

**THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM, PART 4: “FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH”
MATTHEW 2:13-23**

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone!

If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor here, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 4 of our new sermon series called “The King and His Kingdom,” where we're going through the Gospel of Matthew together.

And today's sermon is titled: “From Egypt to Nazareth.”

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

In 2006, a film came out called “Stranger than Fiction” that had an interesting premise.

Harold Crick, an IRS agent (or government auditor) suddenly begins hearing a disembodied voice narrating his life in real-time.

And he later discovers that the voice belongs to a famous author named Karen Eiffel, who is currently writing her next masterpiece, where she intends to kill off the main character—Harold.

Harold, of course, wants to live, so he tries to convince Karen to change the story.

And that's all I'm going to share, so I don't spoil the end of the movie for you.

<pause>

Now, as we continue through the Gospel of Matthew today, we'll see a *similar* phenomenon happening.

Every event that is happening in Jesus' life is happening according to the masterpiece of Scripture. And God the perfect Author intends to kill off the main character—Jesus.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

For now, as we're still in these introductory chapters of this Gospel account, Matthew is just setting the stage for us—helping us put together all the pieces of the story that God's been writing in Scripture and helping us to see God's masterpiece unfold.

Except *this* story is not a movie that we're simply *watching*, but it's all of history that we're *included* in—where what happens to *Jesus* directly impacts all of us very *personally*.

And as we begin to *truly* understand what God is doing in the person and work of Jesus, *none* of us will want to try to convince him to *change* the story.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 2:13-23.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon. It will help you follow along much more easily.

I'd highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don't have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

So far in the Gospel of Matthew...

- we looked at the *genealogy* of Jesus from Abraham to David, to the deportation (or exile) to Babylon, all the way to the coming of Christ;
- we looked at the *birth* of Jesus from the perspective of *Joseph*, where an angel declared to him that Jesus will save his people from their sins and that he is literally God with us;
- and we looked at how people *responded* to Jesus—King Herod and the people of Jerusalem were *troubled*, and the religious leaders were *indifferent*, but the wise men fell down and *worshiped* Jesus.

And now, Matthew speeds through *three* scenes at *three* different locations, where his point isn't so much all the narrative detail but it's to show us how Jesus *fulfills* Scripture.

And with each Scripture fulfillment, he's beginning to *reveal* more to us of who *exactly* Jesus is.

And that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Matthew 2:13-23.

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, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ 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."

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, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ 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." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² 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. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in...

Three scenes, where Jesus fulfills Scripture in each scene:

- I. Flight from Egypt (vv. 13-15)
- II. Slaughter in Bethlehem (vv. 16-18)
- III. Return to Nazareth (vv. 19-23)

I. Flight from Egypt (vv. 13-15)

Look at verse 13 to the beginning of verse 15.

[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, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod....]

Everything here seems to happen in rapid succession.

If you look up to verses 11-12, the wise men come and offer their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—and then it seems that they depart *that* night after they’re told in a dream *not* to return to King Herod.

And in verse 13, once the wise men departed, it says, “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, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’”

And in verses 14-15, Joseph *immediately* trusts and obeys pretty much *word-for-word* what the angel told him to do—“he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.”

You get the sense that they left that *very* night—in the *middle* of the night.

Notice the *immediate* faith and obedience of Joseph in all of this—and he’s going to *continue* to show this throughout the passage. God speaks, and he *immediately* trusts and obeys.

But just think for a moment: What would have happened if Joseph had *delayed* rather than responding *immediately* to God’s word?

<pause>

For us, we may not have an angel of the Lord speaking to us in *dreams*, but we have God speaking to us directly through his *word* every day.

And Scripture repeated says, “*Today*, if you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7-8; cf. Heb. 3:7-4:13).

The key word is “*today*.”

Christopher Ash, in his booklet *Listen Up!* emphasizes this point well; he writes:

The story is told of the devil training his junior devils. He asks them what they are going to tell human beings. One is going to try: “There is no God”. The senior devil thinks it’s worth a try, but doesn’t think many will be foolish enough to fall for that. A second suggests: “There is no judgment”. The senior devil thinks that’s better, but still doubts he’ll have much success, because people have an inbuilt sense of accountability, an understanding that our actions have consequences. “Any other ideas?” “How about, “There’s no hurry”?” pipes up a third. The senior devil warmly congratulates him: “That is exactly the message that will be most widely believed and will do the most harm”.

Every time we listen to a sermon, the devil will whisper in our ear: “That was good stuff. Why not do something about it tomorrow?” And we instinctively want to agree, because tomorrow never comes. As the Red Queen says to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*: “Jam tomorrow, jam yesterday, but never jam today”. The devil echoes this and says: “Respond to the preaching tomorrow, respond to the preaching yesterday, but never respond today”. And if we listen to him, we will never respond.¹

¹ Christopher Ash, *Listen Up!* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2009), 22-23. See also C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 1996).

