

Jesus: Our Source of Hope or Fear

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[0 : 00] We are now continuing on with, you know, heading into the part of the service of the sermon. And those of you who don't know me, my name is Jesse. Those of you who are listening to my voice online, thank you for listening.

And if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Matthew chapter 2. And that's what we're going to work out from today. So we just finished our series in Acts, just in time for the beginning of the season of Advent, which, you know, we did come a week late.

It begins the first week of December on the Christian calendar. But the season of Advent is really just remembering the arrival of Jesus. Advent literally means arrival.

And so over the next few Sundays, what we are going to do is reflect on Jesus' arrival. You know, we're going to use a combo of Scripture, and we're going to actually use some lines from well-known Christmas carols.

And one of the things we realize is, like, you know, Christmas carols are not just really familiar. And from traditions that we know of during the holiday season. I don't know if you grew up in a family that sang Christmas carols or did Christmas caroling.

[1 : 05] But that was definitely my experience growing up and really loved those songs. I really enjoyed those songs, even as a kid. And these carols, they're fun to sing. But you know what?

When you really stop and pause and sing about the words that you are singing in them, they are really very rich songs, full of these amazing insights about Jesus and what His coming means.

And today what we're going to do is we're going to look at the first verse of the Christmas carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem. And then after reading that, we will start in on Matthew 2.

And so here is that first verse. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. And I'm reading this and not singing this for very good reasons, just so you know.

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.

[2 : 03] The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. And I want us to consider that last line. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

That should stir up some thoughts and imaginations and musings of, man, what is that line meaning? You know, up to that point, it's a kind of nice little picture being drawn for us of this little tiny town.

You can kind of think of, you know, cute little towns down in the south that you can get into. And at night with the stars above it, so sleepy and just like, yeah, I can get into this.

Sleepy, serene, quiet. And we can think about, you know, Jesus as a baby and like, oh, it's so cute. It's so wonderful. He's this baby in a manger, you know. Think of the, was it Ricky Bobby of just like, you know, six pound, 12 ounce little baby Jesus and his golden fleece diapers.

And that can really just, we can really think about Jesus in a cheap way that way. But these lines, man, they are saying something powerful. And they're laying claim to something about Jesus.

[3 : 19] And we need to consider what it is they're laying claim to. And it's this. Jesus can either be your greatest fear or your greatest hope. That's a bold statement.

But is it true? And it's obvious who are going to be the people who hope in him, right? It's all the Christians, right? It's all the believers, the people that follow him.

It's kind of our job for him to be our greatest hope. But, man, who are the people that are afraid of him in this world? Is it just like, well, probably the Satan worshipers for sure. They're probably really scared of Jesus or afraid of him.

But who else? What about the rest of the world that kind of lives their life without any thought or care about Jesus at all? Which is probably, to be honest, where most decent, law-abiding, nice

people in America, in the South, would place themselves.

How can Jesus be those people's greatest fear? How could he be their greatest hope if they don't even believe he exists? Isn't there kind of a neutral area here?

[4 : 23] And the answer to that question is actually wrapped up in who Jesus claims to be, right? He isn't just some, like, divine nanny who really comes in and cleans up our messes after us that we make.

He isn't a spiritual guru or a wise man with tips on how to live your best life now or give you life hacks. He's not a cosmic genie that you call to when things get bad.

They're like, oh, hey, or like, hey, I want this, you know? Like, maybe if I say his name and, you know, Jesus, it would be nice to have a Mercedes Benz. In your name I pray, amen. He's not that. Who does he claim to be? He is the long-awaited Messiah. He came to set his people free from sin. And he's the Messiah king who brings his kingdom to overthrow and replace the broken Babylon we now live in, this present world, this present darkness.

And that claim of Jesus right there, right, is an affront to this world. It is a front to all of what it stands for. He stands against its power structures.

[5 : 38] He subverts its versions of justice and morality and truth and its own version of salvation. And this world, this Babylon, is the one that we work in, that we vote in, that we go to school in, that we store up treasure in.

And that's what this Christmas carol is trying to get us to consider. The fears it references don't stem from what Babylon is doing to us as Christians, right?

If you're here and you're a Christian, that is not the fear that it references. It's not even referencing the fears of what Babylon might do to us. These fears that it is talking about, they are caused by Jesus, this polarizing Messiah king who would take Babylon from us.

That is what it's talking about. Which implicates that indifference toward Jesus is impossible. You will either be for him or against him. There is no neutral ground.

And you might say, man, Jesse, I think you're being a little hyperbolic here, right? And I don't think so. In fact, I'm very confident that I'm not being hyperbolic because the gospels, the stories of Jesus and his life show us that whoever encountered Jesus, there was a response.

