

# THE REJECTED KING

## Matthew 2

INTRODUCTION: This week we started reading the Book of Matthew and we will continue through the week following Easter Sunday.

- I commend all of you who continue to read through the New Testament with us.
- I want to encourage some of you who may have fallen behind in the reading, rejoin us in the Gospel of Matthew. If you will read later today from **Mt. 1:18 to 2:23**, just 31 verses, you will be caught up with all the rest of us. Then just read a chapter a day, and you can complete the Gospel of Matthew as I preach through it this month leading to Easter Sunday.
- In fact, we are making it easy for you to practice a regular quiet time. On the cover of your Worship Folder, you have a prayer guide called Journey to the Resurrection. Just set a time every day to read one chapter of Matthew and pray using this simple guide. If you do not already have a daily quiet time, you will be amazed how this will help you with your day, whether you begin or end your day with this practice. And if you will just do this with us for the next three weeks, you will also be surprised how easy it will be to continue it.

Matthew, called Levi by his Jewish brothers, was a tax collector for the Romans, which meant he was despised by his countrymen. Tax collectors were considered extortionists and thieves, because their contract with Rome allowed them to collect more than Rome required and keep the difference as their profit.

Why Matthew chose to enter that profession and endure the hatred of his fellow Jews we do not know. The scorn and animosity he experienced as a result of his choice, we can only imagine.

But one day a man called Jesus who came from Nazareth stood before Matthew as he sat at his tax collection table. Jesus looked him in the eye and said, "Follow Me." And Matthew arose and followed Jesus.

For Matthew it was a whole new beginning. Everything began to change. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Matthew trusted the risen Christ as his own Lord and Savior and fulfilled his calling as an apostle, going to a place near modern day Tehran, Iran to proclaim the gospel. We do not know exactly when, but sometime before the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., Matthew wrote his gospel.

More than any of the other gospel writers, Matthew dug back into the Old Testament Scriptures, quoting Moses and the prophets, so that he might prove to his fellow Jews that Jesus was and is God's promised Messiah, the Christ, who came to offer eternal life to all who would trust in Him.

But Matthew remembered well the three years he followed Jesus before they nailed the Lord to the cross. For through Jesus came the fulfillment of God's promise that a King would come from the line of David to reign forevermore. So Matthew presented King Jesus, telling his fellow Jews and telling us that ...

- Jesus was the physician who came to heal the sick.
- He was the preacher who called sinners to repent and to come into relationship with Holy God.
- Jesus was the King who offered to forgive debts rightly owed to Him.
- He was the Savior who sought to save those who are lost.
- Jesus was and is the King who desires to share His kingdom with a great multitude who will trust and follow Him, even allowing them one day to rule and reign with Him over all the earth.

But Matthew witnessed and wrote about how this gracious, loving, merciful King, became in the lives of many THE KING REJECTED.

If we did not already know the true story told not only in Matthew's gospel but in all four of the gospels, this would seem impossible, would it not? Would it not seem impossible

- That a King should come from Heaven and offer to show us the one and only way to heaven.
- That this King should tell us that He will forgive all our sins.
- That He will offer us the gift of eternal life.
- That He will do this by dying in our place upon a cross and rising from the dead.

Who could reject a King like that? Why would anyone reject a King like that?

But as we shall be reminded by Matthew in his gospel, there were many people who did reject Him and many reasons. So many we will only have time to consider some of them.

May I warn you about something?

The reasons are scary.

They are scary because they are reasons that did not die out in the first century A.D., but persist in the lives of men, women, and teenagers in the world today; and we will recognize many of them as especially prominent in the United States.

Today we will look at only one of those who rejected King Jesus. He is the first mentioned by Matthew and we read of him in the second chapter of Matthew's gospel.

Stand, please, as we demonstrate our rapt attention to the Word of God sent through Matthew, His servant, and apostle.

Matthew 2 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'* "

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*"

16 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. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "*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.*"

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

## **I. KING HEROD THE GREAT REJECTED KING JESUS BECAUSE OF HEROD'S LOVE OF POWER AND PROMINENCE.**

King Herod, known as Herod the Great, was the first to reject King Jesus, while our Lord was only a toddler.

