

“The Struggle of History” – Matthew 2:13-23

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August 17, 2014

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.sobc.net.]

Welcome. Would you turn with me in your Bible to Matthew, chapter 2.

One of the most influential Christian figures in our lifetimes was a man by the name of John R. W. Stott. He was born in 1921 and when he died in 2011 there were spontaneous memorial services that sprang up throughout the world. I know of around 40 that are formally acknowledged on a website dedicated to his memory.ⁱ There was a service in Kampala, Uganda, where my daughters are from. There was one in Dallas, Texas, at a church in Highland Park. There was even one held in Wheaton, IL, where my wife and I used to live, in which the Timothy Keller (one of the leading Evangelical figures in North America) preached and Christopher J. H. Wright (one of the leading experts on missions) presided. The outpouring of grief on every continent was overwhelming, but so was the resurrection hope that was preached at each of these dozens of memorial services. The same hope that Stott put before so many through his ministries and writings. In fact, Stott’s book *Basic Christianity* had shaping influence on me very early in my Christian walk.ⁱⁱ

In that book there is a famous passage in which Stott wrote,

“If you read the bible you’ll see that nobody who ever met Jesus Christ ever had a *moderate* reaction to him. There are only three reactions to Jesus: they either hated him and wanted to kill him, they were afraid of him and wanted to run away, or they were absolutely smitten with him and they tried to give their whole lives to him...”

In the same vein, I once heard a sermon by Keller, titled “Imitating the Incarnation,” in which he made this provocative statement: “We must realize that the only possible way to respond to Jesus is ‘extremely.’” I think he’s correct. And if he is correct then this creates a problem for America’s Christianity. He goes on to say, “the average person in America *likes* Jesus...you *can’t* like Jesus!...no one has ever liked Jesus *who knew who he was*.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Do you see his point? It’s the same point that Stott was making. It’s the same point that the biblical narratives make when we see people responding to the real Jesus. There is no neutrality with Jesus. There is no sitting on the fence. There is none of that once we come to grips with who He really is. We can’t be fans when we realize who He truly is. We will either respond with hostility, absolute terror, or outright love and worship. If that’s not the reaction, then we are not seeing who He is clear enough.

Our text today puts before our eyes one such “extreme” reaction. It’s the reaction of Herod. And it is not pretty. Let’s read it from Matthew 2, starting in 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, to destroy him.”¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what

the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”*

*¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
²⁰ saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.
²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. (Matthew 2:13-23).*

This is God’s Word.

Let’s begin by just grasping the details of the story, which I think can be organized into three sections.

THE FAMILY FLEES (2:13-15)

Verse 13 tells us that after the Magi depart, Joseph has another dream in which he is informed that Herod intends to murder Jesus and, therefore, Joseph was to get Mary and Jesus to Egypt where they would be safe. Once again the text gives the impression that Joseph obeys immediately. So he gets up in the night, gathers his wife and adopted son, and heads South to Egypt, which was outside of Herod’s jurisdiction and thus outside the reach of his assassination plot. It is quite possible that the funding of such a trip was made possible by the gifts the Magi just left for Jesus.

Egypt would have been an ideal spot to find sanctuary. Not only was it away from Herod, but one 1st century Jewish historian named Philo wrote that Egypt had a significant population of Jews, possibly close to a million at that time. Ever since the time of the Ptolemys, Egypt had remained friendly to the Jewish people.

Generally, Egypt has negative connotations in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, but there are several occasions where Egypt provided safe haven for the Jewish people (e.g., 1 Kings 11:40; 2 Kings 25:26; Jeremiah 26:21-23). But I believe Matthew wants us to sense the echoes between what is happening here and what happens at the end of Genesis and the start of Exodus. Just like Jacob (who is also called Israel) and his family sought refuge in Egypt at the start of the Exodus events (cf. Genesis 46), so now Jesus and his family are seeking refuge in Egypt for a time.^{iv} And, in fact, Matthew sees this as a fulfillment of Old Testament scripture from the book of Hosea, which references the Exodus event, but we will circle back to these biblical citations in Matthew in the sermon next week, along with the temptation account in Matthew 4. For now, let’s consider how the story continues to unfold.

