

surely, day by day. Today is the day of salvation, harden not your heart through the deceitfulness of sin, as the Bible says. Is there someone listening now who really needs to hear and respond positively to this honest message?

To further emphasize the urgency of this gospel call, notice with me this fourth honest truth from our text story, namely how dangerous it is allowing some sin to remain in your life and refusing to heed the call to repent and believe, for notice how as time went on, Herod became more and more hardened in sin. In our Scripture passage we find him still sensitive to the voice of his conscience about the cold-blooded death of John he was guilty of, but as time passed, Herod more and more silenced his conscience. We know this for sure, for when Herod appears again in Scripture in Luke 23:8ff, he comes across as an indifferent hardened man. And in the end when Jesus stood before Herod, we read those solemn words that Jesus would answer nothing at all to Herod, indeed, not say a single word to him. As one put it, "Having rejected the preaching of John, Herod ended life ridiculing the One Whom John had said was greater than himself. In the end, God had no more to say to Herod. [Horrible judgment if you only stop to think about it!] The lesson is clear. Unless we silence sin by way of true repentance, sin will silence conscience by way of hardening. Unless you heed God's Word now, the day may come when you despise God's Son and then God will have nothing to say to you [ever and forever]." Do you hear and understand this solemn honest gospel truth?

We are in the time of the year when there are many parties often. Our text passage calls out, 'Let our good times in life be a reflection of the eternal feast day to come for God's people and always in line with the Word and manner of Christ the Saviour of sinners'. In connection with any and all parties, also in this festive season, remember the Lord Jesus Whose coming to the world in Bethlehem we celebrate especially at this time. Jesus came to be the Saviour from sin and to save His people, as many as trust Him, from sin! Will you above all acknowledge and honor and celebrate Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord in all your ways, including the parties you attend? If only Herod had done that! Will you learn from this bad party scene? Amen!

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



LEARNING FROM A BAD PARTY SCENE

In the month of December with the holiday season and New Year's Eve, it is not uncommon for people to attend one or more parties. To have celebrations and parties with family and friends and coworkers can be something very special and wholesome, but there is also such a thing as bad parties. Too often it happens that parties are not wholesome at all. In this broadcast, I invite you to learn some positive truths from a bad party scene that the Bible tells about with a birthday party of King Herod as told in Mark 6:14-29. Looking at this passage, clearly this birthday party of King Herod was not a good party, but it was a party gone wild. In seeking to learn from this bad party scene in one of the palaces of Herod, consider with me something of its haunting memory and then something of its honest message for you and me.

That this party in Herod's palace was one that left him and possibly others too with a haunting memory, we know for sure, for the text tells us that King Herod was thinking that Jesus, Who was by now becoming increasingly well known, possibly was John the Baptist raised from the dead! What would make Herod think that? Well, you see, his conscience was bothering him with what had happened and what he had done at his birthday party before. It had been a big party with all his top brass. Let me briefly tell you the story.

This Herod had, some time before, stolen the wife of another Herod to be his bride and got rid of the woman he had been married to. This new wife, Herodias, was actually also his niece, so you could say the new relationship was both a matter of wicked adultery and incest. There was one man bold enough to tell him how wrong he was in having Herodias as his wife and calling him to turn from his sin, and that was John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a faithful preacher, and he spoke the truth to all who needed to hear it regardless of what they might think or like. Herod actually respected this John and had a sort of liking for him as perhaps the only truly honest man in all his company. But, as we are told, Herodias didn't take kindly to John the Baptist at all and she wanted him silenced and killed. Herod hesitated to kill John not only because he knew that would be wrong, but he was afraid of the people's reaction, so instead of killing him, Herod just had John imprisoned. This did not satisfy Herodias, however, and she was determined that that man who dared to speak against their relationship had to be put to death, and she looked constantly for an occasion that it might happen too.

It is in this context that Herod's birthday party takes place. It was a big party for sure, and verse 21, in the original especially, suggests long planning for it and, no doubt, Herodias too was involved in some of the plans, especially for the entertainment that night. As typical with these parties, there would be lots of drinking and some very suggestive wild entertainment for these men of Herod's court. As one commentary put it, "Imagine, for a moment, the noise and revelry, the crude comments of these men, flaming with lust."

