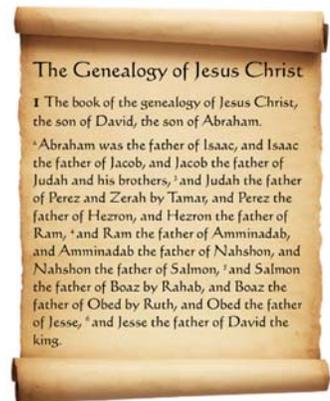




For the next several weeks we are going to be in a series called THE KING HAS COME. That sounds very, very royal. It sounds very powerful. It sounds very much this season; it focuses in on the King, King Jesus. But I'm gonna say this morning that I don't think it is just that simple. It becomes much more complicated than that because there's a whole lot more going on. And here's what I want you to hear this morning is one statement that I want to echo through your mind today: There can only be one king. And that's why what I'm about to share with you this morning is really difficult.



Matthew tells the story—I'm gonna tell it to you just really fast—he goes through this long list of a genealogy to show that this child born, Jesus, actually comes through the kingly line of David. He's born and as He's born, He's born during the time of another king, a guy by the name of Herod. After He's born these men by name of wise men, or you've probably heard him called Magi, from over in Persia, modern-day Iran, hear of His birth. They are at that time the kingmakers and they want to go see this One. Something in their background, something in their understanding made them realize there was something different about this One, and so they arrived in Jerusalem and they ask where is this one who has been born King of the Jews. And Herod, who is the king of that time, who was called by the Roman Senate the king of the Jews, is troubled, and all of Jerusalem with them is troubled.



And so they called together all sorts of religious leaders because something in their knowledge base tells them this just isn't any old king, and they pull them together and as they begin to talk they go into the prophecies of the Bible and they come back and say, “Hey, listen, this child is going to be born in Bethlehem.” The Magi, the wise men, they head out to find this child Jesus, this One who has been born King of the Jews. Herod tells them, “Hey, listen, when you find Him come back and tell me.” He sends



his own guys out looking for Him. The Magi follow this the star and when they arrived there they fall flat on their face and they worship Jesus and they bring Him gifts, and they worship flat on their face. Before they leave the message comes clearly to them through a dream don't go back to Herod like he requested; instead go a different way. A message comes to Mary and Joseph, “You need to get out and take Jesus to Egypt.” When Herod realizes he's been tricked he becomes infuriated and he determines and he orders that every male child under the age of two needs to be exterminated, and that very thing happens.

I started out by saying you need to remember: There can only be one king. Let me just say this, three kings: King Jesus, king me, king someone else. Three kings – but there can only be one king. It's happening at home. It's happening in your workplace. It's happening in your marriage. It's happening in government. It happened 2,000 years ago. There was only to be one king but others saw themselves as king, and in that lies the great tension: Whichever wins, whichever king wins – gets worship. And so the battle begins. It can be all about me. It can be all about someone else. It can be all about Jesus. But

there can only be one king and in that lies the tension: I want to rule. There is something that I want to be in charge of, but each of us in our world we find that there is someone else who wants to rule us. We find there's someone else that we're actually a bit fearful of. We know they have more power and we know that they rule over us and so we tend to go there.

And then we step into here and we hear the words THE KING HAS COME and we know in this context and even in the context of the Bible that king is King Jesus who wants to rule our life. And yet there are others who are trying to rule our lives and even we ourselves want to be in charge, and thus the great tension: Who becomes king? There can only be one king.

Matthew Chapter 2, verse 1, says this:

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,

— you've got to understand who Herod is—

~ MATTHEW 2:1a

Herod is a guy who ends up into his position because he gives in to Rome and he succumbs to the power of Rome, and as a result Rome in that Senate declares him for about 40 years to be the “King of the Jews” and he rules over Israel. In order to maintain a peaceful tension that he would have as he ruled he worked real hard to build great building projects, one of which was to enlarge and build onto the temple. He created all sorts of building projects that brought all sorts of prosperity to Israel in that time. He wasn't really a Jew but because of intermarriage he actually identified as a Jew and he ruled over the Jewish people with this tension of being subservient to Rome and yet trying to keep them happy.

