

The Enemies Shall Not Prevail.

Text: Matt 2:20b

Suggested Hymns:

633, 40, 42, 200, 195

- 1) The Background To The Text
- 2) There Are Powerful Enemies Opposed To Christ
- 3) They Marshal Their Forces Against Jesus
And Seek His Life
- 4) They Fall Vanquished Before Him At Last

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 2:20b, *those who sought the young Child's life are dead.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Often we look at the seeming success of the enemies of Christ. We are living at a time when it seems to us as if the forces of evil are marching on towards victory. The children of disobedience, in whom Satan works, are in the saddle. They seem to be having their own way.

God's children are far outnumbered. They are a little flock in comparison with the mighty hosts of Satan. Christians' hearts often fail them in the face of such overwhelming odds.

But Christ, our Champion, says to us in Luke 12:32, ³² *"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

In the enormous struggle that is being waged here in time, the enemies of Christ are fighting a losing battle. Their defeat and final destruction is indicated in our text.

We learn from our text that indeed, *The Enemies Shall Not Prevail.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Background To The Text

Bethlehem was about a two-hour journey from Jerusalem. So we may assume that the Wise Men arrived there on the same day they had spoken to Herod. It is possible that they left Bethlehem that same night, just as Joseph and Mary and the Christ Child departed before morning. So in the morning the Wise

Men and Joseph's little family were simply gone. No one in Bethlehem could tell where they were because no one knew.

After all the trouble and suffering the Israelites had endured in Egypt before the Exodus, it might seem like a strange place for Joseph and Mary to go with the Christ Child. But it was not strange at all.

First of all, we need to realise that Egypt had been a traditional place of refuge. Abraham had gone to Egypt during a time of famine.¹ Jacob and his family of 70 took refuge in Egypt for the same reason,² and they became a mighty nation there. They remained in Egypt until God led them out under Moses some four hundred years later. Jeroboam fled to Egypt when Solomon tried to kill him,³ and Uriah also fled to Egypt.⁴

There were many Jews in Egypt at this time, so Mary and Joseph could feel quite at home and secure there. Furthermore, Matthew informs us that the flight to Egypt, and the return to the land of Israel, fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, *out of Egypt I called My son*.

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and their exodus foreshadowed the calling of God's Son from Egypt. Matthew directly states that Hosea was not only recording an event in Israel's history; he was also foretelling an event in the life of God's Son, the Messiah.

When King Herod realised that the Wise Men were not coming back, he reacted in a way typical of his murderous reign. According to the report of the Wise Men concerning the time they first saw the special star, Herod calculated how old the Christ Child might be.

Herod commanded his soldiers to kill all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem up to two years old. Since Bethlehem was a small town, we may estimate that the total number slain was about 15 or 20. These victims of Herod are often called *the innocents* (not that they were sinless, but they surely had not committed any crime worthy of death).

Herod's heinous crime reminds us of the ongoing deliberate and systematic destruction of thousands upon thousands of unborn children by abortion in our own day. Is this not an even greater crime?

Herod perceived a real threat to his own authority when he committed his crime, and he may have reasoned that it would be better to sacrifice 15 or 20 children than to permit a blood-stained revolution to take place when this “new-born king” would attempt to seize the throne some years later.

Many of our fellow citizens murder their unborn children as a matter of convenience, and the laws of our country permit it. They insist that they are being kinder and more considerate to their children than they would be if they allowed the birth of unwanted children or children for whose needs they might not be able to provide. Selfishness can make murder seem like a good deed.

The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem was also the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15. Ramah was five miles north of Jerusalem, on the border of Israel. It was the place where Jewish captives had been assembled for deportation to Babylon.⁵ Rachel was Jacob’s favourite wife, childless for years, finally the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. She died in childbirth.

Rachel weeping for her children represented all the Jewish mothers who wept over Israel’s tragedy in the days of Jeremiah. She also typifies the grieving mothers at Bethlehem, as Matthew points out.

The Jewish historian Josephus in his *Antiquities* reports that Herod “died of ... ulcerated entrails, putrefied and maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions, foul breath, and neither physician nor warm baths led to recovery.”

2. The Enemies Shall Not Prevail

There Are Powerful Enemies Opposed To Christ

Let us look at the enemies. First, there is Satan. That Christ, the Prince of Peace, would have enemies was foretold in prophecy. We read in Genesis 3:15, ***15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed.***”

Enemies are to be expected. Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil,⁶ to undo the mischief that rebel spirit had wrought in the seduction of man into sin. Satan, the strong man armed, would not vacate and relinquish his palace without fighting a battle. He is not going to release his victims without a struggle.

