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THE REASON JESUS CAME

Matthew 1:21

By

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Christmas Message

The Reason Jesus Came
Matthew 1:21

Two of the most important questions for each person to answer are, "Who is Jesus Christ?" and "Why did He come to earth?" Martin Luther saw this when he said,

If anyone stands firm and right on this point, that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, who died and rose again for us, all the other articles of the Christian faith will fall in place for him and firmly sustain him.

So very true is Paul's saying that Christ is the Chief Treasure, the Basis, the Foundation, and the Sum Total of all things, in whom and under whom all are gathered together. In Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

On the other hand, I have noted that all errors, heresies, idolatries, offenses, abuses, and ungodliness in the church have originally arisen because this article or part of the Christian faith concerning Jesus Christ has been despised or lost. Clearly and rightly considered, all heresies militate against the precious article of Jesus Christ. (Source unknown.)

The Christmas story is not primarily about the birth of a baby who would grow up to become a great moral teacher and example, although Jesus did become those things. Rather, it is the profound story of the birth of the *Savior*. After explaining that Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit, the angel told Joseph, "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The Hebrew name Jesus (= Joshua) means "Jehovah is salvation." If you do not know Jesus as your Savior, then you do not know Him at all, because ...

Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins.

I want to examine this verse by asking and answering four questions: Who came? What was His purpose in coming? Whom did He purpose to save? What did He actually do? The first question will answer for us the question of Jesus' identity. The last three will tell us the main reason why He came to earth.

1. Who came?

The context shows that this was no ordinary birth: Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit, apart from normal relations with a man (1:18, 20). This is, of course, the doctrine of the virgin birth of our Lord. Skeptics reject it because it is miraculous. William Barclay, for example, assures his readers (*The Gospel of Matthew, The Daily Study Bible* [Westminster Press], 1:20), "Our Church [he was from Scotland] does not compel us to accept it [the virgin birth] in the literal and the physical sense. This is one of those doctrines on which the Church says that we have full liberty to come to our own conclusion." He later calls the virgin birth a "crude fact" and argues that the point of the narrative is "that in the birth of Jesus the Spirit of God was operative as never before in this world" (p. 23).

But Matthew, who was one of the twelve, had direct access both to Jesus and Mary. Luke, who probably interviewed Mary, states that he carefully researched his gospel (Luke 1:3). Both men affirmed the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus. To reject this as actual history is to reject the testimony of two independent historians who lived at that time and whose writings have been accepted as factual history by thousands of scholars. The only reason for rejecting such miraculous events is an arbitrary bias against all miracles, which is a bias against God Himself, who is able to interrupt the laws of His creation according to His purpose. Thus it is reasonable to accept the virgin birth as historically true.

Why is it important doctrinally to affirm Jesus' virgin birth? First, the virgin birth is essential *to affirm the deity of Jesus Christ*. If He was born of a human father and mother through natural biological processes, then He is not God in human flesh. Under those circumstances, He might be a man upon whom God's Spirit rested in an unusual sense, but he still would only have been a man. His existence would have begun at conception, and thus He could not have been the eternal God in human flesh. Yet Jesus claimed many times that He was sent into this world from heaven, assuming prior existence. He told the Jews, "before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58).

Also, belief in the virgin birth is essential *to affirm the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ*. If He was born of natural parents, then He was born a sinner like all human beings since the fall, and He would

have needed a Savior for Himself. If He had sin of His own, He could not have died as the substitute for others. To be born as a man who fully shared our humanity, Jesus had to have a human parent. Through the superintendence of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth, Jesus was born as fully human and yet sinless. The angel told Mary that because the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the most High would overshadow her, "for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Even though Mary herself was not immaculately conceived (she needed a Savior, Luke 1:47), Jesus was kept from her sin and born as fully human, yet without sin.

The angel (or Matthew, 1:23) cites Isaiah 7:14 as being ultimately fulfilled when this woman, Mary, who had not had relations with a man, bore a Son by the Holy Spirit, and this Son is none other than "God with us." As a sinless man, Jesus could represent the human race as sin-bearer. As God the Son, His sacrifice was acceptable before God the Father.

The angel tells Joseph that he is to name this miraculous child Jesus, adding, "for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The Greek for Jesus is *Iesous*, from the Hebrew *Jeshua*, the contracted form of *Jehoshua*, which means *Yahweh is salvation*. "In the shorter form *Jeshua* the stress is on the verb; hence, *he will certainly save*" (William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Testament Commentary* [Baker], p. 108). Since for the Jews a person's name had significance, the name Jesus points us to the very essence of His being, namely, that He is the Savior. The title "Christ" means that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, or Anointed One.

Charles Spurgeon pointed out ("Jesus," *Agnes Software*, sermon 1434, p. 656) that since the Father knows Jesus perfectly, when He directed that He be named Jesus, He was giving Him the best, most appropriate name possible. By giving Jesus that name, the Father commissioned Him to save sinners, and this constitutes the ground of our appeal to God for salvation.

