

11 . Herod

1 . Who he was

Following the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 B.C., Herod Antipas became the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 3:1) until A.D. 39. He was crafty, so much so that Christ referred to him as ‘that fox’ (Luke 13:32). He loved pleasure, and himself. While visiting his half-brother, Herod Phillip I, he became infatuated with his wife, Herodias, so Herod divorced his own wife and the two illicit lovers eloped.

He is also the man who had a meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ, but the Lord Jesus Christ said nothing to him!

2. Why he met Jesus

Herod met with Jesus because Pilate tried to pass the buck. As we have seen, the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate to stand trial, but Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus to death. Time and time again he says that he can find no fault in Him (John 18:38; 19:4; 19:6; Matt. 27:23; 27:24; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:4; 23:13-15; 23:22). The problem is, Pilate cannot release Jesus because he is afraid of the crowd, led by the Jewish leaders, who are desperate

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for Jesus to be killed. However, something the Jews say gives Pilate what he thinks is the perfect opportunity to move this problem into somebody else's in-tray ...

Throughout the whole trial Pilate was up and down and in and out, not knowing what to do with himself. But on one of the occasions he goes out to the Jews, he discovers that Jesus is a Galilean (Luke 23:5). If that is the case, then Pilate thought He would come under Herod's jurisdiction and Herod could deal with the problem (Luke 23:7). A trial was usually carried out in the province where the offence was committed but could be referred to the province to which the accused belonged. It was a straw that Pilate was desperate to clutch! And so Pilate tries to get Jesus off his hands by sending Him to Herod.

Herod was probably in Jerusalem to observe the Feast, a tactic he no doubt thought would please his subjects. Up to this point he and Pilate didn't get on (Luke 23:12). Their feud had possibly turned on Pilate viewing Herod as just a tinpot ruler of a client state. Pilate had also, according to Luke 13:1, ordered some of Herod's subjects to be killed. But this 'gesture' on Pilate's part was an almost ostentatious acknowledgement of the rights of the tetrarch. Despite it serving Pilate's own ends, Herod no doubt saw it as a compliment and from that moment on the two became friends (Luke 23:12).

The only problem was that Herod could find no fault with Jesus either and sent Him back. Whether he liked it or not, Pilate had to face up to the 'problem' of what to do with Jesus Christ. As we all do. On this matter of eternal significance, none of us can pass the buck.

3. What took place

The scene of Jesus standing before Herod is a noisy one. In the background throughout are the chief priests and scribes loudly and vehemently accusing Jesus; no doubt repeating all the things they had said to Pilate. They are trying to give Herod as many reasons as

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they can as to why Jesus should be put to death and we can imagine them all talking at the same time, keen to put their points across, desperate to get what they want.

But the focus is really Herod, who is plying Jesus with questions. He had wanted to see Him for a long time. He was desperate to see Jesus 'perform' and so asked Him many questions and kept on at Him to do something miraculous (Luke 23:8).

Herod just wants to be entertained, and when he doesn't get what he wants, he loses interest and patience. He is disappointed and angry. While he can find no fault in Jesus, before he sends Him back to Pilate the real noise begins. He starts to have sadistic fun at his prisoner's expense. He and his soldiers begin mocking Him, dressing Him up, 'dissing' Him and 'slapping Him about'. In fact, just for fun, they send Jesus back to Pilate dressed up as a king.

We live in a noisy world. Everyone seems to have an opinion on everything, especially God. Rather than someone to be feared, God is a topic for discussion and debate. Governments and politicians; entertainers, commentators, journalists, 'experts', scientists, religious leaders; have all put themselves above God. They decide what is right and wrong. They announce whether they agree or disagree on what the Bible says; which bits to take out and leave in, which bits need modernising and sanitising for our era – the parts of Christianity that are acceptable and the bits to be dismissed as relics of a bygone era. They pass laws that oppose the Word of God and even dictate what children are taught in schools about these things. Some get angry with the bits that cut across what they want to do and think. Others just mock or dismiss it all as irrelevant in this day and age.

4. What he thought

It is frightening to think that with the Son of God before him Herod could only jest. Luke 23:11 says that Herod and his soldiers 'set Him at nought (κἰνῶν).' He had wanted to see Jesus to put his mind at rest that He wasn't John back from the dead. Once that

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had been established and his prisoner wasn't going to 'perform', Herod and his soldiers looked at Him and thought He was nothing. Herod also wanted to see Jesus because he was threatened by Him. Herod was a king and the thought that some people believed Jesus to be king bothered him. This was probably why he had previously wanted to kill Him (Luke 13:31). But when he finally saw Him, in the state He was in, he concluded He was nothing to worry about. This was no king. So unimpressive! A joke!

