

The mass shooting in Las Vegas has been heavy on my heart. I helped plant a church there, met my wife there, and spent five years of my life in Vegas. So Monday morning I woke up to my phone blowing up with texts and social media going crazy. One friend told me, "The spiritual climate of Las Vegas changed in 24 hours." Churches were full all week long for prayer gatherings. Thankfully there are lots of great churches in Las Vegas, so they are in good hands.

For 59 people, the events of that night left their families feeling completely hopeless and alone. For hundreds of others, it shook them to their core. It's terrifying to find yourself in a situation that is beyond your control, to come to the place where you realize that your power alone is not enough to change your circumstances. You certainly don't need a horrific event to shake you; life has a way of doing that in so many other ways.

Maybe you are there this morning. Maybe it's your health, depression, your marriage, your family or your finances. What do you do in those moments? Those moments where you feel lost, powerless and scared?

Every person here is either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or going into one. That's life. When our fear and our pain are too great to bear, it's then that we need to turn to a power, to a person greater than ourselves, to King Jesus.

Today we are going to look at an incredible story that shows us a powerful principle of God's love and care for his children. We'll see that in the midst of chaos and evil, there is a God who is always working behind the scenes of our lives. Often times we can't see what he's doing and—I'll tell you what—we seldom ever understand. This story shows us that when things look hopeless, God is working.

Last Sunday, we saw the contrast between Jesus, the true King of the Jews, and Herod, the wannabe king of the Jews. Suddenly, a group of pagan astrologers, called the Magi, show up in Jerusalem and turn things upside down. They recognize Jesus for who he is and worship him, giving Jesus the best of what they had—gold, frankincense and myrrh. Meanwhile Herod rejects the newborn king and plots to destroy him.

What I love about the story is the fact that God announces the birth of his son to the Magi—outsiders—by breaking into their misguided system of astrology to reveal Jesus to them. Mark reminded us that, "Before the Magi ever sought this king, He was

seeking them. Before we ever seek Him, He is seeking us." That's so true.

After worshipping King Jesus, they were then warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned home to their country by another route. And that's where our story picks up.

### **Joseph's Family Escapes to Egypt and Returns to Nazareth**

**When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."**

**So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Matt. 2:13-15)**

I've had lots of crazy and scary dreams, but I've never had an angel speak to me in a dream. Maybe you have, so I'm jealous! This story is so familiar to us that we can miss the emotional weight of it. Can you imagine what it must've felt like to be startled in a dream with the news that someone with great power and resources wanted to kill your adopted son? The weight of responsibility, the fear, the confusion Joseph and Mary must have felt, I bet was overwhelming.

Just the trip alone would have been enough stress. To get to Egypt from Bethlehem was a journey of 75-100 miles. It was long. It was dangerous. And they would do this with a small child. And not just any child, but the Son of God! That's pressure!

### **Joseph Obeys God Immediately**

What I love about Joseph, and what we see all throughout these pages, is his immediate obedience. There's no hint of him questioning the words of the angel. There's no hesitation. He leaves in the middle of the night.

There's a powerful principle working here: You don't have to understand completely to obey immediately. You don't have to have all the facts and all the details to obey and trust God.

Let's not pretend that Joseph and Mary were super spiritual people either. We tend to do that with people in Scripture. Things were not looking very good for these newlyweds. I bet Joseph was struggling to understand what was going on and

why God was allowing this to happen. I bet Mary was like, "Wait, where are we going? Now? I'm trying to raise a toddler here!"

As followers of Jesus, when we hear His voice and read His Word, we need to learn how to obey Him even in the face of fear. Even when there are consequences. Even when we don't understand. You don't have to understand completely to obey immediately. Joseph was a righteous man who trusted God, and without hesitation, obeys the angel's words and sets off to Egypt.

### **Why Go to Egypt?**

For centuries, Egypt has been a place of refuge for the people of God. At the time, Egypt had a large Jewish population, some estimate as many of 1 million Jews were living in Egypt. They had a community there.

