

## 1. Introduction

"You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are creator, and You are creating the creation of You on this planet."

"The Earth turns on its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You. The birds sing for You. The sun rises and it sets for You. The stars come out for You. Every beautiful thing You see, every wondrous thing You experience, is all there for You. Take a look around. None of it can exist, without You. No matter who You thought You were, now You know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe. You are the heir to the kingdom. You are the perfection of Life. And now You know The Secret."

*(Excerpt from "The Secret" by Rhonda Byrne. 19 million + copies sold, translated to 46 languages )*

- A. This is a very good summary of the mentality of our main character this morning: "Herod the Great"
  - 1) In fact, it's a very good summary of what the current "wisdom" in western civilization is telling you to think about yourself.
  - 2) But we would be wise to trust in a different source of wisdom, wouldn't we?
  - 3) Open your Bibles to Matthew 2:3
- B. Continuing our Christmas series: *Pursuit of the King* in Matthew 2.
  - 1) I warn you, this morning's passage is not a warm and fuzzy one. This is not a twinkle lights, carols and nostalgia passage.
  - 2) Don't get me wrong, this IS a Christmas message. But to fully appreciate the birth of God as a baby, we need to soak in the whole story, the evil underbelly of Christmas included. Today we're going to see why Christmas is so desperately necessary.

## 2. Big Picture of the Gospel of Matthew

- A. Matthew starts his Gospel with a genealogy that proves Jesus' rightful place as King in the line of David (in other words: Messianic King [2 Samuel 7])
- B. He immediately summarizes the birth of Jesus and through the words of the wise men labels Jesus as "King" (Matthew 2:2).
- C. The very next thing Matthew does is to bring another "king" into the picture: Herod.
- D. See a pattern?
  - 1) Such an immediate introduction of another king no doubt shows that Matthew is wanting the reader to see a contrast between kings and kingdoms.

- 2) Herod was a bad, bad, bad, bad man. But it's not that he was so different from you and I on the inside. He just had the power and influence to make his inner-reality an outer-reality.

### 3. Matthew 2:3

"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, *and all Jerusalem with him;*" (why?)

#### A. Herod (all info below taken from Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)

- 1) Herod (the great) himself was Edomite by birth, religiously Jewish by tradition of his ancestors.
- 2) Ingratiated himself to the right people in Rome, and Caesar Augustus (Octavian) eventually made him his vassal King to rule over Israel (one of Rome's conquered territories)
- 3) Was a "practicing" Jew, but only nominally for the sake of keeping the peace in Israel

#### B. History tells us that Herod committed everything from flattery and bribery, all the way to murder in order to gain, establish and protect his rule in Israel.

- 1) Aristobulus, the High Priest: was a rival authority. Had him drowned
- 2) Mariamne I, his wife: suspected her of infidelity and had her killed
- 3) Costobarus, his brother-in-law: suspected him of conspiring against him
- 4) A number of rabbis who opposed Herod's allowance and encouragement of Roman pagan religious exercise in Israel (Golden Eagle over entrance of temple, pagan temple construction, etc.)
- 5) Alexander and Aristobulus, his sons with Mariamne I: suspected them of not forgiving their mother's death and conspiracy. Jailed them and eventually executed them by strangulation (in the same town he had married their mother 30 years prior)
- 6) Antipater, his son: like father, like son, Antipater had tried to poison Herod because he was anxious to become king (but poisoned his uncle inadvertently instead). Herod put him in jail, then asked permission from Rome to execute Antipater.

#### C. While waiting for reply from Rome and shortly before Jesus' birth (5 b.c.), Herod became ill with a terminal disease (approx. 70 yrs old)

- 1) Just before Herod's death, the wise men arrived with questions concerning a king in the line of David.
- 2) Even though Herod was dying and he knew it, he still couldn't handle the possibility of his kingship being supplanted and ordered the murder of all boys two and under in the region of Bethlehem.

### 4. Matthew 2:4-8,16

<sup>3</sup>"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

<sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>"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."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and

ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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.'"

A. After this, we read of the wise men's encounter with Jesus. They then flee Israel by a different route, completely defying Herod's orders to deliver Jesus' whereabouts.

<sup>16</sup> "Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."

