

Matthew 2:13-23

Welcome To Our World

Life is precious. Having a new born in the house for the third time has again confirmed just how precious life truly is. When I look at my two week old son and see his little tiny hands and little tiny feet I realize how helpless he is and how much he depends upon me for his life. It is an amazing turn of providence that the Lord has reminded me of these things right when we are engaging together in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, with the infancy narratives of our One Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to give us life but not just any life, everlasting life. How did he do that? Often times when we think of that question we get it right by saying that he died on a cross and then rose again. But what is underlying those events?

Underlying the events of Christ dying and living is his life. His living is greater than his dying and because of his life he is able to offer us everlasting life. He took on our life so that he could give us his life.

We know how precious life is. Each one of us today is trying to preserve his own life and we are doing it right in the midst of a world where the threat of death is ever present. We don't have to look far to prove this. What did we see this week during the hurricane that has wreaked havoc on our coastlines? People evacuated from their homes by the hundreds of thousands all so they could preserve their own lives.

Our world is in need of rescue and it is rescue that Jesus came to give. In our text today we see this precious life of the Christ child facing the same danger that you and I face - the real threat of death.

READ TEXT

This is the story that we leave out of the Christmas pageant and rightly so because the hope that Christ comes to bring is a hope that brings death to its knees. In this passage we see the life of the Son threatened and God miraculously overwhelming any threat against the life of Christ. Today from this text I want us to learn 4 truths about the rescue that Jesus has come to give.

1. Jesus Has Come to Lead Us Away From Death (13-15)

The central truths of this text are tied to the three references to the Old Testament and they come at us with such a force of directness that we have to pay attention to them if we are going to discern the story that the Holy Spirit through Matthew wants us to learn. This passage is showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the whole story of the Old Testament.

When we say things like Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old

Testament what do we mean? Remember the Old

Testament is more than just black ink on white paper. The Old Testament recalls how God dealt with people's hearts and how in the midst of real events he was weaving a tapestry to display his amazing love, his amazing grace, all of which we now are able to understand because Jesus has come.

Have you ever been to an art gallery? If you go to a modern one you see many works of art that to most make no sense. You see people staring at the art and doing their best to make sense of the artist's mind as they try to interpret the piece. With Jesus we don't have to look and wonder anymore what God was up to long ago, we now have his life interpreting for us all that God has been doing since the beginning.

In this passage Jesus is portrayed in the same light of one of the central characters that God chose to tell his story in the Old Testament - Moses. Moses of course led a people who were enslaved away from slavery and into a land of blessing. Jesus has come to do something like Moses did only this time it is better. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let's look at the text.

Out of Egypt I called my Son. This reference is about the Exodus (the salvation event of the Old Testament) but the quotation is not taken from the book of Exodus. This passage comes from Hosea. Hosea was one of the last prophets of the Old Testament. Hosea is telling a story of the people of God's ungratefulness towards God. Their ungratefulness towards God shows up in their unfaithfulness to Him. Even though they are ungrateful and unfaithful God still reaches out his hand of grace to save. Their sin is great but their sin does not exhaust God's amazing grace. Instead of the expected God does the unexpected. Instead of justice there is mercy, instead of wrath there is grace. God calls to his people in the midst of swirling chaos with the hope of his redeeming love.

God has done this to us too. You and I have so much in common, we are all in need of a Savior. You deserve anything but grace but God who is rich in kindness has demonstrated his love towards you. How? God sent the Son - Jesus. Jesus is our way out of the bondage of sin and death. He comes to sin enslaved humanity, but not just comes to stand far off, but comes by taking on our sinfulness. Without ceasing to be what he was he becomes what he is not so that he can make us what we were always intended to be - worshipers of him, sharers in his life.

This salvation that he comes to offer is greater than any salvation the world has ever seen. Israel had experienced saving from enemies, could sleep at night because their borders were safe, but if you read the history of Israel the story is anything but a fairy tale. Jesus' coming was to do something that no one had ever seen or experienced.

Jesus was going to do all that men could ever hope for.

The next quotation tells the story.

2. Jesus Has Come to Secure Life Forever (16-18)

This is one of the most deplorable happenings recorded in Scripture. It takes a man influenced by Satan himself to go seek the lives of all the male children in a town two years and under and kill them. Katie and I were talking about this the other day and determined that if this would have happened to us then both of our boys would have fallen under the sword of Herod.

Some scholars today doubt that this happened because there is no record of it in history. But if we weigh all the disturbing evidence there is no reason for us to doubt that it could have happened but that it did fact happen. First, this act is in keeping with Herod the Great's character. Here is a man who had his own wife assassinated because he was suspicious of her intentions. He was a man so hated by the people that on the day of his death he ordered the death of Jewish noblemen so that there would be weeping at his death.

Second, and this is the most disturbing fact. The reason that scholars suggest that this event may not be recorded is Bethlehem had a small population and the death of these children would have only been somewhere less than 30. We haven't come too far in our way of thinking about life and its significance. Since we started our time together over 6,000 unborn children have been murdered worldwide all to preserve somebody's free choice. The pace is an average of 105 per minute! Where the earlier centuries saw 30 Bethlehem children as insignificant our culture sees the death of 55 million unborn children a year as insignificant.