It was also outside of Herod's reach. They would be safe there, so it makes sense they would go to live in Egypt. But, there is more going on. Joseph's family are told to flee to Egypt to fulfill prophecy and to tell us something about God. First, this fulfills the prophecy of Hosea 11:1. In the context of Hosea it's clear that Israel is God's son who is called out of and redeemed from Egypt. Like Israel, Jesus is God's Son, who is called out of and redeemed from Egypt. Jesus fulfills yet another prophecy, "Out of Egypt I will call my son."

Matthew is also doing theology. He's telling us something about Jesus. He wants us to see the connection between Moses and Jesus. Matthew views Jesus as the new Moses. Moses was the greatly revered and loved prophet. Jesus was a prophet too. Like Moses, Jesus will go down to Egypt and return to the land of Israel. Like Moses, Jesus will set God's people free, not from the bondage of physical slavery but from the bondage of spiritual slavery to sin. Jesus is the new Moses; He is the new deliverer of God's people.

By making a connection to Moses, Matthew is reminding us that, when things look hopeless, God is working. He had a plan for Israel in Egypt and He still has a plan for the people of God through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**

**"A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more." (verses 16-18)**

### **Herod Kills the Children of Bethlehem**

Herod sees he's been outwitted and in his fury gives orders to kill all the children under 2 in Bethlehem. Remember, Herod was a lunatic! He murdered his first wife; he had three of his sons put to death; he was married 10 times and had 15 children, so he was constantly paranoid about someone attempting to take his throne.

Bethlehem was a small town, so scholars believe there were maybe only 20 boys this age. I'm not minimizing what Herod did, but when compared with all the other crazy and awful things, this wasn't even in his top 10. Again, I want you to **feel** this story, not just **hear** it.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be living in Bethlehem and have soldiers suddenly invade your home, looking for and then killing your toddler or your baby son? Some of you have lost a child and you know the pain and anguish some of these families felt. And while God never wants to see the pain of injustice and suffering, we live in a fallen and broken world where terrible things happen to good and bad people all the time. But, even in the midst of the unthinkable, God was working.

Matthew uses the OT and Herod's actions to remind us that God was working. In Jeremiah 31:15, Rachel was associated in the OT with the area of Bethlehem and the town of Ramah. Ramah was only five miles north of Bethlehem and was a transport center during the time when Jews were deported to Babylon during the Babylonian exile, a time of despair for the people of God. And during that time, the cries from the mothers of Bethlehem as their sons were led off into exile could be heard a few miles away in Ramah. Matthew now applies that time of anguish to these first century mothers who are crying for their sons who died at the hands of King Herod.

What does all this mean? Matthew is saying that amidst the tragedy and pain of Herod's massacre, God was working. Jeremiah told the people that God had not forgotten them, and that He will initiate a new relationship, a new covenant with them.

Matthew quotes from Jeremiah to say yes, the pain is real but there is hope in the One we've been waiting for. There is hope in Jesus because Jesus is the One who will end the mournful exile. Even in the pain, the hurt, and the death, there is hope. A new King is born, a King who will conquer death, a King who will heal our hurts, a new King who will lead us through the exodus from sin and bring us back from exile to God. When things look hopeless, God is working, the exile will soon be over.

**After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."**

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene. (verses 19-23)

## The Family Returns from Egypt

In another dream, an angel tells Joseph to return with his family to Israel. Once again Joseph obeys immediately and they return to Israel. We don't really know how long they've lived in Egypt; we can only guess, but it probably wasn't very long.

And while Herod is dead, his son is not. The text says Joseph was afraid. And he had every reason to be afraid because Herod's son Archelaus, who was also a madman, was now in charge of Judea. So, God again speaks to Joseph in a dream and deals with his fear and steers Joseph back to Nazareth, the original place where Mary and Joseph once lived.

What's the principle we keep seeing? When things look hopeless, God is working. And God's plan was for Joseph to raise Jesus in Nazareth. But, why Nazareth? Again, to fulfill prophecy.

