

Overcoming Evil – Matthew 2:13-23

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I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed that we live in a world where some really dark, painful, evil things are continually happening in all parts of the earth even as we speak? If we could see what God has to see going on all around the world right now, some in secret, some in broad daylight, it would simply be more than we could handle and we would desperately cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!” Put an end to the suffering and hurt and bring justice at last! Bring that day when you set all things right and when there’s no more crying and pain and abuse and injustice.

We live in a world where Satan is prowling around looking for people to devour and where most of the world is unwittingly serving him and being used by him to try and thwart God’s purposes and keep people from discovering the one and only way they can be set free from slavery and spiritual death...the one way they can find what they need to thrive in the middle of the difficulties of life and enter into an eternal life relationship with the One who created them.

We also live in a world that is suffering the cumulative effects of thousands of years of sin and evil...a world where people who are created by God and then actively held together by him all of their lives, live as if he doesn’t exist, as if they have no need for him, and as if they have enough knowledge and wisdom on their own to run their own lives and navigate the extremely complex difficulties and pitfalls of life. And yet, when things inevitably go wrong, people always seem to develop a sudden belief in God and are quick to blame him for anything bad that happens. You might even say that in our world today, God tends to get credit for nothing, but blamed for everything.

Life is hard, my friends. Sin is real and damaging and truly does lead to death. And Satan is alive and active and willing to go to any lengths to work against God, his purposes and his people. In fact, in our study of Scripture today, we’re going to see how far Satan once went to try and destroy God’s chosen One...the One who would provide the only certain way to escape slavery to sin and Satan; to find

the wisdom needed to thrive through the difficulties of life; and to be able to experience that beautiful day and eternity when God will set things right and forever put an end to pain and suffering.

We're also going to uncover some clues about how you and I can overcome the evil that Satan tries to lead us into and bring about in our lives...how we can avoid falling into despair and hopelessness when faced with the difficulties and pain and injustices of life. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 2, where we'll be focusing today on verses 13 through 23; picking up in our harmony of gospels study just after the magi or the wise men had left Bethlehem to return to their own country. If you'll remember, King Herod had instructed the wise men to come back to him and tell him where the baby King was so he could come and worship him too. But fortunately God warned the magi in a dream about Herod's true intentions and they secretly left town without telling him. Jesus is probably between 1 and 2 years old as we pick up in Matthew chapter 2.

II. GOD MESSENGER PROVIDES THE RESCUE PLAN TO JOSEPH (v. 13)

Let's begin our study by reading verse 13 and finding out what happened just after the wise men left Bethlehem:

Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

Probably still in awe about that startling and unexpected visit from the wise men, Joseph and Mary had retired for the night; very likely wondering what God was going to do next! And they didn't have to wait long to find out! As Joseph slept, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and gave him 4 urgent commands that would require immediate action. First, he needed to get up as soon as the dream was over. This couldn't wait until the morning! Second, he needed to get Mary and Jesus up as well and prepare them for a journey. Third, he was to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Their journey was to begin immediately and they were to get out of town and travel to Egypt as fast as possible. And finally, Joseph was instructed to stay with Mary and Jesus in Egypt until he heard from the angel

again. In other words, there would be a future communication from the angel, and until then Joseph and his family were to stay put in Egypt. And the angel closed his message with the reason for the urgency: King Herod was about to search Bethlehem for Jesus so that he could kill him! That bit of information likely woke Joseph up with a start!

