

The Scandal of the Incarnation: When God Invested in a Mess (The Scandal of Jesus' Birth)

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Opening Prayer and Worship Invocation

Let's worship the living God. Father, we just bless you. We praise you. Holy Spirit, we invite you. We desire your presence in our midst this morning. Would you come and rest in this place? You are worthy of all of our praise and adoration. Yeshua's name. We worship you.

[music and singing]

As the Spirit was moving over the waters, Spirit come move over us. Come rest on us. Come rest on us.

[music and singing]

Come down. When you move, you make my heart pound. When you fill the room, you're here and I know you are moving. I'm here and I know you will feel me. Have your way today.

[music]

As the Spirit was moving over the waters, Spirit come over us. Come rest on us. Come rest on us.

[music and singing]

When you move, you make my heart pound. When you fill the room, you're here and I know you are moving. I'm here and I know you will feel me.

[music and singing]

Fire and wind come and do it again. Open up the gates and heaven on it. Come rest on us. Come rest on us. Fire and wind come and do it again. Open up the gates. Let heaven on it. Come rest on us. Come rest on us. Come down spirit. When you move, you make my heart

pound. When you fill the room, you're here and I know you are moving. I'm here and I know you will fill me.

[music]

Holy Spirit, come rest on us. You're all we want. You're all we want. Spirit, come rest on us. You're all we want. You're all we want.

[music and singing]

Holy come rest on us. You're all we want. You're only one. Come rest on us. You're only one. Come rest on us. You're only one.

[music]

Come down spirit. When you move, you'll make my heart pound. When you fill a room, you're here and I know you are moving. I'm here and I know you will fill me.

[music]

Spirit, when you move, you make my heart pound. When you fill a room, you're here and I know you are moving. I'm here and I know you will fill me.

God's Greatness and Worthiness

>> So good. So good, Father. So worthy of all of our praise. You are worthy. Great and mighty God. So awesome in all your ways. You give life. You are love. You bring light to the darkness. You give hope. You restore every heart that is broken. Great are you, Lord.

Sing it again. You give light. You are love. You bring light to the dark. Yes. You give hope. You restore every heart that is broken.

[singing and music]

Great are you, Lord.

[singing]

It's your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise. We pour out our praise. It's your breath in our lungs.

[singing and music]

So we pour out our praise to you only. Great are you, Lord. You give light. You are love. You bring light to the darkness. You give hope. You restore every heart that is broken. Great are you, Lord. Your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise. We pour out our praise. It's your breath in our lungs.

[music and singing]

So we pour out our praise to you holy. Your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise. We pour out our praises. Your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise to you holy.

[music]

Oh pour it out. So worthy. So wonderful. All the earth will shout your praise. Our hearts will cry. These bones will sing. Great...

[music and singing]

All the earth will shout your praise. Our hearts will cry. These bones will sing. Great are you, Lord.

[singing and music]

All the earth will shout your praise. Our hearts will cry. Both will sing. Great are you, Lord.

[music]

In our lungs. So we pour out our praise. We pour out our praise. Your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise to you holy.

[music]

In your breath. So we pour out our praise. We pour out our praise. In your breath in our lungs. So we pour out our praise to you holy. Great are you Lord. So great are you Lord. We worship you.

God of Covenant and Faithfulness

>> Thank you, Father.

>> Sovereign one, faithful through the ages.

>> Amen.

All glory and praise and honor are yours. Yes. Okay. God of Abraham. You're the God of covenant, of faithful promises. Time and time again, you have proven you do just what you say. Though the storms may come and the winds may blow, I'll remain steadfast and let my heart burn. When you speak a word, it will come to pass. Great is your faithfulness to me.

>> Great is your faithfulness to me.

[music and singing]

From the rising sun till the setting sun, I will praise your name. Great is your faithfulness to me. Oh, so your faithfulness from age to age, though the earth may pass away, your word remains the same. Your history can prove it. There's nothing you cannot do. You're faithful and true.

[music and singing]

Though the storms may come and the winds may blow, I'll remain steadfast. And let my heart burn. When you speak a word, it will come to pass. Great is your faithfulness to me.

[music]

From the rising sun till the setting sun, I will praise your name. Great is your faithfulness to me. I hope you never let us down. I put my faith in show up for anger to the ground. My hope and firm foundation.

[music and singing]

He'll never let me down. I put my faith in Yeshua. Thy anchor to the ground. My hope and firm foundation. He'll never let me down. I want my faith in my anchor to the ground. My hope and firm foundation. He'll never let me down. Great is your faithfulness to me.

[music and singing]

Great is your faithfulness to me. From the rising sun until the setting sun, I will praise your name. Great is your faithfulness to me. From the rising sun till the set, I will praise your name.

[music]

Praise. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. So faithful. So faithful God.

>> Oh yes.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you Father.

Another in the Fire

There's a grace when fires are closing. When I look at the space between, I know I will never be alone. There was another in the fire standing next to me. There was another in the waters holding back the sea. And should I ever need my power set free, there is a cross that bears a burden where another died for me.

[music and singing]

There is another in the fire. Oh, my Redeemer, I'm no longer a slave to my sin anymore.

[music and singing]

And should I fall in the space between what remains of me and this reckoning? Either way, I won't bow to the things of this world. I know I will never be alone. There is another in the fire standing next to me. There is another in the waters holding back the sea. Should I ever need my power set free, there is a grave that holds nobody. Now that power lives in me.

