

The Birth of Jesus

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 13th Dec 2009

Intro

- What is the biggest disaster you have made in your life? What is the biggest disaster someone else has made which has affected you? God is a master at turning around apparent disasters, and making them into masterpieces of His grace.

Read Matt 1:18-25

The apparent broken betrothal- Matt 1:18-20, 24-25

- Betrothal in Jewish first century-(see Fructenbaum- Jewish Wedding System & bride of the Messiah). Different to today.
- First was the arrangement- the father of the groom would arrange the marriage and the bride price would be paid to the bride's father by the grooms father. Could take place while they were still children & often they did not even meet each other until their wedding day.
- Next was the betrothal (the 'preparation', 'kidushin'='sanctification, separation'). This was the setting aside of a particular woman for a particular man, 2 witnesses needed, normally mutual consent, and the groom's declaration. They would be legally considered married, but would not live together, but would stay living with their own parents for at least a year. This was the time when they demonstrated their purity and faithfulness to one another (a year being plenty of time for any baby to be born should there have been unfaithfulness). If the woman was found to be pregnant at this time it was considered to be adultery of a more serious kind than after marriage (see Mishna- Sanhedrin 7:1,4,11:1, Deut 22:23-24) and the person responsible for getting her pregnant was to be stoned to death. Nowadays the Jewish betrothal ceremony and the marriage ceremony are generally combined to eliminate the possibility of committing this sin. The marriage, being legal could now only be annulled by divorce ('put her away quietly' Matt 1:19, i.e. written notice and 2 witnesses, without going to a judge).
- If both parties had remained pure during the testing period, the husband would go to the house of his bride's parents and lead her in a grand processional march back to his home. There would be a great party which often would go on for days. They would then live together as husband and wife and the marriage would be consummated.
- We know from Luke's gospel that after Gabriel visited Mary, Mary went to be with her relative, Elizabeth, who was 6 months pregnant, and stayed with her 3 months. Imagine Joseph's heart sinking when she returned pregnant after the 3 months, especially when she says 'an angel appeared to me!' It was the ultimate test of their relationship.
- What things have tested your relationships with those you love? How have you felt?
- **ILLUSTRATION:** Peter Foster, was a Royal Air Force pilot in World War II. During an air battle, Foster was the victim of a terrible fire. He survived, but his face was burned beyond recognition. He spent many anxious moments in the hospital wondering if his family - and especially his fiancée - would still accept him. They did. His fiancée assured him that nothing had changed except a few millimeters of skin. Two years later they were married. Foster said of his wife, "She became my mirror. She gave me a new image of myself. When I look at her, she gives me a warm, loving smile that tells me I'm okay."
- **ILLUSTRATION:** Kent Cederberg called his father to tell him he had AIDS. Father Sven said, "Kent, have you worked this through with God? How do you stand with the Lord?" "That's all worked out," Kent said. "I asked him to forgive me and I know he has." "When God forgives, Kent, he forgets, and I can do no less. You

don't have to tell me any of the details. I just want you to know that I love you." One telephone conversation with his father was exceptionally special. Searching for a way to express his love, Sven said, "Kent, remember the story of the prodigal son? Focus on the father. He loved his son so much. When he saw him coming home, he didn't care what had happened. He didn't care if his son was clean or dirty. He just ran and threw his arms around him because he was home again. His son was home. I'm that father. That's us, and we love you." In the following days, Kent studied the parable in depth and the love of his heavenly Father. He was overwhelmed. Kent Cederberg died on the 26th May, 1987, aged 24. The doctor arrived to confirm the death. "Doctor," Sven said, "he's with the Lord. Do you have any sons, Doctor?" "Yes, two." "Go home and love them. Raise them in the Lord. Our son's with the Lord." The doctor's eyes welled up with tears. He left the room, forgetting to sign the death certificate, and Sven prayed, "Thank you, Lord, for speaking to the first person that entered the room after his death. Kent would have wanted that."

- Joseph no doubt bought his concerns to the Lord 'while he thought about these things', v20. It would take God to get them through this hurdle in their relationship- and God speaks to Joseph clearly in a dream, and Joseph is willing to be obedient to what God says.
- Application- Bring to God the tests in your relationships and trust Him to make a way through- pray about it, rely on Him and His grace. Like Joseph, be willing to be obedient to the words that He gives to you, and be willing to forgive any wrongs, or apparent wrongs, as the Lord has also forgiven you.

