

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

I Wonder

PART

4

TITLE

I Wonder, How Will I Be Remembered?

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18-25



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Well, it is great to see you, Providence family, and if you're new here with us, a guest, welcome. We are thrilled that you have joined us and I hope this time will be really encouraging to you. If you don't know Christ as your savior and you're here perhaps just to learn who he is and what he did and what he said, I pray that this will be one more installment of truth that perhaps God is working in your life, that you too would come to believe and trust in Jesus Christ. If you were here last week, you know that you are blessed. I know that I was blessed and I want to just say thank you. I think it's so fitting for us to pause. As a people, we just keep rolling sometimes to the next thing, because there's always the next thing and yet God did an amazing thing last weekend, to be honest.

Many of you, I know, have been praying for people, you've been blessing people, you've been inviting people. There were over a thousand visitors last week that God used you to invite and to bring, and so I want to say thank you. And then for everybody who participated in serving, whether it was kids, whether it was all hospitality, the front doors or the food, then as you walked in, whether it was ushering, whether it was video room, I know there was a few people who spent literally the entire weekend in a back room and they didn't get to see it, because they were serving us, those who served with sound and audio and then obviously everybody on the stage who sang and played so beautifully, and it was just a remarkable thing. I just want you to know I'm so grateful for you. I'm thankful most of all that it's true, that the story of Christmas is true, that he did come, he did come to rescue us and he was successful.

He's the accomplished one and he's the hero and there's no rival. He's the only one. And so let's pray to him now, okay? Father in heaven, as we come to your word, we pray that you would do a work in our lives now as you did in many lives last weekend and even throughout the week. I pray, Father, for those in the room who've never trusted Christ, that this would be the day when they would see their need personally for a savior and that they would trust Jesus Christ. And for those of us who have, I pray that this would be a day where you would inspire us, in particular with your sympathy towards us, your gifts that you sent to us, but also the reward and honor that you give to those who believe you, it's your word, and who live it out. And so I pray that you would be gracious to everybody who was here last weekend who heard the gospel of Jesus, so they can be forgiven of their sin, and pray that you would bring that to fruition, that people would trust Jesus.

And we pray now that as we open your word, that you would open up our eyes, that you would open up our hearts, that as we read it, God, would you help us first, not to ask the question if we like it, but do we believe it? We know it's your word. I know it's your word. And so by your spirit, would you take this word and would you just pierce through all the distractions and you use a weak person and myself and help us to come away with this time, from this time, with courage, with perspective, with hope and with peace in our hearts. We pray, in Jesus name. Amen. If you have a ... I love the Bible. I hope you love the Bible too. If you have one, if you want to turn with me to Matthew chapter one. If you don't have a Bible, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you and we would love for you to take one home as a gift if you don't have one.

We're in a series that's called, I Wonder. The fact is is that we're all amazingly different. We're all unique. He created every single one of us so different and yet we all wonder about similar things. We wonder if we're making good decisions and how those decisions are going to play out. We wonder about our kids and our future and our past. We wonder about our sin and how much impact it's going to have on the rest of our life. We wonder what our future holds. Frankly, the older you get, the more you wonder how long am I going to be here? How long do I have left? When am I going to die? And what's that going to be like? And there's something in each and every one of us, because we know we're not going to be here forever. That there is a point to where we stop building our legacy.

We wonder how we're going to be remembered, because one day we will not be here to add any more contribution to the perception that other people have of us. And so it leads many of us, if not all of us, to wonder, how will we be remembered? I remember years ago, when I was in high school, I ran track and played football and basketball and there was a great big board and it had all the best times for all the events in school history for track and I just assumed, as a freshman, that if I can get on that board, I'm going to be remembered when I get out of this place. And so by the time I was a senior, my name was on that board four times. I was remembered for four years and then my name was taken off on all four times and now I'm nobody, right?

