

A FATHER'S CARE FOR HIS SON – MATTHEW 2:13-15, 19-23

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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.” 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 and 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 Archelaus 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, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In the 1920s, a physiologist named Walter Canon recognized a natural reaction that happened within just about all living creatures, humans and animals alike. He called it the “fight or flight” response. Based on the name, I think all of you know what I’m talking about. You can see it in a cornered animal, you can see it in a student who walks in late to an unprepared test in the classroom. At one time or another, you have probably been faced with this kind of reaction – the reaction to fight, or the reaction to take flight.

In many situations, we view the “fighting” option as a generally better option to choose, it makes you look tougher, stronger, less afraid. But no one reaction is better than another. The flight reaction is a perfectly reasonable response. For a Biblical example, we need look no further than that of King David. There were a number of times where he chose to stand and fight, and there were other times where he chose to take flight. For he thought it was better to live to fight another day.

This fight or flight response can also be seen early in the life of Jesus and the care his father showed him. Last week, we heard the wonderful Christmas story of the baby Jesus being born in a manger. His birth was heralded by the angels and he was visited by shepherds. As many of you know, it took a little while before wise men from the East came to visit Jesus. And these wise men stirred up a hornet’s nest in Jerusalem when they asked where the new-born king was. King Herod ruled over the land of Israel at that time, and he was none too pleased to hear of a threat to his throne. So now, Joseph, Jesus’ father was faced with the choice of FIGHT OR FLIGHT: A FATHER’S CARE FOR HIS SON.

1. Joseph for Jesus
2. God the Father for Jesus
3. God the Father for us

We have just gotten done celebrating Christmas. We have seen the baby Jesus placed in a manger. We have heard the angels proclaiming a peace on earth and good will to men on whom God's favor rests. Christmas should be something that everyone would love. But not everyone saw it that way. King Herod for one did not see it that way. He was the king in Jerusalem, whom the wise men asked about a new king. Herod was not a very nice man. He was actually quite paranoid, and his desire to take out this infant king, fits right in with his character. Herod feared any attempt at taking his throne that he killed many of his close friends and family, and now he was not above killing off a little baby.

But we see yet another miracle to Jesus' family, "**an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.**" He told Joseph to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt where they would be safe. We see the flight response in Joseph's care for his Son. He listened to the angel of the Lord and left for Egypt. It sounds like he didn't even wait until morning. He woke up, and hastily got up his wife and baby, and took off for the 250 mile journey to Egypt. This is definitely a situation where you could see the better option was to flee. What chance did a poor carpenter have against a king with his armed soldiers, coming specifically to kill your child?

And so Joseph, Mary and the baby spent some time in Egypt. We aren't told how much time, and that really isn't all that important. But what was important was that they returned to Israel. Yet again we are told, "**After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.**" This angel gave him a similar message as the first time – "**Go to the land of Israel.**" And so again, we see faithful Joseph showing A FATHER'S CARE FOR HIS SON, by bringing him back to the land of Israel. He originally decided to go back to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and he had started to make a living. But when he heard that Herod's son, Archileus was ruling in Jerusalem, he felt it too risky to return. So yet again, he takes the flight response and flees to the north in Galilee, back to the town he had met Mary at in Nazareth.

So we see two examples of flight from Joseph, each example showing A FATHER'S CARE FOR HIS SON Jesus. There is something else in Joseph's actions that oftentimes goes unnoticed. In Joseph's actions, he displays an incredible amount of trust and willingness to listen to God. It was the angel of the Lord which came to Joseph in a dream warning him to flee, but Joseph listened to the angel and followed his instructions. Joseph realized it would be foolish to disregard the Lord's warning while using the excuse God will protect me wherever I am.

