

**The Tyrant and the Baby King**  
**Covenant Waterfall, 15 December 2019**  
**Matthew 2:13-23**

Pray

**Introduction**

Today's culture – strongly individualistic. Want to do things my way, make my own choices. We don't want to be told what to do. We want to be masters of our own destinies. We want to make the rules, make our own plans, be our own kings, build our own kingdoms for our own glory - be our own gods. Look at the types of people our culture elevates – celebrities, singers, actors, TV personalities – usually all epitomise this idea of life.

In actual fact, there is nothing new about these kinds of ideas. Since the Garden of Eden, our ancestors and the entire human race – we have always wanted to do our own thing. Adam and Eve rejected God's Word to them and instead raised their fist to their Creator and followed after their own desires instead of God's. They fell for the serpent's temptation that they would be like the gods if they ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The story of mankind in Scripture from that point on shows the outworking of this path – it paints a bleak picture of destruction, death and hopelessness. Story after story in the OT shows that mankind is murderous, perverted, rebellious, self-centred and heading for self-destruction.

Thankfully God did not leave us in our mess. Throughout the OT, despite the mess, we see God restoring his sinful people, the nation of Israel, to himself, and promising them that there would be a day when he would send his Messiah who would fix the mess once and for all. Eventually God's promise was fulfilled. In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ, God's own Son – the Messiah – came to earth, born a baby in Israel. It is at this point where our passage of Scripture in the Gospel of Matthew picks up.

Earlier in the Gospel, we read that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. King Herod, the king over Israel at the time is told of Jesus's birth by the wise men. They are on their way to find baby

Jesus so that they can worship him as the King of Israel – God’s promised Messiah. When King Herod discovers this, he is determined to hunt down the baby Jesus and have him killed, as he cannot tolerate a rival claim to his kingship.

So we are faced with a showdown between two kings – the one a tyrant and the other a baby. The tyrant Herod embodies the epitome of sinful man, self-centred, bent on self-destruction and hopelessness; while the baby Jesus is the incarnate God himself, come to rescue man out of his mess and offer us an incredible hope.

The main idea of this sermon is therefore that: ***Because God is our sovereign King, in Christ there is always hope*** (repeat).

Unpack this – 3 points...

- God’s Sovereign Plan
- The “Insignificant” Baby King
- Our Eternal Hope

#### **A. God’s Sovereign Plan**

v.16

**“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.”**

**Herod** – tried to get to Jesus via wise men in order to kill him – his plan failed as the wise men were warned in a dream that Herod meant to harm Jesus and therefore did not let Herod know where Jesus was. Because of this Herod initiated “Plan B” – kill all the babies in the Bethlehem area who were 2 years old or younger. This, in his eyes, would surely eliminate Jesus from the picture once and for all. Yet, Herod’s “Plan B” also failed – Mary and Joseph had managed to escape Israel with the baby Jesus and flee Herod’s menacing reach.

While Herod, who thinks he is in control as king, is trying his best to eliminate Jesus from the picture, God is the one who is really in control of the situation and sovereignly directing all the unfolding events. Knowing the coming danger that faces Jesus, God sovereignly intervenes, v.13:

**“Behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”**

Because God sovereignly directs Joseph through an angelic visitation in a dream, he is able to escape to Egypt with Jesus, avoiding Herod. Not only does God sovereignly direct this situation and deliver Jesus from impending danger, this event was actually prophesied in the OT, some 600 years before by the prophet Hosea. This shows just how sovereign God actually is. Not crisis management – “oh look, Herod wants to kill Jesus, mmm what shall I do now? Aha, I have a plan...” No, God knew what would unfold before the creation of the universe, as it’s prophesied as a part of his pre-ordained plan all the way back in Hosea!