A few weeks ago I was at a funeral and I heard a brother and a sister and they were speaking with such grace and kindness about their father, who had died, and the life that he lived and how that legacy was one that blessed them and their children and so many other people for decades. It's interesting, both of those experiences, they're sobering to me. How quick a legacy can be forgotten and how much I hope to live my life in such a way that my sons would be able to stand up one day and with integrity in their heart be able to speak words of kindness about my life. Every one of us, we want to be remembered. We want our big moments remembered. Perhaps we want our bad moments forgotten, but we also want our misunderstood moments clarified. That's why when something happens and somebody assumes something of us that's not true, we feel obligated to try to clarify, because that may be the last thing they know about us, and we don't want something that's a wrong perception to be the last thing they know about us and so it causes us to feel unsettled.

That's true of us, just imagine what it was like to be Joseph. Look at these words, starting in verse 18, it says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother, Mary, had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit, and her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet, 'Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.' When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son and he called his name Jesus."

Here's the question that I want to seek to answer with our verses this morning, what does God do to create a noble legacy in our life when we are imperfect? When we're weak and unpredictable and sinful, how does God create a legacy in our life that will be remembered in positive terms? In particular, when we've spent so much of our past doing things that are ignoble? I want to show you three things here, hopefully it'll help answer that question. The first thing that God does is this, is he understands. God stands the crisis of guilt in our world. Now I realize that him understanding something may not necessarily do something to us, but I want to show you that that's not the case, that his understanding creates within his heart a sympathy that leads him to move and act within our life. It also leads him to explain the things that he understands because he loves us so much. And so God understands the crisis of guilt in our world.

Let me try to show you this reality in our verses, okay? It says that Mary and Joseph, that they were betrothed. Now we don't do that in our culture. We do engagement. This is sort of like a legal engagement. It was so legal that you had to be actually divorced to no longer be betrothed, and yet when you were betrothed, it was a little less than being married, in that you didn't live in the same place. There was a waiting period basically. And you didn't live together, you didn't sleep together, you didn't make babies together, and you didn't practice making babies together. Betrothal. And during this time, and Joseph knows that he's not been practicing, she gets pregnant. Now, the text does not tell us what went through his mind, but the text does tell us his resolved conclusion of what he needed to do. And when you understand the news that he received and then you understand his decision and you factor in human reality, things that you and I would be processing and thinking, I think we can understand just a couple of things that likely went through Joseph's mind that led him to the conclusion that I need a divorce. I think the first thing was his perception of Mary, "The love of my life has been unfaithful to me."

"You see, she wasn't with anybody else and being conceived as a Virgin isn't typical on the earth, and I know that it wasn't me and so it must have been somebody else." You see, Joseph did like we do, and that is that he put Mary, I believe, in the courtroom of his own pain, his own conscious, his own heart, and he found her guilty. I can imagine that maybe not physically, but his own thought process was, "You were unfaithful to me." I think there was one other factor though, and that is that he was a just man, and a just man, just like any other man or woman, cares about what other people think. I believe not only did he conclude in his heart that she had been unfaithful, but I also believe that he concluded that, "My community is going to condemn me." That just as he put her in his courtroom and found her guilty, like this other picture you're going to see here, I believe that he believed that the community was going to put him in their courtroom and they were going to find him guilty even though he wasn't.

Now, I want you to consider the fact that his pain was as intense as his misunderstanding. Just because he didn't have the reality, he wasn't seeing things as they really were. He was confused about how she got pregnant. There was waves of pain that likely cascaded through his heart. He knew what people would have thought, "Oh, she's pregnant? She's pregnant? Oh my goodness. There's not another guy? Joseph."

And you have to understand that these whispers surrounded Joseph for the rest of his life. You see, decades later, when Jesus was a man, he's walking around and the Pharisees talking to him, and they're getting more frustrated with him and he's explaining to them that their behavior is actually a cause because of their unbelief and they actually are following their father Satan, and suddenly they get so irritated that they took what they had heard about Jesus and said, John 8:41, "We were not born of sexual immorality." The implication there is that, "We weren't, but we know you were." We know that you were conceived before your parents were married and so for a just man, when it says that Joseph was just, it means he was noble, he was honorable, he was respectable and respected, you have to understand that this would've been a stinger, just as it would be for you and for me.

