

KNOW WHOSE YOU ARE!

Matthew 2:13-23

Prayer...

I was reading up on this passage

and I found myself fascinated with Herod's paranoia.

He's so paranoid!

And it got me wondering,

how do you get *that* paranoid?

I don't imagine you wake up feeling that way;

there has to be the slow fade into that.

As I sat with that question

I came to realize that the path leading towards paranoia

is found in **the need to control**.

And iff we allow that paranoia to go unchecked,

and we live in it too long,

we convince ourselves that controlling our lives,

or the people and situations around us,

is actually possible;

we convince ourselves that we are

god over these situations.

All this usually involves needing to be one more step ahead.

We need to think further than everyone else.

We need to plan in more detail —

anything that will help us stay in control.

Don't get me wrong,

I don't mean to suggest that planning ahead is bad.

There's a difference between

staying on top of our responsibilities

and trying to be in control.

Staying on top of *responsibilities*

usually involves a communal reality;

we are responsible towards others

(whether at work or family members

or community groups) - there are people who

rely on us to fulfill the tasks

we've agreed to fulfill.

But *controlling* is about

manipulating the circumstances

so they tip in our favour;

it always involves us being on top

even at the expense of someone else.

My question for us this morning is,

***what does paranoia really do to us if it goes on unchecked,
and how can we combat it in our lives?***

I'd like to suggest

that we combat paranoia (and the need to control)

by knowing Whose you are,

and, therefore, who you're called to be.

If we allow paranoia to go unchecked,

we actually risk losing all sense of who we are

in the pursuit of controlling everything.

I can't think of a better case study to look at

that the contrast between Herod the Great (living with paranoia)

and Jesus the Messiah (knowing Who He was to God)

HEROD BACKGROUND (PARANOIA)

So who was Herod the Great?

Herod the Great was a semi-Jewish royal figure

who was appointed by Rome to rule over Judea.

He was extremely wealthy,

extremely corrupt,

and extremely paranoid.

Herod assassinated his wife and her two sons,
his brother-in-law, his grandfather-in-law and his mother-in-law,
and all because he suspected them of treason.

Now, why was he so paranoid?

Overall, he was rather successful in his reign
over Judaea and made friends with powerful people.

He encountered a lot of conflict
and uprisings from Jewish gorilla groups
who didn't like a semi-Jewish ruler over them
who was (in their eyes) a puppet of the pagan Romans.

But he handled himself and maintained control.

He was at the top
and when humans get that level of fame and attention,
we long to hang onto it.

Herod tried with all his might
to hang onto what he had
(tried to control his own fate).

He did not want to lose any of it.

What did his paranoia do to him?

As paranoia often does,

it caused him to see everything as a threat.

Everything had the potential of taking away

his fame, prestige, power, wealth, *control*.

N.T. Wright comments,

“Herod the Great, who thought nothing of killing members of his own family, including his own beloved wife, when he suspected them of scheming against him, and who gave orders when dying that the leading citizens of Jericho should be slaughtered so that people would be weeping at his funeral - this Herod would not bat an eyelid at the thought of killing lots of little babies in case one of them should be regarded as a royal pretender.”¹

When we get to this part of the Nativity narrative

we can sometimes think it's a bit of a jump that Herod makes.

He hears of a new baby King being born

so his natural conclusion is to kill all the baby boys?

But within the realm of paranoia

¹ Wright, N.T. *Matthew for Everyone*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 14.

and the deep need to *control*,

it's not a stretch at all

because Herod is incapable of seeing this baby

as anything else but a threat to his control.

A new King means he'll be replaced.

Being replaced means he loses his fame, power, prestige.

He won't control the kingdom's funds

to build his beautiful buildings anymore.

He won't have people patting him on the back

saying what a good job he's done.

Everything that made being a king exciting for Herod

would be stripped away and given to this no-name baby.

This is also why we read of Herod's **fury**

when he realized he had been **outwitted by the Magi**.

When they didn't return to him,

he would've had that same paranoia

that caused him to assassinate his family members.

It's *their* fault! *They* betrayed me!

They stepped out of line!

JESUS (FULFILLMENT)

In contrast,

we find the baby King Jesus,

and in our passage we find

three fulfillments of Scripture.



FULFILLMENT 1 (vv. 13-15)

Joseph is warned in a dream

to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt

because Herod is searching to kill Jesus.

The young family gets up

from the only nation they've ever known

and become refugees.

They live the most formative days of Jesus' life

as refugees in Egypt.

And we hear, **so was fulfilled what the Lord had said**

through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." v.15b

This passage comes from Hosea 11:1

and is referring to Israel's continual turning away from God.

Hosea 11:2 states,

**...the more they were called, the more they went away
from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and burned
incense to images.**

And so Hosea is alluding to the Exodus moment

only to point out that they enslave themselves again
with idols and false gods.

Matthew, knowing this context,

is making a theological point about Jesus,

by explaining that Jesus is the *fulfillment* of this passage.

Jesus is God's Son (the new Israel)

who is called out of Egypt (a new exodus)

because Jesus is able to obey God's call

the way Israel couldn't the first time around.

[Not only will he live obedience

but he will free Israel from the very curse

that caused their disobedience in the first place: sin.]



