

Freaked Out Mr. Fox

Luke 9:7-9 February 4, 2024

Last year, an Oregon family received the worst delivery possible: an urn full of ashes and an accompanying death certificate, notifying them that their beloved 23-year-old son was dead. He had been living in a recovery center and had not been in contact with his family for several years.

Three months after hearing the news, the family was contacted again. Their son, Tyler John was *alive* and ready to talk to them on a video call. The newspaper outlet reporting the story called “this bizarre story of resurrection an urn-ormous mix-up.”¹

In Luke chapter 9, Herod, the phony king of Galilee, received a similar shock. It seemed like someone he thought was dead was back. That’s bad news if *you’re* the one who killed him.

In the opening chapters of this Gospel, the Savior arrives and gets to work. Though kings and devils and doubters stand against Him, He cannot be stopped. He heals the sick, raises the dead, commands wind and waves, casts out demons, teaches enormous crowds, and gathers disciples.

Not everyone understood Who Jesus really was. Most of us come to these chapters knowing the *rest* of the story. We know Jesus is the Messiah, the GodMan Who came from heaven to make a way that human beings can be forgiven of their sins and receive everlasting life. But, at the time, it wasn’t so clear for many. Even Jesus’ disciples struggled to apprehend His identity.

Luke chapter 9 highlights the fact that most people were wonder Who Jesus really was. From the countryside to within the palace walls, Jesus was being discussed. We have this interesting scene shown in *three* of the four Gospels, where Herod is concerned and confused, talking about Jesus, confronted with this reality and then we see the response.

It challenges all of us to consider Who Jesus is and what that means - to pause for a moment and set aside our distractions, our desires, our activities, and preconceptions and to acknowledge the reality of Jesus Christ, how we can know Him, and what difference that should make in a life.

Luke 9:7a - ⁷Herod the tetrarch heard about everything that was going on.

There are six Herods mentioned in the Bible.² They were all from the same, extended family. It was not a good group. The three we’re most familiar with were all killers. This one, called Herod the tetrarch is also known as Herod Antipas. His father was Herod the Great, who killed the babies in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus.

¹ <https://nypost.com/2024/01/11/news/family-receives-urn-full-of-ashes-death-certificate-but-loved-one-is-alive/>

² <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2014/how-many-herods-are-there-in-the-bible>

He ruled over a fourth of the territory of Israel. He wasn't *really* a king - more like a governor - only allowed to exist as long as Rome's Emperor said it was ok. That didn't stop him from cosplaying as a king. He even had a political party that supported him and stroked his ego - the Herodians.³

He had authority over two regions, but he mainly operated in Galilee.⁴ He built Tiberias as his capital on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He was a man of great success, great achievement, but also a man of great vice and corruption. He threw wild parties, stole his brother's wife (who was his *niece*). He was jealous of titles⁵ and always looked out for his own interests.

His life of excess was interrupted in Luke 9. Suddenly, he could not escape hearing about this Jesus and the things He did. The Lord had just sent out the Twelve with power to heal and preach about the Kingdom of God. For a man like Herod, this was no longer just whispers of a backwoods rabbi with a few admirers. This was a growing movement - one unlike anything the world had ever seen. One that made bold claims backed up with undeniable proofs.

Jesus' influence wasn't only in villages or up in the hills. The wife of Herod's very own steward not only *believed* Jesus, she was a key financial supporter of His ministry.⁶ In Acts 13 we learn that one of Herod's close friends was also a believer in Jesus.⁷

"Everything that was going on" can also be translated as "all that was coming to pass."⁸ It's a small distinction, but throughout these verses we should notice an emphasis on the *prophetic* nature of Jesus' presence and ministry. The people having these conversations weren't only saying, "Can you believe what's *happening*," there was also a palpable sense that something was *unfolding*.

That's still true of God's activity today. The Bible reveals that Jesus Christ is not only still alive, He is not only still working, He is accomplishing an eternal plan that *will* be completed in full. We discover this plan in God's Word. There, on its pages, we see the beginning, the middle, and end.

If you're a Christian here today, it's good to be reminded that your spiritual life is not just about your circumstances right now, or reactions to problems today. The Lord *does* have strength for today - He *is* mindful of whatever situations you find yourself in presently - but there is a worldwide, cosmic plan that is *still* unfolding. And God has invited *you* to have a specific part in that plan and He invites each of us to walk with Him and discover what assignments, what opportunities, what position He's set aside for us in that plan.

Luke 9:7b-8 - [Herod] was perplexed, because some said that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ some that Elijah had appeared, and others that one of the ancient prophets had risen.

