

The Promised Suffering Son

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[0 : 00] Well, please do turn to your Bibles and turn to Matthew's Gospel and Chapter 1. I'll be reading the first of our three readings from Matthew's Gospel and verses 18 to 25 of Chapter 1.

Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put it to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[1 : 29] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew chapter 2, and I'll read from verse 1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been 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 scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judea.

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.

[2 : 52] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go, and search diligently for the child, and when you have found 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.

Matthew 2, verse 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.

[4 : 04] 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.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son. Well, may God bless us, his words, this lunchtime.

Well, before we come to think about that in more detail, let's pray. Let's gather our hearts together and pray to our Father. Father, our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that you're a God who speaks, and that you have, in the person of Jesus Christ, spoken fully.

You've spoken finally. And thank you at this time of year, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle, all the lights, all the distractions, we can remember his birth.

But not just his birth, but his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. We remember his very purpose for his coming. And what that means for people like us.

[5 : 23] We can frail people. How we need to hear this message, to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the great news that the Lord Jesus is our Savior, bringing us hope and certainty, because he is the promised light who has dawned on a dark world.

How we can but praise you for your grace and mercy shown to us in Jesus. And so would you, as we come to your word now, would you speak to us?

Would you show us who the Lord Jesus is? And what he has come to do? And might we respond in faith and trust? We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We'll do have Matthew chapter 2 there open in front of you as we think about this together. Christmas is a time for many of family gatherings.

Many people all over the world will, in the next few days, be making journeys to get back home for Christmas. Time magazine reported that last year, 100 million Americans were on the move over the Christmas holiday alone, most of them driving their cars.

[6 : 41] Epic traffic jams are the norm if you're in your car at this time of year. And Christmas is a time when people just want to be at home, to be with family.

But our longings, our hopes, are temporary, aren't they? They're never quite fulfilled. Even if we have a great time with our family, we have to leave again.

For many, time at home, while it promises so much, fails to deliver. Perhaps it was one game of monopoly too many with the in-laws.

Speaking of which, the key is the green spaces. If you're playing with three or more people, get the green spaces, that will win it for you. But joking aside, often old resentments and arguments bubble to the surface after a day or two.

But maybe for you, home just isn't what it used to be. A recent bereavement. An empty place at the dinner table.

[7 : 48] Perhaps a relationship breakdown means that this will be a painful time of year for you. Maybe you've just received from heartbreaking news. That longing for home, which we all harbor, and which usually comes to the fore at this time of year, is a longing that, for whatever reason, will always, in the end, be frustrated.

We long for a permanent home. We long for something better. I know I certainly do. Don't you? A longing for a permanent home, a permanent place to call home.

Well, it is a permanent place of belonging, a true and lasting home that is at the very heart of our passage this morning. It's the very heart of the Christmas message.

It is the call to our true home, to our Heavenly Father that is held out to every one of us here today. 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.

And for all who receive Jesus as King, perhaps even you today, for all who come to him, will be given the right to be children of God, to be brought into the family of God forever.

[9 : 18] All our longings and hopes for home and permanence are fulfilled and found in Jesus Christ. We've read this lunchtime and seen over the past few Wednesdays, if you've been here, we've seen that Matthew 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. Jesus was God's King, come at last, to rescue and to lead his people forever.

But what kind of King would Jesus be? What sort of King would Jesus be? Well, from verse 13 of chapter 2, we begin to see more of the details.

And it is perhaps surprising what we find there. We've just seen that Jesus is the King in the previous paragraph. Wise men have come from the East and they've come to lavish gifts upon him, to worship him.

And then this bit from verse 13 is a bit of a shock. We read about Jesus and his family fleeing to a foreign land. We move quickly from the worship of a king to the wanderings of a fugitive.

[10 : 43] And the picture of the family in the Middle East fleeing a cruel dictator is sadly a picture that we're all too familiar with. It fills our TV screens night after night.

It's a common picture. It's a tragic picture. But why is it here? Why is it in the Bible? Of all the millions of people that have had to flee cruel dictators to flee to another land, why is this one so important?

Why is this one in the Bible? Why is it here in this account of Jesus' birth? It doesn't really fit in with the sort of images we have of Christmas, does it? We can't really imagine this picture adorning the front of a Christmas card.

It looks very weak, very feeble, unremarkable. But Matthew is not just recording human events. This really happened. But he's not just recording it just because it happens.

He also gives us divine explanation of those events. And that is what we have at the end of this paragraph there in verse 15.

[11 : 48] Let's look at it again. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt called my son. Without this word of divine explanation, these events are pretty hopeless and irrelevant.

But with this word from God, the question that you might rightly ask as I discuss this, what has this got to do with me, suddenly it becomes alive.

It has everything to do with you. It has everything to do with your future. It has everything to do with your very meaning and purpose. Two points this afternoon from Matthew's gospel here.

Firstly, Jesus is the true Son of God. We see here that in Jesus, the great hope for a perfect and holy Son is at last fulfilled.

Now you might look at verse 15 and think, what on earth is going on? It perhaps makes no sense to us. We've just read about Jesus and his family fleeing to Egypt and then you get this quote from God saying, out of Egypt I called my son.

[13 : 04] It's perhaps confusing to us, but it certainly wasn't confusing to Matthew's contemporaries. They would have known exactly what this meant and the significance of Jesus' fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy.