[6 : 54] There was no going away neutral. And that polarization, right, didn't just start when he became an adult and doing his ministry. When he started claiming to be God's son, it actually began at his birth.

And that's what we're going to look at in Matthew chapter 2. In verse 1, it says this.

He was familiar with Israel's prophecies about this long-awaited Messiah. And he honestly didn't have any problems, right? Before Jesus was around, he didn't have this trouble that now dogged him.

Because the idea of a Messiah coming one day, that was okay. But it changed when that invaded his reality. It says his soul became troubled, which is he became anxious.

Like that word there in the Greek, it gives you a picture of like having waters that are stirred up by wind. Think of like a stormy ocean, right?

[8 : 19] Chaos and craziness. That's what Herod is feeling right now. And we can say like, okay, that's him, but that's not me. But I would say to us, man, are we any different?

See, when you and I are confronted with the revelation of what it means that Jesus is the Messiah King, it's impossible to stay indifferent. The claim of who he is demands a response from us.

It always will. And now if the response is you turn to him and you say, okay, you're my Messiah King, he can be your Prince of Peace. All that turmoil and trouble that you feel, he can calm those storms within you.

But if you don't, well, you are left to figure that out for yourself. You are left to figure out how to calm your troubled soul. And what happens when we do that?

Well, I would say this. If we walk away from Jesus and don't accept him as who he is, what we do is we become God killers. Look how Herod determined to calm his troubled soul.

[9 : 23] Verse 13. Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

For Herod is about to search for the child, not to give him sweet little hugs or give him gold and frankincense and myrrh and gifts like the wise men. To do what?

Destroy him. Notice Herod's progression. It starts out king. He hears this news about this baby born in Bethlehem, this little town.

His soul gets troubled. And you think about it, he's king. He is the top of the food chain where he's at in that time in his life. He's wealthy.

He's powerful. He's studied. He's clever. But then this little baby born in this poor, insignificant town, man, it messes with him.

[10:20] It turns his world upside down so much so that he attempts to kill this little baby. He attempts to kill Jesus. And in fact, he goes on to order the genocide of every two-year-old kid and under in Bethlehem, hoping that in the process of doing that, this king of the Jews would be wiped out and he would be rid of him.

So was Herod just having a really bad day? A really bad few days? Was he having some crazy, eccentric, manic episode? No, he did what was in his power to try and destroy Jesus.

Herod did what he could do. This was all perfectly in his power to try and do. And we look at that and we can easily disassociate and be like, man, that's Herod.

That's not me. I would never have done that. I would never do that. I would never seek out Jesus to kill him. But I would say in the final analysis, our hearts are no different to Herod's.

And let me explain. See, Herod was confronted by a Jesus that went after who he was, his central identity. The thing he couldn't let go of.

[11:29] The thing that was so most important to him. He was king. Now, your identity might not be king of the Jews, but it's the authority to be the king of your own life, to live your own way, to set your own destiny, to live your own truth.

See, what we want as people is we want our autonomy. We want to self-govern. We want to be the authority of our own lives, to call our own shots, to have control, to live the way we want to live.

And Jesus, what he does as Messiah King, he comes to depose you, to take you off your throne, and take you off the throne of every aspect of your life, and place himself there.

And the unfortunate thing is, we don't get any wiggle room with that. It's not like, hey, Jesus, can I stay on the throne in these areas over here, and you can have these areas over here? He's like, no. I want it all.

It's all or nothing. And that is why Jesus doesn't come as an ally to support our life, and get behind our dreams, and our wants, and what we're on about. He's not there to say, like, hey, I'm here to, like, man, just, like, root you on, and you living your lifestyle that you want to live, and the way you want to live.

[12:46] He comes to take over, and to bring us out of that kingdom of Babylon, to loose its bonds from our hearts. And he wants to bring us into his kingdom, where he rules, and he alone rules.

He leaves us no neutral ground. That's the problem when Jesus invades our life. And we may not seek to murder Jesus in the literal sense, but I would argue that we, don't we try to do so by rejecting him as the Messiah King, as who he wants to be?

I'll say this. Frederick Nietzsche, he was a famous philosopher and academic of the Enlightenment in the 19th century. And to be honest, our modern society today was greatly affected and informed by him.

In fact, I would say it's the great, great, great grandchild. And the essence of the Enlightenment was the redefinition of where truth lies. It was no longer in the institutions of church and religion or the authority of Christ and God as created over all things.

The Enlightenment's claim was that truth lied within man himself. We were told that we could find our own truth now. We get to define it for ourselves without outside imposition.

[14:02] We don't need God to guide us. We don't need his truth. We don't need his rule. And so Nietzsche declared famously in the 19th century, God is dead.

