Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Power of Christmas Truth
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-65

Will you open your Bible as we look together to this great great story of the birth of Christ? And our text Matthew chapter 1 and I would like to begin reading at verse 21 and read down through verse 4 of chapter 2...this to provide a setting for the message that God has put on my heart for this morning. Matthew 1:21...

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. Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son and they shall call His name Emanuel, which translated means God with us. And Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took her as his wife and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son and he called His name Jesus.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying, Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship him. And when Herod the king heard it he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him and gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born.

I want to speak to you this morning on the theme, the power of Christmas truth. I would pray that somehow even in our society there would be nothing that would distract us from the awesomeness of Christmas, although such a prayer I admit I find almost wishful thinking. Christmas has become so complex, so chaotic, so confusing with all the stuff that the reality of the simplicity of the birth of Christ has been blended into the fantasy and lost its significance. Christmas should be simple, not complex, very simple. Christmas should be stripped of all of its trappings so that all that is left is the simplicity of God becoming man.

That is the only element in the Christmas seasonal celebration that has in it any lasting power to effect life. There is no real strength, no real peace or comfort or hope or love or promise or confidence for the future to be found in Santa Claus. There's no lasting value in any earthly gift or any earthly sentiment expressed. The tree always dies metaphorically unless it never lived because it was fake to begin with. No package and no party can really sustain a flickering life. No bright lights can lift up the downcast soul to a higher spiritual level. There is no power in Santa Claus. There is no power in a tree. There's no power in fellowship and there's no power in lights, sentiments. And

when you are desperate, you need power. In the hour of need all Christmas has to offer is Jesus Christ. And He is utterly sufficient. Only He can fill the heart with hope in the time of doubt. Only He can fill the heart with lasting joy in the time of sadness. Only He can fill the heart with peace in a time of fear.

When life reaches its moment of desperation, the only hope is Christ. But what is it about Christ that gives this hope? What is it about Christ that gives this joy in deep sadness? What is it about Christ that provides comfort in loneliness? What is it about Christ that gives peace in fear? One simple look at the birth of the Son of God should tell us the answer to that question. And if I might, may I draw you back to our passage in Matthew 1 and 2 and point you to four titles given to Christ, each of which gives us insight into why He was so sufficient for us and the only real power in Christmas?

The four titles...verse 21, He is called Jesus; verse 23, He is called Emanuel; verse 2 He is called King; verse 4 He is called Christ. All of those titles for that one little child, Jesus Emanuel King Christ....Jesus Emanuel King Christ. These titles will tell us how the child of Christmas has the power to restore the fainting heart.

First of all, let's consider the name Jesus, verse 21. "And she will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus." Why? "Because it is He who will save His people from their sins." Jesus, He gives salvation to His people. He saves them from their sins. Down in verse 25 when He was born it says that Joseph called His name Jesus in obedience to the divine command. The name Jesus, by the way, is the sweetest name the Savior knows, at least from an earthly viewpoint. It is used over 700 times in the New Testament. It is a form of the Hebrew word Yeshoshua, Joshua, Jeshua, Jehosuah. It means Yahweh or God will save. Luke 2:11 says He would be born a Savior. Mark 10:45 says the Son of Man is come to save. Luke 19:10, "He is come to save. He shall save His people from their sins." That is a glorious reality.

The Apostle Paul writing in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." Now the implication here is that men are sinners and that sin is a damning reality from which man needs to be saved, or delivered, or rescued. And Jesus came into the world to save you from your sins. In what sense? To save you from the ultimate consequence of your sins, namely eternal damnation...to save you as well from even the present domination of your sin. But primarily and ultimately He came to save you in the sense that He delivers you and He delivers me and He delivers all who believe in Him from the ultimate damnation that sin requires.

You might say, and I think fairly so, that forgiveness of sins is the primary result of salvation as presented in both the Old and the New Testament. Salvation is by definition a rescuing from the consequence of sin. At the Last Supper as Jesus gathered with His disciples the night before He was to be taken prisoner and then crucified, it says He took the cup and He said regarding that cup that

that cup was representative of the blood of the covenant, His own blood, which is poured out, He said Matthew 26:28, for the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 13:38 and 39 the Scripture says, "Through Him...that is Jesus...forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things." You see, He was a child born to provide forgiveness for sins. Israel's great holy day is a day called Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Annually the ancient Jews celebrated that one day in which a great offering was given for all the sins of all the people through the previous year. And on that day, according to Leviticus chapter 16, the high priest would select two goats, two sacrificial goats. One of those goats was killed, slaughtered and his blood was splattered all over the altar as a sacrifice for sin, as a symbol of the need for death with regard to sin.

