

Herod's Flashback

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Date: 10 January 2016

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn together this evening to Mark's Gospel, Chapter 6, and tonight we're looking at verses 14 to 29.

Verses 14 to 29 of Mark, Chapter 6. Well, we find this very interesting, also very solemn and graphic account of John the Baptist's death and something of the reason behind it.

Now, we all know what flashbacks are, even if we've never had flashbacks, although I suppose you could say that the exercise of your memory is in many ways a flashback because you're going back to things which happened that you're bringing to your mind.

But flashbacks are generally, it's an aim given, as you know, to people who have some traumatic event or whatever in the past.

And occasionally, from time to time, it comes back fairly powerful, usually, into their minds in flashback, as it's called. And it's especially when somebody's been through very traumatic experiences and they come back from time to time like that in the way of flashbacks.

[1 : 20] Well, Herod was having a flashback moment here. In Mark's Gospel, in this description of John the Baptist's death, it's, of course, in relation to the way that Herod had heard about Jesus.

John the Baptist was in prison. Jesus was going about his ministry, still in the early stages of his ministry, pretty much. But nevertheless, as he was going about doing these works and as he gave power to those 12 that he sent out to exercise power over unclean spirits and to heal people with diseases, the news of that reached Herod.

And various people were saying who this person was. People were saying it was John the Baptist. People were saying, no, it's Elijah. Others were saying, no, he's a prophet, like the prophets of the Old Testament.

But Herod was convinced that it was John the Baptist that he had put to death or had caused to be put to death.

And this is what he concluded. It is John, whom I beheaded, who has been raised from the dead. He wasn't, of course, a believer.

[2 : 37] And yet he still believed that this was possible, that John the Baptist could appear again, though he knew he had been put to death. He believed that it was possible for him to be raised from the dead or for him to come back from the dead.

And that's what he concluded. And he was afraid because he knew that he had acted wrongly in regard to John the Baptist. And that's why Mark gives us this account as he goes back over what happened and was now making Herod afraid or the reason why he was afraid.

We're told as Mark opens up this account for us what lay behind that decision of King Herod to put John to death. And as we do so, Mark brings out in the history of these events things which really help us to formulate our own opinions as to what is right and wrong.

And not only that, but applies in many respects to our own age and the kind of lifestyles, the way that people think and the way that people live, and especially how lives that are taught under the gospel, Christian lives particularly, have to be a complete contrast to the way in which we see the world living and carrying out what it thinks or what they think as acceptable lifestyles.

So here, first of all, is the reason for John's imprisonment. And that, you could say, is twofold. First of all, John's own faithfulness to God and the dilemma that that posed in the second place for King Herod.

[4 : 24] Because John, as a man of God, was known by Herod as a righteous and holy man. John the Baptist lived his life in a way that was true to God, in a way that did not shirk from telling it like it was whenever he needed to speak up for God.

That's what he did. It didn't matter whether he was speaking to the king or whether he was speaking to people in the countryside, whether they were young people or old people, you could depend on John the Baptist to actually stand for it and speak out the truth of God.

He lived himself a fairly unique life. We're told that he spent a lot of time in desert places. We're told that he was clothed with camel's hair and that he wore a large leather belt, something like the Elijah of the Old Testament.

So he would have been somebody who attracted attention, somebody who was regarded perhaps as something of an eccentric. And yet what we're told about him here and elsewhere in the Bible is that he was characterized especially by being a godly man, by being a man who lived for God, who had dedicated his life to God, who spoke for God, who valued the way that God had come to call him to the specific work of being the forerunner of the Messiah.

And Herod knew that. But John the Baptist wasn't just a holy man and a righteous man just in the way he lived his life personally. He also was a man who showed his faithfulness to God in what he said.

[6 : 04] And it's important that this passage actually tells us what he said to Herod. Herod had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her.

For John had been saying to Herod. And you see the way it's put there very deliberately, John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

He didn't just say it once. He didn't just say it a few times. He kept on saying it. In fact, every time you get the impression from this, every time Herod would be confronted or would go to listen to John the Baptist or have an audience with John the Baptist, John the Baptist kept bringing this up. He kept telling him about his sin, that it was not right for him to have his brother's wife. When his brother was still living, he apparently had met her when his brother Philip was in Rome and at a party, I'm sure, similar to one described in this chapter.

He had cast his eyes on Philip's wife and then he had taken her back to be with himself. And John the Baptist says, that's not lawful. That is not according to the law of God.

[7 : 21] The Herods, as a family, were notorious. We'll see in a minute that that extended even to Herodias' daughter who danced in this company.