God remains dead. And we have killed him. He boasted in that. For him and those who believed in the Enlightenment principles and the Enlightenment journey, this was their good news.

Hey, we finally achieved it. We finally killed God. We finally cast off those bonds that had been holding us back. And I would say this.

The heart of Herod, that same idea of wanting to be rid of Jesus is alive and well today. It's deeply embedded into our society. It permeates every institution.

It permeates every institution, every academy, every political persuasion, every humanistic philosophy. It does. And what we would see today and what society would declare is Jesus has

lost.

[15:05] We've defeated him. We don't need him. He did not conquer us. We have conquered him. And you and I grow up in this. This is the air we breathe, the society we breathe.

We can't pretend like just, well, I grew up in church. I knew about all these things, man. These things infiltrate our hearts. These things are always tugging at our hearts and our flesh to pull us away from the beauty and the truth and the glory and the singleness of Jesus as Messiah King who would invade our lives and take over.

And so when you and I deny God by turning away from his truth to live our own way, it is no less than desiring God to be dead. It is no less than what Herod did.

That is the nature of sin. This desire fuels every evil, every lie, every curse, every bitterness, every abuse, every disobedience, every self-righteous and selfish act.

And here's the kicker. Without God intervening, you and I would never stop being this way. Merry Christmas. Look, I know this is heavy stuff, but man, this is the truth and the power of what we're talking about in Jesus' arrival.

[16:17] The Bible, when it talks about sin, when it talks about this proclivity for us to live what I just described in the way that Babylon has set itself up and denying Jesus free and pursuing our own way, all that stuff.

That's what our flesh is. It's our sinful nature. And that's our default setting as people. We're born that way. We're born to reject Jesus as king and to be the master of our own lives.

That's our default setting. And maybe it's hard for you to see yourself as that kind of person, but man, I would argue, man, that is truly what we are. And here's a good test of the heart for us.

Do you long for Jesus to be your king? Do you long for him to return? Do you long for his arrival? For him to show up?

To him to come in and to fully be submitted and surrendered to him in every part of your life? Do you long for that? Would you rejoice if he was to return in the next five minutes to judge the world and bring the fullness of his kingdom?

[17:23] Or does that fill you with fear or resentment or sorrow or maybe even a fear of missing out on something that you have yet to experience in this life? You know, often the things we long for and live for today are the things that won't continue in Jesus' kingdom.

So, we don't want his advent. We don't want his arrival. Because that means losing what we really love. And that's the problem.

See, Herod believed that Jesus was the king of the Jews. It's not that Herod didn't believe that. The problem was he did believe that. But when that truth invaded his life, it didn't drive him to worship.

It filled him with fear and loathing. See, it isn't enough to believe in Jesus. You must love him as your savior and king. See, scripture says that even the demons believe in Jesus in trouble.

Right? The book of James says that. Like, you have faith. That's great. You know what? If to be technically true, the demons also believe that Jesus is who he is.

[18:28] They tremble even at the fact that he is the Messiah king. But you know what? They reject him. They don't want to submit to him as king. They don't want to be under his rule.

But to love Jesus is definitely to believe and to receive him as he is. And not as we want him to be. A man named Simeon in the Bible gives us a great example. Very unlike Herod. Let's look at the life of Simeon and the story of Simeon, sorry. And his encounter with Jesus.

And in Luke 2.25 it says, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And so we see a few things about Simeon here. He was righteous and devout. Most likely Simeon obeyed all the rules. Very religious man. All of God's laws. And he did it religiously.

[19:27] He did good things. Most likely he was charitable. Most likely he had given himself to prayer. To going to the temple when he should go to. To offer the right sacrifices.

I'm sure he was a man who was well read in the Torah. Knew all of the words of scripture and the prophecies about the coming Messiah. So he did all those things. Good. Righteous, devout, good man, right?

But to be honest, even moralistic, legalistic people can be like that. It's just that they may do it for the wrong reasons. Right? You could follow God's rules.

You could do all the right things. But it's another way to be in control. And force God to give you what you want. Right? So, Lord, I'm faithful at paying my tithes. So don't I deserve a better car? Or a bigger house? Or a raise? See how we can follow God's rules for the wrong reasons? But Simeon was not a moralist or a legalist. Because there is something else that consumed his heart. [20 : 25] It says he was waiting. He was longing with eager anticipation for the consolation of Israel. The salvation of Israel. Which was only going to come through this Messiah King that was promised.

And like Herod, he knew all these prophecies. He knew that when the Messiah King would come, he would bring this new kingdom. And he would bring order and restoration to Israel. And that he would rule and reign.

But unlike Herod, he waited for it. He longed for it. Kind of like a child on Christmas morning whose parents are still asleep. He's just like, oh my gosh.

