

Matthew 2:13-23 - Birth of Jesus

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Date: 23 December 2018

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] You won't find tell of a king killing innocent children, of a community devastated, of Jesus' family having to flee as refugees.

But we're being reminded here that from the very beginning of the life of Jesus, there was a cost to him in becoming Emmanuel, God with us.

We're reminded that Jesus left the glory of heaven and he had this very humble birth in the stable. And from his earliest days, there was a sense of spiritual opposition and battle wherever Jesus was.

Now, given that the gospel writers are really selective about what they tell us about the early years of Jesus. So you read Luke and you read Matthew, you don't discover very much.

We need to ask ourselves, why does Matthew record this particular story? I think it helps us to see two themes that we can trace through Matthew's gospel.

[1 : 14] We see Jesus at the center of a spiritual battle and we see that Jesus fulfills the purpose and the plan of God.

So we're going to see how these things work out in our text. First of all, we're going to think about Jesus and spiritual battle. Now, boys and girls, I don't know if you've ever realized how many of our favorite stories are about a battle between the good guys and the bad guys.

So we can think about that from stories like the three little pigs. They're the good guys. The big bad wolf, he's the bad guy. We can think about a story like Star Wars, where there's loads of good guys, loads of bad guys.

But we are all in our hearts. What we really want when we read these stories is we want good to win, don't we? We want the good guys to win. We want the bad guys to be defeated.

There is this story of good and evil that we enjoy because we want to see good win. And that's really important to the story of Jesus. Jesus is God's good and true king and he's come to defeat all that is bad and all that is evil.

[2 : 30] And so we find when we've read the first two chapters of Matthew, we discover that the Christmas story is full of the supernatural. And we discover that God is at work and that God sends angels and the angels bring messages.

We find that Jesus comes by the power of God's spirit to become Emmanuel, God with us. But we also discover in this passage that the devil is active, that there is spiritual attack, there's spiritual battle going on.

In fact, one way to read the Bible is to read the Bible as the history of spiritual warfare. We can go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible when everything was perfect.

There was Adam and Eve, but then the snake came, that the devil came in the serpent. He came as the destroyer. He came as the deceiver to pull Adam and Eve away from trusting the word of God to believing that God was holding back something good from them.

So begins the fall into sin. And so we begin to see this battle of good and evil that then plays out throughout the Bible history and throughout the history of the world.

[3 : 44] We see the devil often working through anti-God figures to fight against, to destroy God's purposes and God's people. Here in our story, who's the anti-God figure?

It's King Herod. Read with me again what the angels say in verse 13. The angel comes to Joseph, get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.

Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Herod has heard that God's promised king has come and he wants to get rid of this king.

Verse 16. When Herod realized that he'd been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under.

Here is a king who devastates a community in order to hang on to power, in order to try and get rid of God's king, Jesus.

[4 : 56] Here is Herod killing, historians will tell us, maybe between 20 and 30 innocent little baby boys in order to hold on to power.

Actually, we discover this is quite in keeping with Herod's character. Herod, the king, killed three of his own sons to make sure he could remain king, killed 300 of his court officials because he was worried about conspiracy.

Here is a man who will do anything to stay in power so he wants to get rid of Jesus. So when we read a passage like this, we're reading a story of intense spiritual battle.

Herod is the human player, but we discover that Jesus is in the devil's sights here. If we can kill God's king, we can kill God's good purposes. That is the way the devil seeks to operate.

So as we read the story, we read with a sense of threat and urgency, but we also saw that in this battle between good and evil, God protects and saves his own son.

[6 : 06] And he does it in a variety of different ways. He uses the angels to deliver these messages to keep Jesus safe. He uses his own mother and father, Joseph and Mary, in order to keep Jesus safe.

But again, the question, why does Matthew focus on these horrible events? Why not move from his birth to his public ministry? Well, it reminds us, doesn't it, that from the very beginning, the forces of darkness are lining up against Jesus.

And we see it as he begins his public ministry, as Jesus is out in the wilderness. He then is faced with the devil coming and tempting him.

