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The Gospel According to Matthew

What a Wonderful Savior Part 2

December 24, 2017

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-18

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Mat 1:21)

Luk 2:10-11 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Good news of great joy for all the people. There is the good news of the gospel which is at the center of what we celebrate at Christmas. A Savior. Fundamentally, when we distill all these things down, Christ came into

this world to effect the salvation of His people – *from their sins*.

When human beings are in great distress, what do we do? Call out for help. "Help! Save me! Save me!" A drowning person. A person trapped in a burning building. Save me! They readily and automatically shout this plea.

But in his sin, hardened and insisting he is self-sufficient, man the sinner seems oblivious to his need of being saved. In fact, he ridicules the idea, especially when it comes to any suggestion that his *soul* is in need of saving. Verla and I were watching an episode of Doc Martin last week in which one of the characters professes to be a Christian. But the writers portray him as a real jerk. He has a bus with big letters painted on the side, "Jesus Saves." You've seen that kind of thing in real life yourself.

But the point is that man in his sin mocks the suggestion that "Jesus Saves." And certainly individuals dismiss with a laugh the implication that THEY need a Savior who saves.

The angels and the shepherds were not so foolish. To them, this announcement of the birth of a Savior was, in the old King James language, “glad tidings of great joy.” It was the best news imaginable for which they had been waiting for centuries, ever since Adam and Eve were promised a Savior:

Gen 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Here was the Seed (ESV, “offspring”) promised to Abraham:

Gal 3:16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

Finally, He was here. Born in Bethlehem in a manger, born of a virgin, the Son of God.

It is incredible and astonishingly wicked then for man in his sin, in his terrifyingly desperate condition under God’s condemnation, to mock and reject this heavenly announcement:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

You can see this mocking attitude in people even and perhaps *especially* at Christmas. It is one thing to put up decorations, to hang ornaments on a tree, or to even set up a manger scene – and it is quite another to admit one’s need of being saved! Yet this salvation is the very reason there is a Christmas at all. Man the sinner in desperate need of being saved from...what?

Saved From What?

The angels announced that Jesus, as His very name signifies, would save His people from their *sins*. What then is this business of “sins”? Let’s define the term first:

1Jn 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Sin is *lawlessness*. Sin is that nature which every one of us enters into this world with that kicks against God’s Law. We all know that you do not have to teach a little kid to sin – to break the rules. He knows how to do that naturally. And so it was and is with us. God says:

Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

- But man creates all sorts of gods. YOU have a god that you

worship. That “god” might be yourself, or you might as so many people do, even have some carved idol you pray to. Idolatry. Lawlessness. Everyone has his religion. The question is, is that God Christ, or a false god?

Exo 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

- God’s name is holy. That is to say, His *essence*, his *being*, who He *is*, is to be revered. And yet any day of the week you can go out and be around people who, in one manner or another, take God’s holy name and use it as a curse word. Worse yet, you can find many “religious” people who even claim to be Christians, yet who are hypocrites and who throw God’s name around in an empty, vain manner. This kind of a person may say with his lips, “praise the Lord,” but those words may well be utter blasphemy since the person has no intention of truly praising God.

And on down the line we could go with the Law of God –

You shall not steal. You shall not

murder. You shall not lie. You shall not covet. And Jesus adds to the ante –

Mat 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' (22) But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

See it? We are in a pretty sorry and dangerous predicament in our sin. What person would be so arrogant and ignorant to claim that he has never, ever sinned? That he has never, even in his heart, lusted or murdered or lied?

Listen to these question and answer catechism points taken from the Westminster Shorter Catechism and a few comments from The Westminster Shorter Catechism in modern English with Scripture proofs and comments -

Q. 13. *Did our first parents [ie, Adam and Eve] continue in the estate wherein they were created?*

A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

Q. 14. *What is sin?*

A. Sin is any want [ie, lack] of

conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Here it is in modern English:

Q. 14. *What is sin?*

A. *Sin is any failure to measure up to what God requires, or any disobedience to his commands.*

Q. 16. *Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?*

A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

Q. 17. *Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?*

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Q. 18. *Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*

A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Once again, an explanation in more modern English:

Sinfulness consists of two parts – the sin of our natures and the sins of our lives. When we do wrong there is something wrong behind it. Our nature is wrong, and so we think, say, and do wrong things. A bad tree bears bad fruit.