[music]

There is another in the fire. There is another in the fire.

[music and singing]

There is another in the fire. There is another in the fire. Oh...

[music]

I can see the light in the darkness as the darkness bows to him. I can feel the roar in the heavens as the space between. I can feel the ground shake beneath us as the prison walls cave in, nothing stands between us.

[music and singing]

Nothing stands between us. There is no other name but He who was and still is and will be through it all. Come one day in the space between all the things I've seen and the staggering. I know I will never be alone. I know I will never be...

[music and singing]

There'll be another in the fire standing next to me.

[music and singing]

There'll be another in the waters holding back the sea. Should I ever need you to remind me, remind me free...

[music and singing]

I'll count the joy from every battle, because I know that's where you'll be. I can see the light in the darkness as the darkness bows to him. I can hear the roar in the heavens as the space between us. I can feel the ground shake beneath us as the prison and walls cave in. Nothing stands between us.

[music and singing]

Another in the fire. Another in the fire. Another in the fire.

[music and singing]

We worship. We worship. You alone. I'm returning. I hear your voice. I see your face. You're still my first love. You're still my only one. You're still my first love.

You're Still My First Love

>> You're still my only one.

[music and singing]

Just for you and me. Break the bread and pour the wine. I am yours and you are mine. You're still my first love. You're still my only one. You're still my first love. You're still my only one. You're still my only one.

[music and singing]

>> I feel my heart beating out of my chest. I want to stay forever like this. May the flame of my heart always burn. I want to live forever like I feel my heart beating out of my chest.

Worship and Prayer

I want to search forever like this. May the flame of my heart always be. I want to burn forever like this. You're still my birth song, still my only one. You're still my only. You're still my only.

Sing it out. You're still my first song. You're still my first love. You're still my only. And I feel my heart. I want to stay forever. May the flame of my heart always feel it. I want to pray forever.

Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me. Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me. Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me. Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me.

And I feel my heart like this. Always be. I want to burn forever. You're still my. You're still my only love. You're still my only. You're still my first. You're still only. The only one. Always. Your love is wild. Your love is wild. Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me. Your love is your love.

Oh, thank you, Father. I'm just asking that that very thought would just sink deep, deep, deep into our spirits this morning. You are not a high and lofty God just up there. You are, but you are near. And your love, your love, it motivates everything you do. You are love, but everything filters through your love for us. Father, may it capture us.

May it capture us this morning. Let it capture us this morning. May that just be something we sing—not just pretty words. God, I'm asking for a transforming this morning deep in the heart of each person here, that they would know the love that you have for them and that nothing can separate us from the love of God. You make that real in ways that we've never experienced before. Thank you, Father.

Your love is wild. Your love is wild for me. You're the only one worthy, Father, of all the glory and all the power, all the love and the adoration. Father, you're the only one worthy. Yeshua, you're the only one worthy. We just bless you this morning. We thank you that your love sees through, pierces through to the very heart of each one of us. Thank you, Father, for your goodness and your faithfulness. You are a compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, rich in mercy.

Great is your faithfulness, Father. We worship you in Yeshua's name. Amen. Give him praise this morning.

The Torah Portion: And He Approached

Welcome JJ Santies to the platform for the Torah portion.

Shabbat shalom. I think I forgot to tell my parents that I had the Torah portion this week.

The Torah portion this week—I do not know how to say it in Hebrew, but it is called "and he approached." It's in [Genesis 44:18](#) through 47:27. And it's all about repentance or tshoua—forgiveness—and God accomplishing his plans no matter how messy the situation looks.

It starts with Benjamin about to be taken as a slave because Joseph's silver goblet is found in his bag. And that is obviously not an accident—it's a test that Joseph set up to see if his brothers

were still the same people who sold him into slavery.

So Judah steps forward to beg for Benjamin's freedom. And we know that before that, Judah was the one that had the great idea to sell Joseph into slavery in the first place. But now Judah is in a similar situation. His new youngest brother is about to be taken as a slave and he has a choice to make. This time he begs for Benjamin's freedom and is even willing to sacrifice his own freedom for Benjamin. I think that's a great example of repentance because he's not saying the word sorry, but he's making a different choice when given this opportunity to be selfish again.

So after Judah is done begging, Joseph is the one that has a choice. And if we're being honest, Joseph definitely—I mean, he's the second most powerful person in Egypt. He could be like, "Okay, now you care about your brother or something." Or he could keep testing him like he's been doing. He could get revenge if he wanted to, and nobody would really blame him. I don't think I would. But instead, he starts breaking down crying and he tells them who he is. And instead of getting revenge, he offers mercy and reconciliation. He even tells them not to beat themselves up because God sent him ahead to preserve life. He doesn't say that what they did was okay, but he does say that God was bigger than what they did.

Healing Through Repentance and Mercy

So the portion ends with Joseph sending his brothers back to Canaan to bring Jacob and the rest of the family back to Egypt where they'll be safe during the famine.

This Torah portion leaves us with two important choices in our own lives. Judah is given the chance to repeat the past or to change it. And Joseph is given the chance to repay evil with evil or to show mercy. And because they both choose correctly, an entire nation is saved and restored.

So that's the message: Healing begins when truth and accountability meet mercy and forgiveness. You will get the same choices in your own life, probably more than once and sometimes with the same people over and over again. You'll get to be Judah where you can repeat an old pattern or you can finally grow. And you'll get to be Joseph, where you can hold on to bitterness or let God redeem the situation.

