

Matthew 2:13-23

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/10/2009

Prophecy Fulfilled: The despised deliverer King Jesus is our only Hope

Prayer

Father what a privilege it is to sing praises unto You, to proclaim Your excellences, to declare what You have done in Christ. Father what a blessing and privilege to do this because You've changed our hearts. Because You've put a song in our heart as Your psalmist said. You have given us hearts taken away the heart of stone, and given us hearts that can understand Your Word and know You. Father we praise You for the truth, that it is all in Christ. That our salvation was accomplished through Him alone, and Father I pray as we look into Your Word which exalts Him and declares Him, that we would see it rightly, that we would devide it rightly today, that we would receive it, we would hear and obey what You have to say. And that our lives would reflect Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You so much for Your Word, we ask You to bless it as it goes out. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen

Sermon

Well we have been going through the book of Matthew and we come to chapter 2 of Matthew, we're going to be looking at verse 13, and going through Lord willing verse 23, and some of you are saying "that's not a very good Mother's day message, we have the women weeping because of their children having been taken care of by Herod", but I think as we look at this passage we're going to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills prophecy, and within that prophecy we're going to see the despised deliverer, King Jesus, is our only hope in the midst of an evil, sinful world.

So with that in mind, would you turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Matthew, chapter 2 and we're going to begin in verse 13. And I briefly want to go through some context, I'm not going to do it as in depth as we've done it in the last few weeks, but Matthew is writing this book inspired by the Holy Spirit and this book is presentation of Jesus Christ as King, He is King of the Jews, and we see in this presentation that certainly, certainly a presentation concerning the King would include issues of the Kingdom. Also in the book of Matthew there is the opposition to the King and His Kingdom which God sovereignly to bring about His work in Christ.

Now in chapter 1 we saw first of all, the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the one who fulfills both those covenants, He fulfills the Davidic covenant because He will be on the throne forever. He fulfills the Abrahamic covenant because it is his seed, Abraham's seed singular, in which all the nations would be blessed, salvation would be brought to all the nations. Not that all are saved, but salvation is brought to all the nations. We saw the genealogy that proved that Jesus had the

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legal right to the throne of David, it was the genealogy of Joseph, not His physical father, but His legal father, Mary being His physical Mother. He is rightfully King of the Jews.

And we saw in the end of chapter 1 the birth of King Jesus. And we saw Joseph's dilemma, "it's not my baby", and Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph being a righteous man, desired to put her away secretly, but the Lord intervened in a dream through an angel, and told him not to fear, but to take Mary as his wife because God is taking on human flesh, to save His people from their sins. That is why Joseph, you are to marry Mary.

And then we had the prophecy that was fulfilled in the end of chapter 1:

²³“BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”[Matthew 1:23]

Those who come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are saved will call Him "God with us"; He is now with us! The Living God- we had been separated from Him because of our sin and now we have a relationship with the Living God because of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

And then we turned to chapter 2 in which we saw three different responses to the birth of King Jesus last week. We saw joyful worship, we saw fearful agitation, and we saw murderous hate. Let's turn to chapter 2 and we are going to briefly go through these first few verses and then move to our passage. Matthew 2:1

¹ “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king (remember that, Herod the king), behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”[Matthew 2:1-2]

We saw first of all the magi arrive from the east, and I shared last week, but don't get your theology from Christmas cards; it does not say there are three kings here- it says magi from the east. We do not know much about them. I shared more in detail last week, but who were these magi? They were Gentiles, and that is important to realize, that the first here in this situation [after Jesus had been born in the book of Matthew] to worship Him were Gentiles. Certainly we have the shepherds in the book of Luke who worshiped Him when He was born, those Jews. Now they were Gentiles, they were from the East, and this word "magi" comes from the Persian word which pointed to a special class of priests. Most likely these were the educated from Persia or Babylon; they most likely came from that time, descended from whom Daniel the prophet when he was in Babylon was placed in charge of all the wise men, and certainly they could have heard of those prophecies through Daniel, a righteous man who was a prophet, who shared God's Word, and certainly they might have heard it and known about what happened.

But they saw His star in the east it says. And then that star being in the east, they came to Jerusalem, to worship Him. And we see He was born King of the Jews here, and it was during the time of Herod the

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king. And we need to look at this before we take a look at our passage, we need to again review who was Herod because he was important- not that he is good, but he is important to understand, his background for our passage.

