

Empathy for the Wicked – Herod

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MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 2:1](#) • [Matthew 2:7](#) • [John 12:25](#) • [Galatians 4:7](#) • [Romans 6:1-7](#) • [1 Corinthians 5:7](#)

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love? A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God? Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

The Pharaoh Problem

So this week, I really, really, really wanted to take a look at Pharaoh in the Exodus story, to let him be our villain, to explore empathetic tones toward him. I thought about the Torah portion last week, and I was like, yeah, that's perfect! I tried. I tried. But sometimes there's just a bad guy that you just can't find any empathy for, and Pharaoh seemed to be one of them. Actually, I found it easier to have empathy for Satan in the Bible, this devil figure, than for Pharaoh. And after diving in for a couple hours, I realized why. Unlike Cain or Esau or Jezebel, Satan, Judas, Samson, Nabal—Pharaoh is not depicted as an adversary that you're supposed to have any type of identification with. At least I don't think so from what I read. And it may just be me, and I'm totally open to that. But even if we look at the narrative, we're left without any type of foothold to really grab onto to try to empathize with this Pharaoh character in the Bible.

The Story That Echoes

Remember, the Bible is a story. I'm a broken record when it comes to that. The Bible is a story, and it's a continuous narrative that embodies the mission of God, and it reaches its climax in this person of Yeshua, Jesus. So when we read the Exodus story, it's written as a story. Duh, Matthew. I know. But what I mean is the genre of the Exodus story is a little odd in how it's written. It is presented as a story that actually took place, but it's also presented as a story that is not bound by time, and it's specifically written that way. For example, when we look at stories

in the biblical narrative, we see specific details that tell us when it took place, who it's taking place with. For example, even in Genesis when Abraham starts World War Zero with the kings of Mesopotamia, it names the kings. It tells us when this battle took place. It tells us this was the king and this was the king's name and this was his kingdom all throughout the story. When we go through Joshua and Judges, it names the kings and the Moabites who came over, it names them by name so we can tell this is the point of time in history where this story is taking place. The Exodus story is written in a format where a timeline does unfold, but what's missing? The name of Pharaoh. Did Pharaoh have a name? Yeah, Pharaoh had a name. Of course he did, but the way the story is told, the name's omitted. His name just isn't given. Why? Because this is not some story that was meant to just be read as if it took place only in this specific place at this actual time with this actual people.

Rescue and Redemption

It's a story that sets the theme that echoes for the rest of the biblical story. The story where people have the blessings of God in a land known as Goshen, but they are overtaken by an evil force enslaving them and forcing them to obey a master that they don't want. One that strips their blessings away. A story about a God who hears them cry out. About a God that says, no, I will make a way. I will rescue. I will redeem. I will sanctify. I will make a way for this people, these slaves, to be free, to be empowered, to be strong. I will break the chains of oppression on this people and they will become mine. They will no longer be slaves to a force that overtakes them. No, they will become my sons. They will become my daughters. Plug in [Galatians 4:7](#) or [Romans 6:1-7](#) or [1 Corinthians 5:7](#), my emphasis. The Passover story was not just some point of history. It was the event that was used to foretell something bigger. A time when God would hear the cry of his creation and he would act. Send a messenger that would act on his behalf to defeat not just slavery to Egypt or oppression to Pharaoh, but defeat slavery to sin and the oppressive powers of death itself. Through this lamb's blood, a way would be made through the waters into citizenship within God's kingdom and God's reign. This messenger would be the true lawgiver, giving the Torah and showing how it can change the world and impact every heart it comes into contact with, as the Exodus story is about you and Yeshua. This is a story where the victor leaves a trail of victory that looks as if a giant lion used its brute strength to litter a battlefield with its sharp claws, huge ivory teeth, and sheer strength. But as you look up, as you look up, you don't see razor sharp talons of claws. You don't see ivory teeth that have gashes from bone and metal in them from crushing the enemy. No, when you look up from this battlefield, what do you find? The paradox. You find a small slain lamb, which is exactly what

John describes in his vision in Revelation. This lamb is how this battlefield was littered with this much destruction of the powers against God.

