turn to anger, and even anger against God. It can become a fear of the future, growing into old age without children and grandchildren - the fear of loneliness and frustration. Now let me say this, and this is a delicate subject but I feel I have to say it: please do not jest with young couples about when you will be hearing little feet pattering. It amazes me the insincerity of some believers today! Recently I have witnessed young Christian girls breaking their heart because of the insensitivities of Christian jokers. If we need anything as Christians today it's greater love for one another, it's a greater concern for each other, a greater sensitivity that there are others hurting around us that we don't know about, and we might never know about.

But as we find from scripture, there is little that anyone can say to help a woman who cannot bear a child. Elkanah found that out to his detriment, for he turned to his wife Hannah in verse 8 of chapter 1 of 1 Samuel: 'Hannah, why weepest thou? What's wrong with you, why are you not eating? Why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?'. The answer was: 'No'. Undoubtedly Jacob too proved his love by working for Rachel - you know the story, 14 years - Rachel could never have doubted that he loved her. Perhaps, probably as it was the custom in those days, he loaded her with jewels. She was beautiful, the word of God says, to look upon. But none of those things: the love of Jacob, the jewels, her own beauty upon her face and body - none of it was a compensation for the lack of a son. The terrible truth of it all was that Leah had four laughing lads about her skirts, but an unfruitful Rachel was mocked by men, and women shut out the lip against her.

Nothing you can say or do can meet that need. I can imagine Rachel, her eyes red from weeping, and her hair dishevelled, and the voice hoarse with groaning, coming before Jacob with the piercing cry that we find in Genesis 30 verse 1: 'Give me children or I die!'. Nothing we can say or do can meet that need, but if I can just say this: if there's someone here today thinking 'I must have done something terrible, God must be cursing me'. Maybe you're looking to your past and recalling something you've done in your youth, and you think subconsciously that it's for that reason that you don't have any children today - banish the thought! Banish the thought! Be liberated from it today, it is the lie of the devil! I cannot tell you why this is your lot, but don't for one moment believe it is God's curse on you, because it is not!

Can you imagine today what an extra burden it was for an Old Testament woman to bear the burden of God's displeasure? Feeling that it was God displeased with her, and also the fact that Israel as a nation needed a deliverer, and she would have longed to be that one who would have brought Israel's deliverer into fruition - but she couldn't even bear a child! Can you imagine the pain? The extra burden that would be?

The surprising thing to me as I studied this this week was: although the general thinking of the Old Testament was that God had shown displeasure with you, that you had been disobedient if you had no children, there are several instances in the Old Testament where barrenness is not attributed to disobedience. If you look at Sarah, there's no occasion of disobedience whereby her womb was shut up - the same with Rebekah, the same with Rachel, the same with Manoah's wife, the same with Hannah, the same with

Elisabeth in the New Testament. In fact, as I have been studying, I've found it difficult to find one woman in the Old Testament whose name has been cursed of God by childlessness. The only example I can find that is even near it is Michal - remember, she laughed and mocked David for dancing naked in front of the Ark? It says that from that point on she bore no children - but that mightn't even have been a curse from God, that might have been estrangement that had come into the marriage from that point on.

So, how are we to understand these women's barrenness? Why does it happen? If it's not a disobedience to God, even though it may be perceived to be so in the Old Testament, why has God delivered Israel, and brought deliverers, out of barren wombs? Well, if we could see the first three cases in the word of God: you have Sarah, you have Rebekah, and you have Rachel. If you think about it for a moment you will remember that these three women were ancestresses of Israel, they were wives to Israel's patriarchs. The first, Sarah, was the wife of Abraham, and God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea shore - God had promised Abraham. God had blessed Isaac in Abraham, God had blessed Jacob in Isaac, and so on - and right throughout the twelve tribes and over the whole nation the promise of God was given to them, yet all of these men brought forth their children from barren wombs.

What was the reason? Do you know what I believe the reason is? God was asking these couples in pain and anguish: 'Is your sterility an insurmountable barrier to me accomplishing my plan and my promise? Is your barrenness a threat to all that God has said? Is it impossible to me?'. God would come into their home, into their life, and He would overcome by His power and by His promise an obstacle that seemed to be insurmountable for the testimony of His glory and His name. Now listen, God has not given us that promise, God has not promised to us that we should have children - but, my friend, He gave the promise to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob. God was saying: 'Even though you have a barren womb, nothing will be an obstacle to my plan and my purpose'.