So the question is pretty simple. When the moment comes, will you choose repentance like Judah and mercy like Joseph? Because when we choose correctly, we make room for God to do only what he can do to bring healing, restoration, and life out of the situation that looked hopeless. If God can redeem this relationship, he can definitely redeem yours, whether it's a

friend or family member. Because I'm pretty confident no one here has sold their sibling into slavery. Hopefully.

Thank you. Shabbat shalom everybody.

It's a great Torah portion and now we have some great announcements.

Announcements and Community

All right, first announcement. We won't be meeting next week—it's the first weekend of the month, but we will be meeting the weekend after. So happy new year, everybody.

Yeah, next year. Hopefully it'll be better than this one. I don't know.

So FIT ladies and FIT teens guys, not meeting until January 7th. Then every Wednesday right here, 6:30 p.m., congregational prayer. As always, every month it's going to be tomorrow at 3 p.m. So please come support this. Come together as we pray collectively over extremely important issues—the fellowship, the world, everything. It's important. So please join us for that as well. 3 p.m. tomorrow.

We also have a very special guest speaker coming on January 10th. On Saturday, January 10th, 2026, we'll have special guest Dr. Jason Staples from NC State University, Chapel Hill. He is a New Testament scholar and author of major Cambridge University Press books on Paul and the idea of Israel in the second temple period. Very legitimate teacher and I'm super stoked about this. I'm so thankful that both David Wilbur and Al McCarron really pushed us to make this event happen because in 2017 I did a message, a sermon based on his dissertation. And so it's just really cool to see everything and all the books he's written. So it's going to be a great privilege.

Dr. Staples will be leading the regular Shabbat message. And then after service, he'll do an extended teaching on [Romans 11](#) and "all Israel will be saved." So if you plan to stay, I hope you will for the second session. Please bring your own food—lunch—for a pretty short break, probably a 45-minute to one-hour break in between the messages. We really encourage everyone to stay for the extended teaching on that day. So plan for it. It's gonna be great.

Number five—it's a ticket item, big bold letters: Jeff Apport. After countless years of high-end technical volunteering from getting here at 7 o'clock to 7:30 a.m. every single Shabbat, setting up the worship team stage every single week that we meet, to hauling all the sound equipment up to the mountains of Sakote year after year to dismantling entire soundboards in the back just

to fix a little slider. Jeff is going to be stepping away to tend to some very important personal endeavors that we fully, 100% support and are really excited to do.

During COVID, our fellowship could not meet at the venue that we were at and we really didn't know what we were going to do—like many churches during that season. And Jeff opened up his brand new home to us. Not only that, he put up black curtains all over his living room and he built an in-house studio where we did our services. FIT delivered praise and worship as well as teachings for months on livestream, which was just an incredible gift that you guys opened up your home. Jeff has undoubtedly carried Founded in Truth and supported this ministry in the most vital ways during the most trying times of our journey. And so I would ask if you would stand with me and show him some appreciation in this moment.

Jeff Robin, thank you. Jeff was an answer to prayer. And not like in some spiritual metaphor—I mean a real answer to prayer—that Jason and other leaders at the time were very involved in because we didn't know what we were doing.

And we prayed that God would send someone, and we were just not prepared for the amazing gift that he did send. So, thank you. I don't know how to come away from that one.

Countless Opportunities to Volunteer

So, next bullet point—volunteers. We have countless opportunities to volunteer in this ministry, including stage hand, early Shabbat audio equipment setup. You'll be fully trained, no experience required. We got you.

Stage hand would be post-service striking and tear down, early morning setup, or sanctuary sweeping and trash removal after services. We need some people to help step into those roles. If we want to continue doing breakfasts with a light breakfast in the morning, that would be great if some people could step into those roles.

We also have roles in audio video. We need someone to help with presentations and slides, as well as live stream and kind of helping out with that and stepping into that, because it's being carried on a couple of shoulders right now, and that's just not sustainable. It really isn't.

We also have greeters. All you do, right? Thank you for coming. We have children's teachers—talk to Katie, we can get you in. We need you, as well as teachers assistance and so on and so forth.

So please, guys—see Katie or Jason for more information on any of these opportunities. And I'm excited to see the future and what that season looks like.

Next thing on the list is giving, like we do every week, but it's the end of the year, which is usually one of those times where we push. Thank you for everybody who gives to Founder and Truth Fellowship. We would love to enter into with a lot more confidence in what we can do and what God would lead us to do.

And so if you care about those tax deductions, guys, you have until the end of the year—get those donations in, and you get the benefit—you know the drill. But it's important. We're trying to plan next year, and we're planning based off the resources we have, not the resources that we might get.

So thank you for everybody who has poured into this ministry, who sees God's working here and has been willing to invest in that.

If you'd like to give to Founded in Truth Fellowship, you see God working in this community, in this ministry, as a QR code on the screen. You can also give on the website, of course, and there's a box out in the lobby.

And just from the bottom of my heart, thank you for everybody who gives in prayer, volunteer time, and finances. Those are the resources that have been the building blocks and the faith that glues it all together, that God has been able to use. And so I thank you.

I think that is the announcements.

A Special Blessing Over Them

So now please stand as we call the children forward and say a special blessing over them.

