

# History Reversed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well now if you would turn to Matthew chapter 1 and 2, page 808. We're going to start with the last verse in the section, the last verse of chapter 2.

And as you turn to it, you know expectations and reality are often in strong conflict. I remember the first time I ever bought a laptop computer.

I bought it from UBC Book. I was a student at Regent at the time. And I drove up and I'd imagined it for a week or two. And I picked it up in its beautiful box.

And I put it in the passenger seat in the car. I put a seatbelt around it. I thought as I drove home my life will be different. And it wasn't.

And the expectation, sometimes the reality disappoints. Sometimes, usually it's the expectations that are a problem. And it happens in every area of life. In our families and relationships. And ordering online.

[ 0 : 59 ] And food and travel. Expectation and reality are different. Which means our expectations need adjusting. The reason I say that is because this section of Matthew, so familiar to us, shows us that the reality of Jesus Christ is so very different than our expectations.

And as true in all our Christian life, it's our expectations that need changing. And because it's so familiar and it comes from Christmas time. And some of us have heard this 80 times.

It's easy to miss the fact that it's all wrong. It's all upside down. It's the wrong way for the Messiah to come to planet Earth.

Take the first people who worship him. They're not God's people. They're magi. They're like magicians from Pharaoh's court in the Old Testament from the East.

And the current king of Israel, who should be worshipping the Son of God, just wants to annihilate him. And the king of Israel at the time ends up like Pharaoh 2,000 years ago, just killing a bunch of Jewish children.

[ 2 : 08 ] Jesus doesn't do anything in this passage. He's just called a child, a child, a child. The angel says he's come to save his people from their sins.

That's not what Israel wanted him to do. Israel wanted him to come and save them from other people's sins, particularly the sins of the Romans who are occupying them. And when you stand back from this passage, if there's anyone who needs saving, it's the baby Jesus.

Jesus. And Joseph saves Jesus a number of times. And it's all the wrong way up. And Jesus flees from Israel, the danger of Israel, to the safety of Egypt.

Isn't Egypt supposed to be the country of death and cruelty from which Israel escape? It's all wrong. And we miss it because we're so familiar with it.

And it's not just different from our expectations. It's against our expectations. And what makes it worse is that Matthew repeatedly says this is exactly as God designed it.

[ 3 : 11 ] This is under God's direction. In fact, God keeps intervening. Five times we read an angel appears, specifically, more than any other chapter in the Bible. And five times we're told that what is happening takes place to fulfill what is spoken by a prophet in the Old Testament.

And as we come through these five quotes, we come to the fifth and climactic, triumphant conclusion. The last verse of chapter 2, 23. He went and lived in a city called Nazareth.

That which was, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled. He shall be called a Nazarene. Nazarene. Trouble is, there's no such quote in the Old Testament.

Doesn't occur anywhere in the Old Testament. Nazareth didn't even exist in Old Testament times.

Worse than that, by the time of Jesus, you couldn't have a more irrelevant, out-of-the-way town.

Just a couple of hundred people. I was at a birthday yesterday, and there were a couple of people there from the town of Hazleton. Somewhere in BC. Population 200.

[ 4 : 19 ] And with them coming to the birthday, they emptied the town out. And what's the great thing about this is, when you look at the commentaries, they have apoplexy about this verse.

How can this be the fulfillment, if it's not in the Old Testament? It's never mentioned. And how can this be the climax of fulfillment to this whole section? See, it's not just unexpected.

It's contrary to our expectations. And that is the point. Matthew knows exactly what he's doing. And he doesn't introduce this last quote in the same way that he introduced the first four.

Every other quote he's introduced are specific and singular. Like, look back at 2.17. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. Back to 2.23.

What was spoken by the prophets, plural, might be fulfilled. Not just one prophet, but all the prophets. Not just one prediction about Jesus, but the whole history and experience of God's people are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 31 ] This is very important. Matthew wants us to understand fulfillment in a new and different way. You see, fulfillment is not just a mathematical checklist. Old Testament says Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

Born in Bethlehem. Check. Old Testament says he'll be the son of David. Son of David. Check. Old Testament says he'll be born of a virgin. Born of a virgin. Check. There is a deeper and broader fulfillment that Matthew has in mind.

In himself, Jesus gathers up all the history and experience of Israel and relives it.

He reenacts it. All the law and the promise. All the prayers and the prophecies. All the pain and hope of Israel. Jesus fulfills them by reliving them and reenacting them and filling every piece of them with his heavenly righteousness.