Isn't that good to know today? Isn't it? God was proving that nothing would stand in His way, and that's what the Psalmist means when he says: 'He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children'. Praise ye the Lord, for nothing is impossible with Him! I don't know about you but I, as an accomplished sinner, can sympathise with these women's failure when it came to believing God. As you go through the record we find that Sarah laughed, we find that Sarah and Rachel - both of them - encouraged their husbands to take surrogate wives, Hagar for Abraham, Bilhah for Isaac, to raise up children by the flesh rather than by the promise of God - to do it their own way. You can see what's happening here, here is an insurmountable problem, here is the promise of God - and the promise of God seems not to be fulfilled in their sight and in their understanding, so they try to fulfil the promise of God themselves.

Insurmountable is the problem of sin today in humanity, and it always has been. My friend, if you're here today and you're not saved, I want you to know from the word of God that your sin cannot be overcome by the flesh - your fleshly actions or any flesh of any man - it cannot be done. It must be God's way and God's way alone. Certainly this barrenness that was in these women's wombs was not a consequence of the individual's sin, but certainly typically it can speak to us of the barrenness of the nation of Israel, of the need for a deliverer, and ultimately the need for a Saviour. It would seem insurmountable, wouldn't it seem impossible to you that God could save men and women that are on their way to hell when He's a holy God, He's a righteous God, when He can't look upon iniquity? But isn't it wonderful, isn't it wonderful today that God not only promised Abraham that his children would be like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the sea shore, but He promised Adam in the very Garden of Eden that there would be a Saviour.

He may have said to Abraham: 'Thou shalt surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in thee'. But how would all the nations of the earth be blessed in Abraham? I'll tell you: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy

head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. Whether it's the barren womb, or whether it's the virgin womb, there is one thing in common right throughout the whole scripture and it's this: God would have His way, God would bring that Man forth, God would do it in His own time and in His own mechanism - and, praise God, we're the other side of it today and we can read in the Scriptures: 'When the fullness of time was come, God brought forth His Son made of a woman'. Hallelujah! Made of a woman!

Do you know that His birth was the dream of every Jewess? In Daniel 11:37 we read these words concerning antichrist: "He shall not regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all". Many expositors and preachers have interpreted that 'he will not desire the desire of women' as meaning that he is a homosexual, a sodomite, as meaning he is a member of the Roman Catholic faith and is chaste and does not marry. I don't believe that's what it means - the desire of women right throughout all of the Old Testament was to give birth to Messiah, and antichrist will not regard the desire of women, Messiah.

The desire of all women in Palestine was to be the vessel to bring Messiah to Israel. You can all see it coming together when you come into that nativity scene in Luke chapter 1 verse 28, the angel came unto Mary and said: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women". She was a virgin: 'I know not a man, how can this be?'. The obstacle in Mary was not a barren womb, but was a virgin womb - but it wasn't an obstacle, it wasn't a barrier, the word of God would teach us that it was an absolute necessity that she was a virgin! Even the virgin womb was no obstacle in presenting us today with a Saviour. Women who were barren in the Scriptures brought forth the noblest of children - we've looked at it, remind yourself: Sarah, barren until 90 years of age, begat Isaac. Rachel's piercing cry, 'Give me children or I die!', was answered and she bore Joseph who delivered the nation. Manoah's wife bore Samson, another deliverer of the nation. Hannah, a smitten soul, after sobbing in the sanctuary and vowing vows and continuing in prayer, ignored Eli's scorn poured on her soul and received her answer in Samuel, giving a prophet to Israel. The barren and widowed Ruth found mercy and bore Obed who begat Jesse, the father of David, of whose line came John the Baptist, of who Jesus said: 'There is no greater prophet born of women'.

But, my friend, look at the difference today: the Lord Jesus Christ would not be born of a barren womb, but rather He would be born of a fruitful womb! That womb would be fertilised not by man, but by the Holy Spirit of the Living God! What a difference! Barrenness wouldn't do, only a virgin womb could give sanctuary to the Son of God. There's no parallel with this conception, there's nothing to compare. This wasn't a miraculous conception like the rest, this was a virgin conception! In fact, this was beyond the natural, there was no natural process at all within the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, His birth was normal, but His conception was of the Holy Ghost. Yes, He would be a Deliverer; yes, He would come to a barren nation; yes, there would be no insurmountable objects that would prevent God bringing Him to the people. But, my friend, His Father was God Almighty! That took a virgin birth.

He was the sinless, spotless One. That took a virgin birth. He was the first ever of His kind, He was a divine Deliverer to be born among men, and only a divine Deliverer could come forth from a virgin womb. 'A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us', why did it have to be a virgin womb? I'll tell you why: because God was not supernaturally creating something out of nothing, the Lord Jesus was the pre-existent Christ. He is the Ancient of Days, without beginning and without ending. He was not created like the universe - 'bara', created out of nothingness - but He has always existed and will always exist. That womb of Mary's was only used as a medium and a mechanism to bring the Eternal One into time. Do you see the difference?