Thus our answer to the question, "Who came?" is that Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, is none other than the eternal God in human flesh, and that He came to earth primarily as the Savior.

2. What was His purpose in coming?

He came "to save His people from their sins." To understand that phrase, you must understand the meaning of the word "save." It is a radical word. You do not save someone who just needs a little help. You save someone who is unable to do anything to save himself. A person who is lost at sea needs saving. A person who has stopped breathing needs saving.

This means that prior to Jesus' saving them, His people were helplessly, hopelessly lost in their sins. They were alienated from God, under His righteous judgment, and unable to free themselves from this condition. A Savior is one who has the power to rescue people who could not rescue themselves. Jesus has the God-given power to save His people from their sins.

It is important to affirm this, because there are many in evangelical circles who believe that Jesus' ability to save anyone is contingent on the person's exercising his "free will." They say that He desperately *wants* to save them. He *longs* to save them. He has done everything that He can do to save them. He would save them if He could, but He *can't* save them because of their unwillingness to be saved! So He sits in heaven wishing that everyone would say yes to His salvation, but unable actually to save anyone, because it all depends on the sinner's "free will"! One writer actually goes so far as to say that if God could save everyone, but chose only to save some, He is immoral (Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?* [Loyal Publishing], p. 112)!

But note that our text does *not* say, "For He hopes that some will respond to His offer and be saved." It does *not* say, "He's going to give it His best shot and do all that He can do to save people, but it all depends on their choosing to be saved." Thank God the text says, "He *will save* His people from their sins"! There isn't any human contingency factor about it. "Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9; Ps. 3:8; Isa. 43:11; 45:17). When Almighty God purposes to save a people, *He saves that people!*

In Isaiah 14:24 the Lord declares by oath, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand." In the context, the reference is to God's breaking Assyria's power, but if He is able to accomplish His plan to break the power of a mighty empire, can He not purpose to save and actually save His people from their sins? In Isaiah 46:9-10, God declares,

“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’” In the context, God is referring to His purpose of raising up Cyrus to accomplish God’s purpose for Israel. But, again, if the Almighty can raise up and take down a pagan king to accomplish His sovereign purpose, can He not purpose to save His people and actually save them from their sins?

Matthew 1:21 is a fulfillment of the promise of Psalm 130:8. The psalmist is overwhelmed by his sins. He is in the depths, about to go under, when he cries out in desperation to God. He recognizes that if God were to mark iniquities, no one could stand in His holy presence, but then adds, “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (130:4). Based on the hope of God’s promises, he encourages Israel also to hope in the Lord, adding, “For with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (130:7-8). Jesus is the promised Savior, who actually did redeem God’s people from all their sins.

To suggest that God’s sovereign purpose to save a people for His glory is conditioned on the feeble will of fallen man goes against all Scripture! In Ephesians 1, Paul sets forth the salvation that God has freely lavished upon us. He makes it very plain that our salvation comes *totally* from God. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (1:4). “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure [lit.] of His will” (1:5). Whose will? *His* will! “He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure [lit.] which He purposed in Him” (1:9). In Christ, “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will” (1:11).

I am simply saying what the Bible repeatedly affirms, that “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:10, English Standard Version). When God purposes that Jesus will save His people from their sins, there isn’t any doubt about it. He *will* accomplish that purpose, to the praise of the glory of His grace! Our response should be: “Amen! Blessing and glory

and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (Rev. 7:12, ESV).

Thus Jesus the Christ, who is God in human flesh, came for the purpose of saving His people from their sins.

3. Whom did He purpose to save?

Clearly, He came to "save *His people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21, emphasis added). But who are His people? In the context of Matthew, some may say that "His people" refers to the Jews, God's chosen people. As Psalm 130:8 puts it, "He will redeem *Israel* from all his iniquities." But if this means that all Jews will be saved, then we must conclude that God has failed in His purpose, since many Jews go to their graves rejecting Jesus as Savior and Messiah. Paul points out, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants" (Rom. 9:6-7). Rather, it is "those who are of faith" who are the true children of Abraham (Rom. 2:26-29; Gal. 3:9, 29).

Some would say that this refers to *the whole world*, since Jesus is "the Savior of the whole world" (John 4:42). While there is certainly a sense in which He is the Savior of the whole world (not of the Jews only; see Rev. 5:9), if His purpose in coming was to save every person who has ever lived, then we must conclude that He failed in His purpose. But since it is inconceivable that Almighty God could fail in His eternal purpose, "His people" cannot refer to every person in the world.