Well, we saw last week that Herod the First (or as he was known in history, Herod the Great) was not a Jew; he was of Edomite origin, he was a descendent of Esau. Herod was not a nice man, as we will see today. In 47 B.C. he was in his early to mid-twenties, and he was named by Rome the governor of Galilee, and in that time it was a very high position and the Romans were hoping he would be able to hold down the Jews who had various zealots and up-risings. And so Herod was a very evil man; he used murderous tactics to hold down the Jews. In 40 B.C. because of how well he had done in squelching the uprisings of the Jews, the Roman Senate named him king of the Jews. This title certainly the true Jews would despise, and our passage says Herod is the king, and we also see in Luke chapter 1 that he is king of Judea. And he was a powerful man, a brutal killer; he killed many of his own family. Even Caesar said of Herod "it is safer to be his sow than his son". It is safer to be Herod's pig which is slated to be slaughtered than to be a son. So Herod was an evil man who was willing and ready to murder anybody who got in his way. He was a murderous maniac of a dictator.

So we have king Herod, king of the Jews by virtue of Rome. This despotic murderous king of the Jews, willing to hold on to power, and these magi come saying, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?" This is a problem for Herod because he is the king of the Jews. Well, what is the response? Verse 3.

³"***And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled.*** (We saw last week that word meant agitated, stirred up, shook up), ***and all Jerusalem with him*** (and that is the first response). ⁴"***And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. (where was this to happen)***
⁵ ***And they said to him,*** (right off the bat, no problem) "***In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.'***" (Micah 5:2) ⁷ ***Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time*** (so he knows the place, and now he is ascertaining the time) ***the star appeared.*** ⁸ ***And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him."*** (There is the second response, verse 9) ⁹ ***And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east*** (they saw it in the east, and then they decided to go to Jerusalem to see where the King was; then the star appeared again in Jerusalem and led them here to the Lord), ***went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was.*** ¹⁰ ***And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*** ¹¹ ***And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.*** ¹² ***And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way."*** [Matthew 2:3-12]

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And we looked at this in depth last week, and we saw the responses of those: we saw the Jewish responses, that they were troubled, they should have been rejoicing, "Could it be true, our Messiah has been born?" But we saw the response of unbelief, that unbelief which we see pictured in Scripture which would ultimately lead to the approval of the crucifying of Jesus Christ. Unbelief, leading to their agitation concerning Christ. They were also apathetic, they were unbelieving. And then we saw the response of Herod the murdering mad-man, who is secretly trying to discern where the child is so that he can, as we will see today, slaughter King Jesus. King Jesus the Messiah, which he is following to find, is in his way of his plans.

And then we saw the response of the Gentile magi: very little revelation from God, coming to seek and worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Not detoured by a house in Bethlehem, not detoured at all, but they came, they fell down, and they worshiped the Lord Jesus Christ and presented their gifts. And they obeyed the Lord, and departed another way. And that leads us to our passage today where first of all we are going to see three prophecies fulfilled in Scripture concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And the first prophecy will be fulfilled in the context of Herod's murderous plans, and Joseph is warned to flee to Egypt because Herod is attempting to kill King Jesus.

And here's our passage, verse 13

¹³ Now when they had departed, (that's speaking of the magi) behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." [Matthew 2:13]

"When they had departed" -in context it is the magi who had come; they had come and worshiped the Lord King Jesus, the babe, and then they were warned in a dream to go in a different way and they obeyed that, and when they had departed an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph.

Now at this point Joseph is back in the picture, and evidently Joseph is asleep again because this angel is appearing to him in a dream. And remember Joseph is a righteous man; he is Mary's husband, but not Jesus's biological father. Jesus's human mother is Mary, but that which was conceived of her is of the Holy Spirit; the Child has been born, and now Joseph is back in the picture. So now before we get into this we see an angel, not THE angel, but an angel, a messenger of the Lord, speaks to him. It is not something Joseph is imagining; it is actually happening in the context of a dream.

