

Christmas: The Fulfillment of History – Matthew 1:20-21 – Galatians 3:14

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, December 22, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

- How is Christmas the point of all of human history? In this message we will learn of the unity of the Bible narrative and the chief role of the incarnation as the culmination of the history of mankind. We will see the how God has been in the business of trading righteousness for faith from the very beginning.

Introduction

- Turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 1:20**.
- Look with me at this important verse...
 - This is likely a verse you have never considered before but may be one of the most important verses in the Bible.
 - **Galatians 3:14a** | *The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus... (CSB)*
 - You may think that is an obscure factoid or a piece of Bible trivia that has no real importance or value to our lives, but you would be wrong.
 - This is maybe one of the half-dozen most important verses in all the Bible...
 - Let's look at it again...
 - **Galatians 3:14a** | *The purpose* (the end, the culmination, what everything in history has been about) *was that the blessing of Abraham* (what in the world is that?) *would come to the Gentiles* (that's everyone, that's me and you), *by Christ Jesus.* (CSB)
 - This verse frames the history of the whole world.
 - This verse summarizes the entirety of the Bible...
 - This verse points to the fulfillment of history...
 - This verse celebrates Christmas!
 - Let's see if we can figure this verse out this morning!
- Let's start with something that is more confusing than it ought to be...
 - For most (inside and outside the church) the Bible is composed of two distinct parts.
 - The Old Testament and the New Testament...
 - These parts are almost like two different religions...
 - The Old Testament is characterized by wars, laws, prophets, bloody sacrifices, the temple...
 - The New Testament is characterized by Jesus, the church, the gospel, evangelism, love...
 - We know the testaments are connected but that connection is hard for most people to pinpoint.
 - The New Testament quotes the Old Testament...
 - We know there are some random prophecies sprinkled throughout the Old Testament that sort-of point to Jesus...
 - But most of us would be hard pressed to identify very many of them or tie them to the Old Testament as a whole.
 - Explain how they fit into the fabric of the Old Testament...
 - Some of this confusion is just because of the words we use to describe the parts...
 - Old and New Testament seems like two distinct parts.
 - The titles (which are not actually a part of the Bible) often just bring confusion.
 - Like the New Testament is a stand-alone sequel to the Old Testament.
 - It is true that the Old and New Testaments describe very different times in many ways, but that distinction makes it hard to see the unity of the Bible.
 - **The new Star Wars movies refer back to some of the old Star Wars characters and stories, but they are really two stand-alone stories.**
 - The New Testament is not a stand-alone sequel to the Old Testament.
 - What if instead of calling it Old Testament and New Testament, we called the two parts...
 - The beginning and the end...
 - The set-up and the fulfillment...
 - The introduction and the conclusion...
 - Even "Part 1" and "Part 2" might be better...
 - To fully understand **Galatians 3:14** we need to bring the Testaments together.
- So, today, let me take you on a journey through history...
 - Our goal is...
 - To get from...

- **Genesis 1:1** | *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* (CSB)
- To...
 - **Matthew 1:21** | *She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*” (CSB)
- So that we understand...
 - **Galatians 3:14a** | *The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus...* (CSB)
- Bible history...
 - Pre-Abraham...
 - **Genesis 1-2**
 - The creation...
 - **Genesis 3**
 - Sin enters the world...
 - **Genesis 4-5**
 - Population grows and the effects of sin multiply...
 - **Genesis 6-9**
 - God judges the world with a flood...
 - **Genesis 10-11**
 - Population rebuilds and sin quickly brings division and destruction...
 - **Genesis 12**
 - Abraham
 - Called Abram at the time.
 - Abraham
 - What do we know about Abraham when **Genesis 12** begins?
 - Two important things...
 - A. Abraham and his wife Sara (Sarai at the time) were too old to have children.**
 - Seventies and eighties at this point.
 - B. Abraham was not exactly what we would call the most godly man who ever lived.**
 - Abraham was no Noah.
 - He is a liar and an idol worshipping pagan...
 - **Joshua 24:2** | *Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.’* (CSB)
 - So, something surprising happens in **Genesis 12**...
 - God speaks to Abraham and makes him a promise.
 - **Genesis 12:2** | *I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.* (CSB)
 - Notice the parts to this promise...
 - Great nation...
 - Make your name great...
 - You (your nation) will be a blessing...
 - Surprising...
 - Then nothing happens for a while...
 - Then God reminds Abraham of his promise...
 - Abraham is complaining that he doesn’t have a son so his heir will end up being one of his servants.
 - **Genesis 15:4** | *Now the word of the LORD came to him: “This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir.”* (CSB)
 - **Genesis 15:5** | *He took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “Your offspring will be that numerous.”* (CSB)
 - That was crazy talk...
 - Abraham and Sarai were in their seventies and eighties.
 - But then something happens that stands as the most important thing that ever happened in the Old Testament.
 - Arguably the crucifixion and the resurrection are more important events, but these are really all wrapped up together as different parts of the one thing.
 - **Genesis 15:6** | *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.* (CSB)
 - If you want to study the theological significance of this, look to **Romans 4**.
 - Then nothing happens for a while (again)...