B. Subsequently, permission was finally given for Antipater's (his son, the poison guy) execution, and only five days before his own death, Herod had him killed.

C. Also, shortly before his death, knowing he was going to die soon, Herod lured the most influential men of Israel to the Hippodrome stadium in Jerusalem. He had them shut inside and ordered his sister and her husband to have them murdered upon his death. Here was his reasoning: "I know well enough that the Jews will keep a festival upon my death; however, it is in my power to be mourned for on other accounts, and to have a splendid funeral, if you will but be subservient to my commands. Do you but take care to send soldiers to encompass these men that are now in custody, and slay them immediately upon my death, and then all Judea, and every family of them, will weep at it whether they will or no."

(Josephus, 1.660)

1) In other words, some people will be happy upon my death, so if they won't mourn my passing, I'll make them mourn nonetheless (by killing all of their esteemed leaders).

2) Fortunately this order wasn't carried out.

D. Interesting thought: Self-worshipping arrogance, paved with the blood of his enemies was the way of Herod the king. Self-sacrificing humility, paved with the blood of His own veins, *for the sake of* His enemies was the way of Jesus the King.

E. What are we supposed to think about all of this? What do we take out of such a dark shadow dropped right in the middle of the miracle of Christmas? It's actually a simple warning:

1) The religion of "self" is the most destructive force in the world. And we are ALL complicit in its domination of our world.

2) It's what started the mess and it's what keeps making the mess more atrocious.

3) Pursuit of the true King always demands leaving the false kings we have in His place

5. Jesus was born on this Earth to overthrow the evil empire that had been ruling and wreaking havoc. In Moses' day, people assumed that God would overthrow the Egyptian empire to restore peace. In Daniel's day, they thought it was the Babylonians. In Jesus' day, it was the Romans. In George Washington's day, it was the English. In our day, it might be liberals or conservatives or radical Islamic

regimes like ISIS, depending on your political bent. But those aren't the empires Jesus came to overthrow.

A. Let me show you the Empire Jesus came to overthrow:

“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:4-6)

B. Jesus came to overthrow the evil Empire of "Me." That I am in control, that I chart my course, that I provide wisdom and goodness and knowledge, that I am my own plumb line for morality, that I hold in my hands the key to eternal life through what I accomplish. That I am a god.

C. We all have an inner-Herod. It's that part of me that is obsessed with me. That part that will do anything and walk over anyone to get what I want. That part that says to its creator, thanks but no thanks, I've got this. You may not be as extreme in your heart as Herod was. You may just be indifferent like the scribes and priests that Herod summoned. (He'll be born in Bethlehem, Herod. Do what you want. We'll get back to work at the temple.) Why didn't they go with the wise men?!?!?! This is their King! But instead, this troubles them, they give Herod information they most likely knew would equip Herod to do evil and got back to church. So you may be only indifferent at this point. But indifference to Jesus is complicit and congruous with opposing Him. Jesus is not someone you can be on the fence with. You're for Him or against Him.

D. Herod thought that he could extend his dynasty by killing Jesus. But the reality is that Jesus was born with a mission: Killing Herod. The man who lived and ruled Israel 2000 years ago? No. His mission was to kill the Herod that lives in every one of us. The one who would resist the true King of kings and would seek, through self-obsession, to rule in His place.

E. How do we kill Herod? By faith, we repent of our sin (self-rule) and trust Jesus as our King and Savior. He is gracious, He will forgive and the moment you surrender, truly surrender, He will save you and give you a new identity as the citizen of a far better kingdom, a child in a far better family. And from that moment, He will begin to change your heart.

F. As saved children of the King, our path is to keep surrendering, to keep Herod dead by trust and obedience. To rid ourselves of Herod's legacy by choosing self-sacrifice over self-obsession. And one day, when you breathe your last, and this world's vicious grasp finally loses its hold, you will wake up as a perfectly new and complete human being - the person you were meant to be: a child in perfect loving relationship with your Father God, fully surrendered, infinitely fulfilled, eternally loved.

6. Communion

26 “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ 27 And He took a

cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" (Matthew 26:26-29)

A. Remember Jesus.

B. Use this time to once again pledge your loyalty to Him above all things.

C. Eat the bread and drink the cup whenever you feel ready.