THE MADMAN MURDERS (2:16-18)

We are told in verse 16, that once Herod realizes the Magi are not returning to tell him where the child was located, he reacts in a murderous rage. Remember, he lied to the Magi and said that he too wanted to worship the newborn King of the Jews and he tried to manipulate the Magi by turning them into his unwitting informants, but God intervened in a dream that warned the Magi not to return to Herod with the information

on Jesus' precise location. Still, Herod is a smart man; he had already calculated for the possibility that the Magi would not return with the information, which is why he probed them earlier for the precise time that they saw the star in the sky. From that information he reasons that the child must be two years old or younger, so he orders that every male child in Bethlehem, within that age range, to be murdered.

Some have expressed skepticism about this story because there is no other surviving source to corroborate it. But it is certainly not hard for historians to believe for a number of reasons. First, while these murders would have been devastating to those families in Bethlehem, it is not as large a scale as you might imagine. It's estimated that the population of Bethlehem would have been less than a thousand residents in that day, so we are talking probably around five to fifteen children who were killed in this onslaught. I'm not making light of that, but as far as historical mass murders go it's not surprising that historians may not have noted this one. For some perspective, that's about the amount of homicides that Chicago has been averaging each week this year (which is down),^v but my guess is that doesn't make the news very often and no one will remember that they died two thousand years from now.

Furthermore, this kind of killing is entirely consistent with what we know historically about Herod.^{vi} Herod the Great killed two of his own sons, his mother-in-law, and his wife when he suspects them of envying his rule (his wife, by the way, was later proven innocent of these allegations). Emperor Augustus once remarked that "it is better to be Herod's pig than his son." He was also a man who ordered that 2000 Jewish leaders be crucified at the moment of his own death. Why? Because he wanted to ensure that there would be mourning in the land on the day he died and not celebration. Fortunately, that command was not carried out and the dead Herod could do nothing about it. That's the kind of madman we are dealing with. And there are lots of stories like this available.

So is it really hard to believe that this paranoid nutjob would have any problem murdering a handful of infants, if he thought that one of them might one day grow up to challenge his rule? He murdered his own family for those same suspicions! No. This is entirely consistent with what we know about Herod. Fortunately, God intervenes and Jesus escapes with His life, thanks to Joseph's obedience. On the other hand, there was much mourning in Bethlehem those days as several children lost their lives.

Next, Matthew tells us of the Jesus' return to Israel, some time later.

THE REFUGEES RETURN (2:19-23)

Verse 19 and following says that when Herod died, Joseph has another dream in which he is told to "*Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead*" (2:20). By now you can probably guess how Joseph responds—swift obedience. Look at verse 21—"*And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene*" (2:21-23).

Herod's son, Archelaus, was mean like his father. When Herod died, his kingdom was divided among his three remaining sons (you know, the one's he didn't kill). Antipas and Philip II were named tetrarchs of various regions, while Archelaus was named Ethnarch (a higher title) over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. In fact, Archelaus was named king in Herod's will, but Augustus stepped in and said, "nope, that ain't happening" and made his Ethnarch instead. Augustus promised Archelaus that he would be made king if he ruled well, but that never happened. On the contrary, he was known for his brutality, which climaxed in the massacre of around three thousand people near the temple. That led to him being deposed and exiled to Gaul.

But, stay tuned, this is not the last we will see of Herod's line...

For now, the point is simply that it is easy to see why Joseph didn't want to be near where this guy was ruling. So he goes instead to his and Mary's hometown of Nazareth (Luke 1:26), about a six-acre village in Galilee, populated by no more than 500 people.

