

**WEEK 2 | HEROD: THE WORLD UNDER THE POWER OF SIN  
MATTHEW 2:13-23**

CURRENT SERMON SERIES

**THE**  
**STORY OF HUMANITY**  
**- IN THE -**  
**LIFE OF JESUS**

A STUDY OF MATTHEW 2 - 4



**ANNOUNCEMENTS (5 MINUTES)**

Catch everybody up to date on what's going on with New City. You can use your bulletin or the [Weekly Roundup](#) as a tool to do so (especially remind folks of the Women's Gathering on Jan 19).

**ENGAGE (10 MINUTES)**

*Starter Questions:* Josh mentioned reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* while in school. What's the best book you ever *had* to read (i.e. it was assigned to you)?

**REFLECTION AND STUDY (30-35 MINUTES)**

*To start the year we're going to be looking at the early episodes in the life of Jesus as told by Matthew 2-4.*

- 1.) **Read Matthew 2:13-23.** Why do you suppose this story isn't usually included in Christmas pageants or Lessons and Carols Services?
- 2.) What drives the main action in the story?
- 3.) What does this story teach us about God?
- 4.) What does it teach us about the world we live in? How does a passage like this help address the person who complains that people just believe in religion as form of escapism from the world's problems?
- 5.) Why was Herod so troubled by the news of Jesus' birth? Why does he react so strongly? (see 2:1-3)
- 6.) New Testament scholar Frederick Dale Bruner writes: "*Herod is not merely the Gospel villain; he is Everyman. Herod teaches that a reaction of raw human nature to the kingship*

*of Jesus is rebellion. If Jesus is Lord, then we are not. Herod's response to a center of the universe other than himself is dis-ease, mal-aise... Thus Herod, though an extreme case, is not an isolated one. Herod is what I am deep down inside." Agree or disagree?*

7.) On Sunday Josh said that following Jesus solves a lot of problems, but it also creates new ones. Christianity brings a new peace into our lives, but also a new struggle. Can you think of any ways this is true?

8.) Is there anything in the modern world that reminds you of the cruelty of Herod? How can we care for those whom the world things of us as "the least and the lost"?

9.) On Sunday, Josh mentioned several possible applications concerning how we can follow Jesus in a world under the power of sin: a.) Learn that following Christ will entail struggles, b.) Learn to weep, c.) Learn to act, and d.) Look to Jesus. Which of these do you most need to apply?

### **PRAYER (15 MINUTES)**

Break up into smaller groups of men and women. For those who are comfortable, share your applications and pray for one another.

## **POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

1.) We all know why – we associate certain words and themes with Christmastime (peace, good will, birth, giving, child, angels, light, etc). This story is characterized by hatred, slaughter, weeping, brutality and flight. But by including this story, Matthew reminds us not only of our Savior, but of the state of the world he came to save.

2.) Herod's murderous intent leads to the flight to Egypt, the killing of the children, and the relocation to Nazareth.

3.) It teaches us the sovereignty of God. He speaks to Joseph in a dream two times to preserve Jesus. It also shows us his power: his plans cannot be thwarted, even by human tyrants. This story shows us the love God has for the world: "the word became flesh" in a world where this kind of brutality and evil happens.

4.) More or less answered above. The Bible is utterly realistic about the world.

5.) Jesus was "born king of the Jews" (2:2). If Jesus is king, then Herod is not. Herod will do anything to protect his power. The killing of 20-30 children near Bethlehem was a footnote in the larger story of his cruelty.

6.) The essence of evil from a biblical perspective is rejection of God as king. Herod is an extreme case, but not a unique one. When we sin, we place ourselves in the position of ultimate authority instead of God. As Martin Luther said, sin is *homo curvatus en se* (man curved in upon himself).

7.) When you become a Christian, a lot of things that used to bother you, won't anymore. And a lot of things that didn't use to bother you, now will.

Christianity brings a new peace in the sense that we can rest in God's loving plan for us, rather than being up and down with our circumstances. We can have peace of conscience, knowing that we can face our guilt because Jesus died for our sins. We can have peace of identity: not being inflated or deflated by our successes and failures, because our identity is found in him.

On the other hand, Christianity brings new struggles. Whenever you care about something or someone, it opens you up to disappointment and hurt. Christianity pushes us to care and invest and lay our lives down for God and others. Christianity also causes new internal struggles as we do battle with our own pride, greed, apathy and lust (see Romans 7). And following Jesus may put us in conflict with the world. Mary and Joseph were made refugees because they were Jesus' family; the children were killed because they were from Jesus' city. If you follow Jesus, you are included in his family (Ephesians 1) and citizens of his city (Philippians 3). When lumped in with him, the world will react to you as it did to him.

8.) The slaughter of innocents continues today when human life is deemed expendable. Historically we can think of the Gulags, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing. Today we must be aware of the exploitation of children in the sex trade, the need for orphan care and adoption, the needs of the poor and refugees, and our country's policies on abortion. The Bible calls us to value all human life (born and unborn, young and old, brilliant and simple, healthy and sick, rich and poor).

Next week is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. We'll be hearing a bit about the ministry of Life Forward (formerly Pregnancy Care) and the baby bottle boomerang. God may be calling some in your group to jump in with this ministry. Or perhaps Whiz Kids or Back2Back, or reaching out to the elderly on your street, or something else altogether.

9.) Various answers. This will make good fodder for prayer as well.