If you're visiting for the first time today at Founder in Truth, we have a tradition here where we call the children forward. We take a moment and thank God for the next generation and our opportunity to pour into them.

We hold up a huge shaw over them that we call a hoopa, and it represents God's continued protection and blessings over them. Yeah, it's just it goes out the window every week.

>> Y'all know the drill. Please join me as we go before the father. Alvina Meno, our father and our king.

Father, we thank you for this opportunity to come together on your Shabbat, this one day of the week that has been carved out and given to us as a sign, as a signate of the eternal rest that is only found in your son Yeshua.

We thank you, Father, for the young men here today—that you would bless them as Ephraim and Manasseh, the warriors of your kingdom. That you would instill in them not only grace, but wisdom and courage to carry your banner throughout their generation.

And the young ladies here—that you would bless them as Rachel and as Sarah, even as Holda and Deborah—that they too would be the warriors in your army, carrying your banner forward.

Give them discernment, courage, and hope that they can lean on, that these would be the world changers.

The youth, Father, I ask that you would continue instilling in them the same courage and discernment and the spirit of Joshua, the spirit of Caleb—the spies that ran into the land but did not cower below, that stood looking at the promises.

Father, we ask that faith would be dwelt in them as well. That these would be the next generation that would lift up the name of Yeshua.

Father, we thank you for your spirit of peace, your love, your spirit of mercy. In Yeshua's name we pray.

>> Please join me as we say the Lord's Prayer on the screen. And if you're joining us today, we encourage you to say it out loud because that's how the children learn best. So, any of the kids want to start us in the Lord's Prayer.

>> Yes.

>> Let's start us. Ready? One, two, three.

Our father will be done. Give us our daily bread. Obsy. Amen.

>> [snorts] [clears throat]

The Last Message of 2025

Shabbat shalom, everybody. This is the last message given for 2025, and we'll be starting a new year of course in a couple days. With that, we cannot help but to at least notice where we've been, what we have done, and where we might be going in life. Everybody kind of has that reflection.

Yeah, how was 2025? It's been a doozy of a year, hasn't it?

Man, so today I would like to speak about the incarnation of God taking on flesh, the birth of Yeshua, but also the end of the year giving message—all wrapped up into one.

So I have a preference on the things I like to teach on, but I also have responsibilities that I have to somehow present as well. So prepare your hearts for that today.

This is—I love the word. I love the story of God, and I have become extremely comfortable with the reality of what the story of God says versus what we like to say about the story of God.

And I have realized that sometimes I'm not sensitive to other people not being in the same place and being okay with some of the transparent things the Bible says about people and things about God—things that typically make us uncomfortable. And I may be accused of not being sensitive again today, but I think that the more we get familiar with the raw story of God, the more that we can actually put our faith, hope, and trust in him now, understanding how he works through his story.

That was a great word salad disclaimer, wasn't it? Edge of your seats, I know.

The Story of God Becoming Flesh

But we just finished Hanukkah and we lit the candles, and we talked about the light that wouldn't die—the God that works in silence, or the times when God goes a little bit slower than our preference would like—the Messiah who claimed to be the light of it all in [John 10](#). And now we are in the week—I guess, in the calendar year between that liminal space between Christmas and New Year's. You know, it's kind of a weird space just in culture. Culture around us is winding down, decorations are kind of coming down, you know, the songs and festivities out in public are fading. Some people are happy about that, some people aren't. Everything getting packed away to next year.

But whatever your relationship is with that holiday, the story of God becoming flesh is worth sitting a little longer on. So that's why I don't want to dive in today. And the reason I want to sit on it and dive into it is because I think we've sanitized it.

I think we've turned the story of the nativity into a greeting card. Nice, fancy, right? Mary's always in a nice blue robe, serene smile. Perfect hair. Joseph is always standing so nobly with his staff, you know. He's like, "Yes." In the Catholic or the higher denominational traditions, it's like he's the guy that kind of looks out for the husbands. He's the fathers out there. Nice. I like it.

We have a baby who apparently never cried, lying in clean straw with a soft golden glow around him, having the skin tone of someone from the mountains of Austria, a vanrop child, right? Animals gathered peacefully, maybe some snow if you get that ceramic piece, a village piece. Even though Bethlehem really—I mean, it snows every once in a while—but it's not like it's like a Rockill snow. It's not like a Vermont snow. But it's beautiful. It's beautiful to see this portrayal. It's peaceful, and it's a complete lie. All of it. Not the birth of Yeshua that happened, but the way we tell it strips out everything dangerous, everything uncomfortable, everything that would make people in the first century gasp because this was not a hallmark moment.

It Was a Downright Scandal

It was a downright scandal. And I think that scandal has something to say to everybody today.

Matthew is Building a Case

So if you turn with me to Matthew chapter 1, we will dive into the chapter that we skip over because it looks boring from the get-go. You see all these names that pop up. It's the genealogy, right? Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac begot Jacob. On and on for 17 verses.

And here's what we need to understand. Matthew of all people is not filling space. He's building a case. This is the foundation he's setting for the story of Yeshua. Matthew, the tax collector turned apostle, the guy who is obsessive about details, trained to notice patterns, though he probably didn't need training, opens his entire gospel with a legal argument.

Before he tells you about angels or shepherds or a star or the magi, he's establishing credentials on who he's about to represent.

Verse one: the book of the genealogy of Yeshua, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. What a way to start out an introduction, right?

