

Killing Christmas

Prayer

Good Morning, we have all heard the Christmas story. For years we have reveled in its significance. We have wondered at the events and in fact culturally we have build up in our minds a beautiful pastoral scene around the coming of our savior. What a beautiful image it creates in our minds when we sing songs like away in a manger or little town of Bethlehem.

Today, I don't want to rob any wonder or magnificence from this event but I want to look at some events surrounding the Christmas story that may not be so pleasant. As a culture we have difficulty with the reality of Jesus birth and so we place glamorized elements around it.

For example: A manger was a storage place for animals. It this which may have been a dank, damp cave or a barn like structure, there was straw. Because it was a working stable; It would have smelled like the feces of the animals. It was a filthy environment that our savior would come into.

How symbolic that the Lord of Lord's and king of kings would be born into such a lowly place.

I submit for your consideration that some of what we are experiencing today around the attacks against Christmas are not a new thing...

How many people here today have ever heard of king Herod?

King Herod the Great was given the title of King. He was astute and very ruthless. He was trusted by the occupying Roman authorities and hated by his Jewish subjects. He was the head of a sect called the Herodians who believed that he was the messiah. He set himself up as God.

To give you an idea how wicked he was, I ask you to consider that Mariamme, who was a Hasmonean princess, and was his chief wife. Now Herod fearing the peoples love for her family, had her brother killed and maneuvered her judicial murder by strangulation. Following that, he killed Mariamme's mother and two of his own sons, born to him by her. He even killed her grandfather in his Jealousy and paranoia.

This is the Herod who when he heard from the Wise Men that a new king had been born in Bethlehem, he ordered all of the male children under two years old killed.

Let's read Matthew 2:16-18 NKJV about his Massacre of the Innocents

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

*“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more.”*

But why bring him up?

I bring this up because we tend to bury these more unpleasant aspects of the Christmas story. In Short, They are uncomfortable.

Let me ask another question... Why did Matthew include this story in the bible? If there is no significance here or no lesson to be learned, why is it in the bible? Friends, I believe that there are some aspects here we need to think about.

Herod wanted to kill Christmas! He was scared about how it would impact him. He was scared about what Christ's influence would mean to the perception of how he was doing things. The very existence of Christ was a threat to his methods, his way of life, his self-image, his role as messiah.

Now consider... Why are there groups out there today that want to kill Christmas?

Does the example of the light of Christ shining on their lives show the darkness? Do Jesus teachings illustrate for the world the sinfulness and wickedness of the human heart?

When we consider ISIS, Hitler & his Nazis, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and others, do we see a parallel?

Absolutely, this is an easy comparison.

Now let's consider the motivations of those who would stand on the highest mountains and shout about freedoms, yet are the same individuals who have tried to take Jesus out of our schools, our workplaces, our government. Why are these regular citizens trying to Kill Christmas?

I submit that it is because the light, life and example of Christ bring into sharp relief the individual wickedness of the human heart. Do you think that people who do despicable things want to have their natures exposed?

Think of a thief who is trying to break into a store, would they prefer to be in darkness or standing out where everyone can see what they are doing in the light of day.

You see my friends, Jesus and Christianity is attacked because it calls mankind to account and people simply do not want to be held accountable. People don't want to surrender their lives to Jesus. Just like Herod and so many other despots, it is in their nature to try to take power, to control and to brutally remove anyone who thinks differently.

As a Christian, I may not agree with other religions, but I would never impinge upon their rights of belief and their right to either choose or reject God... Unfortunately, for some of the extreme groups, it goes beyond religious freedom to actual crimes against humanity, crimes against life itself.

Consider with me Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?”

Messianic Miracles

The Pharisee's and Sadducees stated that there were four miracles that only the Son of God could do.

- 1) Heal a leper
- 2) Heal a man born blind
- 3) Cast out a mute demon
- 4) Raise a man from the dead after three days

Now Jesus did all of these things and instead of increasing their faith, they saw him as a threat to their power and position, so they plotted to kill him. This was despite the fact that he fulfilled their criteria for being the messiah.

When people live for themselves alone and personal gain; when people put themselves before others the wickedness becomes apparent. In Herod's case he got to the point where human life meant nothing to him.

A non-canonical (not in the bible) historian named Josephus called him “Barbaric” others described him as “Malevolent” or “Pervert”

When I read online today about those who would try to discredit the authenticity of the bible I am astonished. Other historians in this account of Herod corroborate the word of God.

So what happens when wicked hearts receive power? Some would say that the difference between these despots and those who would come against God in other ways is simply the power to carry out their evil intentions.

With that said, individuals now use media and social acceptance to sway people to their way of thinking. This morning, I am here to tell you that just because something is socially acceptable or legal; those facts do not necessarily make it morally right.

