



### **Matthew 2:13-15**

**13** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord 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.”

**14** So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

**15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

There is a story that has been around for a long time. You have probably heard it but it is a story that is poignant to our message this morning. So, I'm going to share it, if you don't mind.

There was a small town in the Midwest, a farming community with quaint houses and pleasant folks that took care of their neighbors. Although the area was not prone to weather issues, warning devices were placed throughout the town to warn the community in case of an emergency. Just outside of town lived a farmer who had a wife and several children. He was very devout, loved the Lord and his family and was seen as an example of righteousness in his their community.

As the story goes, there had come a hard rain and the rain continued for several days. There came a time when the warning sirens went off and everyone was informed that the town was to be evacuated. The farmer, concerned for his wife and children, sent them out of harm's way to stay with her sister in another county. But he refused to leave. He thought it best to stay and protect his farm from possible looters. He told the people that recommended that he leave that God would protect and save him, if it came to that.

Well, the water began to rise and soon his front porch was under water. A neighbor pulled into his front yard with a raft and suggested that the farmer climb on board. But the farmer refused saying that God would take care of him and provide him with a way out if it was needed. So, he thanked the neighbor for his concern, turned around and climbed the stairs to the second floor of his home.

The water continued to rise and before much time had passed the farmer's second floor was submerged. He looked out his window to see a rescue craft. The people on the rescue craft begged him to jump from the window and swim to the safety of the boat. But he refused saying that God would protect him and provide him with a way out if he really needed one. The rescue craft left, and the farmer climbed up into the attic where he cut a hole in the roof and climbed out.

Once he was on the roof, he could see all the flooding was all around him. He still was not afraid because he knew that God would protect him. He noticed through all the clouds and rain, a helicopter as it approached his house. The helicopter dropped a ladder down to the farmer, but the farmer refused to climb into the helicopter. He shouted up to his rescuers that they needn't worry about him because God would save him if he needed to be saved. The helicopter flew away believing the farmer to be crazy, but they couldn't force him to climb aboard.

And so, the waters overcame the roof the farmer drowned.

When he got to heaven, the farmer was invited to meet with God, and this excited him. He saw this as an opportunity to find out why his faith had failed to save him and ask God why He didn't keep His promise. He said in a clear voice, "Heavenly father, I put my faith in you. I put my trust in you. Anyone in the town will tell you how devout and faithful I am. I don't understand. Why didn't you save me?"

**God smiled at the farmer with a patient smile that only God can muster while shaking His head back and forth and then responded, “You know, I sent you a warning siren. I sent your neighbor with a raft. I send a rescue boat. I even sent a fully equipped helicopter and you just refused to allow anyone to help you. Welcome to heaven.”**

**This is the last sermon in our series on The Angel’s of Christmas. The sermon is titled “The Angel of Warning” because God often attempts to show us the floods coming in our lives so that we can go in a different direction.**

**The Wise Men had a problem. Herod had wanted them to return with information regarding the exact location of the birth of the Christ Child. They did not feel like they could trust Herod. They could see that he had his own agenda. So, when God sent them a message in a dream that they should take a different route home, they did not hesitate.**

**Matthew 2:12 tell us, “And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” They could have ignored the warning, just like the farmer ignored the warnings in our story. But they were open to the possibility that God had a different direction and plan for their lives, even if they did not know all the ramifications involved. They**

stepped out on faith, into a message delivered by a dream and did as God directed them.

There's really a lot going here. Herod is extremely unhappy with this change of plans by the wise men. He also feels ridiculed by the fact that the wise men could see through his lies and deception. Not once does he give thought to the fact that God might be providing information and guidance to the people involved in this story to secure the safety of the Christ child. He feels his solution to this problem of securing his throne from the new king, is sure and fool proof. Since he doesn't really know who the Christ child is or who the parents are, he would just have all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding area, murdered. That should solve everything.

In Psalm 33 verse 10 we read, **“The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.”**

There is also an old Yiddish saying that translates this way “Men plan, God laughs.” And while this is true, what is happening here is no laughing matter. There are all kinds of wrong in this world. We are a selfish species, firmly planted in our own goals and based in the desire that the other person can have what they want... as long as we get what we want as well. That somehow, we are as equally deserving as the next person.