III. JOSEPH FOLLOWS THE RESCUE PLAN PROMPTLY AND EXACTLY, BRINGING ABOUT FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY (v. 14)

Let's see how Joseph responded to this urgent message from the angel as we read verses 14 and 15:

14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

Joseph listened to God's message given in a dream through the angel and then followed his instructions promptly and exactly. He jumped up; he took Mary and Jesus; he fled Bethlehem with them (notice they left while it was still night rather than waiting for the morning); and Joseph remained in Egypt until the death of Herod; a death which he learned about from that future communication promised by the angel, as we'll see shortly. Joseph listened to God's instructions, trusted him, and followed the instructions immediately and exactly. He also patiently waited for more direction from God in Egypt. And as Joseph related to God and his Word this way, God sovereignly protected Joseph and his family, accomplished his purposes, and simultaneously brought about the fulfillment of a prophecy made through Hosea; a prophecy recorded for us in Hosea chapter 11, verse 1:

***When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.***

When these words were spoken by the prophet, Hosea, hundreds of years earlier, they were likely viewed as simply a reference to how God had, in the past, rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

But we find out here that in reality these words had a significant prophetic application to the coming Messiah, who would do so much more than just rescue people from physical slavery to a human nation. Instead, this coming Messiah, whom God would call out of Egypt, would rescue people from spiritual slavery to the devil himself. And not only that, but this Messiah would be God's own Son! And in this strange turn of events that caused Joseph, Mary and Jesus' to flee to Egypt, God was fulfilling a prophecy that had likely been missed by many, and was providing a clue about what this child, Jesus, would do for those who would trust him! He would be a Redeemer: One who sets people free from slavery, as the Israelites had been set free from slavery in Egypt!

IV. SATAN'S INCREDIBLE EVIL IS REVEALED THROUGH HEROD'S SLAYING OF THE MALE CHILDREN AND HEROD UNWITTINGLY FULFILLS A PROPHECY (vs. 16-18)

Well, as Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt by night, things get ugly in Bethlehem and the lengths to which Satan will go in his attempts to fight against God, his people and his purposes are revealed. Let's read verses 16 through 18:

16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

***18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."***

It's hard to imagine the pain and suffering the mothers and fathers and other people in Bethlehem must have experienced as Satan used Herod to kill all the boys ages 2 and under. We can't even begin to imagine how awful and heart wrenching that must have been for the parents; the mothers were described as weeping and mourning greatly and refusing to be comforted! May we never have to experience something as painful this. And may we never forget that this is how

awful, dark, evil and brutal Satan is. There's a reason why he's called the prince of darkness! May we always be alert and vigilant and never flirt with him and his lies and promises of friendship and fulfillment if we'll just try out a few of his many God-substitutes. Always be on guard, my friends, because even those of us who have come to salvation through repentance and faith in Christ can still be led astray and used by Satan for his purposes.

May it also be a very sobering thought to us that so many people in the world today are unwittingly his slaves...his servants who often don't even realize that they're aligned with and being used by such an evil being...a being who, in a heartbeat, would once again do what he did through Herod back on this unimaginable day in Bethlehem, if it served his purposes. That doesn't excuse Herod, however, who was also completely responsible for his actions and made his own choices that led to the death of all these young boys. As we saw in our last message, Herod knew in his heart that this was the King of Kings, the Jewish Messiah, yet because of his own sin, selfishness and desire for power (the God-substitutes Satan had successfully pawned off on him), he chose to try and destroy the Messiah instead of aligning himself with him through repentance and faith. He fell for Satan's lies and it led him down the path to death, as sin always does.

But ultimately we also need to remember that people themselves are not the true enemy. Our ultimate battle is with the spiritual forces of wickedness led by the devil himself. He's the One who deceives people and leads them down the path to death. He's been doing it since the Garden of Eden and he does it well. In recognition of this reality, may we always relate to people as Paul instructed Timothy to do in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 24 to 26:

24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Be sober and alert and conscious of the fact that Satan traps people and holds them captive to do his will. All of us have fallen into one of his traps at some time

or other in our lives. Our goal should never be to fight against people when they're acting badly or when they're fighting against our faith in God, but instead to respond firmly but kindly with the truth, using God's Word to gently speak the truth with boldness; all the while praying that God will open their eyes and enable them to escape the trap Satan has caught them in.