It is an angel of the Lord, a messenger of the Lord. So then what does the angel say? Middle of verse 13, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." This is a simple passage I do not need to explain much; Joseph is commanded- basically the passage goes like this, "Rising up, take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt." And that word flee is the word we have in English- we have fugitive, flees, someone is chasing you, get out of there, get out of there "and remain there until I tell you". And why? Why? God is gracious to give him the angel to tell the reason why: "for Herod (end of verse 13) is going to search for the Child to destroy Him". The word speaks of ruining Him. He is seeking to ruin King Jesus, and later on,

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verse 20, it is to take His life. He is seeking to kill King Jesus, that King of the Jews that has been born which is in the way of his will and his plans. And I believe that is the unrestrained response of evil. Herod has no consequences to his actions. And I believe unbelievers, if they had a chance, they would do the same thing, that we in our unbelief before hand, if we had an opportunity without consequence, we would do anything to get rid of King Jesus. And indeed unbelievers do that in their lives: they do anything and everything to get away from anything that reminds them of, or convicts them of, King Jesus, including His people. John speaks of the fact that the world is going to hate you because they hated Christ first. And certainly Herod hated King Jesus. And the Israelites were agitated by Him.

So then we have this passage- he is going to get Him out of the way. But nothing passes by the sovereignty of the Lord; He is sovereign over all. The plans of unbelieving kings are futile. Hold your place in Matthew and turn to Psalm 2, and I want to read a portion in Psalm 2. This does not take God by surprise, that Herod is doing this. Psalm 2:1

¹"Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing? ²The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed: ³"Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!" (We don't want to be under the Lord Jesus, we don't want to be under this) ⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. ⁵Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury: ⁶"But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain". [Psalm 2:1-6]

Nothing passes by the Lord God; He is not surprised by Herod's murderous thoughts and ideas. And He sits in the heavens and laughs and scoffs at the futile ideas of those who would attempt to kill King Jesus. Now notice what Joseph does being a righteous man (verse 140; exact same language, just verbatim, " ¹⁴ And he arose (really rising, he arose) and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt." Joseph was dreaming, he arose from that dream right away and took the Child. Now there are a lot of commentaries that say Joseph must have been very wise because he fled at night, and that is probably so that the people would not find him and catch him at that time. I just think he fled at night because he arose from his dream and obeyed the Lord. He did not wait for the morning, I think, to say "Well, we need to get some council concerning this; I am not sure if God really wants us to do this or not"; he arose right away, and he obeyed the Lord.

Now Egypt was a safe haven for Jews. Three hundred years earlier, Alexander the Great had established a sanctuary for Jews in the town of Alexandria which was named after him. And during Roman rule, the city was still considered a safe haven for Jews. And the Lord God through the angel commands him to rise and go to Egypt. Now we are going to see certainly it was to protect the Child, but that is not the only thing; there is also fulfilled prophecy here. And again I marvel as we have seen through Matthew the obedience of Joseph. No discussion, no contemplation; just getting up, clearly obeying the commands of God. Oh, that you and I would be like Joseph. We have so much more revelation, if we would just get up and do it by His strength. If we would not sit there and struggle with it; if we would rather obey it.

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Now remember there is no place which is spiritually safe apart from the obedience of and resting the Lord. And Joseph will be safe because he is obeying the Lord, and the Child will be protected. So it is important to realize first of all that the plans of unbelieving kings and unbelievers are futile, but we are going to see that the Lord God uses those very evil plans to fulfill His purposes. Again verse 14

¹⁴ And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵ and was there until the death of Herod (he obeyed right?), that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son." [Matthew 3:14-15]

Joseph remained until the death of Herod, and this took place here we see (we see middle of verse 15) in order that, for the purpose of, "that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled". And we want to make some observations here concerning that statement, there's so much there. First of all notice who is doing the speaking, "that what was spoken by the Lord, through the prophet". God speaks through men; men do not through their own wills speak for God, it is not by man's own will that man speaks for God, it is by God (we will see) speaking through them. 2nd Peter 1:20, I'll read this for you,

²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. [2 Peter 1:20-21]

The Lord spoke through the prophet.

Now as we go along here it is important to realize there are three prophecies in our passage. The first one is in the future tense, that what was spoken by the Lord might be in the future fulfilled. The second one we have in verse 17, "that which was spoken by Jeremiah was"- that is a complete action. And then the third one we have is in verse 23, "and came and resided in a city called Nazareth that what was spoken through the prophets might (future) be fulfilled".

So back in our passage Matthew is making it clear that their departure to Egypt would bring about a future fulfillment of the prophecy out of Egypt- "I will call my Son." And obviously the prophecy is not fulfilled in Him going to Egypt, the prophecy is fulfilled by the fact that He went, and then came back. So that's why it's in the future tense.

