

So Close and Yet So Far: Herod

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

This sermon series follows the season of Advent, which consists of the four Sundays that precede Christmas. The word, *Advent*, is derived from the Latin word that means “coming.” So, Advent is a time to commemorate the coming of God’s Son, Jesus, into the world. In this Advent series, we’re going to explore how various people responded to the news of Jesus’ birth.

Introduction

Before we look at the scripture related to this message, let’s review the background and character of King Herod, who serves as the villain in the Christmas story from Matthew’s gospel. Herod was the king assigned by the Roman government to rule over the area of Judea. He was insecure, insanely jealous, and paranoid about losing his power. When he heard the news that a “new king” had been born, Herod set out to destroy the would-be king. The thought of losing his power, his control, and his way of life created a crippling fear of the very child who was born to save.

1. What are some ways in which people in our world miss out on the “Christ” of Christmas?
2. Discuss a few things that create irrational fear in people and ultimately keep them from Jesus?

Preparation

Read the following text related to today’s message:

Matthew 2:1-5, 7-8, 12-14, 16 (NIRV)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea. After Jesus’ birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. ² They asked, “Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? When we were in the east, we saw his star. Now we have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset. Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too. ⁴ So Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ was going to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied. “This is what the prophet has written.

⁷ Then Herod called for the Wise Men secretly. He found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, “Go! Make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, bring me a report. Then I can go and worship him too.”

¹² But God warned [the Wise Men] in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road. ¹³ When [they] had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him.” ¹⁴ Joseph got up. During the night, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. ¹⁶ Herod realized that the Wise Men had tricked him. So he became very angry. He gave orders concerning Bethlehem and the area around it. All the boys two years old and under were to be killed. This agreed with the time when the Wise Men had seen the star.

Break it Down

Herod was afraid of Jesus because he saw the newborn King as a threat to his identity. Many people today choose to distance themselves from Christ for similar reasons, but the root cause is fear. Let's consider a few things that we fear about Jesus and reasons we might distance ourselves from Him.

We fear Christ will threaten our way of life.

Think about it...if we allow Jesus to get too close to us, He might mess up what we're doing, how we're living, what we're saying.... As long as we can keep Jesus at a distance, He won't threaten our way of life.

1. When has your relationship with Christ "messed up" your life? (e.g., caused changes to be made)
2. What are some things we might not say or do if we knew Jesus were nearby?

We fear that Jesus will take control.

It's likely for most of us that we don't give control to someone unless we trust that person completely. Since Jesus is a coming King, it is a certainty that He will take control; however, that's not something we should fear or dread. It is when we try to control our own lives and circumstances that we land ourselves in trouble.

1. What are some expressions that we use that suggest we like to be in control of our own lives or situations?
2. When and how have you tried to guide your own life only to meet with disaster?
3. What makes Jesus qualified to direct and control our lives?

We fear He will tell us what to do.

Many of our fears about Jesus stem from a misunderstanding of who He is. We hear the tales of testimonies that have been over-dramatized with, "Jesus told me to...." Accordingly, those stories give us pause, "If I get too close to Jesus, there's no telling what He'll want me to do. I might end up a missionary in the Congo!" The truth is that Jesus is not some cruel dictator; He is a benevolent Servant. He's not a threat to us; He is our Savior. If we truly understand who Christ is, we'll no longer fear His presence and Lordship, but embrace it.

1. What are some common misunderstandings that people have about Jesus (believers vs. non-believers)?
2. How has your view of God changed during the course of your lifetime?
3. Share a story about when the Lord told you to do something that you really didn't want to do, and tell what happened when you were obedient.

Conclusion

We have a similar decision to make as those who were "close...and yet so far" to Jesus' birth. Will we let other things keep us from the One whose birth we celebrate, or will we draw near to Him and embrace him as Savior and Lord. The choice awaits.

1. What are some other things we fear about getting too close to Christ?
2. What is one thing you could do during this Advent/Christmas season to draw closer to Christ?

Close in Prayer