

December 28, 2014

Nothing Can Stop Him!

St. Matthew 2:13-23

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There isn't much joy that surpasses the birth of a child. There isn't much sadness that surpasses the death of a child. We have celebrated the joy of Christmas birth. This morning the sadness of death intrudes. All the baby boys in Bethlehem two years old and under are run through by sharp swords at the command of an insane king by the name of Herod.

Herod was a ruthless and powerful king. His hand did not shrink from murdering his own sons and wife, and of whom the Roman Emperor is said to have remarked, "Better [Safer] to be Herod's pig than Herod's son." Such a king as Herod would surely not shrink from trying to destroy the Son of God - the Messiah. And so, he gives the order to kill the babies in Bethlehem and in the surrounding vicinity; and according to one historian, he even kills one of his own sons suspecting that he may be the Messiah.

And so, the "Silent Night" we sang about just a few nights ago is broken by the sound of soldiers marching boots, the wailing of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more, and the gleeful laugh of the tyrant king who thinks he has killed another rival. Not exactly a Hallmark moment!

Some might argue that it would be more in keeping with the Christmas "spirit" to ignore this account, or maybe talk about it some other time. The truth is that it fits perfectly. The church does not shrink in proclaiming the truth. The Savior comes to confront sin and death, this unbelieving world, and the power of the devil. He faces it all. And we learn that **Nothing Can Stop Him!**

Having been warned in a dream, the wise men from the East hastily depart for their own country by another route instead of returning by way of Herod. When they had departed, we are told that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." That very night, Joseph gets up and takes his young bride and his stepson and begins the long, memorable flight into Egypt. It is one of those pictures that is necessary to our proper understanding of the life of our Lord. From the lowly manger to the tomb cut in the rock our Savior was the object of the bitter hatred of evil men. I will say it again, the Savior comes to confront sin and death, this unbelieving world, and the power of the devil. He faces it all. And we learn that **Nothing Can Stop Him!**

We should really not be surprised at all these things. Even as we live in the framework of Jesus' death and resurrection - his victory over all - we still see the last gasp of all that would get rid of our Lord and Savior and us. We experience it in our own lives from many angles.

We are living at a time when it seems to us as if the forces of evil are marching on to victory. The children of disobedience are doing everything in their power to wipe away the church and ultimately the baby born in Bethlehem. And in many instances they seem to be having their way, and we are warned by Scripture that their power will only increase as we approach the second coming of our Lord.

And from your own lives you know that this is the way things are. For example, the idealized and sentimental Christmas of the world is just not the reality. Joy one day is met with sadness the next. One day you are filled with faith and the next moment you are struggling to keep your faith from dying as you experience all kinds of things that would lead you to believe that God doesn't care. The love that you thought would last dries up, friends betray you, and your strength often turns into weakness.

Because of our sinful flesh, this unbelieving world, and the accusations of Satan, God's children appear to be far outnumbered and unable to survive. We are a little flock in comparison with the mighty hosts of Satan. And whether we are looking at things from a broad perspective or narrowly at our own individual lives, our hearts often fail us in the face of such overwhelming odds. But Christ reminds us in Luke 12:32, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." We have no reason to be afraid because our Savior has conquered. His victory has been transferred to us in every way possible.

Nothing would be allowed to prevent our Savior from reaching his goal. He lived a perfect life of obedience for you and me as well as a life of humiliation for us. He made it to his destination - the cross where he suffered for the sins of the world. And it was there above his head that he was declared our King forever to the consternation of the Jews who had put him there. Little did they know that it was the Lord's will that he suffer in this way. Herod wanted the Messiah to die before it was time, and many others tried to kill him at various times and in various ways. But, when it was all said and done, it was according to God's plan. And the irony of it all was that through death came victory. He rose from the dead. As it says in Psalm 2, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying 'I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.'"

You see, nothing can stop the promises of God. Nothing can stop the Almighty One who created everything out of nothing. God took care of Herod. All his cunning and fury could not thwart the Christ child and no evil will be able to thwart the purpose of God in the lives of his holy people. You see, the demise of Herod and all the enemies of God is a forecast of the fate of all the enemies of God in heaven. The Lord Almighty serves notice to all and reminds them and us that Christ sits at the right hand of power on high, and that means that Christ rules in the midst of His enemies. They will not prevail, but everything must work for the salvation of his little flock. The King of kings and Lord of lords will crush His foes in utter defeat.

How comforting this is for those of us who believe in Christ. Those who rage against us and God will not be able to have the victory even though they may very well crucify us as they did our Master, as ISIS is presently doing in Iraq. With all our weaknesses, sins, and even moments when we have stumbled, God in his mercy has brought us to this day where we remain in him. Only let us be careful not to fall. Let us cling to Him in these days of increasing trials and tribulations, holding fast the faithful Word as we have been taught. With Christ, our ultimate victory is assured. His grace and power will continue to cleanse us from sin and all unrighteousness and strengthen us against the temptations yet to be faced in time. As nothing could stop him, so nothing can stop us!

Like the wise men from the East, God is with us and gets us to where we need to be. Like Joseph we are lead to safety. Sometimes we have a tendency to gloss over Joseph during the Christmas season, but he was a man who had been touched by God. Look at his character, and you will see a beautiful example of the way in which we should strive to be everyday of our lives. Everywhere in the record of Scripture he is spoken of as a man who was just, conscientious, God-fearing, and very self-sacrificing. He was content to play a humble part in the momentous events through which he was passing. He did not understand the significance of all these events, nor was it necessary that he should. But for Joseph it was enough for him that the path had been laid out before him by God. He was content to walk in that path step by step without knowing all the details. He simply trusted in God's holy Word.

Let him be an example to us all. When we cannot see clearly the way in which we are walking, nor the reasons for treading such a path, let us think of Joseph and remember that God is working everything for the salvation of his people. Like him, let us follow wherever the Lord may lead. And the Lord did not fail him. Psalm 46 reminds us:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging . . . "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

And so the truth is that today we heard not so much of the sin that intrudes on the Christmas story, but the Christmas story that intruded on sin and won! Out of Egypt our Father in heaven calls to each of us to find our life not under the tree on which hangs lights and ornaments, but under the tree on which hangs to Son of God; to find our joy not in open presents, but in the open grave; to find our peace not in family feasts, but in the feast of forgiveness, in the body and blood of Jesus, here given us to eat and to drink. The story of the Herod does not spoil the "spirit" of Christmas. Rather, it takes us to the heart of what the baby Jesus would do for us. **Nothing Can Stop Him!** And nothing can stop us!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott