

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 9, 2009

Unprincipled Life, Unsound Mind

by Dan Trygg

“And they went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them. ¹⁴ And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, ‘John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him.’ ¹⁵ But others were saying, ‘He is Elijah.’ And others were saying, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.’ ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has risen!’”

Mark 6:12-16

As we concluded our last study, we saw Jesus send His twelve apostle/disciples out in pairs to go through the territory of central Galilee. They were to call people to repent and demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God by healing and casting out demons. As they, and their Master, canvassed the region, **the fame of Jesus spread abroad, and even reached the ears of the king, Herod.** Mark’s explanatory comment, “...for His name had become well known...” indicates that often the rich and powerful are disconnected from many of the events and talk of the common people. **Herod also heard the reports of what people were saying about Jesus.** Some said that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and that the miraculous powers of God were operating within him. Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah, seeing in Him the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy that indicated this OT prophet would make an appearance before the end of the age (Mal. 4:5,6). Still others were of the opinion that Jesus was a prophet, ...not necessarily Elijah himself, but a prophet, nevertheless. It was obvious that the power of God was working mightily through Him. This kind of activity had been seen in the past in some of the prophetic figures of earlier times. Thus, people concluded that Jesus was like one of them. **Herod, however, had his own opinion about who Jesus was. He was firmly convinced that He was indeed John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, risen from the dead.** This “belief statement” serves as Mark’s way to introduce the story of John’s death.

Who was this Herod? What do we know of him, and how did he come to be involved with John’s demise? This is not the same Herod who was king at the time of Jesus’ birth (Matt. 2). That was Herod the Great, king of the entire region of Palestine. He died in 4 B.C. He had ten wives and a brood of children. Some of his wives, and some of his sons had the same first names, which adds to the *confusion* of trying to figure out who is who among the Herod relations. At this point in Jesus’ ministry in Mark 6, it is probably about 29 A.D. **This Herod, the Galilean ruler of Jesus’ adult ministry, was Herod Antipas.** He was the son of Herod the Great and Malthace, a Samaritan woman. Half-Samaritan and half-Idumean (from his father), he had no Jewish heritage, at all. **When his father died, he was made tetrarch (a “fourth-ruler”) over Galilee and Perea.** His older brother, Archelaus, was made ethnarch (a “ruler-of-a-nation”) over Judea and Samaria. Archelaus, however, proved to be too oppressive and abusive to his people, and he was removed. His territory was then ruled over by Roman procurators. These brothers had a half-brother, Philip II, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. He was made tetrarch of Gaulonitis, Traehonitis and Paneas, regions to the north and east. He was a wise and prudent ruler. **There was another older half-brother, Philip I, son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, the daughter of Simon.** He had not been given any land to rule, but became a private nobleman, living in Rome. **He had married Herodias, the daughter of his older half-brother, Aristobulus.** She, in turn, had a daughter by him, Salome. **On a visit to Rome, Antipas was invited to stay at his home. While there, he seduced Herodias, and convinced her to leave Philip for him.** She got divorced from Philip I, and married Antipas. He also sent his first wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, back to her father, so he would be “free” to marry Herodias. This sparked a bitter war by Aretas, where Antipas was overwhelmed and had to call on help from Rome to keep from being totally overrun.

In a multitude of ways this adulterous relationship brought disaster into Antipas’ life. Not only was there the hurt of betrayal afflicted against his brother, and the dissolution of two marriages, but **there was deep hurt, anger, bitterness and even the spilling of blood over this selfish, lustful liaison.** Whatever they may have thought, this decision was *not* to lead to a quiet, neat changing of partners. **The hurt and damage was much greater and far-reaching than they could have imagined.** Everyone could see the folly and lack of restraint of these two. **For pious Jews, like John the Baptist, this was not only a foolish, shameful decision. They were living in open sin.** Herodias was not only Antipas’ niece, but he stole her away from his brother. Even though they were legally married in the eyes of Rome, **their marriage was conceived in adultery and clearly remained in violation of God’s law** (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). Nor was this the end of the disaster they caused. Not only did John the Baptist get caught up in their web, but, **later on in life, the conspiring Herodias proved to be Antipas’ undoing.** When his nephew, Agrippa, was promoted by Rome, she convinced Antipas to go to ask the emperor’s favors, as well. When he did so, however, Agrippa

betrayed *him*, spreading false reports concerning his loyalty to the emperor. **Antipas and Herodias were exiled to Gaul, then to Spain, where they died in dishonor and disfavor.**

