



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Matthew 2:13-23

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English Standard Version

“Protecting the King”

The 4th Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 2:13-23

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.”¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called My son.”

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*

*¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
²⁰ saying, “Rise, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”²¹ And he rose and took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel.²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father*

Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. You have brought us to a hard text this morning, so close to Christmas. This is a text that brings tears. This is a text that opens wounds. This is a text that challenges our faith. This is a text that forces us to see the real Jesus and the real reason why He had to come. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *Neighborhood Scout*¹

Have you ever checked out a website called "*Neighborhood Scout*"?

The answer is probably no unless you're thinking about moving. Modern technology has made it possible to sit at your computer and do a virtual search of any city, town and neighborhood in the country. You can find out about the school system in Tarpon Springs, the average income in Bar Harbor, the rate of new construction in Tacoma, or the demographic makeup of Indianapolis. For that matter, you can break down a city like Indianapolis into many smaller neighborhoods, and then you can compare the stats for one part of the city against another. That wasn't possible until just a few years ago.

I mention that because this week I discovered a page on the Neighborhood Scout website where they ranked **The 100 Safest Cities in the United States**. Using the latest crime data involving robbery, rape, murder, vehicle theft, and aggravated assault, they compiled a list of the safest places to live in the US.

Hartland, Wisconsin came in at number 1.

Followed by Bergenfield, New Jersey at number 2.

Brentwood, Tennessee took the third spot.

Followed by Franklin, Massachusetts at number 4.

Coming in at number 5 was ... **Newtown, Connecticut**.

Most of us had never heard of Newtown before last Friday. If you read the website's description, you can understand why some people would consider it the ideal place to live. The education level in Newtown is considerably above the national average. Going by the numbers, violent crime there has been almost nonexistent. It is a white collar community, upper-middle class, with excellent schools, with lots of new construction and some of the highest home prices in America. In fact, remarkably, it sounds a lot like Leesburg, although to be fair, not a single town in Virginia made the list.

Here's a quote from the website about Newtown ... "*Because of many things, Newtown is a very good place for families to consider. With an enviable combination of good schools, low*

1 The Introduction is adapted from the sermon "*The Boys of Bethlehem*" by Rev. Ray Pritchard, 12/18/12, www.keepbelieving.com and the articles, "*Neighborhood Scout's 100 Safest Cities in the United States*" found on www.neighborhoodscout.com; Crime statistics come from www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime; Max Lucado prayer comes from www.huffingtonpost.com/max-lucado.

crime, college-educated neighbors who tend to support education because of their own experiences, and a high rate of home ownership in predominantly single-family properties, Newtown really has some of the features that families look for when choosing a good community to raise children. Is Newtown perfect? Of course not, and if you like frenetic nightlife, it will be far from your cup of tea. But overall this is a solid community, with many things to recommend it as a family-friendly place to live.”

Clearly, Newtown is a good place to live. One can see why families have been drawn there. It has earned its designation as one of the safest places in America. ... And then came the events of last Friday morning. Rather than repeat here what we’ve all seen and heard, I would rather focus on the fact that in some ways, this is nothing new.

Last year there were **14,612 murders in the US.** That number has not been below 14,000 since **1968.** That’s 281 a week, 40 a day. Said another way, if the murders were evenly distributed across the 50 states (which they’re not), that would be 292 murders per state each year. Divided by 12, that means that each state would suffer the equivalent of a **Newtown massacre EVERY MONTH.**

We are a murderous people, living in a blood-soaked world. Given all the killing, it is to our credit that we can still be **stunned** by what happened in Newtown. It was a crime for which we seem to have no categories at all. As I speak these words nine days later, there seems to be no clear explanation, no answer to the Why question, nothing that would help us make sense of the slaughter of the children of Newtown.

We are a murderous people, living in a blood-soaked world.

Ever since we heard the news, we’ve all been struggling to deal with it. No one seems to have an answer. Perhaps Max Lucado said it best, in these sentences from a **prayer he wrote on that Friday afternoon** ... “*Dear Jesus, It’s a good thing you were born at night. This world sure seems dark.*” He’s right. It does seem darker this week. Odd that just a few days before Christmas we’re talking about **the darkness** of the world.

The governor of Connecticut **said it another way** ... “*Evil visited this community today.*” He was right too. What happened was pure evil, undiluted and Satanic. What else do you call it when a man takes a rifle, kills his mother, then kills 20 innocent schoolchildren and six adults? That’s what evil is and that’s what evil does. Many have commented on how this horrific event took place just a few days before Christmas. It would be horrific at any time of the year, but it somehow seems worse during this season.

