

Matthew 1v18-25 Unbelievable

Assumptions are dangerous, especially when we assume we understand what something or someone else means. I read a story this week of a husband asked to do the shopping, his wife left him a numbered shopping list, except she hadn't told him it was numbered, she assumed he'd understand. When he picked it up he assumed each number was the number required of each thing on the list, which was fine for 1 bag of sugar and 2 bags of flour, but less helpful when it came to item 20 which was bags of dog food. I've had it happen to me; sent to ASDA with a list I looked for polish, as I assumed the list said. What Lucy actually meant was Polish – which apparently was code for some Polish filled sausages the boys love. Assuming we understand is dangerous.

We saw last week in the genealogy that Jesus is the Messiah – God's long promised rescuing Davidic king. That he's the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his offspring. And that Jesus comes to bring a new kingdom, to end exile from God. But there's a danger, the Jews had a whole load of assumptions that they'd attached to that term Messiah. He'd kick out the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom, as well as places where they fell short, so they just expect the Messiah to be just a man in David's line.

But Matthew at the start of his gospel wants to be clear. Jesus is the Messiah yet he's more than just another human branch in David's family tree. And secondly his mission isn't to overthrow the Romans and establish his kingdom now on earth. And so in Matthew's nativity account he tells us two names of Jesus that open our eyes to who he really is and what he really comes to do. And he reveals the nature of Jesus kingdom.

Jesus is God with us

As Matthew records Jesus birth he's keen to stress that biologically he's not Joseph's son(16). He stresses it again(18), Mary is pledged to be married to Joseph but they aren't married and so they haven't slept together. Mary's son is not Joseph's biological son. Matthew stresses that fact again in (25)when he tells us Joseph took Mary home as his wife but they didn't sleep together until after Jesus was born. There's no doubt this isn't Joseph's boy. But why does Matthew make such a point about something that in those days was so scandalous? Because Jesus is God made man, he's God's Son.

Joseph is troubled when Mary arrives back from her 3 months stay at her cousin Elizabeth's visibly 4 months pregnant. He's torn, what should he do? What's right? He decides to quietly divorce her. (20)**“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’** Matthew has already told us that this baby was conceived by the Spirit, but that's news to Joseph. The angel tells him God is doing something new, something amazing. This is a divine child. This is God's son.

Matthew wants his readers to understand who Jesus is. Conceived by the Spirit. (22-23)Make this even clearer. This child is fulfilling God's promise. Turn to **Isaiah 7**. Judah are in turmoil because they're under attack by two kings and Isaiah is sent to king Ahaz with a prophecy. **“therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”**

(slide 3 pics)What can you see? There are actually two things in each picture, two faces or a vase, either a seal basking in the snow or a polar bear climbing out of an ice hole, or a man with glasses or the word liar. Two things in one picture. That's how this prophecy works. There's an immediate fulfilment for King Ahaz as Isaiah's son is born and God fulfils his word and the nations threatening Judah fall. But the son who is born to Isaiah is himself described a sign, a sign doesn't point to itself but to something or someone else.

Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's word. Jesus is the one Isaiah's son's birth pointed to. He's the real thing, Isaiah's son is the shadow, Jesus is the reality. This prophecy is part of a bigger unit in

Isaiah which Matthew alludes to with his quotation. It ends with this description of the child to come: **Isaiah 9v1-7**. Clearly this description is too big for Isaiah's son, but it fits Jesus perfectly. Jesus is Immanuel, light in the darkness, wonderful counsellor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Matthew as he quotes this connects Jesus descent from David, his Messiahship, with his also being Immanuel – God with us.

Jesus is God the Son, God come to be with us. Fully human and full divine, conceived not by natural descent but by the Spirit. Do you see what the angel is saying to Joseph – don't reject Mary, don't assume you know who this baby is and what God is doing. This son is God with us.

Similarly Matthew wants his readers to see who Jesus really is. He isn't just the Messiah, the Son of David, the seed of blessing, he is Immanuel, God with us. He isn't just a human. He isn't just a good teacher, or a human messiah. But God made man. His words God speaking to us, his teaching God teaching us, his loves God's loves, his character God's character, his works God's works, his presence God reaching down to us.

