

AN UNLIKELY KING Matthew 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION: On July 22, 2013 at 4:24 pm, George Alexander Louis was born to Prince William and Kate and the world paused to take note and celebrate with them. The announcement of the royal birth was welcome news—a handsome father and beautiful mother beamed with joyful pride as they presented their baby for all the world to see. Everyone loved this very human look at the royal family!

But the world's royalty is a mere shadow of genuine royalty. The glitzy surroundings of palaces and castles, of gleaming military attendants and adoring crowds, of sophisticated manners and fastidious attention to projecting a regal image—all give the impression that worldly kings and queens are a cut above the rest. Seldom is consideration given to the truth that their reign is nothing more than a temporary day in the sun.

Before the brightness of true royalty, even the sun in the heavens pales by comparison. Jesus, the baby in the barn in Bethlehem, has more glory and splendor in a manger than all the kings of the earth have upon all their thrones combined!

So what if Jesus really is the only King who matters and the world has hitched its wagon to the wrong 'star' and is running hard in the wrong direction? What if we are following the wrong rulers, obeying the wrong rules and paying homage in the wrong way to the wrong masters whose edicts shape our lives? Life means too much to live it hitched to the wrong star!

ILLUS. You have seen it happen. In high school, everyone wanted to be friends with the cool kids and popular kids. And along the way, people usually made choices that treated them far better than those who were not so!

But then everyone grew up and the roles changed! Those who never traveled in the most popular circles emerged as true leaders and successful people. Then the followers scampered around trying to switch allegiances now that they realized that they had been loyal to the wrong people and in pursuit of the least satisfying relationships!

THESIS: *At the beginning of His life, Jesus appeared to be a most unlikely King but is in fact the only true and trustworthy King of everything!*

I. JESUS IS THE MOST EXALTED KING

"...Don't let the manger fool you!"

--Conventional wisdom would take a look at a king named Herod and a baby name Jesus and reach some radically wrong conclusions!

A. A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE KINGS—BORN IN A MANGER AND DWELLS ON THE MOUNTAIN ((HERODIUM AND BETHLEHEM)

--One cannot help notice the pronounced difference between the circumstance of King Herod in the palace and King Jesus in the barn!

--Matthew says volumes in the brief words:

Matt 2:1 *"Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king."*

--Those days were full of intrigue, misery, and fear for some just as much as they were full of dominion, might and obscene wealth for others.

--At first look, Herod and his palaces were clearly more powerful and notorious, more prosperous and more noteworthy than a little baby who had to be born in a barn in an obscure village called Bethlehem.

--All the evidence from the world's perspective tilted the scales in favor of Herod as the one to take note of.

ILLUS. On a small mountain rising from the desert floor just six miles from Bethlehem (distance from here to the state capitol) was one of Herod's most elaborate palaces, *Herodium*.

Herod, like most other kings, loved to demonstrate the extent of his wealth by surrounding himself with the lavish signs of prosperity suitable to his time. Constructing palaces and fortresses was one of his ways and **Herodium**, within sight of the village of Bethlehem, was an architectural and engineering marvel, then and now.

At the time, there were only a couple of palaces larger or more richly designed anywhere in the world (45 acres complete with walls from 60 to 90 feet high, four watch towers, baths, a swimming pool surrounded by colonnades, a banquet hall as big as a football field, all rising nearly 980 feet above the desert floor, beautiful mosaic art and carved stone columns throughout).

At a height of 980 feet above the desert, Herod could stand on the northern wall and see the tiny, inconsequential village of Bethlehem, something hardly worthy of his royal gaze. But to everyone coming and going by Herodium, the majesty and splendor of the palace and fortress made it clear where the power and influence and seat of authority was...**or so it appeared**. For in a small stable outside of an inn in the "nothing town" of Bethlehem lay the true King and the One before whom everyone will one day bow down and declare to be Lord of all.

--No royal midwives in attendance, no silk sheets and expensive linen wraps awaited the arrival of Jesus—but history tells the story that He was indeed the true King in this story, and every story!

B. A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE THRONES—HEAVEN'S GLORY VERSUS HUMAN GAWDINESS

--But as great as the contrast was between Jesus and Herod, the contrast is even more radical between the throne of heaven and the most spectacular thrones of earth.

