

Matthew 1:19-28

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Births can reveal surprising things, can't they? You don't really know your wife in some ways until you've seen her giving birth.

! Someone once said to me, a good friend, that he didn't know his wife until they were in the labour room. And she started throwing things at him.

And saying things to him which he'd never heard her say before. Births can be revealing, can't they? Births can bring out characteristics that we don't always see.

And the birth of Jesus is like that. The birth of Jesus reveals to us things that we may not have noticed. And what I want to try and do in just a few minutes that we've got together this morning is to see how the birth of Jesus according to Matthew reveals things to us. First of all, it reveals to us the turmoil of God's ways. The turmoil of God's ways.

Look at verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 21] There are two words, I think, that are going through Joseph's mind at this point. Two words. Mary and pregnant. And I suppose if we can imagine it, can't we? He had his head in his hands as he paced around the carpenter's shop.

Mary. Pregnant. Trying to make head nor tail of the situation. Somehow, Mary and adultery didn't seem to be in the same dictionary.

It would be adultery. If you look at just verse 18, it talks about betrothed to Joseph. That is, the betrothal that was as good as marriage.

When a couple is betrothal pledged to be married, that was the commitment. The consummation of the marriage was the physical sexual union. And that might take place as much as a year later when the groom took the bride to his own home.

But in that intervening period, after that betrothal, after that commitment, after that pledge, even though they were living together, if there was marital infidelity on the part of one of them, it was adultery. It wasn't fornication.

[2 : 37] It wasn't sex before marriage. It was adultery. And therefore, a marriage could be subject to divorce. And you had to divorce if you wanted to separate as a result of infidelity.

And if one of those spouses died during the period of betrothal, then the other one was left a widower or a widow. Even if the marriage hadn't been consummated.

Even if there hadn't been a sexual union. So it was before this time that they'd come together. It was during the period of betrothal, the time of the pledge.

The commitment had been made and Mary was found to be pregnant. She was pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. But Joseph didn't know the bit about the Holy Spirit.

Because as the story reads, he finds that out in verse 20, doesn't he, and following. All he knows in verse 18 is that Mary is pregnant.

[3 : 39] And you can imagine what must have gone through his head because of that. You see, we read this story and we know it, don't we? We read it every Christmas time, every Advent, again and again.

And it's a hum-ho affair. And we never get too disturbed about it. It never grabs us or shocks us. But that's because you're not in Joseph's sandals.

But think what he was going through. Surely, surely he knew, didn't he? He knew that he hadn't been the one. And he didn't think Mary could or would.

She wouldn't. But she must have. Mary giving herself to another man.

And the mere thought of it, he exclusively slammed his fist into his workbench in anguish. When God brought his Messiah, do you remember chapter 1 verse 1?

[4 : 46] The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. When God brought his Messiah, in this way, it almost wrecked Joseph's life.

He didn't know why Mary was pregnant. He could only infer what he and everyone else must know. And you might be thinking, well, yes. Later, he'll find out, didn't he, in verse 20.

And following what the real story is. And the angel of the Lord will give him additional information. But he doesn't have it at this point. All that he can think of, and all that he can deal with, is just what he knows.

And the time when God was going to bring his supreme gift into the world. And the way he was bringing that supreme gift almost drove Joseph to utter despair.

The turmoil of God's ways. And it plunges Joseph into a gut-wrenching turmoil. And so I want to ask a question.

[5 : 56] I don't think I'm declaring here. Because I think as God's people, as listeners to his certain words, we need to think and we need to ponder as well. But could it be, could it be that this pattern is something that God uses at other times as well?

Could it be that when God is going to do his finest work in our lives, that he may initiate that work? He may start that work by lacing and driving us into intense confusion.

Is it only Joseph that knows this pattern of God's working? Certainly in scripture, isn't it? You think of the other Joseph.

You think of Abraham. You think of Daniel. And could it be that you know that as well? Could it be that in its own way, could this be a word of comfort and hope?

For some of you, that even though you do not understand God's ways, it may just be a prelude to some of his best gifts. There is not only the turmoil of God's ways, but you see secondly the model of God's servant.

[7 : 15] You see it in verse 19, and then in verse 24, and then verse 25. I was once asked to do a video.

