

Introduction

When we speak of flight for life, we imagine a helicopter or plane whisking away a person who hangs in the balance between life and death. Usually there is trauma and an urgent need for intensive medical attention. However, I am using the phrase this morning to characterize a situation in which there was no trauma and no hospital and no surgeon. Nevertheless, the situation was urgent and life hung in the balance, the life of Jesus the Messiah. In Matthew 2:13-23, we find everything Matthew has to say about 90% of the life of Jesus. One word stands out as the theme of those years for Jesus and Joseph and Mary. That word is uttered by the angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream. He told Joseph to take the child and his mother and FLEE. They fled for life.

[Read Text and Pray]

We are going to look at this text in three parts. The first I am calling . . .

I. Flight by Night (13-15)

A. You recall that magi had come to worship the newborn Messiah. Being warned in a dream, they did not return to tell Herod where they had found the child. Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, was also warned in a dream. He was warned that Herod was about to search for the child to destroy him. The situation was dire and the timing was urgent.

B. Joseph without hesitation obeyed the Lord. Rising while it was still night, he took off for the border. It was about a 70 mile trek to Egypt. And there was a sizable Jewish population there. Still it was not home. But there the child and his mother would be safe from Herod.

C. Egypt. It was in Egypt that the Israel grew from its humble beginnings. A dozen family clans went down to Egypt in the days of a great famine. Four hundred and thirty years later in the days of the exodus, it was a nation estimated to include 2.4 million men, women, and children. God brought the people up out of Egypt to bring them into the land he had

promised them. Now Jesus, in identification with his people, was himself going into Egypt.

D. Matthew makes the point that this trip to Egypt was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

This is an interesting word from the prophet Hosea. You might want to turn there. Hosea 11:1 says, "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This example of fulfillment is quite different from one like we have seen before in Matthew where the chief priests and scribes were able to discern that Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem because the prophet Micah had said, "And you Bethlehem . . . out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Clearly Micah is forward-looking and unequivocally focuses on Messiah while Hosea's word actually looks back at the nation Israel as the son of God. He recalls the fact that God called the nation out of Egypt. Matthew understands that Israel, as the son, has served as a type or a picture of Messiah who also is the son of God. God led Israel into Egypt for protection from a great famine and later called Israel out of Egypt to be his chosen nation. Even so he sent his only begotten son Jesus into Egypt for protection from a maniacal monarch. He called him out as well to be his chosen anointed one. Matthew's point here is to further demonstrate that Jesus is Messiah. He is the better son than Israel ever proved to be.

Let me just demonstrate that. When Hosea spoke for the Lord, here is what he said in Hosea 11:1. He said "When Israel was a child (just as Jesus was a child) I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." But see this in verse 2. "The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols."

Here is where Jesus is demonstrated to be the better and perfect son of God. Called out of Egypt he obeys God's commands completely, perfectly, and fully from his very heart. As continuously as Israel disobeyed, the greater son continuously obeyed. In this way he became the perfect sacrifice. He became our perfect and spotless Passover lamb. If His righteousness were not spotless, we would be without hope.

But the Father himself declares of Jesus, "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased." And so we have hope if our trust in Jesus because he is an acceptable offering. And our hope is also because of his identification with us. James Boice asserts that Matthew wants us to understand "that Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of Israel, the one in whom is wrapped up the true character and destiny of the people. The fact that Jesus was taken to Egypt and returned from Egypt was one of God's ways of alerting us to how significant Christ's tie with his people really was." In fact, think about it. Egypt becomes the living symbol of the dominion of darkness ruled by the prince of the power of the air. In order to deliver humans from that dominion Jesus came to undertake the burden for us, to take our sins on himself, to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him! In identifying with us he takes our sin and exchanges it for his righteousness. And that is good news!

II. A Homicidal Tyrant (16-18)

A. Herod is infamous for his ruthlessness and narcissism. So much so that his killing the babies in Bethlehem would have paled in comparison to the total number of lives he took in his quest for self-preservation. But if you lived in Bethlehem in the day, the ghoulish atrocity that took place would have been a day of horror etched in your mind, one you would never forget.

