

King Jesus is God's Promised Sufferer

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Date: 15 December 2019

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to the scriptures now and reading together in Matthew's gospel. Matthew chapter 2. Phil Copeland has been leading us very helpfully through these wonderful stories about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great significance that they have fulfilling so much of what the prophets had spoken for many, many centuries.

Anyways, and this morning we come to Matthew 2 at verse 16. And here's a solemn reading amongst all the joy of Christmas.

Then Herod, when he saw that he'd been tricked by the wise men, remember they had been asked to come and tell him about where Jesus was, but had heard in a dream not to go to Herod and had gone another way.

When he saw that he was tricked by the wise men, he 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'd ascertained from the wise men.

And then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. Her voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation. Rachel weeping for her children.

[1 : 25] She refused to be comforted because they are no more. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 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. And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 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. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled.

He shall be called a Nazarene. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

Well, please do have your Bibles open to Matthew chapter 2. And you will find that on page 808 of our Visitor's Bibles. And it is a passage that is really all about the fact that King Jesus is God's promised sufferer.

[2 : 55] Well, recently I was talking to a Christian friend who works with deprived kids in a pretty rough part of the country.

And he told me that when he started his job, he was amazed and astounded at just how ignorant the local people are of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And he said to me that really the name of Jesus, it seems to be, in the minds of the local people there, is nothing more than a casual curse word, a swear word to be blurted out when things go wrong.

And he said to me that when he tried to share the gospel with the children, it seemed that all that he would receive in return was mockery and ridicule.

Do you know, I think that's actually true throughout the rest of the country. It's certainly true of Glasgow, is it not? That the name of Jesus is treated as nothing more than a curse word, a swear word to be blurted out casually.

[4 : 01] And on the whole, also up and down the country, you'll find that the name of Jesus is a name that is mocked and ridiculed, and many people treat it with scorn.

But then zoom out of the UK and look at the nations, and you will see that the name of Jesus is actually something that is synonymous with suffering and persecution.

There are many places across the globe where to bear the name of Jesus means that you will face daily threats of violence, persecution, and even physical death.

Just think, please, of the report that was released back in the summer of this year, the report that was publicly affirmed by the British Foreign Secretary. I wonder if you've read the report. It stated that some 80% of the world's religiously motivated discrimination is aimed at those who bear the name of Christ, Christians.

So in our world today, the name of Jesus is synonymous with suffering, with scorn and shame. And on the whole, it's treated as a swear word. And yet the strange thing is, that is the way it has been from the very beginning of Jesus' life.

[5 : 14] That is what we will see so clearly in Matthew chapter 2. But we will also see from Matthew chapter 2, that the name of Jesus is the name of the only one who can give us the salvation that we desperately need.

If you've not been here over the past few weeks at the Tron Church, we've been taking our time to carefully work through these early chapters of Matthew and listen very carefully to what Matthew's declaring about Jesus' identity.

And you remember, those of you who've been here, that Matthew was one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' time on earth. This is historical truth that we're dealing with here. And Matthew has written this gospel account to show you and me just how beautiful Jesus is, so that we will surrender our lives to Jesus as our Lord and King, and so that we will build our lives upon Jesus' teaching.

Let me just give you a very brief recap of what we've seen so far, if you've not been here. Back at the start of chapter 1, Matthew tells us that Jesus is God's promised King.

That is, his coming into this earth hasn't happened in some kind of an isolated time vacuum, but rather, his coming to earth is the continuation and the climax of the Old Testament.

[6 : 29] The whole Bible is one long gospel account. It's all about him. He is the one in whom all of God's covenant promises, covenant promises that he made with the forefathers of our faith, like David and Abraham, where they find their yes and their amen in this King, this King Jesus.

Also from chapter 1, verse 18 onwards, Matthew told us that this Jesus is unlike any other king and any other person who's ever lived, because he is both fully God and fully man in the one person, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of his virgin mother.