These other births were miraculous, but this is something else. Listen to Hebrews, this is wonderful, this has thrilled my heart this week: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world he said, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared for me". This is above the rest, this is beyond them, this is

eternally transcendent of anything we find in the Old Testament or in the New - Almighty God here, look at it, is using a virgin's womb as a vehicle for Himself to come among men! A teenager's womb to transport a prepared sinless, separate, sanctified body, a body divinely engineered by God for the task that Christ would undertake, a body that was kept uncontaminated while in Mary's womb - Mary who was a sinner! Even though she was a sinner I do not hesitate one iota to say that that was a blessed womb to host the holy Son of God.

Oh, this difference is supreme. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the Incarnate Deity. Can I leave you with this in closing in the last couple of minutes? Romans chapter 8 verses 22 and 23 reads like this: "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to know, the redemption of our body". This earth cries out like a woman in birth pains for its redemption. Like Rachel crying for a child, the human race has cried out through all time for a Saviour. The problems that would seem insurmountable, the many sacrifices, the many sins, the law of God that they couldn't climb up or climb over, all of it seemed impossible - but what a message! For He has come, and all our sin is gone; and a barren womb or a virgin womb could not hinder God in His holy plan - in fact, God made the virgin womb a necessity. Why? Because our God, in the midst of us, is mighty and He will save!

Think of this for a moment: He gave up the warmth of the eternal light of heaven to be folded in a cosy, dim female womb. The Word of God from all eternity, who spoke and the worlds were, was sentenced to nine months dumbness in Mary's belly. Infinity walled in a womb. The Saviour's first earthly taste was the country barn's bare floor. His first earthly smell might have been the dung of the cattle shed as He was crushed from the womb of that virgin. Why was it all so graphic? Why did it have to be this way? I'll tell you why: because eternity was being squeezed into time! The wonder of it all, and the blessedness of it all today, that from His imprisonment I am made free! Because He took a body, one day I will transcend the body! Because He took terrestrial, one day I will take and put on celestial! From the sweet silence of that babe in the womb, I now can sing a new song from my heart even praise unto our God. Because He was forsaken at Calvary in human flesh, my hand is now clasped by the hand of God, and in His death I have glorious life! Isn't that wonderful? Isn't the lengths that God went to wonderful to save you and me?

Can I ask you today: have you lost the wonder of it all? Have you lost the wonder of it all?

'A child He was, yet had not learned to speak,
Who with His words the world before did make.
His mother's arms Him bear, He was so weak
Who with His hands the vault of heaven could shake.

See how small room my infant Lord doth take,
Whom all the world is not enough to hold.
Who of His years, as of His age, hath told,
Never such age so young, never a child so old'.

Oh come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Our Father, we thank Thee with all our heart that Thou didst send the Lord Jesus Christ from His throne in heaven to that lowly cattle shed. We thank Thee that He came as a Man to save men, but our Father we bless Thee that He came as God to do the eternal work. Father, we worship Him today. We worship Thee: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the plan of salvation. We thank You, Lord, for saving us - and we ask Thee that the wonder of the incarnation, that led to the redemption, and one day to glorification will never cease to thrill us through this pilgrimage until we get to glory. Lord, we would just pray that if there's anybody here today

that's never been saved by this wonderful Saviour, that today they would know the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Bless us now we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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*Appendix D:****"Treasures In The Family Tree Of Christ"***

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I wanted to bring something before you along the Christmas theme, and this is, I believe, the leading of the Lord that I bring before you what I've called 'Treasures in the Family Tree Of Christ'. We begin our reading at verse 1 of Matthew chapter 1. Now there's a lot of strange names in this first chapter of Matthew, so bear with me because I believe that out of the depths of all this difficulty we'll dig out some treasures this morning.

Verse 1: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas", or that could be translated 'Judah', "and his brethren; And Judah begat Phares and Zara of Tamar", drop the 'h' there, 'Tamar', "and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab", or that could be better translated 'Rahab', drop the 'c' and it looks more familiar, 'Rahab', "and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasseh", better translated, "begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. 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".

I want you also to turn with me, we're not reading from this at the moment, but Luke chapter 3 - and I want you to put your Bible bookmark or your little ribbon in your Bible in Luke chapter 3, and keep your Bible open at Matthew chapter 1 as we look at these treasures in the family tree of Christ.

