

Out of Exile the Promise of Christmas

11.26.23

Christmas Series 23

Introduction: It shouldn't be this way, it's Christmas!!!!

A. Have you ever thought this?

1. What we think should be the happiest, most wonderful time of year is often not what we dreamt it to be.
2. For some, this will be the first Christmas without mom or dad.
3. For some, this will be the first Christmas when the kids don't come home.
4. For others, Christmas is a strain on finances, emotions, and relationships.
5. And we think: It shouldn't be this way, it's Christmas!!!!
 - a. There shouldn't be this much stress.
 - b. There shouldn't be this much tension.
 - c. This isn't what Christmas is about.

B. But what if I told you that Jesus' birth and the prophecy of His birth came during a time of pain, difficulty, and exile?

1. The Birth of Jesus was GOOD NEWS amidst a TERRIBLE situation.
2. Yet, The Angel happily declares, "I bring you tidings of Great Joy!"
 - a. As we will see, the naming of Jesus declared two things:
 - b. God is with us!

c. Jesus saves us from sin!

d. Regardless of what is happening around us, this NEWS is enough.

C. Christmas has NEVER been an easy season.

1. And I know that many of us, myself included, hate what we have made of Christmas.

2. The biggest travesty may not be the prominence of Santa, Elves, and the Grinch, but the false promise that Humanity, by ourselves, can make our world a perfect place without Jesus.

a. The American Christmas projects a false belief that if we all just loved each other and played nice, then we could have a perfect world.

b. But the world is broken and fallen.

c. Jesus IS the only hope.

4. I want to share with you, from Scripture, how the Promise of Jesus' birth and childhood was Good News in the harshest of situations.

D. Out of Exile, the Promise of Christmas.

1. Can Good News come from harsh situations?

2. Yes, and this is evident as we read Matthew and the prophecies he connected.

3. There are FOUR prophecies Matthew mentions from the Old Testament prophets that Jesus' birth and early life fulfill.

4. In just a moment, we will turn first to Matthew 1 and then to Isaiah 7.

E. Why does Pastor Paul share so much Scripture?

1. Most Scripture we hear all week.

2. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

3. Keeps me accountable to Scripture through context.
4. Keeps me accountable to you through context.
5. Preaching and teaching are the primary ways I practice pastoral care and pastoral leadership. To share and exposit Scripture with you is, to me, a form of love.

Scripture

Matthew 1:18–25 (CSB)

THE NATIVITY OF THE MESSIAH

¹⁸The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³See, the virgin will become pregnant

and give birth to a son,

and they will name him Immanuel,

which is translated “God is with us.”

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

Isaiah 7:1–25 (CSB)

THE MESSAGE TO AHAZ

7 This took place during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah king of Judah: Aram's King Rezin and Israel's King Pekah son of Remaliah went to fight against Jerusalem, but they were not able to conquer it.

²When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

³The LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Launderer's Field. ⁴Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. ⁵For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, ⁶'Let's go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's son as king in it.' "

⁷This is what the Lord GOD says:

It will not happen; it will not occur.

⁸The chief city of Aram is Damascus,

the chief of Damascus is Rezin

(within sixty-five years

Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),

⁹the chief city of Ephraim is Samaria,

and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you do not stand firm in your faith,

then you will not stand at all.

THE IMMANUEL PROPHECY

¹⁰Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹"Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven."

¹²But Ahaz replied, "I will not ask. I will not test the LORD."

¹³ Isaiah said, "Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds and honey. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria."

¹⁸ On that day

the LORD will whistle to flies

at the farthest streams of the Nile

and to bees in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹ All of them will come and settle

in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,

in all the thornbushes, and in all the water holes.

²⁰ On that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—to shave the hair on your heads, the hair on your legs, and even your beards.

²¹ On that day

a man will raise a young cow and two sheep,

²² and from the abundant milk they give

he will eat curds,

for every survivor in the land will eat curds and honey.

²³ And on that day

every place where there were a thousand vines,

worth a thousand pieces of silver,

will become thorns and briars.

²⁴A man will go there with bow and arrows
because the whole land will be thorns and briers.

²⁵You will not go to all the hills
that were once tilled with a hoe,
for fear of the thorns and briers.