Jesus is none other than the eternal Son of God. He left the gaze of angels and came into this world to become an embryo in the womb of his virgin mother.

And why did he do that? Well, because he was born to be the disclosing King. He came to reveal the full light of the glory of God to sinners like you and me, so that we can sit here today and we don't have to play desperate guessing games about who God is and what he is like.

We can know him. He's come to us in history and said, here I am, come and know me. This is me in the person of my Son. But you know, more than this, Jesus was also born to be not just the disclosing King, but the delivering King.

[7 : 52] As chapter 1, verse 21 says, he came to save us from our biggest problem, the thing that alienates us from our maker, our sin. He came to deal with the punishment that we deserve for the terrible way that we've treated God, so that we could have peace with God and be friends with him forever.

And as we heard two weeks ago, at the start of chapter 2, verses 1 to 12, Jesus, we're told, was also born to be the shepherd king. Those whom Jesus came to save from sin, he also came to shepherd.

Those whom Jesus came to rescue, he also came to rule. And not just to rule for a little time, but to rule for all eternity, forever and ever. That's the picture that we read about in the prophet Micah. This ruler who would come and shepherd God's people will do so in a new world that's full of peace and justice and goodness and righteousness forever and ever and ever.

And last Sunday, when we looked at verses 13 to 18, we heard that Jesus is God's true son, that is his true Israel. He is the one, in other words, who came to live the perfect life, the perfect human life that God the Father desires on our behalf, for us.

[9 : 07] So that if we trust in him, we can be clothed in his righteousness and he can make us holy. He will save us from sin's power and therefore make us more into the people that we really should be.

And more than that, we also saw from elsewhere in the Bible that if we trust in this son, we can be adopted into God's family, the royal family of all royal families.

If you trust in this son, then you too will be made into a true son. And in our passage this morning, Matthew is teaching us, as I've said, that King Jesus is God's promised sufferer.

You see, as soon as Jesus entered this world, he faced brutal hardships. Brutal. Just think about everything that we've read about so far in this chapter that Jesus has faced.

He's not even two years old and already he's been hunted down by a crackpot-crazed tyrant who's seeking to kill him. Remember back in verse 16 that we read a moment ago?

[10:09] We're told that King Herod, the Roman puppet king of Judea at that time, he was so enraged at the possibility of having to bow down to God's newborn king that he launched this murderous plot, this sick, sick plot, to try and destroy Jesus.

He said, go and kill all of the babies in Bethlehem, aged between zero and two years old. Of course, Herod did that, hoping that the Christ child, Jesus, would be swept up and be one of the ones who was destroyed.

It's sick. It's evil. But you know, God is sovereign, friends. He's even sovereign over the wickedness that comes from the heart of mankind.

And so God warned Joseph to take Mary and their infant son and to flee down south, down to Egypt for safety, out of Herod's jurisdiction. And verse 19, we're told that Herod, despite all of his pomp and all of his desperate attempts to oppose God, he's utterly swept aside, done away with.

And of course, that is the way it always will be for those who reject God's rule. But in verse 20, with the death of Herod, God speaks to Joseph again in a dream and says, come back up north, out of Egypt, back into the land of promise, into Israel.

[11:26] But notice, not to live in Judea, where Herod's ghastly son, Archelaus, was ruling instead. Joseph is to go and settle somewhere else.

Please look at verse 23. He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets.

He will be called a Nazarene. Now so far in this section of his gospel, Matthew's been repeating the fact again and again and again that the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding Jesus' birth, it's all the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises.

Promises that the Lord had made centuries before through his messengers, the prophets. Five times, Matthew uses this little phrase where he says, this, that is this event that I've just described to you about Jesus.

It took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, singular. He uses the same phrase here in verse 23, but there's something unique about this phrase here.

[12:32] So far all of the Old Testament quotes that Matthew has pointed us to have been taken from single specific Old Testament, a single specific Old Testament prophet, singular.

