

## A tale of two Kings. Matt. 2:1-12

### Who is in charge matters. Vv. 1-2

Who is in charge, who has authority, matters.

Most of the time we try and live just getting on with our own business and not thinking about who has authority and power in our country, about the business of government.

But the disruption of our lives by the decisions of government – changed holidays, testing and isolation, inability to work, confined to our homes, locked out of our state

Has reminded us – there is authority in human society, and it really does matter who has the authority, the power.

They have the responsibility to protect us and uphold the law.

Their decisions determine how we live, where we can go, how much of our income is taken in tax

At other times their decisions can send you to war.

Who is in charge of our state and country matters

Who is in charge of our world, has ultimate authority over our lives, matters even more.

In ancient times the person who had authority, who was in charge – was the King,

And his was complete authority. Ancient kings were far more powerful than any modern Australian politician or bureaucrat.

They decided how much tax you paid.

They controlled the army – for they were responsible for protecting their country

They were at the head of the judiciary, the final judge in all matters

They had power of life and death

Power and authority belonged to the King, and their citizens owed them honour and obedience.

And what we have in Matthew 2 is a tale of two kings, a contrast of two authorities – and as we look at it remember - who has authority over our lives, can make the difference between peace and chaos, life and death.

*Matthew 2: Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

Two kings.

There is King Herod, and there is the one born King of the Jews

And the text invites us to compare them

To see which is the better King, the King whose rule we would want, and must, live under

## The King on the throne – Herod the Great

### Background

So there is King Herod. There were a few Herods, but this Herod is the one called Herod the great who ruled in Palestine from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC, the father of Herod Antipas who ruled Galilee during the period of Jesus' ministry. Herod wasn't a descendant of David. He wasn't even a full Jew, but an Idumean, someone descended from Esau.

He was called great because of his long reign, which brought stability to Palestine in the very tumultuous years of the Roman civil war. He was a consistently loyal friend and client of Rome, who enlarged the nation and was a great builder. He founded new cities, rebuilt Caesarea, and he especially enlarged and beautified the temple in Jerusalem.

He was a 'can do' king, but to fund all this he levied heavy taxes on the people.

Which means he had plenty of opportunity to display another feature of his rule. Herod allowed no dissent and punished any disloyalty brutally. He was passionate about the security of his reign

For example, He took vengeance on the Sanhedrin when he came to power for supporting a rival claimant to the throne. He persecuted the Pharisees for opposing his introduction of pagan practices to Jerusalem.

But it was probably his family who suffered most. In the course of his life, because of his suspicion that they might be plotting against him, he had executed an uncle, a mother-in-law, two brothers-in-law, a wife who was entirely innocent, and three sons, the last only five days before his own death. The emperor Augustus is reported to have said that, because of his desire not to offend the religious scruples of his Jewish subjects, "It was better to be Herod's pig than his son."

He was a man determined to hold on to power, and so he found the news the Magi, those wise men from the east, brought very disturbing

### Fearful v. 3

*Matthew 2:<sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;*

News of the birth of a king, descended from David, a potential rival, threatened the legitimacy and security of his reign. Even though Herod had real power – sat on a throne, could summon experts, send troops – he lived in fear.

Fear of dispossession, fear of his rule being ended

So he was active to meet and destroy this threat, and to do that was willing to lie and murder.

### Lying 2:8, 12 – covering his true intentions

*Matthew 2:<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child,*

*and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” .....<sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

He questions the wise men carefully, deceiving them by the claim that he too wanted to ‘come and worship him”, acknowledge him as the God-given king.

But in reality he was even then seeking to find out the identity and location of this baby born king so that he could kill him, remove him as a threat to himself and his rule.

This becomes clear in verse 16

#### Murderous v. 16

*Matthew 2:<sup>16</sup> 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.*

Unable to find out from the wise men the details he uses what he has already learnt from them about the time of the appearance of the star to make sure this boy would not survive. That probably meant, based on estimates of the population of Bethlehem at the time, killing somewhere between 12 and 20 under two year olds, but he did not hesitate.

The security of his reign and person were much more important to him

Here is the first king.

A builder, with a long and stable reign

A lover of his own power who would lie and murder

A king who claims he has the power of life and death over his subjects, but whose reign, whose power and authority, is limited, limited in its extent – it does not extend to Egypt where Joseph can flee to keep his baby safe, and limited in duration. He dies, and his plans and threats die with him.

Role/authority limited in place and time 2:13, 15 – Authority does not extend to Egypt

*Matthew 2:<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt<sup>15</sup> 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.”*

*Matthew 2:<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,<sup>20</sup> 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."*

But what we see is that there are always other Herods, always others to take his place. His son Archelaus comes to power in Judaea – v. 22, a son who shares the memory and character of his father, and the same insecurity – so Joseph goes to Galilee.