Herod was definitely caught in the trap Satan had set for him and was being used in very ugly way to try and destroy God's only Son. Herod was much like another king, Pharaoh of Egypt, who earlier in history had also been used by Satan to try and destroy God's people. What happened here in Bethlehem was an echo of something that had happened when the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt and Pharaoh decreed that all the male babies of the Hebrews must be put to death to prevent the Israelites from multiplying so rapidly. At that time, God miraculously saved Moses from that death sentence and from Satan's efforts to destroy the one who would carry out God's rescue plan. Now God did it again by miraculously saving his only Son whom Satan was now intent on destroying. And as Satan mustered all his efforts to try and destroy God's Son, he failed as God knew he would; but not without causing some incredible pain and heartbreak and bringing about the fulfillment of another prophecy, this one recorded for us in Jeremiah 31, verse 15:

***Thus says the Lord,
"A voice is heard in Ramah,
Lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
She refuses to be comforted for her children,
Because they are no more."***

God knows all the details of the future, my friends, and all of his prophecies come true in his perfect timing. His Word can be trusted completely! Amen?!

V. GOD'S MESSENGER RETURNS AND TELLS JOSEPH WHAT TO DO NEXT (vs. 19-20)

Well, all of Herod's efforts to destroy the King of Kings and reserve power and control for himself were soon shown to be wasted effort...another lie of Satan that collapsed like a house of cards as they all eventually do. Herod was quickly

judged by God for the atrocities he committed as he died shortly thereafter. Let's pick up the account in verses 19 and 20:

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."

Herod died. He spent his last days destroying other people's lives in an effort to hold on to something that was impossible to keep...like trying to keep a snowman in 100 degree heat. Herod tried to kill the King of Kings so that he could maintain his rule of an earthly kingdom that was already destined to collapse in a very short period of time. Like all of Satan's lies, it evaporated before his very eyes.

Don't ever allow yourself to spend your life pursuing emptiness and building your hope in this life, which God describes as like the blooming of a flower: beautiful for a few days and then gone with the wind. In God's words given through Isaiah:

6 ...All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:6b-8).

Pursue God and learn to live life with him in pursuit of things that will last forever.

Well, when Herod died, Joseph soon found out about it, because that promised future communication from the angel came to him in another dream. As he slept one night in Egypt, an angel of the Lord appeared and said, "**Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel...**" Sometimes God calls in the middle of the night, and if he says, "Get up," go ahead and do it. I imagine it would probably be pretty hard to sleep anyway after an angel appears to you!

The angel also told Joseph that the reason it was OK to return to Israel was because those who wanted to kill Jesus were dead. It's interesting that the angel indicated that more than one person wanted to kill Jesus and that all those people were now dead. Clearly, opposing God's purposes and trying to snuff out the life of God's Chosen One isn't a safe place to be. As we learned recently in

Joshua, a healthy fear of the Lord is a good thing since the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. I don't know about you, but I don't ever want to risk having the face of Living God against me!

VI. JOSEPH FOLLOWS GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY AND PROMPTLY (v. 21)

So how did Joseph respond to this new communication from the angel? We find out in verse 21:

21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

Once again Joseph responds with prompt and exact obedience to the directions and commands God gives him through the angel. May we all learn to be like Joseph in the way we respond to God's guidance and direction!

VII. JOSEPH WAITS FOR FURTHER DIRECTION FROM GOD AND OBEYS WHEN IT ARRIVES, THEREBY FULFILLING ANOTHER PROPHECY (vs. 22-23)

Well, as Joseph, Mary and Jesus return to the land of Israel, some troubling information comes to light that causes Joseph to be afraid and wonder what to do next. Let's read what it was in our final verses for today, verses 22 to 23:

22 But when [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

As Joseph traveled back with his family toward Bethlehem, he heard the troubling news that Herod's son, Archelaus was now reigning over Judea after his father's death in 4 BC. Considering the lengths Herod had gone to in his efforts to kill Jesus, it was highly likely that his son had also been made aware of this King of Kings who threatened the kingly rule of Herod and his family. History tells us that Archelaus "was hated by the Jews and displayed the same kind of cruelty that had characterized his father's reign (*ESV Study Bible*). His treatment of the Jews eventually got so bad in fact that "Caesar Augustus, fearing a revolution of the

people, deposed and banished [Archelaus] to Gaul" (*ESV Study Bible*). For good reason, the idea of moving back to Judea where Archelaus ruled seemed highly risky to Joseph and he began to wonder what he should do.

