

## How The Enemies Plot Against Christ And His Kingdom.

Text: Matt 2:13-23

1) The craftiness of their plotting

Suggested Hymns:

2) The uselessness of their plotting

301, 414, 415, 389, 396

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 2:13–23, <sup>13</sup> *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”* <sup>14</sup> *When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.* <sup>17</sup> *Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:* <sup>18</sup> *“A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”*

<sup>19</sup> *Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.”* <sup>21</sup> *Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

King Herod was an enemy of Christ, even though he pretended to be a friend of Christ when he said to the wise men from the East, ***“Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”***<sup>1</sup>

To this day there are enemies of Christ that pose as His friends. Christ distinctly says, ***<sup>30</sup>He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.***<sup>2</sup> According to these words of our divine Lord, all those who want to hold a neutral position, and all those who do not gather with Him, or work for Him and for His kingdom, must be looked upon as His opponents. They are against Him; they are His enemies.

You are either a friend of Christ, and then you will act the part of a friend, you will confess His name and work for His kingdom; or you are an enemy of Christ, and then you will act the part of an enemy, even though you may do so under the disguise of a friend.

There are many people in our days who do not believe in Christ and yet they do not openly speak against Him, or persecute Him. Sometimes there are children who are scoffers and unbelievers at the bottom of their hearts, and yet they come to church and make an outward profession of the Christian religion on account of their pious parents whom they would not like to offend by an open renunciation of the faith.

And then again there are parents who are outspoken unbelievers, and yet they send their children to church and to Sunday School, because they can not deny the wholesome influence of religion.

Then there are those who do not openly join the ranks of blasphemers, because if they did this, it might injure their trade and business, or because by such a step they would hurt the feelings of their Christian friends.

Therefore they do not wish to sever their connection with the church altogether. They pose as Christians whilst their entire attitude and demeanour plainly shows they do not care for the church; the word of God has no charms for them; they are unbelievers, enemies of Christ.

But aside from these secret enemies there is another class of bold, outspoken enemies of Christ and His religion, enemies raging and raving against Christ like Herod in our Gospel, enemies who plot, and seek to destroy Christ, and to wipe Christianity from the earth.

Let us consider with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *How The Enemies Plot Against Christ And His Kingdom*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Craftiness Of Their Plotting.**

How ingeniously Herod plotted against the new-born Saviour! When the wise men came to Jerusalem from the East, seeking the new-born King of the Jews, he discovered that such a King was expected and that He was to be born in Bethlehem.

So he sent those wise men to Bethlehem and instructed them to be sure and come back to tell him whether they had found that King, so that he also might worship Him. Hypocrite! He never thought of worshipping the Child. He wanted to kill Him.

God, therefore, told the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod, and they departed to their own country another way. <sup>13</sup> *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."*

See the ingenuity and shrewdness with which this enemy plots and schemes against the Lord's Anointed! So cleverly he arranges his plans, so secretly he works, it seems that he must succeed. Must not the wise men return to their homes by the way of Jerusalem? Must not gratitude prompt them to bring Herod all the information desired?

It was, indeed, a finely laid plot, a scheme which could not but work successfully to the mind of the tyrant, whose soul was as black as night, who brooded death and destruction, merely to keep his throne and not to be pushed aside by an intruder.

But Herod not only plotted against Christ's person, but also against His kingdom. We read of Joseph, <sup>14</sup> *When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> and was there until the death of*

*Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."*

So the persecution directed against the person of Christ also strikes those who were with Christ. The whole family had to flee for the life of Jesus, and dwell for a time in a strange country, in the land of Egypt.

And not only the near relatives of Jesus had to suffer inconvenience, but also those who were in the same locality were afflicted for Jesus' sake. For we are told, *"<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.*

Here again we perceive the ingenuity and shrewdness of the blood thirsty tyrant. The Child who was heir to the throne had to die at all costs. And since the wise men had not brought him the information he desired, since he only knew where, but not who the Child was, he resolved to slay all the children in and around Bethlehem, of two years and under. How could the mysterious Child escape then? When those infants were butchered and the blood of the first martyrs was shed, the king was sure of it that he could not have missed the Christ-child.

This cruel king has had his followers at all times from the beginning of the Christian era to this day. There always have been enemies of Christ who plotted and schemed against the Lord's Anointed and His kingdom.

See how the Jews, notably the Pharisees and chief rulers, persecuted Jesus and planned to kill Him! See how they breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord! And the heathen — how mercilessly they dealt with Christ's followers!

In the first three centuries alone there were seven persecutions waged against the Christians by seven different Roman emperors, and the Christians were put to death by the thousands. Like sheep they were led to the slaughter, tortured, and killed.

Later on Mohammed came. He promised heaven to those of his followers who died on the battle-field fighting for the cause of Islam. And now the

Christians were again butchered by the thousands. Entire Christian provinces were laid waste and depopulated.

