

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS 1: "THE PROMISED MESSIAH"

Praying in recent weeks has led me to suggest a new theme for FUMC for 2008. Following our successful effort to make and keep GODFIRST at FUMC in 2007, I believe we might benefit from a year long reminder that; "It's all about Jesus... Church is all about Jesus...life is all about Jesus...death is all about Jesus...living forever is all about Jesus. I'll begin this New Year with a short series intended to introduce us again to the essential elements of Jesus; his birth, his life, his death and resurrection, and his return. Over the next four weeks we'll discuss Jesus as: The Promised Messiah, The Unusual Teacher, The Transformational Savior, and The Returning Redeemer. My hope and fervent prayer is that we might come to see that we're all about Jesus. So let us begin with a look into God's Word:

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the Child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come." He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" Luke 4: 18-20

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with Matthew's genealogy, or Luke's charming rendition of Mary and Joseph's journey, or even John's Logos. No, the Story of Jesus began way back in the Old Testament.

Some would even point us to Gen. 3:15 *He will strike your head, and you will bruise his heel*; as the first prophecy of God, that Satan's role in the Garden of Eden would result in Jesus dealing the ultimate blow to Satan's head even while Satan continues to nip at his heels.

Other scholars might argue that there are anywhere from 300 to 1000 direct or indirect prophecies or allusions to Jesus found throughout the OT. Most scholars agree and point to 40 some prophecies that are undeniable in their reference to the Messiah as being fulfilled in Jesus. But why does any of this matter?

Do the prophecies of Jesus found in the OT and fulfilled in the NT serve only to distinguish us from Jews both ancient and contemporary? That hardly seems worthy, or necessary. Do the prophecies of Jesus found in the OT and fulfilled in the NT serve only to provide ancient connectors between the Testaments? That hardly seems a good enough reason to make such a big deal about these prophecies. Are these fulfilled prophecies mere fodder for theological debate, and intrigue for further discussion? Those too seem insufficient cause to make such a big deal as the Gospel writers and other NT authors make of this fact: Jesus was the Messiah, the fulfillment of OT prophecy. And further more...what does it matter to you and me, in 2008 that Jesus was somehow connected to the OT in these multiple mentions? Does it make a difference in your life...or mine, that Jesus; who appeared in Bethlehem, lived in Judea, and died on a cross outside Jerusalem; was touted as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the fulfillment of the OT? Yes it does. For at least these 3 reasons; Jesus fulfilling OT Prophecy:

1. VALIDATES THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Luke 24:44

For Jews, Gentiles, pagans, Christians, and unbelievers living then and now, the authority of God's Word is and always has been in question. Is this beloved Christian book just a smattered recording of Narnia niceties or is it something substantive, even life directing if not altering? Is the Bible just a random collection of stories and poetry designed to make those who read it feel good about themselves, or is it the revelation of God's compassionate interaction with God's created beings? Is the Bible just a good book, or is it God's Book? Is the Bible just a coffee-table dust collector, or is it a life-defining, and life enhancing roadmap to heaven? I think you probably know the answer.

But our reverence for this book must have some basis besides just a sentimental Sunday School allegiance. That is found in this fact; that Jesus fulfills, Jesus completes, Jesus defines, Jesus perfectly reveals all that God sought to do in enabling the recordings that make up the 39 books of the Old Testament, and that fulfillment gives authority to this book, that no other book, religious or otherwise can claim. No other religious Holy Book can claim nor prove to be written over almost 2000 years, and contain over 1000 different references, written by different authors, in different times and places, yet remarkably present such a unified figure as this one man Jesus; in this one book; the Bible.

So why should it matter to you that Jesus' birth began the process of fulfilling these manifold OT prophecies? Because it validates the authority this book ought to have in our lives. Does it? It matters not whether your approach to the scripture is from a liberal or conservative perspective. It matters not whether your reading of the scripture leads you to a socially conscious or an evangelical life. It matters not whether your reading, understanding, interpretation and application of this book emerges from a skeptical or sympathetic approach. It matters not if you interpret the Bible literally or figuratively. The only thing that matters is; does the Bible have authority in your life? If it does; great! If it doesn't...what does?

