

Hail! King of the Jews, Part One

Mt 2:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In the mid-1950's, a U. S. Air Force transport plane with its captain and 5 crew members was flying over Alaska when they entered an unusually fierce snowstorm.
 - 1. The navigator contacted an air base only to be told that he had veered several hundred miles off course.
 - a. Correct coordinates were given to the navigator, who continued to insist that his own calculations could not be that far off.
 - b. Soon the plane ran low on fuel.
 - 2. The six men decided to abandon the plane and parachute to safety, but because of the -70 degree Fahrenheit temperatures & winds that gusted to 50 mph, they were all frozen within minutes of hitting the ground.
 - 3. As a result of the navigator's pride, 5 other people went to their deaths.
- B. Pride is so very dangerous.
 - 1. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom" (Prov 11:2).
 - 2. "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin" (Prov 21:4).
- C. Herod I, although he converted to Judaism out of political convenience, would have done well to have paid attention to the words of Proverbs.
 - 1. To put it mildly, Herod was a blood-thirsty tyrant.
 - a. Herod became enraged with his favorite wife, so he had her strangled.
 - b. He executed two sons & he had another executed on his deathbed all because he believed they posed a threat to his power.
 - c. One of Herod's brothers-in-law mysteriously drowned in a very swallow pool.
 - 2. The Jewish aristocracy was afraid of Herod, because, in the words of Josephus "they saw how powerful and reckless Herod was and how much he desired to be a dictator."
 - 3. Knowing the Jewish kosher laws, Emperor Augustus supposedly said that he would rather be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons.
 - 4. The historical account of Herod informs us that he was paranoid of losing power, would quickly execute anyone whom he saw as a threat, & that he often acted quite impulsively.
- D. That historical knowledge allows us to place this morning's text into the ancient culture in which Jesus was born.
 - 1. This morning, we want to take a close look at the mad-man history calls Herod "the Great."
 - 2. We want to see how this mighty man fell so drastically & dramatically. We want to be warned ourselves against the sin Herod demonstrates throughout this passage.
 - 3. Instead of Herod the Great, we shall see HEROD THE DISTRESSED, HEROD THE DUMB, HEROD THE DISGUISED, HEROD THE DECEITFUL.

II. HEROD THE DISTRESSED, vv 2-3.

- A. The magi came to Jerusalem, "saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."
- B. The magi come & ask a very intriguing question: "Where is he who has been *born* king of the Jews?"
 - 1. It is very likely the wording of that question that sends Herod into such a frenzy.
 - 2. He was not *born* king of the Jews, but he was *made* king of the Jews by Rome.
 - a. Obviously, one who had been born rather than made a king would have a much more rightful claim to the throne.
 - b. The term "king" in this era always had political overtones.
 - 1) People did not think of a king in a moral or religious sense, but only in a political one.

