Jesus’ escape to Egypt

Matthew 2:13-23

Key Verse:2:13“When they had gone, an angel of the Lore 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.”

Today’s passage contains three events: 1) Joseph’s escape to Egypt with the baby Jesus and his mother. 2) King Herod’s massacre all the infants in Bethlehem. 3) Joseph’s return to Nazareth. The author Matthew saw all these events as the fulfillment of God’s prophecies that he revealed Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Through today’s passage let us think about three things: 1) Joseph’s obedience, 2) God’s sovereign rule over human history, 3) Duty to keep our faith in Jesus.

First, Joseph’s obedience (13-15) Look at verse 13. “***When they had gone, an angel of the Lore 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.***” In 2:1-12 the Magi in the east came to Jerusalem following the star in order to worship the king of the Jews. When they found the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, they were overjoyed and worshiped him. After worshiping the baby Jesus, they returned to their own country. After they returned, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and asked him to escape to Egypt with the child and Mary. This was because the evil king Herod was about to kill Jesus. What was Joseph’s response? Look at verses 14-15a. “***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***…” Joseph got up in the middle of the night and left for Egypt. It is not easy for parents to get up in the middle of night to take care of their children. But Joseph got up in the middle of night and took the child and his mother and left for Egypt. In verse 21 when the angel asked him to return to Israel, Joseph got up in the middle of night and left for Israel. One of Joseph’s role as the father of Jesus was to get up in the middle of night and move to other places according to the angel’s message.

In the history of the Bible, God blesses obedient people and uses them for his good purpose. Noah was obedient when he built the ark of salvation. Abraham was obedient when he left for the land where God had shown him. By faith he also sacrificed his own son Isaac when God tested him. God did not use Moses until he was 40 years old, full of passion and pride. God put him in the wilderness for 40 years until he became humble and dependant on God alone. God disciplined his people Israel to obey him and keep his command when they entered the promised land. God opened the Red Sea when Moses obeyed him. God let Joshua and his people cross the Jordan River and conquer Jericho when they obeyed God’s command absolutely.

God valued Mary’s obedience highly that she could be the mother of Jesus. It was very difficult for Mary to obey the angel’s message about her virginal conception of Jesus. She wondered, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” But, she humbly accepted the angel’s message saying, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” (Lk 2:38) Mary’s faith and obedience made it possible for Jesus to be born of a virgin according to God’s will. (Is 7:14) It was not easy for Joseph to accept Mary who conceived the child before they got together. But after hearing the angel’s message in his dream, Joseph obeyed. He took Mary to his home as his wife.

In Biblical terms what is obedience? Obedience is denying my own idea or will in order to follow God’s will. These days obedience sounds like a taboo to the young generation. Some think that they are their own men. Others are selective in obedience. They obey only what is favorable to them. This is not obedience, but disobedience. Half-hearted obedience is disobedience. Obedience requires willing submission and whole-hearted devotion. Our Lord Jesus showed a good example. Hebrews 5:8,9 says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and , once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him…” Philippians 2:8 says, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-even death on a cross!” Jesus obeyed God until he died on the cross. Jesus gave a great commission to his disciples before he was taken up to heaven. This commission is not only for the Twelve, but also for all those who believe in him and follow him as his disciples. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt 28:19) God’s command is not optional but essential. Making disciples of all nations is not elective, but imperative. I pray that we may all become kingdom workers and disciples of Jesus in this generation so that we may participate in one to one Bible study on each campus. Amen. God uses obedient people, not hesitant people.

Second, our God is the Sovereign Ruler over history. (16-18) The author Matthew saw Joseph’s escape to Egypt as the fulfillment of God’s prophecy, which is Hosea 11:1. Look at verse 15b. “***And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son***.” In this verse ‘my son’ indicates Israel. Calling my son out of Egypt refers to the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Matthew equated Jesus with Israel. To Matthew’s eyes, Jesus’ escape to Egypt is the fulfillment of God’s prophecy.

Look at verse 16. “***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.”*** Herod was an evil king. He killed all the suspicious people who had seemed to threaten his kingship including his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, his wife, and even his two sons. When he knew that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were under two years old and under. He planned to destroy the Messiah Jesus. The massacre of the baby boys in Bethlehem would be a tragic story but Matthew saw this event also as fulfilling God’s prophecy. Look at verse 17-18. “***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***.” This verse is from Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah prophesied the exile of Southern Judah to Babylonia by Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezar in 586 BC. (Jer 40:1,2) At that time Nebuzaradan gathered all the captives at Ramah, north of Jerusalem, and took them to Babylonia, passing through Bethel, where Rachael’s tomb was near. Rachel, Jacob’s wife, is the symbol of the mother of Judah and Israel. She was weeping in her tomb because her children were no more. This is the picture of the tragic exile of the Jews by the gentiles. Matthew saw the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem as the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the tragic exile of the Israelites to Babylonia.

