

Fulfilled: Hope & Humiliation

Matthew 2:16-23

I hope you had a marvelous Christmas Day yesterday with family and friends. We all hope that for one another because it just seems right and fitting that things should go well on Christmas. But I know for some of you the day is particularly hard. Maybe this is the first year experiencing Christmas without a loved one. Maybe the holidays bring up a memory of a tragic circumstance from years ago that took place around Christmas. Each year is difficult because of what happened, and the pain becomes fresh again.

Even when we turn to Scripture and read the accounts of Christ's birth, we find a mixture of joy and tragedy. The announcement of the arrival of the king and the wonder of the shepherds in Luke 2 is beautiful but the stories we are going to look at today in Matthew 2 are devastating. **We can't really make sense of why Christ came without recognizing the brokenness of the world.** As the song Joy to the World says, "He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found." The reach of the curse is extensive, but the blessings of grace will go beyond the curse. **And often, as we will see today, in the moment when we are experiencing the curse of sin and the brokenness of the world in all its fullness, that's when the glorious light of Christ's coming shines most clearly to give hope and joy.**

So, open your Bibles to Matthew 2 and we will be in 2:16-23 today. We're going to see **Two Unlikely Gifts of Grace Brought by Jesus to a Broken World.**

1. Hope in Suffering that Suffering Will End (vv. 16-18)

In the first part of Matthew 2 we saw the wise men show up from the East looking for the born king of Israel. We also saw Herod, the current king, be troubled by the news of a potential rival. Then we saw God warn Joseph in a dream to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. **Now we get to verse 16 and we find Herod acting on what God had predicted.** Look there.

It probably did not take long for this to happen because Bethlehem was only 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem. This is a shocking display of rage and paranoia from Herod. **In all likelihood the number of children killed during this raid was not a huge number because Bethlehem was a small village, but that doesn't make this**

any less tragic. To dispatch your soldiers to a village to destroy all the baby boys under two years of age is a despicable act of cowardice.

Notice what Matthew does in verses 17-18 as he connects this back to the OT. Again in verse 17 we find our word “fulfilled” and this time Matthew names what prophet. This quote is taken from Jeremiah 31:15. Let me try to explain a bit what is going on here. Jeremiah was a prophet who actually watched the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. He was there when the people of Judah were carried off into exile to Babylon. Look at this verse in Jeremiah 31:15 again and notice the place called Ramah. This was a city about 5 miles northeast of Jerusalem and it was sort of a staging ground for organizing the Israelites for deportation to Babylon for exile. So, the people were rounded up in Jerusalem and surrounding areas and sent to Ramah where they were temporarily organized and then sent off to Babylon.

No doubt Ramah was a sad place. People were frantically searching for family members and coming to grips with the horrors of exile to Babylon. Mothers were realizing that their sons had been killed in battle or that their small children had been lost along the way or killed in the destruction of the city. Notice the rest of the quote though. Rachel is weeping for her children. Who is this?

Well, Rachel was the wife of Jacob, who was the father of twelve sons, who are the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob’s name is changed to Israel. So, her name is used here metaphorically to represent the mother of the whole nation weeping for her lost sons. It would be like saying, “Queen Elizabeth is weeping for her lost children” after England goes to war and men are killed.

What’s interesting though is that Rachel actually died giving birth to Benjamin if you remember. Her life ended in tragedy as she was never able to raise her sons. So, in Jeremiah 31:15 Jeremiah pictures her as weeping once again over the loss of life that is happening through the exile. It’s almost like she’s watching.

Now, before we make the jump forward to Matthew 2 and why Matthew quotes this text, I have to show you one more important piece regarding Jeremiah 31. This chapter falls in a section of Jeremiah called the Book of Consolation, which goes from chapters 30-33 and all of chapter 31 is positive and hopeful for the future, except this verse. Look at Jeremiah 31:1. Jeremiah is writing about a time when God will reconcile with His estranged people and bring them back into

relationship with Him. Look at verses 7 and 10-11. In fact, Jeremiah 31 ends with the promise of a New Covenant. Look to verse 31.

So, why does Jeremiah put this lament (v. 15) right in the middle of this chapter of hope for the future? The lament deals directly with the current circumstances in Jeremiah's time, but it places the loss and the exile within God's greater purposes for Israel for the future. They will suffer and suffer greatly, but in the middle of their suffering there's hope for a return to the land and a New Covenant. In fact, look at Jeremiah 31:16-20.

Now let's jump forward to Matthew 2 and why Matthew uses this text as a fulfillment text. Matthew uses this text because it picks up on the regular occurrence of tragedy that has happened to Israel throughout her history. It's hard to read this story in Matthew 2:16 and not think about Pharaoh's destruction of all Jewish baby boys born in Egypt. Then you think about the situation in Jeremiah's day with the mother's weeping at Ramah as sons are lost in battle and the people are exiled to Babylon. Now you have the same sort of thing happening in Bethlehem.

