

The Promised Suffering Son

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[0 : 01] Matthew's Gospel goes on at chapter 2 verse 1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Gentile wise men came from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who is born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they told him, In Bethlehem of Judea.

For thus it's written, By the prophet, and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Then go and search diligently for the child.

[1 : 21] And when you find him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way and behold the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Now when the wise men had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. And he 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. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.

[2 : 57] And this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son.

We'll do have those opening chapters of Matthew open in front of you.

And we've been thinking about these chapters the last couple of weeks. And we're looking this morning particularly at the last paragraph that Willie read for us, verses 13 to 15 of chapter 2 of Matthew's Gospel.

So do have that open in front of you. That'll be a real help. Now I've been reading over these last, well really since lockdown began, I started reading the Chronicles of Narnia with my two eldest children.

And I've read a few of them myself in the past, but some of them are new to me. I've not read all of them before. So it's been a real joy to me to be reading those. But as I was preparing last night and as the news came through of the latest lockdowns, I couldn't help but think of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and Mr. Tumnus' words to Lucy.

[4 : 15] He said, in Narnia, it is always winter and never Christmas. And that's very much how many will feel, I suspect, after yesterday's announcement.

Plans frustrated. Family not seen. For many, it will bring isolation and loneliness.

Christmas is usually a time, isn't it, of family gatherings. That is what Christmas is for many people. Many people all over the world will in the next few days be making journeys to get back home for Christmas, to spend time with loved ones.

And perhaps it will be just a bit more fraught this year with all the restrictions that we have in place. And for many, journeys have been cancelled. Christmas is a time when we want to be at home, be with family.

And we'll all be feeling that especially keenly this morning, I suspect, that longing to be home. But you see, our longings, our hopes, even in the best of years, are only temporary, aren't they?

[5 : 31] They're never quite fulfilled in the way that we might hope. And we're only too aware of that this year. But even if we do see family, even if we have a great time with them, we have to leave again.

We have to return home. And for many others, time at home, whilst at promises much, often fails to deliver. Perhaps it was one monopoly game too many with the in-laws.

Speaking of which, the key is the green spaces. You've got to get those. And that's your path to victory and monopoly. But perhaps it's just one game too many. Old resentments and arguments bubble to the surface after a day or two.

And maybe for you, home is just not what it used to be. A recent bereavement. An empty place at the dinner table. Perhaps relationship breakdown means this will be a very painful time of year for you.

Or perhaps you've just received some heartbreaking news which just bubbles to the surface at this time of year. That longing for home, that longing for a permanent place of belonging which we all harbour in our hearts, that will always, in the end, in this world, be frustrated.

[6 : 55] Even in a year free of COVID, those frustrations will always come. we long for a permanent home, for something better.

We yearn for it, don't we? I know I certainly do. Well, it's a permanent place of belonging. A true and lasting home that is really at the very heart of our Christmas message this morning and at the heart of our passage.

It is the call to our true home, to our Heavenly Father that is held out to all of us here this morning. the reality of the gospel is held out to you.

That reality of it always being Christmas and never winter. What a thought. But that is the very essence of the gospel.

That's the very heart of those wonderful Chronicles of Narnia that I'm reading to my daughter. You see, this is a passage about the child, Jesus Christ, who was God's true son, who would suffer in order to redeem for himself a people forever.

[8 : 13] That is why he came. That is what we remember each Christmas. And for all who received Jesus as king, perhaps even you today, for all who come to him, you will be given the right to be children of God, to be brought into his family forever.

All our longings, all our hopes for home and permanence, they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So yes, almost all of us are missing out on time with our closest and dearest this Christmas, but don't, don't miss out on an eternal home.

Don't miss out on that. We've read this morning and seen over the past few weeks that Matthew in his gospel is introducing us to the child, Jesus, the one long promised, the great fulfillment of all that was promised in the Old Testament.

Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God's promised savior. And as we saw last week, he is the promised sovereign shepherd who's come to rule his people.

