

Putting Christ Back Into Christian

Matthew 2:1-12

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-12-11

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Introduction

Last week we saw the importance of putting the Father back into (not just Christmas, but also back into) every moment of our lives. The Father sent Christ into the world with a mission and purpose, and we saw that we have also been sent with a mission and purpose. Now, we are not perfect, so we may not be able to say with Jesus that we have finished the work that the Father has given us to do. But we should be more and more driven by the Father's mission for our lives.

Now, today you will notice that I have not titled the sermon, "Putting Christ Back Into Christmas," but "Putting Christ Back Into Christian." And the reason is that if Christ is in our Christian lives every moment, He will automatically be in Christmas. We don't insert Christ into a season. He must be the Lord of our lives, the focus of our lives, the foundation of our lives, and the source of all that we do. And if He is, we will receive the same reaction that Jesus did. He was warmly received by some and hotly reacted against by others.

The passage that I read shows a bunch of people being troubled by Jesus. Verse 3 says, "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." If the Herods of this world are not troubled by at least some of your walk and talk, there is likely something wrong. This past week I read a blog post titled, "Put Herod Back Into Christmas." It was very clever. The point of the article is that if Christians are so seeker-sensitive and so warm and fuzzy that even the Herods of this world like them, they do not represent Jesus and are not living out the life of Jesus very well. There is always backlash from some and transformation of others when Christ is present. Or as Paul worded it, we are either a savor of life unto life or death unto death. Anyway, the blog said,

Herod recognizes something about Jesus that in our sentiment we fail to see: that the birth of this child is a threat to his kingdom, a threat to that kind of domination and rule. Jesus challenges the very power structures of this evil age. Herod has all the male infants in Bethlehem murdered. Not so cozy. This is the Jesus who entered the bloody history of Israel, and the human race.

When Christ was put into Hanukkah it troubled Herod and all Jerusalem, and verse 10 says that it brought exceedingly great joy to the wise men. And when Christ is put back into the Christian life, we ought not to be surprised

to see similar reactions to us.

I. Trouble Happens When Christ Comes Into Our Lives

A. True Christianity demands more than belief in a historical Jesus (2:2,7,8)

So point number one says that true Christianity demands more than a belief in a historical Jesus. Josephus tells us that Herod believed that a Messiah would come. And this passage tells us that Herod believed that the Messiah had been born. He clearly believed in a real historical Jesus. In fact, he knew that Jesus was the king of the Jews. Yet he was not saved.

Verse 2 says that the wise men came, “saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’” Look at Herod’s response in verses 7-8. “Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. [Notice that he believes their message about the supernatural star.] And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘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.’” Of course, he had no intention of really worshipping Jesus, but he believed all that they told him about the historical existence of Jesus.

I take no great comfort in statistics that show that most Americans believe in the historical Jesus. The antichrist believes in the historical Jesus. Herod believed in the historical Jesus. James tells us that the demons believe and tremble. True Christianity demands more than a historical Jesus. And I am convinced that Christmas would be a far less popular festival today if its real significance were understood. Matthew 2 is not about a feel-good Christmas. It is about the Creator of all who is about to turn the world upside down. Most Christmas celebraters today would likely be troubled if they lived in Jerusalem when the conflict between Jesus and the state meant that danger lurked around the corner. If it came to a contest between pleasing Herod and pleasing Jesus, pleasing Herod would win out with most so-called Christians. This is why I say that the issue is not really about putting Christ back into Christmas - it is about putting the real Jesus back into Christian. Christians don't think Biblically when it comes to politics, counseling, education, and many other areas of life. It is time that they submitted to the real Christ and quit worshipping a counterfeit.

B. True Christianity demands more than correct theology (2:4-6)

Second, true Christianity demands more than correct theology. Look at verses 4-6.

Matthew 2:4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. Matthew 2:5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: Matthew 2:6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

Here were religious leaders who knew their theology of the Incarnation quite well. In fact, they knew a whole lot more about the significance of Hanukkah than most Christmas celebraters do today. From the time of the first Festival of Dedication under Moses, Hanukkah had been celebrated on Chislev 25 - equivalent to our December 25. That's the background of Christmas. It's a Jewish holiday that Jesus celebrated in the Gospel of John. And those who celebrated it were anticipating the time when the temple's significance would be ended by the coming of the Messiah. They knew that. And now that the Messiah has come, these priests and teachers of the law are not so sure that this is a comfortable fact. Replacing the temple means that their jobs are on the line. So even though they celebrated the proto-Christmas, what is now called Hanukkah, there was something clearly missing. They wanted the form of Christianity (the Hanukkah) but not the true Christ of Christianity.

C. True Christianity demands more than a belief in the supernatural (2:7)

Point C shows that even if we acknowledge the supernatural, we still might be missing something, because Herod believed in the supernatural. Those priests who were checking which city the Messiah was prophesied to be born in must have believed in supernatural revelation or predictive prophecy. And Herod seemed to believe in it as well. Furthermore, verse 7 indicates that Herod believed in the appearance of the Shekinah Glory – this supernatural, moving star. It says, "Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared." That information would provide him the time frame within which Christ had to have been born. That's why he killed all babies under the age of two. So Herod had no problem believing in the supernatural. Yet he wasn't saved.