What happened at this birthday party? Well, reading between the lines, when the party was going strong and the men had already had too much alcohol, then Herodias had her daughter come in and give a dance that so turned on these men, that Herod in a drunken stupor made a rash promise and repeated it with an oath that he would give her whatever she asked, even up to the half of his kingdom. We are told the daughter goes to her mother to ask how she should respond, showing us Herodias was into a big plot here to get her desire that John the Baptist be killed. This opportune moment now had come and she instructs her daughter, 'Ask for the head of John the Baptist immediately!' You can almost hear Herodias say to her daughter, 'and hurry about this, for we can't let this moment pass.' Thus Mark 6:25 reads, "*Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.'*"

Can't you just hear the sudden silence in that palace hall with this request? Herod knew he was trapped. His men knew it too and so did Herodias and her daughter. Herod could still get out of his drunken promise if he was willing "to lose face" before his men, but he did not and would not. Herod lacked the courage, humility, and perhaps also the soberness or clarity of mind rightly to respond to his daughter's devilish request, and would rather lose John than his own pride and desire for influence. So he ordered John's head cut off and brought on a platter, just as asked. Herod came to the party unprincipled and he left the party guilty of irreparable sin and shame. Can you imagine John's head on a platter brought into the palace hall for all to see and given especially to Herodias' daughter for her to give to her mother? Horrible ending to Herod's birthday party! And this was the memory now that Herod had, this haunting memory from his birthday party of not too long before. Was John the Baptist's head on that platter always staring him in the face as it were, at least for awhile?

Are there sins staring you in the face, haunting memories you can't erase which keep coming before you too? Maybe it had nothing to do with a party, but will you learn with me from this bad party scene? How alone can we prevent and get deliverance from haunting memories from the past? The Bible teaches it is only by looking to Jesus and turning from sin and hearing and following after the crucified and risen Saviour that we find deliverance from the guilt and bondage and punishment of sin. Listen further as we nest

message with this whole birthday party story. Notice and take to heart at least the following truths to be learned from this horrible true but yet very revealing story.

For one, let us learn how that sin never exists in isolation. What I mean here is that if you allow one sin in your life, be sure it will lead to other and more sin in your life, more than you can ever think possible even. Herod lived in sin with Herodias, and when confronted by John about it, rather than turning from his sin, he continued with it, only eventually to become guilty of much more evil and wrongdoing in his life. Herod's particular weakness in sin was sexual sin, but that sin led him to many other sins, even eventually to his decapitating John the Baptist. How we should be afraid of indulgence in the least sin. Are you afraid of sin and sinning? One sin allowed can swiftly and suddenly erupt into a mass of sins committed. Beware of the power of sin! If, as is true, sin never exists in isolation, will anyone listening brashly continue with even one sin in your life? Won't you learn from Herod's bad party scene?

Notice next from this story how we need to beware of the influence of alcohol. It is true the word wine or alcohol is not mentioned in the text but the way the whole story is written strongly implies this party became a ghastly drunken orgy, not unlike the party mentioned in Exodus 32 and Daniel 5 and Esther 1. How much evil and sins of lifelong consequences result from drinking parties and drunken party goers! The Bible teaches alcoholic drink of itself is not wrong, but uncontrolled indulgence in it only spells trouble. How many make themselves unable to act responsibly, drinking too much and doing then also the most irresponsible and repulsive things! Alcohol abuse is the source of so much misery in marriages, in families, and in society life. Read Proverbs 23:29-35 and learn God's warning about alcohol abuse, and listen to just Proverbs 20:1 where the inspired wise man states, "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*" Will you not learn this, also from this story of King Herod's birthday party gone wild?

There are more lessons yet to bring out. Not only how one sin allowed never exists by itself but leads to others inevitably, and not only the wrong of being under the influence of alcohol, or any substance abuse, but notice next, how dangerous it is to put off truly listening and responding to God's Word. Herod heard John often, we read in verse Mark 6:20, but he always put off turning from his sin and bowing in humble submission before the Lord Jesus Christ. He was always "not quite ready for it" really to listen to John, and in the end the decision was forced on him when he was least ready to make it. Too many think they can put off really getting serious with God, and indeed, praying God for mercy and being truly converted, but it is so true as one said, "In dealing with our sins, there is never a time when we are 'more ready'. We must deal with them now, or we may not be able to deal with them later, [at all]." If you won't take seriously the call to repent of sin today, the likelihood is that you will only become harder in sin, slowly but