You can't see it on the internet anymore. You've got to go behind a paywall. But I was asked to do a series of five minute videos. It's the best kind of preaching game I've ever been given. It was in a five star hotel in London.

And you went into this room, and they put makeup on you, and you did this kind of talk. And then they took you for a five star meeting. It was an incredible day. But they gave me the topic of Joseph. So I prepared five minutes of talk on Joseph from the book of Genesis. And when I got there, they said, no, we want you to give five minutes on Joseph, Mary's husband. Well, five minutes, there's hardly anything about him in the Bible.

And we don't, do we normally call attention to the human characters of Scripture? Because the Bible doesn't normally draw attention to them.

[8 : 16] And yet, actually, if you read Matthew 1 and 2, you'll see that Joseph is called to attention again and again. Matthew mentions him four times. He mentions him four times without ever calling him Jesus' father.

But I think Matthew 1 and 2 is trying to set up Joseph as a model. A model of God's servants. You see that in his character, don't you? Verse 19.

This is before Joseph has the additional information. Verse 19. And her husband Joseph being a just man. And unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

He made up his mind. And he's doing the best with what he's been given to work with. And Matthew describes him as a righteous man, not willing to put her to disgrace.

It's interesting that, isn't it? Righteous. Righteous. And yet he doesn't want to put Mary to disgrace and to shame. So he decides to divorce her quietly.

[9 : 22] He's righteous. You see, you can't just say, oh well, Mary slept with some other guy. What's the big deal? Sex is no big deal.

Do you see? He is a righteous man. And sexual purity matters to him. But he also doesn't want to put it in disgrace. It's beautiful. Joseph is righteous.

But he's compassionately righteous. Joseph will do what is right. But he will do it kindly. He's a righteous man.

And yet he cares for Mary. We as God's people would have that balance in our character. Compassionately righteous.

But there's a costliness about it all that we need to see. He gets additional information, doesn't he? The angel of the Lord appears to him and tells him basically three things. What is conceived in Mary is not because she's been unfaithful.

[10:22] It is due to the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice the restraint. Notice there are no fantastic details. It's just the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit touched Mary. That is why she is pregnant. That is all we're told. It is God's power. The power of the Holy Spirit. Have you thought of that?

The role of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus Christ. Think about it. The Holy Spirit made the pre-existent second person of the Trinity into a human being.

By the power of the Holy Spirit. Human life is created in Mary's womb.

And at this point we are full of awe but not understanding. And that is very important. The child to be born will save his people from their sins.

[11:33] And it's all a fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah about the abandoned child that was to be born. Well it must have been a great relief to Joseph. It must have lifted a load from his shoulders.

But he still wasn't without his problem. Don't be afraid, the angel says. Do not fear to take Mary as your wife. Don't be afraid but it will cost you something.

Don't think that Joseph didn't count the cost. Don't you suppose Joseph talked to himself and said, Look Joseph, you can go ahead with this. And you can do it. But you know what will happen.

You know what will happen. And people will begin to talk. And they are going to say, Joseph must have been the one who did it after all. Or don't go ahead with it. And you will be saying that Mary really did do it with someone else.

Joseph would surely divorce her, wouldn't he? But he's not so it must be him after all. It was going to be a costly obedience. Why do you think, I know that there are other answers to this question.

[12:46] This isn't the only one. But why do you think perhaps Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem? Have you ever asked that question? To take Mary to Bethlehem at eight or nine months pregnant. Carrying her on a donkey to Jerusalem for the census.

Why strictly speaking did he take her to Bethlehem when she wasn't required to go? Why did he take her? Why did he take her? Could he be empowered because he wanted to save her from the ridicule and the abuse that was being heaped on her in Nazareth?

What do you think those Jews meant in John 8, 41? When later they're debating with Jesus and they said to him, we were not born of fornication. What they didn't say was as important as what they did say.

Because they were implying, Jesus actually we know you were born out of fornication. We know that there were shady details around your birth Jesus. And Joseph realised he could do two things. He could divorce Mary and exonerate himself. And people would say, Joseph you did what was right. He's a righteous man.

