

God's Perfect Plan, Part Two

- Two little boys were waiting for their mother to finish making pancakes for breakfast and were arguing over who would get the first one. Their mother saw an opportunity for a good lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here," she said, "He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" So the older brother turned to the younger brother and said, "You be Jesus."
- Last week we looked at God's Perfect Plan for the incarnation and three passages from Genesis, starting in the Garden of Eden, that pointed to the coming Messiah. We saw that the plan for our salvation was in place before time and space were created. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always known the perfect plan. The Father initiated it, the Son accomplished it, and the Spirit applied it. Let's look at three more Old Testament passages today that unfold God's plan further.
- **The Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25)**
- We heard in today's reading of Scripture that Isaiah prophesied 700 years before the manger that Christ would be born to a virgin. And that the angel interrupted Joseph's fitful sleep with the same message, that Mary was the mother of the Savior! RC Sproul wrote in his book, *Advent of Glory*, that he has known lots of people who had no problem believing in Jesus, his death, his resurrection, and his deity. But the one thing many of them said they could not believe in was the virgin birth. Well, we have to admit that the first thought Joseph had when he found out Mary was pregnant was not, "This must be an immaculate conception!" No, he knew he had not been with Mary, and so he could only believe that someone else had. Why was the virgin birth necessary? Because as Paul wrote, "...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (Romans 5:12) We sin because we are sinners, and sin came to all of us through the seed of Adam, the first man, the one who is our federal head. Every person who has ever been born of woman, except one, was born a sinner. God could have chosen to send Jesus to the earth in a different way, but because the plan from the beginning was that Jesus would be fully human and enter the world as a baby born to woman, he had to be exempted somehow from the guilt of Adam's sin. He had to be one of us, Immanuel, God with us. He had to become the new Adam and the new head of the human race. He could not, therefore, have a human father, because that father would have passed on the sin nature that came to him and to all of us through Adam. The miracle of the virgin birth, the immaculate conception in which Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit, was essential for our atonement, and vital for our salvation. God let us know about this miracle through Isaiah. He also let us know that...
- **The Messiah would birth a kingdom of grace that never ends. (Turn to Isaiah 9:2-7)**
- The chapter before ends with "the gloom of anguish" and "thick darkness." You see that? But then God speaks to his people about the light that was coming. Light always wins over darkness, even the darkest darkness, and joy triumphs over the gloom of anguish. This is a great light; this is the light of the world who will be born as a baby. Why does Isaiah say, "to us a child is born," and then say, "to us a son is given"? Jesus was *born* because his humanity had a starting point. Jesus was *given* because the second person of the Trinity had no starting point. No beginning. Jesus exists forever as the eternal Son of God. The child who was born, the son who was given, as Jean sang last week, will "one day rule the nations." He came to take the government upon his shoulders. That is true now but sin is still present with us. One day we will see with our own eyes the glorious fulfillment of this promise when Jesus returns.
- The Son who was given is called names that reveal his character: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." These names remind us that all Christ is and all Christ does is for our good and for God's glory. He is the Word who was with God and who is God in the beginning, and therefore his counsel is wonderful: it is pure and true and life changing. The evil counselor enticed the

first man and woman into sin with his lies. Spurgeon wrote, "Ah! beloved, it was fitting that the world should have the Counselor to restore it, if it had a counselor to destroy it." We have the Wonderful Counsel with us. Always.

- He is Mighty God, a title used for God throughout the Old Testament and true of Jesus as well! Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead, commands the wind and waves, and mightiest of all he destroys sin, death, and the grave with the perfect sacrifice of his body and his blood.
- He is Everlasting Father. Jesus is a loving protector, a king who loves his people and takes care of them. Always.
- He is Prince of Peace. Jesus' death on the cross brought peace between God and man. Jesus' perfect kingdom in which we will live eternally will know nothing but perfect peace. Isaiah says of Jesus, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end." Handel got it right with the "Hallelujah Chorus," when he wrote, "And he shall reign forever and ever." And his reign will not just go on forever, it will forever increase! *Forever* increase. We don't understand this, not yet, but Isaiah said, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." Jesus our Savior was born of a virgin and entered the world without sin. He is and will be exalted as King of kings and his kingdom will never end. Let's look at one more prophecy about Jesus' birth, from Micah.
- **The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)**
- I love what John Piper wrote about this: "Have you ever thought what an amazing thing it is that God ordained beforehand that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem, as Micah's prophecy foretold, and that he so ordained things that when the time came, the Messiah's mother and legal father were living not in Bethlehem but in Nazareth; and that in order to fulfill his word and bring two unheard-of, insignificant, little people to Bethlehem that first Christmas, God put it in the heart of Caesar Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled each in his own town? A decree for the *entire* world in order to move *two* people seventy miles!"
- Joseph must have understood something extraordinary was going on. I mean, an angel told him that Mary's baby, which was not his, would save the people from their sins. But did Joseph understand that this meant he needed to make sure they were in Bethlehem for the birth? There's no indication that he did, no record of him asking Mary to get packed and ready to go. *We have to be in Bethlehem before this baby is born!* No. God used Caesar to move them to Bethlehem. Solomon wrote, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." (Proverbs 21:1) But some may ask, why did they need to have the baby in Bethlehem? Luke explains it in his gospel: "And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David." (Luke 2:3-4) We saw last week that the Messiah would be the offspring of the woman (Gen 3) and would come from the people of Israel (Gen 12) and from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49). The center of the tribe of Judah was Bethlehem and the greatest king of Israel, David, was born in Bethlehem. Jesus, the Son of David, would be born in Bethlehem as well.
- Joseph may not have understood this, and the wise men did not know for sure either. They came from the east and into Jerusalem, asking everyone they saw, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" The king of the Jews, umm, Herod, heard this and he was troubled and so was everyone else in the city. Can you imagine something like that today? Wise men from the east walking through Washington D.C. asking everyone, "Where is he who has been born President of the United States?" Well, when Herod heard what the wise men were asking, he called for the chief priests and the scribes. He knew they would know. And they did. They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea," and then quoted Micah's prophecy to the king. I don't want to get too far off the point here, but isn't it mind-boggling that the chief priests and the scribes and Herod himself knew that there were magi in town looking for a baby that was going to be born in Bethlehem, a king!, and not a single one of them went over there to find out if it were true? Not one. We talk every year about the very few people who showed up to see the Christ in Bethlehem. The shocking truth that God chose poor shepherds to be the first eyewitnesses to

the greatest birth in history. But there's also the shocking and sad truth that the powerful and the rich and the well-educated and the religious did not even bother to see what the fuss was about. And that's still true for the most part, today! Ok, back to the prophecy. Who else knew where Jesus was?

- The angel of the Lord knew and showed up in the night sky. The angel appeared on a Bethlehem hillside to proclaim the good news to shepherds and scared them to death. So he started his message to these guys with, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." The Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, had to be born in the city of David, the shepherd of Israel.
- Listen, beloved. God used prophets of old to tell the people of old the good news that they would never see come to pass. Abraham and Jacob never saw it. Isaiah never saw it. Nor did Micah. They could only imagine it, dream about it, and look forward to the time that they were with God and finally know and understand the perfect plan he put into place for our salvation. What a glorious gift we have been given, to know what was prophesied in the old and what was brought to pass in the new. What a Christmas gift!
- Prayer
- Greet One Another