

The Destructive Nature of Sin

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Mark

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Our text this morning is Mark 6, yet again. I have tied the record in my own personal life for a number of weeks preached in a row, and next week I'm going for the hat trick. We will be in Mark 6, starting in verse 14. The title of this message is, "The Destructive Nature of Sin." The destructive nature of sin. Mark 6, starting in verse 14.

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 And she came in immediately 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." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison 28 and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

Most gracious and heavenly Father, we come again to this most difficult text. Lord, there are things in this text that are hard to understand. There are things in this text that are disgusting and ugly, that celebrate sin and wickedness. There are things here that we see that dishonor you and yet at the same time, we know this text is here for your glory, to teach us more about you and to teach us more about ourselves. God, this morning I ask that we would have eyes to see and ears to hear what is true of our own hearts and what you have called us to. Lord, I pray in this time that we would come face to face with our own sin, that we would come face to face with our wickedness and our inability to save ourselves. Lord, there are hard and difficult things that we will look at. Humble us, break us, and draw us to you. Help me now, O God, to speak with confidence, not in myself but in your word, for it is true, that I might speak boldly and clearly and if at any point during this sermon I am boasting in myself, bring me to my knees. Speak, O Lord, to us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last week, we looked at several different things. First of all, we looked at the life and ministry of John the Baptist. We started all the way back in the beginning, actually before he was born, to the promises that were made about who he would be and what he would do. We looked at when the angel of the Lord came to his parents and said he will be a prophet of the Most High. And then when he is born, there is the celebration of all of those around him. And his father, who finally has his voice back, is able to prophesy about what John would do, how he would help to usher in the kingdom, how one would come after him that would bring salvation. And then we looked at his character and the ministry that he had. He was a man of confidence and boldness. He was confident not in himself, but in the Lord. And that boldness drove him to taking a stand when no one else would take a stand. Ultimately, he would end up in prison because he stood up to Herod and told him he was in sin, and it would cost him dearly. But in all of that, he never lost his faith that God was in control of all things, that his life was not for his own glory, but for the glory and purposes of God. But we were reminded by John the Baptist that our knowledge and confidence in God should drive us into action. We must be people of action. Now, our main point this morning, and what we've been doing the entire time, is looking at the life of Herod. So we considered John last week, and now we will look at the life of Herod and understand the destructive nature of sin by looking at his various sins in this text and ultimately what it would lead to, which was the death of John the Baptist.

Now, some of you might know this, not all of you know this: I'm a deer hunter. I'm still relatively new to the deer hunting scene, but I am in love with it, and it costs a whole lot of money, as I have found out. But as I have gotten into it, my first introduction to it was actually a dear friend of mine in college. His name is Curtis, and he is fine with me saying that. He is a deer hunting machine, obsessed with it. When you think of redneck, you think of him. He is the most redneck person that I have ever met. But he found out that I was starting to become a little bit more curious into hunting. I had been watching several hunting shows that were intriguing, and so he invited me to go on a hunt with him. I didn't really know what to expect, but I said yes because it sounded cool. Sit out in nature, look at some animals, maybe put one on the ground. We'll see.

So as we drove up to northern Kentucky, he started walking me through the process. "This is what we're going to do. We're going to get up really early," and when he said early, he meant early. "We're going to get up and we're going to put on a certain type of clothing that has been treated and kept with all sorts of other things to make it not have a smell." Actually, all it did was smell like musk and trees for some reason. "But we would put those clothing on, we would walk quietly out in the woods, and then we would just sit there," which sounded really boring to me. So we did. We got there. We drove up to the property. It's about 5:45, I think, in the morning, which for me is early. Some of you, you're laughing at me and saying that's not a big deal. Early for me. 5:45, we get out into the woods, and then before we walk out there, he starts spraying me with all sorts of just strange stuff. One of them was designed to take the scent off of me, and the other one was designed to put a different scent on me, and it was a very unpleasant scent. If you know what that is, you know, ask me later. I'm not getting into it now.

So we start walking into the woods. We would take a few steps, and then we would stop, look around, make sure we didn't see anything. And then we would take a few more steps, and we would stop and look around. And after about 5 to 10 minutes, and we only walked like 20 yards, it took forever. We get to the tree stand, we start climbing up, we get in position, and I am starting to put the math together and realize we're going to be here a while because the sun does not come up for quite some time. So we got into the tree stand, and I started looking around. I heard nothing, saw nothing, and thought, this is going to be a waste of my time. It took 10 minutes before I fell asleep. 10 minutes. It did not last long. But he elbowed me right as the sun was starting to come up and said, "You're going to want to pay attention because the woods are about to come alive." And they did. Everything started moving. There were squirrels that sounded like elephants. There were all sorts of other creatures that start moving around through the woods. And as the sun comes up, he starts pointing out some things. Look at that. "That's about 30 yards away. That's about 40 yards away. These are my shooting lanes. And at about 7:30, 7:45, there's going to be some deer that are going to come around the crest of this ridge. They're going to walk straight up, and they're going to stop right there." And I thought that was kind of a bold claim to make. How in the world can he know that is exactly what is going to happen? But sure enough, about 7:30, 7:45, in come the deer and they start slowly feeding down the ridge line. We got in a little bit of trouble when a squirrel literally fell out of a tree and landed in front of them and spooked them, but they came back and they start feeding through, and they hit the exact spot that he said they were going to be at and before I knew it, an arrow was flying.

Now, he invited me back the next year, because after I experienced that, I thought, this is the coolest thing ever. I want to do that again. So I went back the next year. I had learned a lot about hunting. But this time, it was rifle season and also mating season, which is an important detail. We get back out into the woods, the exact same thing happens. The deer come feeding over the ridge line at the same time, they hit the exact spot that he said they were going to hit. Boom, 10-point buck on the ground.