In all these prophecies Matthew is giving us the credentials of the Messiah. He's constantly reaffirming all the reasons why we should believe and follow the new king. He's constantly showing what God did for Israel he is now doing in and through his Son, Jesus.

The difference between this prophecy and the others is that Matthew doesn't give us a direct OT quotation. In verse 23 he says, "the prophets." But, if you carefully study the prophets, you'll be hard pressed to find a specific prophecy that says the Messiah would come from Nazareth.

So, what's going on here? A lot. And there's lots of debate about what Matthew is trying to do here. What I think Matthew is doing, among other things, is a wordplay connecting Jesus' hometown of Nazareth with his identity as the Messiah-King. The Hebrew word for "branch" sounds a lot like "Nazareth" and Matthew's audience would have caught the wordplay immediately. Jesus, the Nazarene, is from the "branch," the royal line of King David.

So, Matthew starts his gospel by emphasizing Jesus as Messiah, the Son of David, and the hope of Israel's restoration. He now ends the birth narratives with a bookend, saying the same thing again. Jesus is the One we've been waiting for!

Let me summarize the story for us:

- Herod tries to kill Jesus, God protects Jesus in Egypt.

- Joseph and Mary live as refugees in Egypt, but God provides for them there (gold, frankincense and myrrh).
- Joseph and Mary return to Israel but they don't go back to Bethlehem, because God directs them to Nazareth.

What I want you to see is this is not just a story about something that happened 2000 years ago. This is a story about you and me. The same God who lead and cared for Joseph, Mary and Jesus, is the same God who calls you His adopted sons and daughters. He's the same God who is at work in your life today. So, when things look hopeless, God is working for **you**.

As you look through the Scriptures you see this principle all over the place. The classic example is Joseph from the book of Genesis. Joseph gets sold by his own brothers into slavery and sent to Egypt. While working in the house of Potiphar, he rises up the ranks and runs the whole house. But, Potiphar's cougar wife wants to sleep with Joseph, who refuses, only to be falsely accused of rape. He's thrown into prison until Pharaoh hears about his gift to interpret dreams. Soon, he's working for Pharaoh. And it didn't take long for him to be running the entire country of Egypt. A famine comes and almost wipes out the country, but millions are spared because of Joseph's wise stewardship of resources. And instead of the Jewish people starving and dying, they are fed and spared.

When Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers, after lots of tears he says, "What you intended for evil, God intended for good!" When things look hopeless, God is working for you.

I could go on and talk about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. I could go on and talk about the great women of the Bible too like Sara, Rebecca, Hannah, and Ruth. I could even talk about how this principle was played out in the life of Apostle Paul who said, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." But, the best example of this principle is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Like Israel, we all need a deliverer. We're all enslaved to sin and in need of an exodus. But we need someone greater than Moses to deliver us. We need a Savior.

Jesus came and lived a sinless life. He taught, healed, and pointed people to the Kingdom of God, to what life is like when God is in charge. And yet, God allowed His own Son to suffer, not just any death, but the most horrible of all—death by crucifixion. Jesus did nothing to deserve the punishment and the abandonment of the cross.

When things looked hopeless on Calvary, when the enemies of God laughed and thought they had defeated God, when all the disciples ran away in fear, God was working. And three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and at that moment Jesus defeated sin, destroyed Satan, and overcame death once and for all. He now

offers abundant life to anyone who calls on his name and embraces him by faith.

And one day, Jesus will return to this earth and make all things new again. One day there will be no more pain, suffering, crying, or death. Jesus will have the final word!

So, when your fear and pain are too great to bear, when you are dealing with chaos and evil, remember there is a God who is always working behind the scenes of your life. There is a God who is working all things for the good of those who love Him. There is a God who loves to bring victory out of defeat, life out of

death, and joy out of pain. That is the gospel. That is the power of King Jesus.

You can come to Him when you need deliverance. You can cling to Him when you face despair. You can cry to Him when you are overwhelmed. Because when things look hopeless, you can trust God is working for you.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*