

A Case Study in the Conscience, Part 1

Luke 9:7-9

Well then, I'd invite you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke and Luke Chapter 9. Luke Chapter 9. We're going to be looking at verses 7 to 9 this morning. And what we find in these few verses here is yet another instance where in Luke's Gospel here, where Luke slows us down a bit. And calls us here as the reader to pause for a bit of reflection, really. Before we read about Jesus' feeding of the five thousand.

This section we're about to cover this morning, verses 7 to 9, is a section of scripture on Herod's perplexity. As he, Herod, tries in vain really, to get a read on Jesus's identity, on who this Jesus really is. "Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening. And he was perplexed. Because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. Herod, said, 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought," or the verb is actually a continuous action here he was seeking to see, "him."

One reason, for this pause, for this reflection and it's a narrative concern, in verses 7 to 9, is to explain why it is that Jesus felt the need to take his disciples and withdraw into Bethsaida you could see that at the end of verse 10 there that he took his disciples and withdrew into Bethsaida, bit of back story is going to help us to understand that. But there's also another reason that Luke has included these three verses, that has to do with a theological preparation for us, the reader.

As I said, all four Gospels contain this narrative, this healing, or this feeding narrative of the five thousand. It's a demonstration, a clear, clear demonstration of Jesus' supernatural power as he creates food from nothing. It's also a lesson about the true identity of Jesus Christ. It's a lesson on the nature of his mission as God's Messiah. So Luke, he's very careful here to make sure that we don't miss the lesson.

By the direction of the Holy Spirit, what we're going to study today, this parenthetical insight into Herod's perplexity, his state of mind. This is what is going to prepare us and put us in the right frame of mind to make sure that we see Jesus clearly because, by contrast, Herod did not see Jesus clearly. And there's a really important reason for that. Herod's mind was clouded by guilt, his conscience was defiled, his judgment was

perverted and distorted, his mind was clouded by sin and darkened by, even an act of murder. And even though Luke doesn't really dwell on it here, he records Herod's own confession there in verse 9, that he had murdered John the Baptist.

So now that there's this explosion of Messianic teaching and explosion of miraculous power all throughout Galilee, it had to send a ripple effect all throughout the region. This is the effect of Jesus sending out the twelve, verse 6, "Jesus sent them out two by two." So you have this in radiating directions, six different groups. Jesus himself going out and teaching as well. He's a seventh, on the spoke on the wheel, going out throughout the region.

So this is, this is, in this explosion of activity, Herod's evil deeds here are coming back to haunt him. All that he'd been hearing, all that was being reported to him, that all left Herod in a state of inner turmoil, mental perplexity, in fact, that is the keyword in this section that we need to understand. There in verse 7, "he was perplexed." The same reports about Jesus and his apostles, about their ministry in and around Galilee, those reports actually resulted in the salvation of people who were very close to Herod Antipas.

One of Jesus's earliest disciples, as it says in Luke 8:3, the previous chapter, it's the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, one of his most trusted servants. That man's wife, became a disciple of Jesus Christ, very early on. Another disciple was Manaen, Acts 13:1 says that Manaen was a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch. He was numbered among the prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch. Pretty close associations to Herod Antipas. They heard Christ's Gospel. They heard all these acts of teaching and healing and power, authoritative teaching, and they believed. They believed. Very likely, Joanna and Manaen were two of Luke's sources. As we really in Luke's Gospel, and then the other Gospel writers as well, we get insight into what's going on in the palace. We get insight into Herod's state of mind, his, his thinking. It's as if we're reading his mail.

Herod here, he's in a state of mental perplexity. He's in this condition of great, great confusion. And that is because he suffered the internal turmoil of a guilty conscience. It's really the effects of his own sin. His conscience condemning and accusing him, because he's repeatedly, consistently defiled it and ignored it. According to Romans 2:14 and 15, the conscience is like a spiritual warning system. It alerts us to the way that we keep or break the law that God has inscribed on our hearts.

On the one hand, we can strengthen the conscience that he has given us, educating the conscience with the Word of God, and then exercising the conscience as we listen to its warnings, respond to its cautions and its heeding's.

On the other hand, we can warp the conscience by starving it of the truth. We could weak the conscience by, weaken the conscience by educating it according to a wrong worldly standard; that causes the conscience to misfire, to fire and give us warnings about some other standard, that happens all the time. We can deaden the conscience by ignoring its promptings, by silencing it. We can harden the conscience as well, 1 Timothy 4:2, searing it through hypocrisy and false doctrine, overloading the conscience with guilt so it's subdued and muted.