We find as Jesus moves around in various communities, engaged in his ministry, that he's often confronted by evil spirits.

There is this sense of tension between good and evil. And then we get to the cross, of course, where we see the devil causing Judas to betray Jesus. And we find the Jewish religious leaders conspiring together to get rid of Jesus.

[7 : 15] We find the Roman authorities agreeing to get rid of Jesus. And so we've got this union, this conspiracy of evil. But at the same time, we're being reminded that God is in control.

Herod is full of threat, but Herod's threat fails. Herod wanted to kill Jesus, but notice twice in verse 15, then verse 19, we're told very simply after Herod died, when Herod died.

Herod died, Jesus still alive. God's purpose continues. And actually, Herod's schemes, the devil's schemes, serve to fulfill prophecy.

So as Mary and Joseph and Jesus flee to Egypt, so was fulfilled, verse 15, what the Lord had said through the prophet, out of Egypt I called my son.

God is in control. God is in control. Even in the political situation, Joseph and Mary and Jesus come back. They're worried about Archelaus, verse 22.

[8 : 26] They go and move to Nazareth instead of to Judea. And again, that's fulfilling prophecy. So think about this for Matthew's first readers.

What is he trying to say to them? He's saying to them, have courage. God is in control. God's purposes are accomplished.

As they begin to face trouble, they are living as a Christian community. Take heart. God is in control. At every point in the story of Jesus, there is victory.

So here, when Herod tries to destroy him, he's kept safe. When the devil comes to tempt Jesus, he remains faithful. He resists temptation by the power of God's word.

The demons confront him, and he drives the demons out. And then on the cross, when it looked like Jesus was facing defeat, we're told that that's the point where Jesus wins a decisive victory, that he defeats and disarms the power of Satan and sin and death.

[9 : 28] The eternal plan of God is accomplished. So again, the message from Matthew is, take courage. If your faith is in Jesus, you're on the winning side. There will be battle. There will be opposition.

But just as Jesus won, so if your faith is in Jesus, so you are on the winning side. Some points of application for us. When we look around the world, we see that spiritual battle still rages on.

Maybe you saw on the BBC or elsewhere, the reports on raids taking place on some of the house churches in China. Again, we're seeing a crackdown from the government.

We're seeing members and ministers being arrested. We need to remember to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, but also to remember that God continues to build his church, even while facing opposition.

But that spiritual battle doesn't just rage on in the world, it also rages in our own hearts. I was reminded of a quote this week from C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, fictional conversations between a senior devil Screwtape and a junior devil Wormwood.

[10 : 40] And one of the things that Screwtape says is this, it's funny how mortals always picture us putting things into their minds. In reality, our best work is done by keeping things out.

So part of the spiritual battle, part of what the devil wants to do is he wants to, for example, distract us so we don't think about eternal things.

So we think about the goodness of God we're so busy thinking about here and now. He wants to keep things out so that we can even come to church and have religion, but have it without Christ and without salvation and without the joy of the gospel.

That the devil would try and keep things like a sense of guilt and conviction of sin out of our hearts and our minds so we never repent and turn back to God.

So there's this battle that's going on, not just out there, but also in our own hearts and lives. As one Bible commentator says, if we are determined to get our own way at all costs, we will go to any length to eliminate all trace of Jesus and his claims on our lives.

[11 : 54] I wonder if that's our internal battle just now, trying to get rid of the claims of Jesus, trying to shut him out. But you know, the battle also goes on in Christian hearts too.

That yes, Jesus has won a victory and yes, we are redeemed, but still that battle still goes on. One example of this, just to make it practical for us, is think about our attitude towards, let's say, Bible reading.

So Jesus said, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. John 14, 23. So there's a connection between love for Jesus and the word of God.

To lose interest in the Bible, therefore, is to lose interest in God. Now, as we as Christians reflect on our own spiritual life and experience, either now or in the past, I imagine most of us, maybe all of us, have had times when reading the Bible was hard, where it was the last thing that we wanted to do, where we did it out of a sense of duty, but not of a sense of joy, because we would meet God then.

