Matthew 1:18-25

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0:00] Great folks, well I wonder whether you would just turn back to the first reading that we had read to us earlier in our service sheets. It's from Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18 to 25.

I'm going to just spend a few moments thinking about that passage. But first, let me just tell you that this is my first, well it's my last Christmas as a single man this year.
She'll kill me for telling you this, but I'm absolutely clueless on buying gifts for women. But actually after a bit of research it turns out that what I really need this year, the boffins tell me from the States, is that I could buy her every item from the song The Twelve Days of Christmas.
So they've worked it out over there. On the list is the eight maids are milking, as well as the five golden rings, six geese are laying, and of course the legendary partridge in a pear tree.
But when you add all of that together, plus the FedEx delivery costs, it comes to a whopping $100,000. Well, you know, I think she might have to settle for a box of milk tray this year, you know, maybe next year I'll get lucky.
[1:12] But the incredible message of the Bible at Christmas time is that a most extravagant gift has been given. It is the gift of the birth of Jesus Christ.

That is what Christians celebrate at this time of year. And what Matthew tells us in this passage, in our service sheets, is that that gift, the Christmas story, is about two R's.
Two R's. Christmas is about the gift of a rescue, and it's about the gift of a relationship. A rescue and a relationship.
So if you look at verse 20 there in that passage, the angel speaks to Joseph and describes this gift. He says to Joseph, Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife.
What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people. He will save his people.
[2:15] He will rescue them. Now, I was reading the other day of bizarre 999 calls for rescues from the fire service.

One man needed extracting from a child's toy car outside of a supermarket. I don't know how he did that. Another caller got trapped inside a fold-away ironing board, and one woman had her head caught in a cat flap.
But what has he come to rescue us from? What do we need rescuing from? Well, the key issue, the root of all of our problems, the reason the world is as it is, is that we need rescue, and the angel says it to Joseph, if Jesus will save his people from their sins.
From their sins. So, in 1964, the great boxer, Muhammad Ali, beat his opponent, Sonny Liston. And afterwards, in an interview, he said, I am the greatest, that famous saying. He went on to say, I'm the greatest thing that's ever lived. I've upset Sonny Liston.
[3:26] I've only just turned 22 years old. I must be the greatest. Well, he was young and arrogant at the time, wasn't he? But actually, you know, the Bible says that we have done to God what Muhammad Ali did to his opponents.

We have said to him, you know, this is your world. You made it. You provide life and breath and everything that we enjoy. It belongs to you, but actually I am the greatest. That is the Bible's assessment of how we've lived.
Every time we take a breath without thanking God, effectively, that's what we're saying. I am the greatest. And I know that sounds harsh. I'm not pointing the finger, but that's what the Bible says that we've all done.
We've all done it. So, Christopher Hitchens died a few days ago, didn't he? It was very sad. But in an interview, it's not really related, but he said, Owners of dogs will have noticed that you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, and they will think that you are God.

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It's true, isn't it, if you've got a dog? Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realise that if you provide them with food, water and affection, well, they will draw the conclusion that they are God.
[4:43] That's true. And that is how we have treated God. In all of the provision of life, in all of the things that he has given us, friends, food, family, fun, we have come to the conclusion that we are God's.

I am the greatest. And that attitude is what God has sent Jesus to rescue us from. The Bible calls it sin.
It's a bit of an old-fashioned word. But it's that attitude. And it's what makes God angry. And it would, wouldn't it? It would make you angry. To be called up now and again, treated like some kind of butler.
And God cannot sweep rebellion and evil. It would be wrong for him to do that under the carpet. What kind of ruler does that? He has every right to reprimand us, but actually he doesn't reprimand us.
He comes to rescue us. He comes to rescue us from what we deserve. So the shocking story goes of an out-of-control four-wheel drive that was bearing down on a driver in Canada.
[5:58] 32-year-old Brian Wood was in the driver's seat. And as this truck approached him, he swerved his Subaru wagon to take the full force of the impact on the driver's side.

