

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 2: “ 9 When [the Wise Men] heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. 13 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." 14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 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." 16 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 & under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "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."”

And from the passage in Jeremiah from which Matthew quoted...

Jeremiah 31:15 “Thus says Jehovah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more." 16 Thus says Jehovah: "Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says Jehovah, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy.”

"Fifty Million Dead: Who is to Blame"

This is perhaps the easiest and the most difficult sermon for me to prepare each and every year. Here at Church of the King we make a point of focusing on the particular sin of abortion in our nation as we approach the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion-on-demand. It is a subject that I know well and yet I always wonder what to say this year!

Linda and I were young Christians in the 1970's and I was not even saved in 1973, when Roe was decided. We spent a great deal of time as young Christians studying the work of Dr. Francis Schaeffer and their ministry at L'Bri in Switzerland.

- When they challenged a sleeping Church to engage in the battle to stop abortion-on-demand it had a great impact on our lives, leading us here to Sacramento to be involved on the political front.
- So after thirty years I know the issue well but always struggle with the proper way to remind us of the gravity of the situation: 50 million dead!

None other than Joseph Stalin said: “one death is a tragedy but a million deaths is just a statistic.”

For example, we tend to have great empathy for those mothers who lost their babies to Herod's cruelty...

But when we read the account of God destroying all of mankind in the flood it is more difficult to think about the suffering that took place or the individual lives that were lost.

Granted one was the result of wicked actions by a wicked King and the other was the righteous judgment of God, but the point is that we can relate to a small scale more easily and struggle to relate to the larger scale.

We have seen this in our own nation this past week: Six lives were lost to the actions of a wicked gunman in Tucson and the entire nation has been fixated on the loss of these lives. And yet yesterday, something approaching five thousand unborn babies were ripped from the security and safety of their mother's wombs by the sin of abortion..

- And accept for a few hundred sidewalk counselors out in front of all those abortion chambers, who cried or even took note?

Allow me to illustrate this another way with our own children [*have them stand*] If one –third of them were in an accident would Sacramento notice? So the question in my sermon title is both natural and appropriate to ask... Who is to blame?

- Certainly the abortionist
- Perhaps the women
- What about the father or extended family?
- What about the judges & elected officials who made it legal?
- However, if we know our Bibles well, it is God's people, the Church, who bear the ultimate responsibility

Some will say that the Church has spoken out and especially those of us here at Church of the King because we have it in our membership covenant! This is good and we saw faithful voices even when Israel was committing great sins, but God still held His covenant people and their leaders responsible.

- When Roe v. Wade was passed there was almost no visible opposition from the Church outside of some in the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestant voices of opposition have been raised in recent years, but I suspect our Lord is not pleased with the fact that the rate of abortion is not much different in many churches than the rate we see in the world. We are facing a grave situation today and we need to understand that we will bear the responsibility as God's Covenant people. We learn this from the Scriptural examples that God has given us if we have ears to hear and eyes to see. We see this in the account of the wickedness of King Herod that we remember each year as part of the Christmas account...

- Remember that word of the coming Messiah troubled King Herod and ALL of Jerusalem with him: And they tried to kill Jesus.
- King Herod dies in short order and in seventy years all of Jerusalem would be destroyed.
- And certainly many parents around Bethlehem suffered that night

Jesus had His strongest words of condemnation for the Pharisees and Sadducees, but He also cried over all of Jerusalem as He made His triumphal entry into that city. We see this clearly in the Old Testament with the reign of King Manasseh, the King held responsible for bringing the practice of child sacrifice to Jerusalem. They were more open with what they were doing, but the reasons were the same... [explain & contrast] In II Chronicles we read that King Manasseh, "led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Jehovah destroyed before the people of Israel."

King Manasseh was judged individually captured and led off to Babylon where he repented and was restored, which gives us great hope!

- There is NO sin beyond the reach of God's grace!

However, we must remember that the nation was held responsible as well:

Many years later when it came time for the judgment of Judah, we read in II Kings 23:26 these chilling words:

“Still Jehovah did not turn from the burning of His great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him.”

➤ And when the armies of Babylon marched against King Jehoiakim we read in II Kings 24:3:

“2 And the Lord sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of Jehovah which He had spoken by His servants the prophets. 3 Surely at the commandment of Jehovah this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which Jehovah would not pardon.”

➤ So we see that the Lord judges both the leaders and the people: Both are under the blessings and curses of the Covenant [*Deuteronomy chapters 27 & 28 can be your homework.*]

We should also note how rapidly God’s people can move from faithfulness to such depravity... From the golden age of King Solomon to the Babylonian exile was less than four hundred years...

➤ About the time that has elapsed since the Mayflower Compact!

