

“HEROD’S ATTEMPT TO STOP GOD”
Jeremiah 32:36-42, Romans 1:18-25, Matthew 2:13-23
December 26, 2021

Brett Kays of Brownstown, Michigan tells the account of “a certain preacher and an atheistic barber walking through city slums. The barber said, ‘This is why I can't believe in your “God of love.” If He was as kind as you say, He wouldn't permit all this poverty, disease, and squalor. He wouldn't allow these poor street people to get addicted. No, I cannot believe in a God who permits these things.’

“The minister was silent until they met a man who was especially unkempt. His hair was hanging down his neck, and he had a half-inch of stubble on his face.

“The preacher said to his friend: ‘You can't be a good barber, or you wouldn't permit a man like this to continue living here without a haircut and a shave.’

“Indignant, the barber answered: ‘Why blame me for that man's condition? He has never come in my shop. If he had, I could've fixed him up and made him look like a gentleman!’

“The preacher said, ‘Then don't blame God for allowing people to continue in their evil ways. He invites them to come and be saved,’”¹ but they have not yet responded to His invitation. They have not yet found the better way to live according to God’s standards, so they abandon His commandments and His guidelines and live the way they think is best. And you see the result.

God has provided the way to abundant life here on this world, as well as eternal life after we finish our journey’s here. God has given us the way to find peace and hope and love, but until we make the commitment to come to His Son, Jesus, and claim Him as our Lord and Savior, and follow His teachings, we will continue to live in the midst of this evil world, having to deal with all this poverty, disease, and squalor. Until we let Jesus into our hearts, we can only expect the evil of this world to rule our lives.

The lesson from Jeremiah lays it out plainly, when we turn away from the Lord our God, when we blatantly disobey His commands and follow after our own ways, God removes His hand of

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing House, 2002] pg. 81)

protection and provision and allows disaster and war and starvation and disease to consume us until our enemies overwhelm us, and we become captive to them. Listen to Jeremiah 32:36. (READ Jer. 32:36)

Our disobedience to God's ways brings us into the troubles we are now seeing.

However, when we turn back to the Lord our God, when we embrace His commandments and obey His laws and diligently seek to please Him, then He tells us, just like He did Jeremiah... (READ Jeremiah 32:37-42).

You see, God desires to do good for us, to provide His best for us, and to take care of us and be our God for us. **But we must make the choice to follow Him!** It is an either/or proposal that God gives to us to make our choice. We can EITHER follow the Lord God Almighty and find His protection and provision and safety, OR we can turn away from God, do our own thing, disobey all His commands, and find ourselves with the worst that the world can give out. The choice is ours, and it is based upon our own will as to which we will turn. There's no walking on a fence with this decision. We are either for God, or we are against God. We cannot have a foot in both camps and expect to have anything good come from it. It is a full requirement, to have a "*single purpose in life: to honor God for all time,*" "*with all our heart, so that they will never turn away from Him*" (Jer. 32:39-40). You can't play the ways of the world and commit your life to the Lord God at the same time. It's one or the other.

The lesson of Romans 1 also lays this out clearly. Listen to Paul's words. (READ Rom. 1:18-25). You see, we can "*know God*" (1:21), but **if we blatantly disrespect God's laws and commands, we end up worshipping anything else except Him.** So God gives us up to our own "*hearts desires, and [we] do shameful things with each other*" (1:24). What else can we expect when we turn away from God's ways?

It's like this. "Around 2005 in Texas, a pilot left the engines running on a plane and somehow this plane engaged itself. It was without a pilot and took off. It was flying on its own. It stayed in the air for over ninety minutes. Then, the inevitable happened: it ran out of gas, crashed, and was totally destroyed. [What does this mean for us?]

“For a while, you can fly on your own. For a while, you can take off and be somebody. For a while, you can act like God does not exist. For a while, you can play a little religion, but not be serious about subordinating yourself under God’s rule. And for a while, you can fly.

“I know there are atheists, and they look like they’re flying. I know, sometimes you look at evil people and you say, ‘How come they can be so evil and can fly so high?’ I know sometimes you are jealous when you look at folks who have no respect for deity and seem to be flying high. Keep watching, because sooner or later, they will run out of gas, crash, and be destroyed. When you fly your life without God in the pilot’s seat of your life, that’s what happens. That’s why the Bible says don’t be envious of the evildoers (Psalm 37). Just because they are making money and getting ahead by doing wrong, don’t get jealous of them. **One can only fly high on their own for a while, but there will come a point where they will run out of gas and will discover in an abrupt way there is a God who is Lord over the universe.**”²

But God, in His love for us, provides us with a different way - a way to abundant life with safety and security and protection and provision. It is in following the teachings of Jesus Christ, by submitting ourselves under the control of the Holy Spirit of the Lord, to obey what He tells us. But we see in our Gospel lesson for today that from the very beginning of God bringing this plan of Salvation to our world, that there were some who desired to destroy it. Listen carefully to Matthew 2:16-23 (READ Matthew 2:16-23).

