

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ Now King Herod heard *of Him*, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" ¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he *was* a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. ²¹ Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee. ²² And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you." ²³ He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." ²⁴ So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry; *yet*, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, ²⁸ 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 away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

We are going to see the picture of a disturbed man this morning. And there is much to learn. We will find a man who would say that he was only doing **what he had to do**. He had people to please. But there is one thing that is seriously missing in Herod Antipas's life. He felt no absolute loyalty to please his God. And that lack, in the end, determined his actions.

We need to clarify the characters in this play again. We have Herod the great. He died in 4 BC and his kingdom was divided between his 4 sons. The players we need to know are Aristibulus, Phillip and Antipas. These were all sons of Herod the great. Now Aristibulus had a daughter, Herodias. Phillip married Herodias. This would have been a problem to begin with. She married her uncle, which would have been forbidden by Jewish law. Then Antipas, son 3, talked Herodias into leaving Phillip, son 2, and marrying him. This had several problems. The first is that Antipas **divorced his wife** in order to make room for Herodias. Second,

Antipas married his brother's wife **while his brother was still alive**. Third, Herodias divorced her husband. And fourth, Herodias was Antipas's niece. This is the drama in the background.

So we see that Antipas had a history of doing things without concern for what was right, without concern for what it did to others. He prioritized what **he wanted** over the concerns for what is in the best interest of others.

Think about what it would take for a person to do what he had done already.

Look at the harm he had done to his brother. He also had complete disregard for what God wanted. We are seeing what kind of person Antipas is already.

But this story gives us much more.

Herod Antipas had a lot of people to please. We aren't going to take our normal route through this passage. We are going to jump around a bit.

First we see that Herod wanted to please his wife.

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

¹⁹ Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;

Why did Herod lock up John the Baptist? Vs 17 says for the sake of Herodias.

Evidently Herod didn't mind so much that John the Baptist had pronounced his marriage to be immoral. But it bothered Herodias a lot. Why?

Well, maybe she saw herself as a moral person and John was calling her otherwise. Or maybe she was afraid that he might actually have an effect on her husband that she didn't want him to have. Antipas did, after all, like talking to John. But whatever the motive, Herodias wanted John the Baptist silenced permanently. Herod was not willing to go that far. But he was willing to go far enough to get his wife off his case. So he locked John up and removed his voice from the public arena.

We need to read this and get the full picture. Herodias wasn't just a little miffed.

She wanted John the Baptist dead. And **she** would have killed him if she could.

But Herod was not willing to go that far. He was willing to lock up a man who was not guilty of any crime. He was willing to throw a man in prison that had done nothing worthy of prison. But he was not willing to kill him.

He probably thought of himself as being a moral person, a person with some ethics.

But we need to look at this. What was the right thing to do? The right thing to do would have been for Herod to allow John the Baptist to keep ministering and to tell his wife that she was going to have to live with that fact. But Herod wasn't looking to do the right thing. He was just looking for a compromise he could live with.

So, while Herod would not do the right thing, he also would not kill John. And for that he probably thought he deserved some kind of credit.

Now, let's look a little more.

We see that Herod wanted to please his associates.

²¹ Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee.

²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.

The people at this birthday party were people Herod needed on his side to keep him in power. The more these guys were on Herod's side, the better off Herod is. So he invites them all to a grand party and feeds them and entertains them. This was probably the kind of party that would have been very impressive. It would be an amazing perk for those who were working with Herod.

But look what happens. Herod gets put in a bind. He can either do the right thing, the thing he knows that is honorable and just. Or he can please these men. And what does Herod do? He prioritizes **not losing face** in front of these people over doing the obvious right thing before God. Herod knows the right thing to do. There is no question that he knew the right thing was to continue to protect John the Baptist's life. But now he has to choose. Is he willing to risk his prestige and power? Is he willing to risk his public opinion in order to do the right thing? Or will he spend the life of John to keep his selfish ambitions intact?