“*Today*, if you would hear his voice [whether in sermons, in daily Bible reading, or in small group Bible studies], do not harden your hearts,” but respond with *immediate* faith and obedience.

For Joseph, thankfully that’s exactly what he did, and he brought his family to safety in Egypt.

Look now at the rest of verse 15.

¹⁵ This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

This is a direct quotation from Hosea 11:1, and it’s the first Scripture that Jesus fulfills in this passage.

In order to understand how Jesus fulfills this Scripture, we need to know that Scripture fulfillment can happen in *two* ways.

First, there’s “precise fulfillment,” which we’re probably most familiar with, where it’s more one-to-one.

We’ve seen this earlier in the Gospel of Matthew.

- The prophet Isaiah said that “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,” and the virgin Mary conceived Jesus.
- The prophet Micah said that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, there’s “patterned fulfillment,” where “something that happened in the past is a *pattern* for something that happens in the life and ministry of Jesus.”²

We see this all throughout the New Testament.

- The *priests* mediated between God and the people, but that was to point to *Jesus* as the perfect mediator between God and man.
- The entire sacrificial system where *animals* were sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins was to show that sin deserves death and to point to *Jesus* as the perfect and final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

So with that in mind, Matthew is referring to “patterned fulfillment” when he refers to Hosea 11.

This is what God says in...

Hosea 11:1: When **Israel** was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called **my son**.

So the “son” referred to in the original context is not *Jesus* but it’s *Israel*.

If that’s the case, how does Jesus *fulfill* this passage?

Whenever the New Testament cites a *verse* in the Old Testament, it often has the *entire passage* in view.

And in the very *next* verse, God says this in...

Hosea 11:2: The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.

This was the continual problem for Israel. No matter how much God loved them and delivered them, they kept rebelling against him and running back to idolatry.

So *Jesus* came to do what *Israel* constantly failed to do—perfectly obey.

Matthew is showing us that *Jesus* is the true and better *Israel*.

- Just as God brought *Israel* out of Egypt in the exodus, God will bring *Jesus* out of Egypt here.

² Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). The terms “precise fulfillment” and “patterned fulfillment” are his.

- Just as *Israel* passed through the waters of the Red Sea, *Jesus* will pass through the waters of baptism in chapter 3.
- Just as God tested *Israel* in the wilderness for forty years, *Jesus* will be tested in the wilderness for forty days in chapter 4.

Jesus is retracing the steps of Israel without grumbling, without rebelling, and without sinning.

Every place where Israel *failed*, Jesus is perfectly *obeying*.

So the point of this Scripture fulfillment is that Jesus perfectly obeyed on *behalf* of his people.

We often think of the gospel just in terms of Jesus' *death* on the cross, but the gospel *also* includes the entire *life* that Jesus lived.

It's not enough that Jesus died to take the penalty of sin that we deserved because God's law doesn't just require *punishment* for sin, but it also requires *obedience* to his law.

It's Jesus' *death* on our behalf that deals with the need for our sins to be *punished*, but it's Jesus' *life* on our behalf that deals with the need for us to *obey* God's law perfectly.

So *that* is how Jesus fulfills Hosea 11.

"Out of Egypt I called my son."

Where God's son *Israel* failed, God's *true* Son *Jesus* succeeded.

And like Israel, *all* of us have failed to obey God's law as we ought.

But through faith in Jesus as our perfect representative, we are not only *forgiven* of our sins but counted *righteous* in God's sight.

Christianity is not about what *you* need to do to get right with God, but it's about how there's *nothing* you could do that would ever be enough, which is exactly why *God* needed to come down in the person of Jesus Christ to do what you could never do yourself.

No amount of good works, positive thinking, generous giving, or moral living could ever *even* the scales of our *mountain* of sins against God.

It *cannot* be done, and there is nothing more profoundly humbling and sobering than that recognition.

But at the same time, there is nothing more hope and joy inducing than the recognition that *everything* has *already* been done for us in the person and finished work of Jesus.

That is the message of the gospel.

<pause>

If you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, we're glad you're here today. And as you're hearing this good news of Jesus Christ today, I urge you not to *delay* in responding to him.

Don't wait until *tomorrow*, which never comes, but respond to him *today*.

Today, believe in Jesus as your perfect representative and receive true and eternal salvation in him.

Today, be united to the perfect Son through faith and become a beloved child of God in *him*.

<pause>

And for all of us who *do* believe, in the midst of what seems like a constant stream of *bad* news in this world, think *often* about this *good* news.

Remind yourself of what the aging John Newton continually preached to himself; he said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that *I* am a great *sinner*, and that *Christ* is a great *Savior*.”

