

A Case Study in the Conscience, Part 2

Luke 9:7-9

Turn back now to Luke 9:7. Let's get the rest of the story. We'll look at point two. The cause of Herod's perplexity. Simply stated, the cause of Herod's state of mind, his perplexity, his continued mind dominating perplexity, was a defiled conscience. Herod had dulled and ignored and damaged and ultimately silenced his conscience. And as we read, and read in verses 7 and 9, it created a profound perplexity in him, a deep and abiding consternation, a continuing vacillating confusion about the true identity of Jesus Christ.

Dulling the conscience causes internal confusion. Verse 7, "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." Okay, so in the flow of Luke's Gospel. That's the first hint Luke gives us that John is dead. Before this, we didn't know that we just left, he was left in prison, chapter 3. Chapter 7, he sent emissaries from his prison cell, asking, "Are you the Christ?" And he gets his answer from Jesus, this affirmation. Now we find out he's dead?

It's a fact that's confirmed in verse 9 by Herod's own testimony. Notice it was said by some that John was resurrected from the dead. In fact, Herod's evil deeds are well known. His murder is well known. This is a man who has spent his life dulling his conscience with sin, and a lot of sin. Herod Antipas was prideful to the core. He was ambitious and greedy. He's corrupt and unjust. He's immoral, lascivious, and as we just read, he counted murder, get this, he counted murder as a lesser crime than breaking a rash promise to a teenage girl.

Perhaps a better way to state that, Herod Antipas had vowed to give Salome whatever she wanted, namely up to half of his kingdom. He had in his power to give her exactly that. Whatever was his to give but listen, the head of John the Baptist was not his to give. Herod ought to have rebuked his stepdaughter's request. In the presence of all his guests, because they all knew John was righteous and a holy man. More than that John's a prophet of God and he bore the marks of divine ownership, of divine commission. How dare he. Herod's real crime is that he did not fear God. He feared man.

He wanted peace with his wife and he wanted the respect of the guests. He's not thinking clearly because he dulled his conscience. His internal sense of morality is completely

confused. Ignoring the conscience cultivates impotent speculation. He was perplexed, verse 7, "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 arisen." We know where the first idea came from. Popular level, and everyone saw the depth of Herod's wickedness and executing not just, not just an innocent man, but, this one whom everyone regarded as a true prophet.

But some others said that Elijah had appeared. Notice the change in verb. It's not raised from the dead like the other two verbs. Elijah never died, right? God transported him to heaven, second Kings 2:11, in a whirlwind, chariots of fire. He never experienced death. Still others believed, spread rumors, the power of Jesus and the apostles is evidence that one of the prophets of old had arisen. Perhaps, Jeremiah, that was some proposed that, Matthew 16:14, fulfilling the prophecy of Moses from Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord Your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers, it's to him you shall listen." That's what Moses said.

Different opinions. Herod's tied up in his mind. He's listening to all these different opinions. He's unable here to come to a conclusion. It's all though, it's all speculation for

him, it's speculative. There's nothing but impotent, vain, utterly fruitless pondering and speculation. His wheels are turning but getting him nowhere. Why? How so? Because all those suggestions, all those opinions, all those speculations about the identity of Jesus, all those thoughts about the nature and the power of his ministry. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the ancient prophets, fulfilling Deuteronomy 18:15; all those views, they held one thing in common, Messianic fulfillment.

That's the thread that ties all those views together. Everybody knows this is a sign of Messianic fulfillment. They're off base, they're off target with who he really is, but Messianic fulfillment is in the air, everybody's thinking about that. So for Herod to listen to all those opinions and then totally miss the importance of what's happening. Ignoring his conscience for so long, disregarding the protests of his offended conscience for so many years, when it time, came time to think clearly, precisely, biblically, he could not.