The tendency as we read through the word of God, whether it be the Old Testament or the New Testament, is

to skip out the difficult passages. It would have been very easy for me in the public reading of the word of God this morning to skip out all those difficult names and not make the mistakes, perhaps, that I did in reading them - because it seems tedious, and there seems to be little profit in reading such genealogies. The tendency usually is, when you're doing your daily Bible reading - I hope you do do that - is to skip over such verses of Scripture, but what we must always remind ourselves, and hopefully we'll see the proof of this today, as 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 tells us: all Scripture, all scripture, is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. It's profitable for many things, Paul says to Timothy that it's profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness - but we must conclude that no matter how difficult the passage or the reading might be, or on a little glance on the surface no matter how little spiritual truth we may think there to be in a passage, all scripture which is inspired by God is profitable.

So we have to ask the question: why are these genealogies and names given at the very beginning of Matthew's gospel. In fact they're given in Matthew as a sort of preface, as an introduction, almost like a book in itself at the beginning of this gospel of Matthew. Many of you will know that people at times, even in our own generation, take up the hobby of tracing ancestors because they're curious about where they've come from. One genealogist by the name of Mr Stewart said: 'It's a matter of personalising history'. When we look back at our genealogies, our family trees, we begin to personalise history and we can set ourselves into our family tree maybe hundreds or thousands of years back as to where we came from.

Now if you're wondering the importance of a family tree such as this at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, all you need to do is read letter that was called 'Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho'. Justin Martyr was an early Christian, and he wrote a letter to a Jew trying to convince him of the legitimacy of the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to the title of Messiah or Christ - that Jew was called 'Trypho'. A great deal of this letter was expounding Matthew's gospel chapter 1 to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was in the line of David, and He was who He said He was: Messiah. That tells us alone the importance that such a genealogy was to the early Christians right there at the beginning of Christianity, because as Justin Martyr proved to Trypho the Jew, these verses of Scripture from verse 1 to 17 of chapter 1 of Matthew trace the ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ right back to David the King, and they connect our Lord Jesus with all of the messianic prophecies that are given in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Now if you're not sure about the importance of such verses, I want you to turn with me very quickly to chapter 22, chapter 22 of Matthew and verse 41. The Lord Jesus posed this question to the Jews: 'While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?'. So the Lord was asking them to say who is Christ to be the son of in lineage, in genealogy. And of course they reply: 'They say unto him, The son of David'. Now, therefore, when we trace the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ back to David what is it other than proof that the Lord Jesus is and was who He said He was? You can imagine as Justin Martyr, this early Christian, wrote this letter to this Jew who was unbelieving, the importance of the lineage of our Lord that was tracing His ancestry right back to King David and was proving that He was qualified to be the Messiah, and that all the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures could be legitimately linked with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let's delve a little deeper into the significance of this lineage in chapter 1. If you remember that Matthew's gospel is primarily the gospel to the Jew, the gospel of the King of the Jews to the kingdom, you will see how important it is that in chapter 1 and verse 1 the Lord Jesus' lineage is taken from Abraham. Matthew starts with Abraham. When you go to Mark's gospel there is no genealogy of the Lord Jesus because Mark is more concerned with the servanthood of our Lord Jesus, and as he goes quickly through his gospel you see that little word over and over again: 'immediately, immediately, immediately' - he hasn't really the time to put a genealogy in, it doesn't serve his purpose in his gospel. But as we turn to Luke's gospel which has traditionally been understood as the gospel of the man Christ Jesus, homing in on the humanity of the Lord Jesus, and you look at chapter 3 of Luke's gospel and verse 38 you see that he begins

his genealogy not with Abraham, but because he's speaking of Jesus the man he starts his genealogy with Adam, the first man.

Of course, Luke's gospel is primarily written to Gentiles, so Luke goes beyond even Abraham, the first Jew that was ever called, he goes right back to the father of all humanity - Adam himself. Of course, as you go into John's gospel there's no genealogies per se, but because John is dealing primarily with the divine Christ from all eternity, the Word that was with God and was God, John gives Christ His beginning before the worlds began, and His lineage - as far as John is concerned - is from all eternity past. So we see the different emphasis in these gospels. As Matthew writes this genealogy, he's writing to Jews and he starts the genealogy at Abraham. Incidentally, if you look at chapter 3 of Luke's gospel you see that it's in a different order - he seems to go backwards to the way that Matthew does in chapter 1 of his gospel. The reason why that is is that the genealogy of a man that you find in Luke chapter 3 always goes from the son to the father, so it starts with Jesus and he works back to the fathers. But in Matthew's gospel we have the lineage and the genealogy of a King, and whenever the genealogy of a King was given it was always from the fathers down to that king, whoever the son was. That's why we start with Abraham, so if you get that into your mind first of all: that Matthew is speaking to the Jew, and he is speaking about the King of the Jews that came down from Abraham.