But as we observe how Joseph handled this situation, we see another great example of godly behavior. Rather than just making an executive decision based on his fears and his common sense, Joseph waits for the Lord to show him what to do and God comes through with an answer. In another dream, God soon communicated to Joseph that his fears of Archelaus were justified and that he should settle in the district of Galilee instead of returning to Bethlehem in Judea. And notice that Joseph made this decision, AFTER God had communicated.

How often do we rush into really big decisions without consulting the Lord or seeking his direction? Or how often do we just rely on our common sense or our human desires as we make decisions throughout each day? Joseph shows us here the importance of seeking and waiting for the Lord's guidance rather than just rushing ahead based on our earthly fears, our personal desires or our own wisdom and limited perspective.

Well as Joseph walked with God this way, God led him to an obscure city called Nazareth; a place where nobody would expect a King to be raised. And guess what? In this move to Nazareth, another prophecy about Messiah was fulfilled. This time it was not from a specific chapter and verse of the Hebrew Scriptures, but rather from the predictions of a variety of prophets, especially Isaiah, that the Messiah would be despised and looked down upon because of his presumed ordinary and common background. Jesus, as we know, would be called Jesus of Nazareth, a city that even one of the disciples thought nothing good could come from.

When Jesus' disciple, Nathaniel, was called, listen to what he said about Nazareth in John chapter 1, verses 45 to 46:

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"...

And just as we've already seen today two parallels in Jesus' life to the way God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, we see another one here: As the Israelites were despised and looked down upon as slaves in Egypt, Jesus would be despised and looked down upon as a resident of that ugly city of Nazareth. In this third parallel, God was providing another clue that this Jesus was about to bring about a rescuing from slavery of eternal significance that would be the ultimate fulfillment of what was foreshadowed and pointed to through what God had previously done for the Israelites in Egypt. God was continuing to write his story and his plan of redemption in both the amazing and the seeming ordinary events of Jesus' birth and young life.

VIII. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So as we begin to wrap up today, I would summarize the key point of this passage of Scripture as this:

In the midst of the devil's evil schemes to destroy God's means of redemption and prevent the fulfilling of his promises, God actually used those schemes to bring about fulfillment of various prophecies, and he sovereignly protected Joseph, Mary and Jesus through it all as Joseph waited for, listened to and fully obeyed what God told him to do.

Only the one true God could accomplish all these things in the middle of the evil and sin and incredible complexities of life. God perfectly fulfilled his many prophecies about Jesus and he did it in the midst of, and even at times through, the relentless efforts of Satan and his pawns to destroy his means of salvation. God also echoed and fulfilled in Jesus' life various aspects of Israel's history that pointed to the eternal rescuing from slavery Jesus would make possible through his future work on the cross. As the Israelites were called out of Egypt, so was Jesus. As the male Israelite children were killed by Pharaoh to prevent the Israelites becoming strong enough to escape from slavery, so the Jewish boys in Bethlehem were killed by Herod to try and prevent the One who would bring freedom from slavery from accomplishing that mission. As the Israelites were despised as slaves in Egypt, so Jesus was despised as a person of no repute from Nazareth.

Could all of these and the many other parallels we'll see as we move through the gospels, have lined up through random chance and accident? Could Jesus have perfectly fulfilled hundreds Old Testament prophecies by mere coincidence? Not on your life. The One true God is real and alive and has been carefully writing his story through the events that we now call history!