So how did he know where they were going to be? There's a couple of things that he had done to prepare for that moment. Months and months prior, he had been in the woods

doing a lot of work. He had planted a small little food plot that he knew would attract them in. He started putting up cameras and patterning their behavior, trying to figure out what time are they here and what time are they there. And he placed his stand directly in between where they were bedded and the water source. So every little detail, perfectly mapped out, perfectly planned. He knew he could draw them in.

Now, that stinky stuff that I was telling you about is designed to attract deer during mating season. It is an unpleasant smell, but it works. A male deer is normally pretty smart. Normally, they're the masters of disguise, and you will not see them very often. But during the mating season, also called the rut, they're stupid. They will run around and do the dumbest things. They will put themselves in danger no matter what, just so they can have what they want. My reason for bringing this up is this is what the enemy does to us. He maps out everything that we think and do. He understands our hearts and our behaviors. And he puts out traps to snare us, to draw us in, to make us think that we are running to something that we want and that will be good, which ultimately will lead to our destruction. Brothers and sisters, our enemy knows us well. He knows our hearts, I think, better than we do and he will do whatever it takes to lead us to our destruction. You see, because sin blinds us, it makes us not see clearly, and as we will later find out, the Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So all of us have been blinded by our sin and we run around like a foolish deer, thinking that we are going for something that is good, when in all actuality, we are being drawn in by the enemy to our destruction. I think the story portrays exactly what happened to Herod. Herod thought that he could have things that would be pleasurable to him. He thought that he could do whatever he wanted and it would be fine, and yet the enemy had laid a snare for his heart and it would lead to his destruction.

So what do we know about Herod? The name Herod is actually mentioned multiple times in the New Testament. The first Herod we are introduced to is Herod the Great back in Matthew 2. Herod the Great, the first Herod that we have mention of here is a ruthless man. He is a violent man and he is willing to do whatever it takes to protect his own power. We find that out when he hears about a king that is going to be born in Bethlehem. We all know the story. The wise men comes through town, he hears about this king, he is jealous of potential power being taken from him so he sends them under the guise that, "Go and find this young king, let me know where he is so I can worship him." And all the while he was trying to plan to put that young king to death. But an angel of the Lord appears to the wise men and to Jesus' parents and tell them exactly what's going on, "Herod is after your child." And so Jesus and his parents slip out of town quietly and they flee. The wise men kind of sneak around him and mislead him. And Herod finds out, Herod the Great finds out he's been given the slip, and so what he does is have every single male child born under the age of two in that region put to death. He is not a good man by any stretch of the imagination.

The second Herod is the Herod of our passage this morning. His name is Herod Antipas. The Herod of our passage, and as we will later see, does not fall far from the wicked tree that is his father.

The third and fourth Herod of the New Testament are Herod Agrippa I and Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa I was just as brutal putting James, the brother of John, to death by the sword in Acts 12 and then right after that has Peter thrown in prison. Agrippa II was likely the tamest of the bunch, which is really not saying much but when Paul would appear before him in his defense in Acts 25 and 26, Herod said he would have set him free had he not appealed to Caesar. So there was something in him that was a little bit better. But as we find out, the Herod tree is not a good tree to come from. It is marred by wickedness, by a celebration of sin, and as we will soon find out, it causes them to do very many disgusting things.

Our Herod, Herod Antipas, was actually not really a king. He was a tetrarch, which means that he was given a specific region in the Roman Empire to rule over underneath the leadership of Caesar, but Justin Martyr would record that he was so obsessed with himself that he made every single person call him king. Herod was given a portion of the empire to rule over, but clearly it had gone to his head and he would rule and reign in a very violent and terrifying way. One commentator in talking about Antipas had this to say, "Herod Antipas is less infamous than Herod the Great, largely because he was less able rather than less ruthless. It was not without reason that the early church mentioned his name before Pilate's when recalling the crucifixion of Jesus in Acts 4. Like his father, Antipas was shrewd, pitiless, and a lover of luxury, particularly of magnificent architecture. He was a self-obsessed man. He was unwilling to let go of his own comforts and devoted to protecting his sin at all costs."

This then brings us to our passage this morning. With the focal point last week being John the Baptist, we will spend the bulk of our time on Herod, his sin and the destruction that his sin caused. Before we begin though, we must recognize Herod was not a believer. Herod was an unbelieving man so why should we even talk about his sin in the first place? We do so for three reasons. First of all, and the simplest reason is the Bible talks about it. So if the Bible talks about it, we need to look into it further. Second reason is that sin is sin. We must learn to recognize sin so that we can identify it in our own hearts and in the hearts of our brothers and sisters. And third, finally, we need to recognize sin and its power that it has over all of humanity, and when we do that, it should give us a deep burden to pursue the lost of this world, to let them know of their sin and their need of Christ.

Before we begin though, it is crucial that we define sin. So what is sin? In the Catechism here at Providence Church, and if you didn't know we have a Catechism, we have a Catechism, it asks the question, what is sin? And the answer is sin is any lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. But what is the law of God? The law of God is the commands of God as found in his word that instruct how we, as his creature, are to interact in obedience to him. The full representation of his law is found in the 10 Commandments with the greatest summary being the two great commands, which are the rules of my classroom if you're in the children's ministry. I see you smiling. 1. Love God. 2. Love your neighbor. On this, all of the law and the prophets hinge, right? So to sin is to reject God's commands for us. To sin is to fail to love God as we should as his creature, to honor him in all things, to disobey against his law to live for our glory and not his.

