

Matthew Chapter 2 v 13 - 23

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn our Bibles now to Matthew in chapter 2. Matthew in chapter 2. The last few weeks we've been looking at the life of Joseph, Mary's husband, and how the Lord met with him and sent angels to him to go direct and guide him and help him. And so we're going to pick up from chapter 2 verse 7, but we're going to be particularly concerned with verses 19 and following. But just to give us again that sense of what's going on, we're going to read from Matthew chapter 2 beginning at verse 7 through to the end of the chapter.

Here is God's word to us today. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. 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. 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. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son. When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious. 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'd learned from the Magi. 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, refusing to be comforted because they are no more. 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, go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead. So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelias 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. He went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

[3 : 12] So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets. He will be called a Nazarene. Well, we're in Matthew in chapter 2, and as I said before, the last verses, verses 19 and following of the chapter, we look at the Lord's dealings with Joseph. Now we're very close, of course, to Christmas, and our thoughts are turning to the preparations and the celebrations and the visits and so on. And inevitably, of course, we're also thinking for that event that comes so close to Christmas just a week later, the New Year. And the two events, of course, Christmas and New Year, because they are so close chronologically, also seem to reflect in the way that we think about Christmas. So as you've sent out your Christmas cards, no doubt you've probably signed them, something like this, wishing you a very happy Christmas and a blessed New Year, or a Merry

Christmas and a Happy New Year. We combine the two together in our greetings of one another and in our thoughts as well. And of course, that's not just, I think, because of the chronology, not just because they are close together a week apart, but also as believers, when we think of Christmas, we think of something new, we think of a new beginning, we think of a new start, not just in the greatness of what Christ did in his coming into the world, this great new event, the beginning of the New Testament, the bringing in of the New Covenant, but also, of course, we think for ourselves of something new taking place. And that's what I want us to think about particularly, this sense of something new in the life of Joseph and in our own lives as well. Now, we'll be looking, as I say, at the angelic visits that Joseph received from the Lord during that period leading up to and following the very first Christmas. And we can see there's a very strong link, I hope, between Christ's birth and new beginnings, new starts. For Joseph, the visits of the angels had dramatic effect upon him. They brought great change and redirection in his life. They changed his thinking, they changed his journeying, they changed his whole future, of course, as well. They were crucial, life-altering events. And so, when we see this third event in the life of Joseph, we see again how God's Word comes to him with clarity, with understanding, and with relevance. So, what is happening to Joseph? What's crucial that God needs to speak to Joseph in this way that requires him to hear and obey God's Word? And as I say, Joseph is in this process of redirection. There's a time of upheaval in his life. And to be fair, of course, as we've seen all through the examination of Joseph's life that we've seen, it's been pretty much one of constant change.

Remember, all the way back when he was engaged to Mary, back in his hometown of Nazareth, his life has chopped and changed every few months since then. First of all, he finds out the news that Mary is pregnant and he knows he's not the father and he's in this great quandary for three months as to what he will do, deciding ultimately to have a quiet divorce. But then God speaks in, changes his whole thinking, shows him that this child to be born of Mary is not because she's been unfaithful, but because God is faithful and he's doing something wonderfully new. And so, off he goes, takes Mary to be his wife, and then off he goes, of course, to Bethlehem, journeying across the country to be registered at the emperor's command. There in Bethlehem, where there is no room in the inn, that she gives birth and a baby is born. And many of us know just how much life changes when a baby is born. It's never the same again. But then, off they go back to Jerusalem to offer the offerings that are commanded under the law of Moses, where they meet these two elderly prophets who announce future blessings upon the child. Then they're back to Bethlehem for a while, for a rest, until this band of wandering astronomers turn up with these gifts that we've read about here and visit them. And then, as soon as they leave, verse 13, there the angel comes again and says, you've got to flee, you've got to leave the country, and you've got to go to Egypt, you've got to escape from this mad, bad King Herod.

And so, at last, we catch up with Joseph and Mary and Christ's child. And they're in Egypt, and God is sending them yet another angel, sending his word again to direct them, for another change must take place. Now, I wonder if we can associate it all with Joseph. I hope that we've been able to do something of that as we've looked at these times when God has been meeting with him, times of great decision and choice, times when life is on the downward roller coaster, we thought last week, and here, where there is change, and where there is transformation and redirection in our lives.