B. The magi, in accordance with the direction of the angel, went home by another way and did not tell Herod where they had found Jesus. Soon Herod realized what had happened and he was enraged. He became furious. The Greek construction here expresses an exceeding rage. He relinquished control and gave himself over to the fury billowing up in him and committed unspeakable anguishing evil. He sent and killed all the male children 24 months and younger in the small town of Bethlehem and its surrounding area. Based on the likelihood that Bethlehem had a population of about a thousand, it is believed that between 8 and 12 babies were slaughtered by the madman. Herod's multiple infanticide exemplifies for us the hostility of the world towards the Messiah. Unlike the Jewish leaders, Herod believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and for that reason he sought to kill him. As a king of this world he set himself against the kingdom of God and his Christ.

This world wants nothing a righteous kingdom. It hates the light and it hates rival rulers. This world is bound up in self-determination. I will have MY WAY! This spirit appears in Psalm 2, a great messianic psalm. It epitomizes the hostility of world rulers to God and his king. It expresses the antagonism of Herod and others that have followed in his likeness. "Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast their cords from us.'" Herod was pridefully arrogantly and angrily declaring, "I will not be toppled by this king."

The great J. C. Ryle comments on this point, that we should observe "how true it is that the rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God." He asks, "Do you think that Christ's cause depends on the power and patronage of princes? You are mistaken. They have seldom done much for the advancement of true religion. They have far more frequently been the enemies of the truth. Put not your trust in princes. Those who are like Herod are many. Those who [are not like him] are few."

It is a fitting word for us today. The effort of our own government to normalize abominations and thus move towards criminalizing righteousness reflects this very fact. We are not called to trust in civil governments but to trust in and follow the King of Kings.

C. Now you know that the last thing Herod would have wanted was to have fulfilled God's word. He would not want that any more than the devil wants to fulfill God's plan. But driven by his anger and irrationality, that is precisely what he does. Matthew points out that the result of his ruthlessness was the fulfillment of the word of the prophet Jeremiah.

[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.](#)

Like the previous fulfillment at which we looked, this one stands out. Again, it is not a typical prophecy, as in 'it was foretold and now it has been fulfilled,' but there is a message that underlies the past words of the

prophet which are now being brought to light. Something was there that is now here. The word of Jeremiah is found in chapter 31 and verse 15. You should turn there. The reference is to the sorrow of mothers who were grieving because their children were going into exile. This was the deportation to which Matthew drew attention in the divisions of the genealogy of Jesus. That deportation was the end of the Davidic line of kings ruling from Jerusalem. Now, I want you to notice what follows mention of the tears in Jeremiah. (Read 31:16-20).

There may be weeping. This is a sorrowful situation. But be comforted because God is at work. His people have been resistant and obstinate, but the Lord's heart yearns for his people and they will come back. And the Lord will bring restoration. So what is the hope to which Matthew is now pointing? Jesus the Messiah. He has gone to Egypt but he is coming back. And even more to the point, the deportation marked the time the Davidic line ceased to rule in Jerusalem, but take courage; be assured; the heir to David's throne has come. This baby Herod sought to kill is the Messiah. God brought his people back from exile, and through this Messiah he will gather his people home.

This reference has a future referent even from our perspective. Even after Jesus has gone to the right hand of the throne of God, there is much sorrow and testing now in this life because we live in a world that despises righteousness and holiness and the glorious messiah. We know sorrow and weeping. But there is hope. Jesus is coming back. He is coming back to end the exile and gather his people home. This assurance is born out in what Jesus said to his disciples in John. Listen to John 16:20-22:

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Sorrow may last for the night but Jesus comes in the morning!

III. A Despised Village (19-23)

A. It was not long til Herod died and Joseph again gave heed to the direction of an angel from the Lord who indicated it was time to leave Egypt and go back to Israel. But the region around Jerusalem remained a dangerous place—a place that would have been unsafe for bringing up the child Jesus. So he listened to the angel and withdrew to Galilee. He went to a quieter place, a place out of the way. In fact he went to live in Nazareth.

B. Nazareth doesn't sound bad to me and you does it? Out in the country is not bad. There is a lot to commend out in the country. After visiting Los Angeles a week ago, I rather appreciate the appeal of the country. But Nazareth was a place that was looked upon by the Jews as a place you would not want to go, much less a place in which you would want to live. It was backward; it was uneducated; it was low class. John 1 tells of when Philip introduced Nathaniel to Jesus. He said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law wrote; it is Jesus of Nazareth." And do you remember Nathaniel's reply? He said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was Backwardsville. It was Podunk. So its name became synonymous with everything undesirable. To be a Nazarene meant to be despised and unwanted by the world. It meant you were scum. And they had a scummy accent up there that gave them away wherever they went.