So with that, we now have a grasp of the movement in the scene. But there is something more we have to see from the story. To begin with, this passage is situated within the broader scope of God's Word, which gives us the theological framework to understand this story. In fact, the rest of God's Word allows us to pull back the curtain, so to speak, and see what is really going on behind the scenes of this story. This power struggle between Herod and Jesus is really an iteration of a more cosmic battle Satan is having with God that dates back to almost the beginning of the Bible.

Do you remember how the Bible begins? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1). Then the opening two chapters of Genesis recount God's creation activity and, in particular, his caring and intimate creating of the first humans. But then we get to chapter 3. In that chapter we find a serpent that tempts these original humans into doubting the character of God and into disobedience to the one command given by God. With this, sin enters into the world and devastates God's creation from top to bottom. The end of Genesis 3 communicates some of the consequences of that sin, consequences that are felt to this very day.

Toward the end of that scene, God speaks to the serpent (who is Satan) and says, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*" (Genesis 3:15). The offspring of the woman refers to God's people in general, but especially to a specific offspring of the woman who is Jesus. It was Jesus who would deal a mortal blow to Satan on the cross and Satan has been limping ahead toward his doom ever since. But what you have to see here is that God predicted this struggle between Jesus and Satan from the very beginning.

Now fast forward to the very last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. In Revelation 12, John sees a vision that helps us make sense out of what is happening here in Matthew 2. Listen to some of the vision and then I will explain it a bit.

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. (Revelation 12:1-6)

Now there is a lot more to this text than we have time to explain. Suffice it to say, everyone tends to agree that the child who is referenced is Jesus since he is described as the "*one who is to rule all the nations.*" The woman who gives birth to the child could be a reference to Mary, but it is more likely a reference to the people of God to that point, to Israel, from whom Jesus descended. The "twelve stars" on her crown probably reference to 12 tribes of Israel. Furthermore, the woman has a role in the next scene in Revelation 12, which suggests she stands for more than just Mary. But what you should notice is that the dragon is trying to devour the child (i.e. Jesus) right out of the gate when he arrives on the scene. Revelation explicitly identifies this

dragon with Satan. In this same chapter it says that “the great dragon” is “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan” (12:9). So make no mistake about it, what we are seeing in Matthew 2, when Herod is trying to kill Jesus, is really the work of the evil one. Herod is a pawn being used by Satan to snuff out Jesus. But just as the prophecy in Genesis 3 disclosed, it will never work. Jesus will deal the deciding blow, despite Satan best efforts to thwart God’s plans.

So that is what is really going on behind the scenes of this story. These are the spiritual roots of this conflict. But it’s playing out in and through the vices of this man Herod. Herod’s jealousy and pride gave Satan a foothold that he ran with. And we better be careful. Before we just dismiss Herod as a bad man who we have nothing in common with, we better acknowledge that, if left to our own devices, that’s us. But for the grace of God, that’s us.

You may have wondered why Herod responds with such hostility against Jesus. A little more history will help us to see the answer. Remember, when the Magi roll into Jerusalem they say they are searching for the “King of the Jews” who has recently been born. That triggers something in Herod. You see, Herod was known as the “king of the Jews.” Of course, the Jews didn’t consider him as their king by any stretch of the imagination. They couldn’t stand the guy. But he was named “king of the Jews” by Rome because, at Rome’s permission, he ruled Judea. It was emperor Augustus who gave him this title, in fact.^{vii}

He also reconstructed the Jewish temple and outfitted it with many amenities. In fact, the temple was sometimes referred to as “Herod’s temple” as a way to distinguish it from other iterations of the Jewish temple (e.g., Solomon’s temple). Today only four remaining walls remain standing, including the famous “Western Wall,” which is usually referred to as the “Wailing Wall.” This was the wall closest to the Holy of Holies.

