

December 17, 2017

(The Star Series)

“Threatened by the Star”, Matthew 2:1-20

Last week, in this “Star” Christmas series, we saw the Magi were actually UNLIKELY candidates for God’s grace, but they responded and received it anyway. Today we look at King Herod, a LIKELY candidate for God’s grace, but who chose to be an anti-hero and rejected the kingdom of God with violence. (Matthew 2:1-20)

I. The story of Herod (Matthew 2:1-20)

A. Herod built a great kingdom for himself.

Herod the Great was part gentile, born to a Jewish mother and half Jewish father in 73 BC. Initially as King of Israel, he fought off an invasion and then stayed on the throne through the rules of four different Roman Emperors. Herod excelled as a builder of four fortresses, the entire port of Caesarea, and ultimately the largest Jewish temple ever built in Jerusalem.

B. Herod went to great lengths to protect that kingdom from Jesus. (Matthew 2: 13-18)

Herod was worried that this infant Messiah/King, promised in Old Testament Scripture, might take away his kingdom. Herod had always been insecure about the non-Jewish part of his lineage, knowing the Jews could never accept him fully. To protect his kingdom, Herod questioned the Magi secretly, pretended to want to worship the baby, and proceeded to murder all babies under age two in Bethlehem when he did not know which child to kill. In history, his violence continued as he later strangled his own wife and killed three of his sons.

C. Herod died.

Despite all the grandeur and greatness of the kingdom he had built, despite his ruthless efforts protect his kingdom, Herod lost his kingdom at death. Then he passed on to the afterlife where he will answer for all the sinful things he did to hold on to his kingdom.

II. Lessons learned from the story of Herod in Matthew 2

A. Sometimes, the LIKELY don’t make it into God’s Kingdom.

The Magi showed us that God accepts us and pours out His grace, even if we have troublesome sin in the past. However, Herod showed us that sometimes there are LIKELY candidates for grace who do not make it into the kingdom. Herod was mostly Jewish (ethnicity), knew prophetic Scripture (knowledge), and had done a great task (good works) for God in building the Temple. Yet in considering “What will you do about Jesus?” he rejected the Messiah and tried to kill him. He completely missed the good news of the Gospel.

B. Herod missed out on the something MORE that Jesus was offering.

Jesus/Messiah was offering more, God’s grace, not something less. Even Herod (like us all) was made for God’s worldwide and eternal Kingdom, but he rejected it in spite of being a LIKELY candidate for God’s grace.

Have we handed over the throne of our lives to Jesus so that He can welcome us into His Kingdom, or do we reject our Savior and hang on to the control of our own kingdom?

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there something MORE that you are reaching for in Christianity? Is searching OK?
2. What in your life are you trying to protect from Jesus? Are you willing to surrender it to Jesus? Where can you get help?
3. Are you or have you been one of the LIKELY or UNLIKELY people to be a candidate for God’s grace? Explain.
4. Can you relate with the Magi, Herod, the shepherds, or anyone else in this Christmas story?

5. What is this gospel that King Jesus brings to earth? What did Herod miss? Did we?
6. Where does the world tell us to find our security? How does it differ from Christ's security?
7. Just like the Christmas story, our lives are both lovely (baby) and ugly (Herod). As Christians, do we celebrate how the good & the ugly in us can be made perfect in Jesus?