

Series Slide

“The Night is Darkest Before the Dawn.”

Its what we say when life is falling apart...To give hope that something is going to change.

The story of Jesus' birth is filled with dark night and Dawn's light. Literally- the shepherds are watching their fields by night...and angels light up the night sky.

But there is also figurative darkness.

When Jesus was born- it had been 400 years since God had delivered a word from a prophet to his people Israel. For a people who were instructed to “live not by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”... that is dark.

Had God abandoned them? Was it their fault? Did he care about them?

Israel was under Roman occupation and lived under the complicated and confusing rule of Herod- Who was a uniquely dark character.

Let me give you a little taste of what Herod was like- and show you how he contributed to the very dark time into which Jesus was born.

Herod was all about Herod.

His allegiance and loyalty was only to himself.

So he sort of played both sides between the Romans and the Jews.

He was raised in a Jewish household- But politically, he had aligned himself with Caesar Augustus because Caesar saw an opportunity to placate the Jews and keep them from rebelling.

On one hand- Herod was a cruel, maniacal, megalomaniac on par with Nero, Stalin, and Hitler. He married ten women and had one of them murdered when he thought she was plotting against him.

He had 2 of his sons strangled to death for the the same reason.

Herod was in constant defense mode. Everywhere he looked he saw a someone potentially trying to take his power from him. He was an incredibly anxious and reactive leader.

On the other hand, because it was best for Herod to keep the Jews happy- he did some stuff they really liked.

Israel was in a highly strategic geographical position for trade routes from the Mediterranean sea to the East. So Herod orchestrated deals for copper, balsam and expensive spices that brought a lot of wealth to Israel. He renovated cities and built a spectacular new temple for the Jews.

Herod's temple put Solomon's original temple to shame. It was five football fields wide, and 3 football fields long- built with white marble.

This complicated things for the Jews. Because Herod clearly had betrayed his people for Rome...but he also brought a lot of honor, wealth, and prosperity to the Jews- and made a way for them to carry out their worship with dignity.

Herod was an evil tyrant, both hated and appreciated by the Jews.

He was a lot of darkness...with a little glimmer of light.

Title Slide "Darkest Before Dawn: How to Bring Light into Night " - Matthew 2:13-23

The popular experience with Christmas in America is that it changes your life for a month.

Its a little bit of light inside an otherwise dark, drab year.

You spend a little more without worrying about your budget. You eat a little more without worrying about your health. You take days off work without worrying about your productivity.

But the little bit of light...is just cheap, unsustainable happiness. Because eventually- you'll pay for all of it. What you put off in December will revisit you double in January. In the form of bills, needing a larger and stretchier pair of pants, and frantic catch up at work.

But when we reduce Christmas to just a sort of putting off of our problems for a season- we honor Herod- a lot more than we honor Jesus.

Because that's what Herod was...a lot of darkness...with small glimmers of light that just made people a little less angry or disturbed.

But the truth is...more presents, more time off work or school, more sweets, none of that really helps at all when you encounter the depth of the darkness of sin and death.

Presents don't cure cancer.

Holiday cheer doesn't stop a husband and Father from walking out on his family. Another round of eggnog and a Christmas movie doesn't bring healing and forgiveness.

And no amount of cookies or trees make it easier to bury a child.

We live in a time where we are an extremely anxious, depressed, medicated, addicted, and fragile people...because we have become so accustomed to just appreciating Herod for tossing us a little light...a little entertainment, another glass of wine, a fantasy novel to get caught up in, another trip to Disney.

And then we are surprised when the darkness takes over- that we have no resources to deeply rely on to remind us that..

"the night is darkest just before the dawn."

So what CAN we dig deeply into in the darkness to have hope for the dawn?

Listen to the way John describes Jesus the Son and God the Father.

John 1:4-5

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

1 John 1:5

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

This is very different than Herod. When Jesus was born into the world- he wasn't another Herod. He wasn't another dark character with a little bit of light to offer.

He was...and is...and is to come...Light that will not be overcome by the darkness. He is the Life you are looking for.

And because Jesus was born, died, resurrected, and made a promise to come again...Everything is going to be OK. And that is what we have to bring to top of mind...and out into the open...when the worst of life hits us hard.

Today- from this last bit of the Christmas story in Matthew- I'm going to show you how to become a person that not only believes this...but lives it and brings this light to others.

Matthew 2:13-23

13 After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him." 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.

16 Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 A voice was heard in Ramah,

weeping, and great mourning,

Rachel weeping for her children;

and she refused to be consoled,

because they are no more.