It's amazing stuff. And that's why he is the new Israel. And I think this last verse, which is so throwing to some of us, it's like a key into the section.

[ 6 : 39 ] Nazareth, wrong place for the Messiah to come from. The idea just invites ridicule. And we know from one of the other gospels that someone who came from a town eight miles away said, can anything good ever come out of Nazareth?

It's a laughing stock. It's not the place for God's son to come from. And the point of these two chapters is Jesus must not be confined to our expectations and our imagination.

And the way Matthew does this in our section today is he does two things. He shows us the reality of Jesus from heaven's point of view. And then he shows us the reality of Jesus from a human point of view with two responses.

So I've got two points. And the first one is the reality of Jesus from heaven's point of view. And this is the last section of chapter one, verses 18 to 25. And at the heart of this section is the double naming of Jesus.

Did you notice Jesus doesn't receive just one name? He receives two. One from an angel, one from an Old Testament prophecy. Why is this important? Well, when we finished the genealogy last week, and I've heard requests for more sermons on genealogies, Jesus is supposed to be the son of David, but Joseph is not his biological father.

[ 7 : 58 ] The only way for Joseph to become his biological father in Israel is for Joseph to name Jesus. And that's exactly what he does. So we start in verse 18.

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. Again, Matthew used the Genesis word, the Genesis of Jesus. Something earth shattering is about to happen. Joseph discovers his fiancée, Mary, is pregnant.

And although he's a righteous man, he's got no reason to believe her story. I mean, would you? And because he's a righteous man, he decides to separate from her quietly and not open her to public shame.

And then we have the first appearance of an angel. And it's lovely because the angel reassures Joseph that it has indeed been a virgin conception.

And that the child has been conceived by the Holy Spirit of God, which means it's going to be the son of God. But the weight of the angel's message is not about that. The weight of the angel's message is about the child's name.

[ 9 : 01 ] There's no ultrasound. So the angel helps him in verse 21. She will bear a son. You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

There's the first name, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. And then immediately we read in verse 22. All of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the

prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. And here is the child's second name coming from the Old Testament.

Emmanuel, which means God with us. Now, why are these names important? It's because they belong together. And each name explains the other.

You see, if it's sin that separates us from God, salvation means to be with God. And the way God deals with our sin, but destroys our sin without destroying us, is making a way to come and be with us.

[10:06] But there are two problems, aren't there? The first one is, we don't want Jesus to save us from our sins. We expect Jesus to save us from other stuff.

We want him to save us from the consequences or the effects of our sins. But the sins we like, right? I know it was a great disappointment to Israel that Jesus came to save them from their sins. They wanted a political salvation. They wanted the son of David to restore the monarchy, to drive out the Roman occupiers and establish Israel as the greatest kingdom on earth. It's just like us. If you read around Christian circles these days, what we want is we want saving from environmental collapse. We want saving from financial difficulty or this wretched business of aging.

I mean, surely at the least we want salvation from leaders who use chemical weapons against their people or who lie or who cause starvation and population immigration and refugee crises.

[11:08] We need salvation from wars or from shaming on social media or from boredom or from meaninglessness. And Christ will save us from those things ultimately.

But from heaven's point of view, what we really need is complete saving from our sins. We need a new heart, a new record, a new creation.

We need to turn our back on our sins and come into the presence of God. But that brings me to the second problem and that is the presence of God. If you're familiar with the Old Testament, you will know that the presence of God is absolutely terrifying.

It's too heavy for us. Remember when God came down on the mountain at Sinai? The mountain shook with fire and flame and smoke and sound and the people of God were too frightened.

They said, Moses, you talk to God. We'll be over here somewhere. Or Job, in his suffering, calls out for God's presence. And when God comes to him, he comes in a whirlwind, a tornado.

[12:14] And when Moses asks to see the face of God, he says, you can't see my face and live. And he shows him just a little tiny back of the hem of his back part and covers him with a rock. And what Moses sees makes his face shine so brightly he has to wear a veil before he goes and walks amongst other people again.

God cannot just be present with us without destroying our sins. Otherwise, it's going to destroy us. But have you noticed that what the text says, it's not God present, it's God with us.

And I think that's different. You can be in someone's presence but not be with that person. And if God's presence destroys evil and sin without destroying us, it means that he will be with us, saving us, for us, together.

Which is exactly what God is doing and what he continues to do today. That's why every Christian community where Christ is saving people from their sins, we take our sins seriously.

