

Matthew 2:13-18

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[0:00] How's your geography? How's your geography? I'm not going to give you a quiz. I was really into geography. He's a geography teacher here. There's someone, I think, Naomi Lafroy is studying geography, some people doing A-level geography. Well, Matthew, the writer of the Gospel, he is really into geography, particularly in chapter 2. Matthew wants you to travel. Matthew wants you to get your map out. Get your sat map.

And he wants to take you to three places this morning. He wants to take you to Egypt, and to Bethlehem, and to Nazareth. And in each place, he wants to show you something about someone. Something about someone. And in each of these places, he's got history to tell you, like a good tour guide does. He touches an Old Testament prophecy. He wants to teach you theological geography. So, first of all, we must visit Egypt. And when we visit Egypt, what Matthew shows us is he shows us the hope of God's people. We visit Egypt to see the hope of God's people. And he tells us about that in verses 13 to 15.

And especially how he tells us about how Mary, Joseph, and Mary and the child go to Egypt. Let me read them.

Now when they departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. He said, rise, take the child and his mother. Note the order. It's not normal, is it? Note who's got priority. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

[1:35] Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt. And he remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son.

Now this isn't entirely straightforward, but he is quoting from Hosea, the Old Testament prophet Hosea chapter 11 and verse 1. And it's hard to know exactly what it's got to do with Jesus.

Because if you go back to Hosea chapter 1, the whole verse reads. So why don't you just come there? Hosea chapter 1 if you can find it. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah.

Hosea chapter 11. And it says this, when Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son.

So when you go to Matthew chapter 2, the whole verse reads, when Israel was a child, I loved him.

[2:51] And out of Egypt I called my son. But Hosea chapter 11 refers to Israel, doesn't it? Not to Jesus. So when Israel was young, I called them out of Egypt, I called my son.

It's picking up on what God says in Exodus chapter 4, verse 22. Where God says, Paul's Israel his son, his firstborn. And again, what has that got to do with Jesus?

But hold the question. Look with me at Hosea chapter 11, verse 2. It says this, But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They kept sacrificing to Baals, and burning offerings to idols.

Again, what's that got to do with Jesus? What is that talking about? Well, it says the more they called them, the more they kept going away from them. The they's, God's prophets, God's messengers, God's preachers, the Lord's prophets, they'd address the people of Israel, and the more they addressed the people, the nation of Israel, and preached to them, and the more they called them to faithfulness, to come to God's ways, the further the people of Israel went away from God.

They kept on sacrificing to Baal. They kept on sacrificing to idols. In other words, what you have in Hosea chapter 11, verses 1 and 2, is really a mini history of Israel.

[4:16] From the time they were called out of Egypt, in the Exodus, and then their history, was one of sin, and failure, and rebelliousness, and faithlessness, to God.

And again, what does all that got to do with Jesus? Why does Matthew pick up this one liner from Hosea? Out of Egypt, I have called my son. And it's because I think Matthew wants you and I to see a certain parallel between Israel and Jesus.

So to recap on the history, just like Jacob, at the end of Genesis, in chapter 46, he goes down, doesn't he, into Egypt, with all his family, to get away from a famine that was going to destroy his family.

And Jacob and his family went to Egypt, and they found in Egypt a place of refuge. So, in the same way, the child Jesus is taken into Egypt. Here, he is rescued from the sword of Herod.

And he finds in Egypt a place of refuge. And just as now he is in Egypt, he will eventually come out of Egypt, in the same way that Israel came out of Egypt, in the Exodus.

[5 : 31] So Jesus will have an Exodus from Egypt, when he eventually comes back to Palestine. And just as Hosea, chapter 11, verses 1 and 2, speaks of Israel when they were young.

So in chapter 2 of Matthew, Jesus is young. And he is as a child. And just as Hosea 11 speaks of Israel as God's son, so here Jesus is God's son, as we'll find out.

So you see, don't you, there's a certain parallel that you can see. But Matthew not only wants you to see a parallel, but a contrast, as it were. He is the new Israel.

He is the one true Israelite. Jesus is the one who is retracing Israel's steps. And so as he goes down to Egypt, as a place in refuge, and where he is as a youth, as God's son, will exit Egypt, he will retrace Israel's history.