Now, you may be thinking, “ahhh...that was really sweet of Herod. What a nice gesture. The Jews must have loved him.” Nope. I can assure you it was politically motivated. He also constructed many temples dedicated to Caesar worship and he killed many Jewish rabbis. For example, on one occasion he executed several Pharisees who smashed the Roman golden eagle that had been erected at the entrance of the Jewish Temple. These Pharisees destroyed it because they understood that eagle was a symbol of Roman idolatry and the imperial cult and, therefore, it had no place in or around the temple of God. So Herod slaughtered many Jews because of this. That’s the kind of “king of the Jews” Herod was.

So imagine how it sounds to his ears when he heard the Magi say that there was a new “king of the Jews” on the scene. His jealous rage is stirred and he immediately plots to kill the competition. There can be only one “king of the Jews.” As his power increased, so did his paranoia. That’s a trend we see within a lot of powerful people around the world in history. And it is rare for people in authority to give allegiance to Christ. But remember, Herod is just a puppet of Satan here. Satan is not interested in competition. He is the usurper on the throne of this fallen creation, and Jesus was entering into the realm of this usurper to take back the throne, in a sense, and defeat the power of the evil one. Satan’s overthrow is upon him. Herod’s reaction to Jesus is a reflection Satan’s reaction of Jesus.

But Herod is not unusual in that the default and raw reaction to Jesus and his intrinsic authority is rebellion. We have a tendency to operate as though we are the center of the universe and when someone or something challenges that notion, when someone challenges our authority or autonomy, we typically get rather upset. That anger and hostility and frustration may express itself differently in our lives, but the same thing is at work in the human heart as what we are seeing here in Herod.

There is a historian named Ernest Kurtz who wrote a doctoral dissertation at Harvard that was later published

into a book. That book was titled *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*.^{viii} The reason he titled the book “Not God” was because, he argued, the most difficult hurdle faced by those struggling with addictions of any sort is to overcome the fact that they are not God. In other words, that they are not in control of their little universe and that idol of control is a false deity. They are not truly the kings of their own life.

Of course, we may not respond to the threatened dismantling of that idol like Herod did and murder a bunch of children. But we have the capacity for evil within us, which is precisely what the Bible tries to get across to us in a number of ways. Romans 1 to 3 is a good example of where Paul is making this point. Toward the end of that section, Paul cites the Old Testament in support of this point. He writes,

*None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one. (Romans 3:10-12)*

The reason Paul starts his dissertation on the Gospel (which is essentially what Romans is) like this is because we have to understand and embrace the bad news before we can understand and embrace the good news. The Gospel means “good news,” but if we don’t understand how hopeless and rotten and incapable and insufficient and unrighteous we are to the core, we will never see our need for us to put our hope entirely and exclusively in the work of Christ. We will never see our need for a Savior, because we keep trying to be our own savior, our own god. We will never understand why Jesus came and died in the place of guilty sinners like us, because we don’t understand that we are guilty before a holy God. We will never understand the importance of the resurrection to bring about our justification, because we will never understand how apart from Christ we can have no right standing with God. We have to grasp the bad news about who we are to the core, before we will ever be positioned to hear and respond properly to the offer of salvation God extends to us in Christ. That’s the reason Paul starts there.

And when confronted with that bad news and the reality of who Jesus is, people respond in the “extreme” ways mentioned at the beginning. They run away from Jesus in fear. They react to Jesus with hostility. Or they bow the knee in submission and receive Him as Lord and Savior, laying down their little false kingdoms and becoming a part of His kingdom.

For those who respond in that last way, Jesus brings a certain kind of peace to their life. He brings us peace of conscience because he removes our guilt before God. He brings us a peace of identity, that is, a freedom from trying to live up, to try to prove ourselves, to try to prove to the world that we are somebody. Whether we experience successes or failures it is not about us anymore, it’s about Christ. Our identity is in Christ. And there is a certain peace, a calm, that comes with seeing our identity as in Christ. That can put an end to many of your anxieties.