Now, hopefully, we may not have known quite as many changes in so short a time, but the truth is that, for every one of us, our lives are in a state of flux. Every one of us, we find that our lives are full of change and alteration as we go on, day by day, week by week, year by year. Certainly, the world around about us is a world of change, isn't it? There's change in the political world, change in economics, changes in technology, not only to mention, of course, changes in the weather. We are surrounded by change. But those big changes, those universal changes, as it were, in the political scene and in the economic scene, they don't have all that much effect upon us. Certainly not as much effect as those things which many other people would see as insignificant. Those personal changes, those personal alterations and redirections in our lives, changes in our relationships, whether that be through bereavement, whether that be through breakup, whether that be through coming together, changes in our workplace, promotion, demotion, lack of hours, increase of hours, in our health, in the life of the church, of course, we've seen much change in these past several months, changes in our homes and so on. All around about us, we find that there is a redirection and there is change. So what can we learn from

[10:15] Joseph's experience here? Remember again that Joseph was simply a man of faith. He was a believer. Often when we look at these people in the New Testament and the Bible, we think they are exceptional peoples. They're different people. They're alien to us, but they're not. They're just ordinary men and women that God met with and dealt with and worked in their lives, just like you and I, if we are Christians this morning. And what do we learn from what God has to say to him?

And God has to say, therefore, ultimately to us, because God's word is for all his people. Remembering that you don't need an angel to hear from God. God has spoken to us with something far more solid and certain in giving us his word. Well, the first thing that we have already recognized, what we need to see and understand is this afresh. Change is universal to everyone.

It's not just you. Everyone is subject to change, even kings. For verse 19, chapter 2 tells us, after Herod died. He was Herod the Great, that's who he's known as. He was king for 37 years. He rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. But as we saw last week, he was a ruthless man, a cruel man. He was paranoid that somebody might come and take away his throne. And so he killed his wife and two of his sons and anybody else who he thought might have got in the way. That's why he sent these soldiers to Bethlehem and that area to kill those boys under the age of two. He was a maniac.

But he did everything he could to guard himself, to prevent change, to not lose his throne. But in the end, he still died. So whether you're a king or a pauper, whether you're rich or poor, whether you're young or old, the fact of the matter is that we can't do anything to prevent change. I think that's a wonderful place to get to. That's one of the wonderful places that we need to be in, dear friends, if we are to know God's peace and comfort and encouragement. We need to accept the fact that life is changing and that we are changing in the world around about us and our lives is changing. We can surround ourselves with money. We can surround ourselves with family. We can surround ourselves with friendship, with all sorts of things. We can do all sorts of preparation for retirement and preparation for old age. All those things we can do, but they won't stop or prevent change from happening in our lives.

All of these things will fail. We have to accept the fact that we shall and must change. Somebody once said, change is here to stay. For Joseph, this change of circumstances, in one sense, to begin with, seem quite welcome because Herod, the one who we know had searched to kill the child, was dead.

- [13 : 14] The man from whom they had fled, the man who had filled his heart with terror and fear, was gone. And even though there's change which is welcome, and changes are welcome at times, aren't they?

There are good things that happen to us which change and bring change. It doesn't mean that that change is easy to adapt to. Even if it's good news, it doesn't mean that it's easy to adapt to. That's because, of course, we find, as we see here with Joseph, change uproots us. Change uproots us. Verse 20.

Here's what God says. Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel. So Joseph and the family had to leave Egypt and go to Israel. Now Israel, of course, was their home.

They were Jews. That's where they belonged. That's where they'd come from. That's where they lived all their lives up until that point. And it would have been, in one sense, good to be going home. But it still meant they had to move house again after just a matter of months being in Egypt.

We don't know how long exactly they were in Egypt. We don't know where they lived. We know nothing about what happened there. But we can be sure that Joseph would have had to find work so that he could earn money to pay rent and to feed the family.

- [14 : 36] Over the matter of the months that they were there, they would have almost certainly begun to have made friends and contacts. Perhaps they would have begun to settle into the community in which they had placed.