³ *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*

⁴ Luke 3:1

⁵ <https://www.livius.org/articles/person/herod-agrippa-i/>

⁶ Luke 8:3

⁷ Acts 13:1

⁸ A.T. Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament Volume II: The Gospel According To Luke*

We'll hear Herod's thoughts in the next verse. For now, we see his confusion. He wasn't just puzzled, he was quite disturbed. One dictionary defines this as, "perplexity amounting to despair."⁹ Another source says "perplexed" means, "unable to find a way out."¹⁰

Rumors were flying. Maybe John the Baptist was back. That would be bad news for Herod. If not John, maybe this miracle-worker was actually Elijah. For Jews, that would signal the end of the age, a major advance in God's plan. For Herod, a God-mocking unbeliever, that wouldn't be good news. He knew what Elijah had done to kings like Ahab.¹¹ These Herods were worried about their status and keeping control of their pretend kingdom. Remember how paranoid Herod the Great was when wise men from the east came saying a *new* King of the Jews had been born. He didn't know Who Jesus was, but no matter Who He was, Herod was worried.

Did you notice that all of the rumors had a resurrection emphasis? Maybe an ancient prophet has risen. Maybe Elijah is back. Maybe John is raised from the dead. Their guesses weren't right, but it was undeniable that Jesus' ministry had a supernatural, life-from-death quality to it.

In chapter 8 He literally raised a girl from the dead and she wouldn't be the only one. But, even beyond those miracles we see that encounters with Jesus weren't just about making things a little better in the here and now, or providing short-term fixes to problems. Jesus Christ brings new life.

Jesus said that if we want to live forever in heaven we *must* be born again. When a person is born again, we are made alive in Him - pulled out of the jaws of death, given a new heart, a new spirit, a new mind, a new perspective. The resurrection power of God starts transforming us now. We are "raised up" presently in purpose and spiritual provision¹² and then those who are born again will be raised up out of the grave to live forever and ever in the heavenly Kingdom with God Himself.

When Christianity becomes diminished to the short-sighted level of "Your Best Life Now," or just about God making me *feel* better or making my circumstances easier, then we have seriously underestimated the power of God, the plan of God, His purpose in saving us and providing for us. Christianity is about *resurrection*. It is about life over death. We are set free from the old, dead nature, the old, dead systems, the old, dead snares of sin and now God has shared with us His power. We will share, Paul says in Romans 6, "in the likeness of His resurrection."¹³

Herod was not comforted by Jesus' resurrection power. He was *condemned* by it.

Luke 9:9 - "I beheaded John," Herod said, "but who is this I hear such things about?" And he wanted to see him.

⁹ *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words*

¹⁰ Robertson

¹¹ H.A. Ironside *Addresses On Luke*

¹² Ephesians 2:6

¹³ Romans 6:5

We learn in Matthew and Mark that Herod was convinced John was back,¹⁴ or at least that the *spirit* of John the Baptist was now on Jesus. That made Herod paranoid because it exposed his guilt.

You see, before he died, John told Herod, "You're in sin and need to repent." That made Herod quite angry, but he was torn. On the one hand, he *wanted* to kill John.¹⁵ His wife wanted it, too.¹⁶ But he was afraid the people wouldn't stand for it. He also knew that John was righteous and so he was afraid to actually kill him. So, to try to shut John up, Herod threw him in prison.

But then something strange happened: Herod started *talking* to John. And, we're told in Mark 6 that Herod even *liked* listening to John.¹⁷ How can that be? How can a man want to kill somebody but, at the same time, feel compelled to talk to him about spiritual things?

The answer is that the Holy Spirit was reaching out to Herod the tetrarch. Despite his wickedness, despite his guilt, despite his unworthiness, God sent an offer of peace to him. God was willing to send His best people to share the truth with this terrible man. Even though Herod was terrible, God loved him, just as He loved Pharaoh in Joseph's time, Abimelech, Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Jeroboam, and so many other unworthy kings. Just like He loves you and me.

God gives a genuine offer of peace to every person on earth. He did for Herod. And we see that Herod "wanted to see Jesus."

Ok! So does that mean Herod was seeking the truth? Sadly, the answer seems to be a very definite "no." The Bible promises that if you seek the Lord, you will find Him. Looking at the evidence we see that Herod had no *real* desire to learn about Who Jesus really was. He had no intention of surrendering to God and turning from his sin.

He did not go to see Jesus, like Nicodemus did. He could have. He did not invite Jesus to his home like other civic leaders did. He could have. He would've heard that his steward's wife was a disciple of Jesus. He could've spoken to her plainly about the Lord. He didn't.

