

Spiritual Perplexity

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[0 : 00] The head of the Tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed. Perplexed to be wildered, puzzled, mystified, bemused, and flummoxed.

When it comes to Jesus Christ, our society is somewhat all these things. Some say he was a good teacher, others that he was a prophet of sorts.

Some say he never existed at all, and still others, who cares? We're not the first to have been at a loss when it comes to Jesus. In this verse, we learn that when Herod the Tetrarch, king of the Israel of the day, heard about Jesus, he too was perplexed.

What about you today? When it comes to who Jesus is and why he came, are you perplexed? Or are you clear about him and his mission?

These verses urge us to pursue clarity when it comes to Jesus. It's no use being a-headed. It's better to be a disciple, because the thing is, if we are wrong about Jesus Christ, no matter how great we are in the eyes of this world, we're wrong about everything.

[1 : 23] And our willful mistake will cost us more than we can begin to imagine. Now, on the surface of things, this is a story about Herod.

But dig a little deeper, and as with all the other stories in the Gospels, it's actually about Jesus. You see, Luke, the writer of this Gospel, wants us to be clear about Jesus, so that we may have clarity about those things we as Christians believe.

There are therefore two levels at which we can understand this passage of the Bible, which describes Herod's perplexity. First, spiritual perplexity and Jesus, and second, spiritual perplexity and us.

The most important thing for any of us today is that we are clear about who Jesus is and why Jesus came. Get that right.

And we are well on our way to spiritual life. First of all, then, spiritual perplexity and Jesus. Spiritual perplexity and Jesus.

[2 : 43] Rather than treat the Gospels as a series of moral self-improvement lessons, we need to view Jesus as the hero of the Gospels and ask of every passage, this is a great way to study the Bible, to ask of every passage, what does this tell me about Jesus?

What does this teach me about Jesus? We are Christians. We're disciples of Christ, and the Gospels describe in detail His life and ministry, so that we, like Peter, James, John, and the other disciples, can follow Him better.

And in these verses, we learn three things about Jesus. The presence of Jesus cannot be hidden. The ministry of Jesus is countercultural, and the future of Jesus is execution.

The presence of Jesus, first of all, cannot be hidden. Cannot be hidden. Our passage begins with the words, Now, Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was happening.

Now, that's not surprising. From a civil perspective, Herod was the most powerful man in the country, so it's natural that what was happening shouldn't take so long to reach his ears.

[4 : 00] What John the Baptist had been saying and doing reached him, so it's not surprising that what Jesus had been saying and doing reached him too. He heard about it, because the truth is that a ministry like that of Jesus cannot be hidden.

Given what Jesus had been saying and doing, it's natural that Herod would have heard about it. Jesus has been teaching and healing. He has raised people from the dead.

He has cast out demons. He's made a paralyzed man walk. He's proclaiming the kingdom of God and its standards. He is rubbing up against the Pharisees and the other religious leaders.

Crowds follow Jesus wherever He goes. They hang on every word. To use modern speak, Jesus has become the number one influencer of the day. Greater than the Pharisees.

Greater even than Herod. The presence of Jesus, teaching and healing, cannot be hidden. When His word hits home, lives are changed and it can't stay a secret.

[5 : 16] It comes, one way or another, to the attention of those who are powerful in the public arena. Do not suppose for one second that what we do in this church is a secret.

We may not speak to many people while we're out picking up litter in the surrounding streets. But people are watching and they know what we're doing.

We may not get hundreds of people flocking into our warm space on Tuesday morning. But people in the area know what we are doing. The people in our neighborhood are watching.

As on a Sunday morning, we all stand outside in a long line waiting to get into church. And who knows what they say to each other. What's going on in there?

Perhaps. Maybe we need to check this out sometime. But never mind the church. The presence of Jesus cannot be hidden in someone's life. That change which happens when we become Christians is seen by others.

[6 : 22] even if we do not see it ourselves. They notice we're different and like Herod are often perplexed by it. Confused to the extent that they want to ask us what's all this about?

The presence of Jesus in a person's life cannot be hidden. Second, the ministry of Jesus is counter-cultural. The ministry of Jesus is counter-cultural.