But here is what I am getting at. Having Jesus in your life solves many of our problems. In fact, the Gospel ultimately solves all of our problems. But not before it creates problems for us first. Christianity is a fight. The Gospel doesn’t just bring us peace; it brings us strife. “Herod depicts very vividly a principle. That is, the coming of Christ not only *solves* lots of problems; it actually *creates* lots of problems. It doesn’t just bring tremendous peace, but it creates new strife.”^{ix}

This was anticipated by Simeon’s prophecy to Mary at the temple in Luke 2, when he said, “*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will*

pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35). Later Jesus himself would say, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law... Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:34-35, 39).

Do you see what he is getting at? The Gospel brings new peace and new conflict. The Gospel solves our ultimate problems and creates some temporary, though difficult, new problems. This “come to Jesus and God is going to make you healthy and wealthy and give you an easy life if you have enough faith” is nonsense and it’s not biblical Christianity. There is a dragon out there seeking to do harm to Jesus and leaving a trail of casualties in the wake of his evil ambitions.

In fact, do you know where Revelation 12, that passage I read from earlier, goes next? When he fails to destroy the child, he sets his sights on the mother (probably the people of God from Israel) and her offspring who descend from her, namely the church. Listen to another section of that chapter.

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus... (Revelation 12:17)

Do you see what is going on here? He can’t destroy Jesus, so he sets his sights on those associated with Jesus—Christians. This Satan has it out for us. And he can cause us great harm. But not ultimate harm. Do you know why? Because of what John said a few verses earlier.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short! (Revelation 12:10-12)

You see, there is nothing easy about this scene. There is martyrdom in this scene. People are losing their lives in this scene because they belong to Christ. This is not “come to Jesus and life will be easy and things will go well for you.” This is “*they loved not their lives even to the point unto death.*” But you know what else this is? This is victory. This is good news that when Satan throws his worst at God’s people, God gets the last word. And that word is but the echo of the words of Jesus on the cross—“It is finished!”

Now this is a bit more close to home for some of us these days because the media has been shining a light on some of the persecutions that our brothers and sisters are facing around the world, particularly in Iraq at the hands of a group that called itself ISIS for a while, now maybe just known as the Islamic State. Heard of them? Now the reality of this is nothing new. This happens all over the world and has always been happening since the beginning of Christianity. But in this case it’s getting a lot of media play in America (which is unusual) because it gives political parties a chance to take cheap shots at one another because of the handling of various administrations of foreign affairs in Iraq. I suspect if this was happening in Bolivia or the Congo it would not make the news. But in any case, it’s opening the eyes of many to what Christians face on account of Christ. There is actual genocide happening and Christians are being targeted.

To give you some perspective, have you seen this symbol ____ [it looks like a “U” with a dot over it...and is

pronounced “noon”]. That is the 14th letter of the Arabic alphabet, which is equivalent to the letter “N” in English. It stands for *Nasara* or *Nazarenes*. Look again at Matthew 2 and notice verse 23. “*And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*” That’s the verse these ISIS terrorists have in mind. When they find out where the Christians live, they have been abducting and murdering them. Even if those Christians have fled they still tag the house with that “noon” letter as a way of warning owners that they know who they are, they know they are Christians, they know they live there, so if they return they will get them. Here is are some examples [show pictures]

That’s happening now. So you may have noticed on social media that letter on profile pictures. Even Christianity today adopted it for a while [show picture]. There is even a hashtag campaign trending, #WeAreN. The hope was to bring more attention to the issue than the media and the politicians were. One blog explained it this way, the Islamists “mean it as a mark of shame, we must wear it as a mark of hope... You may kill our brethren and expel them but we Christians will never go away.”^x They are right.

Here is the thing though. This is nothing new. This is just a new chapter in the same cosmic drama that has been playing out since Genesis 3. What Matthew 2 can teach us is, yes, there is evil in the world. That evil eventually put Jesus on the cross. Our evil put Jesus on the cross.