All of that leads me to make two observations:

1. If this can happen in Newtown, then where can you go to be safe?

People moved to Newtown to get away from things like this. And who can blame them? Newtown is not East Saint Louis or inner-city Detroit. Death is everywhere, all around us, all the time. Most of the time we can push it away, keep it at arm’s length, but sometimes death comes in **unbidden, unannounced,** and quite **unwelcome.** Anyone seeking a quiet and peaceful life where these things never happen has picked the wrong planet to be born on.

2. It shouldn’t surprise us that we need to talk about darkness as Christmas approaches.

The signs were always there. From the beginning, the birth of Christ was fraught with difficulty:

- Mary became pregnant under strange circumstances.
- Joseph and Mary made a dangerous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the latter

stages of her pregnancy.

- When they got to Bethlehem, there was no room for them in the inn.
- Jesus was born in a manger, not the peaceful scene of the children's Christmas program but in a stable, perhaps in a cave, at night, when Mary and Joseph were alone in the world.
- When the Magi came to Jerusalem and asked about the baby who had been born king of the Jews, Herod was so disturbed that he ordered the slaughter of the baby boys of Bethlehem.

The birth of Christ was fraught with difficulty. Matthew tells the story this way, Matthew 2:16, *"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."*

The Gospel does not begin in comfort and ease. It begins in dismay. It begins with an urgent message in the middle of the night to get up and flee for Herod is seeking the life of the infant boy. It begins in fear, foreboding, uncertainty. The family flees to Egypt and stays there. Perhaps they sell the incense and the myrrh and use the gold to pay their way. What will become of them? To fully understand it, you have to know that this terrible story is told in the context of **prophecy**, and in particular, the fulfillment of **specific prophecies**.

We find them here in Matthew, chapter 2, our passage for today, and the first prophecy we learn about is ...

v. 13-15: THE PROPHECY ABOUT ISRAEL ²

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called My son."

We learn in this passage that Christ's person and life and circumstances were foretold in Scripture. This passage teaches us that the person of Christ, who He is, His nature, what He is like, His life, the activities, the events, and the circumstances of His life, all those things are foretold in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We learn in this passage that Old Testament prophecy bears witness to the life of Christ, and we learn it not once or twice, **but three times**.

Matthew has a theme which flows throughout his Gospel, that the life, and times, and death, and resurrection of Christ **were all a fulfillment of Scripture**. And so he has a pattern in which he says, this happened in order to fulfill that which was said by the prophets. Twice already in our study of Matthew, we have seen that form used. He says this event in Jesus' life happened to fulfill that prophecy in the Old Testament.

One of the key things we need to know in order to understand the Gospel of Matthew is that Matthew is writing to a largely Jewish audience. And so, in order to persuade the Jews that

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, "The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 1" by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 37-46, "The Gospel of Matthew: God With Us" by Rev. Matt Woodley, Resonate Commentary Series, pages 33-40; And the Sermons, "Flight, Murder, & Return from Egypt" by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 1/26/97, www.fpcjackson.org; "The Struggle Begins" by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA, 9/28/03, www.faihtacoma.org; "The Boys of Bethlehem" by Rev. Ray Pritchard, 12/18/12, www.keepbelieving.com.

Jesus is the true Messiah, the Christ, he constantly draws upon the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, to demonstrate how Christ fulfills numerous prophecies.

However, there's a small problem with this. Many of the prophecies that Matthew says Jesus fulfills ... weren't prophecies about the **Messiah**, but rather, they were prophecies about **Israel**. And by incorporating these prophecies into his Gospel, Matthew is making the claim that **Jesus is the true Israel**.

What we're going to find is that **Matthew** understands **Jesus** to be the fulfillment, not only of explicit prophecies, but also of the Israel's history. He is another **Moses**, another **David**, indeed, another **Israel** herself. This is what's called typology. The history of God's people beforehand foretold the life and ministry of Christ because He was the object and the goal of that history.

Let me direct your attention to verse 15, where Matthew says this was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord by the prophet. In that passage, **Hosea 11:1**, we read, "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*" It is the fact that Jesus will come out of Egypt — spoken by the prophet Hosea hundreds of years before about Israel — that Matthew says is **fulfilled** in the life of **Jesus** as He goes down into Egypt to escape Herod and His family brings Him out. This prophecy about **Israel** has been fulfilled in the life of **Jesus**.

