

“Angelic Warnings”
2 Samuel 24:15-17; Matthew 2:13-16
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A corrupt leader rages, because he has been tricked.

In his rage he kills indiscriminately.

He claims to want to worship God.

But that claim is a ploy, and a lie.

What he really wants is to hold on to his power.

And he feels like his power is threatened.

Threatened by someone who will bring healing.

The corrupt leader is - - king Herod the Great - - whose son Herod Antipas will later be responsible for the executions of both John the Baptist and Jesus. / But at the moment of Herod's rage - - rage at the departure of the Magi who were emissaries from some countries to the East - - in the second chapter of Matthew - - all that is in the future. / Herod's father Herod - - here - - kills children instead.

Meanwhile into the violent and dangerous world of international politics - - an angel appears. / And the angel warns Jesus father, Joseph, to go into political exile - - for the safety of his son Jesus. / Which Joseph does.

And then the nation of Israel waits.

And eventually Herod the Great dies.

And from the standpoint of the followers of Jesus - - his legacy is - - not all that “great”.

When this child Jesus grew up he would openly criticize Herod Antipas.

Luke's gospel tells us that he calls him a “fox”.

Which is actually a great insult. / It's in Luke chapter 13.

According to Jewish holiness codes a fox is an unclean animal.

The Herods wanted to be seen as great and pious leaders.

But their piety was fake and a lie.

So this insult from Jesus - - was a dig at their immorality.

Don't forget that part of the story that led to John's execution was sexual immorality.

Herod had some serious problems with women.

Jesus sees through all this façade and calls it for what it is.

The angelic warning of his childhood - - which saved him - - contains in it an implicit warning to Herod. / Herod was not following the ways of God - - and was hurting people while pretending to be good. / But Herod could not hear the angelic warning for what it was - - and so he went into a rage instead.

Jesus - - brings the judgment to completion with the title above him on the cross:

“The King of the Jews”

Jesus was executed by Herod - - on a cross.

But the cross was - - forever after - - a negative judgment on Herod and his corruption.

In fact a negative judgment on all sin, including corrupt power used to hurt others.

Angels.

We hang them on our Christmas trees.

We wear them as jewelry.

We look to them for hope and inspiration.

Angels.

They are messengers from God.

They bring protection and insight.

Angels.

Some are present at the birth of significant people.

They are God's messengers.

They show up at pivotal moments in history according to the Bible.

And sometimes - - angels - - bring judgment.

In fact that happens a number of times.

But we may be less familiar with that aspect of angels - - and more likely to think of an angel as a hopeful shining figure over the manger - - or in a dream.

Angels have many different facets.

And the warnings are ultimately intended for the good of the world.

But the warnings are intended to be heeded.

And not heeding them - - can lead to some pretty bad consequences.

Let's look at some other instances in the Bible where angels show up and bring judgment - - to see what I mean. / An angel shows up at the end of the reign of King David. / And a number of other kings also receive angelic warnings. / The incident with king David is reported in 2 Samuel chapter 24.

David is remembered as the greatest king of Israel.

David is the opposite of Herod the Great in many ways.

David the Great followed God and brought hope to the nation.

But even David has flaws, which become worse as he ages.

At the end of his story in 2 Samuel he repents to God.

At least he has the insight to repent - - instead of deny.

The presenting incident is a corrupt census.

By the way - - there was also a corrupt census in Jesus day - - as Jesus was born.

Both are judged negatively.

Here, in the time of King David - - the angel is ready to destroy Jerusalem.

Which is pointed because of what King David did for Jerusalem.

David and Solomon built the temple there and brought the ark home.

So to threaten to destroy it is like wiping out his whole legacy.

But at the last minute God's mind changes and the angel relents.

Not, however, without judgment.

Later in 1 Kings chapter 13 another angel shows up to judge a corrupt king.

This time it is king Jeroboam's disobedience to God's ways.

But in this complex account even the angel is judged.

Way before any of this, and before the dawn of kings in Israel, angels bring judgment through Gideon against the foreign God Baal. / Judges chapter 6 is an early instance of angels of judgment in the Bible.

As I said before:

The judgment - - and the angelic warnings are ultimately intended for good.

The good of the world - - and the good of people.

But the warnings are intended to be heeded.

And not heeding them - - can lead to some pretty bad judgment.

Our work as we read these accounts is to hear God's word to us in them.

Where are the warnings for us?

Where is the judgment today?

What does it mean for us to heed God's warning?

I was thinking about this when I ran across an article about a letter once left for a new president - - in the desk of the Oval Office - - by the departing president. / George Herbert Walker Bush left this letter for Bill Clinton:

“Dear Bill,

“When I walked into this office just now I felt the same sense of wonder and respect that I felt four years ago. I know you will feel that too. I wish you great happiness here. I never felt the loneliness some Presidents have described.

There will be very tough times, made even more difficult by criticism you may not think is fair. I’m not a very good one to give advice; but just don’t let the critics discourage you or push you off course.

You will be OUR president when you read this note. I wish you well. I wish your family well. Your success is now our country’s success. I am rooting for you.”

Good luck,

George”

Well I’m not going to suggest that George was an angel.

Nor that this note contains much of an intentional warning.

Nor much negative judgment.

But maybe for those with ears to hear, it is a reminder of a kind of honor.

And maybe that reminder - - contains its own warning for us now.

Warnings come in all kinds of ways.

And judgment does too.

Much of the time, warnings and words of judgment go unheard.

Especially by those who could benefit most.

My hope for us in this next year is that we could have hearts that are open.

May we have ears to hear what God is saying.

May we heed any angelic messages we might receive.

May we think about the long term consequences of NOT doing that.

The thing about all these angelic warnings in the Bible is they have long term consequences. / We don't see the outcome of the angelic warning to Jesus' father Joseph at the time of Herod the Great until decades later. / We don't really have a sense of the impact of King David on the nation of Israel until the later prophets. / They all look back on the Monarchy of Ancient Israel through the lens of King David. / At the time of the angelic warning and David's repentance in 2 Samuel, all we know is that he had some problems later in his life. What people don't see then - - can't see then - - is that in comparison to the later kings, David would be the greatest.

Maybe that's part of the message for us:

Warnings take time to sink in.

Judgment sometimes comes over time and in retrospect.

The good news is that God is still trying.

As far as I know - - God is still waiting on us to wake up!

As far as I know - - God still loves each and every one of us.

So instead of tossing this latest warning aside, maybe let it sink in a bit.

What do you wish was different in your life?

What do you wish was different in the world around us?

Is there anything you can do - - in response to what you hear?

What if these angels had really been heard?

What if - - when an angel appeared - - everyone listened?

Imagine what the world would be like!

Imagine a world - - that is not in need of deliverance from evil.

Instead - - we were working to heal - - and to love - - and to listen.

Imagine what the world would be like if we did that...