A Parallel Tyrant

So when I tried to dive into the historical background of Pharaoh, it became difficult for me. So I decided to jump ahead to someone, another villain in the Bible, whom the Gospel writer seemed to parallel a bit with Pharaoh. A ruler who also slaughtered innocent children of his country in order to snuff out the growth and increase of a kingdom of Israel. Not Pharaoh, but King Herod. So today we're gonna discuss a narrative and we're gonna use our imaginations again based on Matthew chapter 2, which tells us about this king who had a dilemma and who had a prize and who was overtaken by his own sin that he chose to go into a small village and murder children in order to protect himself.

So a little background. King Herod. King Herod was an extremely powerful entity over Judea in the first century. I'm getting geeky here with the history, so bear with me. He didn't just arrive at this place. King Herod, it's not like he assumed this position because his dad was a king, and his dad was a king, so he's king over Judea. No, King Herod, he fought for it. He fought for it physically and politically. And the generation before Yeshua, before Jesus in Judea, in Israel, was quite a complicated and scary war-torn time.

This was a time period where the Hasmonean Empire, the Maccabean lineage, those guys, yeah, yeah, yeah. Spoiler alert. So the Maccabees, the first generation, were these righteous guys, yeah, and the power of God used to push out these Greek invaders and to protect a people and to preserve a people. And the next generation tells us how if we assume arrogance by God's power and use it for our own selfish pursuits, we will fail. And that's exactly what happened to the Maccabees, to the Hasmoneans. Within a generation, they went downhill. They became worse than the Greeks as far as oppressing their own people. But this was a time period where the Hasmoneans were still ruling right before the birth of Jesus. And this Hasmonean empire imploded at the feet of Rome.

Rome's Iron Fist

See, Herod's father, Antipater, he was an advisor to the last Hasmonean king. During the Hasmonean Civil War at that time, Antipater politicked Rome, if you will. He was very much in Rome, and he appealed to Rome concerning the imminent collapse of the Hasmonean dynasty in Jerusalem and Judea. And so what was Rome's response? There's an opportunity here.

There's a whole kingdom that's about to fall. What would Rome do? What's the best thing? What do they do best? Well, Rome arrived in full force in the person of General Pompey or Pompey if you've heard.

Now imagine Herod, not king yet, imagine Herod as a child, maybe 8, 9, 10 years old, sitting in Jerusalem and the year is 63 BC and he looks up and he hears the turmoil of the Roman war machine coming at the gates. The screaming, the war cries as Roman legions breach the walls of Jerusalem. There's explosions and dust and blood and screaming and running. And among all of this commotion, there's one constant, one man that stands motionless. Among it all, it's General Pompey, standing there, looking at everything that he's overtaking. And he looks up at the expanded temple mount that the Hasmoneans were so proud of, and he points to it. There, take me there.

Imagine this general, this pagan, walking up into the entrance, into the courtyard of the mighty God Yahweh as he passes by the altar unimpressed. He walks into the holy place and he sees the candelabra. Look, there's some bread, another mere altar of incense. And he looks up and he sees a veil. What is this veil? This is the veil that separates mankind from the physical manifestation of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sheer force of God's glory. The general grabs the veil, rips it down, and walks onto the spot where the blood of the bull and the blood of the goat are sprinkled once a year. This pagan standing at the intersection of heaven and earth. As a first century Jew, how does that make you feel? This is devastating. This is what is happening here.

Well, a message was being sent. A very clear, simple message Rome wanted to send. Your God is no match for the Roman machine. It's a very clear message that was sent on that day. Herod heard it. He was exposed to it. And Herod's life orbited around that central message for the rest of his life.

The Fall and the Foundation

No one can match Rome. Who is more powerful than Rome? In 44 BCE, or B.C., Julius Caesar. What happened to Julius? He got the knife, right? He was assassinated. I know we're going back to high school, right? High school history. Civil war engulfed between the Roman Senate, Brutus and Cassius, and Mark Antony and Octavian, which was Julius' adopted son, later known as Augustus Caesar. So you have a civil war that broke out among Rome. War-torn empire. Antony had been impressed with this Judean who was politically climbing the political ranks.

And so he appointed Herod overseer of Judea. He appointed Herod as king over Judea, ruler of the Jews, in full allegiance and pledge to Rome.