You know, we all have our own ideas of what Jesus was like. But rather than have our own ideas, it's better we find out what he was really like from reading the Gospels.

And here we discover that when Herod heard about all that Jesus was saying and doing, he immediately thought of John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets of the Old Testament. Now, none of these men fits into the mold of a Jesus who is safe, fluffy, and woke.

[7 : 28] A Jesus who is all about meaningless love and unrighteous behavior. Oh, Jesus would have put up with that. For Jesus, all love is love.

No. Think of John the Baptist who called out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and called them to their faces a brood of vipers. Think of the Elijah who challenged the king of his time about his unfaithful lifestyle and the unfaithful lifestyle of his wife.

Think of the other prophets of the Old Testament who didn't hold back their criticisms of the ungodly cultures of their days. they called down judgment from God upon their nations on account of their unfaithfulness.

What we're learning here is that the Jesus who was so often portrayed to us as ultra-tolerant and totally woke is very different indeed. He is more along the lines of a John the Baptist and Elijah or an Old Testament prophet challenging the people as to where they stood to God and warning them of judgment from heaven against unfaithfulness.

The ministry of Jesus is counter-cultural. Aslan, the famous hero of C.S. Lewis, the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe, is described as being a good lion, but he's not safe.

[9 : 00] The ministry of Jesus critiques the prevailing culture of his day and the prevailing culture of our day. Jesus may be good, but he's not safe.

What would Jesus say about fat cat bonuses, economic inequality, hypocrisy and deceit in government, sexual ethics, and absent parenting in our nation?

What would he say to ministers who stand in the pulpit, put the Bible to one side, and pander to society's immoral behavior? What would he say to a church which fails to critique societal greed, political inequality, and hypocritical deceit at every level?

Think of what John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the Old Testament prophets would have said. That is how Jesus would have responded. Jesus is good, but he's not safe.

He never has been, and he isn't today. After all, if there is no such thing as right or wrong, why did Jesus die on the cross? And if there is no coming judgment from God upon the unrighteousness of men, then why did Jesus tell us there would be?

[10 : 32] Yes, steer clear of the comfortable lies of uber-tolerant woke ministries. Ask yourself, what would Jesus say? Third, third thing we learn about Jesus, the future of Jesus is execution.

The future of Jesus is execution. You know, there's a very dark note of foreboding in our passage. When Herod hears about what Jesus is saying and doing, it reminds him of the ministry of John the Baptist.

He says to himself, John, I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things? This Herod had taken his brother's wife, Herodias, as his own wife, and John the Baptist had criticized him.

Herod's response was to kill John the Baptist. Now, Herod the Tetrarch, this Herod, was the son of Herod the Great, the Herod who ordered the execution of all the infant boys of Bethlehem under the age of two years old when Jesus was born.

Herod the Tetrarch's son was the Herod who killed the Apostle James in the book of Acts. So, you see, murder runs in Herodian DNA.

[11:57] When you think of the Herods, think of the Kims of North Korea, right? Control, violence, and murder runs in their family line.

But this self-talk from Herod in verse 9 here, it's almost Shakespearean in its tone. You could imagine it coming from Macbeth or Hamlet, it reveals the man's heart in a darkened room filled with smoke.

He's by himself and he says, John I beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things? Back in Luke chapter 6 and verse 11 when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Jewish Sabbath, we read, the Pharisees were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do with Jesus.

The Pharisees were Jesus' enemies and now so is Herod. The future of Jesus doesn't look so bright. The Pharisees are it is talking about murder.

The future of Jesus is execution. Within just a few verses from our passage here in verse 22 of chapter 9, Jesus says to His disciples for the first time the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed.

[13:27] Jesus knows it. And if we're reading the text carefully so do we. Even from these early stages in His ministry Jesus knew that on account of the things He was saying and doing He was falling foul of the ruling authorities and they'll kill Him for it.

Death looms large for Jesus. Being faithful to Jesus will always carry consequences for us. It may mean being excluded from a friend group.

It may mean being made fun of by our peers. It certainly means being made to feel stupid by the media.

The future of Jesus is execution and you know for that we're grateful because we know Jesus consciously embraced death because it was for us He was dying to take our sins away.

