

Dark Christmas “The Darkness of Bondage” Matthew 2:13-18

Introduction

- [Slide #1] Every time I read this passage I wince; my soul weeps. And I wonder, God, why? This passage is one of the darkest, blackest, saddest passages in the entire Bible.

Transition

Let me set this up for you and then we'll finish with good news.

- Some time after Jesus was born, maybe as many as several years, the Magi, astrologers, show up in Jerusalem. They're from some distant, eastern country. They're following a star in search a king.¹ They make their way to the palace, King Herod's place, with a specific question. *Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?*
- Imagine yourself in Herod's position hearing this question. You're the king. And the stooges show up looking for a king and it's not you. What did Herod think? I'll tell you what Herod thought. Did these idiot Magi not know who they were talking to? Had they not heard the rumors of Herod's illness and paranoia? That he was prone to fits of jealousy and rage? That he had killed many of his officials closest to him. That he had murdered his wife and at least two of his sons?²
- What was Herod's reaction? Matthew says in [verse 3](#) that Herod was disturbed by their question. Remember last week? Luke uses almost a variant of the same word to describe Mary's reaction to Gabriel's announcement. Herod's upset. Frightened. And we know from [verse 13](#) Herod wants to kill this king the Magi are searching for.
- From that moment on, the Magi become nothing more than pawns to Herod. Herod tries to control the chessboard and move the pieces in his favor. Matthew says He used the religious leaders of Jerusalem to learn where Jesus was to be born, [verse 4](#). He tried to use the Magi as his spies and learn when Jesus was born, [verse 7](#). He sends them off to Bethlehem. Unknowing of the plot they're caught in, they go. They worship Jesus, the newborn King; one of the most touching, tender parts of the Christmas drama. And then the Magi exit stage left; their part in the drama finished. [Verse 12](#). *And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned by another route.*

¹ DA Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

² DA Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

- And Herod waits. And stews. And waits. And boils. He's banking on their return with valuable intelligence info and they don't show. And the ticking time bomb blows. The seething vengeful overflow of Herod's anger is as dark and black as a [Coen Brothers](#) movie. In a day and age where we toss about abortion statistics without batting an eye, the slaughter of a few children from Bethlehem almost loses its horror. We're not talking tens of thousands or even five thousand kids. *Bethlehem and its vicinity* mean maybe a few dozen kids at the most.
- [Verse 16](#). *When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 18 "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."*
- There is no Christmas happy ending for the families in Bethlehem. It wouldn't have taken Herod long to move from intent to kill, to killing.³ Bethlehem is only five miles from Jerusalem. Herod has his death squad on the ground in Bethlehem spearing and hacking boys hours after he gives the orders. And as those boys are slaughtered how many parents are crying out to God the words of [Psalm 10:1](#). *Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*
- I've often wondered why God warned Joseph and Mary but didn't give an advanced warning to the other parents. Maybe as Joseph and Mary fled they warned their neighbors? Maybe some escaped? I don't know. We're never told. All I know is that, like [Psalm 2:4](#) says, and as one commentator points out, *the One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at the Herods of this world.*⁴ Evil will not triumph. Darkness may win individual battles but it cannot win the war.
- Some of you have had an incredibly Dark Christmas. The circumstances you face, circumstances not of your own doing, are incredibly dark. Cancer. An incredibly rebellious child. A failed business. Caring for an aging spouse or parent. Dark, hard stuff. And you're innocent in the matter. It's not like you made bad choices that put you where you're at. You didn't ask for this. You didn't wander from God. You trusted Him; you've done all the right things, you've been obedient and yet there's' darkness. *Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*
- Everybody else around you has been singing "Deck the Halls" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" And it's like salt on a wound. You'd rather sing [Merle](#)

³ DA Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

⁴ DA Carson, *Matthew*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

Haggard's "If We Make It Through December." Your song this Christmas has been *How long, Sovereign Lord?*⁵ How long must I endure? How long must I fight? How long must I suffer? And the injustice of your situation feels as great as the injustice of Herod's slaughter of those innocent boys. Are you there? Is that where you're at?

- *And the One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at those evil plans to suffocate you. "God has spared the Messiah from Herod's massacre so that Jesus can live to complete all of God's will for his life, including the atonement for the sins of humanity and the conquest of the very evil that has caused [your] injustice."*⁶
- If you are a follower of Jesus evil will not triumph. I don't know why you face what you face. But the Sovereign One knows. He knows. And he sympathizes. Following Christ doesn't mean life will go perfectly. That's not God's promise. God's promise is this. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.* His promise is Immanuel. *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."*⁷

Conclusion

- "The Innkeeper"
- *But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge.* **Psalm 73:28.**
- *O Sovereign LORD, my strong deliverer.* **Psalm 140:7.**
- *Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.* **Psalm 68:20.**
- *O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.* **2 Samuel 7:28**
- There is no such thing as a truly Dark Christmas for those who trust in Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ he will redeem your life from the pit.⁸

⁵ Revelation 6:10

⁶ *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 10.

⁷ Matthew 1:23

⁸ Psalm 103:4