

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 2:13 "Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Fools Love Death!

In the last two Lord's Days we have looked to characters in the Christmas account as great examples to follow: We saw in Simeon's life a great example of how we as God's children should have hope, contentment and be a people of great vision...

A people whose hope is in the finished work of Jesus...

A people content with where He has placed us in His Body the Church...

And a people who know that His Kingdom will fill the whole earth!

We then turned our attention to the wise men from the east who taught us the great lesson of blessings for simple obedience and we were reminded how God protected the Baby Jesus, the same way Jesus has now promised to protect us as the sheep of His fold

We began to see the contrast between life and death in this account:

- We saw the wise men come choosing life
- And this week, we will compare them with fools, like King Herod who love death

Again, we have lessons to learn...

- We will see more clearly from the Scriptures how and why the enemies of God love death
- We will discern who God holds responsible for the death and destruction that results from this evil love-affair
- AND finally just as we again see God's providential care over His Son, we will be reminded that WE are in His loving care as His sheep, no matter what circumstances we may face

We concluded the message last week with a short passage from Proverbs chapter eight where we clearly saw this contrast between life and death:

Proverbs 8:35 "For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the Lord; *[as the wise men did!]*

36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death." *[as we see with Herod this morning]*

So who are those that hate God?

The atheist would qualify: As Pastor Doug Wilson likes to say, the atheist strongly & loudly declares two things:

- 1) There is NO God
- 2) And I hate him!

However, the Bible's perspective is much broader... When someone says a person is a 'fool' today we tend to think of court jesters in funny hats or the person who is "too dumb to come in out of the rain."

We must remember that this is not the Bible's definition:

- **In Psalm 14:1 we read that, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" [the heart of the evolution debate]**
- **In Proverbs 12:15 we see that it is the modern humanist: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes..."**
- **And again in Proverbs 14:16 "But a fool rages & is self-confident."**
- **And as we would expect, we find in Proverbs 15:5 that "A fool despises his father's instruction"**

Paul explains this more fully in Romans chapter one where he says of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness:

"19 ... what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [those evolutionists] 22 Professing to be wise, they became FOOLS, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

- **The Psalmist declared that, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" This is not only the state of those who are outward atheists, but rather the state of ALL those who do not acknowledge and bow to the one true God of heaven and earth!**

Paul goes on to show the results of this foolishness as God turns them over to the wickedness of their own hearts with a concluding list in verse 28: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, [again, the one True God] God gave them over to a debased mind, [not stupid, but debased] to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, [you kids don't get a pass!] 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;"

What we are seeing today in our once Christian land is certainly a result of the sins on that list:

- **Fathers who can throw their children from a bridge**
- **Young men who can shoot unarmed women on a campus or at a shopping mall**
- **And yes, the slaughter of over a million unborn children a year which gets less media attention than the few dogs that were abused by Michael Vick!**

I pointed out last week that we had to remember the BIG picture if we were going to Biblically confront an issue like the sin of abortion and Paul's conclusion in verse 32 certainly shows us why this is so... "[these fools] who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." Thus we see that fools love death.

These sins are the result of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, NOT a failure to know the truth: Just like Herod

- **We will not be engaging in this battle against abortion Biblically unless we understand this...**

The innocent are being led away to slaughter NOT because of a lack of knowledge, but because there is a suppression of knowledge:

- **Knowledge or truth suppressed in unrighteousness!**
- **The title of my sermon is simply "fools love death" and that is the conclusion that Paul has proclaimed:**
- **As Christians we must also join with him in presenting the right answer... Jesus Christ and the life that He gives.**

Now we can turn to the second question of just who God holds responsible for the death of the innocents in this passage in Matthew:

Who loved death?

The easy answer is King Herod and perhaps the soldiers whom he sent to kill the little children. King Herod was willing to sacrifice the lives of those innocent children to save his kingdom, just as those who 'choose' abortion today are willing to sacrifice the unborn child in the womb to 'save' what they think is the good life: To keep a boyfriend, stay in college or just avoid the embarrassment of their sin. It would be simple to place all the blame on Herod or with abortion today on the women & doctors:

- **But are they the only ones that God holds accountable for these deaths?**
- **Will the problem of abortion go away if we again pass laws to forbid it or round up and punish all the doctors and women who have participated?**

For the answer to those questions, we must turn again to the Old Testament:

In 2 Chronicles chapter 7 we see King Solomon completing and dedicating the Temple with many sacrifices and much celebration: And we are told that the glory of Jehovah filled the Temple.

