

A Saviour from Nowhere

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Date: 21 December 2014

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that you might help us to look at your word closely tonight and bring out the riches of what you have spoken, so that we might be gripped by this wonderful Savior, the person of Jesus, but also be challenged to live for him.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is our last in the series that we've been doing, looking at Matthew chapter 1 and 2.

So I've got a little outline there as well, if you want to follow along. Well, as many of you would be counting, it's four days before Christmas.

Yay! And expected, all the images of Christmas are everywhere around, right? So whether you're at the shopping centers or you're at the school nativity concert, maybe, or Christmas cards, images like this would be up on the screen, would be popping around.

Stars, mages, shepherds, and the like. But I want to ask you, put up your hands if any of you have seen images from tonight's passage.

[1 : 1 1] Perhaps a scene in your school play of Mary and Joseph escaping to Egypt. Anyone? Or pictures like this on your Christmas card.

Or singing a carol about babies being slaughtered. Anyone? No. I bet you haven't.

And yet the Christmas story isn't complete, is it? Without the events in our passage tonight. Unpleasant as they are, they are part of Matthew's account. So the question we want to ask is, why would Matthew include them?

Why do they form part of this complete Christmas story? Well, that's what we're going to find out tonight. Now, at the most basic level, Matthew is simply just completing the story, showing us how Jesus ends up in Nazareth via Egypt, with God guiding Joseph through three dreams.

But there's more to it than that, because as we find, there are three Old Testament promises included in those accounts. Now, many people, as they read prophecies, what they think is prediction of the future.

[2 : 2 4] But that's not really the way prophecy in the Old Testament works. Rather, prophets spoke events of events in their time with a message for the people there and then, as they spoke.

But as they spoke, what happens is God intervenes in history and a pattern emerges of God repeating his actions and showing consistency in how he saves.

So that often successive events then follow a similar pattern, the pattern that was set out at the very start. And when we get to the New Testament, what we discover is that Jesus fills out this pattern in full.

Hence the word fulfill, fill out to the full. He either brings something bigger or better, or he fulfills the prophecy in an unexpected way. It's not quite exact, but I decided to use it anyway.

It's a bit like the difference between these two pictures. The rough sketch of Kung Fu Panda in black and white. It's like the events in the past in the sketch form.

[3 : 34] Whereas Jesus and what he does is that full technicolor version on my left. Jesus is not Kung Fu Panda. No, he's not. But I want you to bear this in mind.

Whenever you come across the word fulfill in our passage tonight, for that is what Matthew means when he uses it. Jesus is filling out each prophecy in full, completing what the Old Testament anticipates in a bigger, better, or unexpected way.

So the first is in verse 15 as a quote from Hosea, our first reading today. The second is in verse 18, a quote from Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 15.

And the third, well, there's a quote in verse 23, but we'll get to that in a moment as to where that comes from. Each quote, I have to say, is quite involved, and we'll be flipping in our Bibles quite often tonight because we need to see it in its context in the Old Testament.

So hopefully you can stay with me as we look at it. So let's begin with the first prophecy. Where Matthew tells us in verse 13 that when the Magi had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

[4 : 45] Get up, he said. 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. So immediately Joseph obeys, getting up, taking the child, as the Bible says, and his mother, and leaving for Egypt during the night, that is immediately, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophets, out of Egypt I called my son. So first of all, notice that what Matthew does is draw attention, not to the escape to Egypt, but actually the subsequent return from it, out of Egypt.

And so now if you turn with me to Isaiah, that's page 896. Just flick back if you can. We'll see this verse in its context.

There in chapter 11 and verse 1, God speaks saying, when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. Now what God is recalling, of course, is the first exodus.

Exodus, when he first brought out the 12 tribes of Jacob, out of Egypt, out of slavery. And if you've been watching the movie Exodus, Gods and Kings, yeah, that will be fresh in your minds.

[6 : 03] Now the Exodus is God's first act of salvation, first great act. And as such, it forms the pattern for subsequent events. God speaks in Hosea, actually hundreds of years later.

And what he's doing there, is he's lamenting Israel's unfaithfulness. So we keep reading in verse 2, but the more I called Israel, the further he went from me. They sacrificed to the bowels, and they burned incense to images.

