

“THE DESIRE TO ELIMINATE JESUS”  
Exodus 1:8-22, Acts 8:1b-3, Matthew 2:13-23  
January 13 & 14, 2024

In our two Scripture lessons today we heard about the attempt of powerful men trying to destroy the hope of the children of God. In Exodus 1 we heard about one of the Pharaohs desperately trying to limit the growth of the Hebrew people when they were in slavery in Egypt. God had blessed them, despite their harsh condition as slaves, so that their families grew to a number that frightened the Pharaoh. He reasoned that if war were to break out against the Egyptians, the Hebrews might turn against their slave masters.

So this Pharaoh decreed that all newborn Hebrew baby boys be killed upon birth in order to control the population. He gave orders to two midwives to do the killing in order to keep the Hebrews from multiplying. But these midwives *“feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live”* (Exodus 1:17).

After that the king of Egypt ordered that every new born baby Hebrew boy be thrown into the Nile River and be drowned. His goal was to minimize the nation of Israel so that they could be lorded over and held captive as slaves. But God gave grace to a Levite man and his wife, allowing them to save their baby boy as they hid him in their house for three months (Ex. 2:1-2). And when they could no longer protect him, they fashioned a reed ark by which they set him adrift on the Nile River, whereby none-other-but the Pharaoh’s own daughter found him and rescued him, raising him as her own son. Thus Moses was raised to become the Deliverer of the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt. And Moses led the people out of Egypt in order to establish them in a new country as the People of God.

Then, in Acts 8, we heard of the persecution that arose after Jesus’ ascension. The Jews, the very people whom God loved and saved, attacked and murdered the followers of Jesus - Christians. It is our first look at the man, Saul, a Pharisee, who was so inspired by watching the murdering of the disciple Stephen by the members of the Sanhedrin, that he began his very own murderous campaign against the followers of Jesus. His goal was to eliminate any vestige of those belonging to “The Way,” followers of

Jesus Christ. He even had permission from the high priest of the Jerusalem synagogue to go throughout the whole region, arresting and putting to death anyone who professed faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet, God turned this very man, Saul, into His missionary for Jesus Christ as Jesus stopped him cold in his tracks while he was on yet another campaign to arrest Christians. Saul was converted to faith by the very One whom he was trying to eliminate. He then changed his name to Paul, and spent the rest of his life telling other of the wondrous Salvation of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Our Gospel lesson today gives us the account of another man trying to stop the very beginning of God's gift of Salvation to the people of the world. Listen to what King Herod tried to do to eliminate the Son of God from becoming the King of the Jews. This is Matthew 2:13-23. (READ Matthew 2:13-23)

Now, one could easily ask, "Pastor, why is this so important for us to know about it happening? Why right after Christmas are you presenting hardships and difficulties that came to people because of their faith?" The answer to that is that these kinds of struggles and persecutions are still happening today, and I want to encourage you to be faithful in the midst of them so that you might accomplish God's purpose here in the world. The statement is true: If we do not know our history, we will be bound to repeat it, both good or bad. So we must know about the persecution of the Jews and the persecution of the Christians so that we might steel ourselves up, becoming strong in our own faith, to live as His disciples.

In our Gospel account we see that Joseph had a relationship with God, and because of that relationship, he trusted God to guide him, especially during that tremendously difficult task that God had called him to do. Both Mary and Joseph had been told that this baby boy of theirs was not only the Messiah for the world, but God's very own Son, Jesus. They were tasked with not only bringing Him into the world, but to protect Him, raise Him and help Him grow up to become the Savior for the world.

Think what would have happened if Joseph had disregarded the dream warning him of Herod's plan to kill Jesus? Even if he had put it off until the next morning? We don't know when Herod's army

showed up in Bethlehem. But they didn't just kill the baby boys in Bethlehem who were under two years old, but in the whole surrounding regions as well. Had Joseph not responded to the angel's warning immediately, serious consequences could have occurred. It was only through his instant obedience to the angel's warning that he was able to save Jesus and Mary.

Joseph trusted in God's guidance to do exactly what he had been asked to do. And his decision required immediate response. Even though Herod did his best to eliminate the "*new born king of the Jews*," God's guidance and Joseph's obedience thwarted those plans.

The same is true for each one of us. In order for us to accomplish what God has called us to do, we must have a relationship with Him through Jesus so that we can trust Him and obey His call, no matter if it is in the middle of the night, in the middle of a football game, in the middle of a wedding, or at the most inconvenient time for us. Our obedience is necessary for the completion of God's plan. There are some wonderful opportunities for us to accomplish God's work, but we have to be willing to listen to Him, obey Him, and follow Him. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about.

Francisco lived in Peru. It was 1990 and he was 22 years old. "I want to bring Senderista terrorists to Christ!" The young Bible student's eyes burned with his desire. His city, Lima, Peru, had swelled to seven million, as people fled from the countryside to the city because the Senderista's were murdering so many.