The significance of a name-Matt 1:21

- Wonderful choosing names for a child, but everyone wants to choose a name that will not be misconstrued. Simeon, sometimes forgotten by one visitor and person keeps thinking 'Damien'.
- Some real people's funny names: Andy Friese (as in antifreeze, a real race car driver). April May (a real person I knew in school). Bud Wieser (real college maths teacher). C. Good (allegedly a real eye doctor). Cara Sterio (alleged real person). Chip Stone (sculptor). Dr. I. Ball (optometrist). Ima Hogg (a real person, daughter of a Texas governor). Mike Stand (a real person). Sandy C. Shore (another real person). Oliver Sutton (all of a sudden). Terry Bull (allegedly real name)
- JESUS=Yeshua=Joshua=the 'Lord saves'-Joshua, not Moses brought Jews into promised land & divided up the inheritance among the tribes. 'Jesus' predicted by Zechariah (Zech 6:11-12). Jesus' name reflected his destiny. 'He will save his people from their sins'- the Lord saves, not us. The lord saves-heals and delivers, rescues. 'The lord saves' sums up his nature- yes the Lord judges sin, but the essence of God is love (1John 4:8). How do we view God-as love?
- Name is all about identity and character- we have a need to name things- see Tom Hanks naming the basketball 'Wilson' in castaway, James & John nicknamed 'Boanerges' by Jesus, 'Sons of thunder'. Often in scripture related to their destiny. Renaming=break from old and coming into the new, inheritance- God changed Jacob's "supplanter" name to Israel "God's wrestler" (Gen 32:28) -encounter changes things. Simon- Jesus called him Peter or Cephas=rock (John 1:42). Heavenly Father believes in you and probably has a nickname for each one of us- what is it?
- Noah's sons name, 'Shem' literally means 'name', and the word 'semitic' literally means 'shemitic'- both the Arabs and the Jews come from Shem. After the flood mankind tries to make a 'name' for themselves by building Babel and God confounds it- same with us. However, when we surrender to God He gives us a name that we could not earn.
- Covenant affects our lives- names get changed by covenant- e.g. Marriage- take on a new name- new head teacher- where's Mrs Ware? When God made covenants, or promises with people He sometimes marked the occasion by changing their names, indicating their new identity. God changed Abram's "high father" name to Abraham "father of multitude" (Gen 17:5) and his wife's name from Sarai "my princess," to Sarah "mother of nations" (Gen 17:15).
- God has made a new covenant with us- see Jer. He has taken away our heart of stone (Ezek) has written His law on our hearts & put His Spirit in us to walk

according to His ways. We are a new person, married to Him. The bad reputation of the old name is gone, and the shame associated with it. The old man was crucified with Christ & we are a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17- Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

- Is 62:2- The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. (also Is 65:15)
- Christ's new name- Rev 3:12, 21:2. Our new name- Rev 2:17
- ILLUSTRATION: One weekend a nurse, was looking after her six-year-old nephew when he fell off a playground slide and hit his head. Worried that he might have a concussion, she checked him all night. Every hour, she'd gently shake him and ask, "What's your name?" Soon, he began moaning in protest each time she entered the room. When she went in at 5 A.M., she found something white on his forehead. Leaning close, she saw a crayon-scrawled message taped to his forehead. It read, "My name is Daniel."
- Do you know your NEW name today? Or are you going on your old name, 'the old man'? Sometimes we need to believe we are something different to how we have been labelled by others.

God really is with us- Matt 1:23

- Fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah- the name Emmanuel. Context-they were trying to do away with the dynasty of David, but God said it would not happen (God had promised David an eternal dynasty)- David's eternal dynasty would come through the sign of Emmanuel-God with us- God being born as a person (see John 1:14- the word became flesh and tabernacled among us). Paul made known to the Gentiles (non-Jews, non-religious) the mystery of 'Christ IN YOU, the hope of glory' (Col 1:27). You may have never stepped in a Church before, but you can know today 'God is with you'!
- ILLUSTRATION: When John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, was four years old he pulled an old crate to the window of his second-story bedroom and waved to the neighbors gathered on the lawn below. This may not seem a very large feat for a young child — until you realize the home was on fire at the time. Because of John's quick thinking, his neighbors were able to form a human ladder and rescue him from the flames. Obviously, God was with him. John grew up to take the Gospel to all of England, and to the pioneers and natives of America. Tired and weary, he averaged 8,000 miles a year by horseback to annually preach about 1,000 sermons. God was with him. Once, while traveling through the swamps of Georgia, John and his companions became disoriented. Faint and weary, having had no food all day, the men divided one ginger cake among them. As darkness closed in they were forced to admit they were lost and opted to spend the night in the near freezing conditions. Not knowing if they would see the morning, John and his companions prayed for God's help. After a good night's rest, the men were all able to carry on the next morning. God was with them. Years later, a small group gathered around the bed of the old man. It was evident John Wesley was nearing the end of his life. He beckoned them to kneel around him and pray. As they concluded their prayers, John moved his lips, unable to utter the words on his heart. The small group moved closer, and with one last burst of strength John cried out, "The best of all is, God is with us!" What are you in the midst of today? Is it the heat of a fiery trial? Do you feel lost in the wilderness of this world, unable to see the way ahead? Are you facing illness, or the death of a loved one? No matter what your circumstance, you are not alone. With John Wesley we can exclaim, "Best of all, God is with us!"

Summary

- God gives us grace, and a way through when relationships are tested.
- God takes away a name of shame and gives a name of His fame.
- God really is with us.

Song: And Can it Be

Gospel appeal+giving over situations to God.