But that's only the first of three prophecies in this passage. The second one we see is the hard one, for it is ...

v. 16-18: THE PROPHECY OF WEEPING

"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

First of all, there's a big difference between Bethlehem then and Bethlehem now. Today Bethlehem is a bustling town of 28,000 people. Back then it was a tiny village (the "little town" of the Christmas carol) six miles south of Jerusalem. Its population in Jesus' day was no more than a few hundred people. How many baby boys would be under the age of 2 in Bethlehem? No one knows, but the number would not have been large.

Most commentators think it would have been around ... **20**.

Rounded up by Herod's soldiers, slaughtered on the spot, run through with swords and spears. A brutal, vicious, bloodthirsty murder of innocent children. Who can understand this? Why would a man do this? What was he thinking?

It may help you understand what happened if you know that Herod the Great is very old, very sick, and nearly dead. He's been in power for over 40 years and has proven to be a clever and cruel man. Like all despotic rulers, he held tightly to the reins of power and brutally removed anyone who got in his way.

Over the years he killed many — he killed his brother-in-law, he killed his mother-in-law, and he killed his wife. Above everything else, Herod the Great was a killer. **That was his nature**. He killed out of spite and he killed to stay in power. Human life meant nothing to him. Perhaps his basic character can best be seen by one incident in the year 7 B.C. Herod is an old man now. He has been in power 41 years. He knows he doesn't have much longer to live. Word comes that his sons are plotting to overthrow him. They are sons by his late wife. He

orders them put to death . . . by strangling. No wonder Caesar Augustus said, *“It is safer to be Herod’s sow than his son.”* Herod killed his wife . . . his mother-in-law . . . his brother-in-law . . . his three sons . . . among hundreds of others. Killing was what he did best. That’s why the critics are wrong who question this story and say that Matthew made it up. To the contrary, it fits with everything else we know about Herod. If he didn’t have a problem killing his own sons, he won’t have a problem killing yours. And he wouldn’t have thought twice about killing a 20 baby boys in a little town like Bethlehem.

But it meant something to those parents who forever lost their sons. Their tears were those of mothers who would not be comforted. They are like the tears of Rachel. The loss is not lessened because we think we “understand” the tragedy. Nothing could bring those little boys back to their grieving parents. Evil visited Bethlehem that night. Nothing would ever be the same.

In the history of the church, this night is called *“The Slaughter of the Holy Innocents.”* And after 2,000 years we remember Herod for **this one act**.

Now in verse 17, Matthew says, *“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.”* In this passage, Herod has slain the sons under the age of two in Bethlehem and its immediate environment, a horrible deed, a cowardly deed, for which he deserves not only everlasting torment, but vilification in this world. And yet this deed was prophesied through the prophet Jeremiah. There would be a day when Rachel would weep in Ramah for her children, for she would not be able to gather them back to her lap. They would be gone, taken by a wicked monarch serving his own ends. This, Matthew says, was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Once again Matthew points out the biblical pattern. As Rachel in her tomb was said, in Jeremiah, in a beautiful figure of speech, to weep for the exiles as they were taken from the Promised Land, so here she weeps for the dead and the mourning mothers of Bethlehem. And, of course, here again is a parallel with Israel’s early history. If you remember, Pharaoh tried to kill the Hebrew boys, **Exodus 1:22**, *“Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”* However, we discover in Exodus 2 that Moses was spared. And Moses would someday save the people of Israel by leading them out of Egypt.

But there’s another link to prophecy here, not an Old Testament prophecy, but a New Testament prophecy. And it’s found in the Book of Revelation . . .

Rev. 12:1-6: THE PROPHECY OF THE DRAGON³

Revelation 12:1-6, *“And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, **one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron**, but her child was caught up to God and to His throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.”*

Now in Revelation we’re given a glimpse behind the curtain and can see the author of

³ This section is largely taken from my sermon, *“The Cosmic Conflict,”* preached here 3/28/10.

history at work. We're told that "*a woman clothed with the sun*" appears as the first great sign and soon afterwards, "*another sign,*" "*a great red dragon,*" comes into view. The conflict between the woman and the dragon dominates the drama of Revelation 12, which begins in verse 4 with the dragon waiting to **consume** the son to whom the woman is giving birth. The strength, intelligence, and ferocity of the dragon seem to make him an overpowering adversary to the woman and her newborn son. Yet the dragon's plot is foiled with split-second speed, look at verse 5, "*She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to His throne.*" That last statement succinctly summarizes the life, suffering, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Neither the dragon's deadly strategy nor his exercise of raw power is enough to destroy the seed of the woman, the Lion/Lamb who gained the victory by being slain. The chapter closes with the dragon's frustrated attempts to destroy the woman, the son, and the rest of her children.

