

Devotions with Matt

April 18, 2020

BEAUTY AND THORNS

When I read Scripture I try to get the main theme of what I am reading so I can study it in context of what happened then and how it relates to now. Sometimes when I get the overarching theme it reminds me of a song. That is what happened to me today when reading about how Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus away to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. The song that came to me was “You Never Promised Me A Rose Garden” by Lynn Anderson.

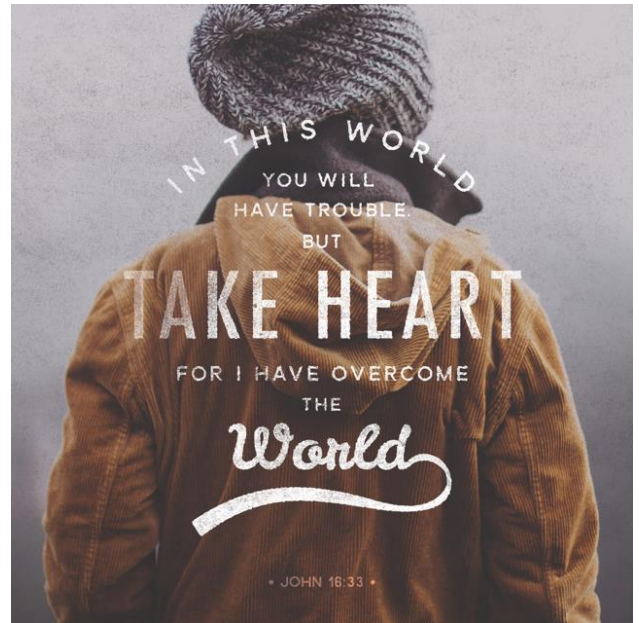
But, why not? He is God after all! This is His Son who He sent to forgive us of our sins, save us from them and reconcile us back to God. This is Jesus we’re talking about. The One whom later God the Father tells John the Baptist (and others) “This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.” This is the second member of the Trinity who always was and always will be. This is Jesus whose coming was prophesied about from the very beginning when God told Adam and Eve this Messiah would crush Satan’s head. This is the same Messiah that we see throughout Scripture (The Scarlet Thread) coming to rescue all mankind. If Jesus has to run from someone to Egypt, what chance do the rest of us have?

My mind quickly wanders to the story when the King of Aram wanted to kill the prophet Elisha and had the city where he was surrounded with horses, chariots and soldiers. Elisha’s servant gets up that morning and sees the king’s army and is afraid. He rushes to Elisha and wonders what they shall do. Elisha tells him to not be afraid because, “those who are with us are more than those who are with them”. God opens the eyes of Elisha’s servant and he sees the hills full of chariots of fire that God had sent to protect them from the king’s army. My mind also wonders to Paul who wrote to the persecuted church in Rome and told them, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Those and more are going through my mind as I read the story of the escape to Egypt. What in the world is going on?

But I also see other places in Scripture that God says we will have problems in this world. That we will have trials and tribulations and be persecuted for our faith. He says that we will have earthquakes, famines and disease. He says we will be tested by fire. How do I reconcile those two things: God’s protection and suffering? The only way we can reconcile the two is to look at it from the whole of Scripture. We can’t just cherry pick the parts we like and ignore the parts we don’t.

When we look at all of Scripture we see God’s prophets being murdered by those who hate them. We see God’s people being taken into exile by brutal and evil kings. We see the Disciples persecuted and killed as they share the Good News. Today, we see our families and friends suffer through a long illness or die way too young. We see horrible accidents happen, poverty and famine, and atrocities perpetrated on the most innocent among us. We see as the Scripture says, “It rains on the just and the unjust” alike.

Maybe God did promise us a Rose Garden, both with its beauty and its thorns. God created the beauty and sin brought out the thorns. But, the only way to get rid of the thorns is to cut down the whole bush. We are sinners and the ones who brought sin in the world- we brought the thorns. Therefore, the only way to get rid of sin would be to get rid of us. Gracefully and lovingly, God is not willing to do so. He came to seek and save the



lost, not to annihilate us. The time is coming when this world will be rolled up like a scroll and when all things will be made new again- but that is not now. Right now, we are going to have to live amongst God's beauty and our thorns.

But how we cope with the thorns is to draw close to our Messiah. He promises to be there with us through all the hard times. He promises to comfort us. He promises to strengthen us. He promises us His peace, hope and joy- even in the midst of trials. He gives us beauty amongst the thorns. He never promised to take us away from them, but He did promise to help us navigate through it the hardships of life with His blessings upon us every step of the way.

We see from the story the child Jesus being taken away to Egypt to safety, but we see the adult Jesus headed right back into the eye of the storm- right toward the darkest forces of evil to overcome them. And overcome them He did. There will be an end to it all one day, but for now Jesus will help us overcome those same dark forces in our lives. We now live in His Rose Garden where His beauty shines and His power reigns and the thorns cannot defeat us.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

In Christ,

Matt