And so God, in his understanding of the situation, he sends an angel and the angel comes and says, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." What a thing to say, "Don't be afraid. I know you're afraid. I know your culture. I know the situation. I know there's a canopy of guilt that surrounds you. I know you've done nothing wrong. I know you have a fear, and I'm telling you, you don't have to be afraid." Isn't it amazing, that Matthew was inspired by God himself, and before this event took place, God looked down and said, "[inaudible 00:14:45], there's Joseph. What's a characteristic that we should write within the Holy scriptures that everyone would know about this man before this event?" And they said, "Just." He's an honorable person, he's an honest person, he's a respectable person. And so here he is. He's told by an angel, "Do not fear."

I would hope what you can see in that moment is there's sympathy wrapped up in the heart of God towards what Joseph is going through. Now, here's the good question that you should answer, if they did no wrong, if he did no wrong, then why did he feel any pressure whatsoever? Why did he feel any fear whatsoever? Let me ask you this question, when you are falsely accused, when there's a situation you've done absolutely nothing wrong, you know that your actions are full of integrity and honesty. You may not even have been there, why does pressure rise in your heart? Why does fear rise in your heart when other people have the wrong perspective of you? Well, to get an answer to that question, you have to understand what God understands, and fortunately, for us, he wrote it down. You see, the Bible begins with special words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created Adam and Eve in his image and there was no sin and when there was no sin, there was no shame." No shame, no guilt. No guilt, no pointing. No pointing, no judging. They were uncovered, totally vulnerable, and unashamed, and then they chose to sin against God and when they sinned against God, suddenly shamed, swept over their heart, and they felt like they needed to hide.

For the first time in their life, they felt like they had to hide. For the first time in their life, when God walked through the garden, they felt like they had to hide, and so they hid in the bushes, and we have been pointing and hiding ever since. That's why when you're driving down the road and you're even going the speed limit, but you're not really paying attention and you see a police officer, he's not even upset, there's no lights. He just happens to be there. He may not even be in the car. She may not even be in the car. It may just be a police car, and you can feel adrenaline rush through. Why is that? It's because there is a canopy of guilt that we live within.

Years ago, when I was in college, I stocked groceries in Woods Supermarket, and one time, at the end of my shift, which was in the morning, I worked through the night, and over the loudspeaker I hear, “Brian Frost, would you please come to Mr. Wood’s office?” I’m like, “Oh no. What did I do?” And literally, I walk in there, I’m thinking I have not stole anything, I’ve not cut time. I’m defending myself immediately. And you know what happened when I get up there? I get up there and a few days before, a lady fell in the parking lot and he wanted to commend me for my response and yet the entire experience was one of dread and fear and pressure. Do you know why? It’s because even in that moment where there was no guilt of what I’d done then, I know guilt. I’ve contributed to universal guilt. And the Bible says that once we all became guilty, that there is this cloud, there’s this canopy, that literally surrounds all of our interactions with each other. And it causes us to feel pressure and fear. That’s why Proverbs 28:1 says, “The wicked flee when no one pursues.” When there’s wickedness, when there’s strains of wickedness within our own heart, nobody’s chasing and yet we feel like everyone’s chasing.

Guilt forms this canopy, which is why we often live our life feeling like we’re on trial. Which is why we have to be so defensive or feel like we have to be defensive. That everything we do in a day is adding one side or another of if we’re going to be found guilty or innocent in the court of public opinion. But this was not his plan. We can’t even imagine life without this, and yet this was not his plan at all. This is one thing that I cannot explain about heaven, what it would feel like for us not to have that canopy over our heads, but I can simply tell you, it’s going to be true. We will walk through heaven and we will not feel like anybody is accusing us. Nobody will second guess our decisions. Nobody will question our motives. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the freedom? Now, before we talk about the solution to this, let me just encourage us as the people of God who have a Bible in our hands, let’s be wise and let’s consider the burden that everybody carries.