<pause>

So the *first* scene was the flight to Egypt; and now the *second* scene is the...

II. Slaughter in Bethlehem (vv. 16-18)

Earlier in verses 7-8, King Herod calls a private meeting with the wise men who came looking for the “king of the Jews” (2:2), and he figures out approximately how old Jesus is.

And then, he sends the wise men to Bethlehem to go find Jesus for him, and Herod straight-up *lies* to them by saying that he wants to come *worship* him, when he *really* intends to *murder* Jesus.

Thankfully, in verse 12, the Lord *warns* the wise men in a dream *not* to return to Herod.

Look now at verse 16.

[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, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.]

After some time, King Herod realizes that the wise men aren’t coming back to him. It’s ironic that Herod feels “tricked” when *he* was the one who originally tried to trick the wise men. In any case, Herod is *furious*—and he commits a horrible atrocity.

“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 had ascertained from the wise men.”

Herod is covering *all* of his bases.

- Some estimate that Jesus was perhaps between six and twenty months old during this time³, but just in case, Herod *overestimates* up to *two years old*.
- And he’s not just killing the baby boys in *Bethlehem* but also those “in all that *region*.”

And this was *not* out of character for him.

In his latter years, King Herod became increasingly paranoid of others threatening his rule—and he even went as far as killing his own wife, mother-in-law, and three of his own sons.⁴

³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 94.

⁴ “Herod the Great ruled Israel and Judah from 37 to 4 B.C. He was an Idumean (or Edomite), and was appointed king of the Jews under the authority of Rome. Herod ruled firmly and often ruthlessly, murdering any who might challenge his place on the throne. This included his own wife, several sons, and other relatives. It is no surprise, then, that he tried to kill the baby Jesus. Despite his cruelty, Herod was known as “the Great” because Israel and Judah experienced prosperity during his reign. He was a master builder who restored the temple in Jerusalem and built many theaters, cities, palaces, and fortresses. Herod also financed structures—including pagan temples—throughout the Roman Empire. Ravaged by disease, Herod died in his palace at Jericho and was buried at Herodium. (Matthew 2:16–18)” (“Herod the Great” in *ESV Global Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018], <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/profiles-matthew-herod-the-great/>). D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 84) writes: “Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabees), and at least two of his sons (cf. Jos. Antiq. XIV–XVIII; S. Perowne, *The Life and Times of Herod the Great* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956]; and esp. Abraham Schalit, *König Herodes: Der Mann und sein Werk* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969]).” Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “Do you want a madman or the Messiah? Do you want a man who would order the massacre of innocent children (v. 16) or a man who would open his arms to children and lay down his life for the less-than-innocent of the world? Do you want a ruler who rules by force, aggression, and cruelty or a ruler who rules by love, compassion, and the cross of his own sufferings? Do you want a man who

So King Herod sought to *ensure* that there would be *no* possibility that Jesus—a potential rival king to him—would survive.⁵

But thankfully, we know that Jesus *escaped*—and so King Herod's plans were *thwarted*.

<pause>

For us, I think it's so easy to be enamored by the rulers of this world—or those that the world would consider to be “great” or “successful.”

Perhaps we're tempted to envy their status, their wealth, and their success.

But just remember that oftentimes it is those *very things* that you admire and desire about them that are a *snare* to their souls, causing their hearts to be more prone towards pride, and their affections to be more chained to this life.

Remember that Jesus said, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a *rich person* to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24).

Remember that Jesus came to *save* sinners, and King Herod sought to *destroy* him.

The rulers of this world are rarely friendly towards the cause of Christ, but they often rage and plot against him (Ps. 2:1-3).

There is hope in knowing that some great and successful men will be like King *David*—a man after God's own heart—but more likely and more often, the great men of this world will be King *Herod*.

Do not envy them or wish to have what they have.⁶ But rejoice in knowing that your name is written in the book of life and you will inherit the new heavens and new earth.

And if *you* are a person that this world considers “great,” then be on guard for your soul and “keep your heart with all vigilance” (Prov. 4:23). Do not be carried away and drowned by the strong currents of this world, but fix your eyes on Jesus and see that he alone is *truly* great and worthy to be praised.

The world may scorn you as a fool for living for *his* greatness rather than your own, but “he is no fool who *gives* what he cannot keep to *gain* what he cannot lose” (Jim Elliot; cf. Matt. 16:26).

<pause>

Look now at verses 17-18.

¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

slaughtered the last remnants of the dynasty that ruled before him, put to death half of the Sanhedrin, killed 300 court officers, executed his wife and mother-in-law and three sons, and as he lay dying arranged for all the notable men of Jerusalem to be assembled in the Hippodrome and killed as soon as his own death was announced, so the people might weep instead of rejoice on the day of his death?”