God had set into motion the fulfillment of His promise of a Messiah to come and set the people of the world free from the wages of sin (Death). Mary had consented to allow God to use her to bring the Savior into the world. The Holy Spirit implanted God’s DNA into her womb so that the Son of God would come to us as one of us. Joseph had humbled himself to become Mary’s husband, enduring ridicule and scorn, so that Mary might be protected and given the assistance and protection she needed to give birth to the Messiah Child. Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that ordered each person to

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 94, #264)

return to the town of their origin in order to register for a tax. So Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 1:18-2:1a, Luke 2:1-7). And people came to see Jesus - from the lowest shepherd to the most prominent and highly educated Magi.

However, King Herod was threatened by the thought that another person would supplant him as king of Judea, so he had hatched a plan to destroy God's Promised One. The plan involved the Wise Men who had come from the eastern lands in search of the "*baby born to be the king of the Jews.*" "*We have seen his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him*" (Matt. 2:2), they had told the king.

Herod told them he wanted them to relay this baby's whereabouts so that he could "*go and worship Him,*" (Matt. 2: 8) too, but secretly planned to send his army to kill Jesus. Herod thought that since he was the king of Judea he could destroy God's Promised Messiah. Herod thought that he had the power and authority to stop God from fulfilling His plan of Salvation for the world.

"Herod the Great, as he was called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed all opposition to his rule, with the help of Roman forces ... He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb, and his building projects (including the temple, begun in 20 B.C) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper (unlawfully keeping his position through the use of force). In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, Herod turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy, killed close associates, his wife Mariamne, and at least two of his sons."³

Herod was flying high under his own strength and wisdom and power, but without the Lord guiding him, he was already in freefall to the point of his imminent death. **This was his last ditch effort to thwart the plans of Almighty God and maintain his legacy as king of Judea.** When the

³ (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaeblein, ed. [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984] Vol. 8, p. 84)

Wise Men did not return back to him with the location of the new-born baby after a day or two, his rage at being deceived by the Wise Men brought a terrible revenge for their “insolence.” The barbarous murder of the innocent baby boys of Bethlehem was the result. If Herod could not kill just this “new King” by himself, he resorted in killing every baby two-years-old and younger in and around Bethlehem in a dastardly attempt to wipe out the prophecy of the new king.

You see, Bethlehem is only 5 miles from Jerusalem, and it would not have taken someone on a camel long to reach the town. And being such a small town, it would not have taken the Wise Men long to explore every avenue and byway and house in search of the baby that the star had told them about. This was not the night that Jesus was born, mind you, as most movies and stories tell about Jesus’ birth, but was somewhere between six and twenty months after His birth.

Mary and Joseph were established in a house there in Bethlehem, and it was from there that they went to Jerusalem for Jesus’ circumcision and naming. It would have been from there that they went to Jerusalem again for Mary’s purification rite after the thirty-three day’s unclean standard had passed. Joseph was a craftsman, so he probably earned money doing work around the village. He may have even built the house they were living in.

However, Herod was intent upon destroying the Promised Messiah, the King of the Jews, so he sent his army to finish his plan of the illumination of the Messiah.

But folks, you cannot stop the work of the Lord! Herod wanted to, had the power and authority given to him by the Romans to try, but God was in control of the situation. Herod was living the high life of luxury as the king, but since he did not have God’s interest in his heart, he decided to go his own way and rule how he decided was appropriate. “Furious at being outwitted by the Wise Men, he raged against the Lord and His Anointed One (Psalm 2:2). Yet this was no narrow escape. The One enthroned in heaven laughs and scoffs at the Herods of this world (Psalm 2:4).” (EBC, pg. 94)

You see, while Herod was plotting his elimination of the Messiah, God was at work delivering Joseph, Mary and Jesus from the swords of Herod’s army. God had already given Joseph instructions to

take his wife and Son out of the jurisdiction of Herod and to go to Egypt, where there was no concern about the displacement of a king through a prophecy. Joseph's obedience to the instructions of God's angel kept them safe until after Herod died. God was not going to let a puny human king stop Him from bringing the plan of Salvation into the world. No matter how angry or jealous Herod got, it would never be enough to stop God from fulfilling His plan of giving us the way to eternal life through His Son.

Psalm 2:11-12 gives us this warning, even for today. *“Now listen to this warning, you kings; learn this lesson, you rulers of the world; Serve the Lord with fear; tremble and bow down to Him; or else His anger will be quickly aroused, and you will suddenly die. Happy are all who go to Him for protection.”* It's God's warning about rejecting Him and living without Him in us.

Joseph was intent upon listening to the Lord God Almighty, and through his obedience to God's instructions, brought Mary and Jesus back into Israel. Upon the death of Herod, they returned to land of Israel, but rather than living in Judea, overseen by the ruthless son of Herod, Archelaus, he went to Galilee, even returning to the town of Nazareth in which to raise Jesus so that He could complete His work as the Savior.

