



Love - Advent - 2022

Matthew 2:13-18

Hosea 11:1

We will start in Matthew chapter 2 today.

At the point when we're picking up in the Christmas story, Jesus has been born. The wise men have seen the star and come from the east to worship Him. They go to the palace of King Herod, thinking that's where the king would be born. And they ask him where the new king is, which is unnerving to King Herod. He likes his job and isn't looking to be replaced. So he is fearful and enraged, but pretends he wants to worship Jesus, too - so he asks the wise men to go find Him.

The wise men come to the house where Jesus is, they worship Him with gifts, and then they are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they head out of town. And we pick up in verse 13 of Matthew 2:

Matthew 2:13 Now when they 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." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 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."

So Joseph and Mary take baby Jesus down to Egypt. They probably went to Alexandria, a region that might have had a million Jews in it. It was big, which made it the perfect place to hide, and was known as the place people would flee to when they needed to get out of Dodge because there was trouble up in Palestine.¹ Because there was a large Jewish community there, Joseph and Mary could easily find their people and not be alone there. So the move made sense.

¹ Morris, Leon. The Gospel According to Matthew. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992). 42.

And you see in the following passage that it saved the life of Jesus. Herod goes on a killing spree, and carries out what is called the slaughter of the innocents, where probably between 30 and 40 children are slain to try to make sure this new baby king would be eliminated.

But Matthew here says that this all happened to protect the Child, but also to fulfill a prophecy of scripture - and he quotes from Hosea 11:1 **“Out of Egypt I called my son.”**

Which, taken at face value, this means there is an Old Testament prophecy that Jesus would come out of Egypt at some point. Which is great, because all of these prophecies about Jesus coming, this one written about 750 BC, all give credence to the story and they're part of the reason we know it's true. It was all predicted in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

So let's look at that prophecy in Hosea 11, where 750 years before the birth of Christ, his coming up out of Egypt was predicted.

**Hosea 11:1-7 “When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.**

**2 The more they were called,
the more they went away;**

**they kept sacrificing to the Baals
and burning offerings to idols.**

**3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them up by their arms,
but they did not know that I healed them.**

**4 I led them with cords of kindness,
with the bands of love,
and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws,
and I bent down to them and fed them.**

**5 They shall not return to the land of Egypt,
but Assyria shall be their king,
because they have refused to return to me.**

**6 The sword shall rage against their cities,
consume the bars of their gates,
and devour them because of their own counsels.**

7 My people are bent on turning away from me,

**and though they call out to the Most High,
he shall not raise them up at all.**

Ok, so I read this in its original setting and this isn't talking about Jesus at all. I have a pretty sensitive "bible verse out of context" meter. And if Matthew said to me that he was writing this story about Jesus and he was going to use Hosea 11:1 as a prophecy about Jesus, I'd say, "Matthew, you can't do that. This "son" in Hosea 11:1 is clearly referring to the nation of Israel, and worse, the whole context is about how badly Israel had sinned and how they were going to be punished for it.

How would you apply that to Jesus? This can't be a passage about Jesus - this son is Israel, and this son is sinful. Jesus is not this son." It is a stretch to say that this was a prophecy of Joseph and Mary taking Jesus up out of Egypt.

But, right there in Matthew 2:14-15, he says this whole ordeal with Joseph and Mary and Jesus hiding in Egypt was **"to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."**

So what do you do when the Bible misuses Bible verses?

In fact, this is an accusation against Christianity, that if you look closely at the things Christianity calls prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament, they don't all seem to really be that. They say they're kind of like Nostradamus's predictions - which are so vague and have been subject to so much translation that you could almost make them predict anything.

And so, as Christians who believe that both Hosea's writing and Matthew's writing are inspired by God, these are both God's word, it's good for us to know how this fits together. And this is going to be important for us to understand, not just so we can connect the dots of Bible prophecy, which is good, but to understand what the Bible is all about and hear what God is saying to us here, and for us to know God's heart for us.

So if I said to Matthew, "This is not what Hosea is talking about," Matthew would say back to me, "I've read Hosea, I know what he was talking about. I'm not saying that Hosea had Jesus in mind when he wrote these things. He wrote them to talk about sinning Israel and how Israel would be punished, I'm not denying that."

It's clear if you read Matthew that he knew his Old Testament, and wasn't going to be taking a verse out of its context and misusing it.

But he was using it to say something other than we might expect when we think of a fulfillment of a prophecy. We're very mechanical - we tend to look for a one to one fulfillment - Micah 5:2 says Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, and He was born in Bethlehem. That kind of fulfillment exists.

But the word "fulfill" in the New Testament doesn't always mean a prophet directly saw part of Jesus' life.