But the other animal was not killed. The high priest would go to the other goat and put his hands on that goat, symbolically transferring the sins of all the people on to that goat and then that goat was taken into the wilderness so far away that it could never find its way back or be seen again. Symbolically, God ordained that simple and graphic ceremony to show that where there was a sacrifice for sins there was a removal of sin so that they would never ever be brought to attention again. Now that goat that was slaughtered couldn't really pay the price, it could only symbolize the one who could and that goat that carried sin out into the wilderness symbolically couldn't really carry away sin but it symbolized the one who could. And it didn't take two, it only took one, Jesus, who both gave the sacrifice for sin and carried our sins away. In fact, the word "to forgive," aphiemi means to send away, to dismiss. It is used in legal terminology to refer to canceling a debt or granting a pardon. So through His death on the cross, Jesus took the sins of all of us on Himself and died our death as a blood sacrifice for our sins and then carried them away an infinite distance from where they will never return again.

The Bible speaks of this. In Psalm 103:12 it says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgression from us." How far is the east from the west? That's infinite....that's a Jewish expression for infinity. Isaiah 44:22 says, "I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist." I can no longer see your sins anymore than you can see a mountain in a dense fog, blotted out. And Micah the great prophet in chapter 7 says, "Who is a pardoning God like You, who passes by our transgressions and who buries them in the depths of the sea?" Oh my, are we hearing this great truth? This was a child born to take away sin, to pay the price for our sin so we don't have to pay that price. That is why Paul says there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1. No judgment to us. Why? Because the judgment fell on Christ. He will save His people from their sins. And He has done that. He paid the price. He died the death that we would have had to die and He carried our sins so far away even God will never again consider their existence.

First John 2:12, John writes, "I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake." Just because of who He is, just for His own purpose, just for His own glory, He forgave all your sins. What a blessed reality that Jesus Christ came into the world to forgive sin. It

doesn't mean that we don't commit sin, we do. It doesn't mean that sin won't have harmful effects in this life, it does. What it does mean is we will never pay the ultimate penalty for sin. It's been paid. We will never die eternally, we will never spend a moment in hell, we will go from this life into heaven.

Listen, no matter what deprivation a man or a woman might experience, no matter how lonely your life might be, no matter how sad it might be, no matter how painful your situation, no matter how bleak the Christmas season, no matter what dungeon or prison cell you might find yourself in, no matter how strong your fears and how terrifying the prospects of the future to you might be, if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you can see through to the one who has forgiven all your sins. And in that there is fullness of joy. You do not need to fear that your difficulty is God's way of making you offer full atonement for your own iniquity. Not so. You, no matter what goes wrong in this life, no matter what is not the way you would like it, no matter how much unfulfillment you face, know this, you have complete and perfect forgiveness for all your sins through Jesus Christ if you place your faith in Him and you will never pay for your sins. Christ has done that...Christ has done that.

Second title given to the child of Christmas comes in verse 23. This is one of the great great titles that He bears, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son and they shall call His name Emanuel, which translated means God with us." He is not only Jesus, He is Emanuel. And to see that at this time of year is to see a great reality. By the way, verse 23 is a quote from the Old Testament. It is taken from Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14, here the angel of the Lord speaking to Joseph quotes Isaiah 7:14. Let me tell you a little bit of background about that because you might wonder as you study the Bible why do you read along and all of a sudden...BOOM...here's a prophecy about Messiah. Let me just give you a little bit of the background. The scene in Isaiah chapter 7 is during the reign of King Ahaz in Judah. You remember that after Solomon's life the kingdom was split...Israel in the north, ten tribes...Judah in the south with just Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. The Northern Kingdom was apostate, the Southern Kingdom at times was true to Jehovah God. It is in the Southern Kingdom that Isaiah is prophesying. It is in the Southern Kingdom that Ahaz is king. Ahaz, by the way, is the son of one of the great kings, Uzziah.

