

Come Out of Egypt

By Jeremy L. Williams

“Out of Egypt I called my son.” ~Matthew 2:15

Christmas is about a child—a baby boy. Even more, it is about a young minority male born to be the bull’s-eye of the prejudices, injustices, misunderstandings, and sins of the world. He is marginalized to a manger because an innkeeper cannot see his potential. He is hunted by Herod before he has the opportunity to call him a snake. He is forced to flee because of situations out of His control. He is forgotten. That is, until he becomes a threat to the established order, then the answer is to kill him. “Man,” Job says, “is but of a few days and full of trouble.”¹

Christmas is about Jesus.

But, if he did not offer an opportunity for excessive corporate profits, he would almost not be remembered at all. In his story, we see another familiar story. It is one that will not be aired on ABC Family, nor honored with hymns, nor contained in carols. Yet, it is a familiar story about a boy. He was not raised in Nazareth but on the South Side of Chicago, in Dothan, Alabama; and inner-city Los Angeles. This young man’s mother is not a virgin nor is his father so attuned to spiritual things that all of his decisions are based on dreams mediated by angels. But that does not exempt this boy from being a target of prejudices, injustices, misunderstandings, and the sins of the world. This young man will be counted as slop in the trough of society, because he cannot read, he has no diploma, he has no degree. O, only if the innkeeper knew that the Bread of Life rested in that manger he would have found a room; only if a hotel guest knew that Living Water was in that manger, she would have given up her room; only if citizens of Bethlehem knew that manna was in that manger, they would have prepared a room.

However, all the innkeeper could see was a family with personal problems. He could not help that they waited until the last moment to get a reservation. It wasn’t his concern that they were irresponsible with their time. They knew that the census had been decreed. They knew they were going to need somewhere to stay. They knew that every place was going to be packed. They knew that they needed to pay attention in class if they were going to make it out of the hood. They knew that if they got kicked out of school they would have no other recourse but to live on the street. They knew that they could not legally secure a lifestyle of comfort without a degree. So the innkeeper says, “the best thing that I can do is *let* you stay outside, on the margins, away from those of us who prepared. That way I don’t have to look at your labor, your pain, or your tears of frustration.”

Friends, in the commonwealth of God, there are no personal problems! When you hurt, I hurt. When you suffer, I suffer. When you give birth in a stable, I give birth in a stable. So, there is no room for personal problems. “We are the body of Christ and

members in particular.”² I recently read a blog about the Black male achievement gap, and one commenter wrote, “black men between the ages of 19-30 are the most destructive people in our society.” Even if that is true (though I certainly know that it is not) we should not be content with that information, because those black men are a part of us and we are a part of them. It is thinking like that that allows Herod to sit in a school board meeting and issue a command that all minority males be eliminated, because they make it hard for teachers. Mr. School Board Member utilizes Pharaoh’s ideology, so that before they can become a threat, he cuts their lives short. Or, perhaps Herod sits on the board of a communications conglomerate and says “let us present more images of black men as gangsters than as college students to show-case Black males making up 5% of the college population and 36% percent of the prison population.”³ This is not a personal problem of the individual, of the family, or of the school, but it is the problem of our entire society, in spite of anything Herod has to say. What Herod has to say is insignificant, because Wise People do not report to Herod.

“And having been told in a dream not to go back to Herod, the Wise People (Magi) returned...by another route.”⁴

In The Mysterious Stranger by Mark Twain, one of the main characters, basically tells another character Theodor, that our experiences of injustice and misaligned priorities are but a dream. Therefore, he encourages him to “Dream other dreams, and better dreams.”⁵ And I declare to you to that Wise People have dreams of a world that is different and better than the one that they currently inhabit. Joseph was a Wise Man whom God gave the foresight to plan for lack amidst seeming unending abundance. Mary was a Wise Woman that did not have a world-view too small to allow for the improbable knowing that “with God all things are possible.” Peter was a Wise Man that had a dream of a Church that was multicultural and not bound by discrimination and marginalization. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Wise Man that had a dream like the Prophet Amos of “justice flowing like rivers and righteousness like a mighty flood!” Teach for America Corps members are Wise People that go with a book in one hand and delayed opportunities in the other to bridge the achievement gap. Passionate teachers in underfunded, urban communities are Wise People that are consumed by a desire to transform a generation one student at a time. Volunteers at the Boys and Girls Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters and other community organizations are Wise People that give time to the work of extending a hand up.