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee. 23 Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

This is no doubt the most omitted part of the nativity narrative. Most likely because it is very very dark. Nobody wants to read about the senseless slaughter of little boys...it doesn't couple well with hot cocoa.

But the thing is...the Spirit of the Living God working through Matthew put it here...for a reason...and we shouldn't neglect...because it ruins our holiday cheer.

I would submit to you, the deepest and most profound resources for finding hope in the darkest of nights...are right here in the verses we just read. That's what I'm going to show you now in 2 points- and then the band is going to bring the light of a Christmas carol into the darkness of searching song to show us what this looks like.

To see Hope in the Night....to expect the Dawn in the Dark...you have to...

1) **Know how your little story fits into His Big Story.**

When Herod hears from the wise men that there is another King of the Jews that has been born in Bethlehem- Herod goes into full dark mode.

2:16

He first tries to use the wise men to kill Jesus...but when things start to seem out of control- he rages commands a massacre in Bethlehem.

To put this in scale- this is probably somewhere around 20-30 little boys in this small community that die because of Herod's insecurity and anger.

Think about the depth of mourning and pain in a town where 20-30 little boys, who would daily play outside their homes..are brutally and suddenly gone.

I bet those parents stopped caring about how many football fields Herod's temple was.

I bet they didn't think a second about how much wealth and respect Herod had brought to the Jews.

I bet every time they overheard a little two year old girl ask where her little friend had gone...and heard the parent quickly shush them and say in Aramaic "We'll talk about that later..." I bet there wasn't much light coming off of Herod.

So in the middle of all that pain, and darkness- look what the story brings out.

2:15 & 19

Herod's death bookends this story.

In fact, Matthew tells us Herod dies and Jesus escapes even before he tells us about Herod's evil plot to slaughter the children.

In other words- Matthew is bringing the light into the dark. I know it seems like Herod is in control and going to win here...but in the end Herod dies, and Jesus lives.

2:15, 17, 23

In this Dark story- there are 3 mentions of the fulfillment of prophecy. In other words- God was never out of control. There is not a moment that he won't redeem and resurrect and restore according to his plan. Even the deaths of these little ones.

Matthew is making the point, that no matter how evil Herod is, no matter how intent he is on murdering to keep his power, no matter how much darkness and evil he is bringing- that words spoken by God through prophets- are still being fulfilled. Some of them only BECAUSE Herod is trying to stop Jesus' birth.

So if you are going to see better what God is doing in the darkness- you have to know the light he has already spoken.

BIG STORY - BIBLE READING & MEDITATION in 2025
Make you a non-anxious presence. A leader.

Back to 1)

But there is something else here.

You don't just look at the Bible. You look at the culture through the Bible.

You look at your little story in the context of the God's big story.

Even in a contemporary figure for Jesus like Herod- you can trace his story all the way back to Genesis.

in Genesis 25- we get the birth of Jacob and Esau. Twins born to Abraham's son Isaac.

Esau- the first born- turned out to be a big, strong hunter- Jacob- the younger- a weak deceiver who even though he was weaker and younger, ended up coming out with the blessing and inheritance of his Father.

In fact, there is a prophecy in Genesis 25 that the older, more powerful, will serve the younger, weaker brother.

Jesus- was born in Jacob's line.

Herod- is an Edomite...in other words- he came from Esau.

v 18

Rachel-is Jacob's wife (from Jeremiah)

Represents all the Jewish mothers weeping over their children who are carried off into exile. In other words- see the pattern. This isn't the first time darkness has overcome the mothers of Israel. But God promises through Jeremiah to restore and bring them back through the birth of a Messiah. Put your hope there.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Back to 1)

See- From Genesis all the way through the OT- for anyone who deeply knew the Scriptures— and who had their eyes open to see what was really happening- not just in what is seen, but what is unseen...

2) Know God's character & pattern.

v 23 & John 1:46

Revelation 12:1-5

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.

2 She was pregnant and cried out in labor and agony as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. 4 Its tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth it might devour her child. 5 She gave birth to a Son, a male who

is going to rule all nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

Character:

Light Overcomes Darkness.

Lord Overcomes Devil.

Life Overcomes Death.

Revelation 21:22-23

22 I did not see a temple in it, because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Pattern:

Lamb Overcomes Dragon.

Like Herod

Why we don't want the king.

Because we believe we are kings.

Explain Persevere- sees people putting this into action- and makes him see something beautiful in his own pain (divorce- death of Dad)

O Come Emmanuel- written from a people in the Dark- who know the story... and are rejoicing in the dark.

can you rejoice in the dark?