We, as Christians, must use the Word of God as the authority for right and wrong in our lives.

This is an unpopular reality about our natures that we really need to understand. When we come to Christ we are righteous because his righteousness covers us. In addition we are new creations in him and our spirits are forever changed, yet there are still areas of our flesh that need work. We need that guidance of the Holy Spirit! Without it, we are blind and lost. People don't want to hear this truth because it forces us to come face to face with the truth about who we are.

Friends, the world is in the state it is in because it NEEDS Jesus! It needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With this we as a species are lost!

Why was Christ Born?

Jesus was born to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)

If anything, the lesson we learn from Herod reminds us why Christ had to be born. We as a people NEED a Savior. It's not an optional thing.

Now many people do have a strong moral compass and resist sin, yet remember that it is not by our works that we are saved, but the only way to God is through his Son Jesus. (John 14:6)

We are saved by our faith in him.

Romans 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Walk with God

For years we have heard the expression in our Churches that says: "We must walk with God" I want to explore this a bit further that the expression this morning.

Exodus 33:15,16

Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.

Friends, our walk with God should not simply intersect at various points in our week, it should never diverge. We must learn to hear his voice and obey...

John 10:27

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

As Christians, we need to realize that God is sovereign. He is in control and though we may not always understand, he has a plan.

Jeremiah 29:11,12

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you

Let's look some aspects of Matthew 2:12-23 to illustrate my point... In these scriptures we see the occurrence of four separate dreams:

- 1) Advises the Magi to go home another way
- 2) Advises Joseph and Mary of danger and tells them to go to Egypt
- 3) Advises return to Israel as Herod is dead
- 4) Advises not to return to Bethlehem but to proceed to Nazareth

Clearly God has a plan and provides direction to those in his big picture.

In addition to his warnings / advice we see that our Lord Jesus' time in Egypt that is mentioned in Verse 15 fulfills Hosea 11:1 "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.*" In verse 18 we see the connection of the weeping mothers of Bethlehem with the sorrow of Israel when in captivity and in verse 23 we see illustrated that even Nazareth as a home for Jesus was a part of God's plan from the beginning.

Herod tried to derail God's plan and regardless of the atrocities Herod committed, Gods will was done.

So what about all the other children who died at Herod's hand... This is a tough one. God does not interfere with the choice to serve him. When a man or woman chooses to act apart from God that man or woman is responsible for his or her own actions.

Regarding those mothers and fathers who suffered such great loss, I can only offer this as comfort.

Romans 12:19

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Psalms 56:8-11

*You Yourself have recorded my wanderings.
Put my tears in Your bottle.
Are they not in Your records?
Then my enemies will retreat on the day when I call.
This I know: God is for me.
In God, whose word I praise,
in the Lord, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?*

Matthew 5:45

So that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

God has not turned a blind eye to the suffering of his people. We ask him to hedge in our families and protect them. But let's be clear, we cannot blame God for the actions of evil men and women. If he took away their free will, we would not have the right to choose to serve him, he allows us to choose.

So choose

Joshua 24:15

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

So God is sovereign and his grace is sufficient for us.

If we examine the Lord's prayer it will give us insights into the very concept of walking with God.

What is the message of Christmas this morning?...

God is God and he always wins in the end. He has a plan!

Man fell, God restored through his Son Jesus. He came that we might have life and life more abundantly.

Friends, we face the same battles today. This same battle for the hearts and minds of the people is happening all around us. ISIS is killing children and their parents for believing in Jesus. It is the ongoing battle of Good vs. Evil. The world we live in didn't welcome Jesus then and they don't welcome him now.

People don't want you to say Merry Christmas, not because it is politically incorrect. They don't want you to say Merry Christmas because it segregates. This are all excuses. The main reason is that when we recognize Christ and his ways, it brings the sin of the world into the light of day.

I would like to conclude with this point... The world has such a huge issue with Christianity because the power of his word to attack the sinful nature of the world and its ways is real. The world doesn't take other belief systems, philosophies and faiths to task because the Satan isn't scared of them.

Everything comes down to faith...

Do you believe?

- Jesus is the Son of God
- Jesus is your savior
- Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven
- Jesus was the sacrifice for your sin
- Jesus is coming back as King of Kings

If you do then Christmas cannot be killed. His Spirit lives on in you. This world can try to shut down Christmas; they can attack his methods, his reality and so on. This is nothing new. It has been going on for over 2000 years.

We celebrate the truth of Christmas! We celebrate Jesus.

Let me close with this thought from John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

“ He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

If the Word brings the nature of the world to light and that light reveals a lost and troubled world, certainly we can understand why those who are convicted would want to hide from the light of truth.

Prayer