What happened that motivated Herod to have John beheaded? Let's work through the account, and then make some observations. Verses 17 and 18 tell us that **Herod had John arrested because he was publicly announcing that it was not legal for him to have his brother's wife.** The language of verse 18 is presented as a direct quote, so it may be that John had occasion to confront Herod directly. It was a very risky business to tell an oriental despot that he was in the wrong about *anything*. Being a prophet, however, and one in the likeness of an Elijah-type of ministry, to stand up to the king was to be expected. Elijah had his Ahab and Jezebel (I Kg. 16:25-22:40); John had his Antipas and Herodias. **This public rebuke was a political liability to Herod, but to Herodias it was much more. She was incensed that some raggedy nobody would dare to upbraid her or rebuke her.** It appears, from the language of the verse that her input may have pushed Antipas to take action and have John arrested. We see the ambivalence of Herod revealed again in the next couple of verses, as well as the bitter resentment of Herodias. **Herodias had it in for John.** She was set against him with deep hostility and bitterness. **She wanted him dead** (vs. 19). **Herod, however, was protecting John from her.** He, as corrupt as he was, had some measure of fear and respect for him. He recognized that he was a holy and righteous man, and for that reason was afraid to do more to him than just keep him imprisoned. **As long as he was shut up in the dungeon, John could do no harm to them.** Beyond that, however, the text tells us that Herod actually liked to go and talk with him. As he listened to John, he became uncertain or at a loss as to what to do. Nevertheless, he *enjoyed* listening to John, and did so repeatedly.

This must have galled Herodias. She was used to getting her way, especially with Antipas. She was looking for some opportunity to move against John. Her occasion came at Herod's birthday celebration. Herod threw a banquet to celebrate, and he invited his high officials, his commanders, and the leaders of Galilee to his party. **When they had had occasion to drink a little, Herodias' daughter, Salome, entered into the room and danced for these men.** We do not know for certain what kind of dance this was, but the suggestion is very strong that it was erotic and sensual. Salome was a young woman at about the age of puberty. The reaction of Herod and the others was quite strong. **Herod, being flush with wine and moved by his lusts, made a public vow to give her anything she wanted, even up to half his kingdom.** Salome was unprepared for this, and went out of the room to ask her mother what she should ask for. Herodias' response was immediate, "The head of John the Baptist."

To me, one of the saddest parts of this entire story is the reaction of Salome. **"Entering in immediately, with enthusiasm she asked, 'I wish that immediately you might give to me on a platter the head of John the Baptist.'"** She felt no horror or revulsion at her mother's suggestion. She was totally of the same mind as her mother. **Having delivered her request before the entire assembly, she waited for Herod's response. Suddenly, he was on the hot seat. Everyone was looking at him.** All the important people of his government, his military commanders, and all the leaders of the important towns of his jurisdiction were there. They had heard his emphatic oath to the girl. What was he to do? He *could have* humbled himself and acknowledged his rash behavior. He *could have* laughed off her request and qualified his oath further. Instead, **though he was very grieved about what he was about to do, yet because of his oaths, and because of all those around him, he ordered that it be done. An executioner was sent to behead John.** His head was delivered to the young woman on a platter, as she requested, and she gave it to her mother.

Some observations: (1.) **"People love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil"** (Jn. 3:19). People usually do not like their sin to be exposed. Some *will recognize* and *admit* their error. Others *will withdraw* from us if we expose their sin, whether by word or example. Some *will attack* us to "put out the light", as it were, or at least get us out of their lives. Don't be surprised. (2.) **Avoid compromising, manipulating and controlling environments. "Bad company corrupts good morals"** (I Cor. 15:33). Mood altering chemicals, ungodly peer pressure, strong emotion, big talk and rash promises can make it very difficult to stand up for the good or righteous thing, when others are against it. Good decisions are not made in such settings. (3.) **The sins of the parents are often passed down to the children through the family dynamics** (Ex. 20:5). We are *not* bound by them. Each person is personally responsible for their choices, but one's upbringing can influence a person's expectations of life, behavior and relationships. God wants to set us free from the unhealthy dynamics of past generations (I Pet.1:18). (4.) **God is not mocked; a person will reap what they sow** (Gal. 6:7). This is true in so many areas. Often we sow the wind, and reap a whirlwind. Moses said, "...be *sure* your sin *will* find you out" (Num. 32:23). (5.) **A guilty conscience, or unresolved emotional hurts, can influence one's thinking.** Herod was haunted by his guilt