He'd been dulling his conscience, he'd been ignoring his conscience, and all along he'd been damaging his conscience. Damaging the conscience clouds divine illumination. Look at verse 9, "Herod said 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?'" What's the evidence of a damaged

conscience? Here's some evidence it doesn't fire when it ought to fire. The fact that Herod can make that statement, make that admission, and not be stricken to the core with guilt and shame over his murder of John the Baptist. He's completely moved past that point. It's just like, yeah, the other day, you know, I gathered some taxes, had a feast, had a few friends over, beheaded John the Baptist, got the mail. You know, he's just he's just moved on.

It's as if this is insignificant in comparison to satisfying this curiosity he has. This is manifest proof that his conscience isn't working properly. It's damaged. It's affecting his ability to see what is so clear and obvious. God sent forth the Messiah, but first God sent John the Baptist, the forerunner who came, to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, Luke 3:3.

John was very clear, Luke 3:16 to 17 he says, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming. The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, to gather the wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." John had been saying this over and over and over again. There is a

division coming. There is a separation coming. There is Holy Spirit baptism, yay wonderful. Holy Spirit falling from heaven. Bless us all, and there's a Holy Spirit, oh there's another baptism, baptism of fire, of judgment.

Such clarity, such power in John's message. And get this God allowed Herod Antipas a personal audience. A frequent audience with this prophet. Crystal clear illumination is before him, such as very few in history have had the privilege. And Herod's dull, disregarded, damaged conscience is not gonna allow him to discern that this Jesus, this is the one, that John has been telling him all about. Yet notice, Herod's conscience isn't completely gone. It's not damaged beyond total repair. You can see evidence of that in this fact, of the three options, John, Elijah, or some nondescript prophet. Which opinion did Herod wrestle with the most? The one that most plagued his conscience?

One more, dulling the conscience causes internal confusion. Ignoring the conscience cultivates impotent speculation. Damaging the conscience clouds divine illumination, and finally, Silencing the conscience culminates in murderous disposition. Look at verse 9 again, "Herod said 'John I beheaded but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought," or he was

seeking, "to see him." The final disposition here, the final settlement of the question about Jesus' identity, it's hinted at, at least for Herod, in that sentence, and he sought to see him, that is significant.

Twice it tells us here in the text that Herod heard something. Back in verse 7 Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening. And here in verse 9 he asked, "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" And now Herod is at the point where he believes, "I've heard enough, now I need to see." Herod didn't need to see anything. He'd really heard all he needed to hear. He heard everything that was necessary to come to a decision about Jesus Christ. Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, she had heard enough to follow Jesus as a faithful disciple. Manaean, his own lifelong friend, he'd heard enough to repent and believe, believe and be saved. Herod too, he didn't need to see. He needed to hear with a good and honest heart.

But he had not listened with the ears of faith. Herod had merely heard with his natural ears. He thought he had the measure of the man. He thought he understood the, the situation and the implications of what was happening all through his territory. So he's through using his natural ears. He thinks he's heard all he needs to hear. Now he wants to see with his

natural eyes. He wants to see Jesus. He is seeking, the verb indicates again, a continuous desire, a continuing abiding interest, a seeking after. You know, by the grace of God, one last incredible privilege given to him, granted to him by God, Herod Antipas finally got his chance to see Jesus for himself.

Wanna to turn over there and look at it? It's in Luke 23. Luke 23 we'll just look at this quickly. Obviously getting toward the time, this is the crucifixion, this is the trial. We're entering the scene here as Jesus on trial before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea and Jerusalem. Some of the Jews told Pilate in this attempt to persuade him to execute the death sentence on Jesus. They said, "He stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." And then this in Luke 23:6 and following, "When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean, and when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jeru, Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him." There's the connection back to Luke 9.

Long desired to see him. Why? Because he had heard about him. Oh, but that's not enough for him to believe. "He was hoping to see some sign done by him." What does the Bible tell



us about those who seek signs? Jews seek for signs, right? Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after signs." Impress me, Messiah? Show me something cool. Show me something I can believe in, and I'll consider whether or not to put my faith in you. That's how they thought.