Sproul writes, "When the Apostles say Christ fulfilled a prophecy, they sometimes mean that He is the true realization of a particular old covenant theme or institution. Looking for such things when we read the Old Testament helps us better understand Christ's work. These themes and institutions include such things as exodus, exile, restoration, prophet, priest, king, temple, and Israel."²

What Matthew is talking about here in Matthew 2 is a fulfillment of the story of Israel and the purpose of Israel in Jesus.

In using this verse, he is saying that Jesus followed in the footsteps of the nation of Israel.

That the nation of Israel was in some ways the shadow of Jesus, that was bent and obscured by its own sin and the sinful world Israel existed in. But Jesus came as the real thing, with no sin, no obscurity - the real thing that cast the shadow of Israel.

The life of Jesus is an important fulfillment of the story of the nation of Israel.

And Jesus came as the true Israelite, the true Israel, and you would expect the shadows that you saw before to, at times, exist in the same shape as Jesus. But Jesus wouldn't be obscured and twisted - he would succeed in every way that Israel failed, and would be for the world everything Israel was supposed to be.

So let's talk about how Jesus fulfills that story and why it matters for us.

If you follow a portion of Israel's history: Israel himself, Jacob, and his sons went down to Egypt at the end of the book of Genesis. They went there to find relief from the famine, to find refuge. And they found it. Joseph was there, and the nation of Israel was spared from a famine because they went down to Egypt.

² <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/israel-son-god>

But the generations came and went, and all of these multiplying Israelites became a threat to Pharaoh. So they were enslaved in Egypt.

There, they cried out to God.

Exodus 4:21-23 “21 And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.””

So God looked at Israel and called that nation his son. And he told Pharaoh, through Moses, let my son go. And through the plagues and the passover, God opens a window of opportunity for them to get out.

And “out of Egypt” goes God’s son.

They go through the waters of the Red Sea.

Then they spend 40 years in the wilderness, wandering, being tested³ as to whether they’ll obey God’s law, and again and again they fail.

They continually failed to be what they were called to be.

They were, for example, called to be a light to the nations:

**Isaiah 42:6 I am the LORD; I have called you¹ in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations**

They were supposed to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation:

Exodus 19:5-6 “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

³ Deuteronomy 8:2

Like priests, they would be the ones who stood between God and the rest of the world. They'd bring God's word to the world, they'd lift the rest of the world up toward God.

And there was always a longing for the True Israel to come, for Israel to finally fulfill all that God had called them to be. And for generations they waited- when will real righteousness come to our nation?

But they failed:

Hosea 11:2 **"The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.**

But then Jesus comes along. And Matthew tells the story in order, laying out these events:

His family takes refuge in Egypt. (Just like Israel did in the OT)

Once their time there in Egypt is complete, they come out of Egypt (like Israel did.)

He is baptized, he comes through the water (like Israel did).

He goes into the wilderness, where he is tested and tempted, not for 40 years, but for 40 days. And there are three temptations the devil throws his way, Jesus passes all of the tests. And on two of those occasions he quotes passages about those tests Israel faced in the wilderness.

Satan tells Him to turn stone into bread, and He quotes from:

Deuteronomy 8:3 "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Satan tells him to throw Himself off of the temple, and He refuses and quotes:

Deuteronomy 6:10-13 “10 “And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

Over and over, he is proving that He is the one who succeeds where Israel fails.

Israel came up out of Egypt and failed to obey the Lord, failed to be who the Lord called them to be in the wilderness.

But Jesus also came up out of Egypt, through the water, into the wilderness, and fulfilled what Israel was called to be. He didn't sin, he passed all the tests, he was the True Son, the True Israel, the light to the nations.

Jesus is the the true prophet, the true priest, the true king (as we said last week). He is the one the story of Israel and the story of the Bible is all about.

And Matthew can say that Jesus fulfills Hosea's verses because He is the True Son, the one who perfectly lives out what Israel was supposed to be. And not only is He the Son of God, He is the beloved Son of God, and when He is being baptized, a voice from heaven announces:

Matthew 3:17 “and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

In Jesus, the True Israel has come, the True Son, the Beloved Son, has come. He is the fulfillment, or the filling up of the promises of God.

But why does that matter?

(1) This matters for how we read the Bible.

One temptation is to read the Bible as a book of rules and moral lessons. And we don't want to go too far and say there are no rules and moral lessons in there. The Bible is the

greatest book of moral lessons ever written, and that the laws and commands are from God and for our good. We are supposed to learn from the lives we read about here, we are supposed to imitate the good, be warned by the cautionary tales, follow the commands as the good word of God that they are. We don't honor God by reading His laws and saying, "The Bible doesn't have laws and moral lessons," of course it does!

In fact, when 1 Corinthians 10 is talking about the biblical stories of the wilderness wanderings and all that happened in the desert, it says:

1 Corinthians 10:6-12 "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

So we don't want to say there is no place for moral lesson following.

But if that's all we have in the Bible we don't have good news. We have good laws, we have what God requires of us, we have a book that tells us what we should be. We have good stories, good and bad examples.