But notice here that it's plural. This was spoken by the prophets, plural. So Jesus being brought up in Nazareth, it fulfills a theme that's found through all of the Old Testament prophets.

prophets. Well, what is this theme that Jesus fulfills by growing up in Nazareth? Answer, that the one who would be born king was born to suffer, born to be despised, born to face rejection, and then to face death.

That is what the promise, that the prophets promised would happen again and again and again about the one who would be born king. Now there are many passages in the prophets we could turn to. We don't have time to go through the majority of them.

I'm sure you can understand. But let me just give you some. Think of Isaiah 53 where the prophet speaks about God's coming king. And he speaks about it in the past tense, but he's really talking about the future.

[13:43] Isaiah says, He, the Christ, 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.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. Then there's Psalm 22 where David, King David, is speaking about his own experience, but he's also speaking as a prophet, prophetically, about the greater king who would come after him, about his experience.

And he said this, But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me.

They make mouths at me. They wag their heads at me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. Or similarly, David says in Psalm 69, again speaking about the experience of the king coming after him, he says, I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons.

Reproaches have broken my heart so that I am in despair. I look for pity, but found none. And for comforters, but I found none.

[15:08] They gave me poison for food and for my thirst, they gave me sour wine to drink. Isaiah 49, it's also the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, says that the Holy One, his promised king, would be deeply despised and abhorred by the whole nation of Israel.

Daniel 9 also promises that the Lord's anointed one, the coming king, will be cut off and will have nothing. Friends, Jesus being brought up in Nazareth and being called a Nazarene, it's the fulfillment of such prophecy, such words of prophecy as those.

How so? Well, you see, back then, to call someone a Nazarene was to swear at them, was to curse them. If I called you a Nazarene, I was labeling you with a term of shame and scorn.

You see, Nazareth back then was apparently a dismal little town of the northern region of Galilee. In fact, the whole of the region of Galilee and especially Nazareth was greatly despised and looked down upon by other regions.

Probably due to the fact that there was a large Gentile population in that place. But Nazareth was seen as a complete armpit of a place, a total dump. You might have a very nice armpit, but I don't, so that's fine.

[16:26] Here's a nice image for you. But this sort of thing isn't uncommon today in our country. For whatever reason, whatever reason, certain places look down on other places.

I'm sure you can think of examples, but let me tell you, when I was in my early teens, I went on a summer trip with some other teenagers from the Tron Church to a beautiful and really nice place called Brora.

Is there a point of your hand if you've been to Brora? Has anyone been to Brora? A few people? Okay. You'll know what I'm talking about. A lovely place. But as a teenager, I befriended other teenagers in Brora. And we were having a good time, but one day I said, can we go down and visit Galsby, which is just down the coast.

Oh dear. I said completely the wrong thing. Their faces that were smiling fell. And they looked at me as though I'd just done some heinous crime, like I'd stabbed someone or something.

And they went, oh no. Oh Galsby, no, no. Why would you want to go there? We hate Galsby. And this was their words. They said, we hate everyone who comes from Galsby.

[17:31] Galsby is full of scum. Now I never got the chance to go and visit Galsby and I'm sure it's actually a lovely place. All right. If you're from Galsby today, that was those teenagers' words, not mine.

But these Brora teenagers despised Galsby and its residents. And that is how Nazareth and Nazarene were treated back during the time of Christ.

And there's flashes of this elsewhere in the Bible. Just think of John chapter 1, please. Just think of the time when Philip, he comes full of excitement to Nathanael and he says, Nathanael, listen, we found the Messiah. We found God's promised king.

He's Jesus of Nazareth. And how does Nathanael respond? He goes, Nazareth? Eh? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? You sure you got that right?

I think twice in John chapter 7, we're told of people discrediting Jesus' claim to come from God because he was raised in Nazareth. And Galilee, sorry, the region of Galilee.

[18:32] Think of Mark 14. Remember when Jesus is on trial and Peter has been accused of being a friend of Jesus? They come up to him and say, hey, you're with that Nazarene.

