

The Silent Hero

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Date: 26 December 2021

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 01] 1000 Community Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 38] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[5 : 08] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[8 : 40] Thank you. your saving love. And so, Lord, we thank you for these arms, these eternal arms that surround your people. That means that we can never be lost, never be in such a condition that we're lost from all eternity when you surround us with these eternal arms of your great love. And so, Lord, we bow again in your presence. We bow knowing that we approach the living and true God. There is no other God but you. You are the one God. Three persons, one God, and we worship you. We thank you,

Lord, that again you've brought us into this place of worship where two or three are gathered together in your name. And as you promise, there you are in the midst. And we thank you, Lord, that even in the midst of this worshipping people that we have that comfort and reassurance to know that you are with us, the eternal God with us, even this night. You are Emmanuel, God with us. And we give you praise and thanks for that truth. And so, Lord, we bow in worship and we ask, Lord, your mercy upon us and upon each and every one here this late afternoon. We pray, Lord, for those of our number away from us, those that are away on holiday, those who are not well, those who have particular responsibilities to perform even this evening. We pray for them and ask your blessing on them. We pray, Lord, for those who were with us this morning and visiting. And we thank you, Lord, for them. We pray, Lord, your blessing upon them. And indeed, Lord, we pray your blessing upon those who mourn that they will be comforted. We pray particularly for the Bailey family this evening, this first Lord's Day that they will have known in the passing of Clive. And we pray, Lord, that you'll bless Clive's widow, that you'll bless her and the family, the girls and their husbands and their children. We pray,

Lord, that you'll bless Clive's congregation, Sterling, Sterling Free Church, that in their loss, that they will find comfort and know that though they grieve, it's grieving without, that it's not without hope. Because they have that hope, that sure hope of eternal life for all who are in Christ.

We thank you, Lord, for Clive's witness, his testimony, his faithfulness. And so, Lord, we pray that as you took him into glory, even these few days ago, that that will be a reminder to ourselves, even the sight of eternity, of the eternity that is real, that is true, that awaits us all.

We pray, Lord, that you will give comfort even to those who are even on the brink of eternity, that they will know your presence, that they will know your comfort, your love.

[12 : 25] So hear us, Lord, as we worship you, as we commit this time of service to your care and keeping. Open up your word to us. Open our eyes to your word, that we may see wonderful things

from your truth.

Continue with us now, Lord, we pray. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm 87. Psalm 87. It's the whole of the Psalm.

The tune is Love Divine, the Psalm that really speaks of the, if you like, the worldwide scope of the gospel that we're thinking of this morning. And again, with some focus this evening.

We're in Jerusalem's holy mountain, he has founded his abode. More than all of Jacob's dwellings, Zion's gates are dear to God. Then, the middle of verse 4, I will name as those who know me, Egypt, Tyre and Babylon, Philistine, along with Cushite, I will count as Zion born.

The whole of Psalm 87, to God's praise. Amen. On Jerusalem's holy mountain, we have founded his abode.

[13:58] For the land of Jacob's dwelling, Zion's gates are dear to God.

Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, as the Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

As your people I recall, I will name as those who know me, If you dare and marvel on.

Fill us, Zion, along with Cushite, I will count as Zion born.

Yes, it will be said of Zion, Listen, that one near below, and your girl, the high athletic, will descend and be controlled.

[15:18] Born in Zion, God will enter in the people's register. They will sing as they may beauty.

All thy bands in dying hell. Let's now turn to read in Matthew's Gospel.

As we were in Matthew 2 this morning, we're going to continue in that chapter. And this time, read from verse 13 to 23, as we consider really the actions of Joseph under God's guidance in the flight to Egypt and the return from Egypt to Nazareth.

So let's read from verse 13. Now, when they, that's of course Mary, Joseph and Jesus, now when they had departed, sorry, that's when the wise men had departed, departed from Jerusalem and back to their homeland, another way from which they came.

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.

[16:47] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he'd 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'd ascertained from the wise men.

This was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. 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. But when Herod died, 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 he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. When he heard that Achilleus 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.

[18:12] And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he, Jesus, would be called a Nazarene.

May God bless that reading from his holy word as we turn to consider really this, the way that God worked through Joseph, using Joseph, this silent hero, this man who, no words of Joseph are actually recorded anywhere in Scripture.