C. Nazareth is where Jesus was taken to be raised. And Matthew says this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets that Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Now here is an intriguing fact. Nowhere in the Old Testament is it said as such that Messiah would be called a Nazarene. But what Matthew is saying should be apparent. Nazarene must have been a by-word for a nobody, a scummy person, someone to be despised and rejected. And notice Matthew does not attribute this word to a particular prophet or even one of the prophets but to the prophets plural. And for sure the prophets did give the word that he would be called "a Nazarene" in the sense that he would be unwanted and disregarded.

Isaiah 53:3 – 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.

Daniel 9:26 says the anointed one "shall be cut off and shall have nothing."

Psalm 22:6-8 depicts Messiah this way: "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they wag their heads."

Psalm 69:12 depicts Messiah saying, "I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me." Verses 19-21 continue, "You know my shame and my dishonor . . . reproaches have broken my heart so that I am in despair."

Isaiah 49:7 says he is one "deeply despised, abhorred by the nation."

Isaiah 50:6 says, "I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting."

D. Do you know the first place Jesus was despised when he began his ministry? Strikingly, it was Nazareth. He went into the synagogue there on the Sabbath and the scroll of Isaiah was handed to him to read. He read, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and sight to the blind." And he explained to them that the scripture was fulfilled that day in their hearing, and he said some more, and the locals were filled with wrath and drove him out of the town and sought to throw him off the cliff. Even to the Nazarenes, he was a Nazarene.

Conclusion

Several important lessons emerge from this text.

A. One comes from the Obedience of Joseph.

I am just amazed by this man Joseph. The Bible does not tell us a lot about Joseph, but it says an awful lot. Whatever he is facing, God gives him a word and he just does it. We need to take from Joseph this morning fresh determination to follow his example of resolute and determined obedience to our great God.

B. A couple lessons derive from the Flight of Jesus.

1. First, the flight was a means of his protection. One of the themes Matthew is intent to express here in these verses is the effort being made to preserve the life of Jesus. Herod's intent was to destroy him, but Joseph, being warned in a dream arose by night and carried the child to safety in Egypt. Then when it was time to come back, it seems Joseph would have gone back to Bethlehem. After all that's the city of David. But for Jesus' safety, he was taken to Nazareth. Protecting Jesus points us to the importance of the life of Jesus. Jesus was born to die but not to die too soon.

Jesus came to die, but he had to be perfected to be an acceptable sacrifice. What I mean by perfected is not that was somehow imperfect or impure. No he was spotless, but he had to live out righteousness in the face of temptation. He had to fulfill the whole law. Hebrews 5:8-9 makes this very point. Listen, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." Paul says in Romans 5 "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." (6) God protected Christ from death until it was the right time. But at the right time he died as God's own provided sacrifice for all who will draw near to God through him.

2. Second, the flight of Jesus demonstrates that he was unwanted and in fact despised. Herod didn't want him. And even when he came back he moved to Nazareth of all places. And after having grown up in this town, they didn't want him either. The main thing we learn about Jesus' life between his birth and the beginning of his public ministry is that he was on the run and hiding away from danger. And things only intensified when he began to openly proclaim the kingdom. Here is a point for us. Following Jesus as Jesus really is does not mean following a popular guy. It does not mean endearing yourself to the world. There is a cost to following Jesus.

Following Jesus is not a luxury cruise. It is not for those who want to take it easy in life. One day as Jesus was teaching, a scribe came up to Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He was on the move from his birth and still on the move in adult life. He did not come to lounge around but to obey and

serve and live according to the will of his father until at the right time he died. Those who would follow him are called to the same thing.

And not only is it a relentless pursuit of obedience. Following Jesus also means persecution. A world that hated Jesus will hate you to. Be ready. Make sure you count the cost. But I tell you this with all the certainty there is. No cost is too great. Following Jesus will cost you everything, and he is worth it.

C. The final lesson I have for you this morning comes from the Fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Matthew relentlessly points out to us how Jesus fulfills OT prophecy and OT types all in an effort to show us there is no doubt. Jesus is the Christ. The Bible confirms over and over that it is him. Jesus is the one. He is the one about whom the law and the prophets testify. And it is a glorious work he came to do. He will reign as king forever. And he will gather his people home! And he will bring us everlasting joy. And he is worthy of worship and obedience.