⁵ Study note on Matthew 2:1 (in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]) says: “The small village may have had 10 to 30 boys of that age. Herod the Great's earlier query to the wise men about the time of the appearing of the star (v. 7) gave him an estimated time of birth for his potential challenger.” R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The ruthlessness of *Herod's* later years, particularly where a potential rival was concerned, is well documented; the victims included three of his own sons (Josephus, *Ant.* xvi. 392–394; xvii. 182–187), as well as several large groups of actual or suspected conspirators (*Ant.* xvi. 393–394; xvii. 42–44, 167), in one case with their families (*Ant.* xv. 289–290). It is thus not improbable that his fear of a potential rival should lead him to kill a few babies in Bethlehem. (The number of boys under two, if Bethlehem's population was about 1,000—and *AB*, p. 19, estimates only 300—would not be more than twenty.) It was a minor incident in a period full of atrocities, and the absence of clearly independent accounts in secular history is not surprising” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 94) writes: “Actually, the story is in perfect harmony with what we know of Herod's character in his last years (Schalit, p. 648). That there is no extra-Christian confirmation is not surprising; the same can be said of Jesus' crucifixion. The death of a few children (perhaps a dozen or so; Bethlehem's total population was not large) would hardly have been recorded in such violent times.”

⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (1856; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 11-12.

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

This is a direct quotation from Jeremiah 31:15.⁷

And it's important to know that this is also *not* a one-to-one “precise fulfillment” as if this was predictive of the baby boys that Herod would slaughter.

Instead, this is a “patterned fulfillment,” where what happened in the past is a pattern for something that happens in the life and ministry of Jesus.

This verse in Jeremiah 31 refers to the *exile* of God's people, where Rachel—who symbolizes the mother of all Israel—is imagined to be weeping in her grave when the children of Israel are gathered as captives in Ramah before being march into exile in Babylon (Jer. 40:1-2).⁸

The Babylonian exile was a big part of Israel's history, which Matthew alluded to in the genealogy of Jesus that he presented earlier in chapter 1. And part of the devastation of the exile was the *end* of kings from the line of *David*.

Even though the Lord had made a covenant with David to establish his offspring *forever* and to build his throne for *all generations* (2 Sam. 7:12-13), the Babylonian exile meant that Israel no longer had a king or kingdom from the line of David. It seemed that the LORD had abandoned them and forsaken all his promises to them.

But when we look at Jeremiah 31, you have to know that the verse that is quoted here is the *only* sad verse in the entire chapter. The very next verses say this in...

Jeremiah 31:16-17: Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears... There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.

Besides verse 15, the *entire* chapter is about the LORD promising to bring them back from exile and how he will turn their mourning into joy (31:13).

<pause>

So how does Jesus fulfill *this* passage?

The point of this Scripture fulfillment is that with the coming of Jesus, the true Davidic king is here, the exile is over, and he brings with him all the hope and joy of Jeremiah 31.⁹

⁷ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 95) writes: “Only here and in 27:9 is the fulfillment formula devoid of a ἵνα (*hina*) or a ὅπως (*hopōs*), both of which normally have telic force (“in order that”), though consecutive force is not uncommon in NT Greek (cf. on 2:15). This is probably because in these two passages the action that is fulfilling Scripture is so horrible that there is an instinctive reluctance to use phraseology that might be (mis)-understood to ascribe enormous wickedness to God (cf. Broadus; Rothfuchs, pp. 36–39).”

⁸ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 94) writes: “Nebuzaradan, commander of Nebuchadnezzar's imperial guard, gathered the captives at Ramah before taking them into exile in Babylon (Jer 40:1–2). Ramah lay north of Jerusalem on the way to Bethel; Rachel's tomb was at Zelzah in the same vicinity (1 Sam 10:2). Jeremiah 31:15 depicts mourning at the prospect of exile; Rachel is seen as crying out from her tomb because her “children,” her descendants (Rachel is the idealized mother of the Jews, though Leah gave birth to more tribes than Rachel) “are no more”—i.e., they are being removed from the land and are no longer a nation.”

⁹ Also, notice that in Jeremiah 31, the *culmination* of the people's comfort, hope, and joy is that God will establish with his people a *new* covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says: ³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” In verse 31-32, this *new* covenant will *not* be like the *old* covenant that they broke, which led to their exile in the first place. Instead, this

The tears and devastation of the Babylonian *exile* are now *climaxed* and *ended* by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem and the surrounding region.

Even though there is great *mourning* in the loss of their children, there is overwhelming *hope* in King Jesus who has escaped and will ultimately reign and redeem his people.¹⁰

<pause>

Now, even if we may agree with this *conceptually*, when suffering and mourning hit, it's much harder to grapple with this *experientially*.