And just as a point of interest, you have probably heard discussions of astronomy trying to date the birth of Christ. Astronomy will never be able to explain this phenomena here for the simple reason that this was not a comet

that appeared. Whatever it was that appeared, it disappeared for awhile, and then reappeared in verses 9-10. Furthermore, verse 9 says that the star travelled – “it went before them.” You can’t say that of a comet. And then verse 9 says, “it came and stood over where the young Child was.” If it was a comet, it wouldn’t have stood still over anything, and any traveling it did wouldn’t be able to be followed. You try to follow a comet sometime and you will quickly find that you can neither follow it nor pin point which house it is over. A comet is too far away to provide any meaningful guidance. And the same is true of any star. Since when does a star tell you which house to go to?

You see, the Greek word for star simply refers to any light in the sky, and it can be used to describe meteors, planets, stars, or in this case, a previously unseen light. I believe it is the light prophesied in the Old Testament. I believe it was the light of God’s Shekinah Glory, and that it was close enough to the earth to be able to guide the wise men and to be able to point to a specific house. I think it was close to the house; standing right over the house. It was a supernatural star or light. So Herod missed the spirit of Christmas even though he believed a lot about Christmas. And the question is, if he believed Jesus was the Messiah, and if he took the Scriptures seriously, and if he even took the supernatural seriously, why would he oppose Christ? He wasn’t a modern liberal.

Take a look at verse 2. This verse tells us that the wise men were saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled.”

D. True Christianity stands in opposition to rebels (2:2 with Numb. 24:17-19)

What was there about this bit of theology that troubled Herod? Josephus tells us that he knew the Scriptures. And I am convinced that he at least had Numbers 24 in mind, a passage that prophesies that the Messiah would come in connection with a star, and would destroy Edom and Moab at the same time that Jerusalem would be destroyed. And of course, Edom and Moab were wiped off the face of the map in the war against Jerusalem in AD 70. Well, Herod was an Idumean, and Idumeans were Edomites, and he was in charge of the territories that were prophesied to be destroyed by this coming Messiah. So it was not a happy message for Herod. That prophecy indicated that the coming Messiah would be in opposition to his reign. No wonder he was troubled.

So this means that the passage that the Wise Men were rejoicing over was a passage that spoke of nothing but judgment on him if he refused to submit to the spiritual reign of Messiah. So he had a choice: cast his crown at the feet of Jesus or take out Jesus. This Jesus threatened to ruin his plans. Rather than staying a historical person, and rather than staying safely in a theology book, and rather than staying as a safe piece of supernatural curiosity, Jesus was making demands upon him; demands that Herod didn't want to accede to.

And I should point out yet another factor that may have troubled Herod. The Jews didn't like Herod, and he had tried to do everything he could to buy their favor. He had spent billions of dollars of tax money turning Ezra's temple into the most fabulous temple the world had ever seen. This was his pride and joy. Even the pagans said that it was one of the wonders of the world. We will be examining the prophecy of the destruction of that temple when we get back into the book of Revelation. It is called Herod's temple to this day. And from Josephus it appears that Herod built this temple in the hopes of winning Jewish favor and winning God's favor. But the passages that prophesied the coming of this Messiah also prophesied that the Messiah would destroy the temple. So that is yet another reason why this Messiah was a threat to Herod.

God cannot be bought with temples, with worship, with money, with buildings, or with pageantry. God does not care about Christmasses if we fail to rejoice at the very thing that brought trouble to Jerusalem. The trouble with Christmas is that it brought more than the birth of a Savior. It brought the birth of a judge, a king, and a Man who was also very God of very God. It brought a Messiah who would continue making demands upon His people.

And so Herod and all Jerusalem with him stand as a symbol of how all humans react until they are regenerated. They might be religious, but they do not find joy in Jesus and in His commandments. They might visit a place of worship, but they do not commune daily with the Lord of that temple. They might read Scripture, but they do not find their hearts burning within them as those Scriptures speak to them of the loveliness of the Messiah. I think this passage is a call for the modern church to put the real Christ back into Christian. Too many have a Christ of their own making because they don't want trouble.

II. Joy, Meaning, & Power are experienced When Christ Comes Into Our Lives

Let's take a look at the joy that this first Christmas brought to the wise men. Verse 10 says, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." Though these wise men obviously had a prestigious position, their focus was not on position, but on the One who gave them their position – the Son of God. Though they were wealthy, their chief object of joy was not the gift of wealth, but the Giver of wealth. Though they were obviously religious, their joy was not in religion but in Jesus, the heart of our religion. There was nothing like knowing that Jesus was their personal King to cause them excitement. And so this brings us to the second main point – the joy, meaning, and power that are experienced when Christ comes into our lives.

A. It comes to those who trust Jesus

My King (vv. 2,11)

First, it comes to those who trust Jesus. What does it mean to trust Jesus? We've already seen that it doesn't simply mean that you believe in a historical Jesus. It's more than simply believing facts from the Bible. It's even more than believing in the Supernatural, as Herod did. True faith is a heart trust and unconditional surrender. Herod didn't have that.