Those hills will be places for oxen to graze
and for sheep to trample.

1. Jesus, born of a real virgin.

A. First, we need to clarify that Jesus was born of a virgin.

1. There is plenty of debate concerning Mary's condition.
2. Much of the debate comes from Christians.
 - a. Of course, the world isn't going to easily accept Jesus' virgin birth.
 - b. This is to be expected.
3. What we need to be careful of are scholars and influencers who do not believe in Jesus' virgin birth.
 - a. There are many smart and Jesus-loving people who do not believe that Jesus was born of a real virgin.
 - b. They debate the meaning of two Hebrew words from Isaiah 7.
 - c. I have read the arguments, and I am convinced that Mary was not just a young, marriageable woman, but she was a virgin.

B. Why does this matter:

1. Jesus' immaculate conception was both sign and promise.

2. If Jesus had a human father, then He would have been born into sin, just as we are.

3. And if Jesus is not perfect, He couldn't be the sacrifice for our sins.

C. Jesus is fully God and fully man.

1. We must also keep in view that Jesus was fully man and fully God.

2. He did not become less than God because He was born in human flesh.

3. He was also fully man, tempted just as we are and without sin.

2. A Baby born in Perilous times.

A. Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah.

1. Of the four Gospels, Matthew was the most Jewish of them and wrote to a Jewish audience.

2. So his purpose was to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah that Israel was looking for.

3. He quotes Isaiah, who was considered the greatest of the prophets.

4. And like all of the biblical prophets, Isaiah was the voice of God to the leaders and the people.

B. The announcement here in Isaiah was a sign during a time of stress and anxiety.

1. Have you noticed that every time I preach from the Old Testament, it seems that God's people were in perilous times?

a. God's people were constantly in a cycle of sin, trouble, repentance, and rescue.

b. There has never been such a thing as "easy" times.

c. The story of human history is a story of sinfulness and the need for a Savior.

2. Isaiah 7 tells of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, being invaded again.

- a. Ephraim, or Israel, has turned on their own people.
- b. And Judah, where Jerusalem is located, was in a dangerous position.

C. Isaiah is sent to King Ahaz with good news.

1. Prophets don't always get to bring good news, so this must have been.

2. God told Isaiah to tell the King that all of these threats will not come to pass.

- a. The enemy that threatens will be defeated before they ever start.
- b. Even more, these enemies will be so defeated that they won't exist in the future.

3. All King Ahaz has to do is to believe and trust in God.

- a. This is all that God has wanted from His people.
- b. Trust in Him and show the nations how to trust in God.
- c. King Ahaz has the opportunity to model faith and belief before God's people.

4. Yet, there is a word of warning: Vs 9

- a. "If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all."
- b. Stand in faith, or don't stand at all.

3. Here's Your Sign.

A. Notice what God does next:

¹⁰Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹“Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.”

¹²But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.”

¹³Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.”

B. In verse 4, God has already told Ahaz these two enemies were defeated.

1. Then, Ahaz has the opportunity to ask for a sign.
2. God permits Ahaz to ask for any sign he wants.
3. In this instance, asking God for a sign was not a lack of faith but an expression of faith.

C. But Ahaz, “I will not test the Lord...”

1. What he says sounds good, but is actually a lack of faith and trust.
2. One of my favorite pastors says it like this:

God hands him a blank check, but Ahaz refuses to cash it. Why? He doesn't want to trust God. Sure, he puts it in pious language (Deuteronomy 6:16). But it's all quick-thinking, diplomatic hypocrisy. He knows there are strings attached. If he lets God in, God will take control. And for Ahaz, that would mean using God's strategies to get through the crisis and giving God the glory for the outcome. Ahaz proves here that faith can be refused by the will, no matter how strong the evidences. **If we don't want God, we can find a way to make our unbelief sound plausible, even pious.**¹

¹ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 90.

3. Ahaz sounds righteous but is actually sinful.
 - a. He doesn't want to win this battle God's way.
 - b. He doesn't want to fully commit to God because he likes to be in control.
4. Isaiah used the strongest language possible:
 - a. Ask the Lord YOUR God for any sign.
 - b. Isaiah wants Ahaz to know how deep God's love and mercy and faithfulness was toward them.
 - c. Ahaz says, "no thanks".