It will help us to understand why Herod so rejected Jesus that he tried to kill Him if we know something about him.

Herod was 22 years old when Cleopatra took the throne in Egypt while Rome began to assert its power in Palestine. Herod's father picked the right side in the battle for Palestine and made an alliance with Rome against the old line of kings left over from Alexander the Great. Once his own power was secure, one of first things dad did was to make his son Herod the governor of Galilee. When Herod's father died, the Roman Senate proclaimed Herod, who was not a Jew but an Edomite, descended from Esau, to be "King of the Jews."

And Herod loved it!

- He loved his throne in Jerusalem.
- He loved for men to bow before him and hide their eyes in deference.
- He loved the splendor and the delicacies and comfort riches could bring.
- And he loved the title. Oh how he loved to hear people say it, "Herod, King of the Jews."
- He loved being King of the Jews so much that he determined nothing, nothing would ever take that from him.
  - While he was still governor of Galilee, he had appointed Aristobulus as High Priest in Jerusalem.
  - But when he took the throne as King of the Jews, he became jealous of the popularity of this spiritual leader. So Herod invited the High Priest to come to the palace for a swim in the pool. Then he ordered his servants to kill the High Priest and pretend it was an accident.

- Even after Herod's kingdom was expanded by Octavian, the Roman emperor to become known as Augustus, Herod lived with a fear of being displaced and losing his power. Even family members were suspect of disloyalty. When accusations were made against his wife Mariamne of unfaithfulness, Herod had her charged with treason and executed, although he had great affection for her.
- When his mother-in-law became meddling in the affairs of the kingdom, Herod had her put to death as well.
- Herod married ten times and had children by all of them, but even his own flesh and blood was not safe when Herod felt a threat to his all-precious pursuit of power.
- He had his two favorite sons, children by the wife he executed, sent to Rome for their education. They returned to Judea and became immensely popular with the people. The fire of Herod's jealousy was once again fanned into an inferno. Herod brought charges of treason against them both, and they were executed by strangulation.
- Herod's next choice for an heir was his oldest son Antipater, named for his grandfather. But he also came under accusation and was executed only days before Herod the Great himself died.
- **Caesar Augustus** himself was said to have **commented, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son."**

But while Herod held on to the power and prominence of his throne with all of his might, God sent word through the angel Gabriel to a virgin in faraway Nazareth, telling her

Luke 1:31–33 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Nine months later, God brought Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem by means of the census decree of the Emperor of Rome. The little town overflowed with guests, and they were forced to seek shelter for the night in a stable.

Luke 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The real King of the Jews had come, but Herod did not know it.

Until magi from the east arrived and asked, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews? We have seen His star and have come to worship Him."

Matthew speaks in understatement and says, "Herod was troubled." I bet he was!

I suspect Herod turned a shade of crimson that bordered on purple. A new King of the Jews? If there were indeed such a usurper to the throne, Herod must find out where He is and kill Him.

So he tries to help himself by helping the magi and sends for the scribes and asked where the Scriptures say the Christ would be born. And the scribes answer, "In Bethlehem!"

So Herod tries to play the magi and says, "After you have worshiped this new king, come back and tell me where He is so that I may go and worship Him also."

The magi found King Jesus in a house in Bethlehem, right where the star God sent to signal His royal birth led them. But then God warned them in a dream not to go back to wicked, murderous, power hungry Herod, so they returned to their homeland without going back to Jerusalem.

Finally Herod figured out he had been tricked and was furious. The magi had said they first saw the star less than two years before. So Herod declared that every male child in Bethlehem should be slaughtered, just to be sure that the One who was King of the Jews should die.

Of course you know, while God the Father sent His One and Only Son to the earth to die, He did not send Him to die by the murderous hand of a power-seeking king. NO, Father and Son were waiting for the time when Jesus would be suspended between heaven and earth on a cross when the Father would lay upon Him the sin of the world, and then to pay the penalty of the sin, Jesus, the Christ, would die.