And yet, as we'll see, he's a man of action. He's a man who does as the Lord commands him to do. But in contrast to this man of action, we read about a man of malefaction.

In other words, a man who does evil, a man who does wrong, somebody who commits that which is utterly, utterly, utterly wrong. And then back to Joseph, this man of proaction, this man who acts decisively, this man who takes responsibility under the sovereign leading of God for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, the man of action.

Now, we've been mentioning Joseph's name, of course. That's what we read here in Matthew 2, the second part of Matthew 2. But remember that, of course, in the Christmas story as a whole, Jesus has to take centre place.

[19 : 37] I mean, it's because of Jesus his coming to earth. It's because of Jesus that your salvation was possible. It's because of Jesus that God and sinners are reconciled.

But remember this, that God in his divine wisdom, God so ensured that surrounding the birth and the upbringing of Jesus and all Jesus' humanity, that God was working through particular individuals in the upbringing of Jesus.

Jesus had a natural mother, Mary. He had a legal father, Joseph. And in God's perfect plan for the development of the life of Jesus, in Jesus' childhood, God is so foreordained and a young, unwed mother and a legal father.

That these would be people who'd be chosen to, and were chosen to be parents of the Christ child. And these parents having all the parental responsibilities that's, you know, attached to bring up a child, even the holy child, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, we know much has been written beyond Scripture. Much has been written about Mary. But we know from Scripture itself that Mary was the mother of Jesus, that Mary bore Jesus in her womb.

[21 : 04] She's remembered, of course, for that. She's remembered for the words that she composed in her praise to God, the so-called Magnificat. She's remembered for being at the wedding in Cana when Jesus performed this first miracle in turning water into wine.

She's remembered for being at the cross when Jesus was crucified. And she's remembered for being amongst the disciples after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension.

But what about Joseph? What about Joseph? Because certainly, whether it be Scripture or even later in comments, there's not the same focus on Joseph as there is in Mary.

And yet God, in his wisdom, had chosen this individual, yes, to be the legal father of Jesus. Of course, Joseph was one of the descendants of King David.

so that ensured that Jesus would be born in the ancestral town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of David. And Jesus being born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Scripture.

[22 : 16] So God, in his wisdom, choosing Joseph. And God, in his wisdom, giving Joseph wisdom to discern what had to be done to keep Jesus safe.

And to keep Jesus safe, especially in that difficult time, that time of danger, that time of great danger when Herod was threatening Jesus' life. And as we say, Scripture doesn't record one word that Joseph spoke in all Joseph's life.

And we have to say that in many ways, he's the silent hero. But the more that you consider Joseph, the way that Scripture shows us Joseph, the way that God so ordained Joseph's life, then, you know, we can praise God for the way that God so ordains the lives of each one of you.

Each one of you. You know, as Paul confirmed in 1 Corinthians 1, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Such was Joseph in his, in his being used of God. Yes, in many ways, low and despised in the world, yet God chose him for the work that God had given him to do in the upbringing of Jesus.

[23 : 42] Jesus. And so, as we look this evening, as we look at the way that God worked, let's work through Joseph. Then, rejoice, too, in the work, the way that God has worked in your life.

I mean, Joseph had a particular role to play. He was so important in the protection of the infant Jesus. He had that human responsibility under God's sovereign control.

And so, through Joseph, God's sovereignty through Joseph, as we see in the passage, Scripture's being fulfilled. In fact, three times we read there that our Scripture being fulfilled.

Scripture being fulfilled in the life of Jesus. God's purpose has been carried out for the salvation of his people. So, Joseph, Joseph, this silent hero, but at the same time, this man of action, as we see, certainly, in verses 13 to 15, very much, this man of action.

What did we read there in these verses? Well, what did we read? We read there that an angelic messenger, an angel, speaks to Joseph in a dream. And, you know, don't dismiss dreams as a form of divine communication.

[24 : 57] You know, you go through Scripture and you see a number of times that God spoke to particular individuals and spoke through dreams. I mean, you know, in this Christmas story that Joseph already had a word from the Lord through a dream.

He was to take Mary as his wife, even though at that time she was pregnant with Jesus, pregnant before the actual marriage. And now, God's speaking to Joseph again through that dream.

And Joseph, he's the man of action. And Joseph's got no hesitation in obeying what God calls him to do. Why? Because he knows that what he's received, he's received from the Lord.