Q. 19. *What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

And there it is. Saved from what? Saved from the penalty our sins deserve. Death and hell. But more fundamentally –

Saved from God!

If you are not in Christ, if you have not seen your desperate need of His salvation from the penalty and power of sin, *then God is your enemy. His holy wrath is set upon you and if you depart this life in that condition, you will end in hell. Forever.* You are in dire need of being saved – *from God!* I entered this world in that state and so did everyone here this morning, and everyone in this entire world.

That God's wrath is right now upon this world, upon human beings outside

of Christ, is evident to anyone who stops and gives even a bit of serious thought to our condition. *Things are not right in this present world.* Something has gone very wrong. People die. Wars rage. We have locks on our doors. People, even children, get very sick. Even “nature” can kill us – floods, earthquakes, hurricanes. Poverty. Things are very, very wrong. And the cause of it is *sin*. My sin. Your sin, against which God’s wrath is set.

YOU are going to die. So am I. Of that we can be sure. On that day, when I stand before God, what will the verdict be? I can tell you – guilty! That is to say, if you depart this life and enter into God’s judgment without Christ so that it is your life and your deeds and your sins that are examined, you will have no defense, no Advocate to plead your case. Your mouth will be closed because you will see the perfect, pure, holiness of God and understand then that there is no hope for you.

Do you still say that you do not need to be saved? That you do not need a Savior? Do you begin to understand why that announcement to the shepherds was such good news?

He Shall Save His People from their Sins

Here is the continuation of the story given by the Westminster Catechism once again:

Q. 20. *Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?*

A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.

Q. 21. *Who is the redeemer of God's elect?*

A. The only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

Q. 22. *How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?*

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

Here it is in Scripture. The Christian is:

Tit 2:13-14 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Mat 1:21)

Rom 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Christ saves. Saves from God's wrath. Saves us from the just penalty our sins deserve. So let's ask two more questions and answer them:

1. How does Christ save from God's wrath?
2. Who does Christ save from God's wrath?

Let's actually deal with the second question first. *Who does Christ save from God's wrath?* Looking over these last few verses printed here in front of us, we find the answer:

- His people
- People who have been "justified" by faith
- People who are "in Christ Jesus"

He will save His people from their sins.

In some way then, if I am going to be saved from the just, righteous sentence of God which my own sins deserve, then I must become one of "His people." I need to become one of these people who are *justified* (pronounced righteous). I need to be what Paul calls "*in Christ Jesus.*"

So how do I get there? How do I become one of His people? We see in these verses from Romans 5 (and many others in the Bible) that it all has something to do with *faith*. It is *by faith that we gain access into a standing before God in which we find grace, not condemnation. Life, not death. God as our Father, not as our judge and executioner.*

More on faith in a moment, but now lets go back to that first question –

How does Christ save His people from God's wrath?

He will save His people from their sins. How? You see it in those verses from Titus we just looked at:

“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession...”

See it? The baby born at Bethlehem came into this world to “give himself” for our “redemption.” That is, to pay the price of our salvation from the wrath of God – which we deserved. To save us from our own “lawlessness.” Christ himself is the payment. Here it is again over and over in the Bible:

2Co 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Isa 53:1-6 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? (2) For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. (3) He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (4) Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--

Christ Himself, dying on the cross, became cursed by God for us. He took the curse. He was made to be sin – OUR sin, and this brings us to a point we dare not miss here.

Christ came to save His people from THEIR sins.

Every word in the Bible is God's Word. Nothing is there by random chance or careless choice. This personal adjective is loaded with meaning. Namely,

Christ came to die for YOUR sins.

