

A Tale of Two Kings

Matthew 2:1-12

It's a strange and bizarre story that doesn't sound right amid the Christmas carols, bright lights and poinsettias. Most of us have our Christmas tree up, and our hearts are full and everyone's happy, right? There's one man that isn't happy about Christmas. In fact he is pretty angry about the whole thing, only he isn't a made up character, he is real. His name is Herod the Great.

His story is told in Matthew 2. Born into a politically well-connected family, he became governor of Galilee at the young age of 25. In 40 B.C. the Roman Senate named him "King of the Jews." It was a title the Jews hated because he was anything but religious.

Herod was the embodiment of the ultimate villain. He exhibited 4 classic characteristics:

1. He had a preoccupation with power.
 - He was addicted to power. Power has been described as the ultimate human obsession. If it were an alcoholic beverage, Herod was passed out on the floor drunk with it. His life and use of power can be summed up in three words--- he was capable, crafty, and cruel.
 - Soon after becoming King, he wiped out several bands of guerrillas who were terrorizing the countryside and made peace treaties with many other competing factions.

- His craftiness had no barriers. Because he had a morbid distrust of anyone who might want to take his throne, he was also known as a very cruel man. Over the years he killed many people: His brother-in-law, his mother-in-law, two of his sons, and even his wife.
- He murdered out of spite and killed to stay in power. The great historian, Josephus called him “barbaric.”

2. He had a preoccupation with possessions.

- Herod wanted it all. He wanted everything a Roman Caesar had. Herod built 7 palaces, and 7 theaters one of which could seat 9,500 people. He even built a stadium that could seat 300,000 people.

3. He had a preoccupation with prestige.

- He loved to make an impression on people. He built cities with state of the art architecture and amenities and named them after his superiors. Seven of his marriages were prestige oriented and politically motivated.

4. He had a preoccupation with paranoia.

- Ever since an enemy poisoned Herod’s father he was obsessed and paranoid. When he became king, he commissioned tens of thousands of slaves to build over 10 emergency fortresses, all heavily armed and well provisioned.
- He ruled for more than 40 years until he clashed with another King, one who was also called “King of the Jews.”

- With that as a back ground let's fast forward to the last months of his life. Herod the Great, King of the Jews is slowly dying of a disease. His breath foul, and his body racked with convulsions, and skin his skin has open soars. He is slowly losing his mind. And then word came to him one day that some visitors have arrived from the east. They asked him a question that shook him to his core in Matthew 2:2 "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and we have come to worship Him."
- Matthew 2:3 says "When Herod heard this he was disturbed and all of Jerusalem with him."
- So he called all of ministers together and asked where the Christ was to be born and they said in Vs. 5, 6.
- Suddenly things are getting really serious. So Herod said to his new three friends in vs 7, 8.
- When they found Jesus they bowed down and worshipped him, offering him expensive gifts. After they worshipped Jesus verse 12 tells us that "Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route."
- Herod realized that he had been out smarted by the wise men; he did something in his rage that is up there with the like of Hitler. He ordered the killing of all males less than 2 years of age.
- To say that the two kings were just enemies crossing paths is putting it too mildly. They possessed immense power, but how they chose to use it revealed the heart of the two radically different men. One was a tyrant, the other a servant. One manipulated, slandered, deceived, and coerced. The other healed, touched, taught, and loved.

- To fully understand the opposite paths of Herod and Jesus, let's take a look at the end of the story. Herod, with all of his wealth and power came to ruin. In the final years of his life his body was infected with disease. His pain was so bad that he could be heard screaming all night long.
- Jesus, after a life of poverty and lowly position, descended yet further to a rough old wooden cross. His cries could also be heard through the night. Herod could not save himself from death. Jesus could have but chose not to.
- Jesus willingly suffered. The constant threats on his life, the betrayals of friends, the beatings, and his death on our behalf, all for a single purpose: to demonstrate God's outrageous love.
- Friends if we took a hard look inside us, we would see little Herod's inside of us. He comes out when I had rather rule than serve; when I focus on what I own instead of what I can give; when I would rather be honored, than look for ways to honor others; and when I see people as a threat instead of as people God loves.
- When it came to the management of power, there was only one thing King Herod and King Jesus shared in common: They both believed that there was nothing that bloodshed couldn't cure.