Some of us here have lost loved ones, and perhaps questions and doubt begin to arise in our mind. And even as we read this account of Herod's horrific slaughter in Bethlehem and the mourning of the mothers, perhaps we wonder, "What real hope is there in Christ?"

We won't be able to address every question we may have, but I want us to see the many ways that Scripture helps us to not only *cope* but find *hope* even amidst such evil and suffering.

First of all, ask yourself: how do *alternative* worldviews address this problem?

- Some worldviews deny the reality of good and evil, so there's nothing really "wrong" about your suffering (e.g., pantheists, Darwinian naturalists).
- Some worldviews deny the reality of a sovereign and good God, so there is no meaningful comfort for you amidst the pain of evil and suffering (e.g., process theists).

But the Christian worldview deals with the issue of evil and suffering head on throughout Scripture, addressing both the intellectual and emotional aspects without diminishing or dismissing the reality and pain of it like some other worldviews do.

Intellectually, there is a vast difference between us and God—and between *God's* infinite, exhaustive knowledge and *our* limited, imperfect knowledge—so we ought not to think that we'd be able to figure out all the reasons God has for allowing evil and suffering in any particular case.

Emotionally, the majority of the Psalms give us language to lament the evil and suffering we experience to the God who is sovereign and good, and who in *Christ* uniquely understands.

And Scripture as a whole provides a full-orbed, nuanced view of evil and suffering in the world that is frankly *unmatched* in any other worldview out there.

I'm going to give a bunch of Scripture references now. We won't be able to look at all of them in detail, but I'll give you the gist of what we can take away from them. I'd encourage you to write down the verses (or take a picture of the screen) and revisit them later on your own.

Ok, ready?

new covenant will *not* be able to be broken because, as we saw before, through faith in Jesus' atoning death and perfect life [or his passive and active obedience] on our behalf, all our sins will be forgiven and all his righteousness counted to us. In verse 33, God's law will be written on our hearts, so that we don't need to be externally *compelled* to obey but we will *desire* to obey God from our hearts. And in verse 34, every member of the new covenant will *truly* know the Lord—not just externally by name but internally from a converted heart. And on the night before his death, this is *exactly* what Jesus says he has come to inaugurate: "This cup that is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

¹⁰ D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 94-95) writes: "Jeremiah 31:15 occurs in a setting of hope. Despite the tears, God says, the exiles will return; and now Matthew, referring to Jeremiah 31:15, likewise says that, despite the tears of the Bethlehem mothers, there is hope because Messiah has escaped Herod and will ultimately reign... Help comes from observing the broader context of both Jeremiah and Matthew. Jeremiah 31:9, 20 refers to Israel = Ephraim as God's dear son and also introduces the new covenant (31:31-34) the Lord will make with his people. Therefore the tears associated with Exile (31:15) will end. Matthew has already made the Exile a turning point in his thought (Mt 1:11-12), for at that time the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the Exile are now being "fulfilled"—i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (26:28) promised by Jeremiah."

[Genesis 1-2
 Genesis 3
 Job 1-2
 Psalm 119:67, 71
 Romans 5:3-5
 James 1:2-4

Romans 8:18-23
 Romans 8:28-30
 2 Corinthians 1:5-7
 Revelation 21:1-8
 Revelation 22]

- In Genesis 1-2, we see that God created everything good; therefore, evil was *not* part of his good creation.
- In Genesis 3, we see that man disobeyed God, and as *judgment*, pain and suffering entered the world as consequences of sin.
- However, in Job 1-2, we're introduced to the category of "innocent sufferer," which Christ would later pattern and perfectly embody.
- In Psalm 119:67, 71, we see that affliction can teach us to obey God's statutes for our good.
- In Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4, we see that suffering produces godly character and spiritual maturity in Christians.
- In Romans 8:18-23, we see that the glory that is to come will far outweigh the sufferings that we experience now.
- In Romans 8:28-30, we see that God is sovereign over suffering and he uses it to conform his people into the likeness of Christ.
- In 2 Corinthians 1:5-7, we see that when we share in *Christ's* sufferings and comfort, we can then comfort *others* in their sufferings.
- In Revelation 21:1-8 and in Revelation 22, we see that when Christ returns and brings final judgment, believers will enter into perfect communion with God for eternity in the new creation, where there will be no more sin, death, pain, or suffering.¹¹

Notice that in all of those verses, aside from the sin of man that first brought suffering into the world, *Christ* is at the center of all the comfort, hope, and joy there is, even amidst such pain.

- Any redemptive *good* that comes from suffering is centered on *Christ*.
- Any unique *comfort* in the midst of suffering is centered on *Christ*.
- Any final *end* to suffering is centered on *Christ*.