Jesus was God's king come at last to rescue, to lead his people forever. forever. But what sort of king would he be?

[9 : 52] Well, from verse 13 of chapter 2, we begin to see more of the details. And it's perhaps surprising what we find here. We've just seen in the previous paragraph last week, we saw that Jesus is the king.

Wise men have traveled from the east. They've come with lavish gifts upon him to worship him. This is the birth of a king. But this bit from verse 13 comes as a bit of a shock.

We read about Jesus and his family fleeing, fleeing for their lives. We quickly move from the worship of a king to the wanderings of a fugitive.

And this picture, this picture of a young family in the Middle East fleeing, a cruel dictator, it's sadly a picture that's really quite familiar to us, isn't it, in recent years.

Folk fleeing from the Middle East for their lives, little children coming with them. It's a common picture. It's a tragic picture. But why is it here in the Bible?

[11 : 03] If this is God's son, what's going on? Why is he having to flee for his life? Why is it here in the account of his birth? It doesn't really fit, does it, with the images we have of Christmas?

Usually we have the manger, the scene with the animals and Joseph and Mary. We don't tend to see this bit, the fleeing in the middle of the night to Egypt. We can't really imagine this, adorning the front of Christmas cards.

It looks very weak and feeble, unremarkable. But Matthew is not just recording the unairbrushed reality of events in history.

He's also giving us the real explanation of all that's happening. He's explaining these events. And that's what we have at the end of verse 15. Just look there, it says, this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. You see, without this word of divine explanation, these events look pretty hopeless, totally irrelevant to you and I.

[12 : 16] But with this word from God, the question that you rightly have at the front of your minds, what has this got to do with me? Well, that question suddenly comes alive.

It has everything to do with you, with your future, with your very meaning and purpose. because this is telling us that Jesus is the one who makes possible salvation, who opens the door from exile to our eternal home, to our place of true belonging.

That is what's being held out to us in this passage. happy dawn. We'll do have that open again.

We'll think a bit more about this little section here in Matthew 2 verses 13 to 15. Now this paragraph, as we've seen, comes just as a bit of a shock to us, doesn't it?

Matthew is presenting this birth as something of epic magnitude with all that he's been saying so far. This is God entering into the human story, the human child, the king of kings, and yet we find them fleeing through the middle of the night, fleeing for their lives.

[13 : 36] What is going on? Well, two things Matthew is showing us. First, this child, Jesus, he is the true son of God.

And second, he is the one through his own sufferings who would redeem his people. So first, Jesus is the true son of God.

We see here that in Jesus, in this child, the great hope for a perfect and holy son is at last fulfilled. Now look down at verse 15.

What on earth is going on here? It seems a bit odd, doesn't it? this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt, I called my son. Now at first glance perhaps makes no sense to us, does it?

We've just read about Jesus and his family fleeing to Egypt, and then you have this quote from the Old Testament saying, out of Egypt, I called my son.

[14 : 40] Perhaps it's a bit confusing to us. But it certainly wasn't confusing to Matthew's contemporaries, those he was writing to. They would have known exactly what this meant and the significance of Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy from the Old Testament.

See, Matthew is quoting here from the prophet Hosea, who wrote several hundred years before the birth of Jesus. And when Hosea was writing, God's people, they were on the very edge of their lowest point.

They were about to go into exile. And at this moment of crisis, Hosea points God's people then back in their history, so as to give them hope for the future.

He says there in Hosea, when Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son.

this is a glance back to the 400 years of slavery that God's people endured in Egypt, living under a foreign empire, oppressed by Pharaoh, and to when God rescued them from their terrible bondage, he called out of Egypt his son.

[16 : 08] And the word son there is another word for God's people. They were often referred to as God's son. He calls his people out of Egypt. But Hosea goes on to say that the more they were called, the more they went away.