See, Herod was not a Hasmonean, though. He was Edomite. His family was forcefully converted into Judaism, probably as a result of the Hasmoneans. So he was not a very popular leader in Judea. No one liked him. So what could he do to increase his popularity? At least just a little. To have that security strengthened. Well, he divorced his wife, banished her and his son, Antipater II, and instead married Miriam I, a good Hasmonean girl. A princess, in fact.

In 37 BC, he defeated the last Hasmonean king in Jerusalem, aided by Mark Antony, his superior. Things were very complicated during this time in the Roman Empire and Judea because to the east there was a kingdom known as Parthia. And the intersection of this other kingdom that fought and competed for these lands against Rome met in Judea near Jerusalem. The last Hasmonean king that was fighting was aided by these enemies of the Roman state, the kingdom of Parthia.

Four Decades of Peace

Herod, after defeating the last Hasmonean king, was now king of the Jews in name and in practice. There was no one left. The victory would mean four decades of peace in Judea, something that hadn't been for over a century, long over a century, especially in the last 25 years, filled with constant warfare. For those of you who are into history, you know the stress that must have been on Herod's shoulders during this time. Anything could happen. Anything could threaten his position as ruler now, something he'd fought so hard to achieve.

The unrest in Rome was no doubt threatening to his own crown as well, especially when Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and attempted to rule the Roman Empire together. Octavian or Augustus Caesar took Rome or the Roman provinces and Antony decided to go and rule over Egypt. Toss in a nice Egyptian queen named Cleopatra and you got yourself a great dramatic conflict waiting to happen. Well, you guys know what happened. That didn't last too long.

Loyalty Tested

Octavian went to Egypt, defeated Antony. Now, who was Antony again? Mark Antony? He was the Roman leader that appointed Herod, right? Still with me? He was the one that gave Herod his power as king. He had been defeated. What's Herod going to do now?

What would you do now? I mean, the most powerful man in the world has just killed the man that gave you your authority that you were loyal to. What's going to happen to you next? He's going to come kill you. He's going to snuff out every leg that Antony had planted.

So what do you do? Well, you depart immediately. Full parade. Get the flags. Get a bunch of t-shirts. "I love Octavian" all over him. Like everything you possibly can. And you run to Greece, to Rhodes, where Octavian is arriving back from battle. And you kneel before Octavian and you submit to him, hoping that he'll even let you live.

Octavian knew Herod's allegiance to Antony, but instead of killing him, he kind of embraced his loyalty. I mean, look at this guy. He's sold out. Look at him. Because Judea was Rome's most eastern province, Octavian (or Augustus Caesar at this point) knew that he needed to keep stability in that area. He didn't want to just overthrow a king there, so he allowed Herod to stay and confirmed his kingship here, knowing Herod's greatest fear was being viewed as incompetent or treacherous, he knew that he could rely on him. He had given Herod a second chance. Herod knew he wouldn't get a third.

An Unexpected Threat

So imagine, this is the background that we're coming up to Matthew chapter 2. Everyone still with me? Okay, good. This is good. I know that was a lot. If Yeshua was born 4 to 7 BC, when most scholars believe he was born, this would have threatened everything for Herod, a new king of the Jews. What would Augustus think of these rumors? Especially when wise men, magi from the east, these magi, these elites from another kingdom coming to pay tribute to this king of the Jews. This threatened everything for Herod.

See, Magi is where we get the idea of magician. It's where we get the words like magician or magic. And I know there are some presentations out there that teach that the Magi were actually like Jewish scribes from Babylon. And I've actually presented that before. I don't really agree with that anymore. Rereading [Matthew 2](#), I agree with the majority of scholars. These are foreigners that were coming to pay homage to the king of the Jews. Not their king, the king of the Jews. Your king, not my king. These Gentiles who looked at the stars and had a revelation of this king over Judea, a king of the Jews revealed to the Gentiles and missed by his own people, a motive that continues throughout the entire narrative that Matthew writes.