I bring that up, because in this story, it can be easy to focus on the actions of King Herod (even though he's hardly mentioned) and say how can people be that offended by Jesus? It can be easy for us to point the finger to all those people who are not here in church, who blatantly disregard anything to do with God, and thank God that we're better than that. But doing that ignores the deeper problem, it ignores the problem within us. It is our instinct either to flee from our sins or fight against God over our sins. Neither of which is a very good option. This is the deeper problem which we are faced with.

Unfortunately, I have heard this phrase all too often, "If only God would tell me what to do, it would make my life so much easier." We look for the grand and the glorious dreams and visions, like Moses, like Joseph, like Mary, and so often overlook God's Word which is resting right before us. We have God's Word before us telling us what God wants and what he hates. But how often have we found

ourselves ignoring the parts of God's Word which make us uncomfortable, or using God's grace as an excuse for our sin? How often have we picked a fight with God's Word over "interpretation?"

So whether we choose fight or take flight with God's Word, we will lose every time. That's not to say people don't still try. That's not to say we should just give up and resign ourselves to our fate. But we should take the encouragement which is in God's Word, and find the gospel. And listen, just like Joseph. The gospel only comes to us through the Holy Spirit when we hear the message about A FATHER'S CARE FOR HIS SON – God the Father's care for Jesus.

(2)

Chances are Joseph would not have found out about Herod's murderous plot for his son if it wasn't for the angel of the Lord coming to him in a dream. So we too can only listen to God's Word and respond. We wouldn't know what sin was if it wasn't for God's Word. And we wouldn't know the solution for our sin if it wasn't for God's Word.

We see God the Father also take the flight response in his FATHERLY CARE FOR HIS SON. He allowed his Son to escape Herod's clutches and flee to the land of Egypt. Through that act he could then fulfill his own prophecy that, "**Out of Egypt, I called my son.**" Just as he had led the nation of Israel out of Egypt 1,500 years earlier, so now he leads his Son, a personification of the whole nation of Israel, out of Egypt. He continued his fleeing by leading him to Nazareth, the town of his parents to keep him safe from the rulers.

That is not to say God couldn't have protected Jesus in any other way, but this was the way God chose. This was the way God brought up his Son in a humble way. Because all those times he allowed his Son to flee, he had the bigger picture in mind. He had in mind the fight his Son would undertake, the fight his Son was undertaking. You can consider Jesus' whole life a fight, but not against earthly foes, but against spiritual ones. He took up the fight against sin, from the moment he drew his first breath, to the time he breathed his last. It was that fight which came to a climax at the cross of Calvary.

This may seem like an odd way for A FATHER TO CARE FOR HIS SON, by sending him to earth to live as a human, and then die a cruel and unusual punishment. But through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus not only rescued us, but showed his superiority over everything in all of creation.

(3)

But God had in mind more than just his son, Jesus. He had in mind all of his sons, that is, believers. For God knows us better than we know ourselves, and he knows the fight or flight reaction we will take to our sin. But that doesn't mean he excuses it. He knew it had to be taken care of, and taken care of it was through his Son Jesus. It was through his Son Jesus that he made each of us sons of God, heirs of eternal life. This is how God THE FATHER CARES FOR HIS SONS.

But our Father in heaven has done more than just give us a ticket to heaven and say wait 'til we get there. He has given us a wonderful blessed life right here. He certainly doesn't promise us wealth and an easy life with no problems (just look at Jesus' life), but he still has blessed us tremendously. He has given some wonderful weather in the wintertime, he has given a wonderful, welcoming place to worship and

hear his Word. And I'm sure you can think of a number of other blessings he has given to you individually. Now, what can you do with all of these blessings? You use them, use them to the glory of God. Appreciate what blessings you have been given, cherish them, share them with others.

These blessings don't come because we are Christians, but because we have a loving God. A loving God who took away our need to fight or take flight. It can be a hard thing to overcome, considering we continue to sin every day. But it is something that Christ has overcome for us. Our sins have been taken away, we have no reason to be afraid. And this allows us to live our lives to the full. No more FIGHT OR FLIGHT because of A FATHER'S LOVING CARE. Amen!