He was not a nice man. In fact, he had his brother-in-law drowned in the palace pool. He killed his mother-in-law. His first wife—he has 10 eventually—his first wife as he becomes king he realizes that she's just not in alignment to be a king's wife. She just isn't going to go down the path that he would see that being, and so he has this wife and his eldest son sent into exile. He marries yet another wife not because he loved her but because he felt that she would be the perfect person to rule within his role as king. Unfortunately for her, she becomes so powerful and so popular that King Herod sees her as a threat to his rule and his kingdom.

In fact, his two sons who would be rightful heirs to his throne, he sees them as constantly wanting to plot against him, wanting to assassinate him, to take him out so they could rise to the level of king. There's one way to solve this and what this evil, wicked man does is he has his wife killed and he has his two sons killed. If you're keeping track of all of this, if he sees them as rivals to the throne they can't have them. The joke of the time was it's better to be a pig in Herod's house than to be a relative.

And so when we read these words that *wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose”*—all of a sudden that is also a huge threat to King Herod.

Now I asked myself the question: How in the world can a baby that has been born become a huge threat? These wise men arriving are coming from Persia, some 900 miles away. Experts tell us it would have taken them a year, a year-and-a-half to arrive. Maybe this baby is a year-and-a-half, at the max two years old at this point, and he's threatened by a baby who has been born King of the Jews. Who's this baby? In fact, that's the question he begins to ask. And knowing what he knows and having the background that he has, he calls in the religious people of that time to say, “Who is this?” Because evidently he realizes when these Magi show up, these wise men show up, that there is something that

WHO IS YOUR KING?

THE KING HAS COME | WEEK 1 | 12.1.2019

they know from a spiritual point of view, and so he calls in the theologians and the scholars to find out about this baby that has been born that he is so intimidated by.

In fact, it says when the wise men show up *he is troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him* [verse 3]. I mean, if you're just gonna take this and put it all into one little category: Herod is a man that is troubled, he is a guy that is intimidated, he is a guy that is very insecure, he is angry, he is hateful, he is revengeful. Now all of a sudden a group of wise men show up. Who are these wise men?

They're from Persia. They're from the east, they're from probably modern-day Iran, from a place that we read about oftentimes in the Bible, never with good connotations, Babylon. They were probably people that had once left Israel in the dispersion when they were pulled out of Israel and taken to Babylon that had never returned when they were given the opportunity to return to Israel. They were government leaders; they were also some sort of quasi-priests involved in that. These were powerful, powerful men and while they had some sort of priestly function.

As I studied them they came from Babylon with this weird mix of other religious influences and this kind of thing, but something happened where they saw a star and they followed that star. And lots of questions: What was that star? I mean, we see stars all the time and say, "It's a cool looking one." Isn't this place decorated beautifully? Just unbelievable and you saw that beautiful star over the tree out in the Café today. We have this visual of stars this time of year. People sing those songs, I was gonna sing



about but I'll try not to, "A star! A star!" And we're just, "Oh, wow, cool." And you think of following a star, looking up at the star, people like to ask the question: What are those? What was that star? What – and there's all sorts of different answers as to what that star might have been or was. All I can say as I've thought about it is it was absolutely something supernatural, something so powerful, so amazing that it was seen by these wise men who were in Babylon known as the kingmakers. And at this time Persia had deposed their king, they didn't have a king, and having seen this star something in their knowledge base, quite truthfully from the Scripture, indicated to them that there would be a king that would rise up and they would follow His star and they realized—now

whatever this star was that they saw had to be so powerful and so supernatural that it was so beyond beyond that they said, "I've got to follow that."

We see that elsewhere in the Bible in the Old Testament when God's people were in Egypt and they were under the iron thumb of the Pharaoh there. And God redeems them and releases them from that captivity and says they can go, and you'll remember that He guided them by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And so God would guide these wise men all the way to the place where Jesus was born.

