

A Night of Flight — Rejection.

Matthew 2: 13-23.

Night Scenes of Scripture

Seventeen Bible Night Scenes, illustrating and elucidating various truths of the Gospel.

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Chapter 3.

A Night of Flight — Rejection.

It is an intensely solemn fact that Christ is not wanted by the very people that need Him most, unless the Holy Ghost has raised the question of sin in their souls. No matter where you find the Lord drawing near to man, this is ever the case, and the testimony of the wise men to Herod first demonstrates this truth, after the Son of God became incarnate. At the very outset of His course He was *rejected*, and that is why we read in the opening chapter of John's Gospel, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own (property), and his own (the Jews) received him not" (John 1: 10, 11). Whenever you bring in the truth about Christ into the world, whenever there comes the testimony of the Holy Ghost to men of the world — introducing Christ — do you know the effect? What was it then? "When Herod had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

Now would you not have thought that they would have rejoiced, and been delighted to hear the news? When they heard the question, "Where is he?" would you not have thought there would be a desire to know where He was, and who He was? Alas! they were not prepared to receive Him, but they were prepared to say, "Not wanted." Somebody said to me only today, "What do you mean by a rejected Christ?" My dear friend, do you know what rejection is? You are not wanted. Sinner! you do not want Him, do you? Indeed, from the date of His birth, I might say, the sad truth came out — He was not wanted. He was needed. But was He wanted by Herod? No! Did the scribes want Him? No! Did the men of the world want Him? No! Do you want Him now? Well, if you are an awakened sinner, you do; but if you are not, you do not. Oh no! Do you know the finest way to spoil a worldly party? Go into the midst of it and speak about Christ. Go into a ballroom, or on to a racecourse, if you like, and witness for Christ, and you will find He is not wanted. The world does not want Jesus.

Some years ago I was in a third-class carriage coming up from Musselburgh on a Saturday night. The train was crowded, and the carriage I was in had five communicating compartments, so there were over fifty people in the carriage. As we journeyed a party of ten who occupied the

middle compartment began to sing. They sang very well — Scotch songs — and all the rest of the people in the carriage stopped talking and listened. When we reached Portobello they got out, and other people got in. At that moment I rose and said: "My friends, I have observed that you have been listening with interest to these Scotch songs. I am not a Scotchman, but I should like to tell you about the song of my native land." Everybody looked and listened. Then I went on "My native land is heaven. I belong to heaven. I am redeemed by the blood of the Saviour, and belong to heaven. I cannot tell you the tune of the song sung there, but its words are these, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." From these words I preached the gospel for two or three minutes, and then sat down. At the same moment the train was drawn up by a danger signal, and there was a dead silence. The first words that broke the silence were, "Is he drunk?" They came from the further end of the carriage, and the speaker was a working-man. "No," said another man, "I do not think he is drunk; I think he is a good man." "He is not a wise man," said a third. "And why not?" asked a fourth. "Because he does not know the time nor the place for these things," said the first speaker. This sentiment was applauded. It just expressed the world's opinion. It never has time or place for Jesus. Sinner, the fact is you have no time for Christ; you have no place for Christ. Alas! you do not want Jesus.

My hearer, you will want Him one day. He was rejected in the day of His birth, and He has been rejected ever since. You say, Oh, things are altered since then. Are they? How many times have I stood with others at the corner of a street, and sought to speak a word for the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and gathered a crowd around us, and just as we were beginning to get into the sweetness of the proclamation of the gospel, Policeman No. B246 has come along and said, "Move on, please; by the order of the magistrates we can't have the thoroughfare blocked." "All right," says some one, and we move on. We go down three blocks, and there, at the foot of a street, is a German band, with the listening crowd reaching over to the other side of the thoroughfare, but you do not find Policeman No. B246 coming and telling them to move on. No, the world likes music, but it cannot tolerate Christ.