The Magi from the East

These magi or magicians, these were not like sorcerers from Parthia. Magicians in Parthia were more in line with mysticism and astrology, kind of pre-astronomy. Very, very, very smart when it came to times, dates, and the stars. So these weren't like people pulling hats out of rabbits or rabbits out of hats. That's magic right there. These weren't the guys playing Quidditch. These were mystical astronomers.

Matthew 2, 1-2. Imagine King Herod standing in his court at this moment, the sun streaming through the window, shining on this rather large group from the east, from Parthia. Rays shining off their dark skin, silk shining robes glistening as waters crashing over rocks, oversized rings in their fingers, confusingly etched amulets around their necks. He could discern, perhaps, that even a few of them were women.

The king's herald steps up to make the announcement, clears his throat. "My Grace, may I present the magicians from Parthia. They have come bearing greetings from Arsicis, the king of Parthia."

A Dangerous Revelation

The herald continues, kind of shaking at this point. "These humble servants have come, my grace, to pay homage to the newborn king of the Jews."

Can you imagine at that moment, Herod's eyes wide open. What is this? No longer looking at the herald or the magi. He's looking around his own court. I mean, Augustus has spies everywhere. Caesar has spies everywhere. Who's noticing these words? Who's recording them in their mind? Who's going to run to Rome and say, hey, this is what we heard in the courts of Herod. Who will run and take this absurd announcement to King Herod?

He stands slowly holding the corner of his throne. He's an old man now, 70, 80 years old. Composes himself. "Welcome to Judea, my friends. Obviously, there has been a mistranslation with my interpreter gazing at him." He points to his newly appointed son, Anubis. "This is my son, crowned prince, and thank you so much for coming. You've heard the news. Thank you for coming to give homage and pay tribute to the new crowned prince of the Jews."

Sitting down, relaxing. That's taken care of.

The Magician's Bold Claim

Now imagine one of the magicians, unnoticed before, stepping forward, almost cutting off the king's presence and words and attention. He begins to speak perfect Aramaic. "There is no

mistranslation, Your Grace. I am Baqadah, Your Grace. And we are well aware of how your son attempted to strip the crown from you and you banished him. Congratulations on the new appointed son you have here crowned. We wish him a long life and prosperity. But we have come to honor the newborn king of the Jews."

Imagine Herod—how dare these foreign pagans come into his palace, his throne room, and make such an accusation. Composing himself, you can just see it—just an old man. "You have heard incorrectly. There is no king of the Jews, my friends."

Bacchus, standing firmly, undeterred, raises his arm across the sky. "We saw it in the stars. You can see some light flickering from his fingertips maybe. Herod doesn't know if it's his imagination or if it's just a trick. Like, what is this? We saw it in the stars. The stars do not lie, your grace. We saw his star many, many seasons ago, and it has taken its place among the heavens. Our wise king, the king of Parthia, Ossusus."

Can you imagine how tense it was in the throne room? What does Herod do? How does he act? How does he respond to this? What's at stake here? If you saw it in the stars, it must be true. "Please, stay here tonight. Let me offer you hospitality, and I will gather my sages and wise men, and we will look at our own holy books. Perhaps we missed something. Enjoy our hospitality. Hospitality offered, of course, by Caesar himself, wanting to make sure he puts forth who he's loyal to publicly. I know you must be tired. Please take a rest. We'll reconvene in the morning. Please go."

A Hurried Council

Imagine this group gathering. The old king hasn't moved this quick in a long time. Scurrying along. Went into his room. Torches lit. Sits down at his seat. Surrounded by the sub-leadership and scribes, he asks, "...what truth is there to their claim?"

Imagine him looking over at the newly appointed high priest, Matthias. Him rushing to please the king. "Your grace, there's no truth to the claims of these pagans, okay? We've scoured the prophecies and there's nothing of this sort. Why? Why would God announce the coming of his newly appointed king to Gentiles and not to his own people? Surely our God would not dare do such a thing as this."

What would that have been like for Herod? He likely wasn't speaking of divine prophecy, you fool. Forget the prophets. Has a Hasmonean king been born?

One that we haven't snuffed out? Is there some lineage of David that's been born? Some rebel leader that's been born in the mountains? I mean, surely there's something. What is happening in our kingdom under our noses? Matthias answers quickly. No, nothing of the sorts. Just rumors. Rumors from an armpit of a village named Bethlehem. Not far from here. Rumors from a bunch of no-name shepherds who have no status. You fools. A mere rumor is all it would take for Caesar to safeguard his province with a legion and swords to our throat. He would gladly replace our very lives over such a rumor.