Or in Acts 24, during one of the trials of the apostle Paul, one of Paul's opponents says this, we found this man to be a plague.

One who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world. He is the ringleader of this Nazarene sect. So Nazarene was a deeply demeaning, disparaging, and hurtful term.

And again, the equivalent today would be like calling someone by a swear word. And this is the label that Jesus grew up with. This is the label that Jesus was permanently connected to all the way through his adult life as well.

Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus the swear word. He was not going to be called Jesus the Bethlehemite with all of its royal Davidic overtones, even though that was his true origin. No, instead he was going to be referred to as Jesus the Nazarene.

[19 : 37] That's Jesus the nobody from nowhere. Straight from birth, King Jesus was sovereignly placed by God the Father into a life marked by suffering, scorn, and shame.

And here's the key question. Why? Why did God the Father do such a thing? Why take his precious son and place him in an area where he would be forever despised?

And I take it the answer is this. God the Father did this so that his son would learn human obedience in the context of suffering. and thus be prepared for the cross.

Friends, this is utterly crucial to the Christian faith. Remember that Jesus, as I said earlier, was fully God and fully man in the one person. Two natures in the one person.

And as Jesus was fully God, he was always perfect, sinless, and obedient to the Father. Always.

And as he was fully man, he was also fully perfect, sinless, and obedient to the Father always.

[20 : 45] But Jesus' human obedience was not automatic. It wasn't static or devoid of growth. Far from it. Listen to what one commentator says.

even though the human nature which Christ took from Mary was holy, it was nevertheless a weak human nature. That means that Jesus, as a man, had to learn what it was to be obedient to the Father in the context of suffering, agony, affliction, and opposition.

The Son's obedience in eternity past was true obedience, but it was not a human obedience forged in the fires of suffering. Jesus wasn't born a man in a child's body.

He had to grow and become mature through his sufferings. Now that does not mean that he improved morally. He was always holy and his obedience was always flawless. But as his natural capacities developed as a man, he increasingly manifested the fruit of the Spirit.

As a boy, he was God's boy. As a youth, he was God's youth totally. As a mature man, he maturely demonstrated what God's grace can accomplish and a life yielded entirely to the Father.

[22 : 06] Now friends, if you don't believe me, just listen to Hebrews chapter 5. Hebrews chapter 5 says this, During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayer and petitions with loud cries and tears.

to the one who could save him from death, that's the Father. And he was heard because of his reverent submission to the Father. Now listen to this. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

And once he had been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Let me say that again. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he had suffered.

And once he'd been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. God the Father placed his already perfect and sinless and obedient son into a life of suffering so that as the incarnate son, he would learn obedience.

Friends, it is horrible and dishonoring to our Savior to think that just because he was fully God, his obedience in his life must have been easy. As though Jesus just simply let go and let God and when he was born, he just sat back and relied upon some sort of spiritual cruise control to take him all the way from the cradle to the cross.

[23 : 30] No. Jesus was just like us in our weakness. He was fully tempted and he was tempted with the most awful experiences of suffering that are far beyond anything that you and I will ever face in our lives.

And yet, as a man, just like us, he was fully obedient to the Father perfectly and faithfully without sin. And you know, as you read through the Gospels, you'll see this, that as Jesus' obedience to the Father grew, as his faithfulness to the Father matured, so too did his suffering.

The more he obeyed, the more he suffered. The more he obeyed the Father's demands upon his life, the more Jesus suffered as a result.

And you know, each experience of suffering that he faced, and every time he obeyed in that experience of suffering, do you know what it did? It prepared him for the next level. It prepared him for the next level of suffering.

And again, and again, and again, he obeyed. He didn't fail. You see, right from the very beginning of his life on earth, Jesus was being prepared to face the cross.