Some day you will sadly want Him, friend, when you cannot get Him. You will want to get to Him when you cannot get near Him. But do tidings of Christ trouble you now? You are like Herod. "When Herod heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." I would to God that you were troubled, but on a right account. Would to God that you were anxious about your soul, and crying, "What must I do to be saved?" It would be a good thing for you if you were to heed the Scriptures too. Herod did, but not for salvation. In his trouble, "when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda,: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." It is a very striking thing that if you want solid information you must go to the Scriptures, and even that godless man Herod had to go to Scripture. Whence did Herod get his information? From the pages of Scripture. And where do men get real light and truth today? Again, it is from the Scriptures.

Let me exhort you, young man, to hang on to the Bible. Do not let the infidel professors of a theology that suits the world rob you of a single letter of Scripture. They are very busy, indeed, cutting out this section and that. Believe them not. A young man wrote me a letter last week, in

which he stated that he had been filled with doubts as to Scripture, and, strange to say, that it was the teachers of religion who had upset his faith. Well, I have not much respect for such teachers. Men who will teach the truth, and give their hearers undiluted and unadulterated Scripture, are above all things wanted now. The man who tampers with Scripture will do so only to his own cost, for he will find out in the end that he has been tampering with the words of the living God. Thank God, He has long patience with all such, but there comes a moment when His patience is wearied out. My friends, thank God for the Scriptures. All the difficulties of the Scriptures, that men so often speak about, are really not such when rightly understood. Errors do not exist in them. God forbid the thought. There are no errors in Scripture, and the difficulties become the greatest beauties when they are rightly apprehended. There is all the difference in the world between what God says, and what man says.

If you take the finest thing man has made, say for instance the finest work in steel, which has been most highly finished off, and burnished, and put it under a microscope, what a rough, wretched, scratched concern it is. There is no smoothness in it at all. Now I put the wing of a butterfly under the glass; and the more you magnify it, the more beautiful it becomes. That is the difference between what man makes, and what God makes — what man writes, and what God writes. So do not you let into your head any of the current, flimsy and withal infidel, ideas as to there being errors in Scripture. I will tell you where the error lies. In the vision of the man who is reading it. He has got a spiritual cataract — a blindness about his moral vision; and he does not see things clearly. Blind men do not see. Every one knows that; and if you think you see errors in Scripture, be sure you have not a clear vision. That is not complimentary to me, you say. I know it is not. I do not want it to be. I want the legs knocked from under you, my infidel friend. I want to see you get down, and say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." You listen to God, for He speaks the truth, and His truth is exactly just in all its proportions.

It is a striking testimony to the value of God's Word that Herod, in the middle of his confusion, is obliged to turn to, and listen to Scripture. When he gets the knowledge, he turns it to bad account, like many another sinner. "Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, *that I may come and worship him also.*" He had no thought of that. That was mere deceit on his lips. He was set on murder, not worship, in his heart. You know what took place. Although on his deathbed, as we are told, he sent out his headsmen, "and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men." Such is man's hatred, that he plots, as soon as he hears of His birth, to cut off the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Now do you not think it startling when you come to look at Scripture, and at what God tells us about His Son? Yes, it is very startling! He was not wanted. Herod's awful project the magi did not aid in carrying out. When they had seen and worshipped the Lord, they repaired, warned of God, to their own country. Scripture tells us that "being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

And when they were departed Joseph had a dream. Joseph got a word from the Lord. And the wise men got a word from the Lord also, and they are obedient. They are obedient as well as worshipful. That same night apparently Joseph had a dream, saw an angel, and heard this word:

"Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother *by night*, and departed into Egypt." Only think that the Son of God, come here to save man, must flee the land of His nativity in order to escape the murderous intent of man. In the darkness of night — to evade observation — a start is made for Egypt. But why Egypt? "That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." How wonderful are the ways of God! These words, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11: 1), are to be fulfilled. You may say, How can that be? Christ retraces in His own Person the pathway of Israel, and He begins that history in Egypt, out of which He comes when Herod was dead. You then find Him at the Jordan, which Israel also crossed. And in the fourth chapter of Matthew we find Him in the wilderness, where Israel utterly failed, but He did not fail. In all this pathway of Jesus you are on truly historic ground. He was the true Israel — spoken of so often by Isaiah. Jesus was going to take up in His own history the responsibility of the people of God, and that is what enables Him to be a Saviour. Where every other man had failed, He glorified God, and then, in grace, died for those who had failed, and therefore needed redemption. His perfection as a Man qualified Him to be the Redeemer.