That evening the Lord appears to the King to explain more fully what His presence at the Temple means: It contains a familiar verse that is often quoted when dealing with national sins, but we must understand the context to see its full meaning and how it should be properly applied to our situation today:

"I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place."

God had established His House and honored it with His name, so He was not only concerned about the sins out there, but those in His House.

God goes on to assure Solomon that his family will receive great blessings for obedience and severe judgments for rebellion. God, knowing where Solomon & his heirs would take his kingdom gives the result in verse 21: "And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and this house?' 22 Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them.' "

The Kings of Israel and Judah abandoned God and they were exiled to Babylon. We studied in Ezra & Nehemiah how God brought them back so that the Messiah could come as the Son of David to take his throne forever, but now King Herod and the religious leaders of his day are repeating history:

Bringing on the final destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in AD 70... without excuse!

- **Remember, Zacharias was a Temple priest who declared for all to hear that his son John would "go before the Lord to prepare His ways."**
- **After Angels proclaimed His birth Jesus was brought to the Temple for the purification sacrifices with His mother Mary: Here two witnesses proclaimed Him to be the Messiah and yet none of the religious leaders took note.**
- **Now these leaders have given the wise men directions to the Messiah in Bethlehem after being told that a star in the East announced His birth but none of them is willing to take the short journey.**
- **And finally, King Herod strikes back with an order to kill hundreds or thousands of children and there is no word of objection from these Shepherds of Israel.**

These religious leaders failed to proclaim the truth about the coming of Messiah

Now they have failed to confront the civil magistrate who is planning a great evil

- **This is the point that God is making to Solomon: It is God's people who must proclaim the truth of God's gracious salvation, which we do today as His Church, the Temple of the Holy Spirit!**

It is God's people who are to confront those who plan evil and call them to repentance: We are, as the Prophet Ezekiel says, to blow the trumpet warning of impending danger or else the blood is on our hands as well!

Or as we read in Proverbs 18:9: "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys"

- **This is what God was explaining to Solomon: IF God's people failed in these duties then they must turn from their wicked ways before God will hear their prayers.**

Failure to do so led to the exile of Israel to Babylon: Failure here in Matthew's account this morning led to death of many innocent children and failure in a few short years would lead to the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory and the final destruction of Jerusalem.

So how should we, as God's people, properly respond to the great sin of abortion in the United States, where over a million unborn children have lost their lives every year since 1973?

- **As always, it begins by believing God's promises:**
- **The gates of hell will NOT prevail against the proper work of Christ's Church!**
- **Christ must reign until He has put ALL His enemies under His feet and that the last enemy to be destroyed is death! *I Cor 15:25-26***

The proper response is to heed the whole counsel of God for all of life:

Right Worship

-- Good soldiers properly commissioned

Right Living

-- Soldiers who hear & DO the Words of Jesus

Right Confrontation

-- Proclaiming God's truth in the public square

Right Mercy

-- LIVING God's truth in the public square

Right prayers

-- Prayers which God can now hear!

Today we rightly hold Hitler responsible for the death of millions in his death camps along with those who ran them...

BUT at the time, God was calling the pastors of the German churches to repentance for their wicked ways –

- **Where was their voice of Wisdom and warning as Hitler captured the hearts and minds of the German people?**
- **Where was their outrage as trains carried the Jews and other "enemies of the state" to the death camps – Many just turned up the music!**

There is no simple solution to the problem of abortion: We are a nation of fools who have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness and are now carrying on a love-affair with death. As Christ's Church we must faithfully:

- **Proclaim the Good News of God's gracious salvation**
- **Sound the trumpet of warning against great sin**

Heeding all of God's counsel for all of life as I just outlined while trusting God for the results. Sometimes this is not easy, like for those parents who lost their babies at the hand of Herod's henchmen: Some of those killed might even have been children of the very shepherds who had seen the baby Jesus.