Because the true King is here with us, evil and suffering will not persist forever, but he will one day make all things right in a way where *we* will be eternally *happy* and *God* will be eternally *glorified*.

I know that may not answer all the questions we have, but God never promises to do that. Instead, Scripture points us to the One we can trust, even in the darkest valleys of suffering.

So especially if you're going through suffering right now, look to *Jesus* who has come and is coming again. See what *he* has done for you at the cross, and trust him even in the cross *he's* bearing with you now.

And if you're *not* going through suffering right now, store up all Scripture has to say about it, so you can be confident in the day of suffering that there is no greater hope to be found anywhere else.

<pause>

So the *first* scene was the flight to Egypt; the *second* scene was the slaughter in Bethlehem; and now the *third* scene is the...

III. Return to Nazareth (vv. 19-23)

Look at verse 19.

¹¹ Also, in Job 42, we see that God is no man's debtor, but he gives far more than he takes away. In Luke 13:1-5, we again see that suffering and death cannot always be directly connected to personal sin, but they are warnings of God's judgment that ought to lead people to repentance. In John 9:1-3, we see that the man was blind not because of his or his parents' sin but that the works of God would be displayed in him. In Romans 9:19-24, we see again God's sovereignty and divine right emphasized, and how God manifests his attributes of justice and mercy to display the riches of his glory. In 1 Peter 4:12-13, we see that one of the reasons Christians suffer is solidarity—to be united with Christ in his sufferings, so that we may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[¹⁹ But when Herod died, ...]

After *all* of King Herod's ruthless efforts to protect his own rule—killing his own family members and even baby boys—he cannot kill *death*.

In just a brief *clause* of sentence, it says, “when Herod died,” and then it moves on. How quickly he is forgotten.

All the power and authority and larger than life status he once seemed to enjoy is all gone—as he goes to meet and be judged by the holy God who lives forever.

Don't be fooled by what you see in this life. Death and eternity help put everything into proper perspective.

<pause>

The rest of verse 19 to verse 21 is a little bit of déjà vu.

[¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ 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.” ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.]

In verses 19-20, it says, “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 in verse 21, Joseph again *immediately* trusts and obeys pretty much *word-for-word* what the angel told him to do—“he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”

But then, there's an unexpected turn of events that happens in verse 22.

[²² 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. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, ...]

It seems like Joseph was planning to return to Bethlehem, but once he finds out that King Herod's son Archelaus was reigning over Judea, he's afraid to go there.¹²

Once again, he receives a *warning* in a dream to go to the district of Galilee instead, which was *outside* of Archelaus's jurisdiction.

And in the beginning of verse 23, they end up settling in a city called Nazareth.¹³

¹² Study note on Matthew 2:22 (in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]) says: “**Archelaus**, one of Herod the Great's sons, succeeded Herod's throne over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea and ruled 4 B.C.–A.D. 6 (see Jewish and Roman Rulers). He was hated by the Jews and displayed the same kind of cruelty that had characterized his father's reign. Caesar Augustus, fearing a revolution from the people, deposed and banished him to Gaul.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 96) writes: “Probably Joseph had expected Herod Antipas to reign over the entire kingdom but Herod the Great made a late change in his will, dividing his kingdom into three parts. Archelaus, known for his ruthlessness, was given Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (see map, p. 58.). Augustus Caesar agreed and gave him the title “ethnarch” (more honorable than “tetrarch”) and promised the title “king” if it was earned. But Archelaus proved to be a poor ruler and was banished for misgovernment in A.D. 6. Rome ruled the south through a procurator. But by that time Joseph had settled the family in Galilee. Herod Antipas, who reappears in Matthew 14:1–10, was given the title “tetrarch” and ruled in Galilee and in Perea. Herod Philip (not to be confused with Herodias's first husband, who was not a king) became tetrarch of Iturea, Trachonitis, and some other territories. He was the best of Herod the Great's children; Jesus frequently retired into his territory (14:13; 15:29; 16:13) away from the weak but cruel Antipas. Joseph, guided by the fifth and final dream, settled the family in Galilee.”

¹³ Study note on Matthew 2:23 (in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]) says: “**Nazareth**, in the lower Galilean hills halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee, was a relatively small village (population estimates vary from 200 to 1,600). Luke 1:26–27 and 2:39 indicate that Joseph and Mary had earlier come from Nazareth.” R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “Matthew, with his typical avoidance of unnecessary detail, does not mention that Nazareth had already been the family home before the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26; 2:4). What interests him is the significance of the choice of Nazareth in the light of Scripture. The Messiah was expected to come from Bethlehem (2:4–6), and Jesus' coming

<pause>

Notice that throughout this entire narrative, the Lord has been *warning* Joseph again and again—each time *saving* the lives of his child, his wife, and himself.