So what else does this passage show us about Herod?

. ²² And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you." ²³ He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."

We see here that Herod also wanted to please Herodias's daughter. Josephus tells us that her name was Salome. Here was a girl whose claim to fame was essentially lewdness. I have read that the word for dance here implies a seductive dance. And the word please is also a euphemism for being aroused. So it is quite likely this young woman truly disgraced herself in front of these men.

And how does Herod deal with that? Is he concerned for the welfare of this stepdaughter? Does he rebuke her for what she has done? No. He wants to heartily reward her.

Now that is pathetically evil. What man acting as a father would do that to one he is responsible for? Even most gentile people of that day would have regarded it as reprehensible to have a young woman do such a thing. Even **they** would view it as a disgrace. But Herod honors it and seeks to reward it.

He seeks to please her for the catering that she had done to these men's base instincts.

And look what he offers her. Ask me whatever you want. **Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.** Even this displays the arrogance of Herod. This would be like President Obama offering someone the State of Texas. It is not his to give. This was probably understood as an idiom. It was not to be taken literally. But even so, Herod was posturing being a big shot.

Now there is one more thing to consider. Along with everyone else Herod was trying to please, Herod may have been trying to please John and God. Or at least he was afraid of displeasing them.

²⁰ **for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.**

We see from this that Herod was spiritually interested. He was curious about spiritual things. Spiritual things were of interest to him. Herod would have seen himself as a pretty good guy. He would see himself, maybe, of being on God's side. After all, he was protecting John the Baptist from his ungodly wife. And he evidently talked to John often. And look at this. Herod was pleased to speak to John. It was a positive thing for him. Herod heard him gladly. He looked forward to the input of John.

Look at this. Doesn't that indicate that Herod was a follower? Doesn't that show that Herod was a believer? Look how good he felt when he heard a good sermon? Look at how much he liked the fellowship of this good man.

But no. This is not a follower of Christ.

How do we know?

Well, we know by what happens in the crunch time. It is only then that the thing that matters most to him is revealed.

We all have events like this in our lives. We might posture any number of things. We might say all kinds of things. We might even believe all kinds of things about ourselves. But life has a way of bringing out what we really are. It shows us what we really hold dear, in spite of what we have said.

Herod is the perfect so called "seeker". He shows a real interest in spiritual things. He even shows some priority to hearing the truth and honoring those who speak it. He looks like he might be on the right path.

But at the end of the day there is one thing wrong. He will not commit. He will not commit to doing the right thing no matter what it costs him. He will not lay down his life for the right thing. He will not bow to the Lordship of God. He will not lose his life for Christ's sake. He won't take up the cross and follow Christ.

What happens in Herod's life?

²⁴ **So she (Salome) went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"** ²⁵ **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." ²⁶ **And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.**

²⁷ **Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.**

Look at this. Isn't this exceedingly sad?

Herod was exceedingly sorry. He felt really really really bad to do this despicable thing. But what does he do? He does it anyway. He knew it was wrong. He knew it was evil. He knew he should not do it. And he felt very very bad about it.

But he did it anyway.

And what do we see? Do we see a spiritual person with a struggle? Do we see a believer in a bind? No. We see the true colors of a worldly person.

This act shows what Herod is made of.

There is an important lesson to learn here. Feeling bad about doing the wrong thing is no guaranty of our salvation. In the end, we show **what we are** by **what we do**. Herod had placed himself in a situation where he had too many people to please. And when he couldn't please them all, He sacrificed pleasing God to have the favor **he most desired**. He protected the things most important to him. That is what we do over time. He wanted to be praised by the onlooking crowd. He was not willing to displease them in order to please God.