There is spiritual battle in our hearts all the time to fight against sin, to fight to desire God above other things.

[13 : 20] And it's important for us to be realistic about that. Some people have the idea that when I come to Jesus, when I become a Christian, everything will become wonderful, that life will become perfect.

But the Bible is full of the language of battle and warfare, and that's much more realistic of what happens in our own hearts. Boys and girls, I don't know if you went ice skating this Christmas.

I don't know if you went down to the skating rink at St. Andrew's Square. I went down to watch, not to skate, because that would have gone badly for me. But one thing that I noticed, I was there for just like two or three minutes, you notice two types of skaters.

You see the ones who are obviously very accomplished, and they kind of glide along. You get the odd spin here and there. It looks really simple. You'd watch them and think, wow, it looks so straightforward.

But then, you'd see the other people, and they'd be gripping on to the side, and the skates would be slipping all the time, and you felt like there was just moments before they were going to hit the deck. When it comes to the Christian life, do we expect that it's about gliding along, or do we expect it to be a battle to get ourselves to the finish?

[14 : 37] It's important for us to be realistic. It's a battle to trust God. It's a battle to obey, but it's a battle that's well worth fighting. And there's good news for us.

There's good news for us because we remember that the victory has been won by our King, by King Jesus, on the cross and through His resurrection.

And so to give us an image from Pilgrim's Progress, maybe you've read Pilgrim's Progress. One of the images there for Christian as he's on this pilgrimage is that while our enemies are real, and that battle is real, they're like lions that are chained.

So there is fear, and there is attack, but we need to remember that those enemies are chained, that the battle has been won by Jesus. So that's something of Jesus and spiritual battle.

Let's now think together about Jesus and the purposes of God. One of the things that we discover in Matthew's Gospel is so many times we find reference to the Old Testament.

[15 : 48] Jesus as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. So three times we're told in our passage here, so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through His prophet.

So let's think about those three things that we discover. What do they say about God's purposes? So verse 15, just to remind ourselves, so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, out of Egypt I called my son.

Okay, first thing to realize, Jesus comes as God's Savior. Now again, boys and girls, I don't know if you've noticed this. Adults, I don't know if you've noticed this either.

How similar some of the early stories of Moses and Jesus are. Remember the story of Moses when he was born?

There was a king, wasn't there? He was called Pharaoh, and he wanted to get rid of all the baby boys who were born to the Israelites. And so what had to happen? Moses had to be put in a basket to be kept safe from a king who wanted to get rid of him.

[16 : 58] Now that's just like Jesus, isn't it? Just as Moses would grow up to be God's chosen deliverer, so Jesus would grow up to be God's chosen deliverer.

And then we know the story of what happened when Moses grew up. God said to him, go to Pharaoh and say, let my people go. And it was Moses who was chosen to lead Israel out of slavery into freedom to become the people of God.

And again, that's just like Jesus. Jesus comes to set us free from a slavery far worse than being worked to death in Egypt, slavery to sin, where we can't know God, where we're far from God, where we're under the guilt of God, Jesus sets us free because he breaks the power of sin and he enables us then to become the children of God.

So we discover the connection there between the story of Moses and the story of Jesus. The great saving event in the Old Testament, the Exodus, prepares the way for the salvation that Jesus comes to bring.

Now, if you notice in your footnote, this is a quotation from Hosea, Hosea chapter 11, verse 1. That prophecy from Hosea, that quotation, it sees Israel being rebuked for being an unfaithful son.

[18 : 26] It says, out of Egypt, I called my son, but the more I called, the further they went, trusting in false gods, guilty of injustice and walking away from God.

We discover that they were not living with faith and obedience towards God who would be their father.

And what we understand is that their failure is our failure too. When we look at our own hearts, we discover that not one of us can say that we have been perfectly faithful, that we've perfectly followed God, that we've perfectly loved God.