At that moment, among the commotion, a weak elderly voice speaks up from a dark corner. The Messiah. He has been born. Prepare the path of the Lord. Silence fills the room. All eyes glare to a dark corner. As Zechariah steps out, the priest—Zechariah of the order of Abiyah—Zechariah, the one who claims to have had an encounter with an angel, the one time he gets to offer incense in the holy place, his eyes glowing with conviction, looking up as if a testimony from heaven itself. Like Abraham, I had no offspring. Like Sarah, my wife gave birth at an old, old age—an angel announcement. They announced to me that Elijah would come forth and prepare the way for the Messiah, the true King of Israel.

Zechariah Speaks of Messiah

Something he had probably said many times before. Imagine his peers mocking him. "You old man, we liked you better when you had your vow silenced. Get back over there. Crazy. Found out how to make a baby and now he's all excited. It's an angelic thing." The Messiah is here. Go to Bethlehem. See for yourself. Ask them. We must prepare the way. The way of God's kingdom. It's birthing now. Oh, your grace. The way of the garden. The way of God's reign is birthing now. The way of redemption and victory for all mankind. Israel is rising up with a new king and a renewed vocation to show the world the power of God's reign. Your grace. It is real.

Imagine all of the leadership mumbling. It's this old guy. Why is he still here? Can't we just give him a pension and go? Get him out of here. Herod looks up. Why Bethlehem? Why? Matthias steps forward. "Sir, we knew the rumors, but Simeon the high priest before me, he didn't deem the information even worthy for your ears. Come now." These are just a bunch of raggedy shepherds, smelling of wet sheep in the cool dew of the night and cattle dung.

Imagine Zechariah stepping forward again, making the proclamation: "In Bethlehem, in Judea, this is going to happen, for this is what the prophet has written." Imagine Zechariah continuing, not stopping there. Ezekiel prophesied about a true good shepherd that would be a divine king. Along with Jeremiah, the prophet Micah spoke of Bethlehem giving birth to the king of Israel

who will shepherd his people. Why do you think it absurd or beneath God that he should reveal this great shepherd to the shepherds first?

What the People Believe

Matthias arguing back, there's no Messiah that has been born. Stop! What was at stake for Herod? Matthias quietly: Fool. It doesn't matter if a Messiah has been born or not. What matters is if people believe a Messiah has been born or not. How did David take the throne from Saul? The people believed. How did Rehoboam lose his throne? The people were against him. How did Augustus gain support to defeat Mark Antony? The people believed. If word gets back to Rome that there is a faction of Judeans loyal to a new king, he will have all of our heads broken—our heads and the lives of our families. We can't let this happen. He will overtake Jerusalem and every life here will be wiped out. Do you not understand?

Imagine Herod's rage, the stress and anxiety of losing everything just over a rumor. He has to get to the bottom of it. Enough rage only to hide his fear, dismissing everyone from his presence. How does a king—how does this king whose reign is built solely on loyalty with Rome—overcome the situation? In one room, he has a good number of Parthian elites, a powerful kingdom to the east, a good ally if things go south with Rome, but Rome is the strongest entity in the world. The ruler of the world, the one who brought true peace, sits on the throne in Rome, Caesar. Nothing like that would ever happen. But I can't offend them. I mean, this is an entire nation. I cannot offend them. I must show good terms to them, good faith. I must get rid of them, though. And what if the rumor of the king child? What if it's true?

The next morning, Herod sat in his throne. Only his son and his trusted advisor were in his presence, and he called to the Magi to come before him discreetly. Verse 7: then Herod called for the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time of the star that they had seen appeared. Imagine the Magi stepping forward again. About two years ago, your grace. Two years. Please, please, go to Bethlehem. Go to Bethlehem. We are embarrassed that we have missed this prophecy. We're embarrassed. Your wisdom is most honored here, O great Magi. Bethlehem is the birthplace of our greatest king, so of course the king child should be born there. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report back to me. Bring me word back so that I too may go and worship him.