Royal Lineage and Covenant

Two claims there in verse one. Son of David—that's royal lineage. It's pretty stout. The promise that a king would come from David's house and reign forever. The son of Abraham. That's covenant line. Double whammy. The promise that through Abraham's seeds, all nations will be blessed. Matthew is saying that this little baby has some pedigree papers. This is the rightful heir. If you're waiting for the Messiah, check it out. Check out the receipts. Check out the paperwork. Here they are.

He organizes the genealogy into three sets of 14 generations. Abraham to David. David to the exile, and from the exile to Christ. It's structured. It's very deliberate. It's airtight. This is a man who kept meticulous records for the Roman Empire, and now he's keeping meticulous records for the kingdom. So far so good. Standard credentials—exactly what you would expect from someone trying to prove Yeshua is the promised king.

Women in the Genealogy

And then Matthew does something strange, something no respectable Jewish genealogy would ever do. He includes women. In the first century, that would have warranted a gasp, because in first-century culture, you traced lineage through fathers. That's how it works, right? You didn't include mothers unless you really had to. There had to have been a really good reason to stick a mom in there. Now, tracing Jewish lineage or Jewish identity through your mother—that came about 200 years after Yeshua, most likely influenced by the sheer trauma of what took place after 70 AD, a dark tradition. But in Matthew's day, it went through the father line throughout all the scriptures.

So when Matthew breaks the pattern and inserts women into his carefully constructed legal document, it's not an accident. He's doing something on purpose.

You all ready? Look at the women that he chooses to include.

Tamar's Story

One of the big ones on the list is Tamar. You know her story comes from [Genesis 38](#). Let's see what she has to do with all of this. She married Judah's firstborn son. He was wicked, which is why God put him to death. The next brother that was supposed to marry Tamar—which was the levirate law: if a husband dies and he has a brother, then the brother—if they don't have any kids—the brother would marry his wife and they would have children to carry on the name of the dead brother. His lineage continues; it cuts into inheritance. It's all a thing.

So the second son steps up, and let's just say he died too. Two out of Judah's three sons are now dead because they interacted with this woman. He's cautious now. He's lost two sons. He thinks Tamar is the problem.

He promises her his third son, Shelah, but he's lying. He has no intention of following through, of giving up his last son. Years pass by. Shelah grows up. Judah doesn't keep his word. And

Tamar is now stuck and is legally bound to a family that won't fulfill their obligation to her. She's unable to remarry and she has no future. Pretty hard place.

So Tamar takes matters into her own hands. She disguises herself as a prostitute and she sits by the road and she waits to intentionally target Judah, her own father-in-law. She solicits her services and he propositions her. He leaves his staff and seal as collateral. She gets pregnant.

When Judah finds out his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he thinks, "I knew this day would come. Bring her out. We're going to burn her alive."

Then she produces his staff and his seal. "I'm pregnant by the man who owns these."

What a soap opera episode, right? The Bible's so amazing.

Judah's response: "You got me." Like, wow, she's so much more righteous than I am. The patriarch of the tribe of the Messiah publicly admitted that a woman who posed as a prostitute and got him in bed with her was more righteous than he was. That's the Messiah's family tree.

Rahab the Prostitute

Let's go to a nicer one. Rahab. Joshua chapter 2. A Canaanite prostitute. Now, some commentators are really uncomfortable with the rawness of the biblical story and what the intention was from all of the collective biblical authors. And so you'll see commentators sometimes call her an innkeeper, as if she had like a Hilton here—like, "here's your key card."

No. No. The Hebrew word is **zona**—it's prostitute. It's there. The New Testament uses the Greek word **pornet**. I think in [Hebrews 11](#) and [James 2](#). It's the same root for pornography. It's there—you can't sanitize this story. You can sanitize others. She was a pagan, part of the people Israel was commanded to destroy. Everything about her said she was an outsider. She should have been on the wrong side of the walls of Jericho when they fell. She should have.

But she hid the Israelite spies. She lied to her own king to protect them. And she made a confession that Israel's own people often failed to make, which is the point of her story. "Yahweh, your God, is God in heaven above and in earth below."

A Canaanite brothel owner is in the Messiah's family tree. Direct lineage.

Ruth, Forbidden Pagan Blood

Keep going. Oh, that's not so bad. A Moabite. The Moabites descended from Lot through incest, by the way. They tried to curse Israel through Balaam. Then they seduced Israelite men

into idol worship. So by the end of it, at Baal Peor, it wasn't even the Moabite men that Israel was really guarded against. It was the women. They were the ones that could get in.

[Deuteronomy 23:3](#) says, "No Moabite shall enter the assembly of Yahweh, even to the 10th generation," aka forever.

And yet Ruth, who clings to Naomi, her mother-in-law, and declares, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God," becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Forbidden pagan blood in the family tree of King Jesus.

Bathsheba and Murder

Not her yet. We're getting there.

Bathsheba. [2 Samuel 11](#). When Matthew talks about Bathsheba in the line of Yeshua, he doesn't even use her name. And if you don't remember, Bathsheba was married to another man before David murdered him after seducing her—or however you want to phrase it, in Matthew's account. Just to make the point: Matthew calls her "the wife of Uriah."

Now you understand—like, oh man, this is getting intense. Matthew's not holding back. He's like, "David, jerk. Uriah." Everyone knows what that meant.