- So, Abram and Sarai try to figure out this problem on their own.
- In **Genesis 16**, Sarai urges Abram to have relations with her servant Hagar to see if they can conceive a child that way.
 - *SURPRISE! That turns out to be a bad idea!*
- Hagar gives birth to Ishmael.
 - More on Ishmael in a moment...
- Then nothing happens for a while (again)...
 - **Genesis 17:15-16** | *God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai ... I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” (CSB)*
- Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah (*in God’s time...*)
 - Isaac would become the child through whom God would fulfil his promise to Abraham.
 - But what about Ishmael?
 - **Genesis 21:12-13** | *But God said to Abraham, “... I will also make a nation of the slave’s son because he is your offspring.” (CSB)*
 - **Genesis 21:17-18** | *... the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “... I will make [Ishmael] a great nation.” (CSB)*
- Ishmael became father of the Ishmaelites.
- 2,600 years later...
 - Six-hundred years after the time of Christ...
 - Mohammed was living in Medina, not far from Mecca.
 - Mohammed was illiterate, but he was befriended by a tribe of Jews that taught him the Old Testament.
 - When Mohammed heard that Abraham had two sons, he connected that with the folklore of the area...
 - Folklore...
 - One of Abraham’s sons migrated to the area and lived in what would later be called Mecca.
 - Abraham would leave his home and visit Ishmael in what would become Mecca.
 - On one trip Abraham and Ishmael had reconstructed an ancient shrine (Kaaba) supposedly built by Adam.



- When Mohammed discovered that the Old Testament seemed to confirm parts of the tradition...
 - Mohammed declared Abraham to be the greatest of all prophets.
 - While Mohammed’s understanding of what that meant changed over his lifetime, that became the genesis (no pun intended) of Islam.
- Do you realize that Jews, Muslims, and Christians all call Abraham the Father of their faith?
 - **Romans 4:16** | *This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham’s faith. He is the father of us all. (CSB)*
- It all started with Abraham...
 - All three of the great religions get that part right.
 - **Father Abraham song could be sung by all three religions.**
 - Abraham was credited with righteousness (a right standing with God) because of his faith.

- But what was God’s plan to fulfil the original promise he made to Abraham?
 - *Through your seed, I will bless the whole world...*
 - That’s where the religions diverge.
 - That critical point makes all the difference!
- Back to **Genesis**...
 - God tells Abraham to sacrifice his own child, Isaac, in **Genesis 22**.
 - Tell story...
 - End the end, God does not allow Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and in this we see several interesting foreshadowing of future events...
 1. This points to the day when a father will sacrifice a son...
 - When God, the Father, sacrifices his Son, Jesus...
 2. God honors the faith of Abraham and Isaac.
 3. God provides a substitute for Isaac.
 - But when the “sacrifice” is over and Abraham and Isaac are still standing on the mountain, God speaks and says something that should have been very familiar to Abraham by now...
 - **Genesis 22:17-18** | *I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed my command.* (CSB)
 - Abraham couldn’t have comprehended “*all nations*.”
 - From this point, everything happens lines up with this promise.
- History marches on...
 - Next God rescues the Israelites from Egypt to show he is a promise keeper.
 - Then God gives the nation of Israel the law so they understand sin and the standard of God.
 - Then God gives them the sacrificial system so they can begin to understand that the penalty of sin is death and the need for a substitutionary sacrifice.
 - The Lord keeps his hand on Israel to accomplish his purpose...
 - For example, when we come to **Isaiah 7**, we see that Judah, the southern kingdom of what was previously the country of Israel is in a battle with Israel (northern kingdom) and the nation Aram.
 - Things are falling apart for Judah.
 - God seeks to comfort Ahaz, the ruler of Judah that God is still in control...
 - **Isaiah 7:10-12** | *Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.” But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.”* (CSB)
 - **Isaiah 7:13-14** | *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? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.* (CSB)
 - Then God promises that the promise will soon be fulfilled...
 - **Isaiah 9:6** | *For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.* (CSB)
 - Because the Jews continue to rebel against his law, he allows the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem.
 - The people are exiled to Babylon (modern day Iraq).
 - It looks, again, like Israel is lost to history and the Jews are no more.
 - But then Ezra and Nehemiah bring the people back to restore the people in the land.
 - Then the Greeks and then the Romans ruled that part of the world.
 - Under Roman rule, the Jews were allowed to practice their faith.
 - The Romans renovated and expanded the temple complex.
 - The Jews were allowed to conduct sacrifices in the temple...
 - *This is such an unexpected quirk of history!*
 - Then the Pax Romana...
 - 200 plus years of peace throughout that part of the world from 27 BC to AD 180.
 - Roads and shipping lanes were plentiful and safe.
 - There was a common language: Koine Greek.
 - Therefore, news and teaching could spread quickly and accurately...
 - The world had never known such peace, stability, and had such opportunities for travel and communication.

