

THE JESUS WE NEED TO KNOW

Baby King

Matthew 2:1-12

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-jesus-we-need-to-know-baby-king/

This series is entitled, “THE JESUS WE NEED TO KNOW” because there are lots of strange half-truths and distorted pictures of Jesus floating around. During this series, we’re going to look at these themes: Baby King Jesus--January 5, The Word--January 12, The Lamb of God--January 19 and The Light That Shines in Darkness--January 26. We’ll consider these questions: Who is Jesus? How does culture distort our understanding of him? How exactly does he save us? What does he save us from?

This scene in Matthew 2 is often pictured in nativity scenes, displaying the shepherds and the Wise Men gathered at the same time at the stable where Jesus was born. Not likely. This event with the Wise Men probably occurred later. But the amazing truth of these verses is how the infant Jesus was treated as royalty. Baby King. But before we can appreciate baby Jesus’ weakness or his power, we have to understand more about King Herod.

Herod was ruthless and brutal. When he began his reign in 40 BCE, he slaughtered members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (a sort of religious council, supreme court, all rolled into one) so he would have less competition. He murdered members of his own family. It’s not surprising he was an ill-tempered man. Our text points out when he was afraid, the whole city of Jerusalem was, too (v. 3) because he might go into one of his fits. He was the wealthiest man alive at that time. He built buildings, arenas and cities. He lived by way of conspicuous consumption.

For all his wealth and power, Herod was afraid the people did not take him seriously. He feared the people viewed his rule as illegitimate. Some of that paranoia comes through in our text when he becomes consumed with the news of a Baby King named Jesus.

So let’s contrast the two kings, Herod and Jesus. Herod’s way is the way of earthly power: threat, abuse, hate, suspicion, jealousy, power grabbing, coercion, fear, violence and murder. King Jesus offers God’s way. Weakness, love, surrender, vulnerability. This king will be a shepherd king (v. 6), guiding, protecting, tending and nurturing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in a sermon that there are only two places where the powerful and great lose their courage and become truly afraid—at the manger and at the Cross [*Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christmas Sermons*, ed. Edwin Robertson, p. 102].

Step back and look at our story, reading it as if for the first time. Baby Jesus is passive. He doesn’t speak or act. He’s not like Jack Jack from “The Incredibles” movie, taking on an inflated body form and exploding in fire on his enemies. He’s just a baby. Herod is the one doing all the action, plotting, conniving, later murdering babies. And yet, when all the dust settles, when

these Gentile magi come, they don't fall down at Herod's feet; they bow down in front of baby Jesus. Doesn't scripture promise that someday, "every knee shall bow..." (Phil. 2:10-11)?

Have you noticed? The danger of hero worship, making idols of human beings, whether they be movie or music celebrities, politicians, athletes, is that when we begin worshiping success, we begin to confuse right and wrong and become blind to truth [Bonhoeffer made this point beautifully in *Ethics*, quoted in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, by Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, p. 249]. How does Jesus save us? What does he save us from? He saves us from our worst selves and he saves us by offering an alternative Kingdom and alternative King. He invites us to stop idealizing power, hate and violence. To adopt a new definition of success.

Richard Rohr once shared about his years working with men in prison. He's also studied men cross-culturally, their initiation rites into adulthood. In every culture, if men are not allowed to experience powerlessness and vulnerability, they grow up to misuse power [*On Being* podcast, Krista Tippett, April 13, 2017].

Just as Herod resisted King Jesus, we have to learn to recognize that resistance within our own hearts. When Jesus asserts his authority over our lives and we feel his pressure because of choices we're making or lifestyles we're choosing. He is annoyingly present! The gospel message for us is NOT that some people are like Herod, full of violence and selfishness and some are like baby Jesus, vulnerable and trusting. The truth is that we have both within us. Would you join me this morning in bowing down in the presence of the Baby King?