*Matthew 2:<sup>22</sup> 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.*

One king – whose love of his own power, his determination to ensure his own security, made him terrible, cruel and brutal,

Whose love of what he was always going to lose to death, his power and life and riches, made his reign a cause of death to many

While Herod was a real king he is also a type of despotic power, of human rulers who make their will and authority ultimate, and seek to subordinate all others to their will. It never ends well for they claim God-like authority without God's power or wisdom or life or mercy

But the sad truth is there is a little bit of Herod in us all, because, like Herod, we are all children of Adam and what we see in Herod is Adam's ambition pursued without restraint.

Adam's ambition was to be like God.

But what is it to be like God?

We think it is being King, ruler of your own life. To have your life not governed by God's word, not have to acknowledge His authority, but to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, to live accountable only to ourselves.

Adam's sin has made an idol of the creature's will, and we are willing worshippers.

In Herod you get a clear picture of what that idolatry means – a licence for lying and violence to get others to serve your will, destruction of life to secure your own life.

Not many of us have Herod's opportunities to enforce our will.

But the idolatry of our wills still shows itself

The verbal badgering of others until they conform, the bullying, the emotional manipulation of withholding or giving favour

The insistence on our way or the highway, that you are either for me, you affirm everything I do, or I cut you off

Don't we see that around us – in controlling, abusive, husbands, manipulative friends, arrogant bosses, in self protective lying and withdrawal of love

Don't we see it from time to time in ourselves where we choose to do what we think is right in defiance of what God says is right to keep ourselves – our pleasures, our power, ourselves – safe.

Yet in Herod you also get a picture of how this idol disappoints and betrays.

Insecurity and fearfulness, the loneliness of someone who removes all threat to his rule

And that is true even if you keep your worship of your own will within polite boundaries

Others are there to serve you, or are a threat

You use, or you fear – and where is life giving intimacy in that

But more – worshippers of this idol face the grief of losing all that they have given so much to obtain

For this idol cannot give life, and they know they must lose in death all they love

That death will deny their will all that it plans and values

Though we think it is life, it is miserable to try and be God where you are not

Herod is terrible – but he is just extreme Adam, where Adam's desire to be like God, to rule his own life, is taken to its logical outcome, by a creature who is not god – not eternal in life, not almighty, not perfect in wisdom,

our idolatry of our own wills, is fearful, enmeshed in lies, destructive of the life of others, and ends in death

But there is another king

### **The Other King - Jesus**

#### **A baby v. 11**

*Matthew 2: <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

The one born king of the Jews, who by the time the wise men arrive in Bethlehem is a young infant – from Herod's action somewhere under two years old.

So, despite nativity scenes, this is after the visit of the shepherds, they are not all at the manger together

Where Herod on his throne with his advisers and his troops embodies power

This king is a picture of weakness and frailty, even more so in a rural community with a high infant mortality. Dependant on others, His grasp on life is tenuous.

And as we see his life is insecure. Soon he is on the move, fleeing his enemy. A child with no fixed address, a refugee with no powerful connections.

It's hard to get a greater contrast between two kings.

But this child is the born king of promise

### **The born King of promise**

v. 2 – born, i.e. is, not becoming

*Matthew 2:<sup>2</sup> saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

He is a king, born a king. He is not waiting to become a king, but is king from birth, the rightful ruler of the Jews, the Lord's people. The Magi are right to give him worship, obeisance

This is reinforced by the religious authorities quoting Micah 5 and 2 Samuel 5:2 to locate his birthplace.

*Matthew 2:<sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*<sup>6</sup> "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

The second, 2 Sam. 5:2, a promise to David of his rule over Israel now applied to David's descendants [embodying the rule promised in Micah 5:4]

The first, Micah 5, speaking of a ruler who will come from David's birthplace, his family home - Bethlehem [1 Samuel 16].

The one born king is the promised Son of David, the one to whom God has given rule over Israel and the nations.

The message of chapter 1 – the genealogy and Joseph's acceptance is reinforced by this quotation from Micah and 2 Sam 5

Jesus, born in such humble circumstances – not a palace but a house in a rural village – is the Son of David, the one to whom God has promised an eternal rule, whose birthright is to rule the world, His rule a gift of God, not something seized and retained by violence.

Truthful Matt. 5:33-37, 24:35 John 18:37

And not only is His person and His right a contrast with Herod's rule, so is the character of His rule as the gospel story makes plain

When He enters His ministry we see HE is the opposite of Herod.