Jesus is the Saviour from sin

Lots of companies and organisations have mission statements. I wonder can you guess whose mission statement these come from?

“To be earth's most customer-centric company where people can find and discover anything they want to buy online.” (Amazon)

“To create the best products on earth – products that change lives and help shape the future.” (Apple)

“to organise the world's information and makes it universally accessible and useful.” (Google)

“To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time.” (Starbucks)

They try to sum up what the organisation exists for. Ours is *“We exist to equip God's people to be grace in the community for the glory of God.”* I wonder if it's time we looked at that again. But that's for another day.

Here we see Jesus mission statement, what he comes to do so there are no wrong assumptions. **“you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.”** Jesus wasn't an unusual name, it was fairly common. It was a translation of Joshua. But it's meaning matters, it tells us of Jesus mission: Jesus comes to save from sin.

Humanity always misunderstands the real nature of our problem. We tend to be so focused on the immediate, what's in our face, that we can't see the bigger picture. If you'd asked any Jew in 1st century Israel what their greatest problem was they would probably have said the Romans. If we asked our friends what would they say? Poverty, work, relationship problems, greed, knife crime, terrorism, debt. I wonder what your answer is? To find out ask yourself what do I pray for most often?

So often our answer to the question doesn't go deep enough. Behind the Romans, behind, poverty, work relationship problems, greed, debt, knife crime, is sin. Not just an impersonal force called sin, but sin embodied in our actions and thoughts and words because sin is in us not just outside of us.

God says our greatest problem is sin. Sin isn't simple to define in the bible. It's complex. It's rebellion, refusing to accept God's word and rule though we'll take his world. It's idolatry as we love treasure and worship created things rather than the creator. It's running away from God or trying to proudly earn God's forgiveness by good deeds that we proudly **wear on our vest like a scout with his or her badges**. It's determining to be on the throne instead of God because we

doubt his love, goodness, justice, sovereignty. It's also shooting for God's standard but missing it but deciding our efforts should be good enough. Sin is complex, it can take one form or many forms. But it always separates from God and leaves us facing his justice.

Even the best people Jesus meets have a sin problem. In the prayer he teaches his disciples he assumes that they'll have an on going daily battle with sin hence the line **"forgive us"**, and that they'll encounter and be wounded by the sin of others daily **"as we forgive"**. In **ch9** Jesus forgives the paralysed man of his sins, because sin is a bigger more dangerous more immediate problem than his paralysis, though he heals him of that too to prove his power to forgive sin. In **ch18** Jesus provides a blueprint for fighting sin and reconciliation in the church – Jesus expects sin to continue to be a cause of conflict. **(18v21)** He tells Peter to forgive his brothers sin not 7 times but 77 times and illustrates it with the parable of the unmerciful servant.

Everyone sins. Everyone fails God's standards. Everyone misplaces our love and worship. Everyone needs rescue because everyone of us faces a God of justice guilty, caught red handed in sin. But Jesus comes to save from sin. How? **(26v28)** At the last supper, the meal we shared in earlier, Jesus tells his disciples **"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin."** At the cross Jesus saves. Every sin we have ever and will ever commit receives its just punishment in the three hours in which Jesus hangs on the cross before he breathes his last. Jesus experiences the separation from God that our sins deserve so we never have to, so we can be saved from our sins if we'll trust him.

Have you accepted his offer of salvation? You need a plan to deal with your sin before you face God. No other plan works, you can deny it to yourself but God knows. You can try to minimise it by comparing your sin to others but God will only compare it to his perfect son. You can try to atone for it by being good, but you can never be good enough and to try to do so is to throw God's rescue plan back in his face and in itself deserves judgement. Why not this morning, trust Jesus? He waits and wants to save you from your sin, it's punishment, it's rule over your life.