With that in mind, let's look at the first of Herod's sins that we will identify this morning. In the process, we will give an explanation of that sin, we will look at where it's at in Herod's life and see the destruction that it would cause. The first sin that we look at is the fear of man. Herod's first sin is the fear of man. It seems funny to say a man with such power was so fearful, doesn't it? Right, he had almost absolute authority over the region in which he ruled, and yet he was terrified. He was terrified of what people might think of him. He was terrified of if he did something, how it might impact his power and his rule and his reign. And this man was so terrified and fearful of man that he was scared of his own wife. Herod was a man with all power and yet all fear.

Now, the phrase "fear of man" is, in fact, a biblical term. It's not something that we've made up. That phrase put together is only mentioned one time, but we see it used in different ways throughout the entirety of Scripture. But the one time the fear of man is referenced is Proverbs 29:25, where it says, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." Now, we will return to the second part of that later on, but in this one biblical reference, the fear of man, we find that it is a very dangerous thing. The fear of man lays a snare, and that is a very unpleasant image, and it should be. For those of you who don't know what a snare is, let me give you a brief explanation of it. It is a hunting device that is used to capture an animal, but it's not necessarily designed to kill it immediately. Now, in some instances with an animal like beavers, trappers will use a snare to either snare them and trap them underwater where they will drown to death, or to trap them and they will starve to death. But for the most part, a snare, which is made up of a loop of either rope or wire, is designed to trap around the head, the body, the foot, whatever it is, tighten down and not loosen so the animal can't get free so the hunter, whoever placed it there, can deliver the final blow. But if you have ever seen an animal that is snared, which I wouldn't encourage you to go find it because it's actually very hard to watch, the animal is scared. It's scared, it's in pain, and it is prepared to fight for its life. When someone approaches a snared animal, it will begin to scratch and claw out of fear of anything that draws near to it. Its behavior becomes erratic. It will bite, scratch, claw, whatever it takes to be free. But what's interesting, I don't know if you've seen these before, there are videos out there of animals that have been either intentionally or unintentionally snared where people go out and try and free them. Now that animal doesn't understand that that person's trying to free them. All they know is I'm in trouble and I need to be free. So a lot of times they are kicking, biting, scratching, clawing, head-butting, whatever you wanna call it, the person that is trying to help them because that snare and the fear that they have within them has blinded them to the reality that someone is actually trying to offer them aid and this is what Proverbs says that the fear of man does to us, and as we will soon find out, it is exactly what Herod would do.

So how should we define the fear of man? Puritan pastor Richard Baxter defined the fear of man as idolizing man or setting man in the place of God. He says that our hearts neglect God and prefer some other competitor. Fear of man is what Lou Priolo calls the love of approval, places the thoughts and approval of others on the throne of our lives. It causes us to be so consumed with the thoughts of others and with the actions of others that all of our decisions become based upon what man thinks rather than a right desire to please God. This is the fear of man and what makes this sin so dangerous is that

oftentimes it will avail itself as a good thing. Let me give you a few examples. One example is someone can make a good desire of loving and serving their neighbor sinful when they do everything out of either A) the desire to win the approval of that person so everything they do is around that purpose. They love them, but they want their approval or B) out of a desire to protect and preserve their own personal image. Right, so it's under the guise that they love their neighbor and they want to be careful, but all of it is inward focused. How does it impact me? The second example, it can also lead someone to a failure to speak hard truth because they are more focused on being loving and not desiring to harm someone. In both instances, they look good in some ways on the surface level but as we start to dive deeper into the fear of man, you realize just how wicked and sinful it really is.

Now more examples could be offered, but I think these two portray the great issue. Fear of man attempts to veil itself as a good thing and what's so scary is that we can attempt to rationalize it in our own lives. We say things like, "Well, I don't want to offend or hurt their feelings. I want to win them over so that I can develop a good relationship, a good rapport with them, and then I'll say something." We also say that saying hard things might cause people to look poorly at me and my ministry. How foolish we are to take that which God has said is wicked and evil and make it good in our own lives. But before we pursue the remedy, let's spend just a few moments trying to identify this sin in Herod and make a few more comments.

The first place that we see the fear of man in Herod is quite literally when he is fearing a man. In verse 14, "King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'He is Elijah.' And others said, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'" He's fearful of actually two men in this situation. He hears about Jesus and what Jesus is doing and what his disciples are doing and he realizes this is bad for business. They're starting to draw attention away from Herod. They're starting to make him look less powerful. And so he's concerned. He's fearful of Jesus, but he's also fearful of John the Baptist whom he ends up thinking that Jesus is. He is terrified of John, terrified of the following that he has, of the ministry that he has. It's an uncomfortable ministry for sinners. And so he's scared of him. He's also fearful that this man that he thought he had gotten rid of has come back to haunt him. He's afraid that he failed to put John to death and to stop his ministry. And while the people around him are trying to offer answers as to who this might be, you can see how irrational the fear of man makes us because he immediately goes, "Okay, I saw this guy's head on a platter, but he's probably put his head back on and come back to life." I mean, it just doesn't make sense.

That's what our sin does to us. The fear of man makes us irrational to not think as we ought to. For Herod, the snare has been set and fear has set in but this would certainly not be the last time that fear of man gripped his heart. Now, Herod really was a vile man. He was a wicked man and he married a wicked woman. And by the way, just as a quick mention, this woman that he had married, turns out it is the wife of his brother, Philip. Oh, and by the way, it's also his niece. Like everything about this marriage is just bad. It's

just wicked. It is detestable. And as we saw last week, people are not happy with Herod. They are not happy that he has taken his brother's wife. They are not happy that he has married his niece because as we saw in Leviticus, that is a sin against the Lord. No one is happy with him, but no one has the guts to say something. His constituents are unhappy. His peers are unhappy. No one's willing to say anything and then walks in this brash man covered in camel's hair that's willing to take a stand.

