

Monday

SCRIPTURES:

"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.' King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, 'Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?'" (Matthew 2:1-4)

"Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, 'Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!'" (Matthew 2:7-8)

"Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance." (Matthew 2:16)

"...Herod died..." (Matthew 2:19)

KEY POINT:

Herod relied on his own power rather than God's power.

READING:

In Matt. 2:1, it says: ***'Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod.'*** Have you ever noticed that you don't usually see Herod on the stages of the re-enactment of the birth of Jesus? Why is that? It's because Herod was not a warm and fuzzy character. We don't have time for a full-blown history lesson - but Herod's reign as king was ruthless and evil. His history is filled with lies, murder, adultery and treachery. Herod's chief problem was the simple fact that he relied on his own power rather than God's power.

In Matthew 2 we read that Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard about the birth of Jesus. Why was that? He was deeply disturbed because he was deeply afraid. Herod was the king of the Jews, and He was afraid that Jesus was going to come and steal his throne and his crown. If you're a king and another king is born in your own backyard, and if you're an insecure person, which Herod was, that's going to bring some serious fear into your life. And that's what Herod was experiencing.

Herod was not a God-fearing person, but he called the wisemen together because he knew that for many years a Messiah had been prophesied. Now people in those days didn't think the Messiah was going to be like Jesus. They thought he was going to come as a political ruler and take over the throne. Herod was feeling the heat; and from that moment on, He became obsessed with taking Jesus out – to the point where he did the unthinkable. He ordered the murder of all baby boys, age two and under, with the intent of eliminating this potential Messiah. Herod leveraged his power to try to trump God's power. But human power is limited, and his plan failed.

Ultimately, the Bible says: ***"Herod died."*** His reign came to an end. His human power was met by the ultimate power of reality - death. Herod relied on his own power when it came to Jesus, and he missed the whole point of Christmas! He was afraid Jesus came to threaten him and make his life uncomfortable. But Jesus really came to save him and bring him comfort. Because of fear, Herod thought Jesus was going to steal his power, but Jesus came to give him real power.

QUESTIONS:

- What are some differences between God's power and human power?
- Why do we tend to rely on our own power rather than God's power?

APPLICATION:

Identify specific activities in your life where you tend to rely on your power rather than God's.

Tuesday

SCRIPTURES:

"For the Kingdom of God is not a lot of talk; it is living by God's power."

(1 Corinthians 4:20)

"God... gives power and strength to His people." (Psalm 68:35)

"...He never grows weak or weary... He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless." (Isaiah 40:28-29)

"... 'My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me." (II Corinthians 12:9)

KEY POINT:

Christmas shows God's power in action, and God wants to give us that same power today.

The presence of God reveals the power of God and brings the peace of God to your life.

READING:

Christmas is God's power in action. Let me share a few things from the Christmas story that display God's power in action. It was God's power that invaded humanity with divinity - the birth of Jesus, God becomes human. It was God's power that changed the natural laws - a virgin birth. It was God's power that foiled the plans of a mighty ruler named Herod. It was God's power that orchestrated all the OT prophecies and fulfilled His promise of a Messiah. It was God's power that guided the wise men and Joseph to safety. Christmas is all about God's power. God's presence (the God-man, Jesus), brings us power, so we can live with peace. That's kind of the summary statement of all of Christmas.

Now what would this power look like in your life and how we live with that power? I Corinthians 4 says:

"For the kingdom of God is not a lot of talk. It is living by God's power." I'm guessing most of you would not question whether God is powerful. But you might say: *'Is that power accessible to me? The power we read about in the Bible, God invading human history and showing up in other people's lives ... is that power available to me, in my life, in the 21st century?'*

The Bible says in Psalm 68: ***"God... gives power and strength to His people."*** If that's true, then when can I count on God's power? I can count on God's power in any and all situations. I can count on God's power when I'm afraid, uncomfortable, occupied, lonely, wounded, questioning, betrayed, frustrated, anxious or depressed. No matter what you're feeling, you can count on God's power. How do we know that? Isaiah 40 says: ***"He [God] never grows weak or weary. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless."*** I love this idea that God never loses His power. He never gets tired or weary. He never goes to bed or loses energy. And here's the good news... God's power is available to us when we are weak and need it most. The Apostle Paul discovered this in II Corinthians 12. God said to Paul: ***"My power works best in [your] weakness."*** And I love what Paul says: ***"So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me."*** God's power shows up in our weakness. Where do you feel weak today? That's where God wants to strengthen you.

QUESTION:

Why is it so easy for us to rely on our own power and strength rather than God's?

APPLICATION:

Develop a habit of checking your power source before and during your activities.

Wednesday

SCRIPTURES:

"So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor." (I Peter 5:6)

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15: 5)

KEY POINT:

How do I access God's power? Step 1 – Admit my need. Step 2 – Plug into God

READING:

The first step to access God's power is **to admit my need**. To access God's power, begin by admitting your need. *'God, I don't feel like I can do this in my own power. I need Your power.'* Now let's be honest. This isn't hard to do when you're in pain - when you're struggling, lonely or hurting. But it is difficult when things are going well, because you're thinking: *'Why do I need God's power? I've got this thing handled!'* But when you live a self-sufficient life, you short-circuit God's power. If you want God's power in your life, drop the pride and admit your need. I Peter 5:6 says: ***"So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor."*** So first, admit your need.