Why did he do it? Well, he saved his wife, who was pregnant with their first child, who was sat in the passenger seat. And God sends a gift of a rescue as he becomes a man to rescue us from the impending punishment that we deserve for saying, I am the greatest in God's world.
And he becomes a human being to take on himself what human beings deserve. He takes the impact of God's anger for all the wrong things that we have done.
And that is what happened at the death of Jesus. I know we're thinking about the birth of Jesus at Christmas time, aren't we? But on the cross, Jesus puts himself in the path of the oncoming anger of God.
He is born in the manger at Christmas time to go to the cross at Easter time. He takes the anger of God.
[7:25] He experiences a collision with the wrath of God on our behalf. He receives the punishment so we can be rescued from it.

So Jesus comes at Christmas to rescue. But the second R this Christmas, the second R of the Christmas message, is that Jesus comes as a gift to rescue, but also to reconcile us in a relationship.
It is a gift of a rescue and a relationship. So if you look at verse 23, there's a quote there from Isaiah. He's an Old Testament prophet.
He says, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. They shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Now I don't know if you've ever had one of those long-lasting feuds with friends or family.
It's horrendous, isn't it? One of those quarrels that just goes on and on and on. And people speak of the regret of not taking the opportunity to sort it out while it's just a disagreement.
[8:37] And eventually it snowballs, doesn't it, into a full-on feud of silence. But actually it's a wonderful thing to get through that and to make amends eventually.

It's such a relief. So about this time last year, there was an end to a family feud that lasted three years. I don't know if you remember this. In the news, the richest woman in France, Lillianne Betancourt, was finally reconciled to her daughter after a long series of lawsuits.
It had been really grim during that time. But the news was that they had finally, finally become reconciled to one another. And they were overjoyed as that reconciliation occurred.
Now, we may have experienced feuds with family or friends, but the thing is that we are in a feud that is far worse than any of that.
You may not realise it, but there is a feud between us and God. Our rebellion against him has driven a wedge between us.
[9:51] And in any relationship breakdown, someone needs to make the first move, don't they? Someone's got to do that. And that is what God has done through Jesus.

Did you see his name in that passage? Emmanuel. It means God with us. God with us. He has made the first move in this feud.

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He has come to us. God and human beings are in the midst of this feud, but the Creator has become part of the creation.
The Maker has become like you and me. He has become human. God with us. To re-establish the relationship.
So if you remember anything from the last ten minutes, remember those two R's. Christmas is about a rescue mission and a relationship. And if you haven't understood that, well, you haven't really understood what Christmas is about.
[10:58] But as we finish now, I want to throw in a third R, a bonus R, if you like. And that is, how do we respond? What is the response? So after a disagreement, Elizabeth Barrett, in the 19th century, had become estranged from her family.

Her family had disowned her. Elizabeth, though, never gave up on the relationship. So almost weekly, she wrote them letters.
But after ten years, she received a large box in the mail, and inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters. And not one of them had been opened.
The letters would later become part of a collection of some of the most beautiful poetry in existence. But they were unopened. And the relationship was never restored.
We have become estranged from God. But he has made the first move. not by sending letters, but by coming himself in person.
[12:08] Limiting himself to a human body, to make contact with human beings. And I wonder whether you'll take the time to respond to him, or will you leave this unopened?

You know, the urgent is often the enemy of the important, isn't it, in life. But we can have a relationship with the God who made us.
We can have a relationship with the person who loves us and knows us best of all. It is the relationship the Bible tells us that we most need. It is the relationship that actually you want.
It is the relationship that you are looking for. So don't pack this away, folks, with the Christmas decorations in a week or two.
The urgent is often the enemy of the important. Let's be honest about it. What is it going to cost? Okay, what is it going to cost for you to respond to this?
[13:14] To take this offer? Well, as far as God is concerned, it will cost you your pride, won't it? to admit you need rescue, to admit that actually we've said it but we are not the greatest, that may cost us.

But actually one day we will stand before God and those words will ring in our ears. So why not take the offer of a restored relationship through Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.
Perhaps come back in the new year to Ealing Lunchtime Talks. We meet every Tuesday where actually all we do quite simply is to see how God explains in the Bible of the rescue and the relationship that he has with his people through Jesus.
That's why we study the Bible each week. So why not come to find out more? Why not take a Matthew's Gospel from the table at the back, continue reading that Gospel from where we've finished here, from this passage.
Look into it yourself. But if you don't want to accept the rescue and the relationship, well actually God will oblige and he will give you that request and you will experience an eternity with neither of those things.
[14:41] You will not have a relationship with God and the feud will continue. Well, in our last carol, let's sing our final carol this afternoon.

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