Now Herod had heard John the Baptist before. In fact, he was in some ways drawn to his ministry. John piqued his interest. It says in verse 20, "When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly." He was drawn to the ministry of John the Baptist and I think in large part, because John was just so different than he was and was so different than everyone else around him. He was interested by this bold, hard man that was saying hard things, but he didn't understand him. But this time when John would walk in, the interaction would be different and it would be very unpleasant for Herod because John would stand up and say, "It is not lawful for you to marry your brother's wife." Herod was likely stunned. I mean, can you just imagine in that moment, he sees the man that he likes to listen to coming and he's like, "This is gonna be good. This is gonna be interesting." And John stands, looks him in the face and says, "You have sinned against God." Stunned. He's probably thinking, "Who has the audacity to say something like that to me?"

Now, Herod being a proud man could have just killed him in a moment. He could have just drawn his sword, plopped his head off and been done with him, but he didn't. Why? I think it's for a few reasons. First, he still kind of liked him. He was still kind of drawn to his ministry. Though he said something really hard to him, he was interested and intrigued by him. Second, though, he was honestly terrified of him. He was scared of the following that John had. He was scared of the words that John said and the power that he seemed to have over the people. The third thing is that he was fearful of how the people might respond if he put John to death. But fearing he might look weak before others and honestly fearing his wife, he put John in prison. He threw him in prison. But this is not the only person that has a fear of man in this text. Herodias also struggles with that.

Now we're not gonna spend much time on her, but she does not like anyone that says she is wrong. Doesn't like them at all. And it's important to realize that there is no other way to put this: this woman is crazy. The levels that she is willing to go to so that she can have her sin and protect her sin is both disgusting and astounding and she did not like that John spoke hard truth to her. And she held a grudge against him. We see in the text that she is holding on to this grudge and that she's starting to devise a plan. "Okay, my husband didn't do exactly what I wanted, but I think I can overcome this. I think I can have him put to death."

Now, while John is in prison, for doing nothing wrong, Herod throws a party, throws a birthday party. It's a celebration of himself, right? So there's some more pride right there. He's celebrating himself and he invites everyone in power that he can think of. And Herodias seeking to seize the moment, it says in the very beginning of it, let's see here, verse 14. King Herod heard of it, trying to fast forward here. The time had come. There was an opportunity. There's an opportunity for Herodias to do exactly what she wanted to

do and so she seized the moment. She set her plan into action, and as we will later see, does some pretty disgusting things to get it done. She will send her daughter out to dance before the drunken crowds. She will send her own daughter out.

Herod and his guests were very pleased with what they saw. Likely they were pretty drunk from the banquet and from the party. They were celebrating themselves. Herod is basking in everyone's approval of him. And so he says to the daughter, after she had pleased the guests, "You can have whatever you want, whatever you want up to half of my kingdom." That is a steep promise to make. So the daughter runs to her mother. She takes off running to her mother and says, "What should I ask for?" Herodias had been planning this all along. She tells her daughter, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist." And so it says at once. I mean, everything that unfolds, the party was probably only a couple hours long, but in this scene, what unfolds happens probably in the span of 10 to 20 minutes. It's quick. It's rapid. So the daughter runs back to the crowd and stands before Herod and says, "I want immediately the head of John the Baptist on a platter." Herod in this moment, likely snapped out of his drunken stupor a little bit. He was trapped. He was snared and he knew it.

So what would he do? The response of Herod shows just how deep the fear of man ran in his heart. He felt sorry. The text says that he feels sorry for what's about to happen but because of the promises that he had made to his guests, now just stop, stop right there for just a moment. He would not break his oath because he was afraid of what others might think. Don't get it twisted. He's not just trying to hold a promise for the sake of a promise. He's afraid of what everyone's going to think of him. He is afraid of what all of those powerful people around him are going to think. He is afraid of what Herodias is going to say or do. He probably asked the question, "Well, I'll look weak if I don't keep my promise. What will everyone think of me? What will my wife think of me?" Now he had the chance to do the right thing. He had the chance. He could have stopped everything and realized just how ridiculous this moment was. I mean, just look around you. Nothing about this is right, Herod. He knew John did not deserve to die. He had done nothing wrong. And he knew that he had the ultimate authority in this situation to put his wife and his stepdaughter in their place and say, "No, we're not doing this." But he didn't. Herod was afraid. Afraid of what the elites might think. Afraid of how he might be seen in the public eye. He feared man, not God and it had some serious ramifications.

Now, when we consider the fear of man within Herod, it should lead us to take a very healthy pause and consider our own hearts for just the moment. Are you infected with the fear of man? Are you overwhelmed with a desire to please people? Are you so obsessed with what others might think of you that it informs all of your decision making and you forsake right thinking and faithful obedience? Let's consider a few examples as identified by Ed Welch and Lou Priolo on the fear of man and people pleasing. It's good for us to identify these things, to bring them to the light so that we can actively wage war against them.

First symptom, are you easily influenced by others? Do you easily succumb to peer pressure and conform to the desires of those around you even if you know it's wrong?

B. Do you struggle to say no? Did you know that struggling to say no is actually the fear of man? You're afraid of, if you say no, what people might think of you. You're afraid of, if you say no, then people won't be happy with you. So your desire is to please people, even though you might not have the time for what you said yes to.

C. A fear of exposure. Do you cover up your sins and struggles because you are terrified of being shown as sinful, weak, or broken? Do you do whatever it takes so that no one knows that you struggle with sin?