You see, Israel, God's son, they were rescued from terrible slavery, called by their father in heaven to be his people. But like a stroppy teenager, they wanted nothing to do with him.

And over the years that followed, from that great moment of rescue, over the years that followed, God was continually patient. But by the time that Hosea is writing, things had reached a crisis point, and the people were about to go into bondage again, not to Egypt this time, but to Syria.

But you see, even in the midst of that, God loved his son, and he promises that he wouldn't ultimately destroy his people, because another exodus event was promised.

See, the Jews, they looked back to the exodus from Egypt as the beginning of their history. But they also looked forward to a new exodus, under a new Moses.

[17 : 36] And Matthew's point here in his gospel account, is that the new exodus, promised by Hosea, it was about to begin with the birth of this child.

Something very much like that exodus event was about to come again. Something like what happened with Moses and God's people in Egypt was going to happen again. Once again, as then, an evil king is slaughtering Jewish children.

And once more, one particular child is hidden and preserved in order to become God's anointed leader and redeemer.

You see, as Jesus flees to Egypt, Matthew recalls these words from Isaiah, out of Egypt, I called my son. That's quite a lot to dig around in the Old Testament, just to explain what's going on.

But did you see what he's saying? The first son, the nation Israel, they failed to fulfill all they were meant to be. But in Jesus, the true son, the greater Moses, had at last arrived.

[18 : 57] He has come at last. And in him, all the hopes of a nation, the whole world, are fulfilled. Because in Jesus, in this child, born to Mary, he is the perfect son.

All God's purposes for Israel are at last fulfilled. And this is good news for all who receive Jesus as king.

Because in Jesus, all that is his becomes ours. For in Christ, you are all sons, through faith, writes the apostle Paul.

God's God's God's love. And this means that all man's failings, despite all your failings, and my failings, despite all that, all who trust in Jesus can know the joy of truly belonging, of truly being a son of God.

Perhaps you feel too far gone. God would never accept me. he'd never welcome me in, surely, the things I've done. Well, if that's you, then you're exactly the person who Jesus can welcome, who longs to welcome into his family.

[20 : 25] Unless you realize the depths of your needs, unless you're realistic about your true state before God, then you can't come to Jesus. God's love.

The one requirement is a broken and contrite spirit that reaches out for forgiveness. All who trust in Jesus can know the joy of truly belonging, of being a true son of the God who made you, even you, even me.

And that is wonderful news, isn't it? But there's more to say. Not only was Jesus the perfect son, but he was the son who would suffer to redeem his people.

Not only does Jesus offer what we cannot offer, namely perfect obedience, but he pays what we don't have to pay if we trust in him, judgment for sin.

He covers it. He deals with it. And so the fact that Jesus is the great fulfillment of this ancient prophecy, that he is the one called out of Egypt to be the perfect son, means that all who trust in him and follow him by faith can also be called true sons of the living God and welcomed into his family.

[21 : 55] That is the wonderful news of Christmas. Well, the second key thing that Matthew is showing us here, first that Jesus is God's true son, the one who fulfilled all the promises and fulfilled all those promises in the Old Testament.

He's God's true son, but he's also the son who would suffer to redeem his people. Matthew here is painting Jesus as another Moses, one who went down into Egypt, one who entered his people's bondage and rescued them from their slavery and into a relationship with God.

God's people back then, you can read about it in Exodus, they were in bondage in Egypt. And we too, today are in bondage, not in Egypt, but in bondage to sin.

You see, humanity has a great major problem. Ever since the beginning of the human story, when in the Garden of Eden, man doubted God's goodness, doubted his words, and instead believed the lies of Satan, rebelled against their maker.

Ever since then, there's been a great rupture between man and God, and between man and man. It hardly needs evidence, does it?

[23 : 32] We just look around us, watch our news programs, to see all is not well. But the source of all that we see is man's rebellion against God.

That's the very heart of it. sin. It's our sin. That is a great problem in our world. It was the reason for the impending exile we heard about there in Hosea.