It was I who taught Ephraim, that's another name for Israel, to walk, taking them by the arms. But they did not realize, it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.

I lifted the yoke from their neck, and bent down to feed them. Now when Matthew quotes Hosea, he isn't implying that Jesus was unfaithful too.

In fact, the exact opposite is true. So yes, Jesus is being portrayed as Israel, by Matthew, but he's better than the Israel of old, because he's faithful, where Israel wasn't.

[7 : 09] This is the son, as it were, that Israel should have been, but was not. And God is saying that it is through this son, Jesus, that God will now achieve a new exodus, a bigger and better one than the first.

And we see with this new exodus, that Jesus is also portrayed as Moses. Jesus is Moses. Someone raised by God to lead his people out of slavery. And if we read Matthew carefully, we'll notice the parallels between Jesus and Moses in this passage.

So first, remember how Moses, when Moses was born, that Pharaoh also had boys killed, yeah, by throwing them into the Nile. it's a parallel with what Herod does here.

Return with me to Matthew now, page 956. And we read in verse 16, that when Herod realized that he had 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 older and under, two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Again, remember when Pharaoh was outwitted too, by the midwives, who refused to kill the boys at childbirth, and therefore, Moses' life was preserved. Well, it's the same here with Herod.

[8 : 31] He was outwitted by the Magi, who didn't return to him. And therefore, Jesus' life was preserved too. And there's one final link between Jesus and Moses, and that's in verse 19, where we discover that after Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, get up, take the child, and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.

Now, those last few words actually echo what we find in Exodus chapter 4 and verse 19. So, look at the comparison I've put up on the screen between those two verses. This is what it says in Exodus.

Now, the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead. So, Jesus' birth then signals a new Exodus.

But whereas Israel was unfaithful, Jesus is faithful. And whereas Moses only freed the people from physical slavery, Jesus will give them a more complete and lasting freedom.

And this is where we get to the second quote, where again, we find another pattern in the massacre of the boys. For having described that massacre in verse 16, Matthew goes on to say, then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled.

[9 : 52] A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more. So, let me explain some of the names here.

Ramah is actually a town about 12 miles north of Bethlehem, in the tribe of Judah, Benjamin, sorry, not Judah. Now, the question was, was it, was Ramah in the vicinity of Bethlehem, and therefore caught within Herod's perch?

We don't know for sure. But what we do know is that Ramah was where the exiles gathered before being deported. And we know that from Jeremiah chapter 40 and verse 3.

And based on tradition, Rachel's tomb was also close by, Rachel being Jacob's wife and the mother of Benjamin. And in the prophecy in Jeremiah, Rachel is being portrayed figuratively as mourning from her grave.

Mourning for the loss of her children, who are being taken into exile. Which is the parallel then that Matthew finds between the children lost by Herod's purge, and those lost to exile, which Rachel mourns.

[11 : 02] And with this parallel, also comes a pattern. And that's our second point, that often, it is out of sorrow, that God's salvation arises. God saves when his people are in their darkest hour, because it's only in those times that they realize their need for God, a need for a savior.

And I've been reflecting, I guess, on the events that have happened this week, in Sydney, in Pakistan, in Cairns. And it brings home to me, how in the face of evil, the world needs a savior.

And that was the case in the first exodus, wasn't it? Because it was in the face of Pharaoh's evil, his slavery, that the people cried out to God. And he heard them, and remembered, and saved.

And it's the same here in this prophecy, for Rachel mourns for her children, and as he does, as she does, God promises salvation. So turn with me to this passage in Jeremiah 7, 8, 2, page 7, 8, 2.

And one of the surprising things we find is that, that verse in verse 15, is actually surrounded, by verse after verse, of promise, of salvation.

[12 : 21] Verse 15 happens to be, as it were, the only solitary verse, of lament. So let me read, for example, verse 7 and 8. This is what the Lord says, Sing with joy for Jacob, shout for the foremost of the nations, make your praises heard, and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.

See, I will bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expected mothers, and women to labor. A great throng will return.

And then, maybe another example, verse 16, just after that. This is what the Lord says, Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, declares the Lord.

They will return from the land of the enemy, so there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their land. And on and on it goes. And the whole chapter, actually, is a chapter of hope, of promise after promise, of what God will do at the return from exile.