We're about to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We do this very strange thing week by week. We confess our sins openly, receiving the Lord's Supper and the forgiveness, reveling in his forgiveness.

[13:39] Now, I think this touches on a key struggle in the Christian life. And it's one area where our expectations go out of whack so easily. We expect the presence of Christ either all at once or to give us some great emotional charge.

And here's the problem. Even though I know I am completely forgiven, I still struggle with sin daily, hourly, wretchedly. And at times it feels like in my own Christian life, feels more like the absence of God than his presence.

And it's partly because I'm seeking his presence in all the wrong places and I'm perpetually disappointed. In the 5th century, there was a monk called Saint Macarius of Egypt.

And he wrote this. He said, He says, Contrary to the stupid view expressed by some, he hasn't been to a Canadian school.

Contrary to the stupid view expressed by some, the advent of grace does not mean the immediate delivery from anxiety. I mean, Mother Teresa spoke about the contradiction in her soul, that sense

of emptiness and darkness and struggle to pray and struggle to believe.

[14:56] And that's why we need to hold these two names of Jesus together. From the time of Jesus' birth, the transcendent God has been with us in a different way in the flesh of this one child.

We seek God nowhere else but in Jesus Christ. And it's in Jesus Christ that he deals with our sins and we know him and that he loves us.

But when Jesus went to the cross, he was forsaken and abandoned and put out of God's presence so that we would never have to be excluded from his presence.

And then he rose again and he went to heaven and his body is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. And he poured out his spirit and he is now spiritually present to us everywhere.

And we receive his presence and we know his presence primarily by faith and obedience. By faith and obedience.

[16:03] And sometimes that comes with great emotion and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it's against my emotions. It has more to do with my affections and where my heart leans.

But I want you to notice just how important this whole issue of faith is to us. In a moment we're going to go into the Lord's Supper. And in the confession we're invited to draw near with faith and make a humble confession.

And in the absolution we're told that God promises mercy and forgiveness to all who heartily repent and turn to him with true faith. And then we hear these words.

God loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And then we pray. We do not presume to come to your table merciful Lord trusting in our own righteousness but in your abundant and great mercy.

And when we come forward we are told when we receive the bread and wine feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving. So what we need to pray for and what we need to work towards is directing our faith more and more toward the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:18] And as we do that he saves us from our sins and he's God with us. So that's heaven's point of view but I need to move quickly now. What does the reality of Jesus look like from a human point of view?

And this is where chapter 2 comes in. You couldn't have a stronger contrast could you? Two diametrically different responses to the coming of salvation of God with Jesus.

Herod war. Magi worship. Herod destruction. Magi devotion. Magi worship. They worship and bring gifts.

Herod is so deeply threatened by Jesus he wants to annihilate him. It's very interesting in Matthew's gospel when he introduces a contrast he always introduces the two parties in one verse.

So chapter 2 verse 1. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They were not wise men.

[18:23] That's not what the word means. They were regarded as fools in Israel because they practiced the dark arts of magic. They were not kosher.

They were the wrong people. They were unexpected. They are professional magicians like Pharaoh's court magicians and they specialized in magic and astrology.

But here's the thing. Their worship is so unaffected and natural. It's genuine. There's no political advantage for them in this. And I don't know how the star worked but there's some miracle that happens with the star.

And as it moves they're personally overjoyed. When they finally meet the baby Jesus these senior men from a court from somewhere else prostrate themselves in worship and they give gifts to the sun.

They are the wrong people. They're the wrong people but they do the right thing. But the right person Herod does the wrong thing.

[19:24] Herod's the legitimate king of Israel. Legitimate-ish. You know with little help from his friends in Rome. But he's still the recognized king. And you know he was an insecure, paranoid, despot, murderer.

When he took his throne he murdered everyone from the... Every one of his predecessors' families. And he would regularly have pogroms where if he suspected someone unfaithfulness he'd kill their family in front of their eyes and then he'd kill them.

And as he got older he killed his sons. He had his sons murdered. He was not a nice person. And he wrote an order. You'll love this. He wrote an order that the day he died all the Jewish nobility in

Jerusalem should be slaughtered.

And that way the mourning for his death would be genuine. You'd be most pleased to know it wasn't carried out. But from the moment he hears about Jesus he wants nothing more than to exterminate this child.

And in chapter 2 verse 13 God knows what's going on and he warns Joseph in a dream about Herod's plan. And he tells Joseph to take Mary and the child to the safe haven of Egypt.

