

"The Broken World"

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the certain knowledge that the same Jesus Christ who was born in the manger in Bethlehem went on to accomplish what he came to earth to do, which was to make the full and complete payment for our sins. To God be all glory and praise. Amen.

Dear Fellow Servants of the King of kings, given the fact that "the Classics of literature" are growing ever smaller in the rear view mirror of modern education, I wonder how many are familiar with the story of Sisyphus. According to Greek mythology, Sisyphus was King of Corinth and was regarded as the cleverest of men. The "gods" resented his arrogance and eventually sentenced him to roll a huge bolder to the top of a long incline, only to have the bolder roll all the way back to the bottom before he could get to the top, at which point he would have to start all over again – forever.

The "Classics" were classic not because they represented cute or interesting stories, and certainly not because we actually believe in the "gods" there depicted, but because they gave timeless insights into the human condition. Sisyphus came to represent not only the frustration and futility of life, but the disappointment that will always result when the one true God is resisted. Imagine struggling with every ounce of your strength, stamina, and will-power to accomplish a goal that you always – at the very last moment – fail to reach. Imagine the bitter frustration of always getting close, but never succeeding.

That's the story of Sisyphus according to Classic Greek Mythology, but we turn that story on its ear with one simple sentence: Suppose Sisyphus was absolutely, thoroughly happy.

Suddenly the whole picture shifts – dramatically – doesn't it? The struggle remains, as does the apparent pointlessness, but everything else about the story is profoundly altered.

This is exactly how Christianity changes everything, and why the world will never get us. The Godless simply cannot comprehend peace and joy in the midst of hardship and frustration. This is ironic, of course, in that the world never makes it to the top of their mountain either.

This morning then, as we cling to the never-fading joy of that lowly birth in Bethlehem, we will contemplate some of the difficulties and frustrations with which Christians of all ages have wrestled – even while

they go about their work with peace and joy in their hearts. May the Holy Spirit bless our feeble efforts with a greater appreciation for our God and for the peace and joy of the salvation he has provided for us. Our text is found recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, the Second Chapter:

^{ESV} **Matthew 2:13-23** *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." ¹⁹ ¶ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

So far the inspired words of our God. *We rejoice, Heavenly Father, in your words, for they are truth, they are light, and they bring joy and comfort to us every day of our lives. So also we pray, "Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"* Amen.

You know well the events described in our text for this morning. You have probably heard from little on how the parents of the Lord Jesus had to travel to Bethlehem during the late stages of Mary's pregnancy. So also it does not sound strange to your ears to hear that not long after the baby was born the young family had to flee for their lives to a foreign country (Egypt) and that they lived there until the depraved king who sought to kill young Jesus had died. Nor are

we unfamiliar with the fact that upon returning to Judea (which is in southern Israel) they heard that Archelaus was reigning there in place of his father Herod and that Joseph therefore had to again change their plans. The young family finally ended up right back where they had begun, for they moved back to Joseph and Mary's original home in Nazareth, well to the north in Galilee. None of this is probably new to you, yet this morning we look at these facts from a little different perspective. Stop for a moment and think through the story again, and this time ask the question: "*Why didn't God...?*"

It is probably safe to say that there is no doubt in anyone's mind here today that God has the power and authority to do whatever he pleases. He cannot lie or otherwise sin, of course, for he is both holy and just and cannot be otherwise, but beyond that he has no limitations. It is with humble awe over against this fact that we ask our "*Why didn't God*" questions. It is in understanding that God could have done whatever he wanted to do that we inquire as to why he didn't do things differently. What things? Take a look again at our text. We can sort of understand the lowly birth in the manger, for although the King of kings and Lord of lords deserved far better, his humble birth signified that he was entering the world of his own creation as a servant to mankind, not as our judge. It was symbolic of the fact that he had set aside the full use of his divine power, and had emptied himself. His humble birth was in full keeping with the fact that he came to a sinful earth to wash us clean from our damning sins. His humble birth, we can see in hindsight, was therefore an appropriate display of our Savior's profound love and humility.

But what about the days and years *after* Jesus' birth? What about the drama and hardship experienced by his parents as they fled the country to escape the thug Herod? This was, after all, *God's Son*. In God's own words this was "***My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.***" And it was Mary and Joseph – the royal family. Therefore our first "*Why didn't God...*" is to ask, "*Why didn't God just end Herod's time of grace and spare this special family the hardships they faced?*"

We know, of course, that by fleeing to Egypt as they did (and by later moving to Nazareth) prophecies were being fulfilled. Yet we are wrong to assume that these things were done *because* of the prophecies. The prophecies concerning Jesus did not *dictate* his actions. They were descriptions of Jesus' actions given to man by the God who knows all things in advance. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus did not scour the Old Testament in an attempt to learn what they must do to fulfill every prophecy. The prophecies were simply glimpses from the life and times of Jesus, given to man before they ever took place. God the Father

knew well in advance that his Son would live a perfect life and then offer that life as the full payment for all sins. We know that he knew all of this beforehand because he promised the New Covenant already in the Old Testament, before Jesus was even born. Through Jeremiah he told us, "***Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.***" (Jeremiah 31:31 & 34b) This forgiveness of sins depended on Jesus' perfect sacrifice, thus God would not have promised such forgiveness had he not known beforehand of Jesus' certain success.

If, then, the flight to Egypt and the move to Nazareth were not required to fulfill a prophecy, then why didn't God just arrange the death of Herod and thus spare his dear Son those trials and hardships?

The answer is, as our sermon theme indicates, that *we live in a broken world*, and only God can know how to bring about his good will and pleasure in a broken world.