[24 : 40] Being called a Nazarene, being despised and rejected by his own people, even as a little infant, all that suffering was so that he would be matured, and that he would learn to more and more trust the Father, so that when the time came for him to face the Father's greatest demand upon his life, he would say, not my will, but yours.

Just think about the Garden of Gethsemane, please. Think about that scene. Think about the distress and the anguish and the sorrow that's filled up Jesus at that time.

Luke says that he was so full of anguish, it was like his sweat was drops of blood. And he faced that decision about whether he was going to go to the cross or not. When he obeyed the Father in that moment, that didn't happen in an isolated time vacuum.

He had to be prepared for that moment as a man. Without all of that suffering before the cross as a man, he would not have been ready for that moment, says the book of Hebrews.

He was called a Nazarene so that he would be prepared to lay down his life for his people, to die as a propitiation on the cross for our sins. I wonder if you studied art at school.

[25 : 56] Just put up your hand if you studied art at school. Anyone? Any artists in? No? Okay, just a few. There you go. I studied art at school because it was a class that demanded very little of you. And as far as I can remember, my mates were in that class and there was a lot of girls in that class as well.

So that probably had something to do with it, but let's move on. But you know, I do remember some of the paintings that Mr. Lees, the art master, showed us in class.

Now, I don't know if he was a Christian, but he loved his paintings that depicted biblical scenes. And I remember one Christmas, he showed us a painting that really stuck with me for years and years and years.

And actually, I only really learned the name of this painting when Willie spoke about it actually in previous Christmases. It's called The Adoration of the Shepherds by Rembrandt.

I wonder if you've seen it. Very powerful painting. In the scene, in the painting, it depicts a dingy, stinking stable where Jesus had just been born. And he's lying in this grotty and rotten animal's feeding trough.

[27 : 01] Mary and Joseph and the shepherds are all gathered round. Now, Rembrandt apparently was a master at using light and darkness in his paintings. And if you look at the painting, you look at it on Google as you go home later, you see from the face of the infant child, Christ child, there's light emitting upon all those who are looking upon him to symbolize and emphasize his identity as the son of God, come to reveal the knowledge of the Father to the world.

But you know, Rembrandt also paints something in darkness, something that as you look up to the ceiling, you see looms above the child. In the darkness, you see the shape of the roof rafters of the building that he's in.

And in the darkness, you see that they're in the shape of a cross. Always looming over this little child, right from the start of his birth. And you know, friends, Rembrandt knew his Bible.

He had great Christology. Because you cannot separate the Jesus who lay there in the cradle from the Jesus who would later hang on the cross. All the way through his life, from the get-go, the shadow of the cross of Calvary loomed over him.

Well, let me say three things before we close today. Three applications. Firstly, if you're here this morning, if you are a Christian, and the fact that Jesus is called a Nazarene, you shouldn't look at this and think this is some obscure little passage.

[28 : 29] Actually, this should fill your heart with worship, adoration, and thankfulness. Because it teaches us that our King willingly submitted himself to such suffering for us.

In fact, all of the suffering that we read of in this chapter, the fleeing to Egypt in the middle of the night, what a nightmare that must have been. Being hunted by Herod, what pressure. Being called a Nazarene.

Jesus went through all of that for us. He was learning obedience in the context of suffering, so that as a man, he would be prepared to go for the cross for us.

Again, had all that suffering not happened beforehand, then you and I would probably still be dead in our sins facing the condemnation that we deserve.

These events should fill us with praise and thankfulness and adoration for our suffering King. Also, they should fill our hearts with great assurance and joy because they assure us of God's undeserved love for us.

[29 : 31] Christmas is actually a time I find of great loneliness. And you don't have to be alone without family members to feel lonely at Christmas. You could be in, I don't know, one of the biggest family dinners of all and feel really lonely.

Well, if you feel that you're unloved this Christmas and if you feel lonely, especially if you feel tempted to think that God doesn't love you, get out your Bible, look at Matthew 2, look at what your Savior has done for you and think, yes, that is how much he loves me.