D. And I think this one is very prominent amongst Christians, do you struggle with decisions? Do you often second guess your decisions because of a desire to have people think well of you? Do you become indecisive because you are consumed by what others think rather than what God commands?

E. Do you shade the truth? Do you tell little white lies to either make people look at you better or make yourself feel better? Or do you do it to cover up the shame of your own sin?

F. Are you preoccupied with the perceptions of others? Do you find that you often talk about yourself and your strengths and your accomplishments, no matter how small and insignificant, so that you can draw in the praise of others? Do you find yourself selecting your next action based upon what other people might think or say?

Here's another one that I think is very common amongst Christians, do you struggle to confront others? I think this is likely the most prevalent. Are you a peace-lover instead of a peacemaker? And there is a difference. A peace-lover will do whatever it takes to keep the peace around them, even if that means sinning. A peacemaker is not okay with sin. Are you more focused on making sure that everyone is pleased with you instead of making sure your brother or your sister is at peace with God? And yet the fear of man causes us to struggle to confront others, to stand up and speak truth when it is necessary.

H. Do you respond wrongly to correction? Do you become defensive when others correct you? Or do you do whatever it takes to be back in someone's good graces? I think that this is really prevalent amongst children. Have you ever watched a child get in trouble? When the parent corrects them, have you noticed that they start sucking up a lot? Or at least that was me as a child. When I would get in trouble, and I knew I was in trouble, I would do whatever it took to look better in my parents' eyes. So I would go vacuum, which I hated vacuuming. I would go do the dishes. I'd take out the trash. None of it was because I loved my parents. It was all because I was afraid of the consequences of what I had done and was trying to buy my way out of it.

I. Do you put on a face at church? Do you walk in here knowing that you are a sinful person, and yet you put on a mask? Are you afraid of what others might think, of how they might look at you if they just knew what you were struggling with?

J. Do you love the praise of others? Do you find that you fish for compliments constantly, that you say certain things and do certain things so people recognize you and give you a compliment? Or here's another interesting one, do you put yourself down in the hopes

that others will disagree and praise you? I've done that before. Or do you begin to pity yourself when other people don't recognize your accomplishments?

K. Do you show favoritism? Do you surround yourself with people that will praise you and make you feel more secure? I think often we play favorites because we know that certain people will give us what we want and make us feel better. Or we don't surround ourselves with certain people because they're going to make us uncomfortable, and they're willing to speak hard truths in our lives.

So let's get real and vulnerable for a moment. Did any of that resonate with you? Did you feel that? Did you start to go through the list and go, "Yep, yep, yep, ooh, I don't like that one"? Because I sure did. When I was preparing this week, that was just painful and it felt like a stinging rebuke. Now some of you, and this is going to be a reflection of your heart, might have started shaking your heads and going, "Nope, that's not good, that's not good, that's not good, that's, yes and amen," and all you were doing was trying to draw attention to yourself so people would think better of you. Again, fear of man. We need a reality check because more than likely, most of us are trapped in the fear of man. It is a snare, and you might not even know it.

Now, lest you think you're alone in this, let me offer you a few words of encouragement. You're not. There you go. Those are the words of encouragement. You're not alone in your fight. I think at some level, every human has been guilty of the fear of man. And Christian, though you have been set free by the blood of Jesus Christ, you can still wrestle with the fear of man. You can still fight with it. I know this because I have seen it in many of my friends. I have seen it in my family. I have seen it in my own heart, and I've seen it in these very walls. I have witnessed people that refused to say no because of what others might think of them. I have seen people refuse to let others into their lives out of a fear of being exposed. I have seen godly people fail to make decisions, fail to act because they are terrified of how it might look or that it might take them out of their comfort zone. I have seen people stand and boast in their accomplishments and how Christian they are. I have seen people respond in anger when they're confronted with their own sin. I have seen people walk into this very building living a double life so that people at this church might think well of them. I've seen people surround themselves with like-minded individuals for the sense of security and increased social standing. And whether you are a leader in this church or a lay member, if this is true, then you need to wake up because it is nothing more than an unholy and ungodly fear of man.

At its very heart, the fear of man is a pride issue. It is a pride issue. It is a form of self-worship. It is a desire to make one's name great, which is exactly what Herod was doing. He wanted to boast in his accomplishments. He wanted to make himself great and was unwilling to do what was right so that he didn't have to admit that he messed up. Pride is at the center of every sin that you and I will commit. Stuart Scott defines pride in his little booklet, "From Pride to Humility," in this way, "When someone is proud, he or she is focused on self. This is a form of self-worship. Prideful people believe that they are or should be the source of what is good, right, and worthy of praise. They also believe that they, by themselves, are or should be the accomplisher of all things. In essence, they are believing that all things should be from them and through them and to them or for them."

The very root of pride is a worship of self rather than God. Is this not true of Herod and every other person that commits the fear of man? They are waging war with pride and some of them don't even know it. Herod desired to make his name great in everything. Everything that he did was for this purpose because it made him feel good. He would build great cities that were devoted to him. He would throw parties constantly for himself. And he did everything he could to protect his wicked marriage to make him feel better, even to the point of allowing a good man to die. This is how deep the fear of man and pride had run in his heart. How wicked this is. How deadly is pride. How terrible is the fear of man and if left untreated, how quickly it will lead to your destruction.