Scripture warns us about this. It says **Proverbs 29:25**

²⁵ **The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.**

Herod is the perfect example of this. Herod feared the opinions of others. But he had never committed his life to God. He did not know the freedom that comes when a person is committed to pleasing only God. When we are committed to pleasing only the Lord, when we are committed to **trusting Him to provide for us and take care of us**, only then are we **safe**. Only then are we **free**. Only then can we be courageous in the face of all kinds of people who are displeased with us. But if we allow ourselves to fear and worry what men might think of us and what men might do to us, we are ensnared to do evil. When we fear men, we will find ourselves selling out, just like Herod did. Because they can offer us things that **we value more than what God can offer us**. And they can take away things that we value more than the things that God can take away.

Herod was in a snare. And he was in a snare because he feared man. And he did not commit himself to trust in God.

How about us? Where are we? Do we trust God? Or are we trying to please a crowd? Does our desire to gain approval of others ensnare us? Do we find ourselves doing the wrong things because we are so afraid of losing what they have to offer? Or will we do the right thing, no matter what the cost. Because we trust God?

Look at the contrast here. Look at John the Baptist.
How about John the Baptist? Who was he trying to please?
Look at what this passage says.

. ¹⁸ **For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."**

The verb tense here means that John said this over and over again. John is the polar opposite of Herod. John only cares about pleasing one person. And he chose wisely. He only cared about pleasing God. He didn't need to take a poll. He didn't need to ask permission. He didn't need to impress anyone. He didn't really care what anyone but His Master thought of him at the end of the day. John was never in a snare. He might live. He might die. But he was free. Many of the stresses of our lives come upon us because we will not fully commit to Christ. We are like Martha. We care about many things. But we are not like Mary who only cared about one thing.

John had only one message to Herod. He was not trying to be liked. He was not trying to make Herod feel good. He was not trying to show Herod how cool Christ is by showing Herod how cool John is. No. He had one thing to say. Herod, you are sinning against God and if you want to be right with God you must repent. He is saying that to the most powerful human in that neck of the woods. He is saying that to a person who has power to take the life out of his body. But to John, that is not even a fact worthy of consideration. If John is to represent God, he must proclaim the truth. And he does. Over and over and over again. And eventually it leads to John's death. And when does that death happen? Exactly when it is supposed to happen.

Now, I assume that John is saying that Herod should have divorced Herodias and taken back his first wife. If it is unlawful for Herod to have her, repentance must have meant a change of behavior. There are times when divorce is the right thing to do. It is rare. But in this case it would have been proper. At least that is how I read it.

But Herod is not about to do such a thing anyway. Because his first love was not God. His first love was himself.

Now we need to look at another character here. **Herodias.**

²⁴ **So she (Salome) went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"** ²⁵ **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."**

We can see from this that Herodias knew exactly what she wanted. It is very likely that she is the brains behind this whole endeavor. It is quite likely that she knew her husband. He knew his self indulgent nature. She knew what effect her

daughter could produce. And she had this end in mind before the whole thing started.

Had Herod done the right thing at the onset, this would have never happened. Had he risked this relationship by doing the right thing of letting John the Baptist remain free, she may have left him early on. Doing the right thing may well have cost him this woman that he desired. But look at what the alternative cost him. We all have choices like this in life. We all must risk those things we care about dearly by doing the right thing. And there is no doubt. Doing the right thing might cost us those relationships. But in the end only those willing to lose their lives will save them. And those who want to save their lives will lose them. Herod is the perfect example of someone who tried to save his life and lost it.

In our story this morning, we see just how much evil a person can do when they are committed to it. Herod was not committed to killing John. But He was not committed to saving him at any expense either. But **Herodias was** committed to killing John. And in the end, that commitment prevailed over Herod's non committal path. In the end she used the weakness Herod displayed of caring about what people thought to her own ends. And she showed how impotent a human sentiment can be when put up against a person who is committed to a cause.

Now, what happened to Herod after all this took place? What effect did it have on him?

¹⁴ Now King Herod heard of Christ, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"

We all see our world through the sieve of our own experiences. No one is completely objective. We may want to be, but we are not. And we can often tell a lot about ourselves and each other by our immediate reactions to things. Because we often project our own selves in how we perceive the actions of others.

