

CHOOSE WISELY - KING HEROD

Text Mark 6:17-29
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PREAMBLE

Last week we had a very powerful sermon on self-discipline or self-control as a key driver for growth; both spiritual and physical growth. Today we will build on that discussion with a case study of King Herod story. This is graphic representation on one who did not choose wisely for want of self-control.

Have you ever looked back on one of those “fork in the road” moments in your life, and wished you had taken the other path, the alternative course of action? A fork in the road is a metaphor based on a literal expression for a deciding moment in life or history when a major choice of options is required.

Have reflection on a deciding moment in life or history when a major choice of options was made.... It may have been something small, like buying a fairly used car (“*Tokubo*”) that broke down all the time – or a much larger decision, such as resigning a job for a big one, then losing the job three months later. One will be filled with the thoughts had I known; I could have Have a reflection on the choice you have made and then regretted!

As the old saying goes: “*We are the choices we have made.*” In Mark 6 we are told the traumatic story of a man who, it seems, would have given almost anything to undo the terrible situation his choices had got him into. He was a King - but he was played like a pawn (Chess game lover will understand – of a lowest value that can be tossed around and can be exchange for any other captured piece). The wife took advantage of his choices to manipulate him to achieve her evil desires! Read **Mark 6:17-29**

Herod’s Happiness

King Herod, from the story, we could deduced that he had made it or that Herod had it made, a very wealth King. He lived in a palace. And his birthday guest list as enumerated in the scripture shows “who’s who “of the great and the powerful (verse 21b).

Everything that could have brought him happiness was at his disposal, and what was not his he took – even his brother’s wife, Herodias. Herod denied himself nothing in pursuit of his happiness; just like He wanted Herodias, he got her.

So, from the story he was - guest of honour at his own birthday, a dancing girl, the daughter of Herodias, to entertain him. It wasn’t her skill as a dancer that pleased the men. No, this was a seductive dance, and Herod and his guests leered over the girl, he mixed his pleasure with a display of power. **Mark 6:22a**

And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." (Mark 6:22 NKJV), "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

Here Herod demonstrates how much he appreciates this entertainment, and how much he can afford to give away in his pursuit of happiness. But this isn't any Dancer – she is the daughter of Herodias; the passage didn't say the daughter of Philip but rather Herodias, well equipped with skills of the mother – wise in the ways of the world, shameless and great schemer. The King was carried away to the extent of willing to part with half of his Kingdom for a momentary satisfaction of the fleshly pleasure – lust of the eyes! The daughter did not make request on her own reasoning but rather consulted the manipulator – the Mother. And when the girl asks her mum what she should request from Herod, Herodias doesn't need to think twice. She is ready with her answer.

Meanwhile, back in the banqueting room, and before the girl returns with her horrible request, King Herod is enjoying the revelry, and has forgotten about the trouble in the making ***Revelry means noisy partying or merrymaking. The bible strongly condemns revelling as the works of the flesh – Galatians 5; 19-21. Revelries was highlighted here, most times we read it in the passing without considering its meaning – to take intense pleasure or satisfaction, usually wild party, or wild celebration. We need to be careful when we celebrate!***

Herod's problems

- Herod happiness came with a price! Presumably he and his brother Philip weren't that close or in talking terms. I'm sure no one will be celebrating with the one that took your own wife.....! And Herodias gotten for such a high prize was causing Herod trouble. **{Read Mark 6:17-20a}**
- Herodias did not like the influence that John was having on Herod. She thought John was so strict in his views, so intolerant, so judgemental that she wanted him dead. She demonstrated her willingness to kill John, even to the knowledge of Herod.
- **He wanted to hear the word of God from John, but he also wanted to disobey the word of God with Herodias. He was being pulled apart by this conflict! Many of us are in this category. We hear God's word regularly and love to hear it but fail to repent for the pleasures of the flesh. We hear His Word but out there we do different things!**
- All did not say anything to the king on his unholy relationship with Herodias except John. Just like many us will not be courageous enough to tell a brother of his errors. Herod respected John for telling him the truth. Herod knew that John was a "righteous and holy man" (verse 20). He liked to listen to John. He was quite willing to hear him. But if he knew John was God's man and that what he was saying was true – why didn't he act on it? We have heard several messages from the pulpit that knock so hard on our souls, that calls for our repentance but rather we hailed the Teacher/Sermonizer. Why can't we act on it? Why wouldn't King Herod repent?