Herod took a superficial glance at Jesus and concluded, 'worthless'. Give me my sin and my pleasure any day over this. But in weighing Him up he got his counting all wrong, and we are in danger of doing the same. We look at the world today and, in comparison, Jesus seems nothing. How can He possibly compete with all that is on offer in the modern world? He seems so old fashioned and unimpressive compared to the cool, trendy, powerful, rich and famous of today. You look at this man from Galilee and think, He's nothing!

But when I have to depart from this world, leave everything behind and stand before God, none of these things will be able to help me. Put all the powerful people together, the coolest, the richest, the smartest; they will be no good to me at all when I enter eternity. They can't forgive me for all the wrong I have done, put right all the hurt and pain I have caused. They can't ease my troubled conscience. They can't make me fit for heaven. Only the One who Herod and his soldiers 'set at nought' (Luke 23:11) will be able to help me on that day.

5. What he wanted

All Herod wanted was for Jesus to do what he wanted Him to do. He was desperate for pleasure and to be entertained. Maybe that is you. All you care about is pleasing yourself. Sex, going out, popularity, your career, your family, friends, studies, job, getting on in life, mixing in the right circles, having influence, being well thought of, possessions, big house, expensive car, the right

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clothes, sport, fitness. It could be any number of things. It is all that matters.

Once Herod realised he wasn't going to get what he wanted, he got angry and impatient. So many people today are like Herod. They just want a religion that suits their purposes, that helps them through the bad times. Makes them feel good about themselves. Fits around their lives. Doesn't make demands. But when the Son of God doesn't do what they want Him to do, they mock Him, try to belittle the whole thing and even get angry.

6. What kept him back

But the really frightening thing is that it wasn't always like this for Herod. At one stage he listened with interest to the preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 6:20). John was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He was the one who prepared the way for Jesus. He was like the herald proclaiming that the Messiah was about to come onto the scene. John was a no-nonsense preacher who impressed upon his hearers the need to repent (Luke 3:1-18), that is, turn away from their sin. John didn't pull any punches. He told it how it was. He put his finger on the part of Herod's life that was wrong; that everyone else also knew was wrong but just accepted or didn't say anything because it was Herod. John, however, repeatedly rebuked him (Luke 3:19-20) but instead of repenting, Herod put John in prison. He didn't want to listen to what he knew was true. He probably thought, 'I'll sort things out one day but not yet. I'll put John in prison and at a more convenient time I'll listen to him again.'

But things didn't turn out like that. At his birthday party, Herodias' daughter danced seductively in front of Herod. Like so many men he clearly had a problem with sex. This aroused, sex mad, slave to his lusts, promised her whatever she asked for, up to a half of his kingdom. Prompted by her mother, she asks for the head of John the Baptist on a plate (Matt. 14:6-12; Mark 6:21-29; Luke 9:7-9).

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You can imagine the party being in full swing. The drinks flowing. Herod the centre of attention, seduced by his partner's daughter, makes a rash promise and gets trapped. He can't go back on it and risk his pride, but is also too scared to kill the preacher. Something has to give though. This is not a life-changing moment. It is an eternity-changing one. Risk losing it all now to keep it later, or keep it all now and lose everything later.

From that moment on Herod tried to bury the truth. He didn't want to face up to it and just lived for the here and now. Whenever he was confronted or reminded about the things of God, he just tried to suppress it and get rid of it.

Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time. Jesus had come to his attention because news had reached him that Jesus had healed sick people, lepers had been cleansed, storms hushed, demons expelled and even the dead brought back to life. He was also performing miracles through His apostles. All this perplexed Herod because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead (Luke 9:7). But 'Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?"' So he sought to see him (Luke 9:9). He was bothered by Jesus and worried it was John back from the dead (Matt. 14:1,2). He wanted to see Jesus to put his mind at rest that John really was dead.

Perhaps this resonates with you. There was a time you went to church. Believed these things. Knew they were true. But Jesus Christ and His demands don't fit in with your lifestyle anymore. It bothers you a bit from time to time but the more you fill your life with things, the better it gets. You have spent your life suppressing the truth and it is working.

You have convinced yourself that you will be okay. You might have been troubled by your sin before but now your conscience is quieter. Hell can't be real can it? The judgement is too far-fetched isn't it? In this modern world God, His law, the Bible, the need for a Saviour, are all a bit out of date. The culture of the day has well and truly seduced you. You now listen to the modern talking

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heads and ignore the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9). We are too sophisticated to be worried about these things. We have moved on. Besides, life is too short to think about eternity. Unless you can offer me something here and now then I am not interested, and I'll just make fun of it or get angry.