[13:53] He could come out with his reputation intact. Or he could take Mary as his wife. And share in the shame and scandal and the suspicion and the indumento. But the towns gossip would heap upon him and help them for the rest of their life.

So what does he do? Joseph rose from his sleep. Do you see what it says? Joseph? He did as the angel commanded him. He did as the angel commanded him.

It's just quiet obedience. It's quiet, costly obedience. Do you notice, I've not noticed this before but Dale Brunner pointed out, Joseph never talks.

You never hear Joseph speak. In all the episodes in Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 1 and chapter 2, Joseph never says anything.

He just does whatever God tells him to do. He never talks. It's like Noah in Genesis 6-8. In that flood story. I know Noah does talk after chapter 9 about the curse on Canaan.

[15:04] But that is in the flood story. In the flood story from Genesis 6-8. And all the time it talks of and refers to Noah. Noah never speaks. He just does what God tells him to do.

So here you have quiet Joseph. No one ever interviewed him on Christian TV to ask him what it must have been like. No Christian publisher ever put out a book describing his trauma.

No one ever described him as a dynamic Christian personality. He just quietly obeyed. He did what was righteous according to God's command.

Even though men and women wouldn't think it's righteous at all. He loved the praise of God more than the approval of men. And he just did quietly what God told him to do.

There's no fanfare, there's no glamour. And maybe not even any recognition. There's a model of God's servant. Thirdly the birth of Jesus reveals to us the need of God's people.

[16:06] Can you see that in verse 21? She will bear a son. And you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

It's interesting how he describes that. Saved from their sins. Not saved from exile. Not saved from the Romans. He identifies our greatest need doesn't he?

Saved from their sins. It's as if their sins are a kind of power that holds them under their influence. Kind of a hostage taker.

They are kind of under the control of them. And they need to be rescued out of them. There's an element in which their sins have control.

And they need to be taken out of that realm and that sphere and that dominance. And we don't always think about sin in that way. We don't always think of sin as a power.

[17:04] Instead we think about it as acts that we do and we don't do. Sin is like clothes that we put on or put off. It's not something that is there.

It's a power that lays hold of us. I don't know if you've done this but some of us do it don't we? When you go to sleep at night you lie in the bed. And you can be sleeping overnight.

And perhaps you're sleeping the wrong way. This has ever happened to you? And you've slept on your arm. Or your hand or something. And then a magic moment happens when the alarm goes off. And you roll over. And you go to reach the alarm on your phone. But your hand is asleep. And it won't grip anything. And you're trying to do what's right.

But your hand is not doing what it should be doing. It's flopping all over the place. It's not under your control. It's under someone else's control.

[18:01] You don't know what's wrong with it. It won't do what you want it to do. It's a terrible feeling. Do you know what it's like to be helpless? To be in bondage to something?

I just can't do it. Do you remember when you learned to ride a bike? If your father like mine wasn't a very patient man. You'd be stuck on the bike even though you were terrified.

And he'd run alongside you. And he would push you until you got out of breath. And then he'd let you go. And he'd shout turn, turn, turn. And you couldn't do it.

And you just kept on riding. Into the bush. Or the wall. Or barbed wire or whatever it was. And he says to you, why didn't you turn?

And he said, I can't. I can't do it. I can't do it. I just can't. Why? Why can't you do it? He says. So I don't know.

[19:00] It's irrational. It's irrational. It's irrational. And that's the way the bondage of sin is, isn't it? I hope you don't think sin is rational.

I really hope you don't think that. You can kind of explain it and get behind it and you can understand. Sin is totally irrational. But it holds us, doesn't it? It holds us.

It holds us. It's what it's like to be in bondage. And you say, well if Jesus came to save people who are in bondage to their sin, then they must be very, very desperate people.

And they are. It is what it says, isn't it? In verse 21. It says it will save his people.

Isn't that interesting? It will save his people from their sin. Now this has got more meaning at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

[20:01] But think about what did it mean for Joseph when he heard those words? He will save his people. When Joseph heard those words as an Israelite, he'd know what those words meant.

That Jesus will save his people from their sins. That he would save Israel, God's people. They were the ones with all the covenants and the prophecies and the promises.

