

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 6:14-29

Topic

Herodias sends out her daughter to perform a lewd dance for Herod with the goal of having John the Baptist executed

Title

"Dirty Dancing"

Introduction

Growing up, one of my favorite shows was *Get Smart*. It followed the madcap adventures of secret agent Maxwell Smart, also known as 86, who worked for the good guys, CONTROL, against the bad guys, KAOS.

In addition to introducing the world to the shoe phone, the show created quite a few catch-phrases that are still thrown around today:

- After causing yet another disaster for the Chief, Max would offer this apology: "Sorry about that, Chief."
- When agents of KAOS would call his bluff, Max would offer another, more unbelievable one, by saying, "Would you believe..."
- When he found himself in a dangerous situation, Max would exclaim, "And loving it."

My favorite catchphrase was, "Missed it by that much," used when one of his schemes miserably failed.

Reading our text today, we encounter King Herod, and the thing that strikes me the most are the squandered opportunities he had to receive salvation. You could summarize it by saying he "Missed it by that much."

Why did he miss it? We will see forces from within him, and surrounding him, that exerted pressure against the Gospel, that eventually hardened Herod's heart to God's love and amazing grace.

- Those same pressures exist today, exerting their destructive influence on the nonbelievers you know.
- Those same pressures can still trip-up believers, if we are not cautious.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Falsehoods Exert Pressure On You To Disobey God, and #2 The Flesh Exerts Pressure On You To Disobey God.

#1 Falsehoods Exert Pressure On You To Disobey God

(v14-20)

How many Herods were there, anyway?!

The first of the Herods in the Bible is often known as "Herod the Great" and is the one who sought to kill Jesus by slaughtering all the infant boys.

The son of Herod the Great was Herod Antipas (or Antipater). He is the Herod we will be talking about.

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great. It was he who persecuted the church in Jerusalem and had the apostle James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, put to death by the sword.

Agrippa's son, Herod Agrippa II, had dealings with the apostle Paul. He was instrumental in saving the apostle Paul from being tried and imprisoned in Jerusalem by the Jews who hated his testimony of Jesus as the Messiah. Agrippa, out of consideration for Paul being a Roman citizen, allowed Paul to defend himself, thereby giving Paul the opportunity to preach the gospel to all who were assembled.

After Agrippa II, the family fell out of favor with Rome.

Herod Antipas - called King Herod by Mark - wasn't a king at all; he was a tetrarch. The word tetrarch signifies someone who governs a fourth part of a kingdom. His father, Herod the Great, divided his large kingdom into four parts and bequeathed them to his sons, an action confirmed by the Roman senate.

Emperor Augustus denied the title "king" to Herod Antipas. Goaded by his ambitious wife, Herodias, Herod pressed for the title again and again until he so offended the emperor that he was dismissed as a traitor.

He was a wanna-be king. In that respect, Herod is a good example all nonbelievers. We are born sinners, separated from God. We wanna-be king, at least in our own lives, but we end up slaves to the god of this world, the devil.

When we last saw Jesus, He had sent out His twelve disciples, two-by-two, to teach and to perform miracles. Word of their activity reached King Herod.

Mar 6:14 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."

It's important we don't pass over the fact that "King Herod heard of" Jesus. There are at least two important truths in that observation:

1. The first is that, even though the work was being done by His disciples, Herod heard of Jesus - not them. In other words, they were ministering to people in a way that brought glory to the Lord, and *not* to themselves.
2. Second, the fact Herod had heard of Jesus establishes something we can overlook since he was such a bad character, and that is that Herod heard the Gospel and could have been saved.

In fact we will see multiple opportunities, precious opportunities, for Herod to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

God is all-about saving people. The most wicked people are no exception. Jesus died for them, too, and you'd be surprised if you knew the extent of God's efforts to reach them.

You might recall Manuel Noriega, the military dictator of Panama from the 1950's to about 1990. At some point after he was removed from power, he became a Christian.

Evangelist Luis Palau reported that the only things in his prison cell were an exercise bike, a cot and a table with a Bible resting on it. And all this once-evil man could talk about was what God had done in his life while in solitary confinement.

Mark decided to catch-up his readers on the plight of John the Baptist. Herod proposes that Jesus is John risen from the dead. We haven't read about his death, but Mark's original audience already knew that Herod had John imprisoned and executed.

Mar 6:15 Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets."