Matthew is quoting Hosea 11:1. It is a reference to the Exodus, where God delivered his people Israel from bondage out of Egypt. Matthew is trying to tell us something here. When OT passages are quoted in the NT, there are used like internet hyperlinks – one short quote that takes us back to a greater context in the OT. This is an example of that. The connection to the Exodus story here is that as the baby Moses was rescued from a plan to kill Israelite baby boys in Egypt, so Jesus is rescued from being slaughtered under Herod. In both cases, God sovereignly protected and delivered two babies from death. Both babies grew up to be deliverers of their own people – Moses, leading the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt, into freedom in the Promised Land. Jesus, leading his people out of the bondage of sin and death and into freedom and abundant life in his kingdom.

Another example in this passage which shows God’s sovereignty is at the end of the passage. When Herod dies, God tells Joseph that it’s ok to go back to Israel with Jesus by sending another angel to him in a dream (v.19). God then warns them through another dream not to settle in their home town, Bethlehem in Judea, as Herod’s son, Archelaus is

reigning there, but instead to settle in the far north of Israel, in Galilee, away from Judea. Here again we see the sovereign God perfectly guiding events according to his purposes.

We see here two kings working to achieve their will. Herod, who believes he is mighty in his own sight, tries his best to snuff out the new baby king Jesus and fails. In contrast to Herod, God, the sovereign King has all things under his care and control. He is the One who knows the end from the beginning, who upholds the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1:3), and who will accomplish his purposes. He always brings to pass that which he has spoken and does all that he has purposed. Nothing can stop God. (Isa 46:8-11).

This is hugely comforting for us - in him, we find perfect security knowing that he is in control and he will fulfil his purposes perfectly in us. We don't have to worry and strive in our own strength, instead we find rest in his sovereign hand over us.

### **B. The "Insignificant" Baby King**

**Herod** – king of Judea. He was not an ethnic Jew, but an Edomite (tribe across the Jordan river). Family had converted to Judaism. Was appointed King of the Jews (Judea) by the Romans, who ruled over Judea. Hated by most Jews – seen as a traitor and collaborator with the Romans. Brutal man – had members of his own family killed (wife, some sons and relatives). Great and extravagant builder – I've been to Israel and seen some of the buildings he built – yes still standing after over 2000 years – Western Wall (foundation of the Temple Mount (greatly improved previous Temple), Masada, desert fortress (sauna, magnificent), Caesarea – beautiful Roman buildings. Shows his desire for earthly glory – wanted to make sure that history remembered him, wanted to be great and build a name for himself. Powerful in his own eyes, self-important.

Therefore you can imagine how threatened he must have felt when he heard about the existence of a rival king, also called King of the Jews – direct affront to his authority and very existence, so had to try and eliminate him. Sign of insecurity – can't tolerate opposition.

Contrast this to **Jesus** – he has just been born, few days, weeks old, helpless, weak – in human terms the complete opposite of Herod. Yet he is the true King of Israel. God's chosen

king. A common theme in Scripture is that God raises up the weak to lead the strong. I think this reveals something of the heart of God...

1 Cor 1:27-28,

**“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”**

Only God could send his Son, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, to this earth as a baby boy. The very fact of the Incarnation, God becoming man in the Person of Christ = God humbling himself by leaving glories of heaven, courts of the king of the universe, and becoming one of us (Phil 2).

Good news for us – God doesn’t wield his power as a brutal tyrant or dictator. God instead demonstrates his power through weakness and humility. Christ came as a baby, yet is the King of the universe. Similar way, God chooses people like us, who don’t necessarily have it all together - the weak, broken, the last and the least, picks us up from the muck and dirt and seats us in heavenly places with him.

Back to *Jesus* – verses 22-23

**“But when (Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.””**

Another prophecy being fulfilled here – the Messiah will be from Nazareth. Not one specific prophet that Matthew is quoting, but getting the gist of what many prophets say about the Messiah. Isaiah 9:1-2 shows that the Messiah will be from Galilee. In Isaiah 53 it describes the Messiah as being very insignificant in outward appearance - not much to look at, having no particular beauty or majesty in his appearance (v.2). Nazareth in particular was something of a backwater village – John 1:45, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Probably comparable to some dorpie like Pofadder – insignificant place. Real, pure Jews from Judea – heart of Israel, Jerusalem. Galilee – mixed area – seen as bunch of rednecks, not significant!