If you keep that in your mind, right away we have a treasure of genealogy - that's the first treasure I want to bring out of this passage: the treasure of genealogy. You see, the reason why Matthew brings us the genealogy of a King is that he is trying to prove the legal right of the Lord Jesus Christ to be Messiah, to be the heir to David's throne, and he does this through Joseph. We have in Matthew chapter 1 the genealogy of Jesus Christ to David through the person of Joseph, His father, His earthly father that is of course. When you go to Luke's genealogy it's the genealogy of Mary tracing back to David - people often ask: 'What's the difference between the genealogy in chapter 1 of Matthew and Luke chapter 3?'. The difference is that chapter 1 of Matthew is Joseph's genealogy to David, and chapter 3 of Luke is Mary's genealogy to David.

Now I know if you look at verse 31 of chapter 3 of Luke you will see that it talks about Heli, or it could be translated 'Eli', as the father of Joseph - but that really is the father-in-law of Joseph. Eli was a relative of Mary, an in-law, a father-in-law of Joseph. So you have here in Matthew Joseph's lineage right back to David, and you have in Luke Mary's lineage right back to David. Now what's that saying? That both Mary and Joseph were in the line to the throne of David - both of them! The two writers are proving, in Matthew the Lord Jesus' legal right to the throne of David through Joseph His father, and Luke is proving the natural right by flesh of Jesus being related to David so that He could be Messiah.

Now you may be a little confused, but let me try and iron it all out for you. Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14 is quoted in this passage, and you'll hear it read probably tonight: 'Behold the virgin shall be with child'. It wasn't only necessary that the Lord Jesus be born of a virgin, but He had to be born of a virgin of David's line. He had to be physically related to King David - but here's where the problem comes in: a woman could never ever be an heir to the throne. It didn't matter that in Luke's gospel we have Mary related to David all the way back, she could never be an heir to the throne - so not only should the Messiah have to be born of a virgin, and born of a virgin that was related by flesh and blood to David the King, but that virgin that was in the Davidic line had to also be married to a man who was equally related to David in the Davidic line.

This is truly a treasure of genealogy, and it has thrilled my heart this week as I have studied it, because Matthew proves that our Lord Jesus - through Joseph as His legal father in the eyes of the nation - was legally the heir to the throne of David and could be qualified as Messiah. He was born of Mary, so he was naturally of the line of David and was naturally able to be the Messiah. Do you see the perfection of the great plan of God? Even though Mary couldn't be qualified to be an heir to the throne, God married to Mary, Joseph, so that He could be legally Messiah. My friends, this is wonderful because the prophets demanded

that there should be a virgin birth, and we right away would say: 'Well, then He could never be related naturally to the line of David, He could never be related legally'. The law demanded that there was a fleshly lineage to the Davidic throne, and this is something that man could never have conceived in his human mind - to bring forth Messiah from the virgin's womb, but that that virgin should be related to David naturally and she should marry a man, Joseph, related to David legally and royally.

There you have it, and let me say categorically today: it is absolutely fundamental and essential that He was born of the virgin, no matter what the BBC will say tonight - and I'm not urging you to watch it. It is essential for who He was and who He is! But does it not warm your heart that all this is brought together in the supernatural providence of God, and I'll tell you better than this: God has left no room for any other man to claim to be Messiah, no room. Apart from the fact that it's proved here in this genealogy, when the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus what happened? In AD70 the Romans were allowed to come and absolutely destroy the whole city, destroy the temple, destroy the nation and disperse them - and with that their genealogical records were all destroyed as well! If a man in Judaism was to stand up today and say: 'I am Messiah, I go right back to the line of David', it could never be proved - but it's proved here!

No wonder the Lord said: 'Many shall rise and call themselves Christ, but it will all be unfounded'. What a treasure of genealogy we have here, does it thrill your heart to see it in the word of God? Perfection! Man would say: 'It's an impossibility', but God brings all these impossibilities together and sets His Son in the midst of it. Now the careful eye will look down this passage and see that there are three omissions of names that should be there. The name Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah are in the Old Testament, but they're not found here. Don't get confused or disconcerted about it, because just because this says 'begat' does not mean it was a direct relationship of father and son, they can skip a couple of generations in these type of genealogies that you have in the Scriptures. But why are these three men left out? I could go into many reasons why they are left out, but I'll give you the reason which I think is primary in Matthew's mind that he left them out: they were three descendants of the daughter of the wicked King Ahab, whose name was Athaliah. Without going into undue detail, let me just tell you this: Athaliah desired to annihilate the kingly seed of the house of Judah. In other words, because Christ would come from the tribe of Judah, Athaliah decided that she would wipe them all out. We could call it anti-messianity, just like anti-Christianity, and anti-Christ today, they were trying to destroy the line of Messiah - just as Cain tried to do, the devil did through Cain when he slew Abel; just as we come into the Nativity story and Herod tries to slay all those man children to try to stop the bringing to fruition of the fulfilment of prophetic scripture in the Lord Jesus.