And notice, what is he told? He's told, by word of warning, he's told to rise. Obviously, if it's a dream, generally speaking, you have dreams at night time. So, it's at night time he's told to rise, to get up, rise from your sleep.

And the way it's written in the original, it's literally having risen, take. Having risen up, just take. In other words, the two things sort of going together. Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.

[26 : 08] Why? Because the child's life's in danger. Why? Because Herod's out to kill the child Jesus. Herod, remember us, we saw this morning Herod had been duped by the Magi, by the wise men.

The wise men didn't go back to him from Bethlehem and tell him where the king of the Jews was born. They go home another way. They avoid Herod. And Herod, of course, as we saw this morning, is a paranoid person.

He's paranoid about his rule. He wants this child destroyed. He wants to protect his throne from any challengers. Even what he perceives as a challenge from this baby boy.

And so, that time, that we've seen verse 14, that time of night, no doubt Mary's been sleeping. Jesus settles for the night. But in command that God gives him, Joseph rises, takes Mary and Jesus.

They leave immediately, setting off for Egypt. At that time, it was a place where people went to from that part of the country when there were times of danger.

[27 : 23] And I'm sure when Joseph settled down that evening, that was the last place he thought he would go to that very night, fleeing with his child, with a child and with Jesus' mother.

But they go there and they stay in Egypt until Herod dies. Right. That's the narrative. That's the story. But what's significant? What are we to take? What do we learn from these events? What do we learn from this man of action? Well, as we mentioned before, fulfillment of prophecy. That's what we read there in verse 15. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt.

I called my son. You go to the book of Hosea, chapter 11, and we read these very words. In other words, Jesus is the fulfillment of the first exodus from Egypt.

Remember, when God called his people, when God called his people Israel out of Egypt?

Remember, in the exodus, God called his people out of that land of oppression to take them into the promised land?

[28 : 32] And that first exodus anticipated the full exodus, the full exodus of the Lord's people from oppression. The oppression of sin, the oppression of Satan, the oppression of death itself.

And it's the exodus that Jesus accomplished by his coming from heaven to earth. That's what we're seeing here. He was born in Bethlehem. He was born, as the carol says, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.

He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was born through the overpowering, overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. He was born that man, redeemed man, no more may die.

And so Joseph's obeying God's word. He's taking the child Jesus out, well, firstly to Egypt. He's going to remain there until Herod dies and then take Jesus out of Egypt.

See, Joseph's central to what's happening in the fulfillment of that prophecy about Jesus, about Jesus who'd be the one to take his people out of oppression, out of the oppression of sin, and into the promised land of God's saving grace.

[29 : 46] This is God's wonderful sovereignty. And in that sovereignty, God choosing this quiet, silent hero, Joseph, God choosing Joseph to play his part in fulfilling the promises that God made about the salvation for mankind.

Joseph had been given this God-given task. And you see, there's one little symmetry of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

I mean, Mary had played her part in bearing Jesus. And Joseph's playing his part in ensuring Jesus' safety. and God's given you particular roles, particular gifts to perform in the work that God gives you to do in the telling others, the showing others the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mentioned in prayer the late Clive Bailey. Some of you knew Clive. I certainly knew him very, very well. And I'm certainly reminded of what we've just been saying about God using his servants, God

working through his servants to further the kingdom on this side of eternity.

And if you read any of the tributes that were given to Clive, it really struck home how God used Clive to well, to play his role in the work of the kingdom.

[31 : 18] Clive Bailey ran that race that God had given him for the glory of God. And Clive used the gifts that God had given him. Clive was a missionary, he was a teacher, he was a counselor, he was an elder, he was a committee member, he was a preacher, he was an encourager, he was a friend.

And we give thanks to God for the life of Clive Bailey. But you've all got a part to play in furthering the kingdom of Jesus, you who know the Lord Jesus as your saviour. Joseph played his part. But you've got to play your part wherever God sends you, wherever God places you. I mean, you might be quiet and unassumingly like Joseph was, but that shouldn't stop you from using your gifts in the service of the Lord.

Think, for example, think of disciples, think of some of these disciples that we know very, very little about. Think of the quiet disciples. There were quiet disciples who became quiet apostles. James the Lys, Thaddeus, and yet these were men that God chose to do particular works in his service. They were all heroes of the faith.

