

Blood, Sweat and Tears

Matthew 2:13-23

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for December 24, 2023

Stephen Davey

If you attend church during Christmas or see a nativity display, you may be struck by the cleanness and glow and aura of the displays. The manger is always smooth and clean, the straw and hay are clean and tidy, the animals are respectfully looking on quietly while Jesus is swaddled in perfectly white linen. But that's not the real Christmas story. The real story involves the tears of Mary, the sweat of Joseph, and blood running in the streets of Bethlehem.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to go down into the underground bunker under the streets of London where Winston Churchill and his military staff directed the war effort during World War II. It had just been opened to the public and you could tour through the rooms and offices along the narrow hallways.

Everyone's desk and paperwork had been left just as they were at the end of the war. As a visual reminder, nothing had been moved. I saw the desk where Churchill worked; there was the same telephone from which he called President Roosevelt to beg for help.

I saw the maps that showed the movements of the allies and the table on which markers identified the location of ships and troops.

At the worst moment in the war, when it seemed almost hopeless for Great Britain to survive the German onslaught, Churchill delivered these words to his people from the House of Commons:

“We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence in the air; we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be; we shall never surrender . . . I have nothing to offer you but blood, toil, tears and sweat.”

Quotes taken from James Montgomery Boice: [Nehemiah, Learning to Lead](#) Revell Company, p. 52 & “Churchill, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer.” Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.

I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat and tears.

Maybe it's about time we readvertised Christianity. Maybe it's time to witness to people and then tell them that if they follow Christ, it'll be nothing but blood sweat and tears.

The television is loaded with false teachers who promise that the narrow path guarantees an easy path.

No wonder people today, especially in America, who decide to give Jesus a try don't last very long because they thought they'd order from a catalog of blessings and instead they're given a sword and a shield and a helmet.

I believe a large part of the misconception about Christianity is tied to these first Christmas scenes and the arrival of God the Son.

The conflict between heaven and hell didn't begin at the cross; blood, sweat and tears came with His first infant cry.

If you're new to us today, we've been digging deeper into this original Christmas passage.

In the opening lines of ***Matthew's Gospel and chapter 2, where I invite you to return***, the Magi—the wise men, the Persian king-makers—arrive in Jerusalem.

They are the spiritual descendants of their revered leader: Daniel, who centuries earlier had left a spiritual legacy that included the coming of the Messiah.

The magi arrive with the shocking question in verse 2:

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews ... we have come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:2

No prince could ascend the Persian throne without the Magi's blessing, but they have come, not to crown Him but to worship Him. In other words, this King is *divine*.

And they've journeyed 2,000 miles one-way to worship Him.

Now, Matthew fills in the puzzle pieces that inform us that Joseph and Mary had decided to stay in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. And you can understand why. They've left behind a scandal and rumors of immorality with Mary's pregnancy.

They've found a home to live in; it could have been a little hut Joseph built with his own hands, on borrowed land, as Old Testament law allowed; we're not told.

What we *are* told is that the Magi arrive and enter the house and ***verse 11 tells us:***

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts ...”

Matthew 2:11

We left off there in our study last Lord’s Day.

Now as we re-enter this scene, the Magi were supposed to return and give Herod the street address of the boy; Herod said he wanted to go and worship him as well, which was a lie.

Verse 12 informs us that the Magi are warned by God not to return to Herod.

In our last study, I mentioned that Herod had been awarded by the Roman senate the title, “King of the Jews”; he guarded that title jealously.

Herod had begun his reign 40 years before the birth of Christ, so by now he’s an old man, inflicted, historians tell us, with venereal diseases and for the most part already partially insane.

In his final two years of his life, the same time-period when the Magi arrived, Herod will kill three of his sons whom he considered rivals; he will kill one of his wives and her brother for their popularity among the people.

On one occasion a faithful soldier reported to Herod, and I quote: “The army hates your cruelty, and many officers curse you.”

This soldier thought this would gain him a promotion, but Herod ordered him tortured until he gave the names of the traitors, which he did, but ended up still dying. Herod then rounded up all the accused and had them executed while he, historians recorded, watched with rage, screaming at them to die.

John Phillips, [Exploring the Gospels: Matthew](#) (Loizeaux, 1999), p. 44

The Roman emperor Caesar Augustus, who had appointed Herod as King over this region once remarked that he would rather be Herod’s swine than one of Herod’s sons.

ibid, p. 40

So, you can imagine the wise men, they had no idea what they had just ignited.

But don’t miss the irony here that evidently the only man in Jerusalem who took the wise men seriously was King Herod. Nobody else seemed to care to check it out.

