

**No Matter What, God's Grace Is Greater**

**<sup>13</sup> When [the Magi] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." <sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."**

**<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he 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. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup> "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."**

Matthew 2:13-18 is a part of the Christmas story that you don't find on Christmas cards. Yet, that doesn't mean it's any less important to the Christmas story. Why? Because it opens our eyes to the reality of the world into which Jesus Christ was born and for which Jesus Christ came. If you doubt the gross, vile brutality of it, remember that there is only one cry in the Bible greater than the cry of the mothers of Bethlehem, it's the cry of the cross. There Jesus cried out for the world.

I imagine instantly when you look at this story in Matthew 2:13-18, you have some hard questions. I imagine you are wondering: "How could Herod do such a thing? Why would God allow such a thing? And what am I supposed to learn from all of it?" Well, let's let those questions serve as the outline for our sermon today, and from the answers, may we grow in faith and sit in awe of God's amazing, sovereign grace that always supersedes all the wickedness and evil of this world.

**Question #1: How Could Herod Do Such a Thing?**

He could because that's what happens when life is all about self, when you believe that you are the captain of your soul and the master of your fate. With an ego like that, there are no bounds to wickedness and evil, even if it means slaughtering 20-30 little boys.

Sadly, King Herod, as terrible as he was, was a typical king. Kings in those days were always looking out for themselves, and if they saw any threat or rival to their power and authority, they had no problem getting rid of it. Like I said, such an ego knows no bounds. The story is even told how King Herod purposely planned a mass murder to take place at the moment of his death to make sure that someone, somewhere would be crying.

History is full of King Herod's, and today's history is no different. Yes, I'll say it, even as babies continue to be aborted. It's all about the wicked ego of sinful human beings. And while you may

continue to be shocked by it all, like you are with the slaughter of the Bethlehem boys, do not be surprised.

Don't be surprised because if you are honest, you know there's a wicked ego that lives within you. When it says in Romans 8:7, 8: **"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God,"** that's talking about all of us.

Here's the harsh but true reality of the question: "How could Herod do such a thing?" Do you know that if you asked God that question, he'd answer your question with a question, and ask, "How can you do the wicked, evil things you do? How can you be so selfish and self-centered? How can you be so jealous and envious? How can you be so mean and vindictive? How come you have such a problem with my authority and rebel the way you do? How come you know what I say but do what you do anyway? How come I receive such pushback from you, such retaliation, such anger, such hate?" And if you would try to answer those questions with a "yeah but," attempting to tell God why Herod is worse, you'd only be exposing how evil you really are, unwilling to see or acknowledge your own rotten, sinful self.

What are we to learn from this story in Matthew 2:13-18? There is a little King Herod that lives within all of us.

### **Question #2: But Why Would God Allow Such a Thing?**

There it is! The question we love to ask God when anything goes wrong or bad: "Why? Why? Why?" And believe me, I can't wrap my brain around 20-30 little boys being slaughtered by an ego maniac either. So I'm not criticizing the question: "Why?" You can hear the same question in several of the psalms. But here's what I want you to notice in Matthew 2:13-18. Even with his One and Only facing mortal danger, again listen to this clearly, even with his One and Only facing mortal danger, God does not answer the question "why" for Joseph or Mary, or even for Jesus. Even as they flee and leave the sound of wailing and weeping, God does not answer the question "why." Even on their return from Egypt to Nazareth, God does not answer the question "why." Why? Because unless you humbly accept the broken, vile world into which Jesus was born, no answer God gives will ever satisfy you. But more importantly, the reason God doesn't answer the question "why" is because he would rather have you focus on the "what" of the story.

Matthew 2:13-18 wasn't happening because God had forgotten Joseph, Mary, or Jesus, nor had he forgotten the boys of Bethlehem or their mothers. No! God had a plan to save this world from sin. But in order for God to carry out his plan, he would sacrifice his Son when it was his time, not Herod or anybody else. Do you see God's sovereign grace even in the midst of the grossest evil? The amazing truth of this story in Matthew 2:13-18 is not only into such a world Jesus was born, but greater than that, "for such a world" Jesus was born. He was born into this world of suffering to suffer the worst fate of all – the payment and punishment for the sins of the world, for your sins and mine. He faced the hostility of King Herod to receive the worst hostility of all – to be forsaken by his own Father so that we wouldn't receive the same. He suffered death, even death

on the cross, so that we wouldn't suffer eternal death in hell. This is the greater story within the story of Matthew 2:13-18. And how did it end up? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

God's saving grace always supersedes any evil and wickedness we see, face, or endure. Always! Because the truth is: Christ did not come to save those Bethlehem boys from Herod, but to save them from hell. Those Bethlehem boys died an unspeakable death, but by God's grace and their circumcision, which marked them as God's children, those Bethlehem boys belonged to God forever. They were in God's hands from the very beginning and continued to be even through their short life. Not one of those Bethlehem boys is questioning "why." They are not asking God: "Why did you let me die so young and so violently?" Rather, because of God's sovereign grace, those boys in heaven are overcome by the fact that they had the undeserving honor to bleed for the One who bled for them on the cross, and they are rejoicing: **"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** (Revelation 5:12).

Do you think I am making this up? The verse in our text that says: **"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,"** is quoted from Jeremiah 31:15. If you would check out that quote, you will read the most amazing thing. Verse 16 and 17 say: **"This is what the Lord says: 'Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded...there is hope for your future...your children will return.'"** In other words, Rachel, who represented the weeping mothers of Bethlehem, will get her boys back. God's sovereign grace reigns.

Even in the midst of suffering and death, even in the midst of sickness and disease, even amidst of a pandemic and political unrest, even in the midst of hate and persecution, even in the midst of whatever trouble or tragedy, evil cannot win. God's grace is greater.

So take to heart the passage that is as true for us as it was for the boys of Bethlehem: **"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living"** (Romans 14:7-9).

There's the greatest lesson to learn: No matter what, because of God's sovereign grace, we belong to the Lord, just like the boys of Bethlehem did. Amen.