

Christ's Reproach

Matthew 2:13-23

20 July 2003

Introduction

Nothing demonstrates the vileness of this world and the abject depravity of the human soul more than the way the Son of God was treated when He came into this world to redeem us.

- What dishonour He met with!
- Here was our Creator, come to redeem us!
 - What respect!
 - What worship!
 - What honour!
 - What welcome!
 - What adoration He should have met with—
- But instead he was despised and rejected from His birth...
 - How malignant is the human heart!
 - We did not want to be redeemed.
 - We did not want to be reconciled to God.
 - We love our idols...
 - We love our rebellion...
 - We are so committed to it that we cannot bear to have a Saviour come to deliver us out of it.

Jesus, who should have met with the warmest reception...

- with the highest respect and honour—
- was given nothing but a cattle stall for His cradle.

And Matthew 2:13-23 shows us how He was treated in His early childhood.

- It shows how the malice of Herod, the king of the Jews, raged against Him and sought earnestly to destroy Him...
 - “Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him!”
- Here is what sin does to us!
 - Here is the man who was the representative of God's people—
 - How sad it is that he represented them so well.
 - Here is man in league with Satan, the murderer from the beginning!
 - He cannot bear to have the One who came to bring him out of sin...

- What could be more vile and despicable than that!

But look at yourself!

- Perhaps you find this same disease in your own soul!
 - Do you want Jesus, to save you when...
 - you are nursing the wrongs that were done to you, do you want to be delivered from your bitterness?
 - or when you are cherishing some sinful desire, do you want Him to come and save you from that?
 - Children, when your parents asked you to clean your room,
 - do you want Jesus to come and call you to love your parents and do your work cheerfully for them...
 - do you want His grace to change your attitude, or would you rather that He left you alone.
- If you are like that, you are like Herod...
 - You do not want a Saviour...
 - You want Jesus out of the way!
 - You do not honour Him or welcome Jesus—
 - You want to destroy Him.
- I tell you, if this is so with you, you need to repent!
 - He is ready to forgive you if you will repent and turn to Him...
 - And Christian, how gracious He is with you to forgive you when there are so many times that you try push Him out of the way too...
 - This is nothing but that ancient malice of Satan—you learned it from him!
 - There is nothing he desires more than to stomp out Jesus Christ from the world.
 - Satan has taken the human race as his partner to rage against the Son of God.

And do you know what makes this all the worse?

- When Jesus is rejected like this, instead of being appalled at the injustice of such treatment—
- It becomes a stumbling block to God's covenant people!
 - They see Jesus rejected, and they say—
 - Can this really be the Messiah?

- Now I have told you before that Matthew writes in particular to the Jews...
 - And what was it that made them stumble?
 - It was the cross—
 - It was that the Messiah should suffer and be crucified!
 - But in Matthew 2, Matthew shows us that this is precisely what the prophets said would happen...
 - They spoke freely and frequently of the sufferings of Christ, not just of the glories that would follow.
 - He shows how God is all along the way working out His plan for His Son and that nothing happens apart from His will.

TRANS> So Christian...

- be comforted by what Matthew says to us here!

I. First of all, look at how God is seen graciously protecting His Son against all the murderous designs of Satan.

A. Just look at how He guided the Magi and Joseph so as to ensure that Christ should not be taken before the appointed hour!

1. You remember how the Magi came from the east to bring their homage to him...
 - And how Herod asked them to come and tell where Christ had been born so that he might worship Him also—
 - They had believed Herod, but all he really wanted was to know where he was so he could kill him.
 - Verse 12 says that God warned the Magi in a dream not to return to Herod, with the result that they departed for their own country by another way!
 - It was not time for Christ to be taken!
 - Conceivably, if they had returned to Herod and told him where Jesus was, Herod would have immediately destroyed Him!
2. And then in verse 13, we see how God directed Joseph also.
 - We are told that Joseph, the father of Jesus, is warned by an angel to take Christ and flee to Egypt in order that Herod might not destroy Him.
 - In verse 16, we are told what would have happened to Jesus!
 - Herod's malice is so great that he murders all the boys at Bethlehem—
 - and just to make sure, he not only includes the surrounding region—

