

## THE RAGE OF DARKNESS

(MATTHEW 2:13-18) 01/01/12

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

THE FORCE OF VIOLENCE & RAGE OF DARKNESS IN THE BIBLE VERSES YOU HAVE JUST HEARD ARE OVERWHELMING, THEY NUMB THE SENSES. IT IS A PASSAGE I USUALLY AVOID OR OVERLOOK. HOW TO EXPLAIN TH MERCILESS SLAUGHTERING OF AN ESTIMATED 20-30 INNOCENT BABIES? WE WANT TO IMAGINE THAT IT JUST WAS NOT TRUE. BUT WE KNOW MATTHEW WLD NOT HAVE RECOUNTED SUCH A HORRIBLE EVENT LEST IT WAS TRUE. EVEN MATTHEW WAS GRASPING FOR AN EXPLANATION. FOR MATTHEW EVERYTHING ABT JESUS WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY. THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT FULFILLS HOSEA 11:1, THE SLAUGHTER OF MALE BABIES, JEREMIAH 31:15. MATT IS REALLY STRETCHING PROPHETIC LICENSE TO FIND AN EXPLANATION FOR THIS HORRIBLE HAPPENING

I AM SORRY BUT I DO NOT BUY MATT'S EXPLANATION. IT IS OF NO COMFORT TO ME NOR DOES IT MAKE ANY SENSE TO ME TO THINK THIS FULFILLS O.T. PROPHECY. IN FACT, IT OFFENDS MY UNDERSTANDING OF GOD. WE MUST LOOK BEYOND MATT'S JEWISH UNDERSTANDING & IN THIS QUEST WE FIND OUR REWARD!

WE TEND TO LUMP ALL THE CHRISTMAS STORIES TOGETHER, DON'T WE? END UP WITH SUCH A GLORIOUS, PEACEFUL, MAJESTIC, SYRUPY SWEET FAIRY TALE: A MANGER THAT DOES NOT SMELL OF ANIMALS & THEIR POOP; BIRDS SINGING; WISE MEN W/ EXPENSIVE GIFTS; SHEPHERDS WITH PRIZE LAMBS; ANGELS BURSTING FORTH WITH FIREWORKS OF PRAISE & GLORY. ONLY THING MISSING IS, THE STORY LINE, "AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER." BUT JESUS IS NOT A FAIRY TALE. AFTER THE TINSEL IS DOWN, THE TREES RECYCLED, WRAPPING PAPER TRASHED, MANGER SCENE BOXED AWAY, ARE WE TO GO ON WITH A MAKE-BELIEVE, FAIRY TALE FAITH? NOT!

HEROD THE GREAT PROVES TO BE TH REALITY CHECK THAT SHOCKS US BACK TO REALITY, "EARTH CALLING, CHRISTIAN, ARE YOUR FEET FIRMLY PLANTED ON THE GROUND?" JESUS WAS BORN INTO THE REAL, DOWN & DIRTY WORLD. HE WAS THE LIGHT THAT WOULD PREVAIL AGAINST THE RAGE OF DARKNESS. JESUS' FATHER IS NO FAIRY TALE, MAKE-BELIEVE TYPE OF GOD. GOD BREAKS INTO OUR WORLD VERY MUCH AWARE OF THE HORROR & THE ANGUISH IN OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCES. HEROD IS THE CHOKE HOLD, THE RAGE OF DARKNESS THAT THREATENS TO CRASH THE PARTY AROUND THE MANGER SCENE.

HEROD THE GREAT: FROM THE EDOMITE LINE OF KINGS, UNDER ROME HE CONTROLLED JUDEA, LIVED 37-3 B.C. HE WAS EXTREMELY BRUTAL. HEROD MURDERED HIS WIFE & 2 SONS TO PROTECT HIS THRONE. CRUEL, CUNNING, COLD-BLOODED. EMPEROR AUGUSTUS REMARKED HE WOULD RATHER BE HEROD'S PIG THAN HIS SON, LIFE WOULD BE SAFER AS HIS PIG.

THIS EVENT IN JESUS' BABYHOOD CLOSES THE DOOR ON OUR MAKE BELIEVE DESIRES THAT JESUS & HIS FOLLOWERS ARE GIVEN A RIDE ON EASY STREET JUST BECAUSE OF THE PASTORAL BEGIN-NINGS IN THE MANGER. ONE OF THE FIRST SHOCKS THAT SHATTER OUR EGO CENTRIC WORLDS IS THAT LIFE WLD DARE BE DIFFICULT FOR US! HOW DARE IT! WE RECEIVE A REWARD OR MAKE SOME WONDERFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT, OR ON THE FLIP SIDE, TRAMA - DOOM - DESTRUCTION CRASHES OUR WORLD AROUND US & WHAT? WE EXPECT THE WORLD TO SIT UP & TAKE NOTICE OF OUR GLORY OR SUFFERING, BUT THE BEAT GOES ON, NO MATTER HOW GREAT THE JOY, NO MATTER HOW GREAT THE PAIN. THE BEAT GOES ON. WE WOULD WISH GOD TO INTERVENE FOR US, MAKE THE WORLD DIFFERENT FOR US. BUT EVEN HERE WITH THE BIRTH OF THE SON OF GOD, WHEN ALL ELSE PALES IN COMPARISON, THE RAGE & PERIL OF DARKNESS CONTINUES. EXPECT IT TO DO SO!