Yeah, some of you are catching on. It's a story to be read and felt. You know the story. Everyone's out fighting. David, the mighty king, is not. He's sitting back. Everybody else is out, and he's chilling in his castle, and he looks out the window and he sees a girl bathing. She was married to one of his elite soldiers, Uriah. He took her anyway. She got pregnant. David tried to cover it up. When that failed, he had her husband murdered. He sent him to the front lines with a letter that was essentially his own death warrant. And when he handed it to the general, the general opened it up: "Hey, make sure you stick him at the front lines where it's the most intense, and then, like, just pull back." It's murder. And that's exactly what happened. David had this man carry his own death warrant to the front lines.

And of all David's sons, from all of his wives, the line to the Messiah runs through their son Solomon. The marriage built on adultery and blood—that's what Solomon was born out of. They had a child together, that child died, and then after David married her, they had Solomon.

Matthew's Scandalous Genealogy

If you were writing a biography of someone you wanted people to respect, would you mention this? Would you lead with this?

Incest, prostitution, forbidden marriage, murder—to name a few.

Any publisher would say, "No, you got to leave that out. You can't leave that in. There's no reason to put that in there."

Matthew leads with it in the very first chapter, the first page—before he even tells us anything about Yeshua, he's making a point. This is how God has always worked—through scandal, through mess, through people who shouldn't be in the story but are.

Before They Came Together

Matthew—in the first 17 verses of chapter one—he's setting us up. You won't be able to unsee it now. He's about to tell us about the biggest scandal of all in the very next verse, verse 18: "And Mary was betrothed to Joseph." That's what he's setting you up for—the story of Mary and Joseph.

Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph, which in that culture was legally binding. It was like marriage without consummation. And before they'd come together, right? They're in this legally binding relationship where they have not consummated the marriage, have not had sex or anything, right?

And during this time period, she's found to be pregnant.

What would everyone assume? I mean, none of us—if an 18-year-old girl who was betrothed to someone walked in here pregnant—none of us would ever think, "Oh, she cheated, right?" Not us. Everyone would think she committed adultery.

There's no other explanation literally in the world for how this would happen. Like, nobody was believing the Holy Spirit did it.

Can you sit with that discomfort and face the reality? If someone walked in here today and said, "Yeah, I got pregnant by the Holy Spirit." I love that, because we all like to say these kinds of things when God has spoken to us. You know, someone will say, "Yeah, the Holy Spirit really laid this on my heart," or whatever. And that's good. And even if you're not really convinced, you would never say, "But that's not right." Like, nobody would even consider it—the Holy Spirit did it. I mean, if you were making something up, you couldn't come up with something worse.

Now by the first century, Jews had lost the authority to execute people through stoning and such.

The Scandal of Her Birth

They needed the Roman approval, which is why the whole facade of Yeshua's trial was the way it was. But Mary should have been stoned at that point according to the Torah. Like, done. But she was actually facing something almost as devastating: social death, divorce, public shame, being unmarriageable. In a culture where women depended on marriage for survival, that was the safety net in the social structure—family disownment and whispers that would follow her everywhere.

Joseph tries to protect her. He's not convinced. Holy Spirit, what? Okay, baby, I love you. I'm hurt. Verse 19—he plans a quiet divorce. Just move on. Just get through this. I don't understand it. It hurts. He didn't want public accusation. He's heartbroken. The woman he loves has apparently betrayed him, but he doesn't want to destroy her.

Then the angel appears to Joseph. That doesn't make anything better, by the way, from a social aspect, right? The angel appears and he's like, "Joseph, everything she said, marry her. It's good. It's all good. She's right. Holy Spirit, right?" And Joseph marries her anyway.

So imagine the girl coming into the community. "I got pregnant with the Holy Spirit." And everyone's looking at Joseph like, "Yeah, you poor guy." And then a week later, Joseph comes in all excited: "Yeah, she did get pregnant by the Holy Spirit." I don't know what the ladies and guys, you know what we're thinking. Like, this guy, look at this piece of work. I'm really emphasizing that because that's what it was. That's what it was.

Rumors That Never Went Away

The neighbors didn't just say, "Oh, the angel came to you and told you it was okay." Fist bump. Clears everything up. No. The rumors never went away. They followed them. The accusations followed Yeshua his entire life.

In John chapter 8, decades later, Yeshua is an adult. He's teaching in the temple. And he gets into an argument with, of course, the religious leaders, right, about Abraham being the father. And in verse 41, it's—do I have it here? Well, there's that. Here we go.

Yeah. So there's several scholars that will actually point out, and it's debatable, but the religious elite look at him, and some of the scholars—New Testament scholars—point out that this emphasis on the "we"—they drew a line in the sand. "We are not illegitimate children." They protested. "The only father we have is God himself."

And so some of the commentaries point out that the way it's phrased in the Greek, it's accusatory. "But you are. Who are you to?" "We are not the illegitimate children here. You're the bastard." That can absolutely be implied here.

30 years later, still throwing his birth in his face, still insinuating that his mother was unfaithful. The light of the world, the son of God—the people called him illegitimate to his face. God entering the world this way was a scandal from day one. And it never stopped being one.

God Enters Through Scandal

Why does this matter? Because we've been told a version of God that isn't true. We've been told explicitly or implicitly that God only works through pure things. That God only works through clean things, through respectable things. That you need to get your life together before God can ever use you. That holiness means distance from messy stuff.

