

God in Our World

Matthew 1:23

Sermon

Hobart, January 6th, 2013

Devonport, January 12th, 2013

Launceston, January 13th, 2013

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Scripture Reading:

Matthew 1:18-23

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

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²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,* for he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,*
which means ‘God is with us.’ ”¹

* Greek *to divorce her*.

* *Jesus* means “The LORD saves.”

* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 1:18-23). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. ONE OF THE THINGS WE AS CHRISTIANS FOCUS ON IS A BETTER LIFE IN A BETTER WORLD

A. AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED BEFORE;

1. We often find the world around us hard, painful, dark and unlikeable
2. We want God to take away it's nastiness, it's harsh realities and difficulties and give us a new world
3. For now we'd like to avoid as much as possible of the world's unpleasantness and pain and discomfort

B. MANY FOCUS ON PROPHECY

1. Putting energy on what is going to happen and when

C. OTHERS DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE WORLD BY POINTING OUT HOW BAD IT IS

1. And often focus on moral standards, and religious rules and laws

S.P.S:

A. Today we are going to look at our lives, the world, the law and prophecy from the perspective of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, his entering into our life, our world, our human condition

B. PRAYER

BODY:

A. AS THE SAYING GOES, SOMETIMES CHRISTIANS CAN BE SO "UNWORLDLY" THAT THEY ARE OF NO EARTHLY GOOD

1. Jesus' birth, as one of us, entering into our world and life and all its experiences of good, bad and ugly, the ups and downs, the joy's and the sorrows; tells us a lot about this topic
2. And reveals the heart of God, demonstrating his approach to the problems of our lives and our world

B. AS JOHN WROTE;

1. John 3:16

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.²

C. TOO OFTEN CHRISTIAN FOCUS THEIR PRAYERS, WORDS AND EFFORTS AT CONDEMNING AND BECOMING REMOVED AND DISTANT FROM THE WORLD

1. Rather than being active agents and partners of God within it, as Jesus was, and is, and will be

D. THE PROBLEM IS THAT TOO OFTEN IN HISTORY

1. Christian leaders and groups think they have it neatly summed up, and then express their view of God and his ways in dogmatic written rules and standards
2. What is the result?
 - a) The focus then becomes promulgating, teaching and encouraging people to conform to the rules and standards
 - b) People who conform are accepted, part of the group

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 3:16-17). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

c) Those who don't are cajoled and pressured and perhaps condemned and ostracised and even fought against

3. And we end up with inter-church, inter-faith conflict

a) In the past when Christianity had a great deal of political influence and power this even led to wars

E. SO HISTORY PROVES THAT THIS DOESN'T WORK

1. The way of religion, trying to bring Godly living, peace and salvation by moral rules and regulations, is a blight on Christian history

2. Yet, there is such a strong tendency to repeat that method

a) For us to fall back into that way of thinking

b) Because our minds tend to like to keep things in simple black and white, right and wrong categories

c) We like to be for something or against it

3. As human beings we are limited in our ability to understand the intricacies and depths of the realities of God on one hand, and life and the world around us on the other

a) We tend to assume that we know more than we do and end up with a lot of dogmatic presumptions and judgments about both God and life

4. As we have discussed before, our general attitude toward the world and people's habits and lifestyles, is an example

a) It is easier to condemn other people's lifestyles and sins than to love the person and accept and serve them

b) It is so much harder being gentle, kind, merciful, patient, and forgiving

c) But that is how Jesus lived, and how the Holy Spirit leads us to think and act

d) But this isn't natural, it isn't easy, it means battling with our presumptions and lazy thinking and tendency to make quick judgments and put things and people into black and white categories

5. This all leads to nations and churches and individuals becoming inflexible, dogmatic, and stuck

a) Becoming defensive, and even aggressive towards new information and any sort of challenge to their views and teachings

6. We see it in church history and in politics, and in our own lives

F. WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO THE POINT,

1. That among religious people, there can be a tendency to see righteousness in terms of good teaching and behaviour

2. Which leads to focusing minds and energies on being right, which can in turn lead to opposing others who are then seen as "unrighteous"

3. Craig Hovey writes about this condemning attitude toward the world in his book, *Unexpected Jesus*;

This posture toward the world condemns more wholeheartedly than does God, seeks a salvation of the world (notably *from* the world) that leaves the world behind, and escapes from the weightier matters of incarnation, love, and devotion in favour of every kind of distance.³

4. Hovey is bringing out the tendency and desire we can have to distance ourselves from the world,

5. Seeing salvation primarily as being God rescuing us from the world, rather than saving and restoring and healing the world

³ Craig Hovey, *Unexpected Jesus*, Cascade Books, 2012, p.33

II. LAW AND PROPHECY:

A. HOW DOES A MAJOR FOCUS ON PROPHECY FALL INTO THIS PROBLEM?

1. Looking to the future for God to fix everything, can lead us to detaching from the present
 - a) To becoming insensitive, uncaring and uninvolved in making a difference in our world today

B. HOW DOES A MAJOR FOCUS ON MORAL AND BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES, RULES AND STANDARDS FALL INTO THIS PROBLEM?