"I do not want to flee. I want to attack with the Gospel!" he exclaimed.

"God answered the prayers of this Jesus Freak.

"One day, as Francisco was walking past the national palace, a car sped by. A terrorist in the car launched a mortar from the car which exploded in the palace. Then the car vanished. Immediately, Peruvian police swarmed throughout the area. Francisco was arrested and taken to the maximum security prison as a suspected terrorist. He was locked up on the fourth floor, in an area set aside exclusively for holding the Senderistas. Five hundred men and women - all terrorists - were imprisoned in this area.

“Francisco wasted no time grieving over his circumstances. He was prepared. He had diligently studied how to present the Gospel to Communist revolutionaries. In a gentle way, he began preaching to the terrorists, sharing the love of God.

“A pretty woman named Maria listened carefully. She was a 24-year-old student from San Marcos University in Lima. One of Maria’s tasks with the Senderistas had been to take her pistol and shoot the wounded victims through their skull to guarantee their death.

“Could God possibly love and forgive me?’ she wondered. When Maria prayed a sinner’s prayer with Francisco, she found out God definitely could - and that He did indeed forgive her!

“A year passed while Francisco waited for his trial. During that time, he brought over sixty terrorists to believe in Jesus! As the love of God penetrated hardened hearts, terrorists became children of God. There is now a church in this prison, filled with new believers brought to Jesus Christ through the faithfulness of Francisco.

“Francisco’s prayer was answered in an unusual way - but what safer place could there be to minister to terrorists than in jail? Francisco was quick to recognize that God had changed evil to good: He used Francisco’s wrongful imprisonment to give him the desire of his heart (to reach terrorists for Christ). Then God blessed his efforts, and many were brought into the kingdom of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Similar to Joseph, son of Jacob, in the Book of Genesis, who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers desiring to get rid of him, and later imprisoned wrongfully by his master’s wife, he was able to say, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*” (Gen. 50:2). Joseph obeyed God, and saved a nation.

There are people throughout the United States and the world who would eliminate not only the Jews, but Christians, from the face of the earth. Because we have found favor with God, they detest us and hate us and desire to eradicate us. These individuals promote hatred of Jews and Christians, and many have come into powerful positions that enable them to begin making and enforcing laws that go

---

<sup>1</sup> (DC Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs, *Jesus Freaks*, [Tulsa, OK: Albury Publishing (1999)] pg. 127-128)

against the laws of God. They are doing their very best to eradicate and eliminate any influence of the people of God in this world. With those powerful influences of those in government and media, I fear the influence of the Christian Church is in decline, and so many are turning away from the laws of God, even those laws in their own countries that based upon the Scriptures of the Bible.

So we have become a hunted and hated group in our world today as the children of God. But that does not mean that we are to hate them in return. No, we must love those who hate us, and we are to rejoice and be glad when people insult us and persecute us and falsely say all kinds of evil against us because of Jesus (Matthew 5:11-12). We are to strive to reach out to them and lead them into a relationship with the Lord our God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus tells us that we are to *“love [our] enemies and pray for those who persecute [us] that [we] may be children of [our] Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:44-45).

As we endure unjust treatment, we have the opportunity to demonstrate the value of having Christ Jesus as Lord of our lives, even to the point of being willing to die for our faith. Rather than falling away from our faith in Jesus, we are to live in such ways as to boldly proclaim that we are followers of Jesus Christ.

So when the world offers us opportunities to worship other ‘gods,’ or even to denounce our faith and live like the “rest of the world,” we are called to remain strong in our convictions and stay true to the teachings of Jesus. We are not to wimp out on Jesus just to gain financial rewards or social acceptance. We’re not to abandon our faith when hard pressed with extreme difficulties or penalties. God is calling us to be faithful, following His guidance, and obeying His directions, no matter what.

That’s what the men of The Thundering Legion did a long time ago. “The Roman governor stood resolutely before the forty Roman soldiers of the Thundering Legion. ‘I command you to make an offering to the Roman gods. If you will not, you will be stripped of your military status.’

“The forty soldiers all believed firmly in the Lord Jesus. They knew they must not deny Him or sacrifice to the Roman idols, no matter what the governor would do to them. “Camdidus spoke for the

legion, ‘Nothing is dearer or of greater honor to us than Christ our God.’

“The governor then tried other tactics to get them to deny their faith. First he offered them money and imperial honors. Then he threatened them with torments and torture with the rack and with fire. Candidus replied, ‘You offer us money that remains behind and glory that fades away. You seek to make us friends of the Emperor, but alienate us from the true King. We desire one gift, the crown of righteousness. We are anxious for one glory, the glory of the heavenly kingdom. We love honors, those of heaven.