So then what is this prophecy that will be fulfilled? "Out of Egypt did I call My Son." What is the significance of this? We could read through this really fast, we could read through the portion later on of the women crying concerning their sons who have been killed, we could read that He should be called a Nazarene; what does that mean? First of all, this first prophecy is a quote from the book of Hosea 11:1, and let me remind you briefly of the context of the book of Hosea. Hosea reveals God's faithfulness in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness. The book of Hosea, God calls upon Hosea to take a wife of harlotry and her name is Gomer; she is a picture of Israel, blatantly and unabashedly going after other gods, like a harlot after other men. And although Hosea is heartbroken and grieved over her actions, he is faithful

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and redeems her, and keeps his covenant, and it is a picture of a loving God (regardless of Israel's unfaithfulness) who keeps His covenant in spite of their unfaithfulness.

And then we have this quote in Hosea 11:1. If you want to turn to Hosea we will take a look at this in its context. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Hosea 11:1,

¹When Israel was a youth (the Lord is speaking here) ***I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son (there's our quote right?).*** ***²The more they called them, The more they went from them; They kept sacrificing to the Baals And burning incense to idols.*** ***³Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; But they did not know that I healed them.*** ***⁴I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; And I bent down and fed them.*** ***⁵They will not return to the land of Egypt; But Assyria-- he will be their king, Because they refused to return to Me.*** [Hosea 11:1-5]

Here we have a clear reference to the fact that God took them out of Egypt, literally, (the nation of Israel) and that because they are still unfaithful, Assyria would come and take them away captive, as God brought about His chastening upon them. Now how does this apply to Christ? How is Christ going to Egypt and coming out a fulfillment of this prophecy which is so clearly pointed to Israel in Hosea 11:1? It is a good question; it is a hard question to answer. But first of all I think we need to understand a couple things, and this is the most difficult of the three today. We need to recognize that the New Testament reveals and it is the complete focus and centered around Christ. The New Testament; and there is one person who has said "The Old Testament has the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament has the Old Testament revealed". We see pieces and shadows of what God would do in Christ in the Old Testament fulfilled in the New Testament. We saw very clearly, and we see very clearly in Luke 24, that the Old Testament points to Christ. And I will read this for you, Luke 24:25, Jesus is on the road to Emmaus and He says,

²⁵And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses (that is the first five books) and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." [Luke 24:25-27]

So with this in mind, how does this prophecy in Matthew concerning God's Son, Israel being called out of Egypt, how is that fulfilled in Christ being called out of Egypt? First of all we need to recognize the Old Testament does speak of Christ. Although veiled, He is the focus. And how does the Old Testament speak of Christ? Many times through types and shadows, things that correspond. God allows certain things to happen in the Old Testament that would prefigure what Christ would do. And before we move on I need to share a caveat here: we are not the ones who determine which things point to Christ, which things are shadows, which things prefigure Christ. The New Testament is the one that determines which things are the shadows and which things prefigure Christ. We never want to go to the Bible and start

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seeing Christ in every little nook and cranny. We need to see it in its context, as illumined by the New Testament concerning what the New Testament says the Old Testament said concerning Christ. For instance, the book of Colossians says that the Old Testament types and shadows were fulfilled in Christ, Colossians 2. The book of Hebrews points out that the old covenant was a shadow of what would be fulfilled in Christ in the new covenant. But again I need to warn you, and warn myself, unless we be like Satan and take the Word out of its context. We do not have the liberty to choose the events; we need to interoperate the ones that God illuminates and points to and in our passage today, He is pointing specifically to this passage and saying, "this applies to Christ, out of Egypt I will call My Son".

So what does that mean, what does it mean "He is called out of Egypt as a Son?" How is this fulfilled? How was Israel in Egypt being called out, prefigured, correspond to Christ? Well I am going to share my view briefly. First of all we need to recognize that just as Israel had to come out of Egypt for God to fulfill His redemptive promises to them, so too Christ had to come out Egypt so that God would fulfill His redemptive promises in Christ. And in both of these circumstances it was not based on those in whom He would redeem; Israel was unfaithful in the Old Testament, and those who He would redeem in the New Testament were unfaithful. If Israel would have been cut off in their infancy, His redemptive would have never been fulfilled for them. The same thing- if Christ would have been cut off by Herod, those promises would not have been accomplished. But we know that nothing can thwart God's will.