Herod made a big call. By choosing his sin the only option then was to put his conscience to death. He either had to kill sin or allow sin to kill him. Towards the close of Christ's ministry, certain Pharisees warned Jesus to get out from Jerusalem because Herod wanted to kill Him (Luke 13:31-33). Jesus reminded him too much of John. Herod was threatened by Jesus. Jesus was a king and Herod wasn't prepared to bow the knee to anyone. He didn't want anyone to tell him what to do. He just wanted to live for himself and do whatever he wanted. Anyone who challenged that, had to be got rid of.

Is that a choice you are confronted with as you read this book? There is a particular sin you really struggle with or a way of life or a relationship that you just can't give up. Maybe, probably, it is a sexual sin. I imagine nearly all men reading this book can relate to Herod's sex problem. When sex is involved most men stop thinking straight. Lust, pornography, adultery, flings, are all things men think they can control, but end up being controlled by them. Every time you indulge in it you think it will be the last time, but you keep having to go back for more.

You have to choose between your sin and Jesus Christ. You think that you can have it for a while and then sort out your eternal soul later. But there will never be a more convenient time than now. Every day you carry on in your sin it takes more and more of a hold of you. Every day you carry on in your sin you harden your heart until there comes that point of no return when God hardens it (Exod. 9.12).

7. What he heard

As we have seen, the encounter was a noisy one. But above all the noise – the accusations, the mocking, the repeated requests to

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be entertained, the rough handling – is the deafening sound of silence. When Herod finally got his moment with Jesus, it was too late. Throughout the whole encounter, the Son of God was silent (Luke 23:9).

Herod's conscience was dead. Unless we silence sin, sin will silence our conscience. You cannot play around with God. Hell is full of people who said, 'when I have done this and when I have done that I will sort things out.' But today is the only day promised as a day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). You may die tonight. However, you may live another seventy years but have no interest in Christ at all after today. He may be calling to you now but tomorrow your heart may be hardened. He may never pass your way again. If you hear His voice harden not your heart (Heb. 3:15).

Herod knew the truth. He just deliberately rejected it. Jesus had nothing more to say to him. I am sure many of you reading this book know what you need to do but you just don't want to do it. It is too hard right now to give things up. There is nothing else to say apart from repent and believe.

Jesus knew Herod's heart and said nothing to him. There was no point. Herod's conscience has gone to sleep because he had done so much violence to it. He was a man who had heard God's Word. Heard one of the best preachers of all time. He had been reasoned with time and time again (Mark 6:20) but rejected it.

Because of the way you are living you want Jesus Christ to be silent now. You don't want to hear what He has to say. But one day you will have a meeting with Him. You can ignore Him, mock Him, be angry with Him, but eventually you have to meet Him. You will stand before God and He will be there. At that moment you do not want Him to be silent. All the while the Son God is observing from heaven, seemingly silent. But one day we will all stand before Him and give an account of our lives. On that day when your conscience, God's law, other people, your bad record are all screaming out, 'Guilty! Dirty! Send him to hell!' you will need

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Christ to speak up for you. If Christ is silent on that day you will be sent into everlasting torment (Matt. 25:46).

But you can meet Him right now. If you come to Him in repentance and faith He will receive you. Jesus never refused a sincere questioner but Herod wasn't in that class. Herod is the only person who Christ said nothing at all to. Today He will still speak to you if you come to Him. 'Forgiven', 'Cleansed', 'Come unto me' (Matt. 11:28 κJV) are still words that can come to you from the Saviour's lips.

There was an article in *The Times*¹ about the thirty-three Chilean miners who spent sixty-nine days afraid beneath the Chilean desert, certain they were going to die. With them was a Christian minister who read the Bible to them and prayed with them every day. The men prayed and believe God heard their prayers as all thirty-three of the men were saved. The title of the article was 'When a man screams to God then he will answer their prayer'. That is true today.

However, there will come a time when the day of salvation and grace will be over, when a man can scream and shout and beg and plead and do whatever he wants, but God will not hear his prayer. Mercy is over, judgement has come. 'Depart from me' will be the only words the unrepentant, unbelieving will hear.

The One who hung on that cross to save sinners is the same One who will one day send all those who rejected Him to hell. One of the Puritans, Thomas Boston, said, 'to be damned by Him who came to save sinners is to be doubly damned.' What an awesome, chilling thought! Pray, call out to Him; 'scream' to Him, while you can.

1. 18 October, 2010, p. 28.