God doesn't have them here, isn't that amazing? Because, as Galatians 4:4 says: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law'. As we heard this morning around the table, the darkness couldn't prevent it no matter how much it tried. Oh, isn't it wonderful? But I have three more treasures to bring to you in the time that's left. The second is a treasure of numerology. Genealogy is the study of generations, numerology is the study of numbers. If you look at verse 17 there are three fourteens mentioned. All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen; from David until the carrying away of Babylon are fourteen; from the carrying away of Babylon to Christ are fourteen. Now I think that one of the reasons why Matthew breaks it into three fourteens is for memorisation, because these early Christians had to memorise this to debate with Jews about the lineage of our Lord Jesus. I think that that's one of the reasons why he does this.

If you can't get fourteen, the reason is that David ends the first list and starts the second list, and Jechonias ends the second list and starts the third - but that's by the way. If you add these three fourteens together the number that you get is the number 42. You have to be very careful in the study of numbers in scripture that you don't go overboard, but let me just say this: 42 in the scripture represents the experience of sufferings. Now I know that the number 40 represents trial - the Israelites were 40 years in the wilderness, the trial that they had; the Lord Jesus was fasting 40 days and 40 nights and then His temptation came. But those trials

don't always have to have necessary deep sufferings, it could just be a trial - but 42 speaks specifically of great sufferings. As you go into the book of Revelation it talks about 42 months, which is the three and a half years of the second half of the tribulation period - Jacob's trouble. No other period of suffering has ever been seen on the earth - and the idea is not just that it's a period of suffering, but that the 43rd period - after 42, after the suffering - the 43rd period is the period of rest.

Now, my friends, as you get this in this genealogy you have 42 generations from Abraham right down to Christ, but the 43rd is rest! Isn't it wonderful? Rest in Christ! We could go on: two times seven is fourteen, you have three fourteens here - and I hope I'm not pushing this but I don't believe I am, most of the conservative evangelical scholars see this in these numbers. Seven is the perfect number in Judaism, perfection, completeness. There is no disorder with the Spirit of God, God is not the author of confusion, and as you look at the Bible you see much of Israel's history is broken into sevens. There were 70 years of captivity in Babylon, there are 70 prophetic weeks in Daniel, the last week of that 70 prophetic weeks is broken into seven years. Here you have in these fourteens, two times seven three times over. If seven is perfection, two times seven three times over - what must that mean? Absolute and complete fulfilment in Christ!

My friend, Christ has fulfilled it all - and if that's not enough for you: David, the name David is mentioned, the all-important name - and I didn't say that now! - but to Judaism the all-important kingly name is mentioned five times in this genealogy. You may not know this, but in personal names letters in Hebrew represent numbers. The letter 'd' represents 4 - they never take vowels by the way, so drop the 'a' - the letter 'v' represents 6, drop the 'i', the letter 'd' represents 4 again - you add it all up, what number you get? Fourteen! Fourteen, and I wonder is that the reason why Matthew puts this right throughout his genealogy, that all of this points to the fulfilment of Christ as in the line of David as Messiah, and isn't it amazing that not just the names fulfil scripture, but the very numbers in it fulfil it!

Let me give you another treasure, a treasure of typology. Genealogy is the study of generations, numerology the study of numbers, typology is the study of types - and a type in the Bible is just a figure, a symbol of something that is future, pointing towards something that is distant. If you look at verse 1 it says: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ'. If you turn with me to Genesis chapter 5 and verse 1, you read here: 'This is the book of the generations of Adam'. Now if you read down this generation of Adam it has the word 'begat', but it often has 'and he died...and he died...and he died'. This is a generation of death that came upon all men via sin, through Adam our forefather; but as you turn to Matthew this is a new generation, the generation of Jesus Christ. That word 'generation', which is the literal word 'genesis', is only found twice in the whole Bible - once in the Old Testament, Genesis 5 and 1; and once in the New Testament, Matthew 1 and 1. What Adam had wrought on humanity by his original sin, now the last Adam is coming in through the Nativity of Christ, born in Bethlehem, to undo and reverse everything in contrast to the first Adam.