Second. **Plug into God**. Plug into God's power source. A very important spiritual truth: *Things work best when they're plugged in*. Think about a toaster - it doesn't work if it's not plugged in. It's got to have a power source. If it's not plugged into a power source, you're not getting toast - you'll just end up with got bread. I have conversations with people in the church and out in the community who say: *'Well, I used to be plugged in. I used to be plugged in to church and a relationship with God.'* But somewhere along the line they unplugged and plugged in to their own agenda, their own way, their own dream, their own goals. And often, they have the audacity to blame God for their problems in life. But if you unplug, you shouldn't have the expectation that God will bless you with His power. Think about it. Why would He? It wouldn't make sense for God to give you power to do something that is outside of His design and will for your life. If you want God's power, you plug in.

And if you are currently plugged in, my admonition to you is to stay connected to God's power. Jesus spelled out this whole connection theory in John 15. He said: ***"I'm the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me*** [that's connected] ***and I in them will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing."*** Apart from Me, you live on your own power. That's why around here we talk a lot about doing life with God. And that's not just spending some time alone with Him each day. It's staying plugged in throughout the day. It means you include God in all your activities throughout the day. Paul calls it praying (talking to God) without ceasing. Just little prayers asking God to strengthen you – when you wake up, as you drive to work, before and during meetings, thanking Him at meals, asking Him to give you wisdom and strength in all circumstances. It's a whole lot easier than you might think.

God wants to connect with you, to be there for you. He's always waiting to do life with you; waiting for you to include Him in all your thoughts and actions, each day. So plug in and stay plugged in.

QUESTION:

Why do we "unplug"?

APPLICATION:

Spend some time identifying activities you feel confident in doing in your own power, and consider the possibilities if you were to do them in God's power instead.

Thursday

SCRIPTURE:

“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

KEY POINT:

How do I access God’s power? Step 3 – Step out in faith.

READING:

How do we access God’s power? Three steps. First, we admit our need. Second, we plug into and stay connected to God. And then third... we **step out in faith**. God’s power works in connection with our faith. Stepping out in faith means this... I’m going to choose God’s way before the power shows up. Key word: *before*. I step out in faith *before* God’s power shows up. That’s what faith is. I’m trusting God will meet me there and that He will act. Hebrews 11:1 is a great verse about faith. *What is faith? “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”* Now you might be thinking: *‘You mean I have to take action even though I don’t have the power, acting as if I have the power, in order to get the power?’* Yep, that’s what faith is. You act as if the power will be there - that God sees your faith and He turns on the power.

Let’s go back to Herod and the Christmas story. Herod was a powerful man by human standards. And juxtaposed to Herod you’ve got Joseph. In the world’s eyes, Joseph was not powerful – he was an ordinary man. So what’s the difference? Herod relied on his own power whereas Joseph relied on the power of God. Joseph stepped out in faith. In the Christmas story, God asked Joseph to do something, three separate times. And even though he was scared, Joseph did it anyway.

First, God said: *‘Joseph, I want you to marry your fiancée, the pregnant virgin.’* And Joseph said: *‘OK.’* Second, God said: *‘Joseph, I want you to leave Bethlehem because Herod is trying to kill Jesus.’* And Joseph left. And third, after Herod died, God told Joseph to go back to Israel. And Joseph went back, even though he was scared. Herod the Great was gone, but at that time Herod’s son was the ruler. So there were no earthly guarantees. Each time, the Bible says Joseph was afraid, but he kept stepping out in faith and God’s power met him each time.

If you’re anything like me, you’d prefer that God’s power would show up *before* you have to step out in faith, wouldn’t you? You think: *‘I’ll do the right thing -- but God, give me Your power first.’* I want God’s power to show up in my life before I go and reconcile that relationship, or before I take on that risky project. But the Bible clearly says that this isn’t how God works. All throughout the Bible and all throughout history, God intervenes in a person’s life when they’ve stepped out in faith *first*. And then God meets them there and infuses them with His power. So, we admit we need it, we plug into God, and we step out in faith.

QUESTION:

Is there anything in your life that you’ve felt compelled to do, but have been waiting for God to fill you with power for it first?

APPLICATION:

Let the fact that God empowers those who step out in faith before they “feel the power” change how you decide when to take that step of faith.

Friday

SCRIPTURES:

"I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God."
(I Corinthians 2:5)

KEY POINT:

God's wisdom is much different than human wisdom.

READING:

Again, how do we access God's power? Step 1, admit our need. Step 2, plug into God. Step 3, step out in faith. What would this look like in the real world? Let me give you a few scenarios.

Let's say you're not a Christian. You're just checking out the whole God thing because you're curious. You wouldn't just walk outside, look up at the sky and ask God for a miraculous sign to prove He is God. That would not be stepping out in faith. So what should you do? Start walking in the direction of Jesus. Take steps. Go to church, grab a Bible and read it, talk to other Christians, or read a book about the validity of Christianity. Start walking in the direction of Jesus and watch how He shows up along the way.

Or let's say you're a Christian. Chances are somewhere in your circle of relationships - family or friends - there's a broken relationship and you're not talking to that person. Every time you think of their name you feel this angst in your life. What do you do? You admit you need God's power, you plug in to Him, and then you step out in faith and do the right thing. You pick up the phone, talk to the person and ask for forgiveness. Not because you want to, but because it's the right thing to do. And God's power meets you there.

Here's the key to this - don't trust in human wisdom or feelings. Trust in the power of God. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:5 - *"I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God."* I'll take the power of God over human wisdom any day. Now is this tough? Are these 3 action steps difficult? Absolutely! But they are essential to experience the power of God in your life. Christmas is a celebration of God's power in action. God's presence came, and with it came His power, so we can have His peace.

QUESTION:

What step of faith is God waiting for you to take so He can give you the power you need for it?

- A relationship in your life you should work to mend?
- A relationship with God you should seek?
- A ministry you should join or start?

APPLICATION:

Whatever it is you feel led to do, step into it knowing that God will give you the power you need exactly when you need it.