They'd been told by God just to go there, and they knew they'd be leaving, but they didn't know when. It could be months. It could be years before they'd have to leave Egypt. They began to put roots down.

Began to feel a little bit at home. It's amazing, isn't it, how quickly we can get used to something new and consider it the norm. As you know, Ange and I and the family moved up here ten months ago.

It seems quite normal for us to be in Whitby now. People who speak in Whitby sound quite normal now. It's quite astonishing how you get used to these strange dialects.

But it doesn't take long, does it? A tradition or a habit or the way that we live becomes firmly lodged in our minds. We begin to feel as if we've always done it that way.

- [15 : 38] Things have always been like this. You see, being in a rut is not a good thing. Somebody once described a rut in this way.

It's a grave with no ends. And we get into ruts so quickly and so easily. As churches, we do that so easily as well. We just have to do something once or twice.

And that's it. We've always done it that way. It's a tradition now. So it is in our own lives. You see, we need to be uprooted. We need to be taken out of the ruts that we find ourselves in.

And God does that by bringing about change and by redirecting our lives. It would have been easy for Joseph just to stay where he was in Egypt with a family.

Got a job probably. Made some community. They begin to settle down. But of course, that was not where God ultimately wanted them to be. And like us, God needs to uproot us.

- [16 : 40] And he needs to do it regularly. Because those ruts come around and are made very quickly. You see, the trouble is if we begin to live in a life which has no change and no uprooting, then something happens.

We begin to live as if this world is the only world we're going to live in. We begin to feel as if this life is the only life there is. We begin to become settled and comfortable.

As if we're meant to stay in this life and this world forever. As Christians, we are pilgrims. As Christians, we are travelers. Our home is not here in this world.

Our home is in heaven. When Peter writes his first letter to the Christians, he says to them, first of all in chapter 1, to God's elect strangers in the world.

And then later on in verse 17, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. We are just passing through this world. This isn't the end of the journey.

[17 : 43] This isn't where we are going to spend all of eternity. We are temporary residents. That's the sense of the word that Peter's using when he speaks of strangers. We are people just here, in all sense, putting up our tent, but getting ready to move on.

We're from a different country. We're from a different place. We're living in this land now, but we are not of this land. That's how God's people have always viewed life.

That's how they've always understood what God is doing with them. Here's, again, this is the writers of the Hebrews speaking about the believers of the Old Testament. He said this, I wonder, dear Christian, do you feel that way?

Do you feel that way in this world at times? This is not where I'm meant to be, ultimately. Or even, perhaps, as Christians, we feel particularly that we don't belong.

We feel out of place. We feel as if this isn't really comfortable and homely. Do we feel as if we're headed on a journey to something better and more permanent and glorious?

[19 : 14] Or do we, as we easily do, dear friends, slip into the ways of this world? Slip into the lifestyle of this world and the thinking of this world?

Do we begin to live as if this world and here and now is all there is to live for? You see, this world is passing. It's temporary. Herod died.

37 years he'd been building his kingdom and establishing his throne, but he's still dying. And you and I, even in the ordinary sense of things, are only here for a short time before we too must die.

But, dear friends, if we live for heaven, if we live for eternity, if we live for the riches that are to come, the treasures that God has provided for us, then we can't hold too tightly to the things of this world.

We can't treat them as if they are the be-all and end-all. We can't be building up a kingdom for ourselves here. There is something that is much more lasting.

[20 : 16] And so we need uprooting. We need to be stirred up by God. We need him to bring change to move us. But also we need those changes as well to keep us fit and healthy as Christians.

See, one of the things that happens is that when things are comfortable, when things are just constant, if I can put it that way, when there is no rippling of the water, when there is no stirring of the sea, then we find ourselves becoming very lazy in our faith.

Because we're not being tested. We're not being tried. We're not having to exercise trust in God daily. Tomorrow will be just the same as today. We have no worries or anxieties.

When life is easy, when there are no changes in our routine, then we become lazy in prayer. Become lazy in reading the scriptures. We become lazy in looking to the Lord for grace.

We just tend to get into this cycle of same old, same old. Before we know it, dear friends, our life, our spiritual life and our walk with God is dull and drab as well.