FULFILLMENT 2 (vv. 16-18)

Herod realizes he's been duped

when the Magi don't return with the intel he's waiting for.

This sets off Herod's paranoia and need to control

and orders the horrid order to assassinate

all boys under 2.

In verse 17 we read,

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled...

Now there's something lost in the english translation.

Between all these three fulfillment references,

there are three different formulas that modify the sentences.

The first (v. 15) has a *hina* clause

which puts the emphasis that

what was spoken through Hosea was God's Will.

God had intended it to go this way.

That's how the construction is laid out.

This second clause (v. 17)

has a *tote* clause, to which Douglas Hare comments,

"By this subtle change Matthew suggests that the slaughter of the innocents fulfills Scripture but is not directly willed by God."

*The All-knowing forces the atrocities that humans commit in defiance of his will, but we must not negate human responsibility by attributing Herod's massacre or any in our time to God's intent."*²

So though we have a fulfillment of Scripture here

it certainly was not God's Plan for a mass slaughter of infants.

And the Jeremiah passage is significant

in that it names Ramah.

In Jeremiah 40:1 we hear that Ramah

is the place where Jeremiah and the exiles,

being taken to Babylon, part ways.

It's a familiar moment for Israel

where they are once again dominated

by another world power,

and longing for a moment when they will be freed

to be the nation God intended them to be.

For Matthew to reference it here,

² Hare, Douglas R. A. *Interpretation: Matthew*. (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2009), 16.

after Jesus' birth,
is to hope in a **new exodus**
that the Messiah will lead.



FULFILLMENT 3 (vv. 22b-23)

Once again we find the formula, of this fulfillment statement, modified.

Matthew uses the word *hopōs*

which puts the emphasis on the *result* of what's said
rather than the purpose.³

And the *result* of what's said

is a play on words in the Greek.

This is significant because throughout the prophets
we don't actually find the statement

that "the Messiah will be called a Nazarene."

That said,

we shouldn't discount this comment that Matthew makes
because he's being very intentional here.

Nazarene shares the same root as *nazir*

which means "branch."

³ (Hare, 17).

N.T. Wright comments,

“A branch, says Isaiah, shall grow out of the root of Jesse; in other words, a new beginning will be made for the royal house of David... In Jesus, not despite the frantic and tragic events that happened around his birth but because of them, **God is providing the salvation and rescue that Israel longed for, and, through that, his justice for the world.**”⁴

Through these fulfillment statements,

Matthew is pointing us toward Jesus and saying,

Here is the One who will live the life we couldn't.

Here is the One who will bring about a new exodus.

Here is the new King we've been waiting for;

the shoot of Jesse, from David's line!

This is who Jesus came to be.

And although he was the One through whom

God was fulfilling all His promises,

and redeeming all of creation,

⁴ (Wright, 15)

and saving all His People,
Jesus was still driven out of his homeland
and made to be a refugee.

The furthest state from fame, power, prestige or control.

And throughout Jesus' ministry

he spends more time with the refugees

than he does the Herods of the world.

Wright comments again,

“[There’s] No point in arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery;
no point having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and
injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God-with-us, he must be with us
where the pain is.”⁵

The reality is, as humans,

we like to feel important.

We like to have influence;

we like to know that our voice is heard

and our opinion matters.

But when that feeling becomes the driving force of all we do —

when it becomes our main identifier —

⁵ (Wright, 14-15).

we will find ourselves taking the first few strides
that slide into the paranoia that Herod experienced.

For Herod his value

was completely in what he could produce

(his fancy buildings, his smoothly run kingdom).

Everything he did and accomplished proved to him

that his control was what made it all happen.

When that becomes your identifier

you'll find yourself constantly trying to prove yourself.

You'll get defensive against those who challenge your ideas

and you'll become paranoid that those

who have differing opinions

are out to take you down.

For Jesus,

his identifier was knowing WHO HE WAS to God -

He was God's Son; he was called.

He was going to lead God's People in a new exodus

and bring them into the New Promised Land:

the Kingdom of God.

That's the only thing that kept him going
all the way to the cross,
because that's where His calling led;
the cross broke the chains that allowed a new exodus.

So how do combat paranoia in our own lives?

Know Whose you are!

Know that in Jesus, you are a child of God

(adopted in Jesus through faith).

You are called by God to follow after Jesus

who not only liberates us,

but leads us to the Promised Land.

Know who you are called to be!

You are called to follow Jesus, our Liberator.

Follow him out of slavery and into life;

out of sin and into grace;

out of control and into joyful anticipation.

Don't put your identity in anything else

because it only fosters the need to control,

which inevitably ends in a life of paranoia.

Rather, let go of control

(recognizing it was never something we could accomplish anyway)

and rest in the joyful anticipation that comes

from being led by Jesus into freedom.

He will lead us safe to home.

Amen.

*Lord Jesus, You are our great deliverer. You free us from sin and death and You lead us into freedom and life. You are the peace in our troubled sea. Thank You for the stark contrast given in this passage, and help us let go the need to control. Free us from that burden and help us rest in the joy of knowing that You are bringing Your peace on earth and in our lives. To You be the glory. **Amen.***