Thus, I believe the calling of Christ out of Egypt points to the fact that God would bring future deliverance from the bondage of sin, just as He called Israel out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Now folks, there are some satanic views by unbelieving scholars that are on the History Channel and so forth that say "Jesus went to Egypt to learn the magic arts, so that He could do all the miracles"; that is not true, that is not true. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, God would fulfill His promises by bringing Christ out of Egypt. It is a clear focus on redemption- that is what happened to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, they were redeemed in the physical circumstance with physical promises, and as Christ comes out of Egypt this pictures the redemption that He would bring. So then I believe it is a picture of deliverance fulfilled in the context of unfaithfulness. "Out of Egypt I have called my Son."

Folks, is that not true with us? We were unfaithful when we were saved, we were not following the Lord Jesus Christ when we were saved, we were unfaithful, sinful. No matter how religious we might have been, "for while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." What a gracious and loving Savior who would die for us. While we were yet sinners.

Well, how else does Jesus fulfill prophecy? Let's take a look at the second one as we see Herod shows his true colors by attempting to kill King Jesus. Back to Matthew, verse 16,

¹⁶ *Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. [Matthew 2:16]*

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This is an awful part, right? Happy Mother's Day, right, this is terrible, right? But I believe we are going to see that within the context, within the evil of men, that God works out for good through the person of Christ. Back to the passage, "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked..." The word "tricked" is translated consistently in Scripture as "mocked." It is the same word used to speak of Jesus being mocked. It speaks of making fun or ridiculing. How did Herod feel that these magi had deceived him or mocked him by their actions? What actions were these? They did not report back to Herod where the Child was, they were warned by a dream and they split, and Herod realized what had happened, at least that they did not come back, and he was extremely mad. That term "he became very enraged" speaks of extreme anger.

Now remember Herod is the guy who murders people; he will murder his children, and now he is extremely mad, extremely mad, he is hot. Because everything is about Herod. And that's why we get mad, right? We get mad because our plans are thwarted, or our will is thwarted by someone. That is why we get mad don't we? Now certainly there is a righteous anger that lasts for but a moment when we see evil, and we are commanded to not let the sun go down even on such as an irritation. But here Herod's plans are foiled and he is extremely angry. So what does he do? This is quite disturbing. He sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem, and all its environs, or districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.

He figured out when the Christ was born, he figured out where the Christ was born, and he sent and slew all the male children. Now my impression before I studied this, and maybe your impression, was that thousands of children had been murdered. And as I looked at it, and as I studied it, if you think about the population of Bethlehem and its environment at that time, and you worked the numbers out, it was probably no more than fifteen or thirty infants at that time that were slain. It does not make it any better, but there are those that say there is no account in history of these children being slain. Well, the things that were given in history were these large slaughters by Herod, three thousand people, so many thousand here; this was fifteen to thirty babies. Does not make it any better, but that is probably how many children were slain.

Now we have a few issues to deal with here, don't we, because the Lord told the magi to leave and because they left these children were slain, right? Remember God is sovereign; He has allowed Herod to do this; it is by divine direction that the magi departed. This precipitated Herod's evil. Now we need to ask the question is God responsible for these deaths? Absolutely not. Herod is responsible, for he is like his father the devil. Any non-believer is like their father the devil, who is a murderer and a liar from the beginning. And indeed everyone who is not in Christ is in the domain of darkness, and for Herod this was unrestrained; he could get away with the murder with no consequence. And indeed everyone who has rejected Christ is by default a slave to Satan and sin. And I believe anyone put in the same position with elevated pride such as Herod's, no temporal consequences, might even contemplate doing the same thing if their will would be thwarted by such a King.

But what about the children? These infants who did not know their left or their right, what about these kids? In a way they were the first martyrs for Christ. One pastor writes, S. Lewis Johnson, "I'm not so

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sure that it was such a curse to be slaughtered in connection with the preservation of the Lord Jesus. And I have a hunch that when we get to heaven, we shall discover that those infants are quite satisfied with the event that transpired in their lives which brought them into the presence of God for all eternity", that's possible. One theologian (Augustine), says, "O happy little ones, but just born, not yet tempted, not yet struggling, already crowned." Another Pastor says (McLaren), "Even in his infancy, Christ came not to bring peace but a sword, and the shadow of suffering already attended the brightness of his rising".