God did not enter through a palace. He entered through a scandal. He didn't choose a respectable family. He chose a lineage littered with prostitutes, murderers, and foreigners. He didn't wait for the perfect conditions. He showed up in the dirt, literally in a feeding trough. That's what the bed was. It's a feeding trough for animals. That's where he was placed.

God is not distant from the mess of human life. That's the story of the Bible. God's not going to be stopped by any guard or boundary in his rescue mission. He likes to work from the inside out. And amen for that. Thank God for that. That's what happened in Bethlehem. God looked at humanity and all our scandal and said, "I'm going in."

Incarnation means the flesh coming forth, being in the flesh—not observing from a distance, not sending instructions from heaven, going in, becoming one of us, being born into the same mess that he came to redeem. And that's just incredible.

That's an aspect of the Bible that we don't like, because the more that pastors and preachers make God this distant, holy, untouchable thing, the more that we will always be starving and relying on human leaders to guide us instead of our faith in the Holy Spirit. This is the God that we follow, and it's good even if it's messy.

He Poured Himself Into It All

And so that's where I want to shift a little, because there's an aspect of this story that we miss entirely as well. And this wasn't just God entering the world. This was God investing in the world, pouring in. [Philippians 2](#)—you know what the cost was?

"Who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself, gave forth everything by becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross."

He emptied himself. The omnipresent God confined to one body. The omniscient God growing wisdom like a child. The omnipotent God getting tired and hungry and thirsty. And here's what's wild: he poured himself into it all.

He didn't back a winning stock. He didn't make an educated bet that he knew was going to be. He committed to bankrupting humanity. He didn't fund the sure thing. This isn't what you would invest in. He funded the scandal. He poured in.

God's Pattern of Investment

After Adam and Eve sinned and took the fruit, wanting autonomy from God, God didn't just curse them and walk away—which is essentially what they were wanting. That's the fruit. He clothed them. You could say something had to die to cover the nakedness. That's a bit of an investment.

After Cain murders Abel, God doesn't execute Cain. He puts a mark on him for protection. He commits to a murderer. That's an investment. God invested in a murderer.

After humanity becomes so corrupt that God undoes creation and floods the world, he preserves Noah and his family. And then he makes a covenant, a promise that limits his own options. He binds himself to a species that has already proven time and time again that it's going to rebel. I'm in it.

God becoming flesh is the ultimate act of that pattern. He put everything on the line knowing we would reject him, knowing we would crucify him. And he came anyway.

The Magi: Everything on the Line

Remember the magi? Wise men from the east. Love it. The three wise men. Three of those gifts can fit on one camel. By the way, there. I mean, no need to have three people. It could have been 40. Could have been two. Doesn't say. I like the 40. Big train.

We've turned them into these cute little additions to the nativity scene. You know, guys in the back. For some reason, they're always darker-skinned or something, like they're exotic. No,

they're from Babylon. They kind of look the same. Three guys on camels. But think about what they actually did.

Like, these were likely some young Persian astrologers. Who knows? Lots of opinions. Scholars who studied the stars and ancient texts. And they saw something in the heavens that convinced them a king had been born in Israel. And they traveled months, maybe years, across deserts and mountains to find him.

And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they went to the obvious place first: Herod's palace. "Where is he who has been born, the king of the Jews? We saw his star and have come to worship him." But the king wasn't in that palace. So they end up being led to a backwater town outside of Jerusalem. And what did they find?

"Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts."

There's no palace. There's no throne room. It's just a house, a young mother, and a baby who looked like any other baby. The circumstances scream, "This is not the king you're looking for." And they gave everything anyway.

Your Treasure Leads Your Heart

Yeshua says something in the sermon on the mount that we tend to read way too fast, and that's [Matthew 6:21](#). It says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Reading this backwards, by the way—we like to read it to mean that our treasure follows our heart, right? Wherever we put our heart, treasure obviously is going to go. You love something, so you spend money on it.

And no, that's not what he said. It's the opposite. Your treasure leads, and your heart follows. What you give yourself to shapes who you become. What you fund reveals what you believe. Where you put your resources is where you're placing your hope. And over time, your heart follows.

I think we all know that's accurate. The magi understood this. They didn't just admire the Messiah from a distance. They didn't just acknowledge that something important was happening. They committed.

The early church understood too. In Acts chapter 2: "All who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold all their possessions and distributed to everybody who was in need." Why? That sounds ludicrous. Sounds unwise. Why? They had seen what God gave. The

very self of God poured out for them. And they responded, "We're in. Whatever it takes, we're in."

And that's where we come to the arc of the message. God poured himself into a scandal. The magi brought their treasures to a scandal. The early church saw God was doing something, and they put their resources behind it.

And so the question is: What about you? We're at the end of the year, and at the end of the year, people make decisions. They look around. They look forward. And they sit down and they decide what mattered and what will matter in the coming year. What gets their time, what gets their attention—very valuable resources—and what gets their resources. That's not an accident.

God Enters the Mess

There's something about endings that tends to clarify stuff, right? God did not enter humanity when we had our act together. He came at the end of 400 years of silence when it looked like nothing was happening. The magi didn't show up when the circumstances looked promising. They arrived at the end of a long uncertain journey when all they found was a house in a nothing town. They didn't wait for perfect conditions. They saw what God was doing and they went all in.