Mar 6:16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"

We tend to read this as if Herod and company are superstitious morons. Truth is, people still suggest all manner of false identities for Jesus:

- Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus is actually Michael, the Archangel. They say He was the first creation of God. He came to Earth as a man, died on a stake, and rose from the grave invisibly as a spirit. Jesus then returned invisibly to Brooklyn, NY, in 1914 to head-up the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.
- Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) teach that Jesus is the spirit brother of Satan. He was once a human being like you and I, but through good works he evolved spiritually to become a god.
- Christian Science and Mary Baker Eddy say that Jesus was only a man and that Christ is a Divine idea. Furthermore, Jesus never did any supernatural miracles; he simply showed people their mental illusions of sin, evil, illness and disease.

All these, and many others, are doctrines of demons - falsehoods that have kept, and are keeping, billions from seriously searching the Scriptures to see that Jesus is God come in human flesh.

Falsehoods are a mighty weapon in the spiritual warfare for the souls of men and women. You all probably know someone who dismisses the claims of the Gospel by referring to some false idea.

Herod executed John, and there's quite a sordid backstory.

Mar 6:17 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.

Mar 6:18 Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

God's Law prohibits adultery and incest. By marrying "his brother Philip's wife [Herodias]," Herod was guilty of both sins.

John preached the repentance of sins. The message of repentance is missing in many contemporary evangelical churches. A recent scientific research survey came to the following conclusion about those born from the 1980's til about the year 2000, called Millennials.

Millennials... do not feel guilt and shame the same way older generations do. As such, they do not respond to what one person referred to as 'fire and brimstone scare tactics.'" Telling them that they are sinners and need to repent does not work. Millennials respond to evangelism that tells them the world is [broken], and it is only through Jesus that it can be fixed.

Was that the message of John the Baptist? Was that the message of Jesus? How about the apostles?

I'm not saying that our methods can't or should not change. They can and should. **But we cannot tamper with the message.**

Stick to the message - repentance and faith. The Gospel is a universal message for the problem of sin. It's applicable in any culture, to any status, to all levels of intellect, to every generation, to everyone, everywhere. It's timeless and it is the power of God unto salvation.

Mar 6:19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;

Mar 6:20 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.

You've heard the phrase, "Don't kill the messenger." Trouble is, people DO want to kill the messenger.

All the time, in the news, there are stories about the efforts of nonbelievers to silence the Word of God. There's always some City Council, or public school district, that is being sued for having "in God we trust" on its property, or some such thing. It's all an effort to kill the messenger, in a legal sense.

We're blessed to still live in a place where they are not able to literally kill the messenger. I think some would, if they could.

John was imprisoned, and his cell was right there in Herod's house. The indication is that Herod and John dialogued, speaking often.

Not only that, Mark says Herod "did many things, and heard [John] gladly." **The Gospel was stirring Herod's heart.** It was "glad" news that motivated certain behavioral changes.

It's going to turn out that the Gospel wasn't falling on good soil, but don't discount its effects so quickly. God is not willing ANY should perish, and that included Herod; it even included Herodias.

Not everyone will be saved, but we need to remind ourselves that everyone is a candidate for salvation.

Herod's and Herodias' are all around us; often in positions of worldly power. We see in this story that even though he was bound within a prison cell, God's servant never wavered from the main message.

John was the person with real power - not the wanna-be King or his wicked wife.

#2 The Flesh Exerts Pressure On You To Disobey God

(v21-29)

There's a good description of sinners in First Corinthians.

1Co 6:9 Do you not know that the **unrighteous** will not inherit the kingdom of God?...

"Unrighteousness" is a word that describes the typical nonbeliever. He or she has no right to stand before God. We are all born separated, spiritually, from God, dead in our trespasses and sins.

The apostle Paul next describes how sinners behave:

1Co 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 1Co 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

That's quite a list of sins. It isn't exhaustive; it is representative. If I think about my life BC - Before Christ - a lot of those words characterized me. Sadly, if we are honest, even after getting saved, we find those things lurking in our flesh, rising up when we let them, to our spiritual detriment.

Whether you are a nonbeliever given over to such things, or a believer who willingly gives yourself over to them, Herod and Herodias will show you how awful, and how evil, the flesh can be.

I guess we should pause and give a working definition of what the Bible means by "the flesh." Scripture uses the term in a morally evil sense to describe man's unredeemed humanness. It is that remnant of the old man which will remain with each believer until each receives his or her glorified body. It is a predisposition to satisfy the cravings we find still operating within us in sinful ways.

We may struggle to properly define the flesh, but, if you are a believer, you immediately know what I'm talking about. The apostle Paul put it this way:

Rom 7:18 For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it.

Rom 7:19 For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want!

Rom 7:20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me.

Rom 7:21 So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me.

It's far worse than you think, your flesh. It looks like this sordid party that Herod threw for his birthday.

I guess what I'm saying is this: I might think I'm only giving-in a little to my flesh, but it has the potential, once unleashed, to become a full-blown destruction.

Mar 6:21 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.