But what happened to Israel's history? What does the mini Old Testament overview of Hosea 11, verses 1 and 2 tell us? It tells us that the more they were called, the more they went away.

[6 : 50] They kept sacrificing offerings to Baal, and burning offerings to idols. Israel was a faithless son. But Jesus will be a faithful son.

Jesus will begin a new history. He will begin a new history of faithfulness, and obedience, and righteousness, in contrast to Israel.

And that is why Matthew wants you to visit Egypt. Because you will see in Egypt the true, faithful Israelite, who is the hope of God's people. And you might say, so what?

What, after all, difference does it make that Jesus is going to be this faithful and obedient Israelite? And actually, you need the rest of the New Testament for this. Because the difference that it makes is this faithful and obedient and righteous Jesus can be credited to your account, can be put to your account.

The New Testament is full of a doctrine called the doctrine of union with Christ. Sometimes, in fact, it speaks more often than this about believers than any other phrase.

[8 : 05] It speaks about being in Christ. That is the way the New Testament describes believers.

That if one is in Christ, if one is placed into Christ by faith, if they trust and rest in Christ alone, then everything Jesus did, and everything that Jesus does, becomes yours.

I'm going to tell you, I'm going to tell you, the Scottish minister gave this illustration, I gave it to you before, of a Frenchman who wanted to become a British citizen. This Frenchman, he was attracted to the British way of life, to British food.

So he took the test, he took his kind of nationalisation papers, whatever they're called, and he went through the process to become a British citizen. And after he became a British citizen, he was asked, how do you feel now?

What difference does it make that you now are an Englishman? And he replied, well it means that instead of losing the Battle of Waterloo, I won it. Because when he became a British citizen, all that Britain had fought for and achieved, and one became his.

And you see, the faithful Jesus, who is the faithful Israelite, who in place of God's faithless son Israel, now is the new Israel.

[9 : 31] Who will walk in faithfulness and righteousness and obedience to his Father. And we are in him. And that is when you are united in my faith, all of his righteousness and all of his faithfulness and all of his obedience becomes yours.

That's why it's worth going to Egypt. You might ask, where does my rebellion and my failure go? And if you've been in the service, you know it, don't you? It goes onto the shoulders of the Lord Jesus.

On the cross. On the cross. All my sin is laid on him. Matthew says, go to Egypt.

Matthew says, come, our next stop is Bethlehem. We need to go to Bethlehem. And you must visit Bethlehem. And the reason you must visit Bethlehem is because you need to see in Bethlehem the mystery of God's providence.

The mystery of God's providence. What does the word providence mean? Short Casicism tells us, doesn't it? What is God's works of providence?

[10:39] God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. It's that he's in control of everything.

It's that there is nothing outside of God's control. And so we go to Bethlehem to see the mystery of God's providence. It's an amazing chapter is that we see in verses 12 and 13 and 14 that the Lord had given the direction to major.

Start of chapter 2, wise men. Rest of chapter 2, evil men. Foolish men. And the Lord had given the direction to the Magi, the wise men and he warned them, don't go back to Herod.

And they go back in a different route and then the Lord warns Joseph in a dream again, don't hang about but take the child and his mother and go into Egypt because Herod is seeking to destroy the child and Joseph evidently he gets up, he doesn't question, he escapes Bethlehem to go to Egypt and he leaves no forwarding address.

They become a fugitive family. They become migrants, they become refugees, they're on the run. And yet Herod is outwitted again. Herod is outwitted again and Jesus is preserved.

[11:58] And we look at chapter 2 and we say isn't that amazing? Isn't that the marvellous providence of God in preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions?

the spectacular providence of God in preserving and protecting the saviour that was born. And we say isn't this amazing? But what about the parents?

What about the parents of the infant toddlers in Bethlehem? In verse 16. You've read that verse of you. And 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 he'd ascertained from the wise men. What do you say to those parents? What message do you bring them? When all of a sudden Herod's police come bursting into their home three or four of them they push the father to the ground they fling the mother into a corner they go into the nursery and they turn it into a butcher's shop with blood everywhere.