Rather than making his own decisions and trusting in his own guidance, Joseph trusted in the guidance of the Lord God. This was God's doing from the beginning, so far be it for Joseph to trust in his own wisdom and make his own choices. He relied upon the help of the Lord to guide him in caring for Mary and Jesus. **He chose to follow the Lord's direction in his life** and listened carefully to where the Lord was instructing him to go. Contrary to Herod, Joseph was trusting the Lord God to lead Him.

“Not long before his death, Henri Nouwen wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*. He writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists, called the Flying Roudellas.

“They told Nouwen there's a special relationship between flyer and catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches. As the flyer swings high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when she must let go. She arcs out into the air. Her job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck her from the air.

“One of the Flying Roudellas told Nouwen, ‘The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.’ The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch her, but she must wait.”⁴ If the flyer tries to make the connection with the catcher all on her own, the catch is usually a failure, for the catcher cannot make contact with the flyer’s flailing arms. The flyer must have complete trust in the catcher for the successful transition from one trapeze to another.

How many of us knows exactly what we’re supposed to do for the Lord our God? As we first put our faith in Jesus to be our Savior, we begin to delight in the Lord’s presence with us. But the world offers us so many distractions that often we find ourselves flying without a pilot, and we begin flailing around, trying this or that as hard as we can, but failing to let the Lord Jesus Christ guide our lives. We depend upon our own wisdom, our own sense of guidance as to what is right or wrong, and it’s not long before we end up out in the middle of the air without a parachute or any hope of rescue. The harder we fight to find ourselves, the worse we get and we find ourselves in freefall, headed for destruction.

But God desires His best for us. He has already provided all that we need to find peace, and safety, and hope, and assurance, and love, and life. But these things are not found through the things of this world, but only in Jesus Christ. We can do our best at trying to control the things going on in our lives, but most often, on our own, we find ourselves outside of God’s provision and God’s law, so we end up finding the difficulties, the hardships, the sicknesses, and the deplorable things of life rather than the abundance of Life that God has for us.

And it’s not because God doesn’t love us. On the contrary, **God wants us to have great success in life, but it only comes as we trust in Jesus**, quietly waiting for His direction, and staying focused on Him catching us and directing our lives in His ways. We must choose Jesus to be the One to direct our lives. We must submit to His care and provision so that we do not fall into the schemes of the one who desires our destruction. Satan calls us to go it alone, do things our own way, get what we want, when we want it, from whomever we can get it. But Jesus calls us to follow Him so that we might have life.

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 283)

And that doesn't mean that when we choose to follow Jesus we will have a life without trials and struggles. In this world we will have struggles and tribulation, but Jesus has overcome the world in order to give us life (John 16:33). We will face hardship and difficulties. We will face tough decisions. We may find ourselves poor, or homeless, or friendless, or sought after, or oppressed and persecuted, but **when we trust in the Lord Jesus, He is able to guide us through all those hardships to provide us with real life.** It may not be like what we ever dreamed about, but it will always turn out to be the best for us.

Remember, we must quietly wait for the Lord to catch us and direct us and pilot our lives for His purpose following His ways and His laws and His guidance. It is the only way for us to find real life. We are to have a "*single purpose in life: to honor God for all time, for [our] own good and the good of [our] descendants*" (Jer. 32:39). It only takes us a few moments to look around us, to watch the nightly news, or catch an email message informing us of how our world has turned against the ways of the Lord our God. And we see the devastating result - drug addiction gone massive, wars, persecutions and great oppression, daily murders, riots, attacks against different ethnic groups, poverty, entitlements, abortions, homosexuality, political unrest, famine and starvation, sex trafficking, corruption at every level of business and government. When we turn away from the ways of God, when we even try to stop God's plan of Salvation for the world, He allows us to do our own thing, to our own demise.

But Jesus tells us, "*Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28-30). But the choice is ours! **We can either fight against God's ways, or we can accept God's ways. That choice will determine the outcome of our lives, either good or bad.** It is Jesus who makes the difference in our life, but we are ones who must make the choice to let Him be Savior and Lord. Let's pray...

Father, Thank You So Much for all the blessings You have bestowed upon us. Thank You for providing a way for us to find eternal life through faith in Jesus. Thank You for giving Jesus to us so

that we might choose to follow Him with all our heart, soul mind and strength so that our lives might be happy and we will have His peace within us. O God, there are so many distractions, so many delights that this world offers to us that draw us away from Your will and Your way. Give us the eyes to see clearly that the ways of the world only lead us to death and destruction. Help us never to try to live without You, for then we crash and burn terribly. But grant us the courage to follow Jesus, especially when things get tough and discouraging. Give us faith in Him so that we never turn away from You. This we pray in Jesus' holy and precious Name. AMEN.