But Matthew quotes this text from Jeremiah because he wants us to think of the context of hope we saw in that passage. And how will that hope be realized for Israel? How will the New covenant come? How will tragedies like this one in Bethlehem cease and things be made right? All through the birth of this born King.

Now, let's bring this forward to you and I today. Both Matthew and Jeremiah are writing of hope in the midst of suffering. How is that possible? When you suffer it tends to consume all your attention. It becomes all you can see. How can we possibly lift our eyes to have hope in the middle of life's brokenness?

I want to help us think about that from the prophet Jeremiah's other book, Lamentations. This is a poem written as he watched Jerusalem burn to the ground. Imagine what it would be like to see a foreign army enter your city and raze it to the ground and carry off your countrymen and friends into slavery. Listen to Lamentations 1:1-3. Now 3:1-6 and 3:16-20. The emotional darkness is thick for Jeremiah. He cannot see a way out and he even says this in verse 18. "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord."

Have you ever felt like that? Like there's no way out. **But there's an astonishing turn in Lamentations and these next few verses in chapter 3 form the very center of the book.** The suffering is still there and the city has still been burnt to the ground. But listen to what he says in verse 21. I read this and want to shout, "What is it that you call to mind Jeremiah?" "What gives you hope when everything is gone?" Listen to verses 22-26.

There are two parts to this. **Remember the steadfast, merciful, faithful love of the Lord and wait for Him.** Here's the beauty of this for you and I. We live after Matthew 2. The Lord has come. The King has been born and died and rose from the dead and is coming again. **All the suffering finds its end in Him.** So, we must resituate our lives in that story to find hope. Too often we attempt to sprinkle in a little eternal life to our culturally bound expectations, loves, and desires. We live life as if we exist in the same story as everyone else around us. One author put it like this: *"Hope becomes the habitual way of life for those who see their lives stretched between Christ's first and second coming."* - Jonathan Wilson How do you have hope? **Know where you are in the true story, the story of the King.**

What's shocking about this King is that he came and brought hope to us through the gift of His own humiliation. This is our second gift.

2. Humiliation that Leads to Salvation (vv. 19-23)

We already found out in 2:15 that Herod would die soon enough and now in verse 19 we see that he does. There's a Jewish historian named Josephus that describes the sickness and death of Herod in some detail and it's horrifying reading. Herod knew that the people would rejoice at his death and not mourn him, so, he rounded up a group of key Jewish leaders and had them imprisoned with the command that they should be killed when he died so the people would mourn at the time of his death and not rejoice.

The angel informs Joseph, who is living in Egypt, that Herod has died, and tells him to take Jesus and Mary and return to Israel. **Interestingly enough, the angel doesn't tell them specifically where to go but just says to return to Israel.** Look at verses 20-21. But as they return Joseph gets concerned about the political situation after Herod's death. Herod had divided up his kingdom into several pieces and a particularly cruel son was ruling over Judea. Look at verse 22. The

Lord confirms Joseph's assessment of the situation and he leaves Bethlehem to go back to Galilee. And finally, he ends up in Nazareth. Look at verse 23.

Now, once again we see in verse 23 that Matthew uses the word "fulfill". Here's the problem. If you search your entire OT you will not find any place where it says that anyone will be called a Nazarene. So, what is going on here? Some people have tried to say that this is predicting that Jesus would be a Nazirite but there's no indication that Jesus took a Nazirite vow or that he lived an ascetic lifestyle.

Notice in verse 23 that Matthew says this was spoken by the prophets, plural. So, this isn't referring to one passage like the other "fulfillment" texts have been doing. Apparently, he's referring here to a theme that was taught in the prophets concerning the Messiah.

Well, what do we know about the town of Nazareth in the Bible? We get a couple of hints at what people thought of Nazareth in the NT. Listen to John 1:46 and Acts 24:5. Nazareth was a small village and a pretty backwoods place. In the cultural stereotypes of the day to be a Nazarene was to be someone who was unimportant, looked down on, and to be outside the mainstream. To be called a Nazarene was meant to be derogatory.

Matthew has already hinted at the lowly birth of Jesus by being born in Bethlehem, an unimportant town near Jerusalem. This fulfillment text is meant to draw attention to his lowly and obscure status. And this is a theme we do find in the OT. Psalm 22 is a Psalm interpreted Messianically in the NT and we find these words in 22:6-7. Isaiah 49:7, speaking of the coming servant of the Lord, says this. And then, a well known passage in Isaiah 53:2-3 speak to this theme as well.

Why does Matthew want us to see Jesus as one derided and obscure, a Nazarene? It's only through this scorned status that he can bring salvation and exaltation for us. After Isaiah 53 speaks about him being despised in verses 2-3, look what comes next. Verses 4-7.

It's through his humiliation and death that He will bring redemption. Hebrews 12:1-2 puts it like this. And 2 Corinthians 8:9 makes it abundantly clear.

So, bring these two together. The born King humbled himself to be despised and rejected by men. He became poor for us and he took our suffering so that we could have hope of new life through Him. Let's Pray.