

Matthew 2:13-23

Date: Sunday, 26 December 2021

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-23

Sermon: Our Faith

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Scripture

Matt. 2:13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matt. 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

Matt. 2:18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,

weeping and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;

she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Matt. 2:19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose

and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Transcript

Introduction

Well, it's the day after Christmas. And I'm sure that it's been a busy season for many of us leading up to and in fact yesterday as well. But for today, I just want to dwell with the Christmas story, and look at this passage that was read out to us today.

Because the Christmas story doesn't end with the birth of Jesus. Does it? Just like when a woman gives birth, the journey doesn't end at the hospital, but there's a journey that occurs afterwards. Just like a marriage doesn't end with a wedding, there's the journey of the marriage afterwards.

So I want to talk about the journey that Jesus makes to Egypt with his mother and his father and then his journey back to Nazareth. And just notice a couple of things.

The Journey to Egypt

Let's look at Jesus' journey to Egypt.

Matt. 2:13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew 2:13-15 (ESV)

It's a very quick account of the journey. Egypt would have been about a week's journey for the young family. But can you imagine for a moment if God asked you to pick up your bags immediately and leave your home, your family, your friends? We're not told that they had family go with them. Most likely it would have only been the three of them as they headed down to Egypt. Following Jesus means sacrifice. It means that leaving behind things and following Jesus.

But something else we learn, is that God is in control. God spoke to Joseph in a dream. But God also provided for them as they made their journey to Egypt. Have you ever wondered how Joseph and Mary were able to pay their way to Egypt and stay there? They're only a young family. Quite possibly, the gifts that the three wise men gave, the frankincense, the gold and the myrrh would have been sold to provide for Jesus, Joseph and Mary's needs whilst they stayed in Egypt. I just love how God is in control of all the details of our lives. That he is able to provide for us as we follow Him.

But we might miss another important thing about Jesus' journey to Egypt. We're told that they stay in Egypt until the death of Herod. In fact, Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 and says the reason why Jesus is in Egypt, is because it is to fulfil a prophecy "Out of Egypt I called my son." It's such a short prophecy, but Matthew's audience would have understood this reference.

It's an echo of Moses, and the Israelites who were called out of Egypt through the Exodus. It's a reference to the LORD saving the nation of Israel out of Egypt. Matthew is wanting us to see that Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. Matthew wants us to see that in Jesus there is a greater exodus that is going to occur. It will result not just in the exodus of Jews, but it will result in the exodus of all people who put their trust in him. An exodus out of slavery from sin.

The salvation of his people.

Sometimes, when Rachel and I do a jigsaw puzzle, I can get really frustrated with where it all seems to be going. We did this puzzle where there was a lot of blue sky. And the only strategy I had for the blue was to test it. It took a very long time to get through that section. It was very frustrating. I was getting lost in the blue and not remembering the big picture.

Sometimes, we can forget why Jesus came to this world. We're told in the first chapter of Matthew that he came in order to save his people from their sins. It's af-

firmed throughout the gospels. When Jesus is on the Mountain, and he gets transfigured before Peter, James and John, he's talking to Moses and Elijah about his departure, about his exodus.

Perhaps, we've been Christians for so long, we can forget the reason why Jesus came to this world. It doesn't end with his birth, it culminates in his death on the cross. It's so important for us to remember that.

Herod's Decree

Let's look at what Herod does.

Matt. 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*Matt. 2:18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

We're told that when Herod finds out that he's been tricked by the wise men, he slaughters the male children in Bethlehem who are two years and younger.

But what Matthew wants us to see is that here is another prophecy fulfilled through the hands of Herod. Matthew is quoting a prophecy from Jeremiah 31. Jeremiah is actually describing a scene where God's people are gathered at Ramah as they go into exile into Babylon. It happens around the time 586BC, some 600 years before.

But what we should notice is that Ramah is significant, because 1,000 years before Jeremiah's time, Rachel Jacob's wife died in child birth giving birth to Benjamin. Matthew's point is that there are patterns that keep occurring. In Rachel's time. In

Jeremiah's time. And now, Matthew's time where Herod slaughters children in order to get to Jesus.

But Matthew's point seems to be that even though humans may oppose God, God's plans are never thwarted. Even if Herod opposed God, God's plans will always come to fruition. Even if Rachel were to die in child birth and never see the promised land, God's plans cannot be opposed. Because maybe you might recognise Jeremiah 31,

Jer. 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)

Sometimes, it feels like our plans fail. Our plans get frustrated. That's life right? Perhaps that what it felt like for the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Their children were slaughtered. But for what purpose?

God's plans and purposes can never be frustrated. There was a bigger plan in action in Bethlehem as the male children were killed. The saviour of the world would come and a new covenant made through the blood and body of Jesus Christ. So that he can be our God and we can be his people.

Perhaps, Christmas is a difficult time for you. It's a time of lost dreams, disappointment, and despair. Family, friends, neighbours have let you down. People have broken their promise with you. But God keeps his promises. But that's when we need to look to Jesus, and we need to remember that he will never let us down when it counts. He will not let us down because he has made a new covenant with us.

As one author puts it,

"In whatever way death casts its shadow on us this Christmas, we can too find comfort and assurance in God's unbreakable covenant with us."

The Road to Nazareth

Let's look at the road to Nazareth,

Matt. 2:19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Some people have tried to work out what it means that Jesus is a Nazarene. But the best I've come up with is what Nathanael says in John 1. His friend Phillip comes up to Nathanael and says that they have found the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth. And Nathanael replies, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth? I love that. Such honesty. Nazareth is such a hole.

I think that's Matthew's point. Jesus comes from nothing, from nobody. We're meant to understand that Jesus came to be no-one. He was to be no-one, just as Isaiah says,

*2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.*

*3 He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Isaiah 53:2-3 (ESV)

That's the kind of birth he had, that's the kind of life he lived, and that's the death he died. Jesus Christ,

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV)

That's what Paul says in Philippians. That's who Jesus is, he's who we celebrate at Christmas. But it's also whom we follow. We follow him, through Nazareth, we follow him to the cross. Take up your cross and follow me he says. When I hear about Christians around the world, they often talk about their "rights." I kind of laugh when I hear about them talking about their "rights" because what if Jesus did that? He said, "I'm going to assert my rights" instead of, "Not my will, but yours be done." We'd be in deep trouble. But we forget that. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners like you and me. But he didn't just save them, he calls each one of us. He calls each one of us to follow him. I know Christmas is over for another year, but we have Easter to look forward to. Take up your cross and follow him.

As Paul writes,

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

Let's take up our cross and follow Him.

Amen.