Herod knew that Jesus was King, but he sought to unseat Jesus from His rightful role. Believing in Jesus was one thing, but being ruled by Jesus was quite another. We might think that we would never do what Herod did to Bethlehem, but let me remind you that every time you willfully sin you are saying, "We will not have this Man to rule over us!" Christians can be just as hypocritical as Herod was. While everyone is watching us, verse 8 can be on our lips: "And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, '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.'" He gave every outward appearance of submitting to King Jesus, but he wanted to murder Him instead.

Lord willing, in two weeks I will look at the meaning of the three gifts given by the wise men. But today I will just mention that they gave sacrificially to Christ. They travelled far to give Christ those gifts. They sacrificed their energies, their money, and their time. All of that indicates that their hearts were in submission to their King. And I would encourage you to make some sacrifices for the Lord, not just at a Christmas season, but every day of your life. There are ways you can give sacrificial gifts every day to the Lord. In

fact, the harder the service to others might be, the greater the gift of love that is to Jesus. Jesus is not just a king way out there. He is a King who says, “inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me.” He is a King who has entered into personal relationship with you. But the first thing it means to put Christ back into Christian is to submit to His kingship. It is an unconditional surrender.

My Christ (v. 4 with 2,9)

In verse 4 we find that the wise men had described this king as the Christ, which in Hebrew is the Messiah. He was the one who was anointed not only as King, but anointed as priest. As priest He provides atonement for our sins. But if we do not recognize our sins or repent of our sins, we fail to treat Him as fully Christ - as fully Savior. C. John Miller wrote a book called, *Repentance & Twentieth Century Man*. In that book he points out that repentance must be a daily part of every Christian. If the true Christ is in our Christianity, then His Priestly washing will be in our Christianity every day. We will recognize our sins more and more and we will recognize our need of Him as Christ more and more.

My Shepherd (v. 6,12)

Verse 6 prophesied that this King would “shepherd My people Israel.” So if Christ is in what it means to be Christian, it means that we are sheep and He is the shepherd. We daily hang out with the Shepherd. We are daily guided by Him, fed by Him, protected by Him. If Christ is in our lives, there must be shepherding going on. The question is, "Is there shepherding?"

In terms of protection, these converts to Christianity were guided and protected by Jesus as well. In verse 12 it says, “Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.” Jesus was not just a shepherd in a general way. He was their Shepherd, and as Shepherd God guided them and protected them. That is a personal relationship of Shepherd. Is He your personal Shepherd? Do you follow where he tells you to go? That's a part of what it means to put Christ back into Christian.

My God (v. 2,11a)

Next, He was also their God. Only God is worthy of worship, yet it is clear several times in this passage that the purpose of the wise men was to worship Christ. He was their God. Verse 2 says that they came to worship him and verse 11 says, “they fell down and worshipped Him.” Jesus’ Deity

meant something to them personally. They recognized that the very one who was being held in Mary's arms was upholding Mary and all things by the Word of His power. Otherwise it would have been blasphemy to worship Him. Liberals often believe that Jesus was a wise philosopher, or a good man, but they deny that He is very God of very God. Well, they aren't truly Christians. Unless Jesus was fully God and fully man, He could not save.

B. Comes to those who worship, love, and serve Him

And because Jesus was fully God, the last point was also true of these wise men. They had come to worship, love, and serve Him. And that is where true joy in the Christian life is found – in worshipping, loving, and serving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Is that what Christmas means to you?

James Hewett tells the story of a Christmas play being put on by a group of children. To show the radiance of the newborn Jesus they put a light bulb into the manger rather than a baby. At one point in the play, all the other lights were supposed to be turned off to focus attention on the newborn babe. The boy who controlled the lights got confused and all the lights went out, including the one in the manger. It was a tense moment, broken when one of the Shepherds said in a loud stage whisper: “Hey! You switched off Jesus!”

We may not be trying to switch off Jesus as obviously as Herod and Jerusalem was, but if you ignore Jesus throughout the day, you have switched off Jesus. If you ignore facets of His work, you have switched off Jesus. And I would encourage you to learn how to develop a constant awareness of His presence in your life. If the only times that you worship Him are at Christmas and on Sundays, you have switched off Jesus at least sometimes. Even if you are not grateful to Him for what you presently have and can only grumble over what you do not have, you have switched off Jesus, or at least dimmed the lights.

Conclusion

It is true that if Christ is in your life, you will receive opposition from the world. You are going to be in trouble. And the tendency is to back off and to get troubled by Biblical truth as well. The world will castigate you if you believe the Bible's politically incorrect message about Jesus. But Jesus said, whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

This Christmas, make it your goal to no longer be troubled over anything that Jesus does and to even find joy in the very things that trouble and bother the world. Let's not put a sentimental Christ back into Christmas so that Herod will like us. Let's submit to the real Christ who claims all that we have and are, and who promises us all the resources we need by His grace. Amen.