And so Matthew sees this same pattern with Jesus, that yes, Bethlehem mourns for her children, but out of it, God promises salvation through Jesus. He was the only boy born in Bethlehem that escaped to be a savior.

[13 : 35] But in quoting Jeremiah 33, Matthew points to the fulfillment, as well, that Jesus will bring. That is, Jesus will fill out what is being promised in Jeremiah.

Fill it out in full. So if you flick over to page 784, in Jeremiah still, I'll show you what that means in verse 31 and onwards. And as I read those verses, I want you to bear in mind that Jeremiah also adopts the pattern of the Exodus, just like Hosea, when he makes these verses.

The return from exile is seen as a second Exodus, not out of Egypt, but this time out of Babylon. And so the promise in verse 31 is this. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.

He declares the law. Declares the Lord. So Moses was the mediator of the first covenant, if you remember. He went up to Mount Sinai to receive the law from God.

[14 : 49] Well, Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant. But this new covenant, as we read further, will be much better because God will give his people not just a new covenant, but new hearts as well.

So in verse 33, just a couple of paragraphs below, the law declares, I will put my laws into their hearts and write it, into their minds and write it on their hearts.

The law given to Moses was written on stone, but under the new covenant, it will be written on their hearts. Hearts that will turn to the Lord, hearts that will remain faithful.

This is the more complete salvation that Jesus will bring out of the sorrow in Bethlehem. And the promises in Jeremiah 31 will be fully fulfilled at that time by Jesus.

So how will this occur? Well, that's where we turn to our final quote. For this salvation, surprisingly, will come out of nowhere. So turn back with me to Matthew chapter 2.

[15 : 55] Sorry, this will be, I think, the last page flick. And let's take it up from verse 21. Having learned that Herod is dead, in verse 21, Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus is one of Herod's son, who I think was just as cruel as Herod, was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Having been born in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee and 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 final quote is actually the trickiest of them all, right? Because there's actually no such quote in the Old Testament. If you don't believe me, you can go and Google search, type in those words and you wouldn't find anything.

Now, and that's because Nazareth actually didn't exist in the Old Testament. It only sprang up in Jesus' day and it was a tiny town and so I think were it not for Jesus, we wouldn't even know about it today.

[17 : 03] And so Jesus was born in the smallest city in Judah and now he grows up in a town even smaller than that. So let's say we compare Jerusalem with Melbourne and then Bethlehem would be somewhere like Barrick.

No one comes from Barrick, yep. And Nazareth will be like Koo-wee-Rup. Koo-wee-wear, you might say, exactly. You know how sometimes people, if you come from small towns, you're always made fun of, you know, like with phrases like, oh, you know, you come from whoop-whoop or something like that.

Well, that's exactly how this word Nazareth or Nazarene is being used here. And we actually have an example in John's Gospel. If you remember in chapter 1 when Andrew finds Nathaniel after he's met Jesus, it says rather excitedly, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law about the prophet, about whom the prophet also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Do you recall what Nathaniel actually said? He said this, Nazareth, can anything good come from there? It's poking fun of Nazareth.

And so I think this is the sense in which Matthew uses the phrase he will be called a Nazarene. It's like saying he's going to be the boy from Wubbub or Timbuktu. He's going to be someone from nowhere.

[18 : 29] So where does all this come from in the Old Testament if what Matthew is saying is that it fulfills what the prophet said? Our first thing to notice is to notice that actually what Matthew says is so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets in the plural.

All the other instances if you look through the last two chapters the word is prophet in the singular which means that what Matthew is doing is that he's quoting not one specific prophet in particular but he's rather paraphrasing a number of prophets.

And so if we look through the Old Testament this idea that the Messiah will come from nowhere have no or little public standing actually has a lot of support. We see it firstly in the people that God chooses.

So Abraham as we saw a couple of months ago was a nobody. Moses came back to Egypt from nowhere as it were after 40 years. David was the youngest of Jesse's son a shepherd boy.

But if we look at the next slide I've got even Bible references that point to the humble standing of the promised Savior. So in Zechariah 9 we have a shepherd king who is rejected by his own.