What do you do in another home? A policeman bursts in through the door this time they don't even knock he grabs the infant from the breast of his mother and he rams a sword right through it.

[13:29] We don't know how many babies it might have been it might have been 10 it might have been 15 for a child's size it's bad for him. But what do you say to those parents? As they simmer in helpless rage and overflowing grief at what has happened to their home?

Do we preach to them of the marvellous amazing providence of God? No we don't do we we talk about the mysterious providence of God.

And I want you to see really clearly that the Bible places both of these aspects of the providence of God the amazing providence and the mysterious providence side by side. We look at the way that Jesus is preserved and we say look at the marvellous providence of God.

Look how faithful God is. And then we see the butchery that Herod's men do and we say there is mystery here.

There is a mysterious providence of God. we say how baffling God is. And we ask the question couldn't the God who preserved the Lord Jesus Christ from Herod's clutches also kept more than a dozen children from being murdered from the jaws of Herod?

[14:57] Why? Why did God not do something? Why did God allow this? We have to say that we in one sense we have to say that it wasn't God's fault that those babies were killed.

We have to affirm that there is evil in this world. Herod was a murderous vicious tyrant. he had done it.

When we think of terrorist attacks, when we think of shootings that take place, some of the disasters that happen, we do need to look at the responsibility of man. The fault of human beings. We have to say that there are men and women who do evil. And when we say why are these things allowed, we have to realise there is such a thing as evil.

There's lots of people who don't believe that. And there are people that do evil things and there are evil men and evil women. But with all that, the Bible teaches and this church believes that God is

sovereign.

[16:12] We believe that God is in control. What are the works of God's providence? The works of God's providence are wise and most powerful preserving all his creatures and all their actions.

And so we have to come back and we have to say, don't we, why does God allow this? Why did God allow that? And here we are faced with the mysterious providence of God. And you and I, we want to get it all together, don't we?

We want to be able to fit this into a nice, neat package that can be summarised in a couple of bullet points. Something that we can handle and we can explain easily to others.

And something like this situation is very, very difficult because you have the marvellous providence of God on the one hand and you have the mysterious providence of God on the other. And I've not got answers for you this morning.

But I want you to notice one thing before we go on. Where is it that we find this question raised about why does God allow this?

[17:27] You and I need to see that this question jumps off the pages of the Bible. It is the Bible that raises this question. The Bible doesn't hide it. It is the Bible that presses the issue home as we carefully read the text.

It is the Bible that brings this issue in front of your nose. It is not some sceptical 21st century philosopher. It is not some angry atheist that suddenly realises this as if you've never thought about it before.

We don't have to wait for some tragedy to strike. No, it is raised in the Bible. It is raised all over the Bible. The Bible is the place where this issue is raised.

It spells it out plainly. The marvellous and the mysterious providence of God. What an honest book the Bible is. How can we get perspective on this?

Matthew says that the incident is a fulfilment of prophecy. Verse 18, can you see that verse? That comes from Jeremiah 31 verse 15. And Matthew takes that text from Jeremiah 31 verse 15 about Rachel, Jacob's wife, and Jeremiah's prophecy in verse 31.

[18:40] and in verse 15 he pictures Rachel personified. And Rachel is weeping and mourning and wailing over her children.

Who is her children? Well, in Jeremiah chapter 31 it's either the northern kingdom of Israel being taken into captivity to Assyria or it's the southern kingdom going into captivity in Babylon.

it's her children being taken away to captivity. But Rachel, the mother of Israel, is weeping over her sons and daughters because they're being carted off into exile.

And she refuses to be consoled. She refuses to be comforted because she says at the end of verse 18, they are no more. What has that got to say?

It's interesting when you look at Jeremiah chapter 31, that verse 15 of Jeremiah 31 is the only negative verse in the whole of the chapter.

[19:43] If you break Jeremiah 31 up into the sections that it should be broken up into, it comes to 10 sections of prophecy, of speaking the word of the Lord, of prediction. And every one of those sections is positive and helpful, even joyful and tone.