So what are some ways we can apply this passage of Scripture to our lives today? Well, we've already hinted at several applications as we've moved through the message. But I want to review and highlight several tangible applications as we close. First of all, don't ever underestimate the evil, darkness and brutality of the devil, the prince of darkness. He's not your friend. He's not anybody's friend, though he likes to pretend to be. He's truly prowling around looking for someone to devour and he will do anything, no matter how horrific, to try and destroy God's people, his plans and his means of redemption. We don't need to be afraid of him though, because God is on our side and our eternal life with him is secure if we've trusted Christ. But we do need to always be alert and aware that Satan is on the move and is actively seeking to catch us in his trap and take us captive to do his will. Life is a spiritual battle and let's never make the mistake of forgetting that crucial reality!

I'm certain we can all think of people, even those who seemed to be strong believers in Christ, who took the bait of Satan and were taken captive to do his will. How does this happen? Well, it usually happens when we allow sin or sinful attitudes to creep into our lives and take up residence there, rather than recognizing them, owning them and repenting of them. It can also happen when we begin to see people as the enemy and start doing battle with them instead of the devil. These things can start small, but if allowed to remain, they quickly grow and fester and eventually blind us to the truth and lead us way off track from God's purposes.

In the choices we make and the way we treat people and deal with issues in our relationships and lives, we need to be constantly talking with God and asking him questions like these: How can I glorify you in this situation? Is the way I'm treating this person the way you would treat them? Is what I'm devoting my time and energy to, accomplishing any purpose that's important to you? In my thought life am I taking captive those thoughts that are out of step with who you are and are being whispered to me by the devil or coming from my own sinful desires? In

asking questions like these, we can begin identifying the lies of Satan and replacing them with God's truth found in Scripture. We can repent in those areas where we've gotten out of step with God's purposes. And we can call out to God to set us free from believing the lies and teach us to recognize them before they take root.

This passage of Scripture also provides us with at least a couple of clues as to how to overcome evil, recognizing Satan's lies and following God's truth instead. One thing that stood out to me was how important it is to know, study and fill our minds with God's Word; paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place (see 2 Peter 1:19). In this passage I was reminded of the importance of really taking the time and putting forth the effort to really get to know Jesus as he is. Think about this: Jesus was born in Bethlehem, yet was called out of Egypt, and was also from the city of Nazareth...each of these facts about him fulfilling different prophecies. Had the Jewish religious leaders really been serious about considering if Jesus was truly the Messiah, it seems like they should have done their research on where Jesus was actually born, rather than just assuming he was born in Nazareth since he had been raised there.

It also would have been easy to miss that prophecy from Hosea about God's Son coming out of Egypt, as well as easy to miss the obscure fact that Jesus' lived in Egypt as a child. This is a reminder that if you want to know who Jesus really is, you need to put some effort into it, spend some serious time with him and ask some questions. Don't just talk about yourself all the time! Immerse yourself in God's Word and seek him continually in prayer. Ask him to teach you who he really is and how you can be like him as you read his Word. Learn to listen and put into action what you hear!

And secondly, Joseph's example in these verses teaches us the best way to avoid the tricks and schemes of the devil and stay on track with God's purposes. Joseph, as we noticed, was very willing to wait patiently for God's guidance, listen to it carefully and then follow it completely. He didn't rush ahead based on his own wisdom and common sense. This is so important for us as well if we want to keep from falling into Satan's traps. May we, like Joseph, learn to seek God in ALL our decision making and not just rush ahead thinking we've got it all figured out and don't need his help on this one! And when God gives us direction and teaches us in his Word (which he promises to do as we diligently seek it), may we be

willing to listen carefully and humbly follow what he tells us to do! There's no better way to deflate Satan's lies and avoid getting caught in his traps than to keep that continual seeking of God going throughout each day and to be willing to wait for and then follow God's guidance and direction even when it may not be what we had hoped for!

Let's close in prayer today, and then we'll celebrate Communion together, remembering what Jesus eventually did on the cross to redeem us...setting us free from slavery to sin and the devil through simple repentance of our sin and faith in his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.