- **As we trust God's justice we must be at peace with what God must do in response to great evil.**

We know that King Manasseh was the most evil of all the Kings of Judah. He sacrificed the children of his day to idols hoping for peace and prosperity Like Herod protecting his throne or those who choose abortion today. King Manasseh was hauled off to Babylon and tortured and this brought his personal repentance and salvation. His reign was followed by a faithful son who brought a great revival and yet in the end the blood of those innocent lives lost cried out to God for justice and Israel faced the full wrath of the Babylonians.

II Kings 24:3 "Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon."

- **Sobering words for a nation that has killed almost fifty million unborn children!**

And thus are final lesson should again be to better understand how the Lord protects His people: As we saw last week God protected the baby Jesus from Herod and again this week from his heir to the throne. God through the Prophet Jeremiah offered comfort even to those parents who lost children at the hands of Herod's men as we shall see when we gather for communion.

And we can learn from the Prophet Habakkuk that God offered comfort, to the faithful as the Nation of Israel faced the coming judgment of Babylon, serving as another example for us here in the 21st Century. It is an important example for us today, because we do not know what is going to happen here in the United States as a result of our great sin:

- **Will our nation collapse as many kingdoms before have done when they abandoned God?**
- **Will we see another great revival as the Church calls our people to repentance by turning from their wicked ways as the son of King Manasseh did?**

We certainly hope, work and pray for the later!

However, we as a covenant nation have shed much innocent blood and it cries out from our land to God for justice, as we saw in the judgment of the nation of Israel I want to conclude by considering how God brought His people comfort through the Prophet Habakkuk

IF we think about his prayer and response in terms of what we may face in the near future we can find comfort today... [Explain the prayer & response]

Israel certainly feared and understood the savagery of the Babylonians.

- **Could our modern equivalent be Red China?**
- **How about a massive economic collapse: Would the baby-boomers and their children – the ME generation – quietly stand in long soup lines like their parents or grand parents in the 1930's?**
- **The same could be true of a great famine or pestilence... Modern 21st Century folks are SURE these belong only in the past!**

So your homework can be this little book from the Prophet Habakkuk where you can open some interesting discussions and more fully see the blessings in the conclusion that I want to focus on:

- **It comes after the Prophet lifts up an inspiring prayer as he submits to God's will:**
- **Habakkuk begins to take in the horror of a Babylonian invasion much as we would dread a land, air and sea assault by Red China or the other judgments I mentioned:**

Then in verse sixteen of chapter three we read:

"When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself..."

The prophet then places his hope in God even though he knows he will face dire circumstances which I want to update to a more modern reading -- In His time the most dreadful fear would be that all agriculture activity would fail, ours today would center more on technologies & comfort:

Here is how we might address God today if we were called on to accept His coming destruction & judgment:

- Though our beautiful homes have been laid waste,**
- Though our cars have no fuel on which to run,**
- Though all of our factories have been silenced,**
- And all the grocery shelves are bare,**
- And all our water facets are fouled...**

Then as His faithful people we would join the prophet in proclaiming:

"YET I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on high hills."

- **Is THAT the kind of hope that you have in our faithful covenant keeping God?**
- **It should be, but it is no surprise that we all must cry with that father of the stricken child who needed to be healed, "Jesus, I believe... Help Thou my unbelief."**

That is why our proper Biblical response to the sin of abortion MUST have at the center the right worship of our God:

- **The Lord's Day and the Lord's Day worship of our Triune God must be central to all we do or we will fail in those times of great testing!**

As we have considered the manifestation of Jesus and how His coming has changed the world:

- **We saw Simeon celebrate His being a light to lighten the Gentiles**
- **We saw in the account of the wise men the contrast of those who seek life and those who love death**

In conclusion we could summarize all three weeks with verse nine of Proverbs chapter thirteen...

- **"The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out."**

Let us be a people who BELIEVE God's promises!

Let us truly be a rejoicing people, even in the midst of much sin, as we go forth to faithfully serve the risen and reigning Savior Jesus!

Communion meditation:

Jeremiah 31:10 "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, And declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.' **11** For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, And ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. **12** Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, Streaming to the goodness of the Lord--
For wheat and new wine and oil, For the young of the flock and the herd; Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, And they shall sorrow no more at all. **13** "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together; For I will turn their mourning to joy, Will comfort them, And make them rejoice rather than sorrow. **14** I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord." **15** Thus says the Lord: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more." **16** Thus says the Lord: "Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. **17** There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That your children shall come back to their own border.

... Salvation is unto us and to our children!