But the future for all these disciples and for us also is one of suffering and shame. Take it as read those who follow Christ must be willing to take up their crosses and deny themselves.

[14:46] So you see from such a short passage we learn so much about Jesus. What do you think about Him now? A Jesus whose presence cannot be hidden but always shines forth.

A Jesus who was counter-cultural. A Jesus whose future is death for us. Makes Him want us to love Him more and follow Him more closely don't you think?

Because it was for us He willingly embraced all these things. Spiritual perplexity in Jesus. Second spiritual perplexity and us.

I know we don't have any overheads today. I was at a minister's training course this week in Edinburgh for three days and apparently the new cool way of communicating today is to avoid PowerPoints and speak to people.

So that's what we're doing. Well if the Gospels tell us what we're to believe concerning Jesus Christ they also tell us what to believe about ourselves and the duties God requires of us.

[16:01] Sound familiar? Yes. Short of catechism question too. They tell us about our world. It's as if when we take the Gospels seriously we put on a pair of spectacles and for the first time we can see God as He really is and we can see our world as it really is.

They clear our vision. They get rid of the spiritual mist. As we consider this passage we also learn three things about ourselves.

First of all the great are not always great. Great are not always wise rather. The great are not always wise. Second we need to be clear about Jesus and third seeking Jesus is our reasonable response.

Let's go through these quickly. First of all the great are not always wise. the great are not always wise. Herod the Tetrarch was the most powerful man in the nation.

He had been appointed by the Roman emperor himself and was in command of the military and political apparatus of his nation. There were other powerful people there too.

[17:05] The high priest in Jerusalem, the Roman proconsul who commanded the Roman legions. They were the nobility, they were the rich, they were the influential. But we read that when Herod

heard about what Jesus was saying and doing he was perplexed.

Now lesser people like the woman who Jesus had healed from her issue of blood in the previous verses in chapter 8, she was quite clear as to who Jesus was. The disciples, none of whom were anything but common men, they weren't perplexed about who Jesus was.

But then they were hardly the great of the land, they were commoners. The point is the great are not always wise. They might be very intelligent, but there's a great difference between intelligence and wisdom.

My family at this point are all going yeah. We've got a great expression in the north that describes someone who's very intelligent but lacks common sense. We say about them, you're no wise. You're no wise. When it comes to the great of our day, they're no wise. The influencers, Taylor Swift and so on, they might be socially and culturally powerful people, but because their knowledge doesn't take God into the equation, they're not wise.

[18 : 35] Remember the proverb, the feet of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? let's not be duped by the great of our day. They might be great sportsmen, they might be great politicians, they might be great influencers, they might be fabulously rich, they might be ridiculously good looking, they might be amazingly intelligent, but the great are not always wise.

Compared to them, no offense to anyone here, we're all common. but as long as our knowledge begins with God, as long as we're wearing the spectacles of the gospel and seeing Christ as he really is, saviour and Lord, and the world as it really is, lost without God, we're wise.

We might not be intelligent, we might not be wealthy, we might not be good looking, we might have no influence upon anybody, but what's important to God is wisdom, not wealth, the great are not always wise.

Second, we need to be clear about Jesus, we need to be clear about Jesus. You know, this word perplexed, it's such a great English word, isn't it?

You just walk around your house going perplexed, perplexed, perplexed, befuddled, mystified. When Herod thought of Jesus, he was perplexed. You know, we have windows which are clear and windows which are opaque.

[20 : 12] We can clearly see through one, but through the other, like this window here or the windows back there or these church windows, all we see are shapes and shadows.

One clarifies, the other confuses. It's important when we come to Jesus. We are looking through clear windows.

We are thinking clearly and not perplexed, looking through an opaque window. We need to be clear about Jesus, who He is and why He came.

For all Herod's greatness, He was perplexed by Jesus. Later, in Luke's Gospel, we find another man who was mystified by Jesus, the Roman proconsul, Pontius Pilate.

But others see clearly who Jesus is. They know who He is and why He came. They tended to be more common people. We live in a society where people are largely confused by Jesus.

[21 : 14] Some say He's just a good teacher. Others say He didn't exist at all. Still others, He's some kind of prophet or a glorified angel. And still others, I don't really care who Jesus was.