There is no deceit or lying with him

He teaches His followers to be absolutely truthful, that God is a God of truth who looks for truth in all who are His [Matthew 5:33-37]

He can say of His teaching that it is completely reliable

*Matthew 24:<sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

Even when on trial for his life he is committed to the truth.

*John 18:<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."*

There is no embrace of lies and deception to support and sustain His rule. He will not lie to save his life

That means His reign is one of trust building, freeing, truth – we need truth, words that you can rely on, to live freely. As many have found with the restrictions on travel confusion and inconsistency make life difficult enough, but lies destroy trust and confidence in acting, create doubt and uncertainty, impoverish our lives. Lies can even kill you – you will not die said the devil, but they did and we do.

But Jesus always speaks the truth, he reigns through His true word, and builds trust and confidence, freedom, amongst His people.

Loving and life giving Matt. 20:28, 27:29, 37

And his reign is not one of murder, of taking life to protect and sustain his own life.

It is one of love, and giving His life to give life to others.

He taught that to be children of the Father you must love even your enemies Matt. 5:44-45

And He lived as He taught, reigns that way, lived and reigned as the true son of His Father by doing the Father's will, acting in love to all, seeking their good not His own

Even seeking forgiveness from the cross for those who killed him

*Luke 23:<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.*

'Father forgive them' He prayed.

This is not fear and resentment expressing itself in murderous hatred.

This is life giving love

And He was on that cross willingly, freely. Unlike Adam and Herod – He said, "Not my will, but yours be done." He willed to do the Father's will, giving His life as a ransom for many.

*Matthew 20:<sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Giving His life to set many, all who believe the gospel, free from sin and death

And He was On that cross as King. His mocking enemies spoke better than they knew. That dying is the expression of His reign for in it He destroys His enemies and saves His people

*Matthew 27: <sup>29</sup> and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!".... <sup>37</sup> And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."*

His reign is one of truth and love, life giving not death bringing

One that frees from fear and death

And appearing weak it is the reign of greater power, almighty power, the reign of one who has life in Himself

This king is one whose rule knows no limit in extent or duration

### **The King without limit**

The star – creation serves Him [cf. the eclipse 27:45]

From the outset it is made plain that creation itself serves the revealing of His reign. The star brings those wise men to Jesus, herald His coming and birth

*Matthew 2: <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.*

*<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

Whether that star was supernova, planets in alignment, or a comet -

Creation serves him – at his birth, just as Creation acknowledges him as its ruler at his death – when the sky turns black

His rule extends to all that is created

And it extends to all peoples

v. 11 – the worship of the magi

These wise men are gentiles, non-Jews. Their coming and worship is an acknowledgement that the King of the Jews is the King of all

“Ask of me” says the Lord to the King of the Jews, to the Messiah, “and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” Ps. 2:8

And His rule is not limited in time, in its duration, for death cannot bring it to its end, only reveal its power in the resurrection.

The resurrection shows this King has power over the most fearsome weapon of his rivals, their ability to take this life, and so has broken their power and the power of the devil who stands behind their rule of lies and murder.

This king continues to reign always,

There is no limit to his authority. As the risen Jesus says



## All authority

*Matthew 28: <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus – the born King, whose rule is the gift of God, His by right

Who rule's by coming to do the Father's will, not His own

Whose reign is characterised by truth and love, by a wisdom and might that surpasses any human's

Whose reign brings the freedom and confidence of truth, the eternal life of those freed from death, to all who embrace it

Whose authority is over all, and forever

### **Which King ...?**

I was going to say 'Here are two kings. Which King do you want to be King over your life?' – but that is not the gospel

You and I don't have a choice of who is King

Jesus is the better King

But the great good news is Jesus is king – now. He not waiting to become King

And certainly you don't make Him King by your choice

The gospel doesn't even ask "Will you acknowledge Jesus the true king, the better king?"

No. It commands, summonses you and I to repent – that is to acknowledge reality, to acknowledge that Jesus is the true and only King, the one with authority over each of us, the authority to judge and forgive, to give life or to execute judgment

To abandon from the start the pretence that your will rules, your will creates reality

For the truth – God rules through His Son, and His will creates reality

If you have not yet done that, will you acknowledge Jesus as King today?

If you have, are you determined keep living under His reign, directed by His authority?

Don't, in desiring to keep ruling your own life, be accountable only to yourself, preserve the idol of your own will– fall for the lie Herod embraced

Herod thought he could deny this born king, usurp his place, delete him from history, from the life of this world

Thought he could kill the one the Scriptures, God's word, declared to be the living God's chosen king.

Why did he think he could successfully resist the almighty God, the God who had life in Himself?