It is an awful thing, but God allowed it; He did not cause it, He allowed it, the execution of children in the hands of unbelieving Herod. But Matthew goes on to point out that this fulfilled the prophecy, again verse 16,

¹⁶ Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.¹⁷ Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled (it was fulfilled at that point, verse 18), saying, ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, Because they were no more". [Matthew 2:16-18]

Prophecy from the book of Jeremiah, certainly fulfilled in the fact that these mothers would have mourned horribly, right? I cannot imagine the pain of someone having their child slaughtered. But there is more to it than this- why would this be fulfilled in this way, what does it mean? I think looking at this passage it only speaks to grief associated with the murder of their children. But is that extent of the fulfillment that Matthew intends to share with us, inspired by the Holy Spirit? Now this is a quote from Jeremiah 31, as Dennis shared earlier, and Ramah is an area just north of Jerusalem. It is on the border of the southern kingdom and the northern kingdom, and it is interesting to note that Ramah was the place in which Jerusalem and Judah were gather together before they were exiled; they had gone through the terrible siege in which many were slaughtered by the Babylonians and they were taken out of the city, as the city was taken and destroyed. And they were gathered together (Jeremiah 40:1) at Ramah on their way to be deported. And at that time we see in Jeremiah that the mothers were weeping over their children having been slaughtered, before they were being deported. That is where this quote comes from. And if you were a Jew you would know that, you would say "Jeremiah 31, that is where this comes from". Yes, this quote speaks of the terrible pain and grief, but I believe there is more to it; in the context of the quote it speaks of the great hope in the midst of great evil that is brought upon people because of man's sin. I believe it was divinely meant to point us to the hope that would come in Christ.

Let's turn just a moment to Jeremiah 31, and we will read a portion of that again. Jeremiah 31:11, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations. Jeremiah 31:11,

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¹¹ **For the LORD has ransomed Jacob** (Jacob speaking of Israel), **And redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he.** ¹² **"And they shall come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, And they shall be radiant over the bounty of the LORD-- Over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, And over the young of the flock and the herd; And their life shall be like a watered garden, And they shall never languish again.** ¹³ **"Then the virgin shall rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together, For I will turn their mourning into joy** (it is really important to see that), **And will comfort them, and give them joy for their sorrow.** ¹⁴ **"And I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness," declares the LORD.** ¹⁵ **Thus says the LORD** (here is our quote), **"A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more."** ¹⁶ **Thus says the LORD, "Restrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded," declares the LORD,** **"And they shall return from the land of the enemy.** ¹⁷ **"And there is hope for your future," declares the LORD,** **"And your children shall return to their own territory". [Jeremiah 31:11-17]**

This quote is in the context of hope in the midst of weeping; the initial context is they are going away in exile but there is great hope that they will be brought back and be given ultimately a future redemption in Christ. And I believe that is what Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit is using in this thing; yes, you see great evil in the slaughter of these children as evil builds up, ultimately the crucified Christ, but in the midst of this evil, there is hope; there is hope, and it is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that is what he intended to do; it is not to point us simply to the fact that mothers were weeping and that is all it is. I believe it points to the fulfillment of great hope in the person of Christ. King Jesus who in the midst of great evil which is being manifest right away, great hope that He would save His people from their sins.

Well, what can we learn from this? A couple of things. First of all, although man being evil means things for evil, God means it for good. Genesis 50:20- Joseph with his brothers who treated him terribly evil; they left him for dead, they would have basically killed him but it was too much of a hassle. Genesis 50:20, Joseph shares to his brothers:

²⁰ **"And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive". [Genesis 50:20]**

God uses the evil of man as opportunities to bring redemptive opportunities in Christ. The very evil that would be poured out upon Christ in His crucifixion would be the very means in which God would bring about redemption.

All the difficulties God allows in our lives because you follow Christ, every single one, He will work out for your good. Romans 8:28

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²⁸ ***And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*** ²⁹ ***For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.*** [Romans 8:28-29]

He is using these things to make you like Christ, these evil things that He does not bring about, but He uses sovereignly for good. He will work out His redemptive purposes in spite of the evil.

What is the second application? Oh, unbeliever, how futile your attempts are in holding on to your own power and authority; we are going to see that. How futile your attempts are to strive and live apart from Christ, how futile to think you can do anything apart from Christ. God will accomplish His purposes, He will accomplish them through you or apart from you. For the believer, the evil that God allows He will turn to good, and for the non-believer, your actions in rebellion to Christ will be thwarted ultimately and you will pay the penalty of such eternally.