Matthew is quoting here from the prophet Hosea who wrote several hundred years before the birth of Jesus and back then, back when Hosea was writing, God's people were on the precipice of their lowest points.

They were about to go into exile and at this crisis moment, Hosea points them back in their history so as to give them hope for the future.

He says, 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 and God rescued them from their bondage.

he called out of Egypt his son, that is the people of Israel. God's son is the nation of Israel and they were called by him to be a light to the nations.

[14 : 17] But as Hosea goes on to say, the more they were called, the more they went away. Israel, the people of Israel were called God's son, called by their father in heaven and like a stropy teenager, they wanted nothing to do with him.

God was continually patient. But by the time Hosea was writing, things had reached a crisis point.

The people were about to go into bondage again, not to Egypt this time, but to Assyria. But even in the midst of that, God loved his son and he goes on to promise that he wouldn't ultimately destroy them because another exodus event was promised, another rescue.

The Jews looked back to the exodus as the beginning of their history. But through Hosea, they also looked forward to a new exodus under a new Moses. Matthew's point here in his gospel is that in Jesus, a new exodus was about to begin.

As Jesus flees to Egypt, Matthew recalls these words from Hosea, out of Egypt, I called my son. Do we see what he's saying here?

[15 : 42] the first son, the nation Israel, they failed to fulfill all that they were meant to be. But in Jesus, the true son, the greater Moses had arrived.

He has come at last and in him the hopes of a nation, of the whole world are fulfilled. Because in Jesus, as the perfect son, all God's purposes for Israel are fulfilled.

What Israel couldn't be, Jesus was. What Israel failed to do, Jesus did. And this is good news for all who will receive Jesus as king, because in Jesus, all that is his becomes ours.

In Paul's letters of Galatians, we read this, for in Christ, you are all sons through faith. And this means that despite 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 being a true son of the God who made you, all because of what Jesus has done.

Now, this is not just excellent news. 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 cannot pay, the judgment for sin.

[17 : 22] So this is our second point. Jesus is the son who would suffer to redeem his people. We see that in Jesus, the great hope for an ultimate redeemer, a greater Moses, is at last fulfilled.

Matthew is here painting Jesus as another Moses, one who went down into Egypt, entered his people's bondage and rescued them from their slavery and into a relationship with God.

God's people then were in bondage in Egypt, and we too are in bondage, but not in Egypt. We're in bondage to sin. You see, humanity has a great 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 has been a great rupture between man and God and between man and man. It hardly needs evidence, does it? We just look around us, we watch our TV programs, our news, to see that all is not well.

[18 : 34] We know there's something fundamentally wrong with mankind, but the source of all that we see is man's rebellion against God.

It's our sin. It was the reason for the impending exile that we were hearing about in Hosea. God's right response to sin is judgment.

How could it be otherwise? And the implications of this are serious. serious. And they're serious for all of us. When we realize that the ultimate sin is the rejection, is the rebellion against God, our maker, then we realize that we're all guilty of that.

All of us by nature turn away from him. All of us by nature are in bondage to sin, and we desperately need rescued from it.

And here in his gospel, Matthew is painting 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 rescue them, he would pay the price for bondage to sin.

[19 : 46] But how would Jesus do that? How would Jesus do it? Well, it was through his own suffering. We see glimpses of that throughout this whole passage.

The shadow of the cross, upon which Jesus would be crucified three decades later, casts its long shadow across the verses of our passage this lunchtime. Yes, Jesus was God's king.

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

Look at the second half of verse 13. The angel says, Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and they remain until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

Now, this wasn't a knee-jerk, paranoid, fleeing to another country. Herod really intended to get rid of Jesus. Just look on down to verse 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.

[21 : 06] Jesus was God's king. But his was a life that would be marked by suffering. It didn't end with Herod's attempts to kill him, but it continued through his life and ultimately to his death on the cross.

Jesus came and he came to suffer. father. This is the pattern Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians. He says this, 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 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.

But his is a story that doesn't end there. 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 might dismiss the events of Jesus' life as a tragedy, a sad waste of a life of a social revolutionary brutally cut short.

But far from tragedy, these events, Jesus' sufferings, were a triumph. This was his very purpose in coming. He came as the great redeemer.

[22 : 50] He was the one who would rescue, who would enter the bondage of his people, who would take the punishment, who would pay the price, the price that we ought to have paid ourselves.

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

The great chasm between man and God has been removed for all who trust in Jesus. Christ. This is the wonderful news of Christmas that Matthew wants us to grasp today.

Jesus is the great promised one, the one who would fulfill all the hopes and expectations for 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 is counted to you.

[23 : 57] His death has paid the price for your sin. And because that is true, it means that you can know a place of belonging this Christmas.

You can be welcomed into the everlasting family of God. 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. So don't ignore his call this Christmas today.

Come along again on Christmas Eve for our candlelit carols here at five o'clock. Come again on Christmas day, eleven o'clock. You should have in your seats a little invitation to the Life Explored course starting in January.

Why not come along yourself? Come with your doubts, your questions. Consider for yourself the claims of Jesus Christ. In him alone, you can know true and lasting belonging through the forgiveness of your sins.

[25 : 21] That is the true center, the true meaning, the true heart of Christmas. He was the great and promised perfect son who would suffer in order to redeem his people.

Born for our salvation, word of the Father now in flesh appearing. O come, let us adore him.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.