So is all blackness & despair? Has the sin of abortion blotted out the hope of the Gospel in America?

➤ God forbid!

As we saw with the life of King Manasseh himself there is always a way back and I want to suggest this morning that those who desire to be faithful in an unfaithful age should focus on three important things:

First we are to help those in need!

Proverbs 24 tells us at verse ten: “If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small. 11 Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. 12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it?

➤ We are not to hide our heads in the sand and we are not to fear being involved.

We see the application of these verses in the life of Jesus as He ministered to the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, and in His famous parable about the Good Samaritan.

This is why we support as a church the ministries that not only confront the sin of abortion in the public square but those who give women a loving alternative and help those in need. This should extend to our individual lives as well: God will bring those in need across your path and there are always opportunities to serve.

➤ AGAIN, our covenant children will learn by our example.

In addition to providing practical help, **we must never fear to preach the Gospel!**

➤ This presentation of the Gospel includes the praying of the imprecatory Psalms as we are doing this week as a congregation.

Our proper response to grave sin is to cry out for God’s justice...

➤ Remembering it is God’s responsibility to determine how that justice will be carried out NOT ours.

➤ When we understand this and truly believe that God does all things well, then we can have peace in the midst of such grave sin.

This is what we see in the life of Daniel and the other faithful Saints who endured the Babylonian captivity. They could not bring themselves to sing the songs of Zion while Jerusalem lay in ruins but they knew that God would ultimately judge these wicked people, with even more wicked people who would enjoy killing even their own small babies.

- We struggle at times to understand how God works out His justice as Asaph did in Psalm 73 when he could not understand the prosperity of the wicked
- Or as the Prophet Habakkuk did when God explained that He planned to use the Babylonians to judge His people.

When we realize all of this we begin to see that the Imprecatory prayers not only call down God's judgment but also give us peace as we remember that He is in control. As we just studied in the Book of Acts, the early Church had two fierce enemies in Saul of Tarsus and King Herod:

- Both were persecuting and even killing the Saints so I am sure some of the very imprecatory prayers we are praying today were lifted up against both men.

In both cases God answered those prayers by slaying the wicked... Saul fell before the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and King Herod fell before lowly worms. BOTH ceased to be enemies of God's Church: One went to hell & the other went on to serve the King of Kings.

If you me ask why I must answer as the Apostle Paul does at the end of Romans chapter eleven: "33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

And finally in addition to offering help to those in need & faithfully preaching the Gospel, the Bible gives us instructions about how we are to live when we face a time of great trouble.

In our study of Acts we have learned how the community of believers came together with all things in common and met each other's needs. The Prophet Jeremiah gave those sent off to captivity in Babylon some basic commands on how they were to live in the new place God had put them...

Jeremiah 29:4 "Thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

- Build houses and dwell in them;
- Plant gardens and eat their fruit. --
- Take wives & beget sons & daughters;
- And take wives for your sons & give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters--that you may be increased there & not diminished. [and here is the really tough ones for us]
- "And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive,
- And pray to Jehovah for it; for in its peace you will have peace."

The Prophet goes on to show that this WAS God's plan and that they were NOT to doubt that it was a good plan:

8 "For thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says Jehovah. 10 For thus says Jehovah:

After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me

with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says Jehovah, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says Jehovah, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.”

The bottom-line is that we are to trust that God knows what He is doing... That sounds so simple, and yet since the time that Eve questioned God’s wisdom in the garden we have all fallen so short in that regard!

And the way we demonstrate that trust is to be faithful:

- Faithful in helping those in need
- Faithful in preaching the Gospel
- And faithfully living peaceful and productive lives.

If we do these simple things we will know and experience the great promise we read this week in Proverbs 12:28: “In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.”

- In a moment we will pray that our nation turn from the sin of abortion as we lift up the Great Prayer
- And we will be commissioned with the reading and singing of Psalm 2, again calling our nation, all the other nations to repentance:

As we do both we must remember that this promise of life from Proverbs applies to nations as well as individuals:

- The Psalmist declares that God has given the nations of the earth to His Son: 8 “Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.”
- Then we see that the Son does the same with them as He did with Saul of Tarsus and King Herod:

“9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' ”

Some nations will be utterly destroyed and others converted, both dashed to pieces from a human perspective!

- Then the Psalmist calls on the nations to choose wisely:

10 “Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling.” 12 “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

- Such is our prayer this morning for America...

Such should also be our prayer for each and every one of us here at Church of the King as well!

- May we be those who trust only in the Lord our helper!

Communion Meditation: I Samuel 28:

“20 Then immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. 22 Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." 23 But he refused and said, "I will not eat."

So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the

ground and sat on the bed. 24 Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. 25 So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.”