For us, I wonder how we feel about being *warned*.

- Do we seriously consider and heed the warnings of those we trust?
- Or do we tend to ignore them and perhaps even get annoyed by their lack of affirmation?

Here and all throughout the Bible, we're shown that warnings are a *kindness*—they're meant to *save* us from pain and suffering.

In the gospel, we are *warned* against the eternal consequences of sin in hell. And though many find offense in it, if it's indeed *true*, is it not a *kindness* to be *warned* of it—and to be told the good news of how we can be *saved* from it?

And as a church, we're called to do this for *one another*. Consider...

Galatians 5:19-21: Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I **warn** you, as I **warned** you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Colossians 1:28: Him we proclaim, **warning** everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, if we see one another going down a path that is *not* according to the gospel profession we've made, then it is a *kindness* to *warn* one another of that.

As C. S. Lewis, the 20th century writer, has said, "Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction."

God has sovereignly called us to live out our Christian lives in the context of the local church because we *need* one another in this way.

This is part of our responsibility to one another as *members* of a church.

So on our journey together to our heavenly home, let's do all we can to *warn*, to *teach*, and to present everyone *mature* in Christ.

<pause>

Look now at the rest of verse 23.

²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Just to be clear: to be a *Nazarene* has *nothing* to do with the Old Testament *Nazirite* vow that we looked at last year with Samson in the book of Judges.

To be a *Nazarene* simply means that a person is from *Nazareth*, just like being called a "Jakartan" (or *orang Jakarta*) means that a person is from *Jakarta*.

<pause>

from Nazareth, an insignificant village with a partly Gentile population and outlook, could well be an embarrassment (cf. John 1:46; 7:41–42, 52); it must be scripturally defended."

Now, it's important to know that this Scripture fulfillment is *different* than all the other ones in the rest of the Gospel of Matthew because no prophet is specifically quoted; in fact, *Nazareth* is not even mentioned in the *entire* Old Testament.

So what is going on here?

This is the *only* place that Matthew says “prophets” in the *plural*, which helps us to know that he doesn't have a specific *quotation* in mind but a general prophetic *theme* in the Old Testament (cf. Ezra 9:10-12).¹⁴

Many of the prophets foretold that the Christ would be *despised* (Ps. 22:6-8, 13; 69:8, 20-21; Isa. 11:1; 49:7; 53:2-3, 8; Dan. 9:26). For example...

Isaiah 53:2-3: For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was **despised** and **rejected** by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was **despised**, and we esteemed him not.

Likewise, Nazareth was also *despised*. It was an insignificant village, mixed with both Jews and Gentiles, that even other people from Galilee looked down on (John 1:46; 7:42, 52; Acts 24:5).¹⁵ For example...

John 1:45-46: Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “**Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

So how does Jesus *fulfill* this expectation of the Christ?

This is a more one-to-one “precise fulfillment,” where the point is that Jesus is the *Christ* who all the prophets said would be *despised* and *rejected* by men.¹⁶

<pause>

Now, as followers of Christ, let's consider *three* implications of this.

First, he suffered for us long before the cross.

We discussed before about how Jesus died on the cross to take the penalty of our sin—and that's 100% true, but it's not the *complete* picture.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelinein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 97) writes: “[T]he formula is unique in two respects: only here does Matthew use the plural ‘prophets’; and only here does he omit the Greek equivalent of ‘saying’ and replace it with the conjunction *hoti*, which can introduce a direct quotation (NIV) but more probably should be rendered ‘that,’ making the quotation indirect: ‘in order to fulfill what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene’ (cf. W. Barnes Tatum, Jr., ‘Matthew 2. 23,’ *The Bible Translator* 27 [1976]: 135–37; contra Hartman, ‘Scriptural Exegesis,’ pp. 149–50). This suggests that Matthew had no specific OT quotation in mind; indeed, these words are found nowhere in the OT.” R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) agrees: “[T]he formula introducing the quotation differs from the regular pattern (see pp. 42–43) in two ways: it refers not to a single prophet but to *the prophets*, and it concludes not with ‘saying’ (*legontos*) but with ‘that’ (*hoti*). This suggests that it is not meant to be a quotation of a specific passage, but a summary of a theme of prophetic expectation.”

¹⁵ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelinein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 97) writes: “Nazareth was a despised place (John 7:42, 52), even to other Galileans (cf. John 1:46). Here Jesus grew up, not as ‘Jesus the Bethlehemite,’ with its Davidic overtones, but as ‘Jesus the Nazarene,’ with all the opprobrium of the sneer. When Christians were referred to in Acts as the ‘Nazarene sect’ (24:5), the expression was meant to hurt. First-century Christian readers of Matthew, who had tasted their share of scorn, would have quickly caught Matthew's point. He is not saying that a particular OT prophet foretold that the Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the OT prophets foretold that the Messiah would be despised (cf. Pss 22:6–8, 13; 69:8, 20–21; Isa 11:1; 49:7; 53:2–3, 8; Dan 9:26). The theme is repeatedly picked up by Matthew (e.g., 8:20; 11:16–19; 15:7–8).”