So look at verse 9, Herod questioned him, "Herod questioned him at some length, but Jesus made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently accusing him, and Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him, then arraying him in splendid clothing. He sent him back to Pilate," and notice that little footnote there, "Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day before this they had been in enmity with one another."

Interesting how opposition to Jesus makes former enemies, friends. So Herod got his wish. He was able to see Jesus. Proving that he belonged to an evil and adulterous generation, one that seeks for a sign. Herod sought a sign; his ears failed him, his eyes didn't see what he wanted to see. Such a sad, sad story of tragedy. He was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39. That means that Herod Antipas watched the entire story of Christianity take shape right in front of his eyes. He saw

everything. Heard the reports, was taught directly by John, and he saw Jesus for himself.

Commentator James Edwards offered this insight, "Had Antipas desired to hear Jesus? Perhaps a seed might have been planted that could have led to faith," Luke 8:4 to 15. "But he hankers for a spectacle, and if Jesus will not provide one, Antipas will provide one himself by mocking Jesus. Those who require a spectacle eventually make Jesus into their own liking, and they will both mock and hate what they have made."

If you ponder that for a little while, you'll see how insightful that comment really is, because that's the result here. The murderous disposition for all those who spend their lives dulling, neglecting, damaging, and silencing their consciences. By sinning against the conscience, people turn friends into enemies, turn enemies into friends. They end up destroying the only one who can save them, as Herod did. Listen, we want to let that lesson sink in a bit, because sinning against conscience can have such devastating results.

Let's hurry to third point. The cure for Herod's perplexity. The cure for Herod's perplexity. For a non-Christian like Herod, sinning against conscience will ultimately lead, unless there's repentance and salvation, it will ultimately lead

to eternal destruction. It'll lead to the forfeiture of the soul. Now for a Christian, though, the Lord will not let us fall away from salvation. But I have watched as Christians ignore the cry of their consciences. And with sadness, I've seen devastating effects in their lives, in holiness, in relationships, or even both. For some, it's led to shipwreck in the faith.

The Spirit of God applies pressure. We are wise to humble ourselves and repent, and repent quickly, when our conscience cries out. But I've seen some people, even Christian people, who refuse to deal with the nagging conscience. Instead, they run away from what's troubling them, and they try to ignore the pangs of conscience. Pride sets in. We dig our heels in deeply. We refused to budge. That's neither wise nor healthy, and it can be very destructive.

After warning people to listen to the Word, to heed its warnings and its exhortations, Jesus said this, giving this important instruction in Luke 11:33 to 36, "No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. When it's bad, your body is full of darkness."

The eye here represents the conscience, the mind, the judgment. Jesus says, "Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

Here is one summary encouragement to you, beloved. Don't darken your conscience. Pay very careful to be receptor of light, the eyes of your soul. Make sure your conscience is clear. And do that often. Be very attentive and regular in cleaning the windows of your soul so that as much light of God can, as possible, can shine through the windows of your soul.

Listen, that's the goal of our instruction, right? First, Timothy 1:5, "Love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Let me give you several points that really correspond to what we've just read. Number one, first, don't dull your conscience. Don't dull your conscience; Sharpen it, inform it, educate it, teach it. Repeated exposure to God's Word, regular instruction in God's Word, that helps to make sure you don't dull your conscience, you educate it and keep it informed.

Second, don't ignore your conscience. Number two, don't ignore your conscience. Having educated it, listen to it. Having

informed it with God's Word, instructed or or listened to it, heed it. Humble yourself before God. This is really the issue. It's an issue of humility and pride. Pride keeps us fixed on our own opinions; humility causes us to bow before the Word of God. To bow before the conviction of conscience, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It means, you need to ignore idle, empty speculation and listen to the single voice of wisdom, it's God's voice in Scripture.

