

THE RAGE OF DARKNESS (MATT. 2:13-18) 12/30/12  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

THE FORCE OF VIOLENCE & RAGE OF DARKNESS IN THESE VERSES ARE OVERWHELMING, THEY NUMB THE SENSES. HOW TO EXPLAIN THE MERCILESS SLAUGHTERING OF AN ESTIMATED 20-30 INNOCENT BABIES? WE WANT TO IMAGINE THAT IT JUST WAS NOT TRUE. BUT WE KNOW MATTHEW WOULD NOT HAVE RECOUNTED SUCH A HORRIBLE EVENT LEST IT WAS TRUE. EVEN MATTHEW WAS GRASPING FOR AN EXPLANATION & WAS REALLY STRETCHING PROPHETIC LICENSE TO EXPLAIN IT IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY. IT IS NO COMFORT TO ME NOR DOES IT MAKE ANY SENSE TO ME TO THINK OF THAT TRAGEDY AS FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PLAN OF PROPHECY. IN FACT, IT OFFENDS MY UNDERSTANDING OF GOD.

ALL THIS HITS US EVEN HARDER IN WAKE OF THE RAGE OF DARKNESS IN THE MASSACRE IN NEWTOWN, CT ON DECEMBER 14. ADAM LANZA SHOT TO DEATH HIS MOTHER, NANCY, WHILE SHE WAS IN BED AT THE HOME THEY SHARED. THEN HE DROVE TO THE LOCAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WITH AT LEAST THREE GUNS (ONE BEING AN ASSAULT RIFLE) TO KILL 20 CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 7, SIX ADULTS & HIMSELF - 28 LIVES HORRIBLY CRUSHED. BEFORE THIS TRAGIC EVENT IN NEWTOWN, MATTHEW'S TRAGIC ACCOUNT OF THE BETHLEHEM MASSACRE WAS INTELLECTUAL TO ME, NOW IT IS OVERWHELMING W/ EMOTION. OUR NATION, NATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE, MOURN WITH THE FAMILIES OF NEWTOWN. HOW CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF ALL THIS & MOVE ON TO NEW DAYS DAWNING?

WE TEND TO LUMP ALL THE CHRISTMAS STORIES TOGETHER, DON'T WE? END UP WITH A GLORIOUS, PEACEFUL, MAJESTIC, SYRUPY SWEET FAIRY TALE: A MANGER THAT DOES NOT SMELL OF ANIMALS & THEIR POOP; BIRDS SINGING; WISE MEN WITH EXPEN-SIVE NEIMAN MARCUS GIFTS; SHEPHERDS WITH PRIZE LAMBS; ANGELS BURSTING FORTH WITH FIREWORKS OF PRAISE & GLORY. ONLY THING MISSING IS THE FAMILIAR 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 NEATLY AWAY, ARE WE TO GO ON WITH A MAKE-BELIEVE, FAIRY TALE FAITH? **NOT SO!**

HEROD THE GREAT PROVES TO BE THE **REALITY CHECK** THAT SHOCKS US BACK TO OUR SENSES, “EARTH CALLING, CHRISTIAN, ARE YOUR FEET FIRMLY PLANTED ON THE GROUND?” JESUS WAS BORN INTO THE REAL, DOWN & DIRTY WORLD - THAT MANGER DID SMELL & SOUND LIKE A CATTLE STALL & WAS DRAFTY COLD. JESUS WAS THE LIGHT THAT WOULD PREVAIL AGAINST THE RAGE OF DARK-NESS. JESUS’ FATHER IS NO FAIRY TALE, MAKE-BELIEVE TYPE OF GOD. GOD BREAKS INTO OUR WORLD VERY MUCH AWARE OF THE HORROR & ANGUISH IN OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCES. HEROD IS THE CHOKE HOLD, THE RAGE OF DARKNESS THAT THREATENED TO CRASH THE PARTY AROUND THE MANGER SCENE. NEWTOWN IS THE CHOKE HOLD, THE RAGE OF DARKNESS THAT HAS THREAT-ENED OUR CHRISTMAS PARTY AS WELL.

THIS EVENT IN JESUS’ BABYHOOD CLOSED THE DOOR ON OUR MAKE BELIEVE DESIRES THAT JESUS & HIS FOLLOWERS ARE GIVEN A RIDE ON EASY STREET JUST BECAUSE OF THE PASTORAL BEGINNINGS IN THE MANGER. ONE OF THE FIRST SHOCKS THAT SHATTERS OUR EGO CENTRIC WORLDS IS THAT LIFE WOULD DARE BE DIFFICULT FOR US! **HOW DARE IT!** WE RECEIVE A REWARD OR MAKE SOME WONDERFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT OR ON THE FLIP SIDE -TRAUMA, DOOM, DEATH & 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 & ON....** WE WOULD WISH GOD TO INTERVENE FOR US, MAKE THE WORLD DIFFERENT FOR US. BUT EVEN HERE WITH THE BIRTH OF GOD’S SON, 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 MATTHEW IS NOT ABOUT HEROD OR THE FURIOUS RAGE HE DISPLAYED - THE BABIES SLAUGHTERED, ETC. NO, IT IS ABOUT JESUS, YET A BABY & HOW HE MIRACULOUSLY PREVAILED/SURVIVED THRU THE RAGE OF DARKNESS. WE MIGHT PESSIMISTICALLY MUTTER, "THAT IS WELL & GOOD FOR JESUS BUT WHAT ABT THOSE 20-30 SLAUGHTERED BABIES & THEIR FAMILIES?" SUCH IS A GOOD REALITY-CHECK QUESTION. BUT HERE WE GO AGAIN, WANTING TO BLAME THAT ON GOD. IT WAS HEROD, NOT GOD, WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THAT PARTICULAR RAGE OF DARKNESS. LIKE WITH JESUS GOD WILL BE WITH US AS THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD RAGES AROUND US.

NO MATTER HOW HARD THE DARKNESS PRESSES IN AROUND US, SO AS TO CONSUME US (BEEN THERE?) OUR FAITH ENDURES & SAVES US. WE PASS THRU IT ALL NOT ONLY TO SURVIVE BUT TO BE MADE STRONGER IN OUR FAITH. WE ARE NEVER ALONE BUT GOD IS WITH US (EMANUEL). **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 & OUTCOME FOR OUR LIVES. ***THINK ABOUT IT.*** JOSEPH COULD HAVE IGNORED THE DREAM & STAYED IN BETHLEHEM - BABY JESUS KILLED ALONG WITH THE OTHERS. THE DARKNESS WOULD HAVE PREVAILED. NO GOSPEL, 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, 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 - EYES OPENED - NEWTOWN - POLICE OFFICERS KILLED - DRUG BUST IN ATCHISON - KNOWING IT IS NOT ALL ROSY RED, FRESH & FAIRY TALE LIKE. CHRISTMAS DAY IS OVER BUT **CHRISTMAS POWER PREVAILS**. 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 THOSE WHO ABIDE IN THE LIGHT. **STEP INTO THE LIGHT**.