

Title: “In Christ Alone”

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Galatians 4:4-7, Matthew 2:13-23

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Overview:

King Herod was responsible for a horrific act of violence long ago, but even today we see pain and suffering rooted in a world of sin, but in the midst of it all we stand firm in our faith of Christ alone.

Lesson:

Romans 5. I can't put it any better than that!

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Christmas day may be over, but the joy of the season still hangs heavy in the air. The presents have been opened and the guests may be gone but the conversations around the Christmas tree and dinner table still echo throughout your home and warm your heart on this cold winter morning. And you probably carried into church some of that leftover jubilation, ready to celebrate one more time the birth of our Lord and Savior. And then we read Matthew's account of King Herod. Stop the celebration; pack up the nativity scene; it's time to enter back into reality.

What just happened? How did we turn so quickly from the angelic choir and the worshipping shepherds to... to this? Before you dismiss this selection as poor judgement by the church or blame Matthew for not considering the impact to your holiday season, let me proffer this: I am hard pressed to think of another passage anywhere in scripture that might be more appropriate on this Sunday. I say that because there is a visible and deliberate line that can be drawn from Jesus' birth, to Herod's actions, to Christ's work on the cross, to our justification, and then all the way back to our celebration of Christmas.

We'll start at the manger immediately after the birth. A great company of angels appear to the shepherds and praise God saying

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

But what happens after that? What happens after the angels have gone back to heaven and the shepherds have returned to their sheep? Reality happens. Another day dawns and with it, sin and all its consequences. We read about it today in Matthew, but we don't need to be reminded of a tragedy from history, as horrific as it was, because we experience it in our world today. Everywhere we look throughout humanity we find the proliferation of sin. We rebel against God on a daily basis,

we read about criminal behavior in our communities, we are kept abreast of the wars around the globe. We are asked to intervene in the lives of the poor, the helpless, and the downtrodden. You see, the reason why I believe this passage is the *perfect* one to read so close after Christmas is to remind ourselves that we still *live* in a sinful world, that we still *are* a sinful people, that there is violence and injustice, and that it didn't stop just because Jesus was born.

We now have drawn a line from the manger to Herod's actions, or more generally to sin. We can continue that line to the cross. Step back from verses 16 and 17 and what do you see surrounding them?

Starting with verse 13:

¹³When they 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."

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And then, after verse 17:

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

In these verses, Matthew records the faith of Joseph. Though fearful and uncertain, he clung fast to the promise of God's protection that he knew through the pages of the Torah. He placed his faith and his hope in God and was delivered to safety. And this is a message for us today: in a world broken and corrupted by sin, when all seems lost, we must cling to the same hope in Jesus our Savior; our hope is found in nothing less.

And this leads to the next two segments of our line: Christ's work on the cross and our justification. I just stated that through faith we must cling to the hope and trust in Jesus, but why? And how does it relate to Herod? In Paul's letter to the Romans we find the answer. We don't have time to read the verses, but I urge you to spend just a few minutes today and read Romans 5. We learn the good news of the Gospel: that sin entered the world through Adam and salvation through the work of Christ on the cross. We learn that because of this work, God sees us as perfect - not because of anything we did, or could do, but all because of Jesus and nothing else. We learn that He did this, *even while* we were enemies with God, because of his love for us. And because we have been justified by his blood, or to word it another way, declared perfect because of his perfect sacrifice, we have the hope, or promise of eternal life with God in heaven. And the Holy Spirit uses suffering to grow our faith. Paul says it this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of

God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So, we have drawn a line from Jesus' birth (the visible initiation of God's plan of salvation), to Herod's actions (the reminder of why he came to this Earth,) to the cross (where he suffered and died to win us back and restore the relationship that we broke with God), to our justification (where we are declared perfect in God's eyes). Now, we finish this line by drawing it back to Christmas.

Oh, wait! I ran out of time time, so I'll leave it to you to do that! How do you draw it back to Christmas?

Let's pray.