We should understand, as the people of God, this is the reality of the world. And if we can understand this, then we can understand things about other people. We can understand, first of all, that everybody is guilty before God. We all have sinned and fallen short of his glory. We are guilty. Knowing that, we can also understand that everybody, to some degree feels like a defendant. If you feel like you’re a defendant, you feel anxious and you feel tired. Think, if every single day of your life, you had to go to an actual, physical courthouse where you were the defendant and you had to go there every single day. You’d feel anxious, wouldn’t you? It’d be exhausting, and yet this is the reality. This is why everybody’s so anxious in the world. This is why we’re all so tired. Everybody’s guilty, everybody feels like a defendant, and everybody cares how they’ll be remembered.

And if we will remember that this canopy exists over all humanity, don’t you understand that it will make us wise in our interactions with others. It’ll help us to be careful in how we communicate to others, knowing that if I come in and I talk about something, they may mistaken that I’m accusing their motives. It’ll help you think about the best way to communicate. It’ll reduce strife in your relationships with others, if you can compensate for this. If you can be kind and wise, it’ll help you to be slow to judge what you cannot see in other people.

You ever thought about everybody who naturally assumed Joseph was the father was wrong, and he heard the whispers his whole life.

And by considering this burden, one other thing will take place and that is that we will become people who are quick to talk about Jesus. And the reason is because the second point is true, and that is that God sent Christ to remove condemnation from our heart. He understands this crisis of guilt that surrounds us, but then the second thing he did was he sent his son into the world to make things right, and to remove that canopy and that condemnation from our own heart. [inaudible 00:22:40], it says that that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. You see the Virgin birth, for some of us in the room, you think, is that really a big deal? Let me tell you something, it's a big deal. It is a really big deal, and you know why? Because the savior, who can stand between God and man, has to be fully God and fully man.

If Jesus was the actual, physical son of Mary and Joseph, he's a man who can stand only before man. But he's the son of God, the Holy Spirit, God and Mary. He did a miracle. Jesus was conceived within the womb, as a miracle. He grew up so that he could be a mediator between God and man, which is why his name is Jesus. Jesus means savior. He was named that because he was going to save us, his people, from our sins. This is why he came. Romans chapter three says it this way, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What that means is that if you feel before God, it's because you are, and so am I. We're guilty before God. He's Holy and we're not. We're guilty. That would be bad news if it ended there, but it doesn't end there. He keeps going and he says, "And are justified by his grace as a gift." That we're justified means to be declared innocent. How can God, who is just and holy, look upon sinful people and declare them innocent? Like we call that a bad judge, right? If you go down here and there's a judge who knows I'm guilty and yet declares me innocent, we're supposed to look at that and say, "Hey, what gives? That's not right."

And yet this is precisely what he did. And so he had to do something before he declared us innocent, and what did he do? He goes on and he says, "How did he do it? Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth forward as a propitiation by his blood." You know what that means, that word? That's a big word. It means substitute.

That God almighty sent Jesus Christ, the perfect son of God, to this earth, and he recognized that there was a price that we could not pay that need to be redeemed, and he paid that price with the blood of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that when we trust Jesus Christ, not only does he remove our sin, but he gives us the righteousness of his son, and therefore a just God can look at people who now have their sins removed and who now possess the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ and he can say what? You're innocent. This is the gospel. This is the hope that we have and this is the only hope you have of getting out of the courtroom of life. Don't you see? Don't you see that trusting Jesus Christ is the only door out of the courtroom of public opinion? It is the only door out of a life full of exhaustion and anxiety. It is the only door. It is Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Faith in Jesus is the only exit.