So God warned Joseph to flee to Egypt, taking Jesus and Mary to safety, away from the jealous wrath of Herod the Great.

Herod died within two years, an excruciating disease that was never diagnosed. Then he went to hell, and everything was even worse.

- No one bowed to him in hell.
- No one served him in hell.
- No one would bring him water to cool his tongue and the flames leapt up around him.
- He had no riches to purchase comfort.
- King Herod was tormented in the flames, just like everybody else who rejected King Jesus.
- He could have had forgiveness. He could have received the gift of eternal life.
- He could have ruled and reigned with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom.
- If he would have bowed the knee and the heart to King Jesus.
- Trusting Him as Lord and Savior.

- But he didn't. He rejected King Jesus.
- He remains in hell and one day will be resurrected to be cast into the Lake of Fire forever.

And so my friend, we should be warned. Because

## **II. DESIRE FOR POWER OR PROMINENCE CAN CAUSE US TO REJECT KING JESUS.**

Now, please, let me make clear. **There is a difference between a tyrant and a leader.**

Herod was a tyrant.

- A tyrant longs for power that he might use it for himself.
- He hangs on to power to protect his comfort, his security, his well-being, his happiness.

A leader may be in a position of power or authority.

Moses was a leader.

Joshua was a leader.

David was a leader.

Jesus was a leader.

A leader uses any power given to them for the benefit of those he or she is leading.

A leader does not use power to take himself where he wants to go but to take everyone where they need to go.

So, Moses led his people first to Sinai and then to the Promised Land.

Joshua led his people to inhabit the Promised Land.

David led his people to be God's chosen nation dwelling in the Promised Land.

Jesus leads those who will trust and follow Him to abundant life now and eternal life with Him in the ages to come.

And there is a clear distinction in who seeks or accepts a position of power or authority.

The tyrant seeks it for personal prominence and self-exaltation. Everything is about him or about her, for a tyrant can be male or female.

A leader does not seek self-glorification. The leader seeks the well-being of those being led and his or her methodology is service.

Jesus said

Matthew 20:28 ... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

#### APPLICATION

My friend, we must all be careful, because we live in a culture that encourages

- Self-indulgence,
- Self-centeredness,
- Self-promotion
- Self-exaltation

Years ago I heard the statement, "He that tooteth not his own horn, the same shall not be tooted!" That is the counsel of the world.

Our culture encourages a focus on self and a desire for personal power and prominence that is the opposite of what the Lord Jesus is about.

The Lord of Glory got on His knees and washed His disciples' feet, and He told them this was an example of the way they were to do things.

This is a warning that we in ministry, we who claim to serve the Lord Jesus, must heed. This is a warning to us, at least as much and maybe more than to anyone else. For it is just as possible to seek power and prominence in religious circles as it is anywhere else.

I will tell you that is one of the many things I admired in the life of Billy Graham. Recognized around the world as the greatest evangelist God has ever raised up in the world, yet humble. Unassuming. A counselor to presidents, but never a bragging word about it fell from his lips.

I admit that in the younger years of my ministry, I would sometimes imagine that I would get to preach regularly at the Southern Baptist Convention meetings or that I would be a famous pastor of a megachurch. I thank the Lord, God poured cold water on those vain imaginations of my heart very quickly.

And any position of power or authority I have occupied has not come because I was being honored or considered the best at anything. It has always come for a single reason: I was willing to do the nitty gritty nobody else was willing to do to get a job done for the Kingdom of God.

You want a job that is only for you? Be willing to serve in a way no one else is willing to serve. Then there is no competition. You can have the job and whatever title comes with it.

Each of us makes a choice when we step into a place of authority as to whether we use it as power for us or service to others.

- Little league coach
- Chairman of a school Parent Committee
- In your work place
- In roles at church
  - Our kingdom
  - Our place of service
- Every time I preach
  - What pleases you
  - What we need

Let us take and keep our eyes off of self and put them on Jesus.

Let us exalt Him and give Him glory, retaining no glory for ourselves.

Let us serve, and serve, and serve some more just as our Lord taught by word and example.

May we never be numbered in the camp of those who reject King Jesus.