And, yes, the world rejects not only Christ but those associated with Christ, so Christians should expect difficulty and opposition as they follow Christ. Not all the time. But certainly some time and to varying degrees depending on the contexts in which we minister.

But, let’s also be reminded, that God protects His own. Absolutely nothing can happen in our lives that is outside God’s larger plan and His will and power cannot be thwarted. When people try to thwart the divine will, God intervenes. And while He may not do it through dreams, and visions, and angel appearances in our lives, He does superintend what happens to us and what He allows into our lives. He does intervene and guide our lives in more ways than we can ever imagine. He is every bit as sovereign in our lives as He shows Himself to be in this passage for Jesus and His family. He protects His own.

And I know what some of you are thinking. “Well how do you explain all the hard times then? All the persecution? All the challenges? All the times when it feels like God has disappeared and is nowhere to be found? All the crisis and disaster?” You explain it the way the Bible does. It’s the struggle of history. God never promises an easy road this side of heaven. But make no mistake about it, He does promise deliverance to those whose faith rests in Christ. But that deliverance doesn’t always come *from* trials and adversity, but *through* them. I’m going to say that again because some of you didn’t hear that and you needed to. God’s deliverance always comes, but it does not always come *from* trials and adversity but *through* them. It is Jesus and His family that are at the center of God’s deliverance in this text. But it didn’t come easily. There was the social stigma of the pregnancy. There was an escape. They became refugees. There was hardship. There was a loss of resources. There was homelessness.

And in Iraq we have Christians losing their lives to ISIS. But ISIS is just a new Herod and therefore just another pawn of Satan. He can take our lives, but not our victory. They overcome him the same way we all do, “*by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.*” Their hope is not rapture. It’s resurrection. And nothing, I repeat, NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

Matthew is telling the story the way he does to highlight the sovereignty of God in all of these things as a way to encourage us. It’s as if he is saying, “God’s got this.” It’s brilliant how he does this in this passage

with three fulfillment references. We are going to look at this next Sunday. It really is brilliant. As devastating as this story is, there is a whole lot of good news here. And we are going to highlight it through these fulfillment texts next week. It's going to help some of you to understand the Bible a whole lot better. And it's going to help some of you finally believe that God is trustworthy, even in your circumstances. So come next week. Bring a friend.

But, listen, are you facing difficult times right now? In serious trials, when many things are going wrong, we must turn and cry out to God the Father, as Jesus did in Gethsemane, in Mark 14:36. "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*" That, friends, is a godly response to trouble. Not overcoming evil with more evil. Not posturing. Not plotting against others. Not despair and unbelief. "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*" That's the prayer of those who trust in the Lord and not in their own strength.

Church, wherever you struggle, a godly response is one that surrenders to the divine providence, asks for deliverance, trusts in God's wisdom, knows that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28) and can rest in, "not my will, but yours" because they have such confidence in the work of Christ that come what may they know they will be fine in the end because God gets the final word. And it is finished.

Let's pray....

ⁱ <http://www.johnstottmemorial.org>

ⁱⁱ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity, 1958).

ⁱⁱⁱ Timothy Keller, "Imitating the Incarnation," originally preached on July 2, 1995, to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. February 1, 2013.

^{iv} Grant Osborne, *Matthew* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 98.

^v For recent statistics, see: <http://homicides.redeyechicago.com>.

^{vi} The historical details concerning Herod in this sermon, both here and below, were drawn, for the most part, from Osborne, 94-105.

^{vii} See Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999).

^{viii} Ernest Kurtz, *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Hazelden, 1991). I first learned of this book in a sermon by Daniel Montgomery, called "Out of Egypt," preached at Sojourn Community Church on August 14, 2005.

^{ix} Timothy Keller, "Christmas War," preached on December 22, 1996, at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

^x <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/383493/christian-genocide-symbolized-one-letter-christine-sisto>.