- 2) Remember, that Jesus was crucified under Roman law, in part, for claiming to be a king, a crime punishable by death in the Roman judicial system.
 - c. Herod believed that if a new king had been born, his own demise couldn't be far off. In reality, he was correct—Herod did not live more than a couple years after Jesus' birth.
- C. One of the more interesting aspects of this passage is that the text says that all Jerusalem was troubled with Herod.
1. Traditionally, people have thought of three wise men coming to Bethlehem to worship the Christ Child.
 - a. That has been reading far too much into the fact that the magi brought three gifts.
 - b. In all likelihood, this was a rather large delegation—perhaps even coming from a foreign king—to pay homage to the new King of the Jews.
 2. Thus, it is extremely unlikely that the magi could have arrived in Jerusalem without many people noticing them.
 - a. The people of Jerusalem notice the magi & they, like Herod, become distressed.
 - b. There are two possible reasons for their distress:
 - 1) They feared a power struggle. The people knew how ruthless Herod was & they did not know who might be in his crosshairs this time.
 - 2) Some may also have feared that the new king may even be more ruthless & more terrible than Herod.
 3. Either way, Herod certainly stands as a reason for the people's fear at the news of a new king's birth.
- D. What can we learn from HEROD THE DISTRESSED?
1. We learn the dangers of power.
 - a. Herod became intoxicated with power—he could simply not allow someone else to have the power that was his.
 - b. Herod was quite the politician in that he did much to keep his power.
 - 1) To enhance his standing among the Jews, he had the temple rebuilt & the coins he had minted had his face on one side & an incense burner on the other.
 - 2) He also sought to please the Romans who had made him king. For example, he built the port city & called it Caesarea in honor of Caesar Augustus.
 - c. With all that he had done, how could Herod allow a newborn child to take his throne? He wasn't going to allow it!
 - d. We know that a thirst for power is incompatible with the way of the cross.
 - 1) Jesus says, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk 22:25-27).
 - 2) Herod had it all backward—greatness doesn't come from positions of great power; greatness comes from service.
 - 3) Do we have it backward, or do we recognize the greatness in serving?
 2. We also see the problems that come from worry.
 - a. Herod was concerned because a new king had been born.
 - 1) Jesus Christ did not come into this world to be a political king; therefore, he never posed a threat to Herod. Even if Jesus had intended to establish an earthly kingdom & reign from Jerusalem, he would not have even started that mission until a quarter of a century after Herod was dead.
 - 2) Herod was brooding, terrified, & worried—he killed innocent children—all for something that never came to pass.
 - b. Aren't we often much like Herod, worrying over things that never come to pass?
 - 1) Research has demonstrated that worry for the average American can be broken down like this: 40% of our worry is about things that will never happen; 30% of our worry is about the past that cannot be changed; 12% of our worry is about the criticism of others;

10% of our worry is about our health that only gets worse with worry; & 8% of our worry is about things that will actually occur.

- 2) God desires that his people come to him rather than worry.
 - a) “Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Mt 6:31-32).
 - b) God desires that his people not worry, for anxiety serves no purpose: “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” (Lk 12:25-26).
3. If only Herod had not been hungry for power & worried about losing it! Are we hungry for power? Do we worry, or do we trust in God?

III. HEROD THE DUMB, vv 4-6.

- A. “Assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”
- B. Herod assembled the chief priests & scribes to discover where the Christ was to be born.
 1. At least, Herod knew whom to ask—the chief priests & the scribes were the perfect ones to assemble to ask for help understanding the Scriptures.
 2. However, Herod should have had no need to ask where the Christ was to be born.
 - a. There was absolutely no mystery in Herod’s day as to where the Messiah would be born.
 - b. In fact, Jesus’ being from Galilee caused some to disbelieve in him.
 - 1) “When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ Other said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ come from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’” (Jn 7:40-42).
 - 2) The people in John 7 got it. While they missed that Bethlehem was not to be the hometown of the Christ, they knew he would come from there.
 3. Herod doesn’t get it.
 - a. Pagan astrologers know the Christ has been born & the Jews know where he’d be born.
 - b. Everyone here understands something about what God is doing—everyone but Herod!
- C. Why doesn’t Herod get it?
 1. Herod is dumb. Herod is ignorant in the proper sense of the word. He is unlearned of the Scriptures.
 - a. When Peter & John stood before the Sanhedrin, the Jews perceived that the apostles “were uneducated, common men” (Acts 4:13). The KJV records that Peter & John were “ignorant men,” i.e., they were not educated.
 - b. If you need brain surgery, you certainly don’t want me to do it! I’m totally ignorant of the latest advances in neurosurgery.
 2. When the magi arrive in Herod’s court & ask where the King of the Jews had been born, Herod acts like I would have if you asked me to do brain surgery. He goes out & gets someone else to give him the answer.
- D. The problem is that we can rely on a trained & skilled surgeon to work on our bodies, but we cannot rely on someone else to know the Scriptures well enough for us.
 1. If I’m facing temptation, I can’t tell Satan to hold on a second, let me call someone, & see what God has to say.
 - a. When Jesus was facing Satan’s assault in the wilderness, he said, “It is written,” not, “Let me call the preacher.”
 - b. David writes, “I have stored your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:11). He doesn’t say that the elders have the word stored in their hearts so that I might not sin.