The King's Secret Plan

Imagine Bacchus bearing, yes, your grace. We will return after locating the king. Go and worship him. That's what Herod was planning—he could finally rid himself of this rumor if he knew where this child was. The Parthians will be satisfied in giving honor to this king. Their king will be satisfied that he did his part in giving the gifts. What will happen if the long-awaited King has been born now? You imagine his trusted adviser coming: "King, what if it's true? What if the Messiah of Israel has been born? What if it's true?" "Makes no difference. We've seen it before. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is no match for the might of Rome. Be silent. Even now we make two offerings a day on the altar of God in the name of Caesar, honoring Caesar above our God. Our God has abandoned us in this place. We serve one God, and that is Rome. Don't ever speak of this again."

That was the reality of Judea in the first century. So you guys know how the story unfolds. A king who has sold his soul to the devil—the devil of his own ambitions, his own comforts, his own security. His pursuits have placed him in a very difficult place, between Rome and a hard place, right? Balancing this act of security and comfort and balance and loyalty and assumed treachery. This is a king that has killed his own children—three of them—to make sure that his throne was secured. His idol was his own security. His wants and his desires.

A week went by. Imagine the king pacing back and forth to the window. Getting his exercise on for once. Any word from the Magi of Parthia? I mean, Bethlehem's not that far away. They should have been back days ago. Where are they? My king, no word from the Magi. Our spies saw the caravan enter into the village of Bethlehem, but they seem to have vanished. How does a caravan of that size, of horses and camels carrying supplies, just vanish? The advisor looks at the king, scared to respond. He knows he ought not. Magic? The containment of the situation depended on the Magi returning to the king. Like that was the plan. If the Magi don't return, then everything falls apart. What now? What have they done? What will happen when Caesar finds out that not only did Herod welcome the Parthians, he aided them in honoring the new king and gave his confirmation for them to return so that he could honor them? What would happen if Caesar finds out about that?

What would you do? How far would you go? How far would you go to contain the situation? Anyone ever told a lie? "Oh, they got a lot of liars out there." Anyone ever told another lie to protect that lie? "Yeah, a lot of liars out there." And then another lie, and then another lie, and then another lie. And if any one of these lies is exposed, then the whole sham is exposed. Everything falls apart. How far do you go to protect this monster that you've created off of one little thing that's become this huge thing that's now crushing you in your own life? Can't come clean. Everything falls apart. Your whole identity falls apart now. You must protect it. You must

protect your own security, your own comforts. You must protect your way of life and everything that you've worked so hard to build.

Seven Children

Herod shouts to the advisors: How many children under two years old live in Bethlehem currently? Well, your grace, the population is somewhere around 300 total, so there are likely seven to nine children of that age and under currently. Seven lives, seven children. It doesn't seem like that big of a deal, does it? It's just seven. We always watch the movies and it's like this mass genocide of hundreds of children, right? No, the population wasn't that large. It was likely 10 and under. Under 10 kids, probably. Under two years old. It's not that big of a deal, is it? Seven kids. Look at what's at stake. National security is at stake. What a worthy sacrifice. What a worthy sacrifice to gain back my sense of security.

When Herod realized... And that's the story we know of Herod. So you may have trouble empathizing with Herod concerning the slaughter of children. Anybody? How am I supposed to even empathize with that? So let's bring it home. And instantly, your brain is either going to go to a defensive, putting a defensive wall up, or it's going to become politically minded, and you're going to try to find different things to attack in your subconscious to try to maybe blame me for just stating facts or dismissing it. And this is good because I want you to do this.

When we were under the presidency of George W. Bush, Jr., we started a war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and not just there, pretty much it broke out throughout all of the Middle East. That war still hasn't stopped, but in 2014, under the Obama administration, a drone program was solidified. These are neat little aircraft that are unmanned. You can fly them from an airport in Las Vegas across the country. You can use cameras that go down, identify terrorists, hit a button, and the terrorist is gone. You guys have seen the videos, right? This is good—we don't have to have soldiers on the ground. We can protect our own men. We have security. This is what we do.