He wasn't seeking the truth. He was scared of retribution for the things he had done. By chapter 13 we learn that Herod wanted to kill Jesus. It was then Jesus said, "Go tell that fox I've got real power and I'm not afraid of you and My work cannot be stopped." Herod wasn't looking for truth. He was a fox - a jackal¹⁸ - a thief and destroyer, out for his own interests. He wanted to hide his guilt, maintain his sad little throne, and hold onto his power as long as he could. He just wanted to find a way out of the conviction he was feeling.

Herod would finally get to see Jesus. It was the day of our Lord's crucifixion. Pilate sent Him over to Herod and Herod got all excited because he thought he was going to see Jesus perform some

¹⁴ Matthew 14:2, Mark 6:16

¹⁵ Matthew 14:5

¹⁶ Mark 6:19

¹⁷ Mark 6:20

¹⁸ See Psalm 63:10 LXX

wonder, some miracle.¹⁹ He was no longer perplexed, no longer paranoid. He just wanted a show. He kept trying to talk to Jesus - kept asking Him questions. But, by then, it was too late. Jesus had absolutely nothing to say to this man who refused to answer God's calls when they came.

Now, if you're not a Christian here today, Jesus still has something to say to you. He's not silent. That's why He allows us to eavesdrop on this palace conversation. He wants to communicate to *all* of us today, whether we be kings or peasants, rulers or servants.

If you're not a Christian, God's message is that you are a hell-doomed sinner who needs to be rescued from their guilt. You may think of yourself as a king or queen. You may enjoy great success or achievement. You may think religion is for suckers.

But here is the reality: The *real* King, the King of heaven and earth, the One Who holds your life in His hands has pronounced you guilty of sin against His law. The penalty for that sin is eternal death. Success won't save you. Making political moves won't save you. Wealth can't save you. Good deeds can't save you. Only Jesus Christ can save you and He *wants* to save you.

In Acts 4, we read:

Acts 4:12 - ¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.

You need to reckon with this question that perplexed Herod: Who is Jesus? Do you believe He is Who the Bible says He is? Do you *know* what the Bible says about Him? Many people have mistaken His identity.

Some think of Jesus as make believe. He's not. He is altogether real. He is alive right now. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is busy unfolding His plan to establish His forever Kingdom.

Some think of Him as a good teacher, or the founder of a new religion. It's just like how the people talked in these verses. Is He John? Is He Elijah? Maybe He's this or that.

The truth is, John the Baptist was simply the herald. Jesus is the King Who was and is and is to come. John said he wasn't even worthy to unstrap Jesus' sandals.

Elijah was a prophet of God who lived for a brief time and gave some messages from heaven to people. Jesus is God, Himself. Jesus was there *with* Elijah - the Angel of the Lord - Who empowered Elijah and directed him.

The ancient prophets of Israel had a dramatic place in Israel's history, but they all pointed people to the Messiah Himself - the One on whom all history pivots and rests.

¹⁹ Luke 23:8

Herod had been brought face to face with some of these truths. His response was “how do I find a way out of this?” But he couldn’t escape. Instead, he simply ignored the reality of Jesus. But ignoring the truth wouldn’t help him. In fact, it just pushed him further and further away from the very Person Who wanted to rescue him from his sin until it was too late.

He had this opportunity to discover the truth and to have Jesus change his life, but instead of seeking, he ignored. He busied himself with other things. He never learned the truth.

If you aren’t sure Who Jesus is, we’d invite you to respond to this offer of life He’s giving you. It will require you to actually speak to God and invite Him into your heart and life.

One commentator wrote, “Who Jesus really is cannot be discovered through second-hand reports and rumors.”²⁰ But you *can* know Him today. If you seek Him, you *will* find Him.

If you *are* a Christian here today, that means you know Who Jesus is. It’s good to be reminded the truth about our King. But there are some secondary applications for us. One is that some people who are close to you may not understand Who Jesus is. It is our privilege to not only try to introduce Jesus to them, but also to *represent* Jesus to them.

Another important principle for us is that our goal as servants of God is to broadcast Jesus, direct people to Jesus, glorify Jesus. This whole scene with Herod happened because the 12 were going from place to place preaching about the Kingdom. As a result, Herod wasn’t talking about Bartholomew or Peter or Thomas. People were talking about *Jesus*. We should not be upset or disappointed if we are not acknowledged or if people aren’t impressed with *us*. Isn’t it better to have the affectionate attention of God Himself, Who delights in us?

The more we understand Who Jesus is, the more we understand who we are. Our value in His eyes. Our place in His plan. The spiritual wealth and privilege and authority we have because we belong to Him. We know that we don’t need to be perplexed by this life and we don’t need to try to find a way out. We’re *on our way in* - into His forever Kingdom, where we will rule and reign with Him, the *true* King Almighty, Who was and is and is to come.

²⁰ Darrell Bock *Luke*