They were the ones who went to synagogue and so on. They were the ones who needed to be rescued from the power of their sin. And therefore, who are these people who are in such desperate need and bondage?

Think about it. They are the religious folks, aren't they? They are the Israelites. They are the people who claim to be the people, the covenant people of God.

And today there are Presbyterians among them. This verse is saying to us, isn't it? That the Israelites needed to be saved from the bondage of their sin.

[21 : 10] That you can be an Israelite and a slave of sin. You can be a Presbyterian and be a lost soul and lest Jesus save you.

You can be a church goer and be lost and be in bondage. That is the need of God's people. That is my need.

And that is your need. Let me read to you from J.C. Ryle. The name Jesus means Saviour. It's the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. He saves from the guilt of sin by washing them in his own atoning blood.

He saves them from the dominion of sin by putting in their hearts the sanctifying spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin when he takes them out of this world to rest with him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin when he gives them a glorious body at the last day.

From sorrow, cross and conflict they are not saved but they are saved from sin. Jesus is a very encouraging name to heavy laden sinners. He who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords might have lawfully taken some high sounding title but he did not do so.

[22 : 27] The rulers of this world have called themselves great, conqueror, bold, magnificent and the like. The Son of God was content to be called Saviour. You shall call his name Jesus because you shall save his people from their sins.

And lastly the birth of Jesus reveals the arrival of God's presence. Look at verse 23. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Immanuel.

Which means God with us. A quote is saying from Isaiah 7, do you remember that? And in that passage Isaiah the prophet throws in the teeth of King Ahaz a promise from God.

But the Assyrians, the big enemy was going to come and they will decimate the nation of Judah.

And Judah will be brought low. And out of this time, this future time when Judah will be in a very low and desperate condition.

There will be born a child who is going to be a king. And the name of that child would be Immanuel. God with us. We can't go into it further this morning. And accept to say, isn't that all that ever sustains God's people?

[23 : 38] Wasn't that what sustained Isaiah and his fellow believers in chapter 8? Just the fact that God is with us. Isn't that all that holds us up sometimes?

And now Matthew is saying that Immanuel has come. It's not just a statement of faith. God is with us.

But it's a personal. Immanuel. God with us has come in warm flesh. And living colour.

And Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with us. He is both human and divine. Jesus is a human mother.

And a divine heavenly father. The creed. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Born of the Virgin Mary.

[24 : 40] He is God with us. He is God with us. And that is what makes all the difference.

When I was in year 7. In high school. We had one boy. Philip Van der Waal. Parents of South Africa.

He was a giant amongst men. We were all little boys. Van der Waal was shaving at 11 years old.

Every school has stuff done there. He was an absolute giant. Played in the second row.

And we would make sure. That he came out of the changing room last. And we never feared. Any other rugby teams. Because if at the end of the day.

We just had to give the ball to Philip Van der Waal. And he kind of ran through them all. It was alright. Because he was with us. Children we talked about in Sunday school.

[25 : 37] Your mum and dad. They gave you your coat. It will be dark tonight before church. And they said. We are going to church tonight. We will meet you there. You walk. How do you feel as you walk in the dark. On your way to church? You feel terrified.

You feel scared. But it is all the difference in the world. Come on. Let's walk together. You are no longer scared. Because your dad is with you.

What makes the difference this week? Isn't it this? It is that God is with us. That Jesus Emmanuel.

By his spirit. Is with us. It is the only thing sometimes that supports us. In the midst of afflictions.

And the only thing that steadies us.

In the midst of fears. Is that we have this. Strange conviction. From the testimony of God's word.

That Jesus. Is with us.

[26 : 38] And that's why we confess. In all of our troubles. With the rest of God's believing people.

That even though I walk through the valley. Of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. Why will you

fear no evil? Because.

You are with me. We say in Psalm 139. Before the sermon. That if I ascend to the heavens. You are there. There. And if I make my bed in the grave.

You are there. And if I go to my workplace. Which is an absolute nightmare. Or my family situation. Which is so difficult. You are there.

Or if I come to the communion table. You are there. For you are Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. Come. Though long expected Jesus. Come and meet thy waiting people. Show them that the Lord is good.

[27 : 40] To the soul that seeks him. To the soul. That's a great. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.