God's right response to sin is judgment. How could it be otherwise? And the implications of this, they are serious. They're serious for all of us.

when we realize the ultimate sin is the rejection, the rebellion against God, then we realize, if we're honest, that we're all guilty of that.

All of us are by nature in bondage to sin, and we desperately need rescued from it. That is our great condition that we need to be saved from.

[24 : 40] And here, in his gospel, Matthew is portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of all that Moses promised. Like Moses, Jesus went down into Egypt, and in doing so, he would redeem his people.

He would pay the price for bondage to sin. How would Jesus do that? How would he rescue his people from their problems, from their sin?

Well, it was through his own suffering. We see glimpses of it all through this passage. The shadow of the cross, upon which Jesus would three decades later be crucified on, casts its long shadow over the verses we've been reading this morning.

Yes, Jesus was God's son, God's king, God's promised rescuer, but he was to be a suffering king. Notice the reason for Joseph and Mary and Jesus fleeing to Egypt.

Look there at the second half of verse 13. This is the angel speaking to Joseph, rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and there remain until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

[26 : 05] this wasn't a knee-jerk paranoid fleeing, was it? Herod really did intend to get rid of Jesus. Just look on to verse 16, just after our passage, it says this, 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 all in that region who were two years old or under.

Jesus was God's king but his was a life that would be marked by suffering.

It didn't end here with Herod but continued all through his life and ultimately with his death on the cross. This is the pattern that the apostle Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians.

Here's what he said, Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. that's the reality, isn't it?

[27 : 34] God himself in human form, suffering to the point of death on a cross. But his story doesn't end there. The apostle Paul goes on, therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Now, many would read through Matthew's gospel, not just these chapters, but they'll keep reading. And they might think, having read that, that Jesus' life was a tragedy, a sad waste of the life of a social revolutionary, brutally cut short.

But far from tragedy, these events, Jesus' sufferings that we get the very glimpse of here in Matthew chapter 2, his sufferings were a triumph.

That was his very purpose in coming. He came as the great redeemer. He was the one who entered the bondage of his people, who took the punishments, who paid the price, one that we ought to pay ourselves.

He died in our place and was raised from the dead so that in him, you, even you can know freedom from the bondage of sin.

[29 : 05] The great chasm between God and man has been removed for all who trust in Jesus. That is the wonderful news at the very heart of Christmas that Matthew wants us to grasp.

Jesus is the great promised one, the one who would fulfill all the hopes and expectations of a perfect son, the one who would suffer to redeem his people.

And so the invitation is held out to you this Christmas. come to Jesus. Trust in him.

His perfect obedience remarkably is counted to you. His death has paid the price for sin.

The death that casts its shadow over these verses, that death pays the price for your sin. And so that means that you can know the place of true belonging this Christmas.

[30 : 22] You can be welcomed in to God's eternal family because of who Jesus was. He wasn't just the Son of God. He wasn't just God's King.

He was God's King who came to suffer, to redeem his people. And if you trust in him, you can be welcomed into his everlasting family.

Not because you've earned it on merit, but because it's a gift given to you, made possible through the sufferings of this child we read about here this morning.

That is where all the unfulfilled longings of our hearts will at last be fulfilled beginning now, but ultimately fulfilled when Jesus the King returns to establish his eternal kingdom.

We'll be with him forever in that great land where it's always Christmas, never winter. So don't ignore his call to you this Christmas today.

[31 : 35] in him alone, in him alone, you can know true and lasting belonging through the forgiveness of your sins. Don't place your hopes in anything this Christmas.

It's illustrated more than ever that our hopes will always be dashed in this world. But look above to what Christmas is truly about and the very person at the center of it, God's true son, who came to redeem you from your sins and welcome you home forever.

That's the true center, the true meaning of Christmas. Born for our salvation, word of the father now in flesh appearing, oh come, let us adore him.

that's the right response to what we read this morning in Matthew's gospel.