And some of you say, “But you don’t understand how sinful I am.” Oh, I know, you’re a mess, and so am I. When we say that, what we’re not thinking about, though, is how powerful is the blood of Jesus Christ? And so embedded in our own text here is an amazing story.

You can’t see it, you can only see a portion of it, but there’s a guy in the Old Testament, his name is Ahaz, and Ahaz is a moral mess. Ahaz is also the King of Israel, so he had authority in being a moral mess. He had resources and affluence in order to fund his moral mess. And that’s exactly what he did. He built a factory that would build idols, wood and stone idols. He stationed them all over his entire nation. Some of those idols, those false idols, they had to be worshiped in a particularly savage way, and that was you would take your infant son or daughter and you would burn your children as a sacrifice unto death. And the King of Israel did just that. We don’t know how many, it just says sons, plural. He locked the temple doors for being anyone to worship God. This was simply a sampling of Ahaz’s life. And yet God had such mercy on him. One day, two armies, they were coming to invade the nation of Israel and there he was, terrified. He knew that he didn’t have the army. He knew that he would likely be killed. And so God, in all of his grace and his mercy, he sends a prophet named Isaiah. Isaiah comes to Ahaz and he goes, “I have good news, God is going to protect his people.”

And God knew that he needed a sign in order to give him hope. And so he says, “I’ll tell you what, ask me for a son. Go ahead and ask me for something as just proof that God is going to protect and these two armies are not going to come.” Well Ahaz didn’t want to play his game. He says, “No, I’m not going to ask for a sign.” He says, “Well, I’ll tell you what, God’s going to give you a sign anyway. Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Emmanuel.” Isaiah 7:14, don’t you see that Ahaz was one of the worst characters in biblical history and he was the very first to hear the promise of a Virgin birth. Don’t you see this as hope for you and me? You see, whether your moral mess is like Ahaz, or whether your moral mess is like Joseph. Here we have an unjust man and we have a just man, and yet they both need a savior. You’re somewhere in that spectrum, between nobility and the way you live your life, and yet there’s still guilt that surrounds your heart.

Whether you’re a moral mess and everybody knows it, and you know it, and you need something, a solution, in order to save you from the guilt, I want you to know that it’s only Jesus. And so I encourage you this morning to trust Christ and believe his declaration of innocence. You can stop hiding this morning behind see-through bushes. You can trust Jesus Christ by admitting that you cannot save yourself, by placing your faith in Jesus Christ, and by confessing him Lord of your life. I urge you to do that right now, but here’s the amazing thing, some of us in the room, we’ve already trusted Christ, we’ve already been declared innocent, and yet we live as though we have never heard that as true. And I urge you this morning to believe God’s declaration of innocence over your life.

You see, Romans 8:1 says, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Now, I showed you these same images a few months ago, but I didn’t show them in the context that we see here. I want to show to you again. Every single one of us before Christ, we’re like this first bucket, and that is sinfulness. It represents sin. There’s filth, there’s dirt, there’s stuff in our past and in our present. There’s things that we’re doing that cause us to be morally compromised. Well, the gospel says that Jesus Christ came to this earth, he died on a cross, he rose from the dead, and those who believe in him will be forgiven, and so this is the bucket that represents forgiveness. He takes all of that dirt and he takes it all away. But you know the Bible doesn’t say we’re only supposed to be forgiven.

It says that we must be perfect, we must be righteous in order to get to heaven. You can’t have zero in the moral bank to get to heaven. He doesn’t just take a negative deficit and bring us back to \$0. What does he do? He justifies us. And this is the picture of being justified. Whereby his righteousness, he fills us to the top. And don’t you see that Satan wants to continue to accuse you and cause you to live under the strain and anxiety of guilt. And how he does it is this, when you live in sin and you look like that first bucket, he says, “Don’t you see how nasty you are?” And sometimes, when we’re only banking on forgiveness, Satan can come, and he says, “Don’t you see how empty you are? Oh, you’re not a mess anymore, but you don’t have what it takes.”