[21 : 22] God needs to stir us and to move us. He needs to send redirections and changes in our lives so that we will seek Him in prayer, so that we will trust in Him, so that we rely not upon our own resources, but that we will rely upon Him.

So when God uproots us, when God lifts us out of the rut, as it were, we're thrown once more upon Him. We're forced to exercise faith in His promises and faith in His goodness and in His grace.

When all is easy, when all is settled, so easy to be forgetful. And so that's why we find with Joseph, of course, that when God brings those changes, when He brings a redirection, when He calls us to go another way, then we find that we are unsettled.

Change is unsettling. That's certainly how Joseph must have felt, unsettled, as he left Egypt to return to Israel. We know that he was concerned because we read there, he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

When he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. He was unsettled. He's anxious. He's worried.

[22 : 40] Yes, Herod was dead. That's fine. He was Herod the Great, the terrible, bloodthirsty man. But, unfortunately, his kingdom was divided between three of his sons.

Philip and Antipas were up in the northern area, over Galilee and Aituria. But the largest part, which was Judea, Jerusalem and the southern area, that was under the rule of Archelaus.

And he was just as ruthless as his father and had a reputation of being just like him. No wonder Joseph wasn't sure what to do next. Just think back.

Back to Nazareth. If you went back to Nazareth, everybody knew who Joseph and Mary were. The couple who'd had a baby out of wedlock.

They knew what they were like. They knew all about them. They knew how they'd had to run off, in one sense. Not quite eloping, but everything wasn't quite right. They'd have to go back and face those people again.

[23 : 48] Wouldn't it be nicer if they could go back to Bethlehem, where they'd lived for those several months after Jesus was born, where they'd got friends. People didn't know them so well, but at least they had community. Where's he to go?

What's he to do? We can be unsettled when change comes. No wonder he doesn't know what to do.

No wonder he's unsure. But again, as we've seen week by week, Joseph wisely waits upon God to direct him. He wisely trusts that God will show him the way and lead him as he does there, having been warned in a dream, withdrew to the district of Galilee.

God speaks into our uncertainty as we wait upon him, as we look to him, as we trust in him, as we set before him the future.

He is pleased to make known his will to us. Don't think, dear friends, that guidance from God is a matter of sort of drawing the shortest straw, or eenie, meenie, minie, moe.

[24 : 54] When we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, when we seek to follow him, he makes the way clear for us. He opens the paths for us. He speaks to us in his word. The problem that we have, each one of us, is this, is that we're impatient.

We jump. We think we've got to do it now. We think we've got to make our minds up now. We think that if we forestall, he who hesitates is lost. No, it's not the case.

The Christian waits on God. The believer trusts in God. God speaks to Joseph words of comfort. The one who seeks your, the child's life is dead.

That's good. But get up and go. Get up and go. Then he goes. Then he moves. Then he acts. Don't be afraid when God unsettles you, dear friends.

Don't be afraid when he unroots you. Don't be afraid when he shakes things up a bit. Because into that, God speaks. The people who are seeking the child's life are dead.

[26 : 00] In one sense, he's assuring Joseph, you've got nothing to fear anymore. You're safe in my care. And so Joseph goes back to Galilee, where the story all began.

In one sense, we could look at this, these three episodes in the life of Joseph, couldn't we, and say, hold on. He started in Nazareth. He's back in Nazareth. Hasn't he just gone around in a big circle?

Hasn't it all been pointless? He's gone off and had these adventures, and he's gone off to Bethlehem, and he's gone off to Jerusalem, and he's gone off to Egypt, but now he's back in Nazareth again.

What's changed? His life has just been one endless circle. No, it hasn't. At the very least, we see that Joseph is now a man of mature faith.

At the very least, he has become a man who has tested and tried the Lord God and proved him faithful. Nothing that happened in his life was fruitless or worthless, and so it is with us.

[27 : 12] You may feel that your life is just cyclical, going around and around in a circle, going to work in the morning on Monday, coming home on a Friday, going to work and coming home, going to church on a Sunday, just going around and around.

Life is just going around in a circle. Nothing really is happening much. Maybe even feel as if our life is meaningless and directionless.