So then we have seen two prophecies. Well, what is the third and last prophecy we see here that is fulfilled in Christ? We see that Herod dies, Joseph brings back King Jesus to Israel and settles in Nazareth. Verse 19

¹⁹ ***But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,*** ²⁰ ***"Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."*** [Matthew 2:19-20]

We do not know the span in which Jesus was in Egypt, but I believe it was not very long. And you might say, "How can you say that?" Well later on in verse 20, here, we see it says "arise and take the Child". There are different words for children in Greek, and this word for child in here, paidion, speaks of an infant or a baby. I believe He was still a baby at this point. Herod died; He was still an infant. "Arise, take the Child and His mother and come back to the land of Israel, from Egypt."

So then Joseph in obedience comes back after Herod dies. Now, in the writings of Josephus, a historian, he gives a picture of Herod's death, and it is pretty awful. He says that Herod died of this, and related that his entrails came out (his maggot filled insides and organs) with constant convulsions and foul breath, and neither physicians nor warm bath led to his recovery. Died an awful death. Those who sought the kid's life, the Child's life are dead.

What did Herod profit, seeking his own desires rather than Christ? Matthew 16:24

²⁴ ***Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*** (That means your will needs to die) ²⁵ ***"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.*** ²⁶ ***"For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?*** (Herod gained it all, he was the top there, and he lost his own soul) ***Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*** ²⁷ ***"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds".*** (Herod lost it all) [Matthew 16:24-27]

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So Herod is dead, the angel appears and Joseph obeys. Verse 21,

²¹ And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.
[Matthew 2:21]

Joseph again is obedient. I can't stress this enough: he does exactly what the angel says. He is a godly man, and notice he comes into the land of Israel; there is no specific. "Arise and go back to the land of Israel"; it does not say go to this area or that area (verse 22) but Joseph sees there is a problem here.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. [Matthew 2:22]

Obviously Joseph was going to go back to Bethlehem of Judah, but he heard that Herod's son was reigning. And Herod's son definitely was like his dad- not as bad, but he certainly was a threat. And notice God's gracious intervention again, end of verse 22,

...and being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, ²³ and came and resided in a city called Nazareth..." [Matthew 2:22b-23a]

Now Nazareth was about 55 miles north of Jerusalem in the Galilee region. And in Luke 1 we find that Joseph and Mary were from the Nazareth area. So instead of going to the house they had had in Bethlehem probably, being warned, in obedience they went to Nazareth. And here we have the third prophecy fulfilled. Verse 23,

²³ and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene." [Matthew 2:23]

So here is the third prophecy, and this is a difficult one to interpret, too. We see because of the actions of an evil man, that God in His sovereignty uses the evil to fulfill prophecy concerning Christ. And we have this prophecy here, "He shall be called a Nazarene." But if you look in your notes in your Bible, there is no cross references to any specific prophecy in the Old Testament saying He shall be called a Nazarene. There is no specific prophecy like that in the Old Testament, which has led many to believe maybe it was something Enoch wrote, or a whole bunch of different things that people are saying. There are some that believe that maybe it doesn't mean Nazarene at all, but maybe "nazare", the Hebrew term which speaks of branch; that He shall be called branch, and we know that is from scripture.

But, folks, in context I do not buy those possibilities, and you say "how can I say that?" First of all, notice it says "that what was spoken by the prophets (plural)" (not just one this time, but prophets plural) might be fulfilled. Has not been fulfilled yet; might be fulfilled. And what is the future fulfillment? He shall be called a Nazarene, because God sovereignly led Him to Nazareth. He grew up there and would be called in the future a Nazarene. And you say "what does that mean?" I believe the key to interpreting this prophecy is understanding what being a Nazarene meant.

Do you remember what Nathanael said to Phillip concerning Jesus in John 1:46,

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⁴⁶ And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" [John 1:46]

That was the viewpoint of Israel- that these are country, uneducated bumpkins. There is nothing good in Nazareth. It was a derogatory term. This was the prevailing view of those in Israel. So what does it mean "He shall be called a Nazarene"? I do not believe it is a compliment, at least in the eyes of the Jews of that day. I believe it was a put down. I believe that multiple prophets there prophesied this fact that Jesus would be put down, that He would be despised, that people would turn and say derogatory things about Him. I think that is what it is pointing to. That is my interpretation, that being called a Nazarene is not a compliment.