All of us have gone astray. So then the Bible would say all of us by nature are slaves to sin and we cannot break free from that slavery. But Jesus comes, thinking about the story of Moses, Jesus comes to be our rescuer.

Jesus comes to be our Passover lamb. He is killed so that the judgment that should fall on us falls on Jesus so that we can be set free. Jesus is our perfect representative, perfectly obedient for us, goes ahead of us.

[19 : 41] We follow after him and through his perfect sacrifice we have our way to forgiveness and our way to freedom. So Matthew wants us to remember that the story of Jesus is the story of God's Savior coming.

Now the second prophecy is in verse 17. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah this time was fulfilled. A voice is heard in Ramah weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted for they are no more.

This comes from Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 15. The sorrow, the mourning in this context is that God is saying families are going to be taken into exile.

But Jeremiah 31 as a whole is a reminder that there is hope beyond sorrow. There is a hope beyond sorrow for Israel. There is a hope beyond sorrow for us because of Jesus.

In Jeremiah chapter 31 although they are told that there will be exile, families will be taken away, there will also be restoration.

[20 : 58] That God will again show everlasting love to his people. That he will enter into a new covenant with his people. He will write his law on their hearts.

So why does Matthew as he reads his Old Testament, why does he apply this text to the situation that we've just read about? Babies being killed in Bethlehem.

Well there's sorrow isn't there? There's slaughter of innocent children which is an evil wicked thing which brings sorrow. But how do we see hope beyond the sorrow?

Because Jesus the Savior King is kept safe. And just as is promised in Jeremiah 31 it's through Jesus that relationships are restored.

It's through Jesus that we can be reconciled to God. That we can be in the family of God. As we look at the life and the death of Jesus we find that evidence of God's everlasting love.

[22 : 03] Of his loving commitment to save his own people. And just as Jesus said that it's in his body and his blood it's through his death on the cross that the new covenant is secured for his people.

That we can belong to God because Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many. So we're reminded that there is sorrow but there is hope beyond sorrow because Jesus is kept safe.

And then in verse 23 we find our final reference to prophecy. He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets.

He will be called a Nazarene. Now this is different because there's no single text here that's being referred to but rather Matthew is drawing certain facts together to make the point that Jesus comes as God's humble saviour.

So there are lots of prophecies in the Old Testament that speak of a Messiah who will be humble. He will be born and live in a humble unimportant place.

[23 : 22] And at the time of Jesus Nazareth was just that kind of place. It was a backwater town not a place of great note or significance. So Nathaniel one of Jesus' disciples when Philip came and said I think I found the Messiah it's Jesus of Nazareth Nathaniel said can anything good come out of Nazareth?

So it was one of those times you didn't really expect anybody great or good to come from but it's all in keeping with God's good purpose that his saviour would come in humility that Jesus' life would be a humble life.

And this reminds us Christianity is not a religion of power. It's not a religion of status. It's not a religion that's all about performance.

Rather it speaks grace and kindness and mercy from God to the humble and to the weak and to the needy.

And we see that all through the story of Jesus. Jesus the one who's born in a stable. Jesus the one who lives as a refugee. Jesus the one who makes this home in a despised town.

[24 : 43] Jesus who associates with the tax collectors, the sinners, the outsiders, the despised ones. Jesus who dies that awful death on the cross.

The hidden part, this hidden part of the Christmas story, is saying really important things to us. It's reminding us of Jesus, our humble saviour.

It's reminding us that he came into this earth in order to enter into spiritual battle on behalf of his people. To give us freedom instead of slavery.

To give us hope instead of sorrow. Jesus has come for us. He has fought for us. He has died for us, securing the victory for us.

Now he rules and reigns for us in the glory of heaven. And one day he'll come back again to take his people to be with him.

[25 : 43] So as we think about King Jesus, as we think about the purposes of God this Christmas, the basic question we need to ask ourselves is, are we on his side?

Is he my king? Am I willing to submit to his good and loving rule? That way heningar can begin as we learn as strangely with his Jen on inher to an man when heWorld