

✘ **Matthew 2:13-23** ✘

IN NOMINE IESU

Before Paul was beheaded in Rome; before Peter was crucified upside down; before James was beheaded; before Thomas was sawed in two; the baby boys of Bethlehem died a martyr's death. They died in witness to the Christ. They died in service of the Lord. Blessed are they.

It makes no sense to us. Why would God let hundreds, if not thousands, of baby boys be taken from their mothers and killed by the very man whose job it was to protect them from enemies of life and limb? We understand that Jesus had to live. He had to live so that He would later be killed by different madmen. But why the holy Innocents? Why this cruelty and seeming senseless act of disgusting violence against the children?

The answer is not satisfying. It does not appease our sensibilities and reason. It was either because God allowed it or God willed it. What do you want to be said? That St. Matthew is wrong, that this was not the fulfillment of divine prophecy? That Herod acted without God's knowledge? That Herod killed those baby boys free of sovereignty? Would you rather that God not be in control of this situation? Would you rather that Herod do things without God's consent, foreknowledge, and permission?

Of course not. For it is God's hand that stays the hand of the wicked. It is He who says to the hurricane: you may go this far and no further. It is He who says to the tornado: you may destroy this much and no more. It is He who says to Satan: you may do this, and no more.

Far be it from God to loose control to Satan. As it is, he is a chained dog, only allowed to go as far as his tethered post allows and no farther? Or would you rather he be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus if it means that you get to justify God? Because that is what he wants to do.

Satan wants to sift you, to go through you so that there is nothing left of you. It is a lie to say that he is satisfied if you don't come to church or don't read your Bible or don't pray. In truth, he is not satisfied until you die, cursing God and neighbor. He will bring against you whatever it takes to ruin you, to kill you, to devour you. Thus neighbors sue neighbors and wives leave husbands, and children offer their bodies as sacrifices to the gods of sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

But that's not Satan's main tactic against you. Oh, no. You know sin is in the world; you're not surprised at the violence on T.V. or the red-light district in every city. You're not even really shocked at the wickedness of Herod. You've heard of his acts before, you know of Hitler and Stalin, you are aware of the wickedness of man. Satan's main tactic against you, O Christian, is to make you question God's motives. Why would God, who is supposed to love you beyond measure, let this or that happen to you? It makes no sense to us. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do the young die and the old stripped of their dignity, made to depend upon others to care for their failing bodies? Why do those who are supposed protect the innocent, fathers and mothers, hurt and abuse?

This life never goes right. It will never live up to the standards of sitcoms and Hallmark cards and Christmas specials. There is always lurking in the shadows the reality of sin and

death, regret and shame. The innocent always suffer at the hands of Herod. Anyone who says, "it'll all work out," unless they're speaking of the Parousia, the second coming of Christ, are wrong. It does not all work out. Babies die and mothers refuse to be comforted.

It's not fair. But then neither is the death of Jesus. It is not just. But then, neither is it just that your sins are forgiven. God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. The answer does not satisfy reason. But it does satisfy faith. And if you think you understand God, if you think you've got it all figured out, and now you can sit back and wait for your vindication, then you have committed idolatry. You are worshipping a figment of your imagination. A god created in your image who looks like you, thinks like you, and acts like you, who would do things as you would have them done. Repent.

God is incomprehensible. His ways are beyond finding out. His ways are beyond all telling. We've no right to judge Him, what He does or why He does it, His motives or reasons. He is God alone, and takes counsel from no one. What we have is what we've been given: His Word. We can go nowhere else. His Word is His self-revelation. And in the fullness of time His Word became flesh. And that baby escaped the hand of Herod. It was not Herod's plan, but God's. It was not Joseph's plan, but God's. It was not Mary's plan, but God's.

It was God's plan that those little Bethlehemite boys were released from a life of slavery to sin and shame even while the One who is free submitted Himself to slavery and shame and humility. Herod released those babies to heaven even while the One who sits in heaven came to earth, born of a woman, born under the Law, born to die for those baby boys and their mothers. His life for theirs. Their life for His.

He seemed to escape death while they seemed to die. In reality, they were given life while He was called out of Egypt to return to the land of Moses to fulfill the law of Moses; to die that they would live. And so it is with you. You are given His life even while He dies your death. You are given His crown and glory even while He takes on your sin and guilt. You are given His peace even while He succumbs to your shame. Your life for His. His life for you.

Do not weep for those baby boys. They have received their reward. They stand in the presence of the One who asked them to die young, and they are better for it. They have no pain, no regret, no heartache, no sin. And they are with their mothers. After maybe fifty years of pain, those mothers have had almost 2000 years of perfect bliss and peace with their sons. The wounds of Christ covered their sin as well.

God's love is greater than our reason. Don't try to reason it out. Don't try to solve the puzzle. Don't try and come to grips with why God allows babies to die and the wicked to prosper. Any answer you come up with will drive a wedge between you and God. Any answer that begins to satisfy your reason will choke your faith because any answer that quenches reason's lust will inevitably lead to the denial of God's love in Christ.

God did not love those little Bethlehemites any less than He loved the generation that came before or after them. Neither did He love them any more than He loved Herod. God's love is not fair. It knows no limits and keeps no record of wrongs. Do not be afraid. The same God who delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh now delivers you from the hand of sin and death, shame and guilt. Go in peace. God does all things well.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