What typology there is in this! I haven't got time to dwell on that because there's something further I want you to see. 'The generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, and the son of Abraham'. Now you think of David and think of Abraham for a moment, and you will remember from your knowledge of the Old Testament that both of them were promised sons - isn't that right? Both of them were promised sons. Abraham was promised a son in Isaac, and Abraham's son in Isaac was a promise of what? A racial line of Jewish people that would number greater than the sand of the shore and the stars of the sky. Abraham speaks of the racial line of the Jew, that there was this nation that would spring up and be a blessing to all nations. But go further into the typology of Isaac for a moment, remember Abraham took Isaac in Genesis 22 and offered him upon the altar to God - the father was offering the son. He had faith, we read in Hebrews 11, to believe that God could raise that child up from the dead again if he was caused to slay it. So there's not only death and offering and sacrifice, but there's resurrection.

Isaac married a woman called Rebekah, and Rebekah was not a Hebrew. Rebekah in these days was a Gentile, Isaac's name means 'laughter' - and I believe the significance of that was forever to be a witness to Abraham of the utter impossibility of this birth to a barren womb like Sarah's. As far as Abraham was concerned the name 'Isaac' meant this, listen: the merging of human and the divine. The Scriptures say that Sarah received power to conceive seed when she was past age. Can you see the typology in all of this?

Let me go on: what about David's son? Well this is the royal line, King David. His son was promised and came, and his name was Solomon, and his name means 'peaceful'. Solomon's greatest endowment was wisdom, and his specific life's work was building the temple. His reign was characteristic of peace and prosperity on the nation. Do you see the typology? Do you see the significance? But let me stop you here and warn you for a moment, because what was in Abraham's heart and David's heart failed! Have you got it? The promise of their sons didn't come to fruition in the son, because you see in the Old Testament the weakness of Isaac's character, the appalling failure of his sons right throughout the whole ages of Judaism - and he failed to really grasp the promises that God had given to his father Abraham. Look at Solomon, and in spite of all his wisdom and gifts from God his life is an unutterable and appalling failure! The temple that he built to glorify God became a centre which was a form of godliness without the power because of his sin, and his sin ultimately caused the fall of the Davidic dynasty.

My friend, if you see in this genealogy the treasure of typology pointing towards another who would perfectly fulfil all the promises that were given to Abraham's sons and David's sons - and who is He? Let me remind you of His words: 'Before Abraham was I am', 'A greater than Solomon is here'. He realised and fulfilled all the purposes that were failed in Isaac, Solomon, and all after him. In His sacrifice, in His glorious resurrection, marrying a Gentile bride, building a spiritual temple and sending forth His Holy Spirit into it to give it the power that was necessary. What I want you to see today is that all the aspirations and incompetence of men has been overcome, and even Abraham the founder of the religion, and David the king of the religion, look to Christ, and have to look to Christ for the full fulfilment of all of God's purposes and promises. Abraham, the father of faith, fades out of sight when he sees his faith vindicated in Jesus Christ. The government of David, which perpetually failed, waits for Christ administration on the earth. The captivity was wrought in the time of Babylon, through which the people of God sighed and sobbed in agony, waits for emancipation - and it is all fulfilled in Christ!

You have through these time periods the judges, the kings, the priests, theocracy, monarchy, hierarchy, and what Matthew is simply saying is that all these things have been pointing toward the Lord Jesus, and now they are all fulfilled in Him - and then he starts his gospel to tell you all about it! No wonder the hymnwriter said:

'Hail to the Lord's anointed,
Great David's greater Son.
Hail in the time appointed
His reign on earth begun.

He comes to break oppression,
To set the captives free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity'.

Here's the last treasure - a treasure of genealogy, a treasure of numerology, a treasure of typology - and here's the last, but not least, and I want to give you it: the treasure of soteriology. Soteriology is the study of salvation. If you realise that in the ancient near east, in Palestine in Jesus' day, a woman was not a person, she was a thing. She was seen as a possession of her father or her husband, and they could do with her as

they pleased. Certainly a woman was never ever to be included within Jewish pedigree, and you would never find a woman in the genealogies of a Jew. In fact, one of the morning prayers of a Jewish man was: 'Lord, I thank You that You haven't made me a Gentile, You haven't made me a slave, and You haven't made me a woman'. Well, if there was to be a woman in the genealogy of Christ, you would have thought perhaps that it would have been a noble and devoted woman that you would find in the Old Testament - maybe Sarah or Rebekah, or Deborah, or as Hebrews 11 says: 'women that received their dead raised to life again, and others who were tortured not accepting deliverance'. In the genealogy of the one who would be the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head and would be Messiah, you would think you would find some great woman of esteem - but can I tell you today, look carefully: there are four women, and three of them at least are not marked by holiness, but they are marked by shame - and the fourth belongs to a race that was cursed by the law of God.