So what is the remedy to the fear of man and pride? I think the first remedy is having a holy fear of God. Having a holy fear of God. Time and time again, Proverbs instructs that we should fear God, that the fear of God leads to wisdom. In some ways, the fear of God truly is a fear. As a sinner, when we stand in the presence of the one true holy and righteous God, we should be shaking in our boots because we have no right to stand before him. But as a Christian, we should stand in awe of him as well. I'll put it in this way. I'm going on vacation a few weeks. That's actually where Pastor Ty is right now, on vacation with his family. If you've gone to the beach before, and I would implore everyone to go to the beach. It's the greatest place ever. If you've gone to the beach before, you've been on a trip, you're laying out on the beach, and then you see a thunderstorm start to roll in out of nowhere. Out of nowhere. You can see the wind and the rain coming, and so you slowly work your way back up to the security of your condo, hotel room, house, whatever it is. What do you do next? You go sit on the porch and watch the storm because it's just so amazing to watch. But you're only doing it because you're secure. This is what a fear of God looks like. We sit in the security of his salvation. We rest in his promises, and yet we sit in awe at his power and glory and might and beauty.

So we fear God. This is what a holy fear of God is as a Christian. We are to sit in the comfort of him. We are to rest in the truth that God is the only one in control of all things. He is the only one that has all power over sin and death, and he is the only one that can direct our steps and that holds all things in his hand. Matthew 10:28 says, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can kill both the soul and the body in hell." What is there to fear in man? They can only kill you. And I know that didn't sound very encouraging, but let's seriously consider that for a moment. What can man do to us compared to the power of God? They can only kill us. God has the power to keep us, to hold us, and to sustain us, but most importantly, he has the power to save us and hold us for all of eternity. What can man do? Fear God.

Second antidote to the fear of man is to trust in the goodness and provision of God. Look again at Proverbs 29:25, the fear of man lays a snare, is what we've been talking about, Herod was caught in that snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. To trust in the Lord is to trust that he is good and he provides all things. The fear of man in pride believes that you alone can provide for your most basic needs and wants, or that you have to rely on the ability of other people, but this could not be further from the truth. In

Genesis 3, Adam and Eve believed the exact same thing. They thought that they could provide for what they wanted, and so they took what God told them not to but in thinking that they were in charge and could do whatever pleased themselves, they actually led themselves straight to death. So trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

Now before you start panicking that I have forgotten repentance, I haven't. We'll come to that in just a moment, but I want to close our consideration of the fear of man, and then we're going to rapid fire the next part. The fear of man, with a quote by Ed Welch in the book, "When People Are Big and God is Small." "All experiences of the fear of man share at least one common feature, people are big. They have grown to idolatrous proportions in our lives. They control us since there is no room to worship both God and people, and whenever people are big, God is not. Therefore, the first task in escaping the snare of the fear of man is to know that God is awesome and glorious and not man." But unfortunately for Herod, the fear of man was not his only sin. When there are one or two sins, you can be sure that more will be found.

The second thing that Herod wrestled with was the lust of the flesh or sexual sin. I'm going to be up front in saying that we are talking about a very sensitive subject, and I want to be very careful in the church to talk about these things. We are sitting in a mixed audience. It is more beneficial to be cautious. The things that happen in this passage are difficult and the details are absolutely disgusting but it's important that we understand God's good design and how man perverts it, how man distorts it. Sex and sexual sin have often been avoided in pulpits and in churches. Some of the reasoning I can somewhat understand and some of it I can't. In some instances, pastors and churches are attempting to be cautious and not introduce certain sins to people that they had not yet struggled with. I know there have been many cases where preachers and teachers have been so detailed that it's actually introduced people to sin. So we don't want to do that. I understand that. But to talk about it in a negative light in terms of sex and sexuality, talk about it in a negative light or to avoid it altogether can be equally as dangerous for a few reasons.

A. It will either diminish or misrepresent that which God declared as good. It was his design for many reasons. First, it was designed to glorify him. That is the ultimate purpose. It was designed to glorify him. Second, it was designed to consummate the marriage covenant. Third, it is an expression of love and pleasure. And fourth, it was God's design to fill the earth with his image-bearers through procreation. It is a good thing.

B. When we diminish or don't talk about it as we should, it can take away the joy that is to be received from it as it has been portrayed as either bad or unimportant.

C. Another reason why the decisions of churches not to talk about this has had bad effects. It can give Christians the idea that since it is not talked about in the church, so

also are they not allowed to talk about it. The danger in this is that it leaves people in the dark, feeling like they have no one to go to for counsel.

Fourth and finally, it can make those who are struggling with sexual sin feel like they have no one to go for help and therefore, they leave it in the dark, never being freed from its bondage.

So as the church, we cannot avoid talking about it. Instead, we must talk about it in its proper context and design. God designed sex to be a good thing when kept in its intended purpose and design. But like all sin, we take that which God has designed and declare it as good and twist and distort it and pervert it for our wicked pleasure and it is crucial that we understand God intentionally designed it to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in the marriage covenant. Period. No other additions. No other amendments. That is its design. Anything outside of that is sin.

But we live in a culture that celebrates sin, and for some reason, celebrates sexual sin. June is fast approaching and in just a few short weeks it will be Pride Month. Cities will have Pride billboards, ball clubs will have rainbow uniforms. Social media will be covered with promotions and advertisements. Our government will likely recognize this month and give speeches about just how great it is. Pride marches will go throughout our cities and towns draped in rainbow flags, which is supposed to be the symbol of the LGBTQ+ community. And before you think any of this is new, it's not. It's been around throughout human history. Just look at Sodom and Gomorrah. It's been around for ages. It has plagued humanity and in a very real sense, there is nothing new under the sun, but we live by far in the most accessible time in human history. Our movies and TV shows are inundated with it. Social media has become a celebration of it. Men and women are encouraged to sexualize themselves to match the culture's standard of beauty. And pornography is running rampant throughout every single generation.