Now what happens next in Matthew chapter 2 is only more blood, sweat and tears. And it comes with the fulfillment of three Old Testament prophecies.

The first one begins here in verse 13:

Now when [the Magi] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.”

Matthew 2:13

Once Herod realized the Magi had tricked him and left to travel back home on some other interstate, Herod would have assumed that that they had warned Mary and Joseph.

R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing, 1964), p. 80

So here we are, in the middle of the night, and another angel shows up here in **verse 13**:
“Joseph, get up. Herod’s soldiers are about to gallop the five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to find Jesus and kill him.”

So hurry ... get up ... you don’t have time to pack; grab whatever you can carry or wear, and run!

Mary no doubt asked Joseph in their panic:

“Where did you say that angel told us to run?”

“He said to run to Egypt, beyond Herod’s jurisdiction.”

“How long are we gonna stay there?”

“The angel didn’t say, he just said he’d tell us when we can come home.”

“Where are we gonna stay in Egypt?”

“The angel didn’t say; Mary, we gotta run!”

Let me tell you, the original Christmas scene was not a cozy manger scene and a peaceful life in Bethlehem.

From the very moment of Mary’s conception, and the misunderstanding that it brought to the difficult journey to Bethlehem, then childbirth without a midwife—a child birthed in a muddy cave into the calloused hands of a carpenter—then a meager existence for a year and a half while they try to refashion their lives amid the suspicions of Jewish community. Then this entourage of Magi arrives outside their little home with Persian soldiers guarding the treasures, servants, and flocks for provisions over the course of their 4,000-mile round trip journey.

But this has a negative effect as well. They have identified Joseph and Mary and Jesus now Herod will find out where they live.

And sure enough, the text implies that within 24 hours, spies have given him the address.

Herod immediately sends his soldiers galloping to Bethlehem, he knows Mary and Joseph will try to run, so the order is to kill every Jewish little boy, two years old and under in that region.

Let me tell you, beloved, from the very beginning, the birth of Jesus signals an intensifying war; it's nothing less than blood, sweat and tears.

Matthew writes here in verse 14:

And [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew 2:14-15

How in the world do you get Jesus into Egypt, of all places? How do you get Joseph and Mary to travel 55 miles away to a country like Egypt?

Here's how: the kingdom of Herod isn't in charge; the Kingdom of Heaven is. And that hasn't changed to this day. God uses this pagan murderer to help fulfill the prophecies of God's Word and God's will.

But don't miss the challenges this all meant for Joseph and Mary. This means more difficulty and more change and more confusion and more unanswered questions.

Get up in the middle of the night and run for your life, no planning, no packing, and they're going to be in another country for a year or more.

Have you ever gone on a family trip that lasted a year? Probably not, two weeks was enough before you thought of killing each other!

But when you traveled for two weeks, how much did you plan? How much did you pack?

My wife and I have traveled to a number of foreign countries, like Minnesota and Michigan! We've been to France, Austria, England, Switzerland, Germany. Listen, talk about thinking through plans:

- Money? Got it!
- Passports? Got 'em!

- Tickets? Got ‘em!
- Itinerary? Got it!
- Carry ons, yep!
- Check ins, yep!
- Chewing gum to help your ears pop during the flight, yes.
- Hotel Reservations? Yep.
- Contact information? Yes.

Listen, you know when you’re leaving, and you know where you’ll be staying! That’s how the will of God is supposed to work.

That’s the way God would want it, we convince ourselves!

Just slip into this original scene: Joseph is awakened in the middle of the night and told to run with no map, no planning, no packing.

In **verse 13**, the word for **flee** in your English Bible is from the Greek word *pheugo* (φευγω) which means to seek safety in flight. *Pheugo* is the same Greek word that gives us our word “fugitive.”

Ritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency, 1976), p. 4

In other words, “Joseph, take Mary and Jesus and run! You’re now wanted criminals. Throw together whatever you can carry and run. Herod wants to kill Jesus; his soldiers are mounting up.

You must run for your lives! And from Bethlehem to the border of Egypt was 75 miles away.

And they ran! Can you imagine the sheer terror of it all?

Couldn’t God protect Joseph and his little family right where they were?

Couldn’t he have deposed Herod and put someone more sympathetic on the throne?

Couldn’t God have blinded the soldiers?

He could have, but He didn’t.

His will for them was blood, sweat and tears.

So, they fled; Herod's soldiers arrived and the killing began as the kingdom of darkness raged against the newborn King of light.

The church in the medieval period of Western civilization couldn't imagine that this kind of difficulty could possibly be the will of God.