- but also includes the boys up to two years old, even though Jesus was probably less than six months at this time.
 - Without mercy, he sweeps wide, just to make sure he hits his target!
3. But praise be to God, Herod and Satan and all his forces cannot touch Jesus Christ because His time has not yet come.
- a. Do you realise how important God's protection of Jesus is to you?
 - There would be no Saviour for the world if God had allowed Him to be destroyed at this time.
 - b. Here is comfort—Satan in all his malice cannot put the smallest scratch upon the church unless God gives Him leave to do so.
 - Let him muster all his forces and all his wit, but it will be to no avail.
 - He cannot destroy God's salvation!
 - c. And beloved child of God, this is true for you too!
 - God has preserved this Saviour for you, and He also preserves you in the Saviour if you are His.
 - Let Satan come and try to tear you away from Christ,
 - Let him come with his lies to try to lure you away from Him,
 - Let him try to deceive you and bring you into error—
 - God will guide you away from danger if you truly belong to Him.
 - And like Joseph and the Magi, you will hear and Christ will not be taken from you.
 - God will guide you with His word to steer you clear of the danger!
- B. See how God makes a way of escape so that you might continue with Jesus and Jesus with you.
1. God had prepared a place of refuge in Egypt for Joseph and Mary with the child Jesus.
 - God had used Egypt before for such purposes—when famine came to the land in the days of Jacob and his sons—
 - And God sent the boy Joseph there to prepare the way for all the sons of Jacob.
 - It could not be that Jacob and his sons would perish in the famine because Jesus Christ was to come from their seed.

- And so it happened again in Jesus' infancy that Egypt, the house of bondage, became a place of refuge for the precious seed of Abraham who was destined to save the world.
 - God can make a refuge for His people anywhere!
 - There are times when for their own safety they are driven from the church and the ordinances of God's worship for a time in order that Christ might remain with them...
 - How many dear brothers and sisters do we know who have had to leave churches for their own spiritual safety because Christ-destroying heretics had come to try to destroy Christ in those places?
 - John warns us to flee from idolatry, and how often it is the case that idolatry comes right into the churches.
 - Did the protestant reformers not have to flee from the idolatrous Roman church in their day?
2. And see how God provided for them to go to Egypt in a very practical way!
- a. Mary and Joseph were a poor family, but the Magi came bearing precious gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
 - With these, the little family could afford to make the journey...
 - b. And see the timing—
 - God did not immediately alert Herod to the Christ's presence,
 - but waited until Mary had had sufficient time to recover from delivering the baby Jesus to make the journey.
 - c. When God calls, He always provides the means and the way.
 - How gracious He is to those who want to do His will to provide for their safety, to ensure that Christ is not taken from them!
- C. But look also at how God provided for their safety to return to Israel again!
1. It would not do for Christ to remain in Egypt; He was sent to minister to the lost sheep of Israel.
 - So God brought an end to Herod as you can see in verse 19-20
 - READ v. 19-20.
 2. But at first it seems a little strange because Joseph obeys and returns to Israel only to find that Herod's son who was just as cruel as Herod is ruling in Jerusalem.
 - a. But once again, God is seen guiding Joseph to safety, only this time he is sent to Nazareth, where Luke tells us Christ grew up.

TRANS> But this is a little puzzling.

b. We might ask the questions—

- How was it that Joseph was told that it was safe to return when Herod's wicked son was ruling in his place and the danger was still present?
- And why was it that he was ever told to go to Egypt if it was safe to go to Nazareth?

c. It would be enough to say that God ordered it this way and surely had His reasons,

- but in this case, we have access to some historical information that explains it all...
- You see, when Herod the Great was king,
 - he had jurisdiction over Jerusalem, Samaria, and Galilee—
- But at his death, the kingdom was divided into three portions and given to three of his sons.
 - And in God's gracious providence, the son who was ruler in Galilee (where Nazareth was) was a very mild man who would not seek to destroy Jesus the way Herod did and the way Archelaus would.
 - So you see how God raised up rulers according to His will to provide a place in Israel for His Son.

TRANS> How God loves His Son and how He protects the relation of His Son to His people!

- He steers His people to safety!
- He provides for His people a refuge where they can remain with Christ!
- He raises up and puts down kings in order to guard their salvation!

II. But God's protection does not mean there will be no suffering for His Son.

- **This very same passage that shows God's protection of Him also shows that He must suffer and bear the cross.**

A. You know that He came into order to give His life a ransom for many—but this was the great stumbling block for many of the Jews.

1. You know that it was God's will that He should be crucified for us.

a. This was the only way that we could be forgiven!

- Our sin made us offensive and odious in God's eyes, and completely unfit for anything but His judgement.