**But God doesn't see things that way and when we think like that, we are attempting to limit God to our values. God sees each and every one of us as individuals. Doesn't Jesus tell us in Matthew 10:29-31 "29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.31So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."**

**God is not in the comparison business. He sees you and each of our needs as unique. He does not quibble about one need being greater than another need. He knows what is important to each of us, and beyond that He intimately knows our every need; even the ones we don't know about.**

**One of the biggest problems that we need to overcome as humans is our expectation on how God is going to answer our prayers. Too often, we ask God to provide us with what we think we need to solve our problems rather turning our problems over to Him and waiting for His solutions. When that happens, we get tunnel vision and only watch for what we have prayed for rather than what God provides to fill our need. We don't see the answer to prayer when it sits right in front of our nose. If we are truly wanting God's protection in our lives, we need to live our lives in expectation of His guidance rather running to Him after the problem occurs. God will provide solutions to problems we don't even know we have, if we will only be open to His guidance.**

He may even give us multiple solutions over a period of time, just like the farmer in our story. But the solution that He provides may not be the one we are expecting. We need to be open and step into His input. He's not Santa Claus where we ask for a new car and find one in the driveway on Christmas morning. That is putting a human solution on a problem that we are expecting God to solve. It is telling God, "Here's my solution, I will drop a little money in the plate and then expect you to answer my solution." Treating God like some kind of vending machine.

Just how does God see and speak His message to us? Let's say that we lose our job. We are pounding the pavement looking for work anywhere we can find it. Then our car dies. Even with all the faith that we can muster, we worry about how we are going to take care of our family, how to put food on the table and keep a roof over everyone's head. God knows our condition. He knows our concern. He values us above every other creature on this planet. He sent His son to die for us. He sees our need. We believe this because we have faith.

God may tell us that we need to relocate.

God may provide transportation other than a car.

God might provide a job that we are unqualified for.

God might provide housing through a relative or friend until we can get back on your feet.

God might send neighbors with food to sustain us.

**God might use the situation to reposition us so that we are in a place where we are in a position to help someone else.**

**God might come to us in a dream and tell us to pack our bags and go in a different direction**

**The question that you need to ask ourselves is, are we willing to listen to God's solution to our problem even though it doesn't fit into the parameters of the solution we are expecting? If God provides a motorcycle when we are expecting a car, are we willing to see that motorcycle as the answer that God is speaking into the problem?**

**What if we can't even see the problem? Joseph certainly didn't know about the problem he was facing. He was still coming to grips with the mountains of change that life had brought him. I'm pretty sure he knew the nature of Herod and that his situation with Mary and baby Jesus could easily be compromised. But who could have foretold that another prophecy was about to be fulfilled? Jeremiah 31:15 tells us**

**"A voice is heard in Ramah,  
mourning and great weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more."**

**No one associated this prophecy with what was happening in Bethlehem until after it had happened. Remember what I told you about being on the other side of**



the miracle? The same is true of prophecy. We don't really recognize the importance of what is happening at the time it happens. We need to look back on it to see how God was working in our lives. It would be so easy to dismiss this passage of scripture in Jeremiah if we didn't have a specific reference to it in Matthew 2:16-18 telling us that this prophecy was specific to this moment in time. That this was prophecy fulfilled.

**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. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**

**18 "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."**

Mary Stevenson wrote "Footprints in the Sand" when she was a teenager. Life was extremely difficult for her. She survived the Great Depression and an abusive marriage and the loss of her son through the legal system. This version of the poem that I reference was written in 1939, but Mary to fight the legal system to prove her copyright. To this day, there are still problems with the copyright and there is no definitive copyright associated with the poem even there are multiple claims. The words to the poem say what I am trying to tell you much more succinctly than my words ever could. Unfortunately, I can't print the words here because of the copyright issues, but I encourage you to read the poem.

**The truth is, you can't see the footprints ahead of you, only behind you. And if you take the time to notice, you will see how God moved into and through your life providing solutions to problems you did not even know you had as well as the darkest times of your life that He carried you. Proof of His patience. Proof of His providence. Proof of His Grace. Proof of His Love.**

**Be open to the possibility that God has a solution for every question mark in your life. Watch for His answers, His solutions. Then take a look behind you to see in the sand those times when He walked beside you and those times when He carried you.**

**AMEN**