Here's a few alarming statistics for you to consider. One out of every five online searches is for pornography. One out of every five. 90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about it with their friends. Only 43% of teens believe that it is bad for society, 31% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. 51% of Millennials believe it's bad. This is where it gets interesting for all of you older generations that think our generation is the worst. 44% of Gen Xers, only 44% think it's bad. And 59% of Boomers. 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say that they watch porn at least once a month. And the average exposure to it is 12 years old. 12. Oh yeah, we've got a problem. These are horrible and heartbreaking statistics. Our culture hates what God designed and will do whatever it takes to destroy it and it's not going to get any easier. Sexual sins are destroying individuals, they are destroying the homes, they are destroying our country, and worse, it is running rampant in the church. It is deadly and we need to recognize it for what it is. And Herod was a man gripped by sexual sin and we will see that it leads to some serious damage.

First case of his sin is found when we take a closer look at his marriage. Herod was married to a woman that he should not have been for a multitude of reasons that we've

already covered. First of all, Herodias was his niece, and as we see in Leviticus 18, that is unlawful according to the word of God. But if that wasn't bad enough, Herodias's marriage, was also married to his brother Philip and we aren't given the details of the divorce, but the text seems to hint that Herod used his power to take Philip's wife because they saw one another and they liked one another. Herodias was not innocent in this either. She mutually entered into this arrangement. On all accounts, this marriage is wrong. It is all based upon their desire for one another and they would do whatever it took to have what they wanted.

And everyone knew that it was wrong, but no one stood up against them. Except for John. He was not afraid of them. John did not fear them, he feared God and he feared his law and his commands, and he knew that this was a celebration of sin before the entire region and he was having none of it. He confronts them and it costs him. But here's where it gets interesting. Herod, when confronted with his sin, had a choice to make. Should he listen to wisdom and repent of what he had done or should he keep on sinning and punish the man for calling him out? Now, Herodias knew her answer pretty quickly. Put him to death. She wanted him dead, but again, Herod was scared of John and his followers so he wouldn't kill him. Instead, he had him thrown in prison. Herod was so engrossed in his own sin that he is willing to throw a man who had done nothing wrong into prison, nothing at all, so that he could stay in his wicked, lustful marriage.

Already his sin was having consequences and unfortunately John was the one that was bearing all of those consequences, and nothing about this party was good. Again, he invited all the dignitaries to bask in his glory by celebrating him. He is a very proud man. He and all of his guests probably drank heavily. There was probably coarse joking likely flying around the room. And because of that, Herodias saw her opening and sent her daughter, her own daughter, to go in and tempt Herod. How foolish does our sin make us? When she sent her in, it was a very inappropriate dance. I will not even consider going into the details, but suffice to say it was sexual by nature. We know this because of the language surrounding the response of Herod and his guests. He said it pleased him. Their celebration of sin was so great that Herodias is willing to send her daughter in to seduce her husband so that she could have what she wants, the head of John the Baptist.

Her sin and his sin had made them blind, and as we saw earlier, we know what her plan was all along. She wanted him dead. Herod was obsessed with the lust of the flesh so much, and it backed him into a corner, again, into a snare. Then came the demand from Herodias' daughter for the head of John the Baptist on a platter and so because of his fear of man and the desire to protect his sexual sin at all costs, he did it. He didn't want to, he really did. And he did it. Herod sent the executioner, and at once, immediately, not a moment went by, and John is dead, and his head is being paraded as a trophy. Herodias wanted the man dead all along, all because she had sinned against God. Herod put him to death just so he could keep sinning.

And everything about this just feels disgusting and wrong. How can an innocent man who feared God and honored God die because two people were so obsessed with their sin that they're willing to put someone to death for it? Herod's sin was so destructive that it

cost John, an innocent man, his life. But eventually, Herod would feel that destruction. Historians have recorded the life of Herod afterwards, and there's much debate and speculation, but here's what we do know, that after a while, his marriage to the wife that he should not have been married to in the first place would cost him. Herodias would try and jockey for more political positioning, even though he should have divorced her. He shouldn't have been married to her in the first place. And because of her political jockeying, it would get him kicked out of his tetrarch position, and he would go into exile. There's a lot of speculation about how he died, but suffice to say he died in a very slow and painful death because he refused to repent.

This is what sexual sin does to us. It blinds us. It does not allow us to see reality, and it destroys everything in its path. Proverbs 6:27 and 28 says, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" Playing with fire has serious consequences. Now, fire is a good thing when used for its intended purpose. It's a blessing to all. And yet when you take it away from what it was designed for, it destroys everything in its path. There are so many historic fires that have all started with one small match. Whether it's a wildfire or burning of a city, it started with something small and we think that our sin is small, don't we? Especially sexual sin, we think it's small and yet it has a snowball effect. When we give an inch, we'll give a foot. We'll give a foot, you know the rest, we'll give a mile and so on and so forth. It snowballs. It destroys everything in its path.

But let's not be naive in thinking that our church is immune to it. I'm willing to bet that there are some in this room right now that looked at pornography multiple times last week. Maybe even this morning before you came here. There are likely several of you that lingered on lustful thoughts when sitting in this very room. A few of our teens and young adults might be having sinful relationships with their significant others. And there's a chance that someone in this room is trying to cover up an adultery as I speak. It is a harsh reality check.