Third, don't damage your conscience. And don't damage it through repeated dulling and ignoring of it. Don't damage your conscience. Strengthen your conscience, yes, through repeated regular education in the Word of God, but also strengthen your conscience by heeding the warnings, by listening to the promptings of your conscience. If you cultivate a healthy conscience, unlike Herod, you will be clear minded to respond to divine illumination when it's brought to you by the Spirit of God and the Word of God and the preaching of the Word and the teaching of the Word.

Finally number four, don't silence your conscience. Don't silence your conscience. Instead, turn up the volume. You want your conscience firing at a level ten. You almost want the cries of conscience to deafen you, they're so loud. A healthy, well

informed, active conscience it's your safeguard against flagrant sin. Someone with an educated, well headed, strong conscience. Rather than looking for that next spectacle, he quiets himself before God, he listens carefully to the Word of God, and he walks in the happiness of holiness.

What does an educated, sharp, active conscience tell us? What does it say to us? First it tells us God is absolutely holy and we're defiled with sin. Tells us there's "no one righteous, not even one that all of sin and fall short of the glory of God." What does the conscience tell us? Active, sharp, loud. Number two it tells us we cannot cleanse ourselves from our own sin. We've served sin, sin pays wages. There's a paycheck coming. The wages of sin is death. The paycheck is truly in the mail.

What does conscience tell us when it's loud and active? It tells us, third, that by the grace of God, by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, by faith in nothing at all in ourselves. It tells us that by faith in him the punishment of our sin is absorbed, the wrath of God meted out against him is sufficient to forgive us. Tells us that in him the glory of God is attained and attained perfectly. It tells us that as Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, pleasing God completely, if we're

found in him, we'll be found pleasing God in all righteousness. It's not a righteousness of our own, but one that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

So what does a sharpened, educated, informed, loud crying out conscience tell us? God's holy; we're sinful. We can't cleanse ourselves from our own sin. But by the grace of God, by faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work, all of our sin can be forgiven completely and wiped away. Not only that, but every single point, smallest point, a jot and a tittle of righteousness is fulfilled in us by faith in Jesus Christ because he fulfilled all righteousness.

And lastly, what is an informed, sharpened, educated, loud conscience tell us? Fourth, "that all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Tells us that full and final salvation, complete, sufficient, perfect in every way is ours, if we'll repent and believe. Also tells us though that all who refuse to repent and believe, they will share the fate of Herod Antipas. They'll share the fate of wicked Herodias. They'll share the fate of all who dull and ignore and damage and silence the conscience. They will suffer eternal death is the final sentence in the Lake of Fire. May God

awaken consciences now to saving and sanctifying effect. Amen?  
Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you so much for the lesson and such a costly lesson it was. The lesson of Herod Antipas and Herodias and Salome. We thank you for teaching us through the sins and the hard heartedness of others. The pride and the arrogance, the unwillingness to humble self and repent, unwillingness to deny self; we thank you that we can learn through those lessons. Looking down on the pages of Scripture to see your holy Word speak so clearly, firmly, in black and white. We pray that you would soften all of our hearts.

For some in here, we pray that it would lead to salvation. That initial repentance that leads to life. That they would find saving grace in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And never fear you again in a craven fear way, but fear you instead with holy reverence and awe. Knowing that you are the God who could have condemned them to hell and cast them forever away, but you've turned into the God who now is Father and Savior and friend.

We pray for those of us who, who do know your saving grace and that initial repentance unto salvation. We pray, Lord, that you would not let us fall into the rut of a hardened heart. That



we would not have a, a damaged conscience, but you would help us to educate our conscience through your Word, to listen to the promptings of your Word and your Spirit to listen to an active, loud conscience. And that by your grace, you'd sanctify us to your pleasure, to the, to holiness that pleases you. And really, to broadcast to a watching world a testimony of a transformed life. We love you. We thank you for what we learned this morning. Please use it to good effect for your glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.