ILLUS. Using the precious materials of the created world, earthly kings try their best to put on the greatest show on earth—the more gold, ivory, silver, precious gems and such, are the means by which human regents try to present themselves as greater than they are.

But Jesus came to the manger from a place where gold is nothing more than paving material, jewels are used to decorate city walls, and His throne shines brilliantly because He sits on it for He is the light because of His resplendent glory!

--The place from which Jesus came overwhelms the highest and greatest throne the earth could ever produce.

ILLUS. Hard as it is to imagine from our vantage point, it would have been *more dramatic* for Him to leave His throne and heaven for an earthly throne than it would for Herod to *trade places* with the baby Jesus in the manger!

Since we cannot comprehend what He left behind, we are much like the people in Israel when He came—our expectations of a coming Messiah King are limited and shaped by the meager picture we have a royalty in our world! To think that the baby in the manger was used to a place of infinite wealth and power never occurs to us.

Consequently, we shape our response to Him in severely limited human terms and miss the wonder of His regal splendor and sovereign dominion as King of kings and Lord of lords! We miss His majesty behind the cloak of His humanity and unbelieving people continue to demote Him to the role of a lesser King, preferring instead to be fooled by the façades of the pretenders.

C. A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE KINGDOMS—ENDURES FOREVER VERSUS SURVIVES TEMPORARILY

--Herod was always anxious, fearful that someone else would come along and take away his kingdom.

--He executed nearly every possible threat—brother, wife, relatives...anyone who posed a threat.

Matt. 2:16 *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.*

--The kingdom of the child in the manger suffered no fear, no worries, anticipated no threats to the enduring character of His reign and the lasting nature of His kingdom!

Dan. 7:14 *And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

--What a contrast! The powerful king with armies at his beck and call afraid that he would be deposed...the little baby in His mother's arms resting secure in the knowledge that He would reign forever [[more on this next week!](#)].

--So appearances are totally deceiving!

--Looking at the outward circumstances, anyone would be justified in choosing Herod as the High King and the baby Jesus would not even have been nominated!

NOTE: People tend to be impressed by the appearances and impressions of prosperity and power, but they are wrong to fall into that trap. Looking for the ultimate and lasting reality will always expose the faults and failures of any created person or thing that gets elevated to the throne. Only Jesus is the exalted King whose identity and essential nature confirm that there is none higher, none greater, none more worthy to reign forever!

--In spite of appearances and assumptions to the contrary, any time we allow anything other than Jesus Christ to rise to the highest place in our allegiance and affections, we insult Him and usurp the place He alone can occupy!

ILLUS. Somehow the magi were not fooled...they understood that regal splendor and eternal glory came together in this little child born in Bethlehem. Above the king in their own land...above King Herod in Jerusalem...they recognized that only One was worthy of their worship. The boldly asked the temporary king for help in locating the eternal King—not concerned that the short-term pretender would be offended or threatened by the revelation that THE King of the Jews had been born!
“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him. And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (2:2-3)

II. JESUS IS THE TRULY RIGHTEOUS KING

“His perfect righteousness does no wrong!”

--Corrupt leadership in government is just about universally acknowledged as self-interest and party alignments usually drag leaders into leadership choices that are not always for the good of all people.

--Only Jesus rules as King over a kingdom with no corruption and no judgments that weigh against the people—because He is truly righteous Himself and has the power and the disposition to only what is good and glorious.

A. HE IS WHOLLY INCORRUPTIBLE

--In a world filled with corruption, Jesus the King sits enthroned above all of that—He is the incorrupt King who is also incorruptible (incapable of corruption).

--The British historian and moralist, Lord Acton, is famous for writing, "*Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.*" (1887 in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton).

ILLUS. This week the world has mourned the loss of a truly unique leader, Nelson Mandela, of South Africa. He could have exacted revenge on those who kept him as a political prisoner for 27 years. But when he was released, when apartheid came to an end, and he was elected by the people as their president, he refused to be corrupted by revenge. Because of that, leaders of nations from all over the world joined their voices in praising such an unusually unaffected head of a powerful nation.

But...he was *not incorruptible*. He may have remained above the fray on many notable occasions, but he was capable, as any of us are, of being corrupted by his sin nature.

Jesus had no nature inclined toward sin—He was wholly incorruptible and there rises to a level far beyond the greatest and wisest of the world's best kings. There has never been and cannot be a truly righteous King but Jesus!!

