

I.N.I.

Sunday after Christmas
Dec. 29, 2013
Matt. 2:13-18

In Christ Jesus, who was born King of kings and Lord of lords, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We are jumping a little chronologically in our sermon text this morning. Next Sunday we will be celebrating the Epiphany with the customary Bible lesson of the Wise Men from the East, but this morning our sermon text takes place after the Wise Men's visit.

One man who ruled at the time of Christ wanted to remain king no matter what the cost, Herod the Great. He came to power in 37 B.C. and ruled in a most cruel way. He was great in his political savvy, great in his shrewdness, great in erecting monuments to himself and great in his wickedness. His determination to remain king brought on a paranoia that led him to kill one of his 10 wives, and three of his own sons. One of his sons he had killed just 5 days before he died a most agonizing, gruesome death.

Nobody, not even his own family would get in the way of his remaining king. One can then imagine his anxiety and fear when he heard from the Wise Men that there had been one born **KING OF THE JEWS**.

Matthew tells us that King Herod was troubled and disturbed by this news. He had usurped the throne of David, becoming ruler of Israel with the help of the Romans. He was not a Jew, but an Edomite and now he is told that there was one who was born King, no doubt a direct descendant of King David. This person must be killed.

We know of Herod's devious plot, trying to deceive the Wise Men into thinking that he too, wanted to go and worship this new born King, asking them to come back and tell him exactly where this King was living but all the while he fully intended to kill Him.

Our text tells us that when Herod realized that he had been deceived by the Wise Men, he flew into a rage. In his furious anger he sent his soldiers to put to death all of the baby boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under. He believed that if he killed them all he would be sure to get the baby King.

One can hardly imagine the grief, the sorrow, the weeping that must have filled the hearts of the mothers and fathers as they saw their babies torn from their arms and put to death. Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15 **A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, LAMENTATION, WEEPING, AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN, REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.**

The prophet pictures Rachel, as the mother of the Israelites, weeping from her grave as her descendants gathered in Ramah to be sent into exile in Babylon. No longer would the Promised Land be filled with her children. That was the result of the nation rejecting the Lordship of Jehovah. Now through Matthew, the Lord reveals that this tragedy in Bethlehem is a fulfillment of that Old Testament event. The baby boys of Bethlehem are no more because of Herod's cruel rule.

But even as the cruel, powerful Herod the Great **MOVED TO RETAIN HIS THRONE** an even **GREATER ONE MOVED TO ESTABLISH HIS SON UPON HIS THRONE!** Herod really had no reason to fear the baby Jesus, at least in this life. For Jesus was not a King of this earth. His calling was not and still is not to sit upon the throne in Jerusalem over the physical nation of Israel. Jesus came to be a spiritual King, ruling a spiritual kingdom, ruling in the hearts and lives of His people.

We are reminded of the words of Psalm 2 **WHY DO THE NATIONS RAGE, AND THE PEOPLE PLOT A VAIN THING? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH SET THEMSELVES, AND THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER, AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS ANOINTED, SAYING, "LET US BREAK THEIR BONDS IN PIECES AND CAST AWAY THEIR CORDS FROM US." HE WHO SITS IN THE HEAVENS SHALL LAUGH; THE LORD SHALL HOLD THEM IN DERISION. THEN HE SHALL SPEAK TO THEM IN HIS WRATH, AND DISTRESS THEM IN DEEP DISPLEASURE; "YET I HAVE SET MY KING ON MY**

HOLY HILL OF ZION."

The Lord God knows Herod's evil scheme and in a dream warns Joseph **ARISE, TAKE THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, FLEE TO EGYPT, AND STAY THERE UNTIL I BRING YOU WORD.** All of this was done to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy in Hosea 11:1 **OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.** Just as God preserved His Son in Egypt in the face of Herod's evil, murderous plot, so also the LORD preserved His children Israel in Egypt and kept His covenant with Abraham in spite of wicked Pharaoh's murderous plot to kill all of the baby boys. God's plans cannot be stopped by puny earthly kings even with names like the Great, or the Conqueror. Everything is under the control of our ever gracious, **ALL POWERFUL GOD.**

So who is going to be King? The answer is easy you say: **JESUS**, not Herod! But wait and let's take another look at that question. **WHO IS GOING TO BE KING...OF MY LIFE?**

When we seriously look at Herod we have to identify within ourselves that same nature--our sinful flesh--which rejects Christ's Kingship and seeks to retain mastery and lordship over our own lives. So **WHO IS KING OF MY LIFE?** The Lord Jesus or me?

Herod was King. When he heard that there was another King he didn't rest until he had eliminated that opponent to his throne. Our will is much like Herod's. We are lord of our life by nature. Our flesh tells us no one has the right to tell us what to do. No one has the right to rule over me. Then along comes another King, the Christ. Who is going to be king? Christ or Herod? Christ or my sinful flesh?

Everyday we make dozens of decisions which either acknowledges Christ's lordship over us in our lives or which asserts our own rule. The Holy Spirit by the power of the GOSPEL has placed Christ into our hearts as King. He rules us through His powerful Word of love. But our sinful flesh constantly, not just once or twice, but constantly fights and rebels against this rule, and against this loving King.

When we are faced with a decision to cheat our employer, by being lazy at work or by taking more breaks than allowed, who rules in our hearts?

When we are faced with a decision to keep drinking till we become drunk or stop at a moderate amount, who rules in our hearts?

When we are faced with the decision to let the hurtful, angry words of our spouse toward us destroy our love, service and commitment to them and hurl hateful, angry words back or in selfless love put away our own anger, say we're sorry and ask for forgiveness, who rules in our hearts?

When we are faced with the decision to get up on a Sunday morning and come to God's house and hear His Word, worship Him and receive His free forgiveness or sleep in, work around the house, and catch up on all the housework, who rules in our hearts?

When you as young people are faced with the decision to be obedient to your parents and tell them where you are going and be in on time or do your own thing, go where you want and come home when you want, who rules in your hearts? Christ or you? When you are faced with the decision to rebel against your parent's authority or to accept it as God's will for you, who rules in your hearts? When you are faced with the decision to cheat on your tests, get involved in drugs, or become sexually involved before marriage or live a morally proper life and say NO to temptations, who rules in your hearts?

It is easy **TO SAY**, Christ does! But does it show? Is it real? Is it from the heart?

Herod felt he had all the right in the world as King to slaughter little baby boys. Today's modern society believes it has all the right in the world to slaughter little unborn babies, because the mother is **QUEEN** of her body. Is one transgression worse than the other?

Now it may seem appalling to be compared with such a wicked monster as King Herod, but my sinful nature, my sinful heart's desire to do what I want no matter what God says, to live my life in whatever way I choose, is no different than Herod's. Our flesh sets ourselves up as king or queen in our lives, the masters and rulers of our fate, and then we try to retain our throne by doing what we want to do.

Thank God that we have the Baby Jesus who has come into this world to forgive us our sins and through His Word to constantly battle against our sinful flesh and strengthen our new man to establish and to re-establish again and again His Kingdom in our hearts. That is why the continual hearing and reading of the Word of God is so essential, so necessary for everyone of us, for if Christ is not ruling in our hearts, than who is?

Joseph hurried to obey His God's commands to first leave Bethlehem and then when told to return,

he did so at once and settled in Nazareth. The little Baby he carried in his arms already lived in his heart and moved him to loving obedience to serve Him, his Son, who was also his King and Savior.

This Baby became our crucified Lord and Savior and King, who came to earn forgiveness for our selfish motives and actions; forgiveness for our determination to be and remain our own king. Our Savior and His Word then fills our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us to submit our wills to His will and to live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

May that not only be the way 2013 ends, but also the way 2014 begins and our life continues until we see our Savior-King face to face.

**To Thee my heart I offer, O Christ-child sweet and dear,
Upon Thy love relying; Oh, be Thou ever near!
Take Thou my heart and give me Thine and let it be forever mine,
O Jesus, holy, undefiled, my Savior meek and mild.**

**What bro't Thee to the manger, O Christ-child sweet and dear?
Thy love for me, a stranger—Oh, be Thou ever near!
O Lord, how great is this Thy love that reaches down from heav'n above,
Thy love for us, by sin defiled, that made Thee, God a child!**

**Let me be Thine forever, O Christ-child sweet and dear;
Uphold me with Thy mercy, and be Thou ever near.
From Thee I gladly all receive, and what is mine to Thee I give,
my heart, my soul, and all I own. Let these be Thine alone.**

Amen.