Then the papacy came. The Roman pontiff sat in the temple of God, in the church *“showing himself that he is God.”*<sup>3</sup> And how cruelly he persecuted the true followers of Christ! Countless is the number of those who under the rule of the papacy were tortured and slaughtered, because they would not acknowledge any other authority in matters of faith than the word of God, and no other ruler and king than the Lord Jesus Christ. The books of history are full of horrors committed under the papal rule.

And have the enemies ceased at last to plot against Christ and His kingdom? Have not the most shocking atrocities occurred within recent years? Have not thousands of Christians been massacred in cold blood?

Are not anarchists and their allies continually at work planning how they might overthrow the established order of things and destroy Christ and His religion? There is no question, to this day the enemies are plotting against Christ and His kingdom.

## **2. The Uselessness Of Their Plotting.**

And now, in the second place, let us see how useless all their plotting is.

What did Herod accomplish against the person of Christ? Did he dethrone Christ? Did he make to naught the prophecy of God concerning the Messiah? No; contrary to his own will he had to be instrumental in fulfilling God’s prophecy.

By Christ’s flight to Egypt the prophecy had to be fulfilled which says, *“Out of Egypt I called My Son.”* And by the massacre of those innocent infants in the borders of Bethlehem another divine prophecy had to come true, the prophecy of Jeremiah, saying, <sup>18</sup> *“A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”*<sup>4</sup>

And what did Herod accomplish against Christ’s kingdom? Did his power extend into the realms of the invisible world? Could he debar God’s holy angels from warning the wise men and Joseph in a dream? Did he not again, contrary to his own will, have to aid and serve the kingdom of Christ which he wanted to

destroy? For did he really harm those innocent infants, those first martyrs, who bled for Jesus' sake?

Many, or perhaps all of them, may have grown up enemies of Christ, had they lived; for most of the Jews rejected their Messiah. But now they entered into eternal glory and were among those of whom it is said in the Psalm, "*Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise.*"<sup>5</sup>

As our children, dying in their baptismal grace, invariably go to heaven, so did these infants, who were Rachel's children, children of the covenant, having received the sacrament of Circumcision which in the Old Testament held the place of Baptism, by their premature death, get to eternal happiness and bliss.

So we have seen that Herod's plotting against Christ and His kingdom was altogether unsuccessful. Even though he succeeded for a while in hiding his diabolical plot from the wise men, he could not hide it from God. Although he formed his plans with the utmost ingenuity and shrewdness and executed them with merciless cruelty, his fight against the Lord and His Anointed was in vain. And so it has always been.

The enemies of Christ never did succeed and never will succeed. In the early times of the Christian church both, Jews and Gentiles, combined and arrayed their forces against the Christian religion.

Entire libraries have been written against the divine truth of the Gospel, and heathen officials tried to stamp out the pest of Christianity, as they called it, by seizing and burning every copy of the New Testament they could find. Entire Christian provinces were ravaged and depopulated, and the smouldering ruins of Christian homes showed how completely the work of devastation was done. But it was in vain.

Christ always survived His enemies. At times it seemed as if the church of God was no more. But the Lord has always made true His promise that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church.<sup>6</sup>

And there is one more point to take note of. Those enemies of Christ who waste their efforts in plotting against Him and His kingdom often meet their due punishment already in this life.

There is but a short notice in our Gospel concerning Herod, <sup>19</sup> *Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.”*

Two secular historians, a Jew by the name of Josephus and a Christian by the name of Eusebius, describe the death of this cruel king Herod. They tell us that his body was covered with ulcers emitting such a stench, that it was almost impossible to stay with him.

When he saw that he must die, he had the most distinguished Jews incarcerated and ordered that they should be put to death as soon as he would breathe his last, so that, as he himself said, all Judea would have to mourn, in place of rejoicing, at his death. Then the miserable wretch committed suicide by plunging a knife into his heart.

And there is another historian by the name of Lactantius who wrote a book entitled, *“Death of Persecutors,”* showing that nearly every one of those Roman emperors and officials who stained their hands with Christian blood met with a most horrible death.

Indeed, God is not mocked.<sup>7</sup> Even when God does not avenge the blood of His saints on earth, even when those who have been devoting their lives to plotting against Christ and His kingdom and have been persecuting the children of God pass away from this life apparently in peace and without suffering, they shall not escape the punishment which they deserve. They shall know whom they have pierced and come to eternal woe.

Let us, then, confidently trust in the Lord. Let the enemies of Christ and His church plot all they wish with the utmost cunning and craftiness, they shall succeed as little now as they did in former times. *“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”*<sup>8</sup> Amen.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 2:8

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:30

<sup>3</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:4

<sup>4</sup> See Jeremiah 31:15

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 21:16, Psalm 8:2

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>7</sup> Gal. 6:7

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 46:7