In the closing moments let me give you those four women. Look at verse 3: 'Judah begat Phares and Zara of Tamar' - there's the woman, Tamar. If you go into the Old Testament Scriptures, Genesis 38 - don't turn to it now - you will read a story there. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah, and she was married to a man who died. He displeased the Lord, so the Lord slew him. In those days if your husband died your brother-in-law had to marry you and raise up seed to your husband. So her brother-in-law came to her, Obed, but he did not raise up seed for her. The Lord was displeased, and the Lord struck him down, and then Judah promised: 'See when that little boy, the other brother that's left, when he goes up I'll give you to him as your wife' - but when he grew up Judah didn't do it, and she was displeased. The Bible says she went out, knew where Judah was travelling one day, disguised herself as a prostitute, slept with him and bore up seed to her father-in-law - incest, adultery, fornication, seduction, you name it, it's in the book. She is in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus. You say: 'What could possibly qualify her to be in the genealogy of the Lord?' - do you want to hear it? The only thing that qualifies her to be there is her shame, her shame.

Let me give you the second one, verse 5: 'Rahab' - Joshua chapter 2. You read about the spies who went to spy in Jericho when they went into the home of this harlot at Rahab, and they were given a place to stay and she hid them from the people in Jericho and from the king. Because of that they had grace upon her, and they said that they wouldn't slay her house and her family if she put a red ribbon or red rope in the window of her home - but the Bible tells us that it was by faith that the harlot Rahab perished not like them who believed not, when she received the spies with peace. She was a harlot, full of abominations, so why is she in the genealogy of Christ? Here's why: faith! That's all, faith.

Look at the third one, verse 5b: 'Ruth' - now there's no stain of character on Ruth, but her problem is she is a Moabitess, and the law of Moses was against the Moabites and cursed them. In fact Deuteronomy 23 verse 3 says: 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever'. But faith brought Ruth into the Lord's people along with her children, and the third generation after her - her great grandson - is King David himself! What the law had cursed, grace set aside and brought her in. Oh, this is tremendous!

The fourth in verse 6, it just says 'her of Uriah' - and of course you know the wife of Uriah the Hittite was Bathsheba, that David committed adultery with. I believe that David is in view here and not Bathsheba, it doesn't even mention her name - and I believe what's being talked about here is the sin of a believing man. Here you have the believing King David whose lineage we have before us, but even he can fall into the depths of sin and shame, yet he's here! His backsliding that he committed, it didn't disqualify him from grace! I'll tell you, if Matthew has anything to tell us from his genealogy it's this: the treasures of salvation. I believe that he deliberately picked out the dregs of humanity to show that it is faith that lays hold of salvation, deliverance from the law is through faith, and even in the case of a believer that falls, the assurance of salvation is through faith. Grace shines through it all, nothing but grace we can see in this genealogy - four women who are sinners, four women who are Gentiles - and we could almost sing with

Hannah today: 'He lifteth up the needy from a dunghill to make them sit with princes and inherit the throne of glory'. Matthew's purpose in this genealogy is not to cover-up the outrageous sin of some of the ancestors of Jesus, but to emphasise them; that on the human side of Jesus' ancestry was part of the world.

Later as we read, verse 18 on, he emphasises that He was apart from sin and He came to redeem us. But let me ask you in the closing two minutes of our meeting: this Christmas time, does this bring any commentary or deepen your understanding of a verse like this concerning the incarnation of Christ: 'He came in the likeness of sinful flesh'. John 1, what about this one? 'He came unto His own'. You have it in the His lineage, but let me say this - and I am on holy ground, and I be careful, but I tell you this - on the authority of this passage I can say it: He was not only the friend of publicans and sinners, but He was related to them. He was related to them! Apart from sin, in His lineage He associates with the sinner - what an illustration and symbol of the gospel that the division between Jew and Gentile is broken down, male and female, clean and unclean - for He is not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Is it any wonder then, in verse 21, God gives Him the name JESUS - Jehovah is salvation.

Now listen: if you can't come and adore Him after that, I don't know what's wrong with you.

Lord Jesus, we fall at Thy feet this day and worship Thee for who Thou art - from eternity past the Eternal Son of God, the Word of God who has neither beginning or end; but yet in time the one who is the rightful heir of the throne of David, the one who came in the likeness of our sinful flesh to redeem those that are under the law. Oh Lord we thank Thee, thank Thee for dying for us, thank Thee for rising again, we thank Thee for everything that Thou art and all that Thou hast fulfilled. We pray that this Christmas time that Thy Spirit will give us a deeper appreciation of the treasures of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Amen.

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