You cannot be an authentic follower of Jesus, and not accept the ultimate authority of the Bible. With all the different interpretations, all the different study methodologies, and all the different understandings...one cannot claim to believe in Jesus, and not accept the authority of God's word. It's all about Jesus! Jesus fulfilling the OT prophecies:

2. VERIFIES THE AUTHENTICITY OF CHRIST'S IDENTITY

And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22

Think about the multiply levels of our identity. We are human. We are male or female. We are some nationality, some race, we possess some family heritage, and we come from some place. We are the sons and daughters of someone. But our identity is also, our occupation, our roles as sons, daughters, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and fathers, uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces, and cousins, and seconds. Our identity comes from a vast variety of places. So too does Jesus'.

The fact that Jesus fulfills the OT Messianic predictions gives us insight and verifies the authenticity of his identity. Jesus was not just a carpenter's kid from Galilee; he was The Son of God. Jesus was not just Mary's boy; he was the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Wonderful Counselor. Jesus was not just a nomadic leader of a ragamuffin band...he was...and IS...GOD WITH US! Emmanuel.

So...what? Well...if Jesus is who God says He is...then we are forced, as human beings to reckon with that reality. If Jesus is connected by this vast scan of history, then we can't just brush him off as a fly by night cult leader. If Jesus is the fulfillment of all those promises, then we can't just disregard his teaching as fanciful feel-good fluff.

If Jesus didn't just happen upon His Messiahship, or choose his fate; then we have to make a decision about the call and claim He renders on our life. If Jesus is who God, the OT authors, and the NT observers say He is...then how can we deny Him? Are you beginning to see why this Promised Messiah thing is so important? Let's try one more. Jesus fulfilling the OT prophecies:

3. VENTURES THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF JESUS' PURPOSE

And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22

There aren't that many words that begin with "V", but I hope you get the point. The fact that Jesus fulfills these many promises made by centuries of writers, gives deep insight into exactly what Jesus was sent to accomplish; what purpose He came to fulfill.

Jesus didn't just come to add a dividing line in our chronological calendars; B.C. and A.D. Jesus didn't just come to create a nice Christmas holiday. Jesus didn't just come to help us all play nice. Jesus didn't just come to teach us about God. Jesus didn't just come to point the way to heaven...Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

With all the baggage that became attached to the meaning of the Messiah following 1000's of years of waiting and interpreting signs and wonders, and rebellion and remnants...and more waiting...this much cannot be ignored or debated. God created human beings. They (we) chose to disregard that. God sent leaders and kings and prophets and priests, and song writers, worship music, and wisdom literature, to win us back...all without success. In a final act of ultimate desperation for our fallen condition, God chose to become one of us, and Jesus accepted this new role being confined by human skin, to live among His kin, and win us all back to God.

He accomplished His part...but his purpose is not yet completely fulfilled...and that is why this whole discussion is so important!

We must act on God's action. We must decide on Jesus' decision. We must yield to Jesus' surrender. God has done God's part; Jesus has fulfilled His destiny, now we must choose our response. We must accept God's gift of Love, we must yield our lives to Jesus Christ, we must be born again into this new relationship of obedience, we must be saved...that's why Jesus came...that's why all this talk is so important. There will be no greater New Year's Resolution than to be an active, obedient follower of Jesus Christ; because...It's all about Jesus!

Josh McDowell records in his book Evidence that Demands a Verdict, about a scholar who studies probabilities. This man suggests that the probability of one man fulfilling just 8 of these 300 or so OT prophecies, recorded over multiple centuries, by many different authors; is a mere 1 in 10 to the 17th power. I don't understand 10 to the 17th power, so I read on. This same scholar speculated that if you were to possess 10 to the 17th power of silver dollars, they would cover the state of Texas 2 feet deep with Silver dollars. And if you were to mark one silver dollar with an X and mix it thoroughly among the rest, then blindfold a man, and ask him to walk any where he wants across the vast state of Texas, and then choose one silver dollar. The chances that he would select the one marked with X are approximately the same as one man fulfilling just 8 of these OT prophecies. That boggles my mind!

Fortunately for us our choice has far greater probabilities. *If we confess our sins God is gracious and just and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Come to me all you who are burdened and heavy laden...and I will give you rest. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Behold, today is the day of Salvation. I am the way the truth, and the life...no one comes to the Father except through me.* Let us pray.

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS 1: "THE PROMISED MESSIAH"

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the Child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come." He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" Luke 4: 18-20

Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament Prophecies:

1. _____ **THE** _____ **OF GOD'S** _____
He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Luke 24:44

2. _____ **THE** _____ **OF CHRIST'S** _____
And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22

3. _____ **THE** _____ **OF JESUS'** _____
And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet. Matthew 1: 18-22