But don’t you see what Jesus has done? Because he died and rose again, he’s literally filled our tank with righteousness overflowing. I urge you to believe it’s true. How do you know if you’re believing it’s true? It’s the second half of Proverbs 28. 28:1 says, “The wicked flee when no one pursues.” Remember? But notice the other half, it says, “But the righteous are bold as a lion.” You know what that means? That doesn’t mean that when we know Jesus Christ, we get to growl at people and chew at people and hunt people. What does it mean? It means when a mouse of a man or a woman or an evil being would come and make accusation to us, a lion simply looks at the mouse and says, “Get out of here. There’s confidence in the way that we live our life, because we’re no longer in court.

Well, there’s one other thing I want you to see, and it’s so true of so many of you in the room and that is that God honors obedience that springs from faith, and this is what happens when you hear the word of God. You see, one simple night of hearing a word from God crumbled Joseph’s resolve to divorce Mary. I hope this has happened in your life. Some of you I know it has. You’ve told me it has, where you’re reading the scriptures and for whatever reason, on a particular day, God speaks to you and you have such resolve of what you know you’re supposed to do. You believe what’s there and it causes you to step out in faith and obedience and it changes the course of your life. He gives you courage. This is what happens when you read the scriptures, it gives you clarity for life, but it also gives you courage to go about living your life in a way that’s going to honor the Lord.

And in one given night from hearing God's word, Joseph's view of marriage changed, his view of Jesus changed, his view of his own special role in life, his purpose in life, it all changed when he heard and responded to the word of God. It says that Joseph rose and he did as the angel commanded and married Mary. Don't you see all the things that he let go of? He let go of fear and he let go of his plans. He let go of his reputation. He let go of the voices of the villagers. And with each letting go, the steel of his own soul became stronger and stronger. They would serve as the shield for Mary and Joseph, and getting away from the harm of Herod and moving to Egypt and moving back to Nazareth and standing near and around and with Mary in a socially compromising, embarrassing situation. Don't you see, that as a result of faith-inspired obedience today, 2000 years later, we remember Joseph as a man of honor. God does not always give you an honorable legacy while you're alive. He doesn't.

There's a good chance that Joseph died when everyone else still thought that he was not as just, he was not as noble as everyone was made to believe. But here we are today. God has secured a novel legacy for a normal man like Joseph, and he'll do the same thing in your life and mine. Let me encourage you to give yourself to hearing and believing God's word. Oh, I know some of you have. I look around this room and I see different people. Different people who, sometimes it's fascinating, it comes on the heels of failure. Some of you, you're in the middle right now of an absolute deep, moral pit. You open up the scriptures and it says you need to confess your sin to people you love and you go and do that, and you begin a new chain, a new legacy, that people will remember.

Some of you in this room, you've heard within the scriptures, you're supposed to serve in this way, you're supposed to be generous in this way, you're supposed to teach children, you're supposed to teach adults, you're supposed to care for people in this way, and as a result of what you've heard within the scriptures and God's placed upon your heart, your faith in it, it looks a whole lot like obedience. And it's creating a legacy of love and mercy and kindness and generosity that other people one day will remember. This is what God does. He sympathizes with our world and then he sends his savior into our world. And then for those who believe him, he takes our very life, he helps other people, and he secures a legacy, a legacy that we all want. And so I command you to the word of God and to believe in him.

Let's pray. Father, I ask that you would work in the lives of people right now who are considering trusting you. And I pray that you would work in the lives of people who have trusted Jesus as savior and yet live their life as though they've not been justified. I pray this morning that you would help us to release the fear of what other people think. I pray that you would help us as the people, people who have the scriptures, to be wise in the way that we interact with one another, sensitive to the reality of a world of guilt. And I pray, father, that you would build in our life a legacy that only you can, that would flow out of faith and love. And so now as we sing and give, we pray that you would be worshiped and we pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.



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