So apocryphal writings compiled legends and myths to smooth everything out.

One legend recorded that when Joseph and Mary and Jesus needed a place to sleep on their journey, they sought refuge in a cave. But it was cold, and the ground was covered with frost. A little spider recognized Jesus and then spun a web across the entrance of the cave so thick that it hung like a curtain and the cave grew warm.

Edited from William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 35

Another legend says that trees bent down to yield their fruit; another legend says that they were unable to sleep one night, so an angel came and played music on a violin, and they fell fast asleep.

If anything, Joseph and Mary would've had trouble sleeping because they were wondering why?

Here's why: the prophets had said that God's Son would come out of Egypt; Jesus is going to become the picture of Israel's calling from that same country; Israel was spoken of in the Old Testament as the **son of God (Hosea 11:1)**.

You might remember, if you're older in the faith, there had been another deliverer whose name was Moses.

Pharaoh had also ordered the killing of all Jewish male babies. Moses was hidden away until he grew up to become a deliverer.

Both Jesus and Moses came out of Egypt, and they both led their people out of bondage. But in **Hebrews chapter 13**, Jesus is called the greater Moses.

And that's because the deliverance of Moses was temporary; the deliverance of Jesus is eternal.

Now if you look back at **verse 16**, the second prophecy is about to be fulfilled tragically.

We're told here:

Then Herod, when he saw that he had 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 that he had ascertained from the wise men. 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 are no more."

Matthew 2:16-18

Rachel's weeping during Israel's exile was a prophetic foreshadowing of the mothers in Bethlehem who would weep over the death of their baby boys.

Herod was nothing less than a first century antichrist, in the hands of Satan, attempting to destroy the seed of the woman, the virgin born Messiah.

Not long after the funerals are over in Bethlehem, Herod dies.

Now we have one more prophecy to fulfill in this original scene.

Verse 19:

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."

Matthew 2:19-20

Here we go again! In the middle of the night an angel tells Joseph to "Get up." I wonder if Joseph went to sleep wondering if he'd make it through the night.

The difference here in this verse is the lack of urgency. There's no need to panic, or run, or hide.

Verse 21:

And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Matthew 2:21-22a

This is not good news. Herod's dead, but Archelaus is worse than his father; in fact, he starts his reign by killing 3,000 Jews in the Temple during Passover.

So, Joseph doesn't want to move back to Bethlehem, that was only five miles from Jerusalem.

We're told here that God gives him another dream and tells him to move into the district of Galilee (**verse 22**).

Now notice verse 23:

And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23

Nazareth was 55 miles from Jerusalem. It was an out of the way, unnoticed, insignificant village, one of the Lord's disciples will later say, "Nothing good ever came out of Nazareth." Nobody is going to look for a king over there.

Archeologists have excavated Nazareth, dating back to the time of Christ and not one piece of fine jewelry was found; not one piece of fine, glazed pottery of that generation was found; just common, ordinary clay.

These original scenes were as challenging and difficult as you can imagine.

It started with the shattering of marriage plans and a normal home-life, painful rumors and then an outdoor shelter for a birthplace, more uncertain months in Bethlehem, then on the run as fugitives into Egypt, months of staying undercover, then back to Israel, to a poor village where they will live for nearly 30 years in total obscurity.

But what character here; what obedience; what surrender to God; what perseverance.

One author I read said that as he traveled in England, he saw in a graveyard the tombstone of an old soldier who had lost his property and his then his life in battle defending King Charles. His tombstone read: He served King Charles with constant, dangerous and expensive loyalty.

Bruce Larson, [The Communicator's Commentary](#) (Word Books, 1983), p. 59

That's Joseph and Mary, and it will be Jesus as well.

Let me offer three thoughts in closing that can be gleaned from these original scenes.

First, the plans God has for you do not eliminate questions, or painful seasons, in life.

Remember, beloved, the narrow path is not necessarily an easy path.

Secondly, the love God has for you does not eliminate the hatred Satan, or the world, has for you.

Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it," which means, hell is going to try everything it can.

Finally, the promises God has given you do not eliminate your responsibility or availability to follow Him.

God didn't whisk them away to Bethlehem; He didn't snap His fingers and they immediately arrived in Egypt; He didn't make it a downhill ride into Nazareth. He could have. But He didn't.

So, stay the course, serve your King with constant, dangerous and expensive loyalty to Him.

No matter what: be it blood, sweat, toil or tears.

© Copyright 2020 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

Access the complete archive of Stephen Davey's teaching ministry at
wisdomonline.org or on the **Wisdom for the Heart app**.