In 2014, we had a campaign targeting 24 different terrorists in Pakistan. We're not even going to get into Yemen or any of the others, but just 24 terrorists—men who were outspoken against our lives and against our liberty and our security and our freedom here in the United States. Some of them were actually U.S. citizens, if I'm not mistaken. They had dual citizenship, an utter threat to our security here. So we launched the drone program against them. Good! Good! Teach them! We need to eliminate the people who threaten our way of life here and keep us safe. Right? That's why we go to war—to protect our way of life and our security here. So out of

those 24 terrorists, we confirmed that we killed six of them. Not quite a huge mission accomplishment there, but that's six guys that we don't have to worry about threatening our security here. So we killed six of those terrorists along with 145 children.

Collateral happens. What do we have here? We have about 60 children that attend our fellowship. 145—what's that? 75, 80, 85 more? Something like that. So our children here, plus 85 more, killed in villages in Pakistan. But it's okay because we have our security. And so we don't give it a second thought when we hear things like that. It's really not that big of a deal. I mean, this is war, right? It protects our security. And to be honest, who really cares about a bunch of kids in a no-name village in Pakistan? As Americans, who really gives it a second thought? Who really cares about a few kids in a no-name village of Bethlehem? Meh.

We Don't Give It a Second Thought

Are you there? We know about collateral victims of our military outreach worldwide and we don't care, generally. Who does? It's just a blip that we read in the news and we keep scrolling and we get back to our lives. It's in the name of freedom and security. And if you can admit that that's you, at least partially, welcome to Herod. You are now entering the world where you have empathy for the wicked. It feels kind of dark to admit it. If I do, I admit it. Read something, just keep scrolling. Not so far-fetched for Herod to give a care in the world anymore, is it?

Just seven lives, and he can protect everybody. This is what he needed to do to secure the well-being of Jerusalem, his estate, his kingship, the lives of those under his reign. If the Romans came crashing into Jerusalem like they did not much earlier, before he was established, many would die. Many innocent people died when General Pompey came into the gates. Many innocent people died when he himself went to Jerusalem and dismounted the last Hasmonean leader. What's he going to do to have security in his city, the holy city, and his kingship that he's fought so hard to secure? Just seven lives. Easy. A worthy sacrifice for security and freedom.

The Balance of Security

Herod found himself in a balancing act, balancing between Rome and the subjects that he reigned over, his Jewish subjects. He doesn't want to be a bad king, of course not, but he wants to secure a sense of security and comfort, or at least the ideal of it, with the Roman Empire. What are you laying on the altar to find your sense of security in life? What are we willing to lay on the altar? Where's that line?

Maybe it's your family and the place of a job. It's pretty common. Men—jobs are important. We're the providers, right? So we have to put energy into providing provisions. It's what we do. That's our identity. We need to make sure that identity is secure. Getting laid off and telling your wife you got laid off is one of the most dehumanizing experiences a man can ever have. It's horrible. That's our identity. That's what we do. What would you do to make sure that you don't even have to fear that? What would you give up?

What Do We Sacrifice for Identity?

Ladies, you guys tend to deal with a more intense form of security. Your image. Outlets such as Facebook and Instagram don't make it any easier. And it's not just an image of beauty anymore, is it? It's an image of being a good mother. It's an image of being a good wife. It's an image of being a good orchestrator or manager of the home. Remember, I'm not actually talking about being a good wife or spouse or a good manager over the home. I'm talking about the image, the security, what people see and what you feel judged by and what your identity is threatened by when other people see you and what they think and what they can take away from you. At what point does our security become an idol? At what point does your focus on achieving these goals place your own family, your own children, and your own spouse on the altar of your own pursuit?

Maybe this story that Matthew tells is not even about security and image. Maybe it's about security in sin. Some of us are secure in our sin. We know it. We have known it. Some of us have been fighting a long time to hold on to things we don't want to let go of because it would destabilize who we are. Maybe the sin in our lives has been something that we've been fighting to keep close, much like Herod kept Caesar close in all aspects. Maybe you find yourself looking back on your life right now, on this journey that you've taken, and seeing sacrifice after sacrifice that you've laid down to keep your identity secure, your sins secure, lie upon lie, as we spoke about.

