

Hope for the Journey

Perhaps the most troubling event recorded concerning the birth and infancy of Jesus is when king Herod, in an attempt to kill Jesus, orders the slaughter of little boys in Bethlehem and vicinity who were two years old and younger. The Scripture also tells us that the Lord warned Joseph in a dream to wake up and to flee with Jesus to Egypt to avoid Herod's brutality. The wise men were also warned not to go back to Herod and tell him where Jesus could be found.

But the question is this: What about the other families in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Why weren't they warned? Why were their babies allowed to be killed while Jesus was permitted to escape? It just doesn't seem fair, does it?

Now I don't think we will ever know all the answers to this question until we go to see Jesus. But, as I was thinking about this, one thing became clear in my mind, and that is this: Jesus escaped to Egypt as a child but He did not escape the execution; it was just postponed. Jesus was sent into the world to die for the world but in order for His death to accomplish its goal He had to live long enough to get His message across to us and long enough to fulfill the righteousness of God. He had to establish His innocence in order to be that perfect lamb of God, that perfect sacrifice, who takes away the sin of the world. His escape into Egypt was not unfair just necessary.

But what does this have to do with we who

follow Christ in 2018? What are the implications

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for us on the first Lord's Day of a brand new year? It seems to me that what Jesus did for us in His sufferings is the one and only--but more than sufficient--hope we have as we begin our 2018 journey.

Without Christ there isn't much reason to be hopeful. Families are in turmoil. Drug abuse and the tragedy it brings is rampant; more people than ever before are the victims of violent crime. Traditional moral and family values continue to erode. The cost of health care and health insurance continues to skyrocket, erasing any significant gains from increased salaries. Acts of terror, attempts at ethnic cleansing, and human trafficking continue. Even in America where we have enough food to eat and clothing to wear and more modern conveniences and more toys than any other generation on earth, people are not content. Depression is common and suicide rates are at historic highs.

In a little booklet Billy Graham did with Max Lucado in 2006, Graham wrote: ". . . we are a world in pain--a world that suffers collectively from the violence of nature and man, and a world that suffers individually from personal heartache." Its been twelve years since Graham made that observation, and if anything, the heartaches have only gotten deeper. It seems to me that for many 2018 is merely the next chapter in the same sad and often tragic story.

But you and I do not need to be afraid. You

and I do not need to be sad. You and I do not need to despair. Why? Because we have good

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news. Look at what our Scripture for this morning tells us. Romans 8:28-30 say. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The first good news we have is that we have a purpose. Those who have received Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives know what the purpose of life is and the purpose of life is to progressively become more and more like Jesus. The good news is also that this process is already underway and will continue until it is complete. We can look forward to 2018 because this is a year in which we are becoming more like Jesus. God has called us, justified us, and is glorifying us for this purpose. **We begin this year with confidence because we know our purpose, and that purpose is Christ.**

We begin 2018 with a purpose. The second reason we do not need to be afraid in 2018 is that we have an advocate. Romans 8:31-34 say: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,

how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that

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condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Wow! what amazing promises. God is on our side, so much so that he sacrificed His Son to save us.

Look at the table before us this morning. This is awesome. Here we see the symbols of His body and blood. What does it mean? It means that God loves us so much that He suffered for us; He allowed Himself to be tortured for us; He even died for us. He cares for us this much and more than we can imagine. **We begin 2018 with confidence because we have an advocate; we have a Savior.**

We begin 2018 with a purpose and we begin 2018 with our Savior Jesus Christ. He has promised to be with us throughout this coming year. The third reason we do not need to be afraid is that we have a future. We don't know what the future may hold for us in the short term. We know life can be hard. We are not immune from the maladies common to this fallen world. We know there can be disappointments and heartaches plenty. We know the apostles and early Christians suffered for the same faith we affirm and that we are not immune from Satan's attacks or from the ridicule of those who worship the lesser gods of this world.

Nevertheless, we also know that ultimately, our future is secure. In Romans 8:35-39 Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or

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famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." **Because we are loved of God nothing can ultimately harm us. Because He has conquered death, we will live with Him in eternity.**

We have a purpose. We have His presence and His power. We have a future. And, it's all because of what we see offered us on this table.

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Romans 8:28-39

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