[32 : 33] All these disciples used their gifts in the service of God. And their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And you know, we're coming towards the end of another year coming to the start of a new year.

Well, ask yourself, even looking back, did I do what I could have done for the Lord in service of his name? Even looking into the new year, if God gives you that blessing of a new year, a new year is less than a week away.

Ask yourself, is there not more I can do for the Lord, even in the year that's soon to happen in God's grace? Maybe if you are serving, what about going that second mile?

Ask yourself also, am I using the gifts that God has given me to work the works that God requires of me? And you may well be quiet by nature.

That doesn't mean you don't do what God has given you to do in the cause of the kingdom. God's got work for quiet people as well as not so quiet people. Maybe you're getting on in years, but God still has work for you to do.

[33 : 50] There's no such thing, or there shouldn't be any such thing as an unemployed believer in the kingdom of God. We've all got work to do for our Lord. Whoever you are, whatever your personality is, God will work through your personalities.

We've all got different personalities. God works through these personalities as he worked through the personality of Joseph and the cause of the kingdom.

But in contrast, as we said, in contrast to this man of action, Joseph, there's this man of what we might call malefaction. It's a word that maybe we don't use that word very much, but it's a word that really means evil or acting in an evil way.

You see, so far we've seen the flight to Egypt, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, flying, going to Egypt. That, of course, seemed to be very positively.

But you come to one of the, I think, what you have to say, one of the most horrible parts of Scripture. You read of infanticide, read of the killing of the innocents by Herod.

[34 : 56] We touched on this a wee bit this morning, but, you know, let's rekindle what we said about Herod this morning. He was a brutal ruler. He was an such an insecure ruler.

Remember, he was appointed by the Romans to rule in that particular part of the country in Judea. And as we noticed in his conversations with these wise men, he thought he could go to Bethlehem, that he could put a stop to this, what he perceived to be this challenger to his rule.

Herod wasn't a Jew. This king of the Jews obviously was by birth, and Herod, when we said he was duke by the Magi, is so furious that he's going to seek to kill not just the king of the Jews, Jesus, but all male children in Bethlehem, two years old or under, according to the timing when he heard, first heard of this, the birth of the one when the wise men told him about it.

Herod was such a, as we said, such an insecure ruler. He kept executing anyone he thought was a challenge to his rule. Three of his sons he put to death, even his wife he put to death.

You know, the elimination of these male infants in Bethlehem and beyond, just part of his character. But again, what about the bigger picture?

[36 : 27] what are we seeing here in this murderous, cruel act of an evil ruler? Well, it's the same pattern as we see elsewhere in scripture, certainly just before the time of the Exodus.

Remember when Pharaoh tried to kill all the male babies of the Israelites when he didn't want the Hebrew population to rise and threaten his power. The same mindset of evil that Matthew records of the time of Jeremiah the prophet.

We read there in verse 18, Rachel weeping for her children. That time when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the ruthless Assyrians.

Many of the people of Israel taken into exile. Many of the children separated from their parents at that time of exile. And mothers weeping for their children whom they reckoned they would never see again.

And the loss of these children we have to say brought about by the sins of the people and the rejecting God. And in Jesus' day mothers weeping for their children because these children had been destroyed by an evil ruler.

[37 : 45] And what Jeremiah was writing about if you like past events in the history of evil that found its fulfillment its full fulfillment and the slaughter of the innocents under Herod's control because Herod hated Jesus.

And that's the brutal reality of the fury of the evil one against the Lord Jesus. I mean Jesus escaped the clutches of Herod but Satan and his fury working through Herod unleashing that fury against these little ones.

And you know we live in a world that hates the Lord Jesus. Don't be surprised when you see and hear and even experience for yourself that fury of those who hate the Lord Jesus.

Who hate the Lord's people, the Lord's children, the militant atheists who unleash that volume of venom against the Lord's people.

And you do it through violence, the violence of speech, even physical violence. And the fury of the evil one unleash the children of the Lord.

[39 : 02] But rest assured, and always be assured of this, that the victory is Christ's, that God is in ultimate control. That man of evil, that man Herod, that man of malefaction, that man, the man whom he represents, all who are represented by Herod, he won't have the final word, he won't have the victory, because the victory is Christ's.

And then thirdly, we're back to Joseph, this man of proaction, this man of, well, who takes responsibility, this man who, if you like, who's decisive in his actions, because we read there from verse 19 that Herod dies.