They were notorious for their immorality, for their looseness, for their lewdness, for their licentiousness. They were known even in their day for that kind of lifestyle.

But they were very powerful people. And Herod was a very powerful man. Herod could actually have, as we see with John the Baptist, he could have people just instantly taken to prison.

And with John the Baptist, as you can see, Herod could actually give an order instantly that somebody be executed. And John the Baptist knew that. He knew who he was dealing with.

He knew the kind of man Herod was. And he still kept saying to him, this is not right. This is against the law of God. This is contrary to what you know in your conscience.

[8 : 23] He reproved Herod. He didn't leave him alone on this matter. He kept on saying to him, it is not lawful for you to have her.

Now, of course, that's something which we need to take note of as well. We're all required as Christian people to live the kind of life that the Bible sets out for us.

To live a holy life. To live a righteous life. To live a life that's pleasing to God. A life that's in accordance with the standard of God's own truth. But it's not enough for us that we live privately in that way.

We have to rub that truth into the conscience of the world. And into the conscience too of those who are in authority. And perhaps we should say especially those who are in authority.

When they are living and making decisions and laws that actually contradict the law of God. Pray tonight for those in the media.

[9 : 25] For those in political circles. For those as political advisors. Who do try and present the truth of God. Which they believe themselves. To those who are in authority.

And yet largely go ignored. Or just listened to but not complied with. Pray for Christians in these circles. Remember the difficulties they have.

Remember they're dealing with people who have power. And power goes to people's heads. Not least in our day. There are plenty of Herods in the world.

There are plenty of Herods in our nation. If not exactly in the same way as you see Herod behaving. Nonetheless certainly in terms of having influence.

And having power and having authority. And having a hand on people's lives. And affecting people's decisions. Pray for Christians. Who are trying to maintain their witness.

[10:24] And who are seeking to keep advising and giving advice. To those who have these responsibilities. So here was Herod. Here's John the Baptist. And John the Baptist keeps saying to him.

This is not right. He keeps getting to his conscience. And you and I have means today. Even if we can never meet with the government of the day.

Or with the opposition of the day. Or with political representatives of our day. We have means nevertheless. Through writing. Through emails. Through what institutes like the Christian Institute. And Christian Concern. They make it easy for us. They even draft letters for us. So that when things come up. Which we know are actually at odds. With God's truth. And with God's commandments. They tell us about that. And they say. Look this is important. Write to your MP about it. Write to the Prime Minister about it. Write to the minister responsible for it. And it's so easy to do it.

[11:25] But do we do it? It's the way that John the Baptist would have us to act. Because he would not let Herod alone. With his ungodliness. Neither must we. We must hold those that we elect to represent us in government.

And the government that's elected. We must hold them to account. We must say. We have put you into office. And you are not representing our Christian convictions.

The way we would like. They'll be getting all kinds of other representations. That are very far from Christian representations. But let them never say.

I never heard from any Christian. In Knock Free Church. Or in Point. Or wherever. On this issue. Herod. Was constantly.

Given to know that he was wrong. This man of God. Would not let him alone with his conscience. And that was Herod's dilemma. Because you read in this passage that.

[12:29] He feared John. And yet. Was perplexed. And yet he heard him gladly. He feared John. Because. He knew that he was a righteous man.

And a man of God. And that itself is interesting. There was a measure of respect. You could say. Certainly of regard. By Herod. For John the Baptist.

Even though he. He wasn't. At all. Complying with. What John was saying. Or didn't at all intend. To do as John was saying to him.

Nevertheless. He had. A respect for him. He respected. Or regarded. The fact that he was a holy man. And a righteous man. And you know. That. Does. Get through. Don't think that. Living a holy life.

Will mean that. Everybody out there. Will just hate you. And despise you. There are many people. That respect. Christian lives. When they're honest. And through. To what they believe.

[13:26] And that's what we want to live. Honest. And through. And consistent lives. So there was a measure. Of respect. For this man.

Even on the part of Herod. But then it says. He was greatly perplexed. And yet. He heard him gladly. Now it seems to be. The right translation there.

And other translations have. When he heard him. In verse 20 there. He did works. And yet. He heard him gladly. And it's. It's much more. In keeping with. The way it's translated there.

That fits the context. When. When Herod heard. John the Baptist. He heard him gladly. Yet it left him. Greatly perplexed. Why? Because he was caught.

Between. Doing what. John the Baptist. Set out for him. And keeping Herodias. This woman. That he had taken. So wrongly. And so sinfully. To live with him.

[14:22] He was perplexed. Because. He was in a fix. He knew. That John was right. Yet he didn't want. To lose Herodias. And he didn't want. To lose her presence.