And this is the point. When the New Testament cites a verse from a chapter in the Old Testament, which they frequently do, they frequently cite one-liners, they expect you to look at the whole of the Old Testament chapter.

They expect you to look at that little verse in the Old Testament but look at the context which it comes in. And after Jeremiah states this about Rachel and weeping for her children, the answer to it comes from Yahweh, the God of Israel in the next line.

So let me read it to you. Jeremiah 31. this is what it says. Thus says the Lord, keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord.

And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future. future. Do you see what God is saying? God is saying, and it doesn't take all the pain away, it really doesn't.

[21:13] It doesn't take all the pain away on the spot, but what the Lord is saying, look, you think that you can write finished over, over the history of Israel. But in those moments, he says, keep your eyes from tears.

they will come back from the land of your enemy and there is hope for your future. And Matthew takes that over. And what does he want us to hear?

He wants us to see that just as again in Bethlehem, Rachel and Israel come into awful suffering, this situation. Yet there is hope.

There is hope for the grieving parents of their sons in their son, the firstborn son.

And even afreshly, God's people are a suffering people, aren't we? And the message of Jeremiah still holds that even though God's people are a suffering people, they are not a hopeless people.

[22 : 24] And the path of God's kingdom is wet with tears. There's no avoiding that. Jesus says, marvel, don't marvel not if the world hates you.

And he's saying to you very, very clearly this morning, there is this mysterious providence of God. God. And what we do then is we live by faith beneath the mysterious providence of God.

And it means that we don't, we refuse to bring up simple, easy answers for such issues so that they can be made rosy and cosy again. And as God preserved the infant stevia from the knives of Herod, even in our weeping and our tears and our anguish over strange providence, he still says to you and I, there is hope.

There is hope. There's hope for your future. Matthew wants to take you to Bethlehem. And then he wants to take you to Nazareth. He wants to take you to Nazareth to see the humiliation of God's son.

Nazareth is his third stop in verses 19 to 23. Joseph wants to go back to Judah, probably to Bethlehem again, but he finds out that, what's he called, Alcaus or whatever, is ruling in the place of his father Herod, and like father, like son.

[24 : 05] And he doesn't want to go back there, so being warned in a dream, he goes up north to Galilee, and it says he settled there, doesn't it? He settled there in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, and he would be called a Nazarene.

Now, why this place? Why all this festival of Nazareth? Notice he says, so what was spoken by the prophets, he doesn't just cite one particular one, so you don't have an exact quote to find, but he will be called a Nazarene.

Matthew says, why all the fuss, why worry about that? The word Nazar means branch, there's an illusion I think to Hebrews 11, you know Hebrews 11, do you remember that? The tree that is cut down on a stump, there's a stump in the field and a root will come out of Jesse, and that is a fulfillment of this, he will be called a Nazarene, but what is all this fuss about it?

Nazareth had a bad reputation, as did Galilee in general. The folk down south around Jerusalem, the kind of more true blue Jews, who had a more straight base Judaism, they always looked with a sceptical eye on Galilee.

Galilee was regarded with contempt. There was a saying, if you want to get rich, go north, and if you want to get wise, go south. north around Galilee, that was where the trade was.

[25 : 36] The south was the study of the law of God. And they were saying you can't be prosperous and pious. Galilee was more open to outside influences, more interaction with pagans, they were less strict in their religious observances.

True Jews regarded Galilee, that area, with a kind of quizzical look. And Nazareth in particular. even other Galileans seem to regard Nazareth with repose.

So in John's Gospel, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, when he was told that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he said, what are you kidding me? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? And that's why Matthew has to explain this.

How can you have someone who is really the Messiah coming from such a rotten place like Nazareth? I'm trying to think the first one's ridiculous.

But when I was growing up, two years before I went to my high school, the Welsh school, Astrol Goven Goir, took and were given our lower school.

[26 : 45] And I think it's fair to say the school I went to, Gowden Comprehensive, hated Astrol Goven Goir. As far as I was aware, we had never lost a rugby game to them. It was unthinkable.

We treated them with absolute disgust. And you always knew that no matter who you played in rugby during the year, there was always one game you would win, Astrol Goven Goir. I can't stand them even now, really.