He was willing to become a man of sorrows because he loves me that much so that I could be saved. Secondly, doesn't this teach us that we have a high priest and a king who knows exactly what it means to suffer as we do?

And again, it could be here, it could be that you're here this morning and you're absolutely dreading Christmas. You're dreading it because recently life has blasted you in the face with some terrible hardship.

There are many of us in this congregation who've lost people over the last few years, people who are dear to us and at Christmas time we feel their death more than ever, more than usual.

[30 : 44] Or it could be something else that has blasted you in the face and you feel so deep in despair that you're deep in suffering. Well friend, please know, if that's you, that you trust in a high priest and a king who's been deeper, deeper into the pit of suffering and he is able to sympathize with you fully, he's full of compassion with you because he knows your sorrow and he prays and intercedes for you and he knows what you need in your darkest hour because he's faced it all.

And the fact that his suffering was not in vain, that should also fill us with great assurance because the next time when you're in the thick of it, you must remember that God never allows his beloved children to suffer in vain.

When we suffer, we are following in the footsteps of this son, the saviour, the Nazarene. The father used his suffering to prepare him for glory and he's going to do the same in your life too if you're one of his children.

We never suffer in vain as Christians. Thirdly, there's one last thing we need to learn from the fact that Jesus is called a Nazarene.

The Greek word for Nazarene sounds apparently a lot like the Hebrew word netzer. Netzer means twig or branch. Now why do I tell you that?

[32 : 11] Well because it's used in a very specific passage in the Old Testament, again in the prophets. In Isaiah 11 verse 1, in that verse, Isaiah says that when Israel as a nation is at its very lowest point when it's cut down and it's like just a tree stump because of the exile, when it's at its very lowest in that darkest hour, there will come a netzer.

Sounds like Nazarene. A branch. Now that branch will be despised and rejected. He will come from humble origins on earth. But it's this netzer, this branch, that God the Father will use to save his people, to feed his enemies, and establish a universal kingdom of perfection.

This branch will be the one who will bring in a new creation marked by justice and peace. A new creation that is full of the knowledge of the Lord and full of his rest.

Jesus is that one. Friends, there is a day coming when Jesus, the suffering king, will return to earth. And on that day, he will no longer be known as a Nazarene.

He will no longer be the branch who was despised and rejected. No, on that day, he will appear as the triumphant Lord of glory of everything and everyone.

[33 : 32] He will bring in the kingdom of God in all of its fullness. And for all those who've trusted in him, for all those who've persevered and followed him down the hard road of suffering for the gospel and for the kingdom, well, they will be raised from the dead in power.

Never again to suffer, ever again. Elsewhere in the Bible, we're told that on that day, the Lord Jesus will come round to every one of us personally and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

There will be no more suffering, only blessing forever and ever in his kingdom. And that's what Matthew's holding out to you this morning.

If you're not yet a Christian, he's pleading with you, come to know this suffering king. Trust in him.

Be willing to share in his sufferings and you will know the certain and sure hope of a future of eternal blessings freed from suffering to enjoy him and worship him forever.

Will you trust in the Nazarene? I pray that you will. Well friends, let's bow our heads, close our eyes.

And why don't we take a moment just in the quiet to respond to the word of God in our own hearts and then I'll pray for us.

[34 : 51] Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you sent your eternal, holy and perfect Son into this world to suffer and die so that we might be saved from our enemies, so that we might be forgiven and made new and so that we will have the certain hope of eternal life with you in your kingdom.

We praise you, Lord Jesus, for coming into this world willingly and obediently and that even in the deepest, darkest moments of suffering and pain that you faced, you were faithful and you grew in faithfulness to the Father.

Father, we pray that this wonderful truth about Christ's work would permeate our hearts so that we would be full of praise, praise to him. Please help us, please help us to be assured of your compassion and your love for us so that we too might humbly submit to a life of suffering as we follow our Nazarene King on the hard and long road to glory.

We pray all these things in the name of our King, Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.