And as I studied this in research this, what I came to understand is that we don't just have a couple wandering wise men who happened to be in Persia a thousand miles away when this happens. When they leave there this isn't just a few guys that head out on a camel to get there, this is an entourage with huge pomp and circumstances with, I mean, it must have looked like an army arriving there in Jerusalem looking for this King of the Jews. And this deeply troubles Herod.

But when they find out where this child is to be born they are led to Bethlehem about two and a half miles outside of Jerusalem where they find Jesus. And the text tells us that



when they come to Jesus they were going there to worship Him, and the word *worship* there means “to fall flat on their face.” That when they saw this King who had come, their response was to just totally be flattened before Him. Herod sends out his people to look for Jesus, but he sends them out with a very different mindset and a very different purpose.

As I read the last half of this text, let me read a few words to you, Chapter 2 of Matthew, verse 7:

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”

~ MATTHEW 2:7-8

Now what we learn as we read this text that was not at all his desire; he had a whole different thing in mind. So you have one group of people that go there to worship Him and they fall flat on their face. You have Herod who all he wants to do is go find him, kill him and take him out so that he can remain king.



I started out by saying these words: There are three kings but there can only be one. I talked about the king of self, the king of others, and King Jesus. And as we sit in this room today, as we enter into the Christmas season, I do believe that each one of us would admit that we struggle with the king of self—what I want, what I can get, the power I want to have. This says Herod said I want to worship Him. The wise men, they go and they do worship Him, and it causes me to say when we ask which one of the kings that's gonna be—me or you or Jesus? I think one of the first questions we have to ask ourselves is: Who am I worshipping? In other words, who am I putting first? And I can begin to look at that by the motives of my heart and what's going on, and I have to tell you this troubles me because as I look at my own life I know what drives me on a daily basis. Who am I worshipping?

I was thinking about something, when I thought about those wise men it was like how cool is it to think that when they arrived there before Jesus, baby Jesus but the King of Kings, the Lord of lords, they fall flat on their face. Can you imagine if this morning on this stage Stephen fell flat on his face? We'd have been, “Whoa! Whoa! We're not part of that kind of a church, are we? That was weird.” And maybe that's not how we want to do it in this room, but have we ever gotten on our knees before our Savior? I mean, would there ever be this moment where we would be driven to get down on our knees, to get low, to come flat on our face before God? Is the only time we can get to that kind of a position when we are totally wiped out and totally destroyed and in the darkest moment of our life? Is there any reason why it can't be today, this month, tonight in our bedroom, whichever it may be, we come before the King of Kings and say, “You are the King. I'm out. No, I'm not gonna be scared of my boss. No, I'm not gonna be scared of that powerful person in my life. No, they're not king. I'm not gonna be king. Jesus, You're gonna be King.”

I was fascinated by the words where it said this, verse 9, this was the wise men:

⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

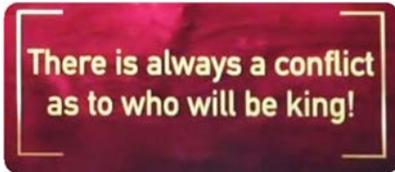
— they listened to the king, but they followed the star. At the end of their time with Jesus, it says this:

¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

~ MATTHEW 2:9 & 12

They listened to truth and they left by a different way.

When I think about how we're going to get to a place of understanding these three kings and how I'm going to decide which king to follow, I'm gonna have to decide which one to listen to. If I listen to king me, I follow my every want, my every desire, my every wish, and I'm out to make me happy and that's all that matters. And there are signals being sent to all of us constantly that basically say treat yourself, bless yourself, take really good care of yourself, because in our world the grandest thing that we have outside of Jesus is self. And we live in a world where king self rules and it is really difficult to allow King Jesus to rule. And the question here became really: Who are you listening to?



One last thing: What would change if King Jesus were to be your King? I think as I learned a little bit more about Herod and as you've learned a little bit more about Herod, this guy of all guys should have longed for a Savior, for King Jesus. As even the angel had told of Him:

“...for he will save his people from their sins.”

