

THE BETHLEHEM BLOOD BATH

Matthew 2:13-18

December 5, 2022

1. The Danger Forewarned (vv. 13-15a)

What we want to see, in particular, at this point is how God's enemies and ours have no power over us.

Psalm 2:1-2 (ESV) – Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed

📖 **God KNOWS all the dangers which threaten His children.**

He knows even before the plans are set in place

Sometimes He warns us...

Sometimes He supernaturally protects us...

Sometimes He allows us to suffer harm... (i.e. Paul, Jesus, Christians in persecuted countries today)

📖 **God wants us to respond in faith, no matter what comes.**

Joseph obeyed immediately. It would have been very understandable, at least at some level for him to question this. After all, wasn't this the Messiah, God's anointed one?!? And in the middle of the NIGHT?!?

"He obediently went out, as his father Abraham did, with an implicit dependence upon God, not knowing whither he went." Matthew Henry

(Hebrews 11:8 – by faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.)

📖 **God gives us all the resources that are needed to deal with whatever might come against us.**

God gives us the grace we need to deal with whatever circumstances He allows to come into our lives. However, He does NOT give us the grace to deal with whatever we can CONCEIVE of POTENTIALLY coming into our lives...!

Note the phrase: "Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother" indicating, once again, that Joseph was not the child's biological father.

2. The Danger Foretold (vv. 14-15)

What a welcome to our world! Forced to flee for their lives, Jesus' earthly family is sent to Egypt—the place where his earthly ancestors had fled to escape bondage—the place which represents all of us before we came to know Him as Lord and Savior, before we were redeemed from our own bondage to sin...

And yet, as it was to Joseph and His family, it was also a house of refuge before it became house of bondage...

All of Scripture points to Jesus

The Messiah was sent to and returned from Egypt so that the prophet's words, "I called my Son out of Egypt." might be fulfilled. (Hosea 11:1)

Similarities between the nation of Israel and the Son who was born their King.

📖 In this case we can see how Israel was God's chosen "son" by adoption (Exodus 4:22), and Jesus is the Messiah, or "chosen one," God's Son.

📖 In both cases the journey into Egypt was to escape danger, & the return to the land of promise was part of God's plan to deliver His people from slavery.

📖 Jesus, like Moses, escapes death to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt to freedom. The difference being that Jesus is freeing their souls and not just their bodies...

The Scriptures are "revelation," revelation of God to His people. There are pictures throughout the Bible to God and His work that we have only begun to understand.

Luke 24:25-27 (ESV) – He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

So what does this all have to do with us? Do you want to know God better...?

3. The danger fulfilled (vv. 16-17)

📖 **The Reality in the Violence**

Jeremiah 31:15 referred initially to the weeping of the nation as a result of the death of children at the time of the Babylonian Captivity (586 b.c.)

When the Babylonians invaded Judah and carried the Jews captive into Babylon, Jeremiah 40:1 tells us that the deportation headquarters were in Ramah!

This points to the child who would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" [Isaiah 53:3]. Thinking about this reminds us that Christmas isn't the saccharine story we've created in the popular consciousness.

Even the actions of wicked men fulfilled God's plan.

Why two years old & under?

v. 7 – Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

Five days before he expired, Herod had his son Antipater executed. Then he called all the leading Jews of his territory to his palace. When they came, he imprisoned them, giving orders that they were all to be killed the moment he died. He wanted to ensure that there would be national mourning at his death, rather than rejoicing!

Herod's dream of power and glory had turned into a nightmare. The desperate king struggled to the last to maintain control over his kingdom, long after he had lost control over himself. And so he died. Larry Richards

"God is dead," signed *Nietze*...
signed *God*

"Nietze is dead,"

"He who was born King of the Jews is dead," signed *Herod*...

"Herod is dead," signed *He who was born "King of the Jews"*

exhausted upon themselves instead of their infant
Lord? ^{Jamieson, Fausset & Brown}

If we can only shake the Herod dream, and see in Jesus' humility the key to greatness and true glory, you and I can find a distinctive freedom that the world around us, stumbling over the external, can never understand. ^{Larry Richards}

The Hope in the Tragedy

Why doesn't God directly intervene in order to stem evil or the tragedies that come into our lives?

"If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty he would be able to do as he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both." This is the classical argument made by the atheist.

In essence – the Christian response is, "I don't know."

First: To honestly acknowledge pain and suffering. As with all tragedies, real pain and suffering come into the lives of people. As long as we are on this side of eternity, this will be part and parcel of human life because of sin. And that sin is part of all our reality – babies, moms, dads and the entire world. Sin has brought pain and suffering to humanity.

The **second** reality is that we can confidently affirm: God does love you, beloved, and He is always right there with us – even through the tragedies.

Is God all powerful?

Look at the Cross for those answers. There – through an instrument of weakness – Christ conquered the dominions and principalities and powers that have plagued humanity. He destroyed the sting of death by taking the full weight of death upon Himself and then conquering death, once for all.

Is God truly love?

Once again, look at the cross. These things that God offers us in his Son are not intended to provide a hollow or pat answer to people experiencing pain. Nor does this exempt us from the suffering associated with tragedies on this side of eternity. Pain is still a part of this life. There are no easy answers, but there is hope. Hope that we aren't passing through these trials alone – that God is with us, that He has a good purpose in our suffering, even if we cannot see it now. Hope because we know our God understands what suffering is like because He endured it in myriad ways as Jesus suffered and died. Hope because the grave does not have the last word. Hope that the day will come when all tears will be wiped away and that there will be no more suffering and pain.

O ye mothers of Bethlehem! methinks I hear you asking why your innocent babes should be the ram caught in the thicket, while Isaac escapes. I cannot tell you, but one thing I know, that ye shall, some of you, live to see a day when that Babe of Bethlehem shall be Himself the Ram, caught in another sort of thicket, in order that your babes may escape a worse doom than they now endure. And if these babes of yours be now in glory, through the dear might of that blessed Babe, will they not deem it their honor that the tyrant's rage was

The Challenge to God's People

Herod exemplified the character that increasingly marks contemporary society. On the whole, ours is a society without restraint, a culture that defines what is good by the fleeting sense of happiness that comes from getting one's own way.

Solomon described the modern condition when he wrote:

Anything I saw and wanted, I got for myself; I did not miss any pleasure I desired. I was pleased with everything I did, and this pleasure was the reward for all my hard work. But then I looked at what I had done, and I thought about all the hard work. Suddenly I realized it was useless, like chasing the wind. There is nothing to gain from anything we do here on earth. (Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11 ^{NCV})

Our pursuit of wealth was but a symptom of a deeper malady; it revealed that we were placing ourselves on the throne of our own lives. "Our children will have it better than we did," we told ourselves. We had been deprived, we told ourselves. So, we told our children that they were smarter than any generation before them. We told them that they were able to make every decision without reference to the wisdom of prior generations. We ceased worrying whether they could read or write and no longer concerned ourselves with teaching them to add and subtract; what mattered was that they felt good about themselves.

We entrusted our children to teachers who taught them that there were no consequences for their choices. We told them (or allowed our culture to tell them) that the morals of past generations were meaningless—what mattered was that they feel good about themselves. We said they could not restrain themselves, and since they can't help themselves, our sole concern was that they "protect" themselves.

A Truth to Remember: Although we cannot always explain WHY painful things happen, we CAN always be confident that God has a good purpose in them.

A Challenge to Consider: Are you willing to acknowledge God's GOOD hand, even in the midst of tragedy, and to offer to Him the sacrifice of praise... by faith, believing the price that He has already paid for you?

One thing I heard this morning was...