Yes, changes come, bumps in the road come, but we're still going around in circles. You see, dear friends, when we are children of the living God who has an active interest and involvement in our lives, then though we may go around in circles, like the ramp on a multi-story car park, we're going upwards.

We may be going around in circles, but by rising up, we're growing in faith, we're growing in the knowledge and the love of God, we're growing in our service of him, and of course we're going heavenward and homeward.

Yes, change is universal to us. Uprooting is often unsettling, but above all, dear friends, as we see here in the life of Joseph, a simple carpenter from the north, God dramatically redirects us to fulfill his purpose and plan, ultimately for the salvation of men and women.

[28 : 31] Notice how he closes. He went and lived in a town called Nazareth, and here's Matthew's comment, so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets. He will be called a Nazarene.

Matthew's not quoting from one prophecy in the Old Testament, as he does with the others, where he quotes from Jeremiah and he quotes from Isaiah from one prophet. He says from the prophets. He's taking together the general sense and theme of the teachings of the prophets about the Christ who would come, that he would be one of lowly birth.

You see, Nazareth was the backwater of the north. I won't say what it's like here. You probably will know of some place like that, but it's the place where Nathaniel was able to say, can anything good come from Nazareth?

It was a despised place, a lowly place. The Messiah who was coming, Isaiah chapter 53, tells us we'll be despised by men. But Jesus owned that title, Nazarene.

He called himself Jesus of Nazareth. His disciples were known as the followers of Jesus of Nazarene. He's the one who is with the despised. He's the one with the outcast.

[29 : 50] He's the one who comes from the nowhere place. You see, he had to come from the nowhere place because he was coming for the nowhere people.

He wasn't coming for the kings. It wasn't Jesus of Jerusalem. It was Jesus of Nazareth. It wasn't Jesus of Rome or Athens or Cairo.

Jesus of Nazareth. He was coming to fulfill the salvation of sinners, of the ordinary people, of the outcast people, of the nobody people. He was coming in humility and condescension.

And how could he come and fulfill that purpose except that he was in Nazareth? All of God's purpose and plan in bringing Joseph to Nazareth was so that he should fulfill his purpose for the savior of sinners.

What God has been doing in your life and mine, dear friends, in bringing us through those times of change, of redirection, where things have been unsettling, is this. He's not only been bringing us to salvation, but he's been bringing about in us salvation.

[30 : 59] In other words, he's been working out his salvation in our lives to mature our faith, to cause us to grow. But, I believe this more than anything else, that God has directed and led you, dear friends, and brought you through times of unsettlement, that you might be part of God's salvation plan for others.

Where he has put you, he has put you that you might be his witness and his testimony and his gospel. No matter where that is, no matter how you've come by that place, no matter how difficult it may be at times.

Here's Paul in Philippians chapter one. This is Paul writing from prison in Rome. What does he say? I hate prison food. No, he doesn't write about that.

He says, Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me in being in prison has really served to advance the gospel. Isn't that marvelous?

It's served to advance the gospel. Dear Christian friends, the purpose that God has saved you for is yes, that you might be in heaven with him and he might keep you until that day that you enjoy the delight of seeing his face.

[32 : 13] But the reason he has kept you and is continuing to work in you and to redirect you and to change you and to alter your life is that you might be able to be part of his advancement of the gospel.

Who is going to hear the gospel in your street except from you? Who's going to hear the gospel in your school apart from you? Who's going to hear the gospel in your workplace, in your supermarket, in your care home, in your family?

who God has directed and led and taken and changed. It's because he has a purpose to advance the gospel and fulfill his purposes in you and through you.

Joseph, oh, he's the backstage boy, isn't he? Of the nativity. But in God's hand, he was the vital part that was moved and directed by God for the salvation of souls.

Let's sing, dear friends, then as we close with our final hymn. It's a hymn that reminds us again that we are in need of the Lord day by day, moment by moment, and that he is faithful.

[33 : 21] 5, 4, 6. I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord. 5, 4, 6. I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord, who tend the voice my mind, can be eternal food.

I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need thee, O mercy, now my Savior, I come to thee.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, may he equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory, now, tomorrow, and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. For betterolf me, Baba. Amen.

Mexicana. Amen.