

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,
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MATTHEW 1:22-23

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

WHEN HOPE WAS BORN #1 **WHAT PROPHECY TEACHES US ABOUT HOPE**

Several years ago self-made millionaire Eugene Lang did something extraordinary that forever changed the lives of a class of sixth-grade students in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? As a Caucasian male, he wondered how he could get these predominantly African American and Puerto Rican children, who were attending the same school he graduated from, to even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. “Stay in school,” he admonished, “and I’ll help pay the college tuition for every one of you.”

At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time in their academic careers they had hope. Said one student, “I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling.” Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.¹

Hope is a powerful motivator. I watched the students from that class interviewed on Good Morning America when they graduated from high school. Those students genuinely loved Mr. Lang. They couldn’t say enough about the hope that he provided. I’ll never forget watching their sixth-grade teacher. She had stayed in touch with her special class, and there was such pride in her eyes as she saw a group of students doing what no other class at her school had done – graduate in such large numbers, prepared for college.

I wonder what it is that you are hoping for this Christmas season. Some of you may wish that you had a child or were a child in that sixth-grade class. A college scholarship would be nice. Others of you are hoping for a stronger marriage and family life or a better work situation. Some are hoping for even the prospect of employment.

I want to suggest to you as we begin this Christmas series that when Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem, some 2,000 years ago, true hope came into this world. We desperately needed the hope that only the Savior can bring, and that hope was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm>

As early as Genesis chapter three, the Old Testament spoke about a coming Messiah, Who would rescue His people from their sin. Every Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, which is truly remarkable when you consider that there were hundreds of Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.

Some people I know tell me that they don't like to read the Old Testament. "It's boring!" they'll tell me. Or, "I don't understand what it's talking about." Sometimes I'll hear, "It just seems so irrelevant to my daily life."

The Bible isn't irrelevant. Sometimes, we just need to take time to scratch beneath the surface to see what the Bible is teaching us. One of the trickiest areas to understand in the Bible is Bible prophecy. Many of us immediately think about prophecies concerning the end of the world when we think about prophecy. Scripture has plenty to say about the End Times, but these aren't the only places in the Bible where prophecy concerns itself. Old Testament prophecies often times had to do with upcoming punishment or the exulting of nations. Sometimes prophecy had to do with individuals or groups of individuals. And, very often, prophecy had to do with the Messiah.

I like what the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministries writes about this topic:

"Fulfilled prophecy is strong evidence that God is the author of the Bible, because when you look at the mathematical odds of prophecy being fulfilled, you quickly see a design, a purpose, and a guiding hand behind the Bible. If just one prophecy failed, then we would know that God is not the true God, because the Creator of all things, which includes time, would not be wrong about predicting the future. Deut. 18:22 says, 'If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously' (NIV). Isaiah 46:9-10 says, 'Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'

One approach to use with an unbeliever is to turn to Psalm 22 and read verses 12-18. This is a detailed description of the crucifixion -- 1000 years before Jesus was born. After you read the section ask him what it was about. He'll say, 'The crucifixion of Jesus.' Then respond with something like, 'You're right. This is about the crucifixion. But it was written 1000 years before Jesus was born. And on top of that, crucifixion hadn't even been invented yet. How do you think something like this could happen?' After a brief discussion, you could show him (or her) a few other prophecies like where Jesus' birthplace was prophesied (Micah 5:2), that He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), that His side would be pierced (Zech. 12:10), etc."²

I love that unique approach to sharing your faith. My Grandpa used to talk about the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled when sharing his faith with people. I've told you before

² <http://carm.org/prophecy-bible-and-jesus>

that my Grandpa Ray was quite the evangelist. I remember many times sitting down in a restaurant with my Grandpa and knowing that before the meal was over he would say something to our server about his faith. He liked to go over and over again to the same restaurants, stores, barber shops, etc. so that he could get to know the people in those places. His true hope was that he would spend eternity with those who were in his sphere of influence.