One Greater Than Caesar

And you find yourself drowning even today, as Herod was. You find yourself in the face of an impossible future if you let it go. Caesar may come and take it at any time. You could lose your identity. You can lose your comforts, your security. Guys, I'm here to tell you that there's one greater than Caesar in your midst. Even now. Let me tell you that there's one greater than your job, even in your midst now. There is one greater than your sin in your midst now.

Herod tried to dismiss that one. Herod thought that he could kill this king child and all of the worry and all of the anxiety would just disappear. No, he couldn't. He couldn't kill the king child. Why? Why? Because that king child had a destiny. A destiny to grow. A destiny to show the world what God looked like. To show the world that they don't have to worry. To show the world that they don't have to be anxious. To show the world what love looks and feels like.

The Destiny of the King Child

The king child, born in a manger, had a destiny to fill the void in your life, even today, that you're fighting so hard to fill with your own pursuits. He is greater. I hate that translation. It's the only words in the English language that we can really formulate about the Greek that really help portray this eternal existence or eternal vitality or this age to come as a reality now.

Anyone who will drop their false securities, their vain pursuits, drop their allegiance to Caesar, drop their allegiance to sin, they can enter into this age of life. Those who try to fill it with false pursuits will never taste it. This eternal life that Yeshua speaks of and the gospel writers write about, it's not something that's like a 401k investment that we're going to get a long time from now. Yeshua portrays it as a reality that we experience now, and it is so potent and life-giving that it surpasses death. Which will we choose? Worship team, you guys can come up and conclude.

If Herod Had Trusted God

Imagine what if Herod trusted God instead of himself. How would Matthew have written his story? Can you imagine? Can we really play pretend? Let's pretend Herod went with the wise men and he walks up to the house. As he approaches the door with this whole caravan behind him surrounding this first century hut, the door opens. There's Joseph, Mary beside him. And there he is, the young boy holding onto the fingertips of his mother. Herod, just not sure what to do, hears some commotion behind him. He turns and the massive crowd of foreigners are now on their knees, their heads on the dirt, arms extended. He looks up. Even the camel has kneeled down, as if creation itself is yielding to this king child's authority. Imagine Herod, just in shock, turning back and looking into the eyes of the child: "This is my king." That's how the story could have ended. It didn't end that way for Herod, but it can end that way for you. That's the gospel message.

Where Are You?

So I don't know where you're at today. I don't know if you are a wise man or if you're a King Herod. Maybe you're a little bit of both. I don't know if you find yourself in an impossible situation or a place. Maybe you don't know what to do because you've built up a false sense of security on all sides and find yourself being crushed by them all. There is an answer, and it's an answer that gives life eternally. We all find ourselves looking for the right answers in life. Do I turn left?

Do I turn right? What do I do in this situation? I want to know where God's leading me. I want to know what step to take next. God doesn't invite us to know all the answers of what our future holds. God invites us to go in the direction of the door that he opens and to allow us to trust on him as we wade through whatever mess of darkness that he's invited us to be a witness of him in.

And sometimes it hurts and sometimes it's tough and sometimes you don't know what to do or if you're doing the right thing. But you keep going and you keep waiting and you keep trusting because that's what God has called us to do.

Maybe that's you today. Don't leave without grabbing a hold of the only trust that exists, that Yeshua is king. He is the king of all the world. All adversaries have already been defeated.

There Is Hope

So please stand for worship. We have a prayer team that will be off to the sides. And if you find yourself trapped by walls on all sides today, I invite you. You can go off to the sides. There are people here. We have a team here that will stand with you, support you, pray with you. There is hope because the scripture tells us that you're no longer a slave and you have no reason to fear or allow such things to consume your life any longer.

Shalom, I'm Matthew Vandrells and I hope you enjoyed this message. Founded in Truth exists to cultivate a fellowship of image bearers that live the redeemed life only Yeshua can give. If this ministry has been a blessing to you, we would love to hear from you. Send us an email through the contact form on our website and tell us how God has used this ministry to edify your faith and relationship with Him. If you'd like to see more messages like this one, subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking [here](#). If you'd like to donate to this ministry and be a part of what God is doing through it, you can donate through our online giving portal [here](#). We thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to next time. Shalom.

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