

HEROD: THE CLASH OF KINGS, MATTHEW 2:1-12

Casting Call #2

◆ **Intro:** Historically Herod was not a rightful king over Israel. He was a puppet King appointed in 40BC by Rome which conquered Israel in 63 BC under the General Pompey. He came from a very wealthy family that was descended not from Jacob, but from Esau. So there was nothing legitimate about Herod when it came to the Israelite kingship, though he claimed the Jewish faith and rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem in hopes of writing himself into the script that the Book of Haggai prophesied.

◆ Herod was wealthy, powerful, also paranoid and very violent. He really wanted to be the Big Cheese. To insure this, Herod killed all remaining Hasmoneans, the ruling family in Israel for the previous 100 years. Herod had many members of the religious court, the Sanhedrin, executed. In his suspicion Herod slaughtered his own wife, Mariamne, his mother-in-law Alexandra, and three of his own boys! Herod actually arranged to have all the elite leaders of Jerusalem killed upon the moment of his own passing. They were to be herded into the hippodrome and dispatched simultaneously to his own death. (It didn't take place.)

◆ So how does Herod fit into the Nativity Story? There's no Herod figurine in a Nativity set. That's because this all came about two years later, when the Wisemen came looking. While he isn't part of the Nativity, he is a disturbing element Jesus' story. Herod was the Scrooge in the first Christmas Carol. He was the Voldemort opposing the chosen one, Harry Potter. He was the Grinch near

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Whoville. He was the Mr. Potter in *It's a Wonderful Life*. He's Scar in *the Lion King*. Going back to the earliest story, Herod reflects the snake in the Garden of Eden. For every hero there's a Herod, a villain. And here's the worst part: there's a little Herod in every one of us, including you and including me. Let's start there.

◆**1. There is a piece of me at war with the true King.** Herod represents all that is at war with God's Kingdom including us. Jesus is the one *born* "King of the Jews" by the word of the Magi, which also happens to be the title Herod secured politically with the Roman senate. So what we have here is two opposing kings here; one legit, and one a usurper.

◆A. That makes Christmas a battle scene. Jesus' incarnation drops him right into a war zone, and a spiritual war that's been raging since the fall of man. We cannot claim ignorance on this. Herod could not claim surprise. It's not that Herod was ignorant that there was a rightful ruler. His family followed Jewish religion. They all knew the prophecy: Isaiah has said in that Day the nations would come streaming into Jerusalem laden with gifts of gold and incense!

◆*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...The*

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wealth of the nations will come to you... They will bring gold and frankincense..." Isa.60:1-6

◆ Well here come kings, following a light, bearing gifts! Herod knew right away it was the "Messiah" they were looking for. He didn't have to ask his advisors about that. He only needed reminding of *where* the Messiah was supposed to be born. And they had the information on the tips of their tongues! Everyone in Jewish culture knew that there was to be a Messiah. Modern Jews are still waiting/longing for him! In Jesus' day they'd already been waiting 1000 years!

◆ So here's the shocker in the text that shows you the hidden war in the Christmas story: where we'd expect celebration we find instead desperation. There's no "Woohoo, the Messiah must be here!" There's no, "Ah Grasshopper, so it begins. Our hope is coming to fruition! Everything we've waited for since King David is on the verge of coming true." No. The text says Herod was "*disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.*" The whole town! They were all like, "Awe man, this is the last thing we need right now. A political battle. We're just getting used to the Roman occupation. Don't make waves. Just go with it."

◆ Tell me, when God, or any of his signals, show up in your life do you experience celebration or desperation? It all depends on who you really want to be king of your life. If you want to be your own king, Jesus will always be

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competition because there is a piece in each of us that doesn't want God's way. We call that our sinful nature, and the sinful nature is right in the middle of the Christmas story. The Apostle Paul put it like this:

◆ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. Romans 7:19-20

◆B. Herod wanted to be his own king. He spent over 40 years working on the temple trying to write his own fame into the Israelite story. He actually attempted to preempt the ancient prophecies of God so they would not be fulfilled! That's what sin is; sharp disagreement with God. Herod is the ever present sinful nature of mankind that wants to be it's own king, that doesn't want to be told what to do, and that wants to be the center of the story that we aren't meant to be.

◆ Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

◆Two verses earlier Paul points out that by nature every one of us are enemies of God!

◆Rom 5:10 For if, when we were God's **enemies**, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

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◆**C.** What does that tell you? Can you think of any time/event/moment when you didn't want to think about God, and whether he might have a claim on you or your world? Can you think of a time when you told someone not to "preach" to you? Or a time when your faith seemed inconvenient at the moment? Of course you have! If you bow to Christ, you'll have to stop _____. If you profess to believe, you'll have to care about _____. God tends to get in the way, especially when you want to do, or say, or think something that he warns against. Or when you don't want to do the right thing that he commands.

◆**2. Two things about hidden Christmas war: it's a warning and a hope.** In the Lion King, Simba sings about how he can't wait to be king. But obviously he's quite naive about what it takes. Don't be naive.

◆**A) It's a fools errand to challenge God. None of us are going to beat God!** You cannot rule destiny no matter how hard you try. You can try to not believe there is a God, or a way that is right, but that will not make him go away. As violent, paranoid, and powerful as Herod was, he couldn't keep the Messiah from being born! Murdering all the boys under two couldn't safeguard his throne. God has the upper hand. A baby beat him! The infant king outlasted the illegitimate king.

◆*Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather
together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.*

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"Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Ps.2:1-5

◆ Friends, it is in your best interest to pay attention to the claims this Christmas Child makes over your life. Jesus is not like other religious teachers. He claims absolute authority over your life and mine. If the Christ Child is who he says he is, he is an eternal threat to and enemy of those who want to rule their own lives. Tim Keller says, "If the Son of God was really who was born in that manger, we have lost the right to be in charge of our own lives!" Trying to be neutral is the same as declaring war with God.

◆ B) Another side of this same point is very encouraging: The Christmas clash of kings illustrates that God's Son is destined to win! We need not despair for he brings peace for his own. And that, friends, means evil is going to lose. Brokenness is on the way out. Disaster will not survive into eternity.

◆ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. Isa.9:5-7

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◆ Confidence people! Courage! No matter the headlines! No matter even death! These earthly troubles are but fading skirmishes, for the war has already been won!

◆ That's why Matthew quotes Jeremiah, "a voice is heard in Ramah...Rachael weeping for her children." Is he saying, "Oh, people are weeping for their children again just like in Jeremiah's day"? Not really. Jeremiah 31 is all about hope! "Rachael weeping" was Israel mourning that they were being carried off into exile by the Babylonians. But Jeremiah tells them "Don't cry. It's going to turn out good in the end. Your children will all come home." Look!

◆ For the LORD will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;...I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow... This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more." This is what the LORD says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the LORD. "They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future," Jer.31:11-17

◆ **Conclusion:** Who are you putting on the throne of your heart? Are you still sitting there hoping to be king, to decide right and

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wrong for yourself, to determine your own future, or identity, or destiny. It's not a winning move.

And though this world
With devils filled
Should threaten to undo us
We will not fear
For God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us
The prince of darkness grim
We tremble not for him
His rage we can endure
For lo his doom is sure
One little word shall fell him

◆ Or will you surrender your heart's throne to the Son of God? Jesus is your best choice! When you relinquish your heart's throne to him, he rules with wisdom and grace upon grace! He delights to bring peace into your life. He delights to forgive and restore. He delights to grant you life beyond the grave!

◆ *many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Phil 3:18-21*

It's not about you. It's about him. But then, he's all about you!