I'll never forget when my Grandpa shared his excitement over his Jewish server coming to faith in Jesus Christ. He had been sharing Christ with this person for a number of years when it came to Grandpa that it would be a good idea to talk about the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Taking a napkin, my Grandpa ripped it into many different pieces. He then asked his server, "Do you think you could rip that napkin up the exact same way that I did?"

"No," the server responded.

"And what do you think the possibilities are that one person could fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah and not be Him?" my Grandpa asked.

For whatever reason, my Grandpa's napkin illustration helped drive the point home. Jesus was the Messiah. The server's defenses went down that day and the server trusted Jesus as her Savior.

Let me share with you today, just eight of the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the birth of Christ, when hope was born.

1. The Birth Foretold

The very first mention of a coming Messiah was in Genesis 3:15. A casual reading of this passage might not make this immediately apparent. But, God is pronouncing judgment upon the serpent, who is Satan, in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15 we read, "15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

I want to read you a lengthy quote from John MacArthur here, because this is such an important prophecy, and we need to understand it accurately. "Here's what Satan is thinking: I failed to a degree in heaven and, yet, I succeeded; I was thrown out of heaven, but I took a third of the angels with me, so I have my kingdom. He came to earth "cast down," as Revelation 12 says, and he goes into the garden. And he's still trying to take over for God, and he's trying to be a sovereign in his own right. And he is successful in capturing Adam and Eve. He's successful. And at this point, Satan may well have felt that he had made a massive dent in the divine purpose. That God had gone to all of this wondrous effort to create a universe, and to place man and woman in His universe on the earth. And it was so magnificent, and it was a paradise like the original paradise of heaven before the angels were thrown out. And Satan succeeded in wrecking paradise. He succeeded in gaining the devotion of Adam and Eve. And that is

really, essentially what happened. Eve believed Satan instead of God, and so did Adam. Adam wasn't deceived specifically by Satan. But he could see Eve, and she wasn't dead. And Satan had said you can eat of this tree and you'll be like God. And God doesn't like the people to be like Him, because He doesn't like the competition. He's really trying to hold something back; He's trying to prevent you from getting something wonderful and good. He's trying to hold back the opportunity you have to be like Him. And I know He said that in the day you eat, you're going to die, but you won't die. And Eve ate, and she didn't die. And Adam saw, wow, this could be great; she didn't die; she's still alive; I'll do this; I'll be like God, et cetera, et cetera. They believed Satan.

And so Satan now realizes that he has engaged himself with man and become a kind of sovereign. Now Adam and Eve believe him, instead of believing God. And it's very likely that Satan may well at this point have thought: I have won the full devotion of humanity. I have won the "mother of all living," as Eve is called down in Verse 20. I have won Adam to my side; he doubts God, he questions God, and he believes me. And now Satan may be saying: I have captured humanity, and now they will aid me in my effort to overthrow the almighty God. I now have a third of the angels, and I now have all of the humans. There aren't many, just two, but it's a start. Satan may well have thought that he had become the sovereign of man, that he had become the sovereign over the race, and now he was in charge of them. And if Adam and Eve, who were perfect, fell so easily, what would imperfect sinners do before the onslaught of his temptation? You can see him beginning to lick his chops and rub his hands and think to himself: I now have not only demons, but I have men to fight my battle against almighty God. And that's why God says what He says.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." Oops. Satan, you are absolutely wrong. "Enmity" means conflict; "enmity" means hostility; "enmity" means hatred. And God says to him: Don't think too fast about your successes, because I curse you, Satan, by making you the enemy of the woman; and the enemy of the seed of the woman. And One will come who will crush your head. That's a very direct answer to the assumption that must have been in the mind of Satan that he had just acquired some great power, pulled off a great coup, and now had total control over the man and the woman. And immediately, God says, "I will put enmity" -- conflict, hostility, hatred. You will not rule easily; you will not rule successfully; you will not have complete control. I will bring humanity into conflict with you.