- But together God the Son and God the Father devised a plan that all that judgement should fall on the Son instead of His elect people!
- b. Another way to say it is that God the Son went to Hell for His church.
- When He went to cross, He bore the curse of God against sin for all His people.
 - All our iniquities were laid on Him.
 - He came to go to Hell for us.
 - We are careless when we speak lightly of Hell—
 - And say that this or that was like Hell—
 - It is true that we taste the wrath of God here on the earth in our afflictions...
 - But we have no idea what Hell is like—
 - the Bible strains to find language to express it—
 - the Lake of Fire,
 - The place of outer darkness where the fire is not quenched and worm does not die;
 - Gahanna, a garbage dump;
 - A place of eternal punishment.
 - This is what Jesus suffered for every member of His body—all that would be saved from the Old Testament times until the end of the world...
 - The weight of all our sins were laid on Him!
 - He went to Hell for us!
 - It was God's will that He should do this.
2. And you see in Matthew that His suffering and His humiliation began as soon as He came into the world...
- a. I'm not talking about His humiliation in the fact that He who was the Son of God became man—
- but I am talking about the way He was treated by us after He came.
- b. Here was this great one, coming to save us—and we did not esteem Him!
- 1) He should have had the finest palace in the land, with faithful attendants and servants all around Him...
- You think that you are unappreciated—

- Here was the One that God sent not only to rule the world, but also to redeem the world!
- 2) And what was His situation?
- There He is, having to flee to Egypt for safety, driven from the land of Canaan that God had promised to His people.
 - There He is, with a decree issued by king Herod intended to eliminate Him from the earth before he was even two years old.
 - There He is, returning to His own land only to live on the edges as a despicable Nazarene—
 - for to call someone a Nazarene was to call them rude and despised.
 - It was not a place where kings were expected to live.
- c. What kind of treatment is this for the Son of God who came to save His people from their sins?
- Could this really be the Messiah?
 - Could it really be that today He is found not in the great cathedrals of the world, but in disciples that are scattered here and there in churches that are hardly noticed by the world except to sneer at?

TRANS> But the Holy Spirit shows us something very remarkable about His sufferings in Matthew 2...

B. He shows us that His suffering are related to His people's sufferings throughout the ages...

- That their suffering throughout the ages are cut out of the same cloth as His.
 - That He is connected with His people in bearing reproach.
1. We are called to be crucified with Christ!
- a. There has to be a death to sin, and it has to be a shameful death.
 - Crucifixion is the death of a criminal—it is a death of shame and reproach.
 - b. What this means is that God has to do whatever it takes throughout your life to bring you to confess your sins—and into a deeper confession of sin.
 - You are very much alive to sin and the way you die to it is by faith in Jesus who died on the cross.
 - You have to see yourself, the criminal, hanging on that cross and realise that Christ was put there for you.
 - You have to be able to say, “I was wrong, I deserve that!”

- c. But you know that it is not that easy for us to say this...
 - And even after you do, you still need to come more fully to terms with it.
 - To help you do that—to strengthen your faith, God calls you to bear the cross...
 - He calls you to die daily...
 - He calls you suffer reproach with Christ.
 - To bear the rejection of a sinful world for His sake—the same rejection that He had to bear.
 - Do not be ashamed brethren, this is God’s plan through the ages.
 - Take up your cross with cheerfulness...
 - As Paul said, that I might know the fellowship of His suffering.
2. All though the Bible, you see God working to humble His people and bring them to a true confession of their sins.
- a. God made all those wonderful promises to them about giving them an inheritance in the land of Canaan.
 - Here, He would dwell in the midst in His gracious ordinances, and they would live under His laws.
 - But to prepare them for that,
 - He first sent them to Egypt for 400 years where they went because they could not keep alive in the famine, and where they became slaves under cruel oppression.
 - God was crucifying them by sending them to Egypt...
 - He was making them feel their death and their bondage so that when He redeemed them and brought them to the land, they might give Him the glory.
 - They had to die before they could come into the land.
 - They had to be crucified before they could obtain God’s inheritance.
 - To give up on self and turn to God alone.
 - b. And as the years rolled by and they forgot that God had redeemed them and that they were nothing in themselves, they had to be crucified again.
 - The humiliation started when the kingdom was divided and when God began to bring in their enemies against them more and more.
 - They were being crucified.
 - But the climax came when God spewed them out of the land and brought them into bondage in Assyria and them Babylon as captives.