“You threaten fearful torments and call our godliness a crime, but you will not find us fainthearted or attached to this life or easily stricken with terror. For the love of God, we are prepared to endure any kind of torture.’

“The governor was enraged. Now he wanted them to die a slow, painful death. They were stripped naked and herded to the middle of a frozen lake. He set soldiers to guard them to prevent any from coming to shore and escaping.

“The forty encouraged each other as though they were going to battle. ‘How many of our companions in arms fell on the battle front, showing themselves loyal to an earthly king? Is it possible for us to fail to sacrifice our lives in faithfulness to the true King? Let us not turn aside, O warriors, let us not turn our backs in flight from the devil.’ They spent the night courageously bearing their pain and rejoicing in the hope of soon being with the Lord.

“To increase the torment of the Christians, baths of hot water were put round the lake. With these the governor hoped to weaken the firm resolve of the freezing men. He told them, ‘You may come ashore when you are ready to deny your faith.’ In the end, one of them did weaken, came off the ice, and got into a warm bath, having denied his faith.

“When one of the guards on the shore saw him desert, he himself took the place of the traitor. Surprising everyone with the suddenness of his conversion, he threw off his clothes, and ran to join the naked ones on the ice, crying out loudly, “I am a Christian!

“Some call it ‘the mystery of martyrdom.’ Why would seeing 39 believers who were willing to die for their faith inspire a highly-trained soldier, in the prime of his life, to join them in death? It seems so foreign to our American way of thinking. It is amazing to see how God works through these tragic situations to call more people to Himself.”<sup>2</sup>

But that same thing happened just a few years ago, as not only soldiers, but doctors and medical workers and scientists and others refused to comply with the Covid19 mandates. Christian military officers were stripped of their commands; Christian doctors and medical professionals were dismissed from the hospital and clinics they worked at; Christian school teachers and professors were relieved of their teaching positions; Christian people were let go of their jobs - jobs they had held for decades; and countless numbers of Christian people were prevented from finding employment because they rejected the government mandates to receive an untested, even dangerous vaccine. Christians were standing up for their faith, and they were persecuted because of it.

And as recently as October 2023, people of faith who are standing in support of Israel after the brutal Hamas attacks on communities along the border of Gaza and Israel, are finding themselves in peril. University students are being attacked because they are Jews or because they stand in support of the Jews. Those who are in leadership positions in government and in business are finding horrific verbal abuse from the media and those who stand against Israel. Anyone who publicly supports Israel is lambasted, ridiculed, attacked, reprimanded and even let go of their jobs.

The same is true with regard to support of Christian values on marriage and sexuality. Anyone standing against the LGTBQ agenda is horrifically accused of being “haters” and “supremacist.” Because they stand firm in their faith in the biblical teachings of God in regards to marriage, and because they stand on the Christian foundation of God creating only male and female, Christians are being called “scum,” “deplorables,” “threats to democracy,” and ones “worthy to be eliminated.” And those who call for the right for biological women to compete against only other biological women in all

---

<sup>2</sup> (DC Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs, *Jesus Freaks*, pg. 96-98)

levels of sporting events are chastised, maligned, and even attacked.

It's the same way with those who stand by the Judeo-Christian belief of the sanctity of human life. Those who want to be able to kill a person at any level of age, including the pre-born, are punishing, attacking, and arresting those who would seek to share the Judeo-Christian values with those who are vulnerable, those who are seeking a "simple convenient answer" to their problem. Laws are being made to prevent free speech to those who are seeking an abortion. Laws are being made to manipulate and mutilate children and young adults. Laws are being made to euthanize those who are no longer able to contribute to society.

Christian values within our society today are on the attack, and it is up to us who follow those Christian values and standards to remain strong. The world is still trying to eliminate Jesus and the Children of God. Yet, we can make a difference if we stand strong in our faith in Jesus Christ, trust in Him and obey His teachings. It may be one person at a time, but we are called to live faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in order to witness our faith among a world bent upon degradation and destruction. How will the world see any other option outside of the world's ways unless we boldly witness our faith before them, even if it brings us to the point of death?

I challenge you today to listen to God speak to you. Trust in His Word and His commands. Follow His Son, Jesus. And let everyone know where you stand as a disciple of Jesus. Then obey His call to do His work, no matter what! Who knows the lives you might save in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for sending Jesus to us. Thank You for the faithful obedience of Joseph and Mary. Thank You for the faithful obedience of the disciples of Jesus like Stephen, who were willing to stay true to Your Word, even in the face of death. Give us the resolve and determination to hear You, trust You, and obey You so that we, too, may be among the faithful who proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in the way that we live, the way that we treat others, and the way that we speak. Guide us to become living witnesses for the love of Jesus Christ, even to the enemies among us, so that they may come to know Him, too. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.