The woman symbolizes several things, all at the same time. She symbolizes both Israel and the church as the redeemed people of God, though the church is also referred to as the "**rest of her offspring.**" But most importantly, she symbolizes the mother of the promised seed who would slay the serpent. This conflict is far older than one might think, as it began in the Garden of God, when the serpent deceived Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and God pronounced His curse upon the serpent, **Genesis 3:15**, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

It's clear in this vision that the woman is the mother of the Messiah, for it says in verse 5 that He is the "**one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.**" **Psalm 2** is a messianic Psalm, which is the most quoted Old Testament text in the New Testament. **Psalm 2** recounts God's decree anointing the Messiah as the universal King. And that's how it's quoted here, **Psalm 2:7-9**, "*I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*" However Psalm 2 opens with the kings of this world conspiring against the Lord and His Christ, **Psalm 2:1-2**, "*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed.*"

And that has **now** been reversed! **That's** what's being celebrated by the 24 elders who worshipped Him, saying, **Revelation 11:17-18**, "*We give thanks to You, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for You have taken Your great power and begun to reign. ¹⁸ The nations raged, but Your wrath came.*" The nations raged against the Lord God Almighty in **Psalm 2**, but now He has taken power and He shall reign forever and ever.

Back to Matthew 2 and the third prophecy of this passage, which is ...

v. 19-23: THE PROPHECY OF REJECTION

"But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "Rise, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

This phrase, "*He shall be called a Nazarene,*" doesn't appear in any prophetic writings,

or indeed, anywhere in the Old Testament. Usually, when we have a prophetic fulfillment without an actual prophetic quotation, it means that the thought pervades Scripture. If Jesus had come to be known as “Jesus of Bethlehem, he would have the aura of one who came from a royal city.” But Jesus of Nazareth carries the overtones of contempt, and serves to remind us that Jesus would be, **Isaiah 53:3**, “...*despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*”

And so here, in verse 23, the truth that the prophet taught, that the Messiah, when He came would be despised by His own people, is encapsulated in the phrase, “*He shall be called a Nazarene.*” He is one from Galilee, not from Judah. One from unclean bloodlines, not from the royal line. Surely not one to admire or to emulate, or to follow, or to obey, and certainly not to worship. Over and over Matthew tells you in this passage, Jesus in His person, in His life, and in His circumstances **fulfills Scripture**. Matthew wants you to understand that everything in the life of Christ is set forth, bounded by the Scriptures as Jesus’ life unfolds, it’s also the unfolding of what God has revealed to the prophets.

CONCLUSION: *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*⁴

Let’s shift the scene for a moment to **Christmas Day, 1864**. After four bloody years, the Civil War is slowly drawing to close. Already **500,000** soldiers have died. Many more would die before the war would finally end. On that Christmas Day Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned a poem that became a beloved Christmas carol called ***I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day***.

It starts with these hopeful words:

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

There is a story behind this poem that most people don’t know. Shortly after the war began, Longfellow’s beloved wife Fanny died after being terribly burned in a household accident. Her death threw Longfellow into despair. In his journal for **Christmas Day, 1862**, he recorded, “A merry Christmas’ say the children, but that is no more for me.” The next year, in **1863**, his eldest son Charles was severely wounded and crippled in battle. Out of his own sadness and in response to the carnage of war, for **Christmas Day, 1863**, he wrote this pessimistic verse:

*And in despair I bowed my head;
“There is no peace on earth,” I said;
“For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”*

Lately those words have seemed all too true. Hate **IS** strong.

Where **IS** our hope at Christmastime?

I want to ask a question that I can’t fully answer, but it is one that we all think about in

4 The Conclusion is adapted from the sermon, “The Boys of Bethlehem” by Rev. Ray Pritchard, 12/18/12, www.keepbelieving.com

different ways and at different times. If the angel knew about the impending massacre at Bethlehem, why did he warn Mary and Joseph and not the others? On one level we know that Mary and Joseph were warned so that Jesus might be preserved from Herod's murderous intentions. But what shall we say about the other boys of Bethlehem? And what about their parents? Were not those babies precious to the Lord also? Does the Lord hear the wails that arise from the little town of Bethlehem?

Here is my best attempt at an answer. We know that the Lord does care and that He does hear the cries of those who hurt so deeply. **Psalm 34:18** tells us, "*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*" God has promised to do that. Millions of people can testify to God's presence in the midst of the worst pain and the greatest loss. But this truth, wonderful as it is, does not cancel **our very real pain** and it doesn't **reverse the loss**.