Herod chose not to act

Why didn't Herod act decisively? What was stopping him? The answer is in the parable of the Sower. Mark 4:18-19 explains Herod failure to act. **He heard God's word from John, but that word was being choked because Herod was worried about all the**

perceived “good things” he was going to give up! You may have reached that fork in the road. You may have seen the reality of your sin and where it will take you. You may have been thrilled to hear several messages about the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you know you need to act on this – but the life-giving, life-changing seed of God’s word is in danger of being stolen right now because you are thinking about what you would need to give up. Living with Jesus as Lord will mean changing or giving up parts of your life that you so treasured.

In reality no one gives up anything good to follow Jesus. Those who trust him discover that knowing him is more valuable and satisfying than anything else. Right now you may be admiring your beautiful thorns; if so let Herod experience guide you!

Herod’s Distress

Back in the banqueting hall, Herod was making merry and probably forgot the battle that was raging within him. His guest must have been longing to hear what the dancer was going to ask the king for – most probably they were calculating the loss to Herod’s personal fortune if she did ask for half his kingdom. They didn’t have to wait long.

There are people in the world who realise how powerful God’s word is, and hate it so much that they will give anything to stop it having its impact on others, {give example; outdoor preaching}. Herodias was like that.

The offer by the King was a golden opportunity for Herodias and her daughter to have some financial independence. **She could have become a very wealthy woman in split seconds. But instead she trades half the kingdom for the perverse joy of silencing God’s word in her husband life.**

We must see again the trouble Satan will go to in order to steal God’s word. That should challenge us to guard it and treasure it and accept it; your adversary, the Satan doesn’t want you to accept it!

Herodias daughter delivered her lines and revealed her request. It must have been a horrific moment for Herod as he instantly sobered up. His heart must have skipped! He is the most powerful man in the room and in the kingdom. But as everyone laughed and cheered at the girl’s request, the king knew deep down he was a pawn; he played the fool. **This was a life changing moment for Herod as he sees his whole life passed before his eyes. What a fool he had been. He had fallen into a trap of his own making. He had hesitated and dithered. He listened to John the Baptist repeatedly and knew what he said was right. Opportunity had knocked on Herod’s door again and again, but hadn’t taken it.**

Herodias grabs the single opportunity that came her way to deliver her blow!

I wonder if Herod’s guest thought their host had got off lightly. He could have lost a fortune – instead John the preacher was going to lose his head. Maybe it was no big deal to them. But Mark tells us Herod was greatly distressed.

The pressure to keep his foolish oath to friends, family and work colleagues meant that Herod caved in. he hadn’t acted on what John said about Herodias. **So in the end he felt forced to do something he didn’t want to do – and had John killed. He allowed the head**

that warned him, the tongue that told him to repent and be rescued, to be literally cut off.

Much as he feared John, Herod feared his peers more. We may feel that we are very different from Herod, but this is a pressure we all face as we respond to the gospel message. We can just imagine what friends and colleagues, even family members will say if they hear we are follower of Christ and a member of the Lord's Church. Will we deny what we know is right because of what our families, friends, business colleagues will think or say about us?

Conclusion

Herod is mentioned a final time in the Gospels. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, sends Jesus to meet Herod, and in Luke chapter 23, Luke records what happened. **The meeting between Herod and Jesus is worrying, not because of what is said, but because of what is not said.** *“And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.”* (Luke 23:8-9 KJV)

You see, there does come a time, after repeatedly refusing to repent, when sadly there is no longer an opportunity to do so. It's easy to put it off, to say that we don't have the time, to think that we have too much to lose, or that there will be a more convenient time in future.....example on the covid-19 and door to door evangelism.

Of course, it's never easy to repent. But Herod's story reminds us that there is a cost when we refuse to listen to God's word. It also warns us that we may not get an opportunity later. **Herod threw many questions at Jesus – but received no answer!**

It is a tragedy that John the Baptist lost his life. And yet the tragedy of Herod himself is even greater. We are the choices we have made. When Herod failed to choose wisely, he lost something that was more precious even than life itself; - the opportunity to repent!

How Herod must have longed to go back to that fork in the road of his life. Perhaps that's the fork at which you stand today! ***Choose wisely!***