Now, listen: There was already enmity in the world. But the enmity was between man and whom? And God. There wasn't at this point any enmity between man and Satan. Adam and Eve had followed Satan. There was no hostility there. There was no enmity there. And you don't find them running around the garden after they sinned, hiding from the serpent. Who are they hiding from? God. There was enmity there. Satan could see that or sense that, know that. And that's why it's very likely that Satan concludes, ah, I got 'em. Now there -- now there is hostility between them and God, and now there is conflict between them and God; there is a desire to run from God, to hide from God,

because they don't see God -- listen -- as their friend anymore. They see God as their enemy, and they see me as their friend. So Satan's going to conclude: This couldn't be any better.

God immediately steps in and says: Guess again. The enmity I'm going to put between you and that woman. You're not going to have Eve. And you're not going to have sovereignty over her seed. In fact, one of them is going to come and crush your head."³

And we know that that one was Jesus Christ. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled in Jesus and many New Testament verses speak to that. Let me read you just passage. It's found in Galatians 4:4-5 and is Paul writing to the church at Galatia about the hope that came into the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

2. Messiah would come through Abraham's Lineage

In Genesis 12:2-3, we have the recording of the Abrahamic Covenant, in which God tells Abram that He will make him into a great nation.

Listen to the prophecy. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

That prophecy is fulfilled in Acts 3:25-26.

25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

3. Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah

In Genesis 49:10, it was prophesied that, "10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."

Judah was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, and eventually would be one of the two tribes that would make up the nation of Judah, where Jerusalem served as capitol city. It was through Judah's line that a pagan woman named Ruth would eventually marry into. Ruth would marry Boaz who would become the grandfather of Jesse, the father of David, the great King of Israel, whose line Jesus was a part of.

³ <http://www.ondctrine.com/2mac0156.htm>

This prophecy is fulfilled in Luke 2:4.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

4. Messiah would come from Jesse's descendents

In Isaiah 11:10 we read, "10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious."

We see the fulfillment in Luke 2:4-5.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

5. Messiah would be born of a virgin

The amazing prophecy is found in Isaiah 7:14.

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

For years liberal theologians have tried to soften the text in Isaiah 7:14. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible, a very liberal translation of Scripture, even mistranslated the Hebrew word, "almah" in Isaiah 7:14 to say that a "young woman" would be with child, instead of "a virgin."

In 1961, fifty years ago, Redbook magazine polled theological students from 8 different seminaries. One of the questions that was put to the seminary students was, "Do you believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?" 56% of the ministerial students said "No. We don't believe in the virgin birth."⁴ What a sobering statistic. To deny the virgin birth is to deny Scripture and lessen the miracle of the incarnation. It is sobering to think that many of those pastors have been filling the pulpits of America's churches for the past five decades.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 1:21-23.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

⁴ http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=64152

6. Messiah would be called Immanuel

Isaiah 7:14 doesn't just tell us that Messiah would be born of a virgin. It also tells us his name will be called Immanuel.

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

And again, Matthew 1:21-23 records the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

Okay, quickly now. Two more prophecies fulfilled in the birth of Christ.

7. Bethlehem would be the place of Messiah's Birth

In Micah 5:2 we read:

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Luke 2:4-7 records the fulfillment of that prophecy.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And finally, a very sad prophecy fulfilled at the birth of Christ.

8. The Killing of all male children under the age of two in the vicinity of Bethlehem.

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:15

15 This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."

There will be some, who even though they desperately need the hope that is to be found in Jesus, and Him alone who will reject the plain truth. The Bible includes thousands of prophecies. Many of those prophecies speak about our future.

Jesus said the following to His disciples in John 14:1-3 - 1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

Have you trusted in the God who fulfills prophecy? There have been nations who have tried to eliminate any reference to God. Among them is the former Soviet Union.

"As Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband."⁶

May you know the hope that Jesus brings, this Christmas season! Not sure about Christ and His promises? You can study them. Every one of them will point you to a Savior who is who He and the prophets claimed that He is. He is worthy of your trust, your worship and your life!

⁶ Gary Thomas, *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26.