But I want to tell a story. This is a very important story. When I left for college, I believed that I could do college on my own, which is just don't, don't do that. You need community. But the first month of college, I just stayed in my dorm room and I hid there. I thought, I'll just get by, get my degree and get out of here. Nothing could be further from the case. First month, my RA, who I didn't really know that well, came and grabbed me out of my room and said, "We're going to have our first prayer meeting of the hall," and there were about 20 of us on the hall. We didn't have frats there, but we basically did. It's a Christian version of a fraternity. It's very goofy and you name it, Greek words. I'm filibustering. So we pile into this room, 20 of us pile into a room that's no bigger than the counseling room, which is a small room, 20 of us. And it was all guys, so it didn't smell great. And we started going around and sharing prayer requests. I pray for my family going through a hard time. Pray for school and trying to study harder. Pray for me, I've just been tired and not sleeping well. Not very deep, just kind of vague. And then in about 30 minutes into it, one of my dear brothers that I am friends with to this day, opened his mouth in a very weak and broken voice and confessed to struggling with sexual sin. Ripple effects. Another one spoke up. And then another guy spoke up. We were in that

room for three hours. Three hours of confession and pleading for God's grace and freedom all because one had the courage to stand up and say, "I am struggling."

There are people in this room that are struggling right now, and I know it. I know it because we're still broken people. If you are struggling, know you are not alone. There are people in this room that have struggled with every sin under the sun, with the fear of man, with pride, with sexual sin, and we love you enough to tell you when you're wrong. We also love you enough to tell you, you need Christ. And we want to stand here and help you as a church, as your church family. I have dealt with the sting of sexual sin. And in that room that night was the first seed of freedom for me. God's grace is sufficient. But it all started because we realized we were not alone in the fight. You are not alone in this fight.

To whoever is struggling in this room, you're not alone but you cannot stay there. You can't stay there. This brings us then to the final remedy, closing thoughts. What's interesting, and John and Herod are contrasting characters, John is confident in God, Herod is confident in himself. John is humbled by himself and the message that he carried, so much so that he said that he needed to decrease when Christ showed up. Herod only wanted to increase. They are contrasting in every single way, but we shouldn't be surprised. We shouldn't be surprised by Herod because 2 Corinthians shows that mankind has been blinded by their sin. Herod was a blind man. We can see that there was a design within him, as was designed in all of humanity, to worship God because he was somewhat drawn to the message of John, but because he was blind, he refused to repent. He refused to turn from his sin and ironically, he sent the man that carried the message he needed to death. And he did not repent.

We are blind. We need our eyes to be opened, and the message of John's ministry was simple, "Repent. Repent." This was behind what John said to Herod. He wasn't just calling him out for his sin. I guarantee he was calling him to repentance because that was his ministry. But he was blind. Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And Romans 6 says that the wages of sin is death. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. Herod was dead in his sin and was blind to the fact that he needed to repent. But that brings us to the remedy, not only for sexual sin and for pride and for fear of man, but to all of our sins. 1. Repent and believe. This is where we begin. Repent and believe. Sin runs to the very core of our hearts. It pollutes everything that we do and it destroys everything in its path and the only way to be saved from that destruction is by repenting of your sins and trusting in Jesus Christ. To repent is to confess and turn away from your sins but what are you turning to? John's ministry was to usher in the only one that sinners could turn to, which was Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life. He was the Son of God. He willingly went to the cross and took on every sin, every sin that we have committed, are committing and will commit. He nailed it to the cross and completely and totally defeated sin and death.

So when we repent and believe, we are placing our faith in that truth, that Jesus has saved us from our sins, that we are set free from the bondage of sin, and he is now our Lord and Savior but that is not the only thing that we are called to do. We are called to repent and

believe and we are also, number 2, called to take action. Knowing what we know from this text, we cannot be passive Christians. We have been called to action and we cannot be passive with our own sin. As Christians, we are called to daily put sin to death. So let's get to work. Here are a few action points for you as we close our thoughts.

1. Get in the word. If you want sin to no longer have a foothold in your life, then you need to know more of God and less of yourself.
2. Use prayer as the weapon that it is. If you are not communing with God, then you are not using one of the greatest tools in the Christian arsenal. Take everything to the Lord in prayer.
3. Get accountability and get it quick. We weren't designed to live the Christian life alone. You need others. You need others that will know your heart and are willing to speak and be a John and say hard truth to you.
4. Be a John. If you see something, say something. If you see sin in your brother or sister's life, you are doing them an unloving disservice by not saying something. Speak truth into their lives. Tell them that they have sinned against God and call them to repentance and love and grace.

Fifth and finally, get discipleship. I am a product of God's grace through faith discipleship. I had countless men pour into my life from a very young age that refused to let me go and struggle in my sin. I had a pastor, Mitch Chase, the pastor of Cosmosdale Baptist Church that spent years counseling me, mentoring me, pouring into me and raising me up to be an elder at that church, not because of something great within me, but because of the grace of our great God. You need discipleship. You need discipleship. You need people walking with you daily, telling you what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The truth of the gospel should lead to change and it should lead to action. And if you only knew, if you only knew what was happening through our counseling and discipleship ministry, you would be invested in it because it is changing lives. The gospel leads to change. It does not leave us sitting in our sin.

So get to work. You will not truly grow in your discipleship only by what you know. Merely listening to a good sermon will not change your heart. Hearing the word, or for us leaders that are in the room, preaching and teaching the word without applying the word makes us useless for the kingdom. It's time to stop discovering or divorcing our knowledge from our action. Let me implore you, kill your sin and be bold and loving enough to help other people put their sin to death. My prayer is that we would be a church that looks less like this world and more like Jesus. Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Let's pray.

God, we are undeserving of your grace. There are so many sins that beset us, that entangle us, that keep us from your promises. O God, help us to be a people committed to confessing and repenting, committed to trusting in you, committed to following you and

committed to speaking truth into one another's lives. Our knowledge of you should lead to action, so make us a people of action. Make us more like you and less like the rest of this world. Lord, we anticipate your arrival with eagerness when you will make all things new and we will no longer struggle with this body of flesh but until then, give us the strength to persevere. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.