Here we learn that we need spiritual eyes to see all things from God’s point of view. The massacre of the innocent babies is a heart-breaking, sad, and tragic story but Matthew did not fall into sentimentalism or fatalism. He saw all things from God’s point of view. He believed that our God is the Sovereign God, the ruler over human history. He is all powerful, all knowing, and all present. There is no darkness at all in Him. In all things God works for good for those who love him. (Ro 8:28) In the Old Testament, Joseph’s brothers intended to harm Joseph, but God used them to send Joseph to Egypt and to save many lives through Joseph.(Ge 50:20) King Saul attempted to kill David out of jealousy. David suffered much as a fugitive until he became almost a depressed patient. But through this, God made David strong and become a compassionate shepherd. David wrote many beautiful and heart-moving psalms while he was fleeing from King Saul. The evil people killed our Lord Jesus on the cross. Satan seemed to rule over the world but God raised Jesus from the dead so that he could conquer death and crush Satan’s power. After his resurrection, Jesus’ disciples received much persecution. The more they were persecuted, the more they spread out and preached the gospel. The Apostle Paul never despaired over his imprisonment. In prison he wrote half of the New Testament, which instructed the scattered Christians around the world.

There is no despair and failure in Jesus Christ. In all things God works for good. Christians are those who are able to turn tragedy into glory by the power of Jesus. This is because we Christians believe that our God is the Sovereign God who rules the world and gives us final victory. No matter how Satan tried to kill the baby Jesus through King Herod, God protected Jesus through the angel, the Magi, and Joseph. God’s wisdom outwits Satan’s scheme. We need eyes to see all things from God’s point of view and we never lose heart when we do God’s work. Amen!

Third, we must protect Jesus in our time.(19-23) Look at verses 19-20. “***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***.” King Herod died in Jericho in 4 BC. According to the Bible calendar, Jesus was born between 5 and 6 BC. The 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.” What was Joseph’s response? “***So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.***” (21) Joseph had been well trained to get up in the middle of the night and move to other places. Look at verses 22,23. “***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***.” Before King Herod died, he divided his kingdom into three parts and gave them to his three sons, Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip. Herod Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea while Herod Antipas ruled Galilee, Perea, and Herod Philip ruled Iturea. Herod Archelaus was a ruthless king like his father so Joseph was afraid to go back to Judea. After the fourth appearance of the angel in his dream, Joseph moved to the district of Galilee, to their hometown Nazareth. Matthew saw this event also as the fulfillment of God’s prophecy. We don’t find any verses from the Old Testament which indicate the name “Nazareth”. But to Matthew’s eyes Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, people usually had despised. (Jn 1:46) Matthew described Jesus as the Promised Messiah who was despised and rejected by people and grew up in a humble state. (Ps 22:6-8, Is 11:1, 49:7, 53:2-3, Dan 9:26)

Joseph obeyed whatever the angel instructed. In this way Joseph took an important role to protect the Messiah Jesus from the evil people. It was not easy for him to escape to Egypt and to return to Israel. If you don’t understand this, ask missionary Isaiah! From Bethlehem to the border of Egypt, it took more than seventy five miles. He had to travel with a nursing mother and an infant baby in the desert, on mountains, and cross rivers. His trip continued day and night because of Herod’s order. In order to keep Jesus safe and sound, Joseph and Mary risked their lives in the foreign land. The baby Jesus was more precious and important than anyone and anything else in the world, even more than their own lives.

Christians are men in Christ. We Christians are those who carry the name of Jesus. Jesus is the treasure in our lives and the source of eternal life. He loved us and died for us. God forgives our sins through Jesus and we become his children. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Jesus is everything to us. Even though we lose everything on this earth, we must not lose Jesus from our hearts. We are Jesus-keepers in this anti-Christian generation. How much do you struggle to keep Jesus in your heart? How many times do you fight spiritual battles to protect the name of Jesus from this world? The days are evil and Satan is like a lion which prowls to devour its prey. Peer pressure and persecution come from everywhere and every day. Can you get out of your comfort zone and participate in the sufferings of Christ? Someone says, “If wealth is lost, nothing is lost, if health is lost, something is lost, but if Jesus is lost everything is lost.” If you lose Jesus, you lose everything.

A young and ambitious musician was sitting before his piano dreaming his bright future as a world famous singer. Then he found a note of lyrics titled “*I’d rather have Jesus*” written by Rhea Miller. The young man’s mother put the lyrics intentionally for her son so that he could read it and be changed to a Christian. When the young man, George Beverley Shea, read the lyrics, his heart was moved. This was because the words were speaking to him. He wrote music based on the lyrics. His mother asked him to sing the hymn at church the next Sunday. This was the day George B. Shea’s life was changed. He refused an offer from NBC to be a pop singer and chose to join the Billy Graham Crusade as a gospel singer. Mr. Shea found a precious treasure in Jesus in his life. He had Jesus rather than silver or gold, and he valued Jesus more than worldwide fame.

Today we learned Joseph’s escape to Egypt and his return to Jerusalem. This short story taught us how we should live as Christians in this generation. I pray that we all may protect Jesus in our children and in our Bible students’ hearts. Above all we must be faithful to Jesus and live for his name’s sake. For to us, to live is Christ and to die is gain.(Php 1:21) Money cannot be our goal. Career is not our purpose. Children should not be our idols. We must teach our children according to Biblical principles and encourage them to obey God’s word. Let us pray that we may value Jesus as the first importance in our lives. Amen.