It is death that Jesus has come to undo and he has come to undo death for forever. Look at the Old Testament reference. This is a quotation from Jeremiah. If you have never read Jeremiah you should. No other Old Testament book has ministered to me like Jeremiah, it is one of my favorites. Jeremiah is only quoted 3 times directly in the New Testament and all three are in Matthew. It may strike us as strange to look at the circumstances and then go to Jeremiah. There are so many questions that when we answer them we will know what Matthew is doing.

Why mention Rachel? Who was she? Rachel was the second wife of Jacob. Jacob's other wife was Rachel's sister, Leah. Jacob remember had his name changed from Jacob to Israel. Jacob had 12 sons who became the leader of the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel only gave Jacob 2 sons but Rachel was the choice wife out of the two wives.

The two children of Rachel are Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph was thought to be dead because he was sold into slavery by his other brothers and Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Jeremiah then looks at the story of Rachel to tell the story that he is going through in his own time. Jeremiah is using the sorrowful story of Rachel as a picture of the tragic consequences of the impending exile that is coming upon the people of God due to their incessant disobedience. But here again, even in the midst of sorrow and despair, God has a message of hope for his people.

Jeremiah uses the story of Rachel to assure Israel that grief will not be final. This quote in Matthew comes from Jeremiah 31. Jeremiah 31 is one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible. Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks of God doing a new thing. Let's read it:

“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, 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. 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. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Now that Jesus has come these days, promised in Jeremiah, are here. Look at how God will do this new thing. The new comes in the midst of great tragedy and grief. The new triumphs over great tragedy. The message here is that weeping may be for the night, you may experience great heartache, but it is only for a moment. One day, because of the salvation that Jesus gives, our shouting and singing will outlast our deepest cry of grief. Rescue is coming for those of us who weep, and look at the way that it has come.

Here we see a vulnerable Jesus fleeing for his life. The way that Jesus will do what was promised in Jeremiah is not this day in Matthew 2 but what this day is leading to in Matthew 27. Here he is fleeing for his life, but soon he will turn and face death and be overcome by the wages of our sin - death. Though he will be overcome he will not be overwhelmed. He will burst forth alive from the bonds of death overwhelming death by his indestructible life. But until then he is fleeing.

Quite a welcome for our King. This is far from the welcome that he deserved. From all intents and purposes it looks as if this mission is doomed for failure. Number 3 this morning:

3. Jesus Appeared the Least Likely to Succeed (19-23)

Look at the text again. Here is the final Old Testament reference for us to consider. *That he would be called a Nazarene.* There are two things for us to note to make sense of this. 1 - The plural prophets. 2 - This quote does not appear directly in the Old Testament. To answer these questions we need to determine the significance of being a Nazarene. The answer to the significance of calling Jesus a Nazarene is its insignificance. Nothing good comes from Nazareth. The Messiah coming from Nazareth would be a thing to despise which is Matthew's point.

Matthew does not say prophet but prophets because he wants to relate the many instances throughout the Old Testament where the Messiah is despised. The Messiah is not only despised he is

rejected. The story of his rejection is what Matthew takes great lengths to demonstrate for us throughout his Gospel.

The reference, though not directly from the Old Testament is from Isaiah 11:1. *Nazir* means branch which alludes to Isaiah 11:1. *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.* The royal tree of David has been reduced to a stump, the line of the king seems to be but a distant memory, but there is an expectant hope that God, who never lies, would be true to his word. In the midst of what seems to be despair, God is bringing salvation!

And let's just say this with absolute certainty. Some suggest that Matthew is cherry-picking the OT trying to make Jesus fit. But if that were the case he would not have chosen such an obscure passage like *he would be called a Nazarene.* Matthew is so convinced of the life of Jesus that he is going to great lengths to convince us that this life is not some isolated life, he is the Christ!

Jesus looks the least likely but in reality these passages laid over his life confirm more than he is the least likely, he is the only one qualified to be an all sufficient Savior.

4. Jesus Is Unstoppable (13-23)

Matthew is demonstrating God's unstoppable mission.

Since the first words of Matthew we have seen opposition. The lineage is filled with disobedient lovers of self, murders, liars, adulterers. His innocent mother Mary could have been stoned to death. Herod is trying to kill him. He could have been lost during the trek to Egypt or while in the densely populated Egypt. The old Serpent, that old Dragon, is trying his best to devour the child. The kingdoms of the earth have set themselves against Lord and his Anointed. But he who sits in the heavens laughs.

No matter how great the opposition we see, his life is indestructible. A darker hour is coming for Christ as he dies on a cross and not even then death could oppose him. From the Cross it looked as if death was swallowing him but in reality he was swallowing death. No matter who tries to put Jesus to death he always rises to outlive his pallbearers.

His coming secured our salvation. He was unstoppable the moment that he decided to take on flesh, the moment he decided to seek and save. The tender cradle meant there was to be a cruel cross. The cruel cross meant the darkness of the tomb. And the King who came to the Cradle, who took on the Cross, who went into the tomb, was going to come from the dead alive! His victory was inevitable. No power of hell nor scheme of man could stop him from accomplishing his plan.

This is why you must trust him. Only he can save. Only he who is indestructible can both give and guarantee life. What is your welcome for the King? Will it be with a heart of adoration or are you trying to snuff out his life?