Here we learn very much about Herod. He was a slave to his fear of man. And as a result he did things that he knew that he should not have done. Now he is a slave to guilt. He is guilty of killing an innocent man. John the Baptist had done nothing but tell the truth about the law.

So when Herod hears of Christ, Herod reveals himself. Now remember that the disciples are travelling throughout the land doing miracles. And Christ is doing the same. The combined effect must be that there are very few who have not heard the gossip about Christ. Christ's name must have become well known.

Now there are surely some talking about Him being the Messiah. There are some saying Christ is the Prophet that the Old Testament prophesied as coming before the Messiah. Others thought about it and assumed that since Christ was doing some of the same things the prophets in the old testament were doing, He must be a prophet.

But Herod did not see Christ that way. There was a glaring obstacle to Herod's sight. And that obstacle was the guilt he carried with him every day. He saw life through that burden.

"John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

"This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"

Guilt is only intended for one thing. It is intended to cause a person to repent of a specific sin and to turn to Christ for forgiveness. Guilt is very useful in that one regard. But that is all it is good for.

When we carry guilt that we will not confess or repent from, it will always serve to make us stupid. It will tinge everything we see and do. It will make fools of us. Herod saw everything through his own guilt. So when he heard about Christ, his guilt began to speak. All manner of superstition and suspicion came out. He could not see Christ for who Christ was. He was blinded by his guilt. All he could see was the person of John the Baptist who he had wronged. This guilt was all pervasive.

Are you carrying guilt this morning? Have you done something that you knew was wrong? But you find it so hideous that you cannot speak of it? You cannot believe that God could forgive you? Or you simply are too proud to ask God to forgive you? This is the morning for you to get rid of that burden. Come to Christ and confess it. Scripture says **1 John 1:9**

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That is what Herod so desperately needed. He needed free of the burden of his guilt. He needed to be able to see his Savior clearly for who He really is, not through the shroud of his guilt.

Maybe you think that God cannot forgive you of what you have done. If you believe that, you simply underestimate God. He is willing and able to cast your sin as far as the east is from the west.

Herod never turned to Christ. Eventually he had a chance to meet Christ. And in that meeting Herod ended up doing one of the most hideous actions in all history. Instead of intervening in Christ's stead, Herod made more decisions to please men. And He sold Christ out to His death.

We will all face choices this week. And when we face them, we are likely to either be like Herod or John. We will either compromise what is good and right before

God to gain something or maintain something for ourselves. And that compromise will be woven into a trap for us, step by step, until it can be sprung for our harm.

Or we will do the right thing because **we only fear God**. And we will live free of the guilt. We will represent God. And we will be welcomed into heaven with Christ saying, "Well done good and faithful servant."

We have probably all experienced that the **hardest decisions to make** are the ones **we care the most about**. Herod was in a bind with his wife. He didn't want to lose her. He wanted her favor. So when faced with doing the right thing and risking losing her, he would not do it. He was not willing to pay that price. He compromised. **Herodias**, on the other hand, did not care in the least about the price she would make Herod pay for killing John the Baptist. Herod would have done very well to do the right thing even if it cost him this relationship.

Is there a place in your life where you are compromising to satisfy someone? Where you will not do the right thing, the thing you know you should do? Learn from Herod. It does not lead to a good end, to a godly end.

And think about Herodias. Is there a way that you are asking someone to do a wrong thing, or at least not do the right thing, for your sake? We need to see through what we are doing to the hideous source of that manipulation. Would any of us really want to be seen as a Herodias?

And look at John. Doing the right thing does not always lead to a pleasant life. But it leads to a glorious eternity. And a life of freedom. John was God's man. He was the greatest servant of Christ prior to Christ. Because He only had one Master and John served God wholeheartedly until he died. Now that is an example to follow this week.