You are disappointed with that answer, aren't you? Maybe you were expecting some new and intriguing revelation that would help you to sort out some troubling issues in your life right now. On a certain level, I'm disappointed too, but that's the reality of the thing. We are human beings, not gods. There will always therefore be more things that we cannot explain than there are things that we can. In practical terms, that means that I will not be able to explain why one of my grandfathers lived to 104 while the other was taken home at 44. Why many fine Christians suffer while scoundrels enjoy perfect health.

We could speculate endlessly as to why God did what he did, or why he allowed what he allowed during his Son's life on earth. The simple fact is only God is capable of understanding the whole picture, the entire master plan. Only God knows how or why Herod's time of grace could not be ended until after the Royal Family fled to Egypt. The complexities of why this was necessary are well beyond our human understanding. A billion "if-thens" no doubt came into play. We don't need to guess at them. We don't need to know them. All that we need to take from these early trials on the part of Jesus and his family is an increased appreciation for God's love for sinners.

It is simply amazing to consider that God loved the world of rebellious sinners so much that he was willing to allow his own Son

to suffer hardships of every kind so that his plan of mercy and love would be carried out – individually and collectively. It would have been a very small thing for God to end Herod's life before Herod carried out his butchery of the babies in Bethlehem. In his infinite wisdom he chose not to do that. He allowed an evil man to carry out a hideous act of barbarity. What parent in Bethlehem in those days did not wonder why God allowed such a thing to happen to those precious little children? Put yourself into their shoes and consider how you would have felt. What sense would you have been able to make of such a senseless act of cruelty? Think of the ridiculous nature of Herod's evil. His actions are based on a divine prophecy concerning the birth of the Savior, and yet he imagines that he can somehow thwart God's will by his actions? Who can make sense of such things?

Now fast forward to the present. We see terrible things on every hand. We see pain and suffering of every imaginable sort, and so much of it seems so senseless, so avoidable. And yet through it all we still experience the loving providence of our God every day of our lives. His protecting hand covers us; his Precious Son intercedes for us; his Holy Spirit preserves and strengthens us. We cannot now see the big picture as does our God, but thanks and praise be to that God for making us a part of that picture – for he has declared us to be his own dear children through faith in his Son.

Do yourself a favor. Beginning right now – right this moment – acknowledge that the world in which we live is broken. Irreparably, irreversibly broken. It cannot be repaired, it can only be survived. We cannot right the world's wrongs. We cannot correct all that is amiss. In fact the devil would love it if all Christians worked themselves into a frustrated rage by spending themselves on such a futile endeavor. God has not only called us to different work, he has called upon us to be **"in the world, but not of the world."** This world will one day be rolled up like an old rag and burned in the fire. In the meantime we have been told to expect frustration, hardship, and disappointment. But, like Sisyphus, everything gets turned on its ear when we are told by our God that we can and should pass through this broken world with complete joy, peace, and confidence: Philippians 4:4-7 **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.** ⁵ **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;** ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.** ⁷ **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Paul then goes on: ¹¹ **I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.** ¹² **I know how to**

be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

What a great comfort to know that we can and should let God be God, trusting that he knows what he is doing. Rather than question our all-knowing God, we seek now to serve him unquestioningly – in good times and in bad – while we await the return of his Son. God grant us strength for the trials that lie ahead, comfort and joy in the forgiveness of our sins, and confidence in our final deliverance and victory. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV Isaiah 63:7-14 I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." And he became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. ¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, ¹² who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, ¹³ who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. ¹⁴ Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

ESV Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The First Sunday after Christmas – December 29, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 90 (Stanzas 1-4, 7-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 63:7-14) Our first lesson today reminds us that the time following the reception of gifts is the time for giving thanks. The greatest of all possible gifts has been given to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who entered our world to pay the debt that we owed because of our sins. Give thanks to the Lord our God, for surely he has been good to his people.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Supplement page 30) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Galatians 4:4-7) Paul here reminds us of the great gift we have been given through Jesus Christ – freedom from the slavery of sin, hell, and Satan. God sent his own Son to free us from the evil that had enslaved us, and he did so by sending Jesus, as this reading reminds us, *at just the right time.*

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 83 (Red Hymnal)

"Hark! What Mean Those Holy Voices"

The Sermon – Matthew 2:13-23 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Broken World"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 715 (Brown Hymnal)

"Where Shepherds Lately Knelt"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 94 (Stanzas 1&4) (Red Hymnal)

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (43) Average (40) Tuesday (47) Wednesday (21)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	- No Midweek Classes	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Pastor John Hein is considering the professor call to ILC. Pastor James Albrecht has returned the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich have called Pastor Michael Wilke. Trinity of Spokane has called Pastor Caleb Schaller.

Confirmation Class and Advent Services – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town this week visiting family. As a result, there will be no Confirmation or Midweek Bible Class on Wednesday. There will be Sunday School next Sunday, but no Adult Bible Class.

Annual Meeting Notes – Justin Bueligan was accepted into communicant membership, and Timothy Meyer was accepted into voting membership. Phil Pfennig and Brian Fettig were elected to the Church Council. The Council subsequently organized itself as follows: Mark Johnson, President; Mick Johnson, Vice President; Keith Mantz, Treasurer; Phil Pfennig, Secretary; Gary Miller, Financial Secretary; Brian Fettig, Trustee Coordinator. The voters approved the establishment of a St Paul Endowment Fund, proceeds from which will go into the General Fund. The 2020 Budget was accepted with a 3.5% increase. The FY2021 CLC Cooperative Budget Estimate was set at \$14,750. The voters authorized the Church Council to implement the use of screens in our worship services, cost not to exceed \$2,500. \$1,200 from the St Paul Benevolent Fund will be sent to a CLC member in need. Parents of Confirmation students will be invited to attend Confirmation classes with their children, and the children of the congregation will be invited to sing more regularly in our worship services.