

The Greatness of His Salvation

He Has Done Great Things / Matthew 1:21 / Christmas Eve, 2023

Introduction:

This evening, we will conclude our Advent season contemplating the great things God has done. We have been looking at the proclamations Mary received from Gabriel and Elizabeth about the child promised to be born to her, and how those proclamations led her to burst out in a song of praise to God for the great things He has done. Tonight, I want to look at the angel's proclamation to Joseph and how it reveals the greatest thing our God has done for us. The proclamation is found in Matthew 1:18-25, that we heard read earlier. There, Matthew shows how the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream as he was considering divorcing Mary quietly. In that dream, the angel shared the truth of Mary's miraculous conception, called Joseph to take her as his wife, and told him to name their son Jesus. All of this, we are told, took place to fulfill Isaiah 7:14 that speaks of a virgin bearing a son that everyone would recognize as God with us. When Joseph awakes, he obeys the Lord, waits to have marital relations with Mary until the child was born, and names him Jesus. For our time this evening, I want to consider the depths of the angel's promise in verse 21 through a series of questions. The first question is, why was He named Jesus? Look at verse 21, "She [Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." The name Jesus is clearly important because the angel tells both Joseph and Mary to name him Jesus. Certainly, the meaning of the name was significant as Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, or Jeshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation," or "Yahweh saves." However, the name itself actually wasn't unique. The Jewish historian Josephus records 12 people named Jesus around this time. When we look closer, we discover the name finds its ultimate significance in the reason given for this name. Notice the word "for" in the middle of verse 21, "for he will save his people from their sins." In his commentary, Leon Morris notes how "he" is emphatic in Greek, essentially saying "He and no other" will save (Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 29–30). We also see a particular people being saved, as the angel says, "he will save his people." Finally, they are saved from something specific, "he will save his people from their sins." This promise alludes to Psalm 130:7-8 where the Psalmist says, "O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Israel, God's people, were called to hope in the steadfast love and redemption God would bring. A redemption He alone would accomplish, that would ultimately be from all their iniquities, or sins. This is one reason why Matthew connects this promise to Isaiah 7:14 that declares the child would be recognized to be God with us. God Himself promised to come and save His people from their sins and He had come to do just that. Yet, we need to understand this promise goes farther back than simply the history of Israel. This promise goes all the way back to the fall of man at creation. At the fall of man, the curse of sin came through the deception of the serpent and God promised to send a deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent and reverse the curse of the fall. This is the promise spoken of in Psalm 130:7-8, and this is the promise the angel is proclaiming will be fulfilled in this child named Jesus. "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." We discover that this name was no ordinary name because it signified this child would be God Himself come to save His people from their sins. So, why was He named Jesus?

To Point to God's Ultimate Promised Salvation

The second question to consider is, what does it mean to be saved from sin? The scriptures speak of our problem with sin in three ways. First, there is a penalty for sin. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, but the penalty of sin goes deeper than that because that death wasn't just physical death but spiritual death. It was a death that caused the hearts of humanity to suppress the truth of God, turning away from His goodness and rule over our lives, leading to all unrighteousness. After proclaiming the gospel because of the power of God unto salvation, Paul says in Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

This reveals a frightening reality, God's wrath has been revealed against the sin and unrighteous of those who suppress the truth about God. Physical death is only one aspect of that wrath. Following this, in Romans 1-3, Paul shows that all have sinned and fall under that just penalty for sin. If you have trouble consider this, think about it with me for a moment. If there is a God who created everything good, and our sin marred his creation and led us to suppress the truth about Him, reject His goodness, and turn from giving Him the glory He deserves, then He is completely just to punish that sin. Yet, there is a beautiful promise in Romans 3:24-25, that we, "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." Propitiation is not a word we commonly use today but we need to understand it's meaning. Propitiation means an appeasing sacrifice. Christ's shed blood on the cross made an appeasing sacrifice for sin. This is Romans 5-8 can say though we were enemies of God, we have peace with Him, being reconciled through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, and declared righteous by faith in Him, removing God's condemnation for our sin. The gospel is God's power to save us from the penalty of sin through the appeasing sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Yet, we discover from scripture that sin runs deep and there is also the power of sin in our lives that needed to be broken. Romans 6-7 unpacks this, showing us how, in our flesh, we are slaves to sin and bound to live in sinful passions. Yet, after speaking of our justification by faith in Christ, Romans 6:6-7 and 22 tell us, "our old self was crucified with him [Christ] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin," and because you have "been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." The gospel is God's power to save us from the power of sin in our lives, helping us to be able to live for God. This means, through Christ's power, we have the ability to overcome the power of sin. On this side of eternity, we will not do this perfectly, but His power will help us overcome the power of sin, and one day there will no longer be any presence sin in our lives. 1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." Christ, as the God man, was the only human to live a perfect life and never sin. He remains the God man, perfect in righteousness, and in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 we are told that His resurrection is the firstfruits of our resurrection. One day, when Christ returns, the curse will be completely reversed and we will be like him, because the gospel is God's power to save us from the presence of sin. So, what does it mean to be saved from sin?

To be Saved from the Penalty, Power, and Presence of Sin

This all leads to one final question that we must consider. Who are His people? I pray the question your heart is wondering this evening is, to whom do these promises apply? Paul says in Romans 10:11-13, "the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" All who call on him will be saved, meaning all who call on Him are His people. There is no distinction. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. But, how do we call on him? Romans 10:9-10 says, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Calling on the Lord means believing in Jesus' death and resurrection paid for your sin, securing the forgiveness of God, and confessing that He is Lord. Who are His people?

All Who Believe in His Power to Save & Trust in His Death and Resurrection

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in our final carols this evening, think on the greatest thing God has done for us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save His people from the penalty, power, and presence of their sin, who are all who call on Him for their salvation.

Think the name above all names, Jesus Christ, and what it means for you. If you have not called on the name of the Lord, turn to Christ for this gift of salvation. And to all who have called on the name of the Lord, glorify Him this evening for the great things He has done. We are going to sing two more carols together. One that speaks of the birth of Jesus as the curse removing hope for the woes of our sin and strife. The other that proclaims the good news that Christ our Savior is born. May these songs be more than familiar tunes for you this evening. May they speak of the joy of our salvation and draw your heart to think on how He has done great things. Let's respond together.