- Once again they were crucified and they learned that only God could resurrect them.
 - And God did, but only after they had been crucified.
 - One of God's promises was that He would multiply them, but they were reduced to almost nothing.
- c. And then there was the reproach that they had to bear in every age.
- God had promised them glorious dominion over all the earth,
 - But even after they returned from captivity, they remained under the rule of foreign nations.
 - When Christ came into the world, there they were, living under the thumb of the Romans.
 - Once again, God was teaching them about the cross.
 - There could be no reigning until there was crucifixion.
 - They had to die to their sins before they could reign.
3. In this passage, Christ's sufferings are tied together with the sufferings of His people.
- a. Look at verse 15!
- It says that Jesus fulfilled the exile of Israel to Egypt in His exile to Egypt.
 - Israel had gone to Egypt to taste death when the land of Canaan had been promised to them—
 - But now Jesus Himself was driven from Canaan to abide in Egypt—away from the temple and its ordinances, away from the glorious worship of God at Jerusalem.
 - Only, Jesus fulfilled Egypt for us—
 - He, as the Son of God who came to represent His people, had to be exiled for us.
 - We were not truly crucified—or not sufficiently crucified—in Egypt, but He fulfilled it for us!
 - He did what we could not do.
- b. Look again at verse 17-18
- Jeremiah very graphically depicted the agony of the captivity by referring to Rachel, Jacob's wife who bore to Him Joseph and Benjamin.
 - She very much desired to have children—

- She is the one who cried out to Jacob, saying,
- “Give me children or I die.”
- And it was in giving birth to Benjamin that she died and was buried near Ramah which was just outside Bethlehem—
 - This territory was probably one of the surrounding territories that Herod included when he ordered the infant boys to be slaughtered.
- Well when Jeremiah in his day saw the Babylonians gathering the captives at Ramah to prepare them for deportation to Babylon,
 - He thought of Rachel whose tomb was there and how passionate she was for her children.
 - And he speaks of her as the representative of all the mothers who were weeping as their sons were carried off to Babylon—and as many others had been slaughtered.
- Now Matthew picks up on this when Herod had slaughtered the children at Bethlehem to get at Christ—
 - And he says, Jesus is the fulfilment of the Babylonian captivity—
 - It is the assault against Jesus Christ and the effort to destroy Him.
 - This is Israel’s captivity fulfilled—
 - This is when it finally accomplished for God’s people what needed to be accomplished!
 - the Messiah must be hunted down and carried out of the land for the sake of the people.
- c. And then there is verse 23— that Christ should be called a Nazarene.
 - This prophecy is presented more generally.
 - Matthew speaks of the prophets rather than the prophet;
 - and he omits the word “saying” because it is not a direct quote.
 - It is rather a general saying of the prophets that Christ fulfils...
 - That Christ will be called a Nazarene.
 - Now I have already explained that this was a term of contempt...
 - Even Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
 - The Son of God deserved to be at Jerusalem in a palace, but instead He was in Nazareth in a carpenter’s shop.

- This was brought out in the prophets when they said that Christ would be of lowly birth
 - In Isa 11—a root out of dry ground...
 - a similar word is used to refer to Him as a branch.
 - And in Isa 53 when it said that he would be despised and rejected among men, and that there would be no beauty in him that we should desire Him....
 - And in Psalm 22 where it said that He was a worm and not a man, and that people would heap scorn upon Him.
 - And so you see that instead of reigning as a king and having dominion and honour, He is called a Nazarene.

C. Christ had to fulfil all this for us because we are a sinful people.

1. It was because of our sin that He had to go to Egypt for refuge, to be driven from the land of Canaan, and to be called a Nazarene.
2. His rejection, as far as those in league with Satan were concerned—was because they could not bear to have a redeemer—they did not want to be saved from sin.
 - But His rejection as far as God was concerned was on account of His identification with the sins of His people.
3. And let me add to this that you who serve Christ today are called to enter into His sufferings and to be crucified with Him.
 - Truly, He has fulfilled all the suffering and crucifixion that God requires of us...
 - But because of our dullness,
 - because we are not so struck with the realisation that the Son of God had to bear all these things for us that we immediately die to sin—
 - God calls us to die daily and daily teaches us to bear the cross to humble us for our sins.
 - That is why it is that His true disciples are often must flee from apostate churches...
 - And why it is that they are often persecuted and brought into captivity...
 - And why it is that they are often despised and rejected even by their brethren in the church—and called Nazarene.