He didn't want. To lose. The prestige. Of having her. All of that. Left him in a fix. He was caught. Between. Those two. Horns. Of his dilemma. If you like.

He knew. That John the Baptist. Was right. He knew. That John the Baptist. Advice. Was an advice. That he should live by. He knew. That John.

Was speaking. From God. When he said. It is not lawful. For you. To have her. And yet. He wouldn't want. To get rid of her. He didn't want. To have her removed. He didn't want. To stop living.

That lifestyle. He just. Could not. Bring himself. To do that. Every time. He heard. John. This was how. He felt. He came away.

[15:17] Perplexed. He came away. With a bad conscience. And yet. He didn't do. What was right. And so.

We read. That Herodias. Had a grudge. Against John. Now. Herod. To give him. His due. As far as you can. At least. He kept. John the Baptist.

Safe. He didn't. Put him. In prison. Just because. He hated him. And didn't. Want to hear. About. What he said. Anymore. It does seem. That Herod. Would visit. John the Baptist.

In his prison. And what it says. Here is that. He kept him. Safe. In verse 20. Kept him. In custody. He kept him. Under protection. So Herod.

Knew. That. The people. Respected John. And he had a measure. Of respect. For himself. So. In order. That Herodias. Would not get at him. And organize his death. He had him.

[16:13] Kept in prison. But Herodias. Had this grudge. Against him. Because obviously. She. Absolutely. Hated this man. For what he stood for. And what he represented.

And what he said. To this man. That she had. Now come to live with. He didn't like. The truth. And this grudge. That she had. Against. John the Baptist.

Was one. That actually. Brought about. Eventually. His death. Now. We're not making excuses. For King Herod. This is what happens.

When you get into. The entanglement. Of sin. And immorality. That Herod. Was entangled in. Despite. What his conscience. Said. The more he went on.

With his life. The more entangled. He became. And that's what sin. Does to you. When you don't deal with it. When you don't actually. Bring it to God. When you don't answer. What your conscience. Is saying. He had enough.

[17:11] Of a conscience. To make him scared. But it didn't change him. He had enough. Of a conviction. About the wrong. He was doing. But it didn't lead. To a change. In his lifestyle. He knew.

That John the Baptist. Was right. But he still. Kept Herodias. Let it never be like that. For me. Or for you. The moment.

Your conscience. Tells you. Something is wrong. Deal with it. Don't put it off. Don't become entangled. In any sin. Whatever sin it is.

Or any of the ways. Of sin. Don't become entangled. In them. Thinking that somehow. You'll extricate yourself. Out of them. You'll escape. You'll manage to come out of. The meshes of sin. Sin does not work like that. It's a bit like a spider. Building a web. That. Sticky.

[18:06] Flimsy looking web. That begins with such a small. Round. Sort of beginning. And as you watch the spider. And it's amazing how the spider. Can cover. Large distances.

Compared to its own size. And as that web. Increases. So the potential for. Insects getting caught. And it increases. The web.

As it increases. Begins to enmesh. More and more. The insects. That come into its vicinity. That's how sin is. That's how sin is. When you leave it undealt with.

When it's not repented of. It doesn't decrease. It doesn't stay static. The web gets larger. And indeed it gets more sticky. As well. Our sin.

Our sin is something. That should trouble us. Sufficiently to bring to God. Instantly.

[19:04] In repentance. Which is what John the Baptist preached. Which is what these men. Who Jesus sent out preached. They preached and proclaimed. That people should repent.

We don't like that. That calls on us to change our lives. To change our minds. To change our outlook. To change our lifestyle. To change our hearts.

To turn them inside out. From what they are as sinners. We have no option. That's what God is telling us. If we want his approval.

Don't do a herod. Don't put off dealing with your sin. Don't think it's going to go away somewhere. And it'll be dealt with somehow. Don't think you'll feel better.

Just as time goes on. Don't think you'll feel better. Don't think you'll feel better. Because God is abundant in pardon. And God's pardon. God's forgiveness.

[20:00] Is the only proper remedy. For your sin and mine. Now Herod knew that. And yet he didn't do anything about it.

That's his dilemma. He just cannot let go of his sin. He doesn't want to change. From what he is. Even though he has a bad conscience over it.

That's the reason. For John's imprisonment. It came about because. Of the way that he had constantly dealt with. This issue. And he was put in prison. Yes for a measure of protection. But nevertheless. That's what led to it. And then we're told of the day. Specifically the day. On which he was put to death. The day of John's execution. Was the day of Herod's birthday. Verse 21. An opportunity came. This is for Herodias especially. An opportunity came. When Herod on his birthday. Gave a banquet for his nobles. [21 : 04] And military commanders. And the leading men of Galilee. There it is. You see it's all about Herod. It's all about his prestige. It's all about how important he is. And on his birthday. He gives this great banquet.