Like, when are they going to wake up so I can open these presents? Like, Simeon had this longing, this eager anticipation like that. Somehow, Simeon got it. Right?

Somehow, Simeon got it right about Jesus. Like, he knew about this long-awaited Messiah. But he was longing for it. And Herod didn't.

[21 : 22] Which means that knowledge of this thing isn't enough. Believing isn't enough. The difference between that we see between Simeon and Herod here, I think, is really found in verses 25.

And it's also repeated in verses 26 and 27. It says at the very end of verse 25 about Simeon. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. Then it goes on to say in verse 26.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God. See, Simeon, unlike Herod, had the Holy Spirit.

It says it was upon him. God the Holy Spirit was upon him. And the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see God's Messiah King. And that this Messiah King was Jesus.

[22 : 22] When Jesus came into the temple with his parents to be presented, Simeon the Holy Spirit said, that's him. That's the one I told you about. That's the one you have been waiting for and longing for your whole life.

Man, and that was the difference maker. He had the Holy Spirit. And you know what? For us today, we are no different. The Holy Spirit turns Jesus from being our greatest fear to our greatest hope. We need him to do that. Simeon was a man, obviously, full of scripture. He knew all the right things, but he was a man full of the Spirit. And the Spirit's main job, as we see in scripture, is to exalt Jesus Christ to our hearts.

And when the Spirit works in this manner, it produces love in our hearts for Jesus that spills out of us with blessing and worship to Jesus. We see that. Simeon, he beholds God's Messiah.

And his heart is so filled with love and joy. He's like, ah, finally, I have beheld it. That he breaks out into a song, that is his response, right? I mean, how many of us have been so happy that the response is, you know what?

[23 : 34] I just got to sing. That's what I got to do. And so this filling up of joy of beholding this child, this promised king that he had been waiting for, he says this in verse 29, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people. Israel, this old man, I love this picture of Simeon.

And this old man is so moved by God's goodness that what he does is he runs and swoops Jesus. He, the Messiah king, he runs and picks him up in his arms and embraces him and begins to worship.

He doesn't care who's watching. He doesn't care who's listening. He's just, he is going for it.

Simeon might have been a terrible singer, but he could not help himself.

He is so full of joy, he is going to rejoice. He isn't thinking about himself at all. He is totally lost in the person of Jesus. That is so different to Herod, right?

[24 : 46] Herod, all he was thinking about was himself, his kingdom, his throne, his life that Jesus would take away. But for Simeon, full of the spirit, man, Jesus is all he wants.

And so he runs and he embraces this Messiah king, his Messiah king. Simeon is not holding on to his life as it is. He is not holding on to Israel, the status quo of the day.

No, he wanted something better. He knew this Messiah king would bring something better. And now he says, Lord, now your servant is ready to depart in peace.

Why? Because he's seen Jesus. He's ready to let go of his life fully. He knows the rest of the story of what this Messiah king was going to do.

Nothing in Babylon, in this Babylon, is worth holding on to when you've been captivated by Christ. And we have a choice. You could either embrace Babylon and continue abiding in it and loving in it, or you can forsake it.

[25 : 58] You can let go of it and embrace this Messiah king and have him abide in you. One of the verses, the fourth verse of O Little Town of Bethlehem, it says this.

As the band comes up. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in.

Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us.

Abide with us. Our Lord Emmanuel. Our Lord God with us. So I want to say this to us.

In response to remembering that Jesus arrived, born in Bethlehem, in a stable, in a humble manger.

[27 : 01] That today, he is still coming. He is still being born into the hearts of his people. And whether or not you are a Christian, God is putting this, he is laying this at our feet today.

He is asking us these two questions. I'm going to have them up on the screen. Are you captivated by Jesus as the Messiah king? Are you embracing and longing for his return?

These questions invite us to come honestly to God. This is an opportunity for us to confess. And repent. And return to him. To this Jesus.

As Lord. And as our Savior. And maybe that's you for the first time today. If so, we are going to have a moment to pause and pray. And there's going to be a prayer for you to pray.

Up on the screen. Maybe you're already a follower of Jesus, but your heart has grown cold. This is an opportunity of God coming and saying, man.

[28 : 06] Man, come to me. I want to be your Savior. I want to be your King. I want to occupy that place on your throne once again.

The throne of your heart once again. Jesus is always inviting us to come to him and to find help and grace and mercy. And he will always do that. So let's take a few moments to respond and pray to him.

Jesus, we thank you. One, that you love to be with your people. You come to dwell with us.

But you don't come to be relegated to the corners of our lives. But to be the center. To be on the throne. Lord, may we embrace you as our Savior, as the Messiah King.

Amen.