He was in love with the idol of his will and He had become habituated to the lie he had lived by, Adam's lie, that he was like God, God's equal – though all the evidence, his fear, his lies, his destruction of life – told otherwise

Blinded by his lie all he did just increased his condemnation

Are you so in love with the idol of your will that you think that somehow if you block your ears to what the risen Jesus commands you have removed Him from the scene;

or that your determined faultfinding with Christians will relieve you of the burden of taking Jesus seriously

that your choosing to reject Him so that you can do whatever you wish means you will never have to deal with Him?

None of that will stop Jesus from being King, the one with authority over all

The one who is true, and will do what He says in His gospel –

Either give life to those who repent, who turn their back on worshipping their own will, and believe the gospel, that is acknowledge the gospel is true and live trusting His promises, and listening to and obeying Jesus,

Or give up to judgment and its outcome, the eternal death of hell, those who persevere in rebellion

Herod's path is the path of failure

There is No future in it, and its present is also miserable

Lonely, Fearful, insecure, sustained by untruth and violence,

A King to worship

The good news is in a world full of Herod's Jesus is the true King –

The better King by far – who does pardon rebels who turn back to Him

Be like the magi – their worship a recognition of Jesus' rightful rule, their joy a joy in finding the true King, King of the Jews, King of all.

They went to so much effort to bow before the young boy Jesus, guided by a star

We have it so much easier.

We meet Jesus in His gospel, not as a baby full of promise

But as a tested and triumphant King, victor over death and keeper of all His promises

The power of His life flowing in the river of His Spirit to all who trust Him

The reality of His love for those who don't deserve it demonstrated beyond doubt

The truth of His offer of pardon proved over centuries.

What joy to worship Him – who gives us truth and love, pardon and life

To be wise like them in honouring Him by listening to Him and doing all that HE has commanded.

And so live securely, building what will last by that trusting obedience

### A King to make known

And where many still live under the bondage of their idolatry of their own wills, loving their own power and control, or oppressed by petty despots

Will you share the good news of the true King – for He is the King of all, the better King by far, the forgiving and life giving King whose rule is joy and peace

It is love to call people to repent and believe the gospel, to turn from death, the death of rebellion, to life, eternal life – by confessing Jesus as King, as Lord

That is what our good King calls us to, to make disciples, followers of Himself, from all nations.

We should be doing that Individually and collectively as we have opportunity

And we do have opportunities still.

One of those is church planting

Church planting is about making disciples by sharing the good news of the true King and gathering those whom God calls to Himself through the gospel into a community of believers who can witness together to the goodness of life lived under Jesus' rule

Today we are farewelling Sam and Bec, Rachel and Josh, Kaedom and Hannah who are leaving us today to join the Donnybrook Church plant that will start next Sunday under Ben and Tanya Keladas leadership

One of our opportunities is to support them in their going – to pray for them, to stay in touch with them, and as a congregation to support our giving to the Property Development Fund, the fund used to buy property for church plants – and we know how useful that is.

But farewelling them also reminds us that there is a cost to that commitment to making Jesus known  
-for them and us –

Emotional cost – the grief of saying goodbye, of feeling the absence of those you love

Loss of their labour of love, the cost of filling the holes left by their departure, and for them the cost of new and extra work – setting up, welcoming into their lives strangers, the turn over

Financial cost

Loss of their giving, support of the Property Development Fund to which we give 5% of our giving

But when you see how good a King Jesus is, and the cost He paid to bring us under His life giving rule

And you see in Herod the misery of our idolatry

Pay that cost cheerfully, gladly

But Church planting is just one way of doing what we are all called to do

Praise the Lord – many ways

AFES – we can support and encourage those involved in the work of AFES amongst us

Work together in Kid's club and GSF, Mainly Music and Youth Group

We can seize the opportunities for conversations about Jesus with each other and with those who do not yet believe

I suspect many of us are at the end of 2020 Tired still, uncertain, a bit flat because of the persistence of the virus and its constant threat to the way we live, maybe even a bit sad to be farewelling our brothers and sisters – and so we are hesitant to get back into our ministry, dread the expenditure of energy that involves

But let me encourage you to renew your commitment to make disciples of our Lord Jesus

In the end that commitment doesn't depend on our energy, or on whether we feel up to it, but our love – and we act, not confident in ourselves, but in faith in His promise, that God's grace is sufficient, and that he will show Himself mighty, mighty to save, in our weakness

In Herod see the misery of rebellion, the misery of the old idolatry, and then in the gospel see the wonder and glory of the true King and His reign – life, love and truth

Now is a good time if we are believers in Jesus, those who live by repentance and faith in the Lord, Jesus, the Christ, the King of the Jews, to be renewed in our commitment