This party. And invites all the big people. All the big names. From around the countryside. And the town. To actually come to his birthday party. The more people he has. Of importance. In human terms. The more Herod's ego. And Herod's prestige. Is increased. And of course. With such parties.

There's always. Goings on. There's always plenty to drink. And plenty of merriment. And so it was with Herod's party as well. Lots of entertainment.

Lots of worldly things. Lots of immorality. Lots of excess. Lots of excess. And it's all about Herod's greatness.

[22 : 02] And isn't that how the world is? Isn't that sadly how it is. For too many people in power. It's all about themselves. It's all about massaging their ego.

And the more they get of prestige. The more they want of that same prestige. The more they want added to it. And isn't that how it is sadly.

With so many actually in the world. You know you appear terribly. Old fashioned. When you denounce things like.

Drunken birthday parties. These kinds of goings on. Dabbling with this and that. Whether it's drugs or alcohol. Whatever. Nowadays you sound. Very old fashioned.

If you say. Well these things simply ought not to be done. But you know there's a version of Proverbs. Which whether Herod knew about it or not. You and I should know about it. And we will know about it.

[22 : 58] Because when you read the book of Proverbs. Chapter 21 verse 16. You read this. One who wanders from the way of good sense. Will rest in the assembly of the dead.

Proverbs has a habit of telling it like it is. That calls a spade a spade. That doesn't pretend. That things are other than they are.

That's what it says. That's just one verse out of many. One who wanders from the way of good sense. Will rest in the assembly of the dead. That's what happened to Herod.

He wandered from the way of good sense. The good sense that he was given by John the Baptist. By John the Baptist preaching and teaching and advice. He wandered from the way of good sense. And he came to rest in the place of the dead. The assembly of the dead. That's the occasion. And this is the opportunity that Herodias was waiting for.

[24 : 01] Now she says. You see there that it says. When Herodias' daughter came in. Now literally what that says is. When the daughter of Herodias herself came in.

She danced. In other words. This was very unusual. You wouldn't normally get the daughter of somebody. Of rank such as Herodias.

Somebody who was really in that upper layer of society at the time. You wouldn't get them doing this kind of thing. This would be frowned on. This would normally be looked down on. Because this kind of dance was not just an innocent kind of dance.

It would involve licentious movement. And it would involve mimicking sex acts. It would involve that kind of debauchery. And Herodias didn't mind it.

In fact she probably put her up to it. So that she would come to avail herself of this opportunity to get to Herod. And to get to Herod's mind.

[25 : 01] And to get from Herod. Something that could actually be used against John the Baptist. That's why people hired professional sort of dancers.

To do this kind of thing in those days. It was regarded as beneath people of rank. But here's the daughter of Herodias.

Dancing before Herod and his guests. Sporting herself. Degrading herself. In such an occasion.

Let me just say this in passing. And this is especially for our young people. That world out there lives on that sort of stuff. That world and its worldliness.

It really has an appetite for this kind of stuff. All you've got to do is watch some pop videos. Many pop videos. That's just one example.

[26 : 05] Of the way in which the world shows itself. Through this kind of thing. Of what is so popular. And we should have great concern. As Christian people. As to what young people are watching.

Not just our own young people. But young people at large. This is the kind of stuff they're brought up on. This is the kind of grating so-called dancing.

That so much of the world has a place for. It should have no place. In a Christian life. In a Christian home. And just like John the Baptist.

We have to speak. And call things as they are. This is ungodliness. This is sinful. This is displeasing to God.

This should have no part in the life of our young people. And yet so many millions of young people. Are sucked into this world.

[27 : 09] So much so. That when you come to shows for entertainment. And X-factor type things. Millions and millions of people.

Who volunteer and come to audition. Are really out to have this kind of outcome. They hope for themselves. Friends. Friends. Let's be very very aware.

Of the spirit that's at work. In those kind of scenes. And behavior. And in all of that kind of scene.

And in all that kind of lifestyle. That is projected at our young people. As being quite alright. And just being right up to date. Just ask yourself always.

Please young people. Ask yourself always. Of what you're watching. And what you're doing. And what you're seeing other people doing. Does this please God? Is this lawful for me?

[28 : 12] According to God's standard. If it's not. It's not for you. Don't make a Herodias of yourself. Or a daughter. Or a Herod.

Listen to the voice of truth. That comes to you from the gospel. And please. Commit yourself. To a godly lifestyle.