And another dream was given to Joseph, the angel gives, speaks to Joseph through this next dream, and Joseph's still in Egypt, and this angel tells Joseph, rise, he's to rise again, he's to take the child and his mother, he's to go to the land of Israel, because those who sought the child's life are dead, and we're told that Joseph rises, he takes the child, he takes Mary, and we go to the land of Israel.

But then, as we read there in the passage, when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judah, that's Herod's son, he's afraid to go there, and we warned in a dream, another dream, he withdraws to the district of Galilee.

You see what's happening here, Joseph's a wise man, he's been given this wisdom from God, he's a faithful man, and when he hears that this Archelaus, this terrible ruler, Herod's son not just in descent, but in character, when he hears this man's now ruling, he's afraid, he's afraid to go to, well certainly back to Bethlehem.

[41 : 04] He's heard of the cruelty of this new ruler, Archelaus, he's only a young man, he was only 18 when he became successor to his father, but he's heard how much he's even hated by the Jews in Judea.

He's put down so many uprisings, he killed 3,000 people in the temple in Jerusalem, and news would have reached Joseph of this terrible action, and he's afraid, he's afraid for the life of the child. Joseph's using his God-given wisdom. He knows that it's not going to be safe to return to Bethlehem and Judea, but remember the angel had told him through the dream to return to the land of Israel.

He didn't say where precisely. So Joseph certainly obeys leaving Egypt, and he's going to yes, leave to cross over into the land, but he uses his God-given wisdom to wait on the Lord for further guidance.

As we notice in a dream, Joseph's directed to go to Galilee, and to go to the town of Nazareth. And for the third time in the short passage, we're told that, well, that Scripture's fulfilled, and he went and lived in a city called Nazareth.

[42 : 27] That was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled. He shall be called a Nazarene. Nazareth. At that time, it was certainly an obscure, unimportant time.

If you were called a Nazarene, immediately that would have the sort of connotations of, well, someone from an obscure place, a place where nothing happened, nothing of any importance happened.

If you were a Nazarene, you were considered a bit of a nobody. You'd be even despised as someone coming from that place, that little place. of Nazareth would be considered just of no significance, no importance at all.

Remember when Jesus, when he began his ministry, Philip, the disciple, told Nathaniel that they'd found the Messiah. And he referred to Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth.

Remember what Nathaniel's saying, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Now, of course, God's grace, Nathaniel would come to love the Lord Jesus.

[43 : 34] He'd come to follow Jesus as one of his disciples. And he no longer despised Jesus as a Nazarene. But there were those who did despise Jesus.

There were those who regarded Jesus of no worth at all. The opponents, particularly those of the religious authorities, the Pharisees.

And Jesus truly was despised and rejected of men as Isaiah prophesied. But what about you? Jesus is still Jesus of Nazareth.

And he's still despised by many. What's your response to the Savior? Won't you believe in him? Won't you trust him for your very life?

And won't you be proactive in your faith and obedience just as the silent hero Joseph was? Joseph did what he could for the sake of the Son of God.

[44 : 36] Joseph in his love for his son. Joseph his legal son. Joseph obeyed the word of God in relation to Jesus. Won't you obey the word of God in relation to Jesus?

And won't you give your life to him? It's incredible to say that this is the last Sunday of 2021.

Anything that's of a final action, final words as it were, the point is it's a significant moment.

Certainly the last Sunday of 2021 is significant. I plead with you in this last Sunday of 2021, if you don't yet know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, come to him now and close this year with Christ.

Next year isn't guaranteed. Receive him. Receive him now. This is a day of opportunity. Receive him on this day and know the blessings of his love eternally.

Amen. let us pray. Lord, may it be that all who are here even this evening, whether in this building or from home, that they will close this year with Christ.

[45 : 56] We look back, Lord, and we give you thanks for the many blessings that you've shared upon us, even in this year that's fast coming to an end. But Lord, help us to trust in you for the year, the time that you have given to us and however many years you will give to us.

We pray, Lord, that we will know that you are the Lord of the years and that's to you to whom we are answerable, even for the ways, even for the times that we've spent, even before you.

So hear us, Lord, as we cry out unto you. Give us that strength, give us that enabling to be those men, women, children of action, as we seek to serve you, the living and true God.

Continue with us now, Lord, we pray. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.