That's Herod. He is the case of a seared conscience. And that seared conscience completely undermines any ability that he would have to come to a right conclusion about Jesus and the Gospel. That is what we're seeing in Herod's perplexed and troubled in verse 7. He's in a state of total bewilderment, confusion. He is utterly at a loss. That's what the word means. Luke, he does not want us to be caught in the same confusion. That's why he's included this account here.

Especially as we're about to read about one of Jesus' most significant and instructive miracles in all of Scripture. He does not want our, our consciences to be cloudy in the least. So by reading this case study on the conscience, before we enter into that narrative, we're going to be able to clear our conscience before God; come to a right conclusion about Jesus and the Gospel. What mercy of God isn't it? And even in the pages of scripture, as we're reading through, he causes us to pause for a moment, to reflect, to think and ponder just a little while. So as we consider the text, we want to look at this in basically three points. The context of Herod's perplexity. The cause of his perplexity. And finally the cure for Herod's perplexity.

So we've got the context, the cause, the cure. We'll start with the context of Herod's perplexity, point number one. We're going to begin by going back a little bit in scripture, so turn back to chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel, chapter 3. This is the section on John the Baptist's Ministry. This is prior to the baptism of Jesus Christ. And look at verses 19 and 20. We want to get a little bit of the back story here, and understand the context of Herod's perplexity. We're going to see this first in Luke 3, and then we're going to turn back to Mark 6 in a moment, and just see what explains his perplexed state of mind.

Starting there, though, with Luke 3:19 and 20 it says, "Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by John the Baptist for Herodias, his brother's wife." Okay, that's, that's not good. Indication of adultery, brother's wife. Indication of an, kind of an incestuous kind of a thing, and knowing who Herodias is, and that she's a part of the same Herod family tree, it's not only adultery, but it's an incestuous adultery. Very confusing state of circumstances here.

So John the Baptist reprovved Herod for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, and he added this to them all that he locked up John in prison. And we're going to unpack that a bit, this whole sorted affair this morning. But first I want you to see the significance of what Luke has written right here. John, as a prophet, he has reprovved Herod. He doesn't say anything in his mind, like, hey, let's leave religion out of politics here now. I don't want to get too involved in that. No, he's gonna dive right in. He reproves Herod. We need to understand that this is a grace of God, because if Herod repents and listens to the prophet of God, you know what happens to the land? Righteousness prevails. Oh for a humble repentant, political leader. Amen?

Rather than responding in humble repentance. Rather than repenting of all the evil things that he had done, Herod ignored his conscience. He ignored the conscience that came through the prophet of God. He chose instead to silence the prophet's voice by imprisoning him at the castle Machaerus.

Now, let's get back to more of this back story. Turn to Mark's Gospel and this is the fullest account we have of the three accounts of Herod's sin. Mark chapter 6. We're going to start reading in Mark 6 at verse 12. Mark 6:12 and following, 12, just read a couple verses here at first, and make a comment. So they went out. This is the apostles and proclaimed that people should repent. They cast out many demons, anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. That's parallel. This helps orient us. This is exactly parallel to where we are in Luke's Gospel, Luke 9:6 and following.

And just as we read in Luke 9:7, Mark 7:14 tells us right there at the beginning, King Herod heard of it, he heard of it. King Herod here is also known as Herod Antipas. He's one of the sons of Herod the Great. He rules in Galilee, which is west of the Sea of Galilee, and he rules also in Perea, which is southeast of the Sea of Galilee. This Herod Antipas, he had

half-brother named Phillip. He's also identified as Herod Philip the First, or simply Herod the Second, taking his father's name. But Philip, this brother of Antipas, he married the daughter of his half-brother Aristobulus. He married the daughter of that half-brother, she's a real peach of a gal named Herodias.

Yes, the union between Philip and Herodias was the joining together of an uncle and a niece. Together they had a daughter. Her name was Salome. Herodias, she's an ambitious woman. She has a lot of, let's just say she's high maintenance, she's, ah, got some interests and desires. She had a little problem. Her husband, the hapless Phillip, he failed to rule over any part of Herod the Great's territory. The problem was a lot of Herod's sons failed to rule over what they wanted to rule, but the problem was, with Phillip, he seemed to be okay with that. He lacked the family trait of ruthless political ambition.

That didn't suit Herodias at all. She wanted out of Rome. She wanted back to Jerusalem, where she could climb up the social ladder. So Herodias hitched a ride home with her other uncle, Phillip's half-brother, Herod Antipas. As tetrarch of Galilee and Judea, Herod Antipas could rely on a pretty significant stream of tax income. He had political alliances that he wanted to maintain and keep. That meant a lot of wining

and dining and feasting. So she looked forward to the luxury, the licentiousness in a land where her family connections actually mattered for something. No one regarded her in Rome. Back home, she was somebody. One small obstacle. Both she and her, Herod Antipas were at the time of their coming together, they were married. Antipas had a wife.