- Then it was finally time...
 - **Matthew 1:20** | *But 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. (CSB)*
 - **Matthew 1:21** | *She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (CSB)*
- And the promise to Abraham was fulfilled...
 - **Genesis 22:18a** | *And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring... (CSB)*
- And now, through Jesus, we see how Abraham’s faith (and our faith) can be credited as righteousness.
 - **2 Corinthians 5:21** | *He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (CSB)*
- And that brings us back to **Galatians 3:14a**...
 - **Galatians 3:14a** | *The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus... (CSB)*
 - And that is Christmas!

What Lessons do we Learn from the Journey from Abraham to the Incarnation?

I. God has a plan and keeps his promises.

- **Psalms 119:90a** | *Your faithfulness is for all generations... (CSB)*

II. Our God exchanges faith for righteousness.

- **Hebrews 11:6** | *Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (CSB)*

Conclusion

- Will you celebrate and respond to the Lord today?
- Come Thou Long Expected Jesus...

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
 Born to set Thy people free;
 From our fears and sins release us,
 Let us find our rest in Thee.
 Israel's strength and consolation,
 Hope of all the earth Thou art;
 Dear desire of every nation,
 Joy of every longing heart.
 Born Thy people to deliver,
 Born a child and yet a King,
 Born to reign in us forever,
 Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
 By Thine own eternal Spirit
 Rule in all our hearts alone;
 By Thine all sufficient merit,
 Raise us to Thy glorious throne.
 By Thine all sufficient merit,
 Raise us to Thy glorious throne*

Discussion Guide

Connect

- What's the best movie sequel you have seen?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Romans 4:1-5.
 - The passage tells us that Abraham was not justified by works. What does that mean? Why would "justified by works" give Abraham something he could have boasted about?
 - This passage quotes Genesis 15:6 when it says Abraham believed and it was credited to him for righteousness. What does that mean? How does a person obtain righteousness (a right standing with God)?
- Read Romans 4:13-16.
 - What is the role of the law (keeping the law) in obtaining righteousness?
 - What is the guarantee that Paul speaks of in Romans 4:16?
 - What does it mean that Abraham is the father of us all? In what way is this true?
- Read Genesis 21:12-18.
 - What religious movement was established (directly or indirectly) through the events of these verses?
 - What does teach us today about the interconnectivity of history?
- Read Genesis 22:2, 10-18.
 - How does God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son point forward to Christ's death on the cross?
 - In Genesis 22:12, God stops Abraham's sacrifice. What was the reason God gave? What is the connection between fearing God and having faith in God?
 - What does the substitute sacrifice found in verse 13 and the name Abraham gave to that place say about how we are saved?
- Read Galatians 3:14.
 - What was the "blessing of Abraham?"
 - What does it mean that the blessing would come to the Gentiles?

Respond

- How are the Old and New Testaments connected? How does the promise given to Abraham find fulfillment in the birth of Christ?
- What does it teach us about the character of God when we learn how he had this grand plan that he worked to unfold over thousands of years all to make it possible that we might be right with him?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Why did God send Jesus when he did? Why not during after the people returned to the promised land under Joshua? Why not during the reign of David? Why not wait until after the Dark Ages?

Message Ideas

- The history of faith...
 - **Matthew 1:1**
 - Son of David...
 - But what about the son of Abraham?
- Jesus is the final revelation...
 - To many today, the Old Testament with its prophets, laws, sacrifices, and the New Testament with Jesus, the church, and justification by faith seem like two different religions.
 - Connected because the New Testament in makes a few references to the Old Testament...
 - And connected because in some vague way that we can't really put our finger on, the Old Testament anticipates the New Testament...
 - Some of this is because of the OT/NT dichotomy...

- Two parts...
- That is true in a sense...
- But that takes away from the unity of the Scripture narrative...
- The NT (and really the birth of Christ) is the culmination of the OT.
 - The OT is 4,000 years of history about what God was working on...
 - The NT is 50-60 years of the culmination of the OT.
- The NT is the...
 - Period on the end of the sentence...
 - The food at the end of the all-day of preparing/cooking...
 - The open house and the end of a year of construction...
 - Graduation at the end of the four years of college classes...

Notes

- From the Father of the Faith to the Son of God...

References

- **Romans 4:16** | *This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham’s faith. He is the father of us all.* (CSB)
- **Galatians 3:8-9** | *Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed through you. Consequently those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith.* (CSB)
- **Galatians 3:14** | *The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promised Spirit through faith.* (CSB)

Thoughts

- What does ‘blessed’ mean?
 - Sometimes it means ‘rich.’
 - Sometimes it means things are going well.
 - “Bless his heart”
 - An excuse to say whatever you want...
 - Survive the sneeze...
 - Have a blessed day...