Some would say that "His people" refers to *all who believe in Him* for eternal life. I agree, but to say that is not to go far enough. The Bible says that because of the fall, all men are in spiritual death and darkness, unwilling and unable to come to Christ in faith (John 3:19-20; 8:43; Rom. 3:10-18; 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3). So we must ask, *why* do these people believe in Jesus? What enabled them to believe?

Scripture is clear that the only reason anyone believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord is that God has chosen them and drawn them to Himself (John 6:44, 65). The Spirit of God has quickened them from spiritual death to spiritual life (Eph. 2:4-5). He has opened their formerly blind eyes to see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). Both saving faith and repentance are gifts

that God grants to His elect (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:48; 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29; Heb. 12:2). They believe because God granted them faith.

Thus we must conclude that "His people" refers to those whom the Father has given to the Son (John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 6, 9), namely, His elect whom He purchased for God with His blood "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). They are His people and there is not a shadow of a doubt about it, *He will save them from their sins!* (Read the verses above.)

There is one other thing to be noted about "His people": They are *sinners*. As Jesus says (Luke 19:10), "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." These people are lost, alienated from God, because of their sins. As Jesus also says (Luke 5:31-32), "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." If you do not see yourself as a sinner in need of a Savior, then Jesus' coming means nothing to you. If you think that you are a basically good person and that you will get into heaven through your own goodness, then you are not one of Jesus' people. He came to save sinners and sinners only.

Thus we've seen that Jesus Christ, who is eternal God, took on human flesh to save His people from their sins. His people are those whom the Father has given to the Son. He does not hope that they will all choose Him someday, but it's up to them to decide! Rather, He will accomplish His eternal purpose by saving them. That leads to the final question:

4. What did He do?

The answer is, "He actually saved His people from their sins." In other words, Jesus' death on the cross was substitutionary and specific. He died in the place of those He came to save. He did not offer Himself *potentially* for anyone who would later decide to believe in Him. Rather, He *actually* purchased His elect people from the slave market of sin by interposing His blood (Rev. 5:9), so that they do not have to pay for their own sins. Those whom He purposed to save, He saved. All whom the Father has given to the Son *will come* to Him, and of those, Jesus will lose none (John 6:37, 39).

Jesus gives eternal life as His gift to all whom the Father has given Him (John 17:2).

When it says that He will save them from their sins, the meaning is twofold. First, He saves or delivers them *from the penalty* of their sins, which is eternal punishment in hell. That happens instantaneously at the moment a sinner is awakened to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Second, He saves them *from the power* of sin in their daily lives. That happens gradually and progressively as the believer learns to walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit. It will not be perfected until the moment when we see Jesus (1 John 3:2-3). If a person is not growing in holiness and striving against sin, he needs to question whether he has been saved from his sins at all.

Conclusion

Our text is very plain: Jesus "will save His people from their sins." My question to you is, "*Are you one of His people?*" If you ask, "How can I know?" the answer lies in answering some other questions. Has God opened your eyes to see that you are a sinner who deserves His judgment? If you think that you're a pretty good person in God's sight, then you are not one of His people (at least it has not yet been revealed). But if you say, "Yes, I know that I am a sinner, deserving of God's judgment," then the next question is, "Have you fled for refuge from God's judgment to the cross of Jesus Christ?" "Are you trusting in His shed blood alone to pay the penalty for your sins?"

If you answer yes to those questions, you need to ask yourself further, "Is there any evidence that Christ has saved you from your sins?" It is possible to *say* that you have believed in Christ, but to have an intellectual "faith" that does not save. You must ask yourself, "*Has God changed my heart?*" Before you used to live for yourself only, with no regard for Christ or for what He did on the cross. But now, you love Jesus Christ and are flooded with gratitude because you know that He gave Himself on the cross for you. Before you had no hunger for holiness and were content to live in disregard of God's commands. Now, although you do fall into sin, you mourn over your sins (Matt. 5:4), you confess them and seek to please God by forsaking sin and by obeying God (1 John 1:8-9; 2:3-6; Titus 2:14). Now your aim is to know Christ more and more (Phil. 3:9).

If you can honestly say, "Yes, those things are true of me. God has begun a good work in my heart," then our text should bring you great joy and assurance. "He who began a good work in you *will perfect it* until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Jesus *will* save you from your sins!

If you answer no or you're not sure if Christ has saved you yet, then give no rest to your soul until you know that your faith is in Christ alone for salvation. Either your sins are upon you or they are upon Christ. If that burden of sin is on you, Jesus bids you, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He promised, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). If you come to Jesus, you can know that you are one of His people and that He has saved you from your sins.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is believing in the virgin birth essential to the Christian faith? What other essential doctrines fall if it falls?
2. Why is it essential to affirm that salvation is *totally* of God and not partly from God and partly from us? What is at stake?
3. Is it right to give assurance of salvation to a person who claims to be a Christian, but who is living in known sin? Why/why not?
4. How should we respond to the charge that the doctrine of election is not fair?

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