~ MATTHEW 1:21b

Talk about a guy who's murdered, he's killed, he's banished, he's done all sorts of very dark things. Even the way he got into his position in the first place and what he was doing by holding Israel in captivity; very, very dark, he should have wanted a Savior. He should have never been afraid of a Savior. History tells us he lived probably at the max three years after this account. He would be dead in three years. Maybe it was only one year some thought. One to three years left to live and he's afraid of a baby? But he knows that that baby is going to change things, because if we put Jesus as King in our life, all other kings have to go away because there can only be one king.



Now think of the wise men. They are kingmakers. They've been in the position before. High levels of authority where they could go to someone who was high up and strong and powerful and call him out and say, “You are king.” When they arrive where the star leads them to, I mean, they thought that they were going to find the King in Jerusalem. They thought they were going to find the King in Herod's palace, where else? But to be born of an existing king in the royal line they end up as this text says in a

house, because it's probably a year and a half after Jesus was born, and there what they find is a baby. It's not what they expected but because God through supernatural form had led them to that place and because they realized Jesus was the King they fell down and worshiped Him.

We paint pictures, and we say it all the time, “Well, if God was—,” “If God is loving—,” “If God is caring—,” “If God is powerful—,” why doesn't He do this for me? Why doesn't He make this happen for me—because obviously I'm king—God should be somehow subservient to me and then God would do this. And we try to paint God as we want Him to be, and they arrive and they find God the King who has come to be a little baby. But rather than denying Him, as Herod did because they wanted to be king, they fell and they worshipped Him as King.

Here's the message: The King has come. There can only be one king.



We can deny it as Herod did and he dies a year, two years later in his sin, in his misery, in his troubled-ness, in his discouragement, in his fearfulness, or we can do like the Magi who, I don't think they came from this godly background, but these Magi came seeking, following the star, and when they saw the King they responded.

This is a month of response to the fact that the King has come. We invite you to take it in this month, take a deep breath and ask: Which king is on the throne in my life? Self, someone else I'm fearful of, or Jesus? Let's pray.



We invite you, Jesus, into our lives. I would pray for those in this room who have been resisting You that this would be the month that they would put their trust in You.

As we come to You to worship You, we have to lay down the things that matter most to us, the things that others are requiring of us, and call you King.

If you have never put your trust in Jesus, like we said those wise men found that He was not what they expected, but today we come before Him and just, He says just to ask Him into our lives, put our trust in Him, follow Him and transform your life. That's why, it's why we each come here every week.

If you've never done that, then right now is time to let go, stop being king of your life, it's not working well for you. It didn't work well for Herod. Let Jesus be King of your life. Just say in your heart and your mind right now: “Jesus, forgive me of my sins. I know You came to love me and I want to follow You and worship You.” He'll transform your life. He's changed mine. He's changed the people on this stage. He's changed so many in this room. There's nothing more important. It would be a great way to start out this Christmas season than by letting Him be King of your life.



Lord God, for each person in this room feeling drawn by that right now, I pray that they would reach out and let You be King, they would bow down before You low and say, “You are my King.”

We love You. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

WHO IS YOUR KING?

THE KING HAS COME | WEEK 1 | 12.1.2019

We know from looking at our nativity scenes, which the wise men were probably never there at the nativity as we know it, but that's okay, that they brought gifts and they poured them out before Jesus. You see, when we realize that everything we have is His, there's nothing too much than what we could give to Him. And so we give generously right now and back to Him because we love Him, because He is our King, because He is first our life.

Being king of our own lives money [*he laughs*] is pretty much at the center of that, and the more we can grab the more we feel like we're kings. I visited that fortress that King Herod built, Masada. It looked like a bunch of dirt to me on top of a mountain, but he built it up. And for many of us we're building up lots and lots of wealth and riches to satisfy ourselves and someday it'll be nothing. We have an opportunity right now to say I'm not king, He provides, I'll give it to the King. So as you give just be thinking about that, giving back to the King, King Jesus, letting Him be King of your life. I forgot, pass the buckets, as we now give our gifts back to the Lord.



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