Well, what about us? Who do we really think Jesus is? And why Jesus came? It is of first importance that we understand these things, that we are clear about Jesus.

Because the thing is that Jesus, through His Word, is not opaque about Himself. He clearly tells us who He is, and He clearly tells us why He came. He is the Son of God, the Lord and Savior, in whom all must have faith.

He came to save us from our sins by dying for us upon the cross. He came to preach the message of love, forgiveness, and righteousness, and to conquer death by His victorious resurrection on the third day.

It is clear, it is obvious. It is so important that we are clear about Jesus because, as the Bible tells us, it really is a matter of life and death.

[22 : 28] Some people say, well, I am kind of agnostic, as if to say I do not really know who Jesus is. They say it because it sounds cool, intelligent, and respectable, but in reality, it is foolish, it is dangerous, and it is frankly dumb.

the gospel urges us that if we don't want to end up like Herod or Pilate, we need to be clear about who Jesus is. In view of what He clearly teaches about Himself in the gospels, we need to be clear about who He is and why He came.

Well, what is the takeaway, the practical application for us? Read about Him in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Ask for help from other Christians if you're at all unclear. Listen carefully to the regular preaching of His Word, because to be clear about Jesus is a matter of life and death. It's a matter of primary importance.

It matters more than how healthy we are, how wealthy we are, or how influential we are. Let's be sure that in a perplexed and confused world, we're clear about Jesus.

[23 : 50] And then lastly, the last thing we learn about our world is that seeking Jesus is our reasonable response. Seeking Jesus is our reasonable response. Our passage begins with Herod hearing about Jesus.

It passes through Herod's mental processes as he struggles to understand who Jesus is. It darkens by referring to Herod's execution of John the Baptist, but it ends with the words, and he sought to see him.

Herod was perplexed by Jesus and wanted answers to his questions. Now, on the surface of things, this seems a reasonable response, does it not? Herod wants to see Jesus.

Might even be a promising request. Maybe Herod, too, will come to understand that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel. Maybe Herod will become a disciple of Jesus, but underneath the surface of Herod's request are dark purposes.

This Herod's father, Herod the Great, remember, told the wise men that when they had found the baby who was born to be king in Bethlehem, they should report back to him that he, too, should worship the child.

[25 : 11] But we know that Herod the Great's purposes for that baby were very dark and murderous. So were those of his son Herod the tetrarch. He didn't want to see Jesus in order to know him, but to kill him.

He wasn't seeking Jesus out of sincere motives. Now, we might wonder to ourselves how it was that Jesus did not obey Herod's request.

How did Jesus know that Herod was not sincere? It could be because Jesus was wiser than us and that he knew that the Herods, as a family, having failed to kill him as a child, would try it again.

But I rather think it was because Jesus had a spy in Herod's camp. Back in chapter 8 and verse 3, we learn that one of the women who followed Jesus was called Joanna, and she was the wife of Herod's steward, a man called Cusa.

Perhaps he had heard from Herod, told his wife, and she had told Jesus. Perhaps it was she who warned Jesus about Herod's psychotic and murderous intentions.

[26 : 30] If there are any here today who are seeking Jesus because they are confused about who he is and why he came, I would like to think that you've come here with genuinely sincere motives.

You don't just want to understand who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. You want to become a disciple of Jesus. Is that not true?

That you want the mist in your mind cleared so that you too can follow him. You're tired of perplexity. You want some clarity instead.

The truth is it is not enough to understand who Jesus is and why he came. We must move on from understanding to faith and trust. After all, how can we put our trust in a Jesus we do not know?

But having got to know him and the beauty of his love and his righteousness, how can we not trust him? What then is the verdict?

[27 : 40] With whom shall we side in this passage? The greats of this world who are not always very wise? Or the Jesus whom to know is to love?

If it's with the world, with its spiritual perplexity and its bewilderment and its apathy toward Jesus, you know we will never be sure of anything. Nothing. But if it's with Jesus and his righteousness and his self-sacrificing love on the cross, we can be sure that though we might suffer like he did because we're going against the flow of society, day and always, in the words of Joshua, choose this day who you will follow.