I OFTEN TIMES NOTICE A VERY POPULAR MISCONCEPTION OF FAITH: I.E., IF WE BELIEVE STRONG ENOUGH & LONG ENOUGH THEN WE WILL BE INSULATED & PROTECTED FROM THE RAVISHING OF THE

WORLD'S HORROR & PAIN. NOT! WE EACH HARBOR THAT MAKE-BELIEVE WISH OF FAITH, LIKE IT WILL NOT HAPPEN TO ME & WHEN IT DOES WE LANGUISH, "WHY ME?" MANY A GOOD CHRISTIAN SUPPOSES THEIR FAITH TO BE AN INSURANCE POLICY TO MAKE THE HERODS OF THE WORLD GO AWAY & WHEN THEY DO NOT, WE BLAME GOD & DOUBT OUR FAITH. EVEN WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE RAGE OF DARKNESS CONTINUES.

BUT THIS ACCOUNT FROM MATT IS NOT ABOUT HEROD NOR THE FURIOUS RAGE HE DISPLAYED. NO, IT IS ABOUT JESUS, YET A BABY & HOW HE PREVAILED/SURVIVED THRU THE RAGE OF DARKNESS. WE MIGHT PESSIMISTICALLY MUTTER, "THAT IS WELL & GOOD FOR JESUS BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE 20-30 SLAUGHTERED BABIES & THEIR FAMILIES?" SUCH IS A GOOD REALITY-CHECK QUESTION. BUT YOU SEE, HERE WE GO AGAIN, WANTING TO BLAME THAT ON GOD. IT WAS HEROD, NOT GOD, WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THAT DESTRUCTION. GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF DARKNESS. BUT LIKE WITH JESUS GOD WILL BE WITH US AS THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD RAGES AROUND US.

I MK SENSE OF THIS AS IT RELATES TO MY OWN EXPERIENCES. MOST OF MY LIFE I HAVE ENJOYED THE FRUITS & BENEFITS OF A STRONG WORK ETHIC, BEING PRETTY MUCH A GOOD MORAL PERSON. UNTIL MY WORLD OF CARDS CAME CRASHING DOWN FROM THE HORROR OF DIVORCE. I HAD NEVER KNOWN SUCH PAIN & ANGUISH. 2 MONTHS LATER MY MOTHER DIED. SOUND FAMILIAR? WHEN IT RAINS, IT REALLY POURS. THEN CAME THE PAIN/UNCERTAINTY OF ENDING ONE CAREER (MINISTRY) & BEGINNING ANOTHER (LIFE INSURANCE). I WAS SUFFERING THE TRAUMA & LOSS OF THE BIG THREE: LOSS OF FAMILY, MOTHER & CAREER. NO MATTER HOW HARD THE DARKNESS PRESSED IN AROUND ME, SO AS TO CONSUME ME (BEEN THERE YOURSELF?) MY FAITH ONLY GOT STRONGER. WITH THE HELP OF THE LORD I PASSED THRU IT, NOT ONLY TO SURVIVE BUT TO BE STRONGER IN MY FAITH. I WAS NEVER ALONE BUT GOD WAS ALWAYS WITH ME GIVING ME STRENGTH & HELPING ME TO PERSEVERE & EVEN GROW FROM THE EXPERIENCES. THE LORD IS THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF STRENGTH & POWER EVEN WHEN DARKNESS RAGES AROUND US! BAD THINGS DO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE! IT IS GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE THAT KEEPS US FROM SUCCUMBING TO THE RAGE OF DARKNESS.

HOW WE RESPOND TO THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF GOD DETERMINES THE COURSE FOR OUR LIVES. THINK ABOUT IT. JOSEPH COULD HAVE IGNORED THE DREAM - STAYED - BABY JESUS KILLED ALONG WITH THE OTHERS. THE DARKNESS WOULD HAVE PREVAILED. NO GOSPELS, NO CHURCH....ETC. TAKE JESUS OUT OF THE PICTURE & THE WORLD'S UNFOLDING DRAMA WOULD BE BUT DARKNESS, ALL WOULD BE DARK!

MUCH OF THE TRAUMA & RAGE OF DARKNESS THAT INFLECTS US WOULD HAVE - COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED IF WE HAD ONLY FOLLOWED MORE CLOSELY THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF GOD. THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: JOSEPH LISTENED TO THE ABIDING OF GOD, FLED TO EGYPT, JESUS WAS KEPT FROM THE WRATH & RAGE OF HEROD. WHICH IS TO SAY TO US WHO SEEK TO FOLLOW JESUS: EXPECT THE HERODS OF LIFE, THE CHAMPIONS OF DARKNESS & EVIL TO SEEK OUR DESTRUCTION. DO NOT BE SURPRISED THAT THE WAYS OF THE WORLD WILL CALL UPON US TO COMPROMISE & TURN AWAY FROM FOLLOWING JESUS. THE UNDERSTANDING IN HEROD'S MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT KINGS & KINGDOMS IS THIS: JESUS WILL REIGN BUT HIS KINGDOM GOES MUCH BEYOND NATIONS & COUNTRIES OF THIS WORLD. THE ONE DEFENSE AGAINST THE RAGE OF DARKNESS IS THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF GOD THRU JESUS.

WE COME TOGETHER - HAVING JUST LEFT THE MANGER. IT ALL SEEMS SO ROSY RED, FRESH & FAIRY TALE LIKE. BUT THEN CHRISTMAS IS OVER & WE PASS THRU THOSE DOORS INTO THE WORLD. THE RAGE OF DARKNESS IS ALL ABOUT US. WE WILL BE AT RISK EXCEPT THAT WE ABIDE IN GOD. THE DARKNESS HAS NOT, WILL NOT OVERCOME THE LIGHT. STEP INTO THE LIGHT!