But Ahaz, though son of the great Uzziah, filled Jerusalem with idols. He reinstated the worship of the pagan god Molech which required, by the way, sacrificial burning of babies and he burned his own baby on the altar to Molech. He was so wicked and so evil that even wicked kings around him were upset at what he was doing. Two of them, a man named Rezin who was king of Syria and a man named Pekah who was ruling over the area of Israel, that territory, decided to get rid of Ahaz. So these two kings, Rezin and Pekah, were going to move against Ahaz to get him out. In the face of such a threat he decided to strengthen his hand not by turning to God to preserve the Davidic line and preserve the people, but he decided to turn to the Assyrian king Tiglath- Pileser. Feeling that if he made an alliance with this great Assyrian monarch, Rezin and Pekah would think a long time before they would attack him because of the formidable nature of this man and his powerful army.

In fact, he was so adamant about it that he went and plundered the temple, stole all the gold and silver and gave it to Tiglath-Pileser to buy him and buy his allegiance. It was precisely at that time that God said, "Isaiah, you need to go have a talk with Ahaz." And so God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to confront him, to tell him not to trust the Assyrians but trust God, the living God. In spite of all of his evil he said, "God will preserve your people and God will preserve the Davidic line. He will deliver you from those two kings, you don't need this alliance with the Assyrian." Ahaz refused to listen. And it's at that juncture that the prophet said this, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son and they shall call His name Emanuel."

What's he saying? How does this fit? He's saying...Look, God is saying to you no one will be allowed to destroy the people of God and no one will be allowed to destroy David's royal line. The virgin shall be with child, shall bear a son, shall call His name Emanuel." This thing is going to go off the way it was planned, that's what he's saying. Even if the armies of Rezin and Pekah come against you, the virgin born Son of God who is Emanuel will come.

Now what does that mean? Listen carefully to this. What Isaiah is saying to him is God has promised not to forsake His people. That's what he's saying. You don't have to fear these two petty kings, God won't forsake you. In fact, when the Messiah comes it will be God with us. God not only will not forsake you, He will come among you. That's the point. That's the point. Just trust Him, He won't forsake you. Don't you know His promise is to come and dwell among you?

What does Emanuel mean? It means God lives among us. It means God became a man. God will be present with His people. The child of Christmas is Emanuel, God with us. That child that was born that day though fully human was also fully God. In the Old Testament the presence of God was in the tabernacle, the presence of God was in the temple. And now in the New Testament the presence of God is in a body in the person of Christ. God with us.

That's a Christmas truth and like the term Jesus, Emanuel is a powerful Christmas truth. What does it mean? Listen to what it means when you extrapolate its significance, listen to Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14. "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself...that is Christ the Lord...also partook of the same." We have flesh and blood, so He took flesh and blood. We share, we koinonia in the same common physical elements. And He partook, He took them on. By the way, that word metechousually has to do with something that someone has which is not theirs naturally. We are by nature flesh and blood, Emanuel was not. But He became flesh and blood. He added to Himself our nature to die our death to save us from our sins.

But there's more, look at verse 17 of Hebrews 2. He had to be made like his brethren in all things, He had to be fully human in every sense in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest. You say, "What do you mean?" A priest is someone who intercedes for you, someone who

goes to God for you. How can He go to God for us and plead our case and ask God to help us if He doesn't understand us? So a priest was always chosen from among men because he could then pray for the needs of men because he knew what they were. Jesus became one of us in order that He might rightly represent us as our faithful high priest before God. And verse 18 says He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered and so He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. He knew temptation. He knew testing. He knew suffering. Chapter 4 verse 15 says, "He was tempted in all things like we are but without sin." He never sinned, but He still knew all the temptations...all the temptations.

You say, "What is this saying to us?" Listen, at Christmas when you see the child, see who He is...Emanuel, God with us. He was hungry, He was thirsty, He was tired, He slept, He learned, He was glad, He was sad, He was angry, He was indignant, He was grieved, He was troubled, He was disappointed, He was tearful. He was overcome by the prospect of future events. He exercised faith. He read the Scripture. He prayed. He sighed with an aching heart. He felt everything. You say your life is in danger? His was always in danger. You say you've been mistreated and misjudged? So was He.

No, this is not a cosmic God who is utterly indifferent. He knows our hurts and He knows our weaknesses. And He's not only the Christ of salvation but He's the Christ of sympathy. This is a Christmas perspective. The child born that day was God with us to feel what we feel, to experience what we experience, to be tempted and tested as we are tempted and tested in order that He might sympathize with us on the one hand, in order that He might aid us on the other hand. It's not just to sympathize, it's also to aid us. Yes we cast our care on Him because He cares for us, but it says here in Hebrews 2:18 He is able to come to the aid of those who are tested. God with us.