1. It is easier to stand on what is presumed to be the moral high ground, to remain untouched and uninvolved and unaffected and unburdened by the problems of our world, and to judge, rather than come down and be involved, and step into the “unholy mess”

C. SOME EXAMPLES OF THIS ARE:

- a) At a speech club many years ago, someone asked “if you were given or won a million dollars, what would you do with it?”
- b) Many answered, put it towards the preaching of the gospel warning message about the coming end of the world.
- c) Some said giving it to charity would be a waste, as nothing will be fixed until Christ returns

D. SO WHAT HAS ALL THIS TO DO WITH THE INCARNATION?

1. Everything

E. GOD DIDN'T TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT AND STAY DISTANT FROM US AND OUR PROBLEMS AND SINS

1. He isn't telling his people to just endure this world, keep out of it as much as possible, preach a warning message to the world and behave righteously yourselves until Christ's return

2. God came down into our world, to be with us in our problems, to walk with us in our world, to be love us sacrificially and unconditionally while we were yet sinners

F. AND HE SPENT LARGE AMOUNTS OF HIS TIME:

1. Caring for and helping the condemned and ostracised, the ones living lifestyles that society stood separate from
2. And battling with the religious people and leaders who did the condemning and held to a closed minded, dogmatic worldview

G. EVEN THE SITUATION OF HIS BIRTH SHOWS THIS

1. Herod was out to get rid of him from the start, as he wanted to preserve his power and position, he certainly didn't want to listen to or follow anyone else
2. Jesus wasn't born into the in group of society
 - a) His family was among the outsiders
 - b) He wasn't born in a palace or to a Princess or Queen, or a Priest or religious leader

Matthew 1:23

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,*
which means 'God is with us.' "

3. God's solution to the problems of the world is to come and be with us, to be one of us
 - a) To save us from being close and intimately and lovingly involved with us
 - (1) **Not be operating dramatically from a distance, just using judgment, power and authority to command and demand conformity to a set of rules**

* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

H. A PROPER VIEW OF PROPHECY

1. sees that God's purpose is incarnational, koinonia, living with us, in us, and through us to save us
2. Love, sacrifice, forgiveness, mercy, serving our deepest needs with compassion and gentleness is what the Scriptures, history and prophecy point to salvation through Jesus being our Immanuel, right here in our world helping change our world from within it, not from a distance

I. A PROPER VIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE LAW IS THE SAME

1. The law was instituted because the people refused to draw near to God
2. It was only there to stop them going further away from him
3. And it pointed to, and was completely and wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus, the living Word, the way, the Truth, and the life, Immanuel, God with us
4. And the sending of the Spirit leads us into all truth, into relationship, as adopted children of God

J. GOD SENT JESUS TO LEAD AND EQUIP US

1. to partner with him in incarnationally serving our fellow human beings and the world around us
2. To be part of his work not of condemning, but saving the world

III. MATTHEW 1:18-23

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which means ‘God is with us.’ ”

A. GOD’S PLAN IS NOT TO REMOVE US FROM THE WORLD, BUT TO BE WITH US IN OUR WORLD.

1. To help us to live on earth, to live among and with the rest of humankind, in peace and harmony
2. Through entering into our world as one with us, one of us, God, in Jesus, came to bring peace on earth
3. To deliver us from our ways that run counter to peace
 - a) To enter into our darkness and overwhelm it with his light
 - b) To enter into our loneliness, feeling without help or hope, to join us and give us the help and hope we so desperately need



* Greek *to divorce her*.

* *Jesus* means “The LORD saves.”

* Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

IV. PHILIPPIANS 2: DESCRIBES THE INCARNATIONAL LIFE

2 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

² Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God,^{*}
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges^{*};
he took the humble position of a slave^{*}
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,^{*}

⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

^{*} Or *Being in the form of God.*

^{*} Greek *he emptied himself.*

^{*} Or *the form of a slave.*

^{*} Some English translations put this phrase in verse 8.

CONCLUSION:

A. SO GOING BACK TO WHAT WE WERE DISCUSSING:

1. Rather than being part of the voices of condemnation and self-righteousness
 - a) Of pushing moral rules and ostracising those we don't approve of in society,
2. We are to listen and draw close to Jesus and learn from how he related to the immoral and condemned members of society
3. We can hardly be partnering with him, living and sharing his life if we are thinking, acting and speaking differently to him
4. We shouldn't be looking for, as Hovey wrote;
a salvation of the world (notably *from* the world) that leaves the world behind, and escapes from the weightier matters of incarnation, love, and devotion in favour of every kind of distance.⁴

B. WE ARE CALLED NOT TO DISTANCE OURSELVES FROM THE WORLD,

1. But to share in the incarnational life of Jesus
2. To be his partners in bringing good news, light, hope and peace to the world
3. To live and experience Jesus' life ourselves, exemplifying the weightier matters
4. And to share Jesus' life with those around us in the way we live our lives and relate to one another

C. PRAYER

⁴ Craig Hovey, *Unexpected Jesus*, Cascade Books, 2012, p.33

Lord's Supper

D. JESUS' BIRTH, HIS INCARNATION, HIS BEING IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US

1. shows God's desire to be with his creation
2. For us to be at one with him, and at one with one another, and all the creation

E. THE LORD'S SUPPER REMINDS US

1. of how much God loved the world
2. It reminds us how Jesus took on our lives and all of the ungodly actions and attitudes of the anti-God world, and how he defeated them through unconditional love, self-sacrifice and forgiveness
3. By being one with us, rather than distant and apart from us

F. TAKING THE BREAD AND WINE EMBODIES THIS

1. We partake of the body of our Saviour, and his life's blood
2. We commune with him, and he with us in the taking of the bread and wine
3. We show forth the unity and community of God as we take it together,
4. We picture what God is doing in and through us today, and what he will do fully and completely at Jesus' return to be fully with us, once and for all

G. BREAD

H. WINE