Whatever people might say. About being old fashioned. It's not people's opinion. That we really have to be concerned about. The thing that you and I. Young and old.

Have to be concerned about. More than anything else is. What does God think of me? Where do I stand? Within God's opinion. And if we're being true to the gospel.

Then we have to counter worldliness. And all it's debauched for. Forms particularly. As they are. Brought before us. In our day. Well here she is.

[29 : 12] And she. Pleases Herod. And his guests. And as so often. It led to tragedy. Not for herself. But although that was. Tragic enough.

But for John the Baptist. There's the outcome. As she pleased. She. The king said to the girl. When he called her over. Obviously. Like what she was doing. As Herod would.

And he said. Ask of whatever you wish. And I will give it to you. And just to show again. His own prestige. And his own importance. And just how great a figure he was. He said to her.

Ask me. Anything you like. Up to half my kingdom. Isn't he a big man? Isn't he important? And she went out. And said to her mother.

What should I ask for? He's given me. This. Liberty. To ask for things. Up to half his kingdom. What do you think. I should ask for? Quick as a flash.

[30 : 07] Mother said. Ask for the head. Of John the Baptist. And the king. Was exceeding sorry.

But because of his oaths. And his guests. He did not want to break his word to her. Is that not pathetic?

Is that not an awful thing to read? About a man who had the power to say. No. I will not do it. I respect this man too much. I will not have him put to death.

He didn't want to lose face. With these important people at his party. He was probably well drunk by that stage anyway. But rather than lose face.

He would rather that John the Baptist lose his life. What a ghastly figure. What a dreadful decision. What an ungodly man.

[31 : 13] Just to save his face. And so that he would keep up his reputation. With those that kept him in power. He gave the order to the executioner.

Go and take off his head. And you read that. The executioner did as he was commanded. And he brought the head of John the Baptist.

On a tree. That's graphic. It tells it like it is. Just so that we can see how horrible.

Sin really is. And just so that you can see. What some people have to suffer. Because they remain true to God.

It's not just in the past friends. It's happening in our world. As you well know. People's heads are being cut off. Because they're Christians.

[32 : 16] Because they believe. In and follow Jesus. And there are many tonight. Throughout the world. Who face execution. Just as John the Baptist did.

And just for what he believed in too. Herod. Placed pride. Over. Principle.

He had regard. For a good man. But he remained a bad man. A thoroughly bad man. John the Baptist.

Lost his head. But Herod. Lost his soul. Which would you rather? You would rather.

Lose your head. And be safe. And be safe. In the arms of Jesus. Than to lose your soul. And maintain your integrity. With worldly human beings.

[33 : 20] That's how it was for Herod. He had all the advantages. He had many opportunities. He heard John the Baptist gladly. And yet he ordered the executioner. And yet he ordered the executioner to kill him.

Just to keep his sin. And his sinful lifestyle. As it was. And remember friends. We began by looking at.

By thinking of flashbacks. Or referring to flashbacks. There's nothing in hell. But constant flashback. When you go to Luke.

Chapter 16. You find the account of the rich man. And Lazarus. The beggar. Who was laid at the rich man's gate daily. They both died.

Lazarus was carried by the angels. To heaven. To what's called Abraham's bosom. A rich man lifted up his eyes in hell. Being in torments.

[34 : 21] Is how the Bible puts it. Then he has these terrible flashbacks. And they never stop. He begins thinking of the life he left behind. Of the brothers he left behind.

Of the people that would follow him. Into this terrible eternity. That's what hell is. Dreadful flashbacks.

And they never end. And there's no cure for them there. There's no antidote. There's no treatment. That has to begin on this side of death.

Because there's nothing like that in heaven. It's the very opposite. And that's why Jesus came and died. So that you would not have these flashbacks of hell.

That instead you would be with him in heaven. And that you would live for him. While you have the opportunity. In this life. May God bless these thoughts to us.

[35 : 29] Let's pray. Lord our gracious God. We give thanks for the clarity of your truth. And for the way in which your truth addresses our sin and our sinfulness.

And we pray that you would help us Lord. To apply it not only to how we live and how we think. Help us also to carry it in our lives and in our behavior and in our talk.

Into the world in which we live. And help us we pray to counter the workings of sin and of evil. In the way in which we ourselves in our day. See so much of it around us.

Help us to be consistent in our obedience to you. Help us Lord we pray to help one another. And to give that support to one another as we seek.

To live lives that are pleasing to you. Go before us now throughout this week we pray. And in all of these areas of our life. Be our protector and our guide. For Jesus sake.

[36 : 26] Amen. Amen. Amen.