What does it mean to come to our aid? What does He do? I'll tell you what He does. He gives you the courage to face your cares. He gives you the wisdom to understand your cares. He gives you the strength to endure your cares. And He gives you the faith to trust Him for the rest. No tree is going to give you that, no Christmas card, no Santa Claus, no person, just Emanuel. God with us not only to understand us but help us. If all we needed was understanding we could ask another man, we need more, we need help. He gives us supernatural help.

Jesus...for He saves us from our sins. Emanuel...for He's God with us to help us in our struggle. Third title, when the wise men arrived and confronted Herod, verse 2 of chapter 2, "They said, Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?" Here He is introduced as king. He came not only to save His people from their sins, He came not only to sympathize and succor and help His people, but He came to rule the world. He came to rule the world. Down in verse 6 it says He will be a ruler...a ruler.

It is now many months after the birth of Christ when the wise men arrive. Chapter 2 verse 11 says the family is in a house by now. And the wise men have come a long journey. They go to King Herod to find out about this other King. And, of course, King Herod is paranoid. King Herod is a maniac of the worst order. King Herod isn't even a king and that's why he was so nervous, he was an Indumaean who was put into that position by the Romans. He was a political king. He had been in a long time by now but he was paranoid about losing his position. So paranoid was he that if he didn't like somebody he got rid of them. He felt them threatening him, he killed them. He drowned the high priest for one. He murdered his wife. He murdered his wife's mother and he murdered three of his sons cause he thought they were all threatening to his throne.

And then he went through the city of Jerusalem, found all the most distinguished citizens in the whole population and said to his soldiers, "Put them all in prison and keep them in prison and the minute I die execute all of them." And when asked why he said, "Because no one will mourn when I die and when I die I want mourning in Jerusalem. And if they won't mourn for me they'll mourn for them." Then when he heard there was a little baby king born he set out to murder all the male children under two years of age and massacred babies all over. He was paranoid. He was a maniac. He wasn't even a true king. And set against that fake king who wasn't a king, who didn't come from a royal line and who wasn't even a Jew is the true King of the Jews, Jesus. Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?

There's something to focus on when you look in to the Christmas scene. Jesus, Savior...Emanuel, sympathetic high priest...King, ruler, monarch, sovereign. That child was born a King. The wise men brought fitting gifts for a king...gold frankincense and myrrh. He was a King, not a very auspicious beginning for a King. Not for THE King, THE King of kings and Lord of lords...and even through His life it didn't appear that He was the kind of King that they wanted Him to be. And even the disciples were wondering when is He going to take His Kingdom? When is He going to assert Himself? And Pilate confronted Him and said, "Are You a King?" And He said, "Yes, I am a King." But He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world, if it were of this world My servants would fight." He said, "I'm a King but My Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom." But He also demonstrated in His transfiguration that some day His spiritual Kingdom would come to earth in the great future Millennium when Christ reigns on the earth. Yes He was a King, not just a king like other kings but a king unlike any other king, a king over all kings. In fact, in Psalm 2 the Father said to the Son, "This day have I begotten Thee and I have given Thee the nations of the world as Thine inheritance and Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron." In the book of Revelation we look to the future, and as we look to the future we see Jesus already the spiritual King of kings begin to take His earthly throne. It tells us in Revelation chapter 11 and verse 15 as we look ahead, "And the seventh angel sounded and there arose loud voices in heaven saying, The Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever." Chapter 12 verse 5 says, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron." And we see Him as He comes to His Kingdom in Revelation 19, heaven opens up, He comes on a white horse, His name is faithful and true. Verse

11, "And in righteousness He judges and wages war and His eyes are a flame of fire and upon His head are many diadems and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself and He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called the Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses and from His mouth comes a sharp sword so that He may smite the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

He will come. He will come and I believe He will come soon. He will come as the equalizer. He will come as the avenger. He will come as the King, the puny petty little monarchs of this world who raise their fits in as assumed pseudo-sovereignty as if they ruled anything will learn who really rules. Like Nebuchadnezzar who thought he had made his own kingdom and wound up eating grass in insanity because he thought he could take the glory of the true king. All the monarchs of this world will bow their knee to Jesus Christ when He comes in His kingly glory. He is King in the spiritual Kingdom, He will be King over the world and the universe in the future. And as you look at that little babe in the manger, that is a Christmas reality. What a child.