[19 : 45] In Isaiah 53 the suffering servant many of you would know he's someone without natural beauty or majesty rejected and despised by men. Isaiah 42 the Lord's servant is someone without a public voice.

And in 49 he's despised by the nation. And then in the Psalms in Psalm 118 and verse 22 it says the stone the builders reject has become the capstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous to our eyes. Friends we live in a world that is drawn to power and popularity.

That's true isn't it? That's what we idolize. And that's how democracy works. The most popular people by preference vote of course gets to be in power.

Facebook and Twitter they work like that as well. number of followers number of likes. And as a result I think the world then tends to look for saviors that have power and glamour and clout.

[20 : 48] But God's salvation does not come this way. Instead he chooses a saviour from nowhere a humble man. Just think about Jesus' life.

For the first two years he was actually a refugee in Egypt like a little like the families that are running from ISIS at the moment. In fact I saw this picture recently that this Christmas some of them have actually put up a tent for Jesus and his family in one of the refugee camps in Iraq.

And then as he grew up for nearly 30 years he was just a carpenter in a sleepy town. A tradie in Kuwira if you like.

I just imagine when people bought furniture from Joseph's business they didn't have a single clue that what they were buying was being made by the son of God.

Imagine what that would sell for on eBay if they did. When I worked for KPMG I used to come across fresh graduates who were constantly thinking about promotions even though they had only been in the job for six months.

[21 : 56] And then there were colleagues whose goal in life was to make partner by the time they were 30. And yet here we have Jesus a king living and working quietly for 30 years not seeking to get ahead in life or build a following as a ruler.

And then when he finally begins his ministry he picks a red bag of disciples fishermen tax collectors not quite the cream of society. When he ate he ate with prostitutes and sinners people who knew they needed a savior.

And then when the most decisive moment in history occurs where do we find our savior? Riding into Jerusalem like a knight in shining armor with an army behind him?

No on a donkey on his way to a lonely death a shameful death even. And yet out of nowhere out of seeming defeat God saves the world on the cross through the death of his son.

Do you begin to see why Matthew is including these prophecies for Christmas? He wants to show us that this king of the Jews that the Magi was looking for is the savior of the world and that's where we are to look for him.

[23 : 15] Not in the pomp and circumstance of high society but at the cross on a hill of shame outside the city the cross you see is a key part of the Christmas story.

Friends this is God's pattern of salvation over and over again and it shouldn't surprise us that that's how God brings salvation to our lives too. I don't know whether you get disappointed sometimes or frustrated because nothing spectacular seems to be happening with you.

How God doesn't show himself in a decisive or powerful way or why if you're a Christian life's still hard. Why is there not the victorious salvation that we are promised?

But actually it's often in the mundane in our time of deepest need that God meets us far away from the glamour and power of this world. Friends I don't know if you realize but God's biggest priority isn't to give us a comfortable and praying free life.

It's actually to free us from slavery. Slavery from sin to make us a holy people. Free from selfishness, jealousy, anger, hatred, free from the guilt of our past.

[24 : 30] And that kind of work happens quietly without fanfare or resume test when God renews our hearts. When a spiritual transformation happens so that his laws are written on our hearts that we love him wholeheartedly, we trust in him willingly.

God brings salvation. He brought it on the cross in this way, out of nowhere, out of sorrow, to free us from slavery. So don't be surprised if that's how he does it in our lives, quietly working by the spirit to change us, to transform us, doing the hard but necessary and long term work of changing us to be like Jesus.

Until one day, we too will be revealed in glory with Jesus. Let's pray. Father, we thank you again for your Savior, Jesus.

We thank you for your Son who is faithful, who was the true Israel, the true Moses, who leads his people out, laying down his life for them.

Thank you that when we cry out to you, you hear us in our need, you remember your promises to us. Help us to be patient, help us to know that if we turn to you and if we follow your Son Jesus, then the Spirit is working in us, perhaps unseen, perhaps longer than we would like, but yet he is transforming us, writing your laws on our hearts, helping us to love you, helping us to be faithful, helping us to trust you, even if often this happens through trials, through difficulty in our lives.

[26 : 28] So help us, Lord, to see your way of salvation and to welcome it, even though for a time there may be patience and perseverance required from us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. of