Herod had been given many amazing opportunities to be saved. Imagine having a personal audience with John the Baptist. Herod let those opportunities pass, and so the flesh found opportunity to destroy him.

It started off innocently enough as a birthday party, but it quickly got out of hand.

Mar 6:22 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."

This was a men's only event. After they were good and drunk, Herod called for the dancing girls. Think strip club.

To his surprise, Herodias sent out her own daughter, who commentators say was pretty young - certainly still in her teens.

Stop for just a minute. Seriously, Herodias? You sent your teen daughter to strip for a stag birthday party?

Don't lose sight of the point we are making: your flesh, left unchecked, is capable of all manner of evil.

Herod could have put a stop to this before it got out of hand. Instead, one compromise led to another, and another, until he blurted out, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

That's a stupid thing to say. Think of it in a spiritual sense, and it makes perfect sense. Here's what I mean. When we start giving in to our flesh, we may as well be saying to our flesh, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

Don't get to that point by giving in. You can say No to your flesh, and Yes to God.

Mar 6:23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

Drunk, overcome by lusts, Herod was completely ruled by his sinful passions.

People give their testimonies and it can almost sound as if there was something to be admired about how drunk they were, or how stoned they got, or the extent of their debauched activities.

Think of your flesh with Herod in mind. Whenever you give-in to it, no matter how slightly, it's on a par with Herod being drunk and lusting after his wife's teen-aged daughter. It's ugly and perverted.

Mar 6:24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

Had Herod simply obeyed God's Law, he would never have found himself in this terrible plight. Don't commit adultery with Herodias and you never get to this.

Don't host a kegger and you won't be compromised by getting drunk.

God gives us rules as boundaries for our own good. We break them at our own peril. Grace will abound, if we will turn to the Lord; but we must never sin so that grace will abound.

Herodias wanted John dead right then. She called for his execution as the big finale to the party - so that Herod would not be able to change his mind.

The flesh always wants to be satisfied right now.

Mar 6:25 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."

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I don't think Herodias was sending her daughter to Sunday school. She was teaching her to strip, and she was ready as a young teen to do so.

Mar 6:26 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.

John preached repentance. Herod was "exceedingly sorry," but that was not repentance. Repentance leads to a turn-around in behavior.

Herod gave in to peer pressure. It's a powerful force the devil wields against us, for us to conform to this world.

Mar 6:27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,

Mar 6:28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

The phrase, "I want his (or her) head on a platter" is a too-common idiom in the English language. Let's retire it, because it derives from this sordid episode.

I'd like to know how this ended. Did the guests applaud? Did they disperse quietly? What did Herod say to Herodias after he sobered? What did Herodias do with John's head?

In the end, it doesn't matter. The aftermath could not have been positive. Their flesh had brought a terrible destruction into their household.

However, don't forget the opening verses of this story. After the fact, Herod was hearing about Jesus. After all this, he *still* had opportunity to be saved.

Mar 6:29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

Bad news travels faster. Good for these guys, risking themselves to give John a proper burial.

Who was really dead? John was in Hades, in the Paradise compartment called Abraham's Bosom, awaiting the death and resurrection of Jesus. After that, he would accompany all the righteous saints to Heaven, to await the Lord's Second Coming.

Herod was dead. Herodias was dead. **They were dead in their trespasses and sins, separated from God.** Should they die in that condition - and we can be pretty certain they eventually did - they, too, would find themselves in Hades.

But their address in Hades was not Paradise. It was punishment. They are there still, awaiting the end of the Lord's future thousand-year Kingdom of Heaven on the earth. After it ends, they - along with the unrighteous dead from all time - will be raised to a judgment of their sin. Having rejected the Gospel, their names will not be found in the Book of Life. They will be cast alive to be in eternal conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

When we started to discuss the flesh, I read a passage from First Corinthians. Let me read it again but with it, what comes next.

1Co 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,
1Co 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

1Co 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

God finds you in verses nine and ten but puts you in verse eleven when you receive His Son, Jesus Christ.

Your sins were as scarlet, but because Jesus died for them on the Cross, you are white as snow.

You are sanctified, meaning set-apart, from the world, to serve the Lord. A big part of being sanctified is having, within you, God the Holy Spirit, so that you can always overcome the flesh.

You are "justified" means that not only are you not guilty, but you've been declared righteous by God, Jesus having taken upon Himself your sins, and giving you, in exchange, His righteousness.

Falsehoods abound, and, if anything, will be multiplied in the last days in which we live.

The flesh is a constant enemy - the enemy within - tempted by the world, and the devil.

Neither falsehoods, nor the flesh, can overcome you as you yield yourself to God and follow His indwelling Holy Spirit.