But we don't have hope.

Because, on our own, we are like Old Testament Israel.

The more we are called by God, the more we run away.

If this is a book of moral lessons alone, and the offer of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, we are in trouble.

We deserve the same punishment that Israel deserved.

But the story of the Bible is not just that God gave us laws that we broke and good moral lessons that we didn't follow.

This is a book of good news, because it, first and foremost, is the story of Jesus. It's the story of God's intricately planned redemption of his sinning people.

So this should change the way we read the Bible, it is a story of redemption.

(2) Two, it matters that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Bible's prophecies because it shows us the loving heart of God

This should dazzle us. Our redemption, and God's grand narrative, is not some slapped-together shoddy workmanship - it's more beautiful and genius than we could have anticipated - it's the good we "would have asked for if [we] knew everything he knows," to quote Tim Keller.

In fact, if you keep reading in Hosea's passage, God has told Israel that they've sinned and will be judged for their sin.

But then listen to His heart:

Hosea 11:8-9 "How can I give you up, O Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, O Israel?

How can I make you like Admah?

How can I treat you like Zeboim?

My heart recoils within me;

my compassion grows warm and tender.

⁹ I will not execute my burning anger;

I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and not a man,

the Holy One in your midst,

and I will not come in wrath.

So you have these wrath-deserving people, but a loving God, who sees them in their sin, in their Baal worship, in their running away.

And He says "my compassion grows warm and tender."

So what could He do? He is just - a holy and just God, and these people deserve punishment, we deserve punishment.

But He is also a God of love and compassion and tenderness.

And so, because we failed to provide the obedience that the law required, Jesus provided it. He alone uniquely obeyed God's commands as the True Israel. He suffered on the cross, completely undeserving of such a death. And because He was God, his sacrifice was an infinite one. His death could pay the price for his people.

He was a propitiation, a sacrifice that can atone, and make it possible for God to justly forgive and bless us.

He came and took our place.

African scholar Athanasius, in speaking of Jesus' incarnation, wrote that **"He became what we are that He might make us what He is."**

And all of it was to show that God is perfectly loving and forgiving, but also perfectly just. The whole thing glorified Him. It was all for the glory of God. Because it isn't right for a good judge to call wicked people righteous. So he had to give us righteousness, at infinite cost to Himself, so He could be just and a justifier of us.

Romans 3: 25 This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Israel deserved judgment, we deserved judgment.

But, if we will believe, our sin was judged on the cross.

"God hath long contended with a stubborn world, and thrown down many a blessing upon them; and when all his other gifts could not prevail, He at last made a gift of Himself." - Henry Scougal

And because of what He did for us, listen to the future God promises for His people at the end of Hosea:

**Hosea 14:4-7 "I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;**

**he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
6 his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.
7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.**

To be a Christian is to be a recipient of the love and mercy of God that did for us what was impossible for us to do for ourselves.

In Jesus, the compassion and love and justice of God was fulfilled for us.

And if we will turn and believe, we will be redeemed.

And for the redeemed, it matters what we think our story is.

If we think our story is, "I used to be bad, then I learned God's ways, I cleaned myself up, I started obeying, I got into church, I made myself good," then we will be arrogant, religious, better-than-everybody, aloof, critical of others, and elitist.

But if our story is that we sinned and rebelled, but the True Son came, died to forgive us, gave us the gift of faith, redeemed us, washed us, forgave us, poured out his mercy and tenderness on us, and to do so He orchestrated all of history, all of the biblical story, to lead to the death of His son and our coming to faith - if we believe that is our story - how could that make us gracious? And loving? And compassionate? And, like God, brokenhearted for those who wander and sin and don't believe.

Arrogant self-righteous people miss the whole story of the Bible.

But if we believe that the story of the Bible is all about Jesus coming for His people who couldn't save themselves, then it will humble us, secure us, and give us an awful lot of patience and love and send us on a mission to others.

Father,

We thank you for promising us this future of flourishing with you, because you have allowed your Son to pay the price for our sin. We confess that often we ignore your

redemption by trying to earn it ourselves, by treating the Bible like it is mainly a book about us and what we should do. We miss the beauty of the story of redemption, and even try to work our way to you because we have lost the plot. Father, forgive us.

Thank you, Jesus, for being all that we should have been. Righteous, holy, loving in every way, always pleasing to your Father. And thank you for being punished on our behalf so we could have life.

Spirit, help us to believe this and become loving like your Son in response.

Assurance:

**Psalm 103:8-12 “The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
9 He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the difference between reading the Bible as a book of morals and as a book about Jesus?
- 2) What does it mean that Jesus is the True Israelite?
- 3) How does Matthew 2:15 use Hosea 11:1? What does it mean that Jesus’s return from Egypt was the fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy?
- 4) Is it possible to love morality and not love Jesus?