¹⁶ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelinein, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984], 97) writes: “It is possible that at the same time there is a discreet allusion to the *nešer* (“branch”) of Isaiah 11:1, which received a messianic interpretation in the Targums rabbinic literature, and DSS (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, p. 104); for here too it is affirmed that David's son would emerge from humble obscurity and low state. Jesus is King Messiah, Son of God, Son of David; but he was a branch from a royal line hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn. Jesus the Messiah, Matthew is telling us, did not introduce his kingdom with outward show or present himself with the pomp of an earthly monarch. In accord with prophecy he came as the despised Servant of the Lord.”

Jesus' suffering didn't *begin* there but...

- it began at his birth when he was rejected from all the inns, only to be born in a manger with animals;
- it continued as he lived as a refugee in Egypt, as King Herod sought to destroy him;
- and it persisted as he was raised in Nazareth—an obscure, despised town that nobody cared for.

He was on the run before he could ever run, and he was hated before he could ever speak.

Long before Jesus ever began his public ministry, he was *already* despised; and long before he ever went to the cross, he was enduring the suffering and shame that *we* deserve for our sins.

<pause>

Second, we should *expect* to be despised and rejected as Jesus was.

I know we know this, but we need to hear it again and again.

Jesus said in...

John 15:18-20: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not *of* the world, but I chose you *out* of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted *me*, they will also persecute *you*....

We tend to gloss over passages like this because our flesh inherently recoils against them. We don't *want* to be hated or persecuted, despised or rejected. Instead, we want to be loved and respected and praised by the world.

But here, Jesus warns us with a sobering thought: If you're more like the *world*, they will *love* you; but if you're more like *Jesus*, they will *hate* you.

So ask yourself:

- How is the world responding to me these days?
- Do my speech and actions look more like Jesus or the world?

Of course, we're not *looking* to be hated, but the more we *resemble* Jesus and the more we *talk about* Jesus, the world *will* increasingly despise and reject us.

But sharing in *Christ's* suffering uniquely *pictures* the gospel to the world. It puts *flesh* onto our gospel proclamation, so that we *embody* Christ to a dying world.

And even if they hate us, we embody the same *compassion* that Jesus has for the lost in this world and the same *passion* that Jesus has for his Father's glory.

<pause>

Third, we should run to Jesus often in prayer, knowing that he uniquely understands.

When we pray to our God, we are not praying to a God who remains distant from our problems and suffering, but one who *entered into* them and *experienced* them to the highest degree, and who is able to *sympathize* with us in every way.

- Are you a refugee? Jesus uniquely understands.
- Have you been betrayed? Jesus uniquely understands.
- Have you wept the loss of loved ones? Jesus uniquely understands.
- Do you feel like a "nobody" in this world? Jesus uniquely understands.

No matter what you're going through, run to Jesus in prayer. He knows our troubles, and he draws near to us in our affliction.

So don't hold anything back from him. Go to him *often* and find him to be the most intimate friend there is.

Conclusion

As we close, I want us to take a step back and see the *grandness* of it all—and see that this is all *God's* story.

He wrote it all in *Scripture*, and he fulfills it all in *Christ*.

You probably don't want to hear this, but it's so important for *us*—for *me*—to hear this: It's not about “my life” and how “my life” needs to turn out.

Rather, just like every *Scripture* is meant to point to Jesus (cf. Luke 24:27, 44-47), in every *event* of our lives, it's meant to point to *him*.

We all naturally tend to think that *we're* all our own *main* character in our story, but *we're not*. In the grand scheme of eternity, it's not *about* you or me.

At the same time, that doesn't mean that it doesn't *concern* us.

Everything that Jesus does radically *shapes* how we understand and live our lives.

As we saw before...

- He's our perfect representative who *did* what we could never do to *gain* for us what we could never lose.
- He's our greatest comfort, hope, and joy, even amidst the worst sufferings in this life.
- And he's our suffering substitute, who was despised and rejected for *our* sake long before the cross.

So it's not *about* us, but we see how he *cares* for us.

And believing that *this* is who Jesus is and *this* is what he's done for us is meant to take our eyes off of ourselves and to fix them upon the *main* character of all creation and all history—Jesus Christ.

So whatever season you're in, let's turn our hearts to Jesus, who came not only to fulfill *Scripture*, but who came for sinners like *us*.

Let's pray.