The going down into Egypt, then, was that Scripture might be fulfilled, and the next thing we read is that Herod sends out his bloody edict that another Scripture might be fulfilled. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matt. 2: 16-18; Jer. 31: 15). Why Rachel's voice? While Bethlehem belonged to the tribe of Judah, Benjamin was next to them; and you recollect Benjamin was Rachel's son. Bethlehem is first mentioned in connection with Rachel's death (Gen. 35: 16-20), and her sepulchre was "in the border of Benjamin, at Zelzah" (1 Sam. 10: 2). This bit of land, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, dipped down into the land of Judah; and about a mile north of Bethlehem, on the main road from Jerusalem and Bethel, the site of her tomb is marked by a little building to this day. Herod was so determined to sweep the coast clear, that not only in Bethlehem, but in "the coasts thereof," i.e., the parts of Benjamin just alluded to, were the children slain.

The quotation from Jeremiah is a remarkable application of Old Testament Scripture. Rachel had been dead for centuries and centuries, but the Spirit of God puts it in this remarkable way, as if her spirit had risen from the dead; and in connection with this fearful slaughter of so many of her own children, as well as the murdered infants of the tribe of Judah, Rachel's voice is lifted up in weeping, and her cries of sorrow are heard even in Ramah, the chief town of Benjamin. It is highly interesting to see how one passage of Scripture interprets another, and is interwoven with all Scripture. We should not have expected Rachel to meet us here, but, as I said before, Bethlehem was the place where she died. There also her children died, just because it was the spot where her Saviour and theirs, and thank God, my Saviour, was born. Is He your Saviour? If He is, we shall both thank God for Bethlehem by-and-by.

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." I may just say you will not find that expression "Nazarene" in the Old Testament; but Nazareth was a despised place, and Jesus was brought up in that despised and disgraced place. Do you not remember what Nathanael says in the first chapter of John, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? What came out of Nazareth presently? The blessed Lord came out. My dear friends, Jesus of Nazareth is a living, and a loving Saviour; but He has been rejected. Rejection met Him at the outset of His history. The world has never wanted Him. From His birth He has been rejected, and now He has gone out of sight.

Jesus the Nazarene — Jesus of Nazareth — the blessed Son of God has passed through this scene — alas! — unloved and unwanted by man. He was rejected. "He came to his own, and his own received him not;" but then, as now, grace has led some to care for Him, and of them it is written, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1: 11, 12). But though He was a rejected Saviour, He would still be a Saviour. Nothing chilled His love. He is rejected still; but, friend, what I want is your heart for that rejected Saviour now, and if you have never yielded your heart to Him till now, I ask you, Is He not worthy of it? And do you not think the day is coming when God will vindicate Him, and judge the world that has rejected Him, and the man who has refused Him? You may be certain He will.

Let me then urge you to come to Him in time, and confess and own Him now. God give you, my friend, this moment to receive that blessed One as your Saviour. You may say to me, You have not told us much about His work. You have heard plenty about His work, and have not been converted. I want you to see tonight that He is a rejected Saviour. The world has rejected Him, and you either side with the world who rejected Him, or with Him who is rejected. God has yet to settle with you, my friend, as to how you stand in relation to Jesus. God has said to Him, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

How do you stand in relation to the One who was rejected by the world, which at the outset would not have Him, and at length spat upon Him, scorned Him, and finally crucified Him with malefactors? How do you stand in relation to Him? Yours is an awful case if you are on the world's side, for, mark this, He will appear, He will come back in power and glory; and woe betide the man who is not on His side then. God help you to take your stand with Jesus, and for Jesus. Where is He? At the Father's right hand. Whom will He save? Anybody that will trust Him. Whom will He receive? Any one that will come unto Him. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." If you are wise you will say tonight, "From this moment forth, Lord Jesus, I will be on Thy side, whoever may be opposed to Thee. Yea, Lord, I am Thine."