We looked down on them. John Hartson went to Astrol Goven Goir, that kind of person. And what Matthew is saying is Jesus grew up in Astrol Goven Goir.

And the reaction that I had as a teenager to that school, that is the reaction people had towards somebody in Nazareth. Can't you have a Messiah who was a little bit more class than to grow up

and live in a place like that?

And he had to explain to Jews who would be offended and have a problem with that. And that is why Matthew goes to the problem and he says, wait a minute, there was a line in prophecy, people saw those things as mutually exclusive.

[27 : 51] They thought you can't have a Messiah, God's chosen king who comes from Nazareth. It would be like saying the Pope is a Presbyterian, you can't have those things, it can't be. And Matthew says, but that's what's prophesied in God's word.

That the Messiah would really have humble associations. Do you see God's humility? Let me read to you from J.C.

Ryle. In Nazareth, the Lord Jesus lived thirty years. It was there he grew up, from infancy to childhood, from childhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to man's estate. We know little of the manner in which those thirty years are spent. That he was subject to Mary and Joseph were expressly told. That he worked in the carpenter shop with Joseph is highly probable. We only know that almost five sixth of the time that the saviour of the world was on earth, was passed among the poor of this world, and passed in complete retirement.

Truly this was humility. Let us learn wisdom from our saviour's example. We are, most of us, far too ready to seek great things in this world. Let us seek them not. To have a place, a title, a position in society is not nearly so important as people think.

[29 : 04] It is a great sin to be covetous, and worldly and proud, but it is no sin to be poor. It matters not so much what money we have and where we live as what we are in the sight of God.

Where are we going when we die? Shall we live forever in heaven? These are the main things to which we should attend. I was in McDonald's on Friday, I know it was the day of fasting, but I ended up studying at the moment so I'm working in different coffee shops and you tend to get to mid-afternoon and even McDonald's coffee tastes good.

So I was in there, working away and not eating, I promise you. It was a remarkable afternoon really, in that I don't know how it happened, but a fight broke out between two girls.

One was a Polish girl and one was a Somali girl. I don't know what was said, but it erupted very, very quickly. And the words, if I can omit the expletives, are, what are you looking at me, you Polish?

To which the response was, off you, Somali girl. It's quite weird, I looked around and kind of everybody was just working, well not working normally, but eating there, whatever it is.

[30 : 20] And it struck me doesn't it, that both immediately went to where they're from, and addressed each other's home country with hate and shame.

And both were alleging they are outsiders who don't belong. And here you have Jesus, don't you? The Messiah, the Son of God, with humble, shameful, hated roots.

Do you see how Jesus is willing to stoop and take the lowest place? I don't know where you're from. I don't know what your background is, maybe you're ashamed.

Maybe you feel an outsider, even the church. But do you see how your saviour is not ashamed to be smeared with the scummy name of Nazareth.

And this is our encouragement there. That if you have in your saviour a fugitive, a migrant, a refugee, who grew up in a despised village, do you think that maybe, just maybe, he might be able to understand you?

[31 : 37] because the centre of this passage, the centre of Luke chapter 3, is a child.

And amidst all the geography, what Matthew wants to show you is a child. And don't take your eyes on him. And Matthew says everywhere he went, he was a fulfilment of scripture.

Spurgeon wrote, our prince steps along a pathway paved with prophecies. And he is one who is humble.

And he is one who is able to take the lowest place. Go to Egypt. Go to Bethlehem. Go to Nazareth. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that though there were many human writers, there is one writer. The Holy Spirit inspires men who wrote your word.

[32 : 46] We thank you that the author of scripture is God. And as we see the Old Testament and how it connects, Lord, and is fulfilled in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we marvel at your wisdom. We marvel at your grace and your power.

We thank you that there is hope. There is hope for the grieving. There is hope for the mourning. we thank you that the Lord Jesus is your firstborn son, that where we have failed, he has succeeded, where Israel was disobedient, he was obedient, he is your faithful son. And we thank you that Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers. We thank you that he came from the highest to live amongst the despised. may we never think more of ourselves than we are Lord. May we rejoice that there is a welcome even for us, for people like us. For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.