Then there are wicked spirits. The legions of wicked spirits who revolted against the Most High stand by their leader in grim determination to hold their spoils.

Finally there are wicked people. Many of the victims of Satan here on earth are only too willing to serve him and join his forces in opposition to Christ. The Psalmist says in Psalm 2:2, ² *The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed.*”

The mighty men of earth, the Herods, many rich, men of high degree, philosophers, and unbelieving scientists, oppose themselves against the Christ. The enemies of Jesus Christ are all the anti-Christian forces in the world.

Think of the millions of followers of false prophets in the world! The Jewish scribes and priests, showed no inclination to join the wise men from the East in their search for the King of Israel, the promised Messiah, even though they knew the promises of God given to their forefathers and were able to tell Herod where Christ should be born.

The Popery, the very Antichrist, who seats himself in the temple of God conducts himself as if he were God. We are warned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, ³ *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Add to this great army the host of indifferent and callous Christians, of whom the Lord says in Matthew 12:30, ³⁰ *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.:*

What a formidable array of enemies are aligned against the Christ! Where do you stand?

3. The Enemies Shall Not Prevail

They Marshal Their Forces Against Jesus And Seek His Life

The enemies of Christ are desperate and marshal their forces and resources in sustained efforts to crush Jesus and His Church. They seek the young Child's life.

Consider Herod's gruesome effort to crush Christ. See Herod, the crafty, cunning king, pretending friendly interest in the new-born King of the Jews. He asks the Wise Men to return to him, when they have found the Christ, that he, too, might go to Bethlehem and worship Him.

But he does all of this while in his heart he is planning to murder that Child. Look what happens when the Wise Men, warned by God not to return to Herod, and fail to bring him word of the new-born King! Herod vents his fury in the slaughter of the male children at Bethlehem aged two years and under in a futile attempt to kill the Christ Child.

The enemies also wage attacks against the Church. Let sacred and secular history tell the story of Satan's attacks against Christ. The old dragon sought to devour the Christ Child as soon as He was born. We read in Revelation 12:4, *And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.*

The persecutions that began when the rulers of Israel refused to recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah brought Him to the cross and the persecutions continued after His resurrection and ascension.

From Jerusalem they spread to Judea and then in ever widening circles to the ends of the earth. There was the terrible era of persecution under the Roman emperors, the wars waged by the Turks, the brutal Spanish Inquisition, the soul-destroying activities of the Papacy, as well as Communism and other political "isms" which still continue today.

What is the method of attack today? With ferocious power and deceptive propaganda the enemies marshal their forces to attack. They use pulpits, cathedrals, governments, schools, colleges, and universities in their endeavours to destroy Christ and His Church.

They enlist the services of crafty politicians, scientists, philosophers, merchants, mechanics, labourers, in their work of destruction. Through the medium of newspapers, magazines, books, radio, TV and the internet they seek to destroy the faith in Christ and thus to destroy His body, the Church.

Down through the ages the old evil Foe has meant *"deadly woe; deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight; on earth is not his equal."*⁷

What would become of us in a world aflame with hatred and animosity against the Christ if we were left unprotected and exposed to the wrath of all these enemies! *“Soon were our fall effected.”*

*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*⁸

4. *The Enemies Shall Not Prevail* **They Fall Vanquished Before Him At Last**

Our text says *those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.*

Herod’s End. God dealt with Herod. With all his cunning and fury that wily king could not touch the young Child Jesus. Swift judgement removed the dreaded monarch from the scene. Stricken by a fatal disease he died a wretched death.

The Doom of Christ’s Enemies. Herod’s demise forecasts the fate of all the enemies of Christ. God serves notice to all adversaries of His Son in the words of Psalm 2:6, *“Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.”*

Enthroned at the right hand of power on high, Christ rules in the midst of His enemies. They shall not prevail. The King of kings and Lord of lords will crush His foes in utter defeat at last.

We learn in Revelation 14:10–11 that they will be made to *drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. [They] shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.*

Fear Not, Little Flock. How comforting to us who have cast our lot with Christ to know that the enemies shall not prevail. With all our weaknesses, sins, and frequent lusting for the flesh-pots of Egypt, God in mercy has not allowed us to fall from Him, but has called us again and again to repentance.

Let us cling to Jesus 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.

His Holy Spirit will sanctify and keep us in the faith He created in us. Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Being found in Him, we will always be able to say: **The enemy shall not prevail!** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Genesis 12:10

² Genesis 46

³ 1 Kings 11:40

⁴ Jeremiah 26:21–23

⁵ Jeremiah 40:1

⁶ 1 John 3:8

⁷ Hymn 195

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:57