Jesus, He saves His people from their sins. Emanuel, He is God with us, sympathetic high priest, able to understand and to aid us. King who rules a spiritual Kingdom which will some day come to His people and at which point He will rule the world. Finally, verse 4 gives us one more very familiar term, it says that he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. The Christ is just a term that means the Messiah, the anointed...Messiah, Christ, same thing, one from Hebrew, one from Greek, means the anointed one, God's special anointed one. And it reflects His right to rule, His right to have authority and sovereignty as the promised Messiah of God. There's so much in that term that we can't focus on at all but let me just capture one element that I believe is inherent in that. When you have the great prophecy of Isaiah chapter 9 introducing the coming Messiah, it says that there will be a child, a son, and He will be wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, or the Father of eternity or the eternal Father, you could translate it a number of ways, the Messiah is the eternal one and He is the eternal Father in the sense that He is the eternal generator of life. He is the life giver. And that is certainly the intent of John 1, "In Him was...what?...life, all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made."

When you see the word "Christ," think of Him in this way, as the generator of life, the giver of life, the originator of life, the creator of life, the giver of life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. I am come, that you might have...what?...life. I am, John 11:25 and 26 says, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me though he were dead yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die, do you believe this? John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," John 14:19, "Because I live you shall live also." Peter says, "You have put to death the prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead." And therein was the essence of His life demonstrating. He gave

His demonstration that He was in charge of life...how?...by rising from the dead. So when Peter calls Him the prince of life, he identifies Him as the giver of life.

By the way, the word prince is archegoswhich means beginner, initiator, author...my favorite, originator, originator. So when you think about this child think of Him as the originator of life. When you think about the cross think about the unbelievable conundrum, the hopeless paradox that they actually took the life of the giver of life and if spiritually speaking you take the life of the giver of life, you will never be able to receive life. Jesus, Emanuel, King is the one who gives life, sustains life. He is the one of whom it is said in Psalm 36:9, "For with Thee is the fountain of life." You who were dead in trespasses and sin has He made alive together with Christ.

And so, I say to you, friends, that no matter how bleak the cell, no matter how lonely the life there, no matter how painful the situation, no matter how stark the scene, no matter how mistreated, rejected, scourned, and unjustly treated you are, no matter what life is dishing out to you, no matter how unfulfilled, you can live in the hope of life to come.

His name is not Jesus, Emanuel, King, Christ because He's our example. His name is not Jesus, Emanuel, King, Christ because He's our teacher. His name is not Jesus, Emanuel, King, Christ because He's our guide. His name is not Jesus, Emanuel, King, Christ because He's our friend. He is all of that but His name is Jesus because He saves us from our sins. His name is Emanuel because He is our sympathizing strengthener, He is God with us. His name is King because He's our sovereign and the sovereign of the universe. And His name is Christ because He is the source of our life. And when you know all that and when you believe all that and when you confess all that, then you have seen through the trappings to the simplicity of the birth of Christ.

That will make your Christmas significant...really significant. If you'll do what Hebrews 12:2 says, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, King Jesus, Christ Jesus, Emanuel..." it ought to make it the greatest Christmas for you, too. Let's pray.

Father, we express to You our worship at this moment as we bring this service to a conclusion, thanking You for the gift of Jesus Christ. Lord, help us who are free and unbound, who have spouse and children and home and friends and all the good things of life, not to squander our attention on those things and miss those contemplative worshipful moments of focusing on You, fixing our eyes on Jesus and all that He is. Make this the most significant Christmas for all of us. And for those who are here today for whom Jesus is not the Savior of their sins, who has not delivered them from death, who has not forgiven them because they have never come in repentance, may this be the day that they turn from their sin and fall on the mercy of a forgiving Savior. And for those who know nothing of the Emanuel, who know not what it is to have a sympathetic compassionate strong high priest, may this be the day that they embrace Jesus Christ and find His sufficiency. And for those who are not a part of His Kingdom, who do not enjoy the bliss of being ruled by His beneficient sovereignty, may

this be the day that they subject themselves to Him and enter the Kingdom. For those who have no life, may this be the day that He gives them life. And may we worship Jesus, Emanuel, King, Christ with all our hearts and may He be pleased with the gifts that we bring. Amen.

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