As we see in Psalm 22:6-8, Jesus would be reproached by men and despised by the people. He is called the despised one in Isaiah 49:7. And most of us are familiar with Isaiah 53:3, and I want to read that,

³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. [Isaiah 53:3]

Speaking of Israel- they did not esteem Him. Here is that Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth. I think it was a cut, not a compliment. And I think there were multiple prophets who prophesied that man, specifically Israel, would reject Him in such fashion.

So what is the significance for us? God sovereignly ordains the circumstances which would cause man to despise Jesus, there is one element of that. And I believe this was a foreshadowing of what would ultimately happen, that because of man's satanic hatred for Christ, He would be delivered up for death, a death that would bring about our redemption. Isaiah 53:4

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. (That Nazarene) ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him". [Isaiah 53:4-6]

And maybe there are some of you here today who treat Jesus lightly? You despise Him by your actions, because you do not think about Him, you do not care about Him, you do not worship Him. But in spite of that, He was pierced for our transgressions, He died for our sins, in spite of our unfaithfulness, in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, in spite of your sin (and actually because of your sin) He brought about redemption. Jesus- "the Lord is salvation, for He shall save His people from their sins."

So what have we seen today? We have seen three prophecies fulfilled in Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills the redemptive promises of God as pictured and foreshadowed in their coming out of Egypt (the Israelites). Jesus is the one who delivers mankind from the bondage of sin. And although mankind is completely unfaithful to God, spiritually adulterous, Jesus came and redeemed sinners.

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Secondly, Jesus Christ is the one in the midst of great evil and mourning because of man's sin. He is the only one that brings about hope, eternal hope, and this hope is foreshadowed in the hope of Israel's restoration after their exile, but ultimately in Christ, that He would bring about after our separation because of our sin- from God He would bring about our restoration by dying for our sins.

And lastly, it is the same Jesus who would be despised and forsaken. It is through mankind pouring out its satanic wrath upon Him by crucifying Him that God sovereignly brought about forgiveness of sins.

So how does it apply to us? First of all, if you do not know Christ, everything you are doing is against Him. If you Are not for Him, you are against Him. Your will is not His will, and thus your will and your plans will not succeed. If you continue in your way of opposition to the King Jesus, opposing Christ, you will end up like Herod. You will die and you will be punished eternally for your sins. But as I shared, the good news is regardless of your unfaithfulness to Christ. You do not follow Him, you do not care about Him; regardless of your unfaithfulness, Christ died for you. It is not about how good you are, it is about what He did for you, and in the midst of this you can cry out to Him and be saved. The only true hope is in Christ, where He has taken all the evil that man and Satan and pour out and is turning it for good.

Oh brother and sister, let me ask you this, do you see the evil and the difficulties God allows as the fertile ground He uses for His redemptive work? Do you see those difficulties as the ground in which He is going to make you more like Christ? Do you see that as the ground in which He will bring about opportunities to share the truth of Christ as people see our response in Christ. Do not worry, do not fear, for everything Christ allows He will bring good. He is working out His purposes, He will not be thwarted. He works all things together for good, and He is worthy of our worship.

I want to close in Psalm 2, and we are going to read the whole Psalm this time if you would turn there with me. What a gracious God; despite of our unfaithfulness, our sin, Christ came. Psalm 2,

¹*Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing?* (you have got the nations, the people) ²*The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed:* ³*"Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!"* ⁴*He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.* ⁵*Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury:* ⁶*"But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."* ⁷*"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.* ⁸*'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.* ⁹*'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'*" ¹⁰*Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.* ¹¹*Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling.* ¹²*Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!* [Psalm 2:1-12]

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Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You so much. Thank You for Your Word- how blessed are all who take refuge in Your Son, who take refuge in Christ. Oh Father, thank You so much for the fact that Your Son's will, Your will, will not be thwarted. That all the evil and wickedness that man will do is turned for good for those who love You, for those who are called according to Your purpose. We praise You and thank You for that. Father, I thank You so much that You sent Your Son to redeem unfaithful men and women, men and women who rejected You; You sent Him to die for us. I pray for anyone here who recognizes they are unfaithful to You, they do not care about You, that they would come before You and worship in reverence, they would acknowledge You as Lord, they would confess their sin and be forgiven forever. For those of us who have been forgiven, may we rejoice, how blessed are those who take refuge in You. May we worship You in reverence and praise You for what You have done in Christ. Thank You for this passage which points out the wonderful truths that Christ fulfills these prophecies, and they all point to what He would do for us at Calvary, praise You for that now in Jesus name. Amen.

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