And I'll be honest, you guys know me. I hate talking about money. Every pastor does. It feels gross. The televangelists asking for their seed offering, they've ruined it. They've ruined it. But here's what I realized in my ever-growing maturity as a pastor: I'm not asking you to give it to me. I'm not even asking you to give it to the fellowship. I'm inviting you to participate in what God is actually doing.

This community where we dig into scripture honestly, where we ask really hard questions and aren't afraid of them, where we welcome people who have a diverse background or have been burned by religion—this community exists because people put their resources behind it. The building we meet in, the children's ministry, the youth program, the teaching that reaches people that we will never meet. It all happens because people decided it's worth their treasure.

So, at the end of this year, I'm asking you to make a decision. Not because I guilted you. Not because you're pressured to do it. I want you to make a decision because you see what God is doing in this place, in this community, and in your own life, and I want you to be a part of it.

The Invitation to Go All In

The magi brought their treasures to the scandal. They didn't wait for it to look ideal and they didn't need guarantees. They saw God at work in the mess and they went all in. That's the invitation. It's not an obligation. It's not guilt. It's an open door to be a part of what God is actually doing here, what he's done here for 13 years, and what I believe he's going to continue doing here in a very real way.

And so, with that being said, with the anticlimactic conclusion, there's a QR code in the middle of your brochure that you can scan and give something. There's a tithe box in the lobby. Use one of them or don't. But if this place has meant something to you, now you know how to do so.

I believe God is doing something. I think he's been doing something since Genesis. And the whole story is about him entering a mess instead of avoiding it, choosing scandalous people to carry his purposes forward. And he invites you to participate. He invites you with your presence to show up even when life is hard. He invites you with your gifts in ways that only you can serve. He invites you to come with your resources, your treasure leading, your heart following. He invites you with your whole self, mess and all, scandal and all, to be all in on the story that is still being written.

Your Mess Doesn't Disqualify You

And if you're sitting here thinking you're too far gone for any of that, look at the genealogy one more time with a fresh set of lenses. Prostitutes, murderers, foreigners, an unwed mother everyone assumed was unfaithful. That's the family tree God chose. Your mess doesn't disqualify you from any of that. Your mess might be the exact point of it all.

The light showed up in a scandal and it's still shining. And at the end of this year, you get to decide whether you're going to be part of carrying it forward. So don't wait until you feel worthy because you never will. Neither did Tamar. Neither did Rahab. Neither did Mary. Just say yes and say, "I'm all in. I'm ready." That's what the invitation is. That's what it has always been in the entire story. That is the gospel message. You're invited to participate in the mission. That's why Paul calls you a soldier of Christ. So march forward. Let us do that collectively as we enter into this new year.

The Closing Prayer and Blessing

Please stand as we conclude with worship. And during this time, if you need prayer, there's a prayer team on either side of the stage. I encourage you to spend this time meditating and just

going before the Father asking how can I be all in? Where can I step up? How can I be a participant in this journey?

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for providing us with the proof of who you are and how you work in your own word. We thank you that you didn't wait to use worthy people, that you didn't wait to use people that were cleaned up, that you didn't run away from a scandal, but that you dove into it because that is your favorite place to play and work. That is where your power is shown, just as Paul said.

Father, I ask in the name of Yeshua and the Ruach HaKodesh that the power of the Holy Spirit within us now as your followers would reveal itself in ways that we never expected it. That it would show us the strength that we have to participate, to move forward out of the place of complacency that we're at. Father, give us strength and give us focus and allow the hope that we have in you to be more than superficial going into this next year. We thank you, Father, for the opportunities that you've given to us. And we thank you for diving into our mess. In Yeshua's name we pray. Amen.

[Worship and singing]

You are the only [music] cure for everything I feel within, redeeming what [singing] this is a healing kind of love through the night [singing] when I was at I am comforting my heart till it [singing] again. Oh, this is a faithful [music] kind of Everlasting Father, Prince of [singing] Peace, Immanuel, God with us. You're here with me. Wonderful Counselor. The government [singing] is resting on your shoulders. You [singing] are the final. You alone [singing and music] decide when every page will turn. So I will trust your timing. I will rest assured. [singing] Oh, this is a steady kind [singing] of Everlasting [music and singing] Prince of Peace, Immanuel, [singing] God [music] with us. You're here with Counselor, the government [singing] is resting [music] on your shoulders.

Everlasting [singing] Father, Prince of [music] Emmanuel, [singing] God with us. You're here with Counselor [singing and music] is resting on your shoulders. Your name, say [singing] it all. They say it all. I stand all of you. Your name, say it all. [singing] They say it all. I [singing and music] stand. Your name, say it all. [singing] They [singing] say it all. I stand in all [singing] of you. Your name, say it [singing] all. They say it all. I [music and singing] stand in [singing] Your name. Say it all. Say it all. [singing] I stand in all of you. Your name [singing] say it all. [music] They say it all. I stand. All of you everlasting [singing] Father, God with us. You're

here [singing] with me. Counselor, [singing] the government is resting on [music] your shoulders.

Peace, us. You're here with me. Wonderful, is resting on your shoulders. Counsel is resting on [music and singing] your shoulders. Your name, say it all. [singing] Your name say is adorned. [singing] O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. And blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift [music] up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Sar Shalom, our Prince of Peace, Yeshua Hamashiach, we pray. Amen. And amen. Shabbat shalom family.

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