D. The result of this disbelief was destruction.

1. Ahaz had it in his mind that his only hope was this up-and-coming empire of Assyria.
 - a. Assyria was strong, powerful, and terrible.
 - b. King Ahaz thought he was calling for a savior, what he received was a slave master.

Isaiah 7:17–20 (CSB)

¹⁷The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria."

¹⁸On that day

the LORD will whistle to flies

at the farthest streams of the Nile

and to bees in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹All of them will come and settle

in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,

in all the thornbushes, and in all the water holes.

²⁰On that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—to shave the hair on your heads, the hair on your legs, and even your beards.

2. The result of Ahaz's disbelief was the future exile of Judah.

a. In the near future, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including Daniel, will be marched in exile.

b. They would be shaved, a sign of disgrace.

c. They would be marched, more than likely, naked.

d. Some would be attached with hooks in their noses in a line of slaves.

3. The cost of unbelief is always tragic.

4. The Original Sin was Unbelief.

A. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, it was a sin of unbelief.

1. Can God be trusted?

2. Is He really good?

3. Does He really love humanity?

4. Will He do what He said He would do?

B. When Adam and Eve decided that God wasn't good, and that He couldn't be trusted, and that He was withholding from them something good, they fell into unbelief and sin entered humanity.

1. When King Ahaz decided he would rather trust in Assyria than trust in God, he sinned and led Judah into rejection of God.

2. When we fail to trust God, we participate in the familiar sin of unbelief.

3. Left to ourselves, we will die in our trespasses and sins.

C. But God gave a sign!

1. Yes, Ahaz rejected God's offer to ask for a sign.
2. So God gave the most unlikely of signs:
 - a. A virgin will give birth.
 - b. And He will be called Immanuel.
3. And this prophecy was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus.

5. When all hope is lost, there is Immanuel.

A. Jesus is the Promise of Salvation when surrounded by enemies.

1. The announcement in Matthew was during a time of Roman occupation and ever increasing hope of a Jewish Messiah.
2. Everywhere the Jewish people looked, they saw the symbols of another Empire.
 - a. Gone was Assyria.
 - b. Gone was Babylon.
 - c. Now, the Roman Eagle dominated the land.
3. But born in the midst of this trouble was Jesus, the Son of God.

B. The SIGN God gave was that a virgin would give birth.

1. He shall be Immanuel, God with us.
2. He shall be named Jesus because He would save us from our sins.

C. I remind us today that Jesus still saves, sanctifies, heals, and delivers.

1. Though it may look like I'm surrounded, I'm surrounded by the Spirit of Jesus.
2. Though I was born into sin, Jesus forgives me of all my unrighteousness.

3. Though this world is lost, hurting, dark, and broken, the Promise of Christmas still rings: Jesus, God with Us.

6. Hope for this Christmas Season.

#1. God is not surprised by the messiness, so invite Him in.

1. We all want the holidays to be perfect.
2. But when life gets in the way, and sin shows its ugly head, invite Jesus into the mess.
3. He isn't surprised, shocked, or scared.
 - a. Instead, prayerfully invite Jesus to bring peace to your chaos, joy to your sadness, and holiness to your messiness.
 - b. The sinfulness of the world is the reason why Jesus came.
 - c. Invite Him in and let Him sanctify, forgive, and bless.

#2. Invite Jesus in because He is God with Us.

1. You are not left alone in your sin, in your sadness, or in your trouble.
2. He is God with us.
3. He willingly closed the distance between us.
4. We couldn't approach Him, so He became God with Us.

#3. God knows you need saving.

1. The Angel told Joseph to name the baby "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins.
2. God knows your sinfulness, your brokenness, and your lostness.
 - a. Would you confess your need for a Savior?
 - b. The sign has been given, the virgin has given birth: Will you trust Jesus and believe in Jesus?

Prayer for those feeling overwhelmed and in need of Jesus.

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ⁱ From the time of Ahaz there never was again a 'house of David' in the true sense but only a line of puppet, pretend-kings under alien domination until, at the exile, even they disappeared into the sand of history never to re-emerge. The name of the overlord power would change, from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, before Immanuel would be born, but when he was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord's word. The promise awaited its time but the threat was immediate.ⁱ Alec Motyer 1996