TRANS> So you see that Matthew shows clearly that suffering of Christ is not something to stumble about—

- to make you say—“Can this really be the Messiah?”
- It is all a part of God’s plan!
 - It was all prophesied of Him in the Scriptures.

But there is something more to see in the verses that Matthew quotes here—

III. In every one of them, the context is that though the difficulty is great, God is using it to bring life!

- **Yes! You are crucified with Christ in order that you might live!**
- **Christ was crucified in order that we all might live!**

A. The quotation in verse 15: “Out of Egypt have I called my son...” is taken from Hosea 11.

1. In that passage, God is expressing great love for Israel.

- Hosea 11:1-2: When Israel *was* a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. *As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images.*

2. Perhaps you remember Hosea and his marriage to an unfaithful woman named Gomer.

- Hosea’s love for Gomer illustrates God’s love for Israel
 - Just as Hosea had married Gomer—so God had married Israel
 - Just as Gomer had become untrue to Hosea— so Israel had been untrue to God.
 - Just as Gomer had been enslaved by her paramours, so the Israelites would be enslaved by those very nations in which it was putting its trust.
 - Just as in his tender love, Hosea had restored Gomer, so Jehovah would restore Israel’s remnant.

3. And so the message is that even though Christ must suffer and be sent to Egypt, God will bring Him out to inherit the land for us!

- God loves His Son and He will not leave Him in Egypt—even though He goes there with all our sins charged to Him...
- And He will not leave you there either—in that place of separation from God’s land—that place of bondage and oppression—if you are in Christ.
 - You will be brought to share with Christ in His glorious inheritance!
 - You may be called to suffer here and even to be excluded from God’s pure worship,
 - but you will inherit Heaven.

- God loves His Son and will not leave Him in Egypt.

B. And in the passage about Rachel in verse 18.

- This passage found in Jer 31 is also followed by a glorious promise!
- 1. When Matthew quotes these verses to the Jews to whom His gospel was directed, you must remember that they were very well taught in the Old Testament.
 - They knew the context—
 - Matthew did not need to quote a long passage to draw the connection in their minds to the glorious promise that followed Rachel’s tears.
- 2. They knew that after Jeremiah showed Rachel weeping and refusing to be comforted, the next verse (Jer 31:16) says:
 - Jer 31:16-17: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded,’ says the LORD, ‘And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future,’ says the LORD, ‘That *your* children shall come back to their own border.’”
- 3. The message is that the children are coming back!
 - This was like a hopeless death—they are no more—they were there on account of the nation’s sins—
 - but no! It is not the end!
 - God promises that He will bring them back!
 - And so it was for the covenant children of Bethlehem whose mothers wept!
 - Weep not, the one for whom they suffered is going to come and suffer for them—and though they have died that He might live, He will die that they might live!
 - Rachel, do not weep, your children will return to you again!

C. And finally there is the Nazarene—despised and rejected, bearing reproach.

1. How grievous it is to see how little regard is paid to Christ...
 - His word is despised and so are His disciples.
 - His worship is despised and so are His disciples.
 - They are reduced to obscurity in almost every nation.
2. But He will reign and His disciples will reign with Him.
 - a. In Psalm 22 where the deep rejection and humiliation of Christ is set forth—
 - Then there is that great turning point when he says, “You have heard me.”

- And then we are told of how all the nations are gathered to Him to serve God through Him.
 - The One that is despised and rejected is exalted to be king and head of all.
- b. Likewise, in Isa 11—it is that branch of Jesse—the root out of dry ground—that is said to be filled with the Spirit.
- And thus Christ the King is the source of Spiritual life for all who call upon Him.
 - He who was despised and deprived of earthly riches now has the treasure of the Spirit to bestow on all.
- c. Philippians 2 tells how the one who was despised
- and brought all the way down to the depths of crucifixion
 - is the same one that has been highly exalted and given the name which above every name,
 - that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

CONCLUSION

The picture in Matthew 2 is very bleak in one sense—

- Here is the Messiah of the nations having to flee from one enemy and another—living as a fugitive, living in exile, pursued with murderous intent, despised as a Nazarene.
- How wrong, how unjust all this is...
- What a stumbling block it is for God's covenant people—
 - How could it be that the Messiah should be lowly and rejected like this?
 - Is this really the Messiah?

But Christian in all this is the hope of the world!

- It is by His poverty that we are made rich!
- Christ bears reproach for us that we might live for Him!
 - The prophets have said so.