2. When I face my mortality, I don't want to have to rely on someone else to remember the promises of God.
 - a. As Jesus faced the end of his mortal life, he recalled the Scriptures. "And taking the twelve, he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets may be accomplished'" (Lk 18:21).
 - b. It is precisely because of the end of all things that the Scriptures are to be proclaimed: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word" (2 Tm 4:1-2).
 3. There is grave danger in not knowing the Scriptures.
 - a. Paul tells Timothy: "From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 3:15). If we fail to know the "sacred writings," we **cannot** be wise for salvation!
 - b. Not knowing the Scriptures causes us to go into error.
 - 1) When the Sadducees asked Jesus about the resurrection, he says, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt 22:29).
 - 2) How many of you spent time in error?
 - a) You meant well; you wanted to do the right thing, but you were in error simply because you did not know the Scriptures.
 - b) But, when you learned the Scriptures, you obeyed the truth.
- E. How ignorant are we of the Scriptures?
1. Jay Leno once asked his audience to name one of the Ten Commandments. An audience member spoke up after a long pause and said, "God helps those who help themselves."
 2. While we might chuckle at such ignorance, many Americans do not know their Bibles. The Gallup Organization conducted a poll & found that 12% of Americans believe that John of Arc was the wife of Noah.
 - a. Among graduating high school seniors 50% believed that Sodom & Gomorrah were husband & wife.
 - b. A large number in one poll believed that Billy Graham preached the Sermon on the Mount.
 - c. Fewer than half of adults could name the four gospels.
 3. With so many people not knowing basic Scripture is it any wonder that we struggle with abortion, sexual promiscuity, lying, drug abuse, and other scourges of immorality in this country?!
 4. It is almost as if Amos prophesied about our time: "'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD'" (Amos 8:11).
 5. Do we suffer from that famine of knowledge of the Scriptures like Herod, or do we study the Word of God?

IV. HEROD THE DECEITFUL, v 7-8.

- A. "Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'"
- B. We know that Herod had no intentions whatsoever of worshiping the Christ. He only wanted to get rid of the competition.
- C. Important for our purpose this morning is the fact that Herod called the magi secretly.
 1. Deceit requires secrecy.
 - a. If I'm going to lie to Tammy, I'm not going to wear a shirt that says, "Hey, honey, don't believe a word I'm about to say"!
 - b. What's the purpose of Herod's secrecy?
 - 1) If those in Herod's court & Jerusalem are aware that the magi are coming back with directions to where the Messiah has been born, there would likely be many waiting to worship him.
 - 2) Herod, in his quest for power, cannot allow any competition.

2. Sin loves secrecy.
 - a. “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (Jn 3:19-20).
 - b. Speaking of “the sons of disobedience, Paul says, “It is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret” (Eph 5:11).
3. How much do we really know about one another?
 - a. I don’t mean that we can’t have privacy, but are there parts of ourselves that we purposefully keep from others?
 - b. How embarrassed would we be if everyone knew what we did the other night? How embarrassed would we be if everyone knew the history on our computer browser? How humiliated would we be if everyone knew the facades we take off when we get home & people saw us the same way our families did?
 - c. If we purposefully keep a part of our lives secret, we likely have a serious problem.
- D. Not only did Herod meet with the magi secretly, but he told them a bold-faced lie.
 1. He was never going to worship the Christ & God knew that. Had Herod told the magi his true intentions, they likely would never have even contemplated returning to him.
 2. We must be those who speak the truth.
 - a. Lying makes us a child of Satan, for the devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44).
 - b. “Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25).
 3. Let us be those who always speak the truth! Do you need to come this morning & speak the truth about Jesus—to confess your faith in him & then be baptized for the remission of your sins?