Not for “sin” in general, but for your sins in particular. For YOUR crimes. For YOUR guilt. For YOUR lawlessness. And He lived a perfect life of obedience to His Father’s Law for YOUR justification:

Rom 3:21-28 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- (22) the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(24) and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (25) whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

By faith. By faith. Let me explain. Listen to it again:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Mat 1:21)

Luke 2:10-11 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

He will save. He is the Savior. He is the satisfaction to God’s justice. He was pierced for our transgressions.

Why do we labor the point so much? Because this is point at which most human beings, in their sin and pride, stumble. They do not value Christ because they delude themselves into believing that they do not need any Savior except themselves, or none at all. Here it is, Christmas once again, and the world is confronted with the fact that God...well, listen to His own Word tell it:

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

This is what Christmas is – a remembrance of that first nativity when God sent His Son into the world to save His people from their sins. Listen in closing to J.C. Ryle, a pastor in England way back in the 1800’s. In a booklet entitled “*What do You Think*

of Christ,” written for the Christmas season, Ryle said:

“...Let us *consider why all men ought to think of Christ.*”

This is a question which needs to be answered, at the very outset of this tract. I know the minds of some people when they are asked about such things as I am handling today. I know that many are ready to say, "Why should we think about Christ at all ? We want meat, and drink, and money, and clothes, and amusements. We have no time to think about these high subjects. We do not understand them. Let parsons, and old women, and Sunday-school children mind such things if they like. We have no time in a world like this to be thinking of Christ.”

Such is the talk of thousands in this country. They never go either to church or chapel. They never read their Bibles. The world is their god. They think themselves very wise and clever. They despise those whom they call "religious people." *But whether they like it or not, they will all have to die one day.* They have all souls to be lost or saved in a world to come. They will all have to rise again from their

graves, and to have a reckoning with God. And shall their scoffing and contempt stop our mouths, and make us ashamed? No, indeed! Not for a moment! Listen to me and I will tell you why.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *the office Christ fills between God and man.* He is the eternal Son of God, through whom alone the Father can be known, approached, and served. He is the appointed Mediator between God and man, through whom alone we can be reconciled with God, pardoned, justified, and saved. He is the Divine Person whom God the Father has sealed to be the giver of everything that man requires for his soul. To Him are committed the keys of death and hell. In His favour is life. In Him alone there is hope of salvation for mankind. Without Him no child of Adam can be saved. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (I Cor. iii. 11; 1 John v.12.) And ought not man to think of Christ? Shall God the Father honour Him, and shall not man? I tell every reader of this tract that there is no person, living or dead, of such immense importance to all men as

Christ. There is no person that men ought to think about so much as Christ.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *what Christ has done for all men*. He thought upon man, when man was lost, bankrupt, and helpless by the fall, and undertook to come into the world to save sinners. In the fullness of time He was born of the Virgin Mary, and lived for man thirty-three years in this evil world. At the end of that time He suffered for sin on the cross, as man's substitute. He bore man's sins in His own body, and shed His own lifeblood to pay man's debt to God. He was made a curse for man, that man might be blessed. He died for man that man might live. He was counted a sinner for man that man might be counted righteous. And ought not man to think of Christ? I tell every reader of this tract that if Christ had not died for us, we might all of us, for anything we know, be lying at this moment in hell.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *what Christ will yet do to all men*. He shall come again one day to this earth with power and glory, and raise the dead from their graves. All shall come forth at His bidding.

Those who would not move when they heard the church-going bell, shall obey the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God. He shall set up His judgment-seat, and summon all mankind to stand before it. To Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. Not one shall be able to escape that solemn assize. Not one but shall receive at the mouth of Christ an eternal sentence. Every one shall receive according to what he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad. And ought not men to think of Christ? I tell every reader of this tract, that whatever he may choose to think now, *a day is soon coming when his eternal condition will hinge entirely on his relations to Christ*.