

Sermon

December 28, 2025

Matthew 2:13-23

Carried Through the Wilderness

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a particular sound a child makes when the night goes wrong. Not a cry for attention, but the sharp, frightened sound that says, *something is not safe*. Parents know it. You are asleep; suddenly you are awake. The house is dark, the hour unreasonable, and the child is not asking questions but clinging.

Matthew's Gospel opens a door into such a night. "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'" (Matthew 2:13). No explanation. No long theology lesson. Just movement. Just obedience. Just danger.

And that is where the tension begins. Because we like our faith tidy. We prefer a Christmas that ends neatly—with angels singing, shepherds rejoicing, and the baby safe in a manger. But Scripture refuses to cooperate. The Child who is "God with us" is almost immediately a refugee. Herod's jealousy turns Bethlehem into a killing field. Mothers weep. Homes are emptied. And the Savior of the world is carried through the desert under cover of darkness. This is not how rescue stories are supposed to go.

Isaiah knew that feeling. In Isaiah 63, he looks back over Israel's history and does not gloss it with nostalgia. He remembers slavery, fear, and rebellion. Yet he dares to say, "I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord... according to all that the Lord has granted us" (Isaiah 63:7). Not because the people were faithful, but because God was.

He says something startling: "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (63:9). The Lord did not watch from a distance. He entered the suffering. He carried them.

“He lifted them up and *carried them* all the days of old” (63:9). That image—*carried*—is the thread that binds these texts.

Israel was not merely guided out of Egypt; they were borne through the wilderness. Like a father lifting a child whose legs have given out, God did not simply point the way and say, “Try harder.” He took their weight. When the Red Sea closed behind them and the desert stretched ahead, the Lord did not demand courage. He supplied Himself.

And now, in Matthew 2, the story repeats—but in miniature, and deeper. The Son of God goes down into Egypt. Hosea’s words echo: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matthew 2:15). Israel was God’s son, and Israel failed. Jesus is God’s Son, and He will not.

Here is where C.S. Lewis would slow us down and whisper, *Pay attention—this is the same story, but the meaning has changed*. The exodus is happening again, but this time God Himself is small enough to be carried.

Joseph does not understand everything. He is not given a map. He is given a command. And he obeys. Not heroically, not triumphantly, but faithfully. The Son of God survives Herod’s rage not by calling down angels, but by trusting His Father enough to be held in human arms.

Why this way? Because God is not merely rescuing humanity from danger. He is entering it.

Galatians 4 names the moment: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, *born under the law*” (Galatians 4:4). Not above it. Under it. Under every command, every curse, every consequence.

The verse continues: “...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive *adoption* as sons.” Paul uses one Greek word here that matters deeply: **huiothesia**—*adoption as sons* (Galatians 4:5). Adoption is not sentimental. In the Roman world, adoption transferred status, inheritance, and name. You did not slowly grow into being a son; you were declared one.

And how does that adoption happen? Through the Son who was hunted, displaced, and obedient in our place. We may well wonder, if God is this faithful, why does life still feel so unsafe?

Many of you know what it is to be awakened in the night—not by a crying child, but by a diagnosis, a phone call, a memory that refuses to sleep. Faith does not cancel those moments. Christianity is not an escape hatch to get out of fear. It is a promise that fear will not have the final word.

Consider the story of Ernest Gordon, a Scottish officer captured during World War II and imprisoned by the Japanese along the River Kwai. The camp was brutal, designed to break men into animals. But something unexpected happened. As Gordon later wrote, when a few prisoners began caring for the sick and sharing food, the camp did not become easier—but it became human again. Compassion did not remove suffering; it carried people through it.

Scripture is saying something stronger. God does not merely inspire compassion. He becomes the One who is present *in* the affliction.

Isaiah writes how God's Holy Spirit does this. He says, "Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest." (Isaiah 63:14). That is not a dramatic charge up a mountain. It is a steady descent into a place where rest can finally happen.

But notice the rebellion Isaiah mentions. "They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" (63:10). The carried people resist being carried. The children squirm in the Father's arms. We recognize that too.

This is where Galatians speaks again. Paul says we have received "the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). *Abba* is not a polished prayer word. It is the cry of a child who trusts before understanding. The Spirit does not teach us how to impress God. He teaches us how to cling.

And now the second Greek word, brief but luminous: **kleronomos**—*heir* (Galatians 4:7). "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." An heir does not earn the inheritance. He receives it because of who his father is.

That is the resolution toward which all three texts move.

Herod dies. Matthew records it almost casually: “But when Herod died...” (Matthew 2:19). Tyrants always do. The danger that seemed absolute proves temporary. The Child returns. Not to glory yet, but to Nazareth—quiet, obscure, unimpressive. Safety does not mean spectacle.

And here is the delight hidden beneath the fear: Jesus survives not just Herod, but the law, the wilderness, the cross, and the grave. He survives *for you*. He goes down into Egypt so that when you go down into fear, loss, grief, or are enslaved by internal or external forces, you do not go alone.

Isaiah’s carried people. Matthew’s carried Child. Galatians’ adopted sons.

This is not a God who shouts encouragement from a distance. This is a God who shoulders the burden, takes the night shift, and brings His children home.

You are not wandering aimlessly. You are being led. You are not abandoned in affliction. You are being carried. You are not a slave trying to earn God’s attention. You are a son, an heir, named and claimed in Christ.

The world still has Herods. The night still comes. But the Child who fled now reigns, and the Father who carried Israel now carries you—through the wilderness, through the danger, and finally into rest, where fear is finished and the inheritance is fully revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Bright

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