[ 20 : 39 ] And all our Bible alarm bells are going off. And we read in verse 15 this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt I have called my son.

Just as a side note you might be interested to know that the first century Jewish rabbis accused Jesus of being a magician.

It was the way they explained some of his miracles. And they said he picked up these magical tricks when he was growing up in Egypt. Leave that there. Why did he go to Egypt?

The reason he went to Egypt according to this quote is to relive Israel's experience. He, God is making him into the new Israel.

Out of Egypt I've called my son comes from the prophet Hosea. It's talking about the nation of Israel as God rescued them from Egypt. God makes them into a community to his people into his son.

[ 21 : 37 ] Now God is about to create a new people through a new exodus. Jesus is God's son in a way Israel never was. And when Herod discovers that this Jesus has slipped through his fingers, he does exactly what Pharaoh did 2,000 years before.

He tries to kill all the babies while in Bethlehem in the area, killing the children of God's people even though he's their king. Now the experts tell us that the population of Bethlehem in the surrounding area at the time was under 1,000 people.

So likely it was less than 20 people, 20 children who were killed, which I find absolutely zero consolation. You know, the killing of one child is a blasphemy before God.

And what does the text do with this? Verse 17 and 18. Then 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 were no more. In other words, this is not just another episode in the history of genocide and evil.

[ 22 : 49 ] This is given specific significance by this Jeremiah quote. This is very difficult. I want you to follow me on this. The Jeremiah quote is there to show that the whole Bible rises up against this obscenity.

Ramah was north of Jerusalem and in 587 BC, 600 years before this, it was used as a prisoner of war camp, a staging camp for those who are captives to be taken by the Babylonians off to Babylon.

They collected them in these prison camps in Ramah. Rachel had died 1,400 years before that.

And Jeremiah, who's prophesying at the time of the exile, pictures Rachel weeping from her tomb inconsolably because of the desolation of her children.

You see what's going on. Here it is again. Because Satan hates children. He's hated children since the Garden of Eden, when God promised that one of Eve's children would crush his head.

Revelation 12 is a commentary on what happens in Bethlehem. It's the vision, you remember, of Satan being cast out of heaven as the great dragon, thrown down to earth, and he finds the woman pregnant with this child, and he wants to devour and destroy this child.

[ 24 : 17 ] But God protects the mother and the child. And then we read at the end of Revelation 12, See, this is one of the marks of Satan's work.

It's always one of the marks of Satan's work. Children always get sacrificed to the idols of power. And here is the thing in this story. This child, God's son, in the great act of reversal, will lay his life down as a sacrifice.

He will defeat all the power of evil and Satan in the act of great powerlessness. And he'll open the kingdom of heaven to those who trust in him like little children.

And like all of those with the power of death who bring death to others, Herod himself dies. And the angel tells Joseph to take the child back to the land of Israel.

The angel warns him to go to Galilee. And the last verse finishes, So that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. I just want to finish with this.

[ 25 : 29 ] Between the worship of the Magi and the war of Herod, there is the simple obedience of Joseph. It's just a great picture. And it shows what's saving from sins.

And it shows what God with us is like. And the reality for Joseph and Mary was completely different than anything he could possibly have imagined or expected.

Don't you love Joseph? There's nothing fancy in his obedience. I don't think it takes much imagination to see what a terrible inconvenience this was to Joseph. Fiancé, yeah, my fiancé became pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

You know, any reputation I might have had has gone out the window. I didn't choose this. I didn't expect this. It turns life upside down for both of them. There is no notion of family or marriage that could possibly have conceived how big God's plan is.

And God with us demands from Joseph, as it demands from all of us, a new and radical obedience, even when we don't understand it. And Joseph didn't understand this, and I don't understand it.

[ 26 : 39 ] I wrote a little prayer from Joseph. It goes like this. Lord, I think you've got the wrong person. I'm a carpenter. I work with my hands. I don't know anyone who lives in Egypt, and I am afraid.

I was hoping to set up shop in Galilee and live a quiet life. Did I mention, I think you have the wrong person? Amen. And Matthew has this lovely way of showing us that at every point, Joseph does exactly what the angel says.

In fact, he doesn't even wait until morning. Gets up in the middle of the night, off he goes to Egypt. And by doing what God tells him to do, when God tells him to do it, he places the baby at the center of his life, even though he doesn't understand it all.

And then he makes Jesus the axis around which everything else fits and happens in his life and Mary's life and in this chapter.

And that is exactly what God wants to happen, and that's exactly what we're seeking together. So let's kneel and pray.