They divorced their spouses, they married each other. And like all high profile marriages, divorces and remarriages, all of that's conducted in the public eye. When that became known to John the Baptist, as I said, he didn't stay quiet about it. He spoke about that sin. He spoke openly about that sin. He condemned it. He spoke of issues of sin and righteousness and judgment, as all faithful preachers must do. And he called for repentance immediately.

Let's keep reading just a little bit further. Look at Mark 6:14. "King Herod heard of it." Heard of what? Heard of all those miracles, all that teaching for Jesus had become known. "Some said John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That's why these miraculous powers are at work in him. But others said he's Elijah, and others said he's a prophet like one of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard of it, he said John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Several popular opinions there about Jesus' identity. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of old. Notice which option stands out most prominently in the mind of Herod Antipas. He's got this superstition. He's feeling the guilt of his evil deed. And now Mark moves on in the record here to expand on the nature of Herod's crime. Look at verse 17, "For it was Herod, who had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Phillip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' Herodias had a grudge against him, wanted to put him to death, but she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed." There's that word again, and yet he heard him gladly.

Look at verse 21, verse 21 says, "but an opportunity came." Opportunity? Opportunity for what? Well, Herodias had a grudge, verse 19, "she wanted to put him to death, but she could not," because Herod's, whatever's left of his conscience is still in the way. Oh, but an opportunity came. Verse 21, "It came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when

Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests." There's the opportunity right there.

The dancing girl, not named, her name is Salome. It's not the Salome who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, but this is the daughter of Herodias from her former marriage to Herod Philip the first. This Salome in Scripture, she has the dubious honor of being a great dancer. She's a lewd performer before a drunk stepfather and a group of drunken, lustful men. So-called nobles, military commanders and leading men of Galilee. Herod's hosting all of them for his birthday party at the Citadel called Machaerus, where John in fact is imprisoned. So gorged with food, inebriated with wine, Herod called for his stepdaughter. The offspring of his wife's former union.

Interesting that he cares nothing for her dignity. Shows he despises her and he sets her forth, sets her in front of all these drunken men as yet another object to be consumed. Leered at by drunken eyes. Salome does what's required of her. She dances her dance pleases the guests. Herod here feeling proud, probably in a bit of a lightheaded stupor, he decides to flaunt his magnanimity, as a royal, before this gathered crowd. Look at the rest of the verse 22, "The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish and I will give it to you.' And he vowed

to her. 'Whatever you ask of me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother 'For what should I ask?' And she said 'The head of John the Baptist.' 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.'"

Yet another girl seeking approval from people above her. With haste, immediately, those words indicate agreement. She's doing what she wants to do as well. That Herodias, Herodias here, she saw her opportunity, she took it. Alfred Edersheim reflects on the scene. He says, "Silence must have fallen on the assembly. Even into their hearts such a demand from the lips of little more than a child must have struck horror. They all knew John to be a righteous and holy man. Wicked as they were in their superstition, if not religiousness, few if any of them would have willingly lent himself to such work. And they all knew also why Salome, or rather Herodias, had made this demand." End Quote.

Interesting how sin totally undermines moral authority. Faced with the gruesome, macabre request. What's Herod going to do? Look at verse 26, "The king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break

his word to her.” Well, at least he's a promise keeper. He gets right to it. Verse 27, “Immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison. Brought his head on a platter. Gave it to the girl. And the girl gave it to her mother.” Gruesome scene.

Herod Antipas issued the order to one of the attendants. The attendant related to a servant. Servant informed the guards, the executioner. And where they were perched up in the citadel, the palace, you had to go down the hill. Down below the citadel, this palace where Herod feasted with his guests. It was on the east facing slope. It was a walled town where about 1000 or more people lived. And that town obviously provided for the palace up above, but also it acted as sort of a buffer in the event of an invasion, any attacking force would come from below and would have to go through the town, which would slow them down a little bit as they killed and pillaged and plundered. And as, their, in their attempts to reach the citadel above, it was down there in the town where the dungeon was located.

Interesting, isn't it, that Herod put John where an attacking force, such as maybe the anticipated anger from the Nabatean king Aretas. He put John as a buffer between him and an attacking force, hoping that John would be killed in the

invasion. He didn't need to wait, did he? It didn't require an attacking force to deal with Herod's little problem. All it required was a failure to resist sin. You need to see this clearly. It was a failure to resist sin that led to this murder. It was a failure to listen to a nagging conscience. It's a failure to confront his wife. It was a refusal to listen to God's voice through the prophet John.