--All His judgments are righteous ones and His standards of living are established in holiness and purity in all things.

--Never would He amend an unpopular restriction or impose an unjust regulation in order to appease any group or sentiment, no matter how strong.

--The truth upon which He rules is as incorruptible as the King who establishes what is true and good and right by the essential character of His own righteous name!

B. HE IS PERFECTLY WISE

--Every action of this King arises from the perfect wisdom of One who sees the outcome before the beginning.

--If any world leader, or king, in our day possessed perfect wisdom, what a blessed people he would rule!

--But with the limitations of experience, understanding and without certainty about the future, the best human leaders can hope for is an occasional insight and glimpse into the realm of what is good and right.

--However, the eternal wisdom of God rests fully and perfectly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

--No other king, no other ruler can legitimately make that claim and no other people but the people of the kingdom of Christ will be blessed by serving such a glorious Master!

C. HE IS ENTIRELY GOOD.

--All that this King decrees is good...good for His glory and for the welfare of His people.

--From Jesus, our King, flows a fountain of goodness that fills the lives of His subjects with great joy!

ILLUS. As the song we sang earlier notes,
*"There is a fountain, who is the King,
 Victorious Warrior and Lord of everything;
 My Rock, My Shelter, my very own,
 Blessed Redeemer who reigns upon the throne."*

--He protects us ...He shelters us...He establishes us...He redeems us...He instructs and warns us...all for our good and His glory!

D. HE IS RADIANTLY HOLY.

--This holy King radiates the brilliant light of the glory of God to such an extent that all who come into His presence bow down in humble adoration and praise!

--The magi saw it from afar and came to worship...the shepherds learned of it from angels and came to worship...Simeon and Anna waited for the holy One to appear and bowed down in worship...His first disciples witnessed it and fell down on their faces in worship...Saul encountered it on the road to Damascus and cried out in reverent awe and worship...and so it continues until the end of the age!

Rev. 5:11-13 *And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."*

--Jesus, the baby from Bethlehem, is the Lamb of God, the one who reigns in radiant holiness and perfect purity and is worthy to be worshiped and served with all our hearts!

CONCLUSION: Some people may not mind declaring their allegiances and fixing their future on the wrong person or the wrong agenda. But thoughtful, discerning people want to make their lives matter. They want to invest themselves and all they have in the greatest possible good for the most satisfying life—now and forever!

Evidence from the Bible and the testimony we have of the life of Jesus Christ shows that He alone can make that kind of difference. As the Glorious King of heaven and earth, it only makes sense to get on board with the one before whom everyone will bow down one day. Earthly kings and kingdoms come and go and leave little lasting impact...temporary passions and allegiances wear out soon enough leaving those who tied their futures to them wondering why they wasted the one life on such trivialities!

Phil. 2:9-11 *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

As unlikely as it seemed at the time, Jesus not only ruled over Herod on the day He was born, but He has always triumphed over every human institution, every head of government and every dominant world force (business, academic, medical, athletic, investment, etc.). He is pre-eminent, sovereign and reigns over all!

Take aways:

1. *As subjects of the King, His will and ways always stand out as our highest priority and most pressing responsibility.*

--Live under His authority just as if you were serving the greatest king on earth...He is King of heaven and earth!

2. *The King of kings is not only to be obeyed, but to be worshiped and adored.*

--No created being is to be worshiped, but our King Jesus is not just to be obeyed but must be worshiped and adored!

3. *Living in this world as if the kingdom were already in full force means that we must keep our eyes diligently fixed on the Righteous King!*

--We take our cues for life from the slightest hint from our Sovereign King and long to do His bidding!

Who sits on the throne of your life? Are politics and governments where you think the answers lie? Are riches and careers what you believe will provide a meaningful life? Are family and good health the answer to a well-lived existence?

One day all that will come to an end...and not a very satisfying one at that! The coming of Jesus Christ into the world brought to us a Sovereign King—unlikely as He may have appeared at first. A day is coming when you will bow before Him and address Him as Lord and King. Whatever holds that place in your life now must be cast aside if you want to experience the joy of the King's reign now! Come, worship the King! Jesus Christ is King of kings and He will reign forever!

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Providence Baptist Church

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