This much we know. God always has a bigger plan than we can ever see from where we sit. He preserved His Son so that one day His Son could die on the cross for the sins of the world. These babies died now, so that the baby Jesus could grow up and die later. Jesus had to escape **this time** so that He would **NOT** escape **the next time**. Seen in broadest perspective, **Jesus escaped the first time so that He wouldn't escape the second time so that we would escape for all time.**

I understand that this truth would have been small comfort to the weeping mothers of Bethlehem. And no comfort either for the weeping mothers of Newtown. On that night it seemed like a senseless slaughter, and the next night it seemed the same. One week later it still made no sense. One year later there was no explanation. Even a decade later no one could understand why those babies had to die. But run the clock forward about 33 years and suddenly things come into focus. Outside the walls of Jerusalem a man is dying on a cross. He was the one baby Herod could not kill; now He offers himself up for the sins of the world. In the end, **He died too.** If he had died in **Bethlehem**, he couldn't have died at **Calvary**. All of this was part of God's eternal plan.

Somewhere in my reading since last Friday, I ran across a statement that went something like this ... ***God declared war at Bethlehem.*** That's hardly the way we think of it, but it's not unbiblical. Ever since Eden, a battle has been raging between God and Satan for control of planet earth. When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan struck a blow for evil. From that time until this time, sin has reigned in every corner of this planet and has found a home in every heart. All the pain and suffering we see around us — every bit of it — may be traced back to that that fateful moment in the Garden of Eden. Since then the armies of evil have been on the march in every generation. They have landed wave after wave of soldiers on beachheads around the world. There are times when it seems as if the battle is over and evil will reign unmolested forever. Satan struck with terrible fury last Friday in Newtown, Connecticut. Evil invaded this peaceful New England community.

But if **Christmas** means anything, it is this ... ***God Wins In The End!*** At Bethlehem He launched a mighty counteroffensive that continues to this very day. It all started with a tiny baby boy named Jesus, born in a scandalous way, in a barn, to unmarried teenagers who were homeless and alone. The world had no idea what was happening in Bethlehem that night. Only in retrospect do we understand.

That same battle of evil and good continues to the present moment and will continue into the future until the day when Jesus returns and defeats evil once and for all. Perhaps that thought is what led Longfellow to write one final verse to his poem in answer to his own despair:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
 "God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
 The wrong shall fail,
 The right prevail,
 With peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

Rightly understood, there is a world of truth in that final verse, "*God is not dead; nor doth he sleep! The wrong shall fail, The right prevail, With peace on earth, good-will to men!*"

At Bethlehem God struck a blow to liberate the world from sin and death.

God's front line soldier was a tiny baby boy. **One of the boys of Bethlehem.** Don't take him for granted. There is in this little baby all the strength of Deity. The power of God is in those tiny fists. He has strength which is divine. Whatever He desires, He's able to achieve. The baby wrapped in rags is also the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He's the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the undefeated Son of God. He's the **leader** of the **armies** of **heaven**.

Because He is who He is, Longfellow was right. Jesus is the undefeated Son of God. "*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail. With peace on earth, good-will to men.*" I urge you to say those words aloud. "*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail. With peace on earth, good-will to men.*"

We need to remind ourselves in these sad days that the devil **will not have the final word**. Though he strikes many painful blows, he cannot win because the battle belongs to the Lord. In one sense, the slaughter of the boys of Bethlehem is a perpetual reminder — at the very beginning of Christ's earthly life — "***This is why He had to be born.***" **This is what Christmas is really all about.**

Be encouraged, my friends. Do not despair. Through your tears, lift up your eyes and look again to Bethlehem. [Luke 2:11] "***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a SAVIOR, who is Christ the Lord.***" That sleeping child will rise to battle and no one will stand against Him. The boys of Bethlehem will be avenged and every enemy will be defeated. Better days are coming. In that confidence let us trust in God and commit ourselves to Jesus Christ now and forever. And because these things are true, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas, The King has come!

Think about that ... You need to pray.
 Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Oh Lord, our Lord. Thank You that You have given us a King. This Advent we look forward to His coming and we look forward to His saving. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Help us to see Him as a King in a stable. Help us to see Him as the Lamb who was slain, returning as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Help us to see Him as a Messiah who is rejected and despised, but who returns as the Warrior King who conquers all enemies. Help us to understand that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

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Revelation 21:3-5; 1:15

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also He said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ... “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”