God is looking for Wise People because according to our passage, Wise People, after they dream must go a different way. A Wise Person cannot go back to Herod’s murderous, destructive, and selfish ways. They must go another route. They cannot accept that most Black males are destined to die in jail or on the streets, there’s another way. They cannot be discouraged by the fact that Black males only make up 5% of college students, there’s another way. Bishop Joseph Johnson, the first Black student at Vanderbilt University recorded that “whenever we choose the difficult right over the easy wrong we gain our lives.”⁶ So, there is another way. We cannot give up and allow Herod to take another generation, because there is another way. Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”⁷

“Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”⁸

This is why we have to go another way, because an echo reverberates in our souls. Tears consistently fall upon the pillows of hearts, because our sons, our brothers, our friends are being thrown out like slop. We cannot afford to be quiet. My fraternity brother Reverend. Gardner C. Taylor tells this story:

The superintendent said to the Negro principal, “John, I know that for the last six years we have been promising to you and to the Negro people, a school for Negro children. I know that it’s awfully difficult to teach knowledge in a church building hardly designed for a schoolroom. And, to tell you the truth,” he said, “I want you to know that I’ve been wanting you to have it. But we’ve discovered that the ten schools we have for the white children just aren’t enough. And while I recognize that there ought to be at least one school for Negroes, I’m afraid we’re going to have to postpone it another year and build another school for our white children.” To which the principal replied, I’m very glad to hear that, sir, for if there’s anything our country needs, it’s more education for our white people.⁹

Yes, we must be that voice that realigns the values of our families, our communities and our nation. I believe that the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness starts as a cry in the one crying. The tears of the prophet for her people adds a resiliency and vibrato to her voice that carries it from the Jordan River into the alleys and bedrooms of Jerusalem. Our hearts should be overwhelmed as we hear that in 4th grade only 12% of Black males read at or above their grade level.¹⁰ Our hearts should bleed knowing that only 32.4% of Black men who start college will finish in six years.¹¹ So, we have two options. We can either weep with Rachel or we can help them to hear God calling.

“...I called my son.”¹²

As Matthew crafts his Gospel narrative to present Jesus as the King of the Jews, we find Jesus in Egypt escaping Herod’s tyranny. The reader recognizes this as a familiar place. A place where God had previously wrought miracles, but more importantly it was the runway for the exodus. It was a runway, because it was temporary, and was only important because it helped them to pick up speed so that they could soar to the celestial heights to which God had called them. The Bible reader would instantly note, that God brought the Israelites to Egypt in order to demonstrate His power. So, similarly he was going to do the same for His Son, as recorded in the book of Matthew. For as the songwriter said,

It is no secret
what God can do.
What He’s done for others
He’ll do for you.¹⁰

So in the same way that he called out His Son Israel, according to Hosea. And the same way that he called out his Son Jesus, according to Matthew. He will do the same for His Sons forsaken by the Pharaohs of mis-education, forsaken by the Herod's of government, and forsaken by those who are mindless enough to follow oppressive systems. To those Sons of His, the God of the universe that resides upon the jasper throne and rests his feet between the two cherubim, on the mercy seat; He who at the dawn of creation “took the light and rolled it around in His hand;”¹¹ He, whose presence makes the mountains leap, rivers run, He is the one that calls them and says, “Come out of Egypt!” He calls:

Come out of low expectations!

Come out of following followers!

Come out of allowing Lil Wayne, Rick Ross, and Kanye to determine your values!

Come out of living like slop and wasting your potential!

Come out of following role models who have no character!

The Spirit says, Come!

The Bride says, Come!

“O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him, born the King of Angels.
O come let us adore Him.
O come let us adore Him.
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!”¹²

Notes

1. Job 14:1, King James Version of the Bible (KJV)

2. 1st Corinthians 12:27, KJV

3. Whitaker, Bill. "Shocking School Achievement Gap for Black Males - CBS News." *Breaking News Headlines: Business, Entertainment & World News* - CBS News. CBS, 10 November 2010. Web. 18 November 2011. Online location: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/11/09/eveningnews/main7038804.shtml>

4. Matthew 2:12, KJV

5. Twain, Mark, and William M. Gibson. The Mysterious Stranger. Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

6. Johnson, Joseph. The Soul of the Black of Preacher. Philadelphia, Pilgrim Press,

1971

7. John 14:6 New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV)

8. Matthew 2:10 NRSV.

9. Taylor, Gardner, and Taylor, Edward. Words of Gardner Taylor Volume 4: Special Occasion and Expository Sermons. Judson Press, 2001.

10. Harper, S. R. (2006). *Black male students at public flagship universities in the U.S.: Status, trends and implications for policy and practice*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Via presentation by Charles. H.F. Davis

11. Ibid

12. Matthew 2:15 NRSV.

10. It is No Secret What God Can Do. By Stuart Hamble. Online location:
http://www.gospelsonglyrics.org/songs/it_is_no_secret_what_god_can_do.html

11. Johnson, James W. God's Trombones. Penguin Group, 1976.

12. Oh, Come All Ye Faithful. By John F. Wade. African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Press, #199.