Paradox - Herod = powerful king in human eyes, earthly trappings of power: political power, building projects in his honour, feared and ruthless – yet false king, did not last forever.

Verse 19, throwaway line, **“But when Herod died...”** Sovereign eternal King of the universe, true king of Israel = helpless baby, who grew up in some insignificant hick town.

### **C. Our Eternal Hope**

We’ve seen that Herod, the tyrant king, left a legacy of destruction, terror and brutality. Tried to kill the Messiah, had countless innocent baby boys slaughtered. Left people in tragedy and hopelessness.

Yet the baby King Jesus is completely different. Instead of destruction and hopelessness, this King is bringing restoration and hope. Verse 18, a seemingly unlikely verse, brings this into focus:

**“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”**

This is another prophecy, from Jeremiah 31:15, which Matthew uses to show how Herod’s slaughtering of the innocents was prophesied in the OT. Weeping, sadness, seeming hopelessness. Remember what I said earlier about OT quotes like hyperlinks? Here is another example – need to go back to Jer 31 and see what it’s all about – more meaning for us. Judah about to be exiled into Babylon because of their sin and idolatry. The weeping and mourning is for the children who are about to go into exile and captivity. But the passage doesn’t end there. In verse 17 in Jer 31 it says, **“There is hope for your future, declares the LORD.”** So in the midst of all this destruction and heartbreak, God is promising hope. What is the hope? He will eventually restore his people back to their land, their exile will eventually come to an end.

The same thing is happening here. There is mourning now for the babies who are being slaughtered by the tyrant Herod, yet real hope has arrived and is about to be realised through the baby King Jesus. Here is God’s promised Messiah who has come to restore his wondering people back to God, to rescue them from their mess, their sin and rebellion. Salvation is finally here! Soon and very soon he will die on the cross and rise again, bearing

the just punishment for sin that we deserved, on himself. And in return, those who believe will be forgiven of our sins, restored in right relationship to God, and released into his abundant life that starts now and lasts forever in him! This is real hope!

How completely different is this from Herod's reign of destruction and hopelessness? In Christ, there is full restoration and a hope that is real and life-changing!

## **Conclusion**

It's easy to look at all of this and see how evil Herod was and leave it at that. Reality is that we are not that different from Herod. Maybe you think that's hard to believe? Think: I'm not a baby killer, I'm not a power-crazy king! Yes maybe that's true, yet that same desire of Herod to usurp the baby King Jesus is something common to all of mankind since the Garden of Eden, and culminated in mankind crucifying Jesus – the ultimate act of rebellion. This is a part of our sinful core that we want to oppose the true King, be masters of our own destinies, our gods and own kings – and leave no room for *the* King to rule in our lives.

Although this may sound appealing, especially in our highly individualistic and independently-minded culture, its promise of power and meaning is hollow. Like Herod, we will all come to nothing one day. Glory and power now, on our own terms, as gods and kings independent of the God and King leaves us hopeless. There is nothing within us that can give us any kind of hope. On our own we will only walk the same path of Herod – destruction and hopelessness. Hope can only come from something outside of us.

It is only in Christ where we find true hope. Because God is our sovereign King, in Christ there is always hope.

Like Herod, on our own, all our plans ultimately come to nothing. They are futile, fleeting and end in disappointment.

In Christ, we are called into God's sovereign plan which he has predestined before the foundation of the universe. In him, we find perfect security knowing that he is in control and he will fulfil his purposes perfectly in us.

Like Herod, on our own, we think that true power comes from building our own empire of wealth, influence, getting people to fear and respect us. Yet our own empires are always temporary and human power ultimately fades away.

In Christ, God became a weak helpless baby, the true majesty of heaven became nothing in order to save us. He finds us in our weakness, in the midst of our sin and brokenness, and raises us from death to life, seating us in heavenly places with him.

Like Herod, on our own, we run a hell-bound race of destruction, which leaves us empty and without hope.

In Christ, because only he has come as the Messiah to die in our place for our sins, and in return grant us complete forgiveness and a brand new life, restored to our Father – he have incredible, true, real and everlasting hope in him.

Amen