We have to understand Jesus mission, he comes to save from sin. If we have then Jesus mission statement becomes ours. Sin remains the world's greatest problem. But Jesus comes to save the world from sin. We participate in his mission as we recognise the reality of that diagnosis – sin is everyone's greatest problem - and as we share that good news. I want you to stop and think of one person you want to share that good news with this week. Picture that person in your minds eye? Sin is their biggest problem and Jesus waits to save them if they will have him. This week pray for an opportunity to share that invitation with them.

Called to God's kingdom not our kingdom

Matthew writes his gospel to believers under pressure. Believers whose faith in Jesus has cost them. Who are opposed, isolated, outside the norm. But he wants them to see that it's worth it because of who Jesus is; he is the Messiah, the promise fulfilled, the exile ended, God with us, the only Saviour from sin. He wants them to grasp those truths because only when we really see Jesus as he is will we willingly lay aside our kingdom bow the knee and join his.

I wonder what your kingdom looks like? What do you imagine life like for you and your family? Good job, not lavish wealth but comfortable enough, good relationships, health, good reputation, acceptance for your faith and so on.

As the angel comes to Joseph we see his world turned upside down. We see his kingdom laid aside in order to embrace and become part of Jesus kingdom. Prior to **(18)** what's Joseph's plan for life? It's just like ours isn't it? Good job as a carpenter, respected for his faith, marrying a godly woman, having a family, being a good parent, quietly serving God in Nazareth where he can. And there's nothing wrong with that. But here Joseph's kingdom comes crashing up against God's.

(18) That phrase **"she was found to be pregnant"** contains so much emotional pain and turmoil fro Joseph. They are legally betrothed, it's binding, signed before witnesses, there's a prenuptial

agreement, and requires a divorce to end. And added to that sexual unfaithfulness during betrothal was counted as adultery and carried the death penalty. Joseph's world is rocked, his kingdom lies in ruins. He plans to divorce Mary quietly, to save her from public scrutiny, maybe he can salvage something of his life and protect her.

Until (20) the angel appears to him in a dream. At the end of the dream (24) we read **“When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord has commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”** Don't skip over that too quickly. Joseph isn't picking up the pieces of his kingdom, beginning to patch his dreams back together again. Joseph's kingdom has died and he's killed it. Instead he plays his part in God's kingdom. His kingdom is gone. His reputation, his idealised family life, his quiet godly life all goes in this moment as he embraces God's kingdom. The scent of scandal will follow him wherever he goes. The stain of a birth outside of marriage lingers. The rejection Jesus experiences, the conflict it brings into their family. In **ch2** Jesus' birth means Joseph has to flee from a murderous Herod, becoming a fugitive and refugee. Joseph's comfort and kingdom die in order for him to serve in God's kingdom. Has ours?

It's costly to follow Jesus, to enter his kingdom, to welcome the king. To his readers Matthew is introducing another of his themes – Jesus' kingdom is in conflict with the world, to follow Jesus is costly. He's confronting another possible wrong assumption; following Jesus won't lead to comfort but conflict. Many of them were feeling that and were tempted to turn back. But stand steadfast, what you're experiencing is the norm, and Jesus is the only Saviour, he's God with us it's worth it. Some of us this morning are feeling the cost of following Jesus. The life we imagined we'd enjoy, our kingdom, is in ruins. Following Jesus has cost; conflict with family, opposition, mocking. Be encouraged that's normal. Like Joseph hear God's word and obey.

But there is another danger. It is that we misunderstand the kingdom, either thinking that Jesus serves us and our comfort or that he comes to fit in alongside us, to create a hybrid kingdom. Instead of being like Joseph and giving up to obey we try to accommodate Jesus into the shape we feel our life should have. It might show as keeping our faith quite, chameleon Christianity, living one way on Sunday and another at school or work. Or in our Christianity finding no more expression than in an hour on a Sunday morning. Or in compromising and going against God's word in an area of life. But to follow Jesus means to give up our kingdom, you can't have 2 kings.

Following Jesus costs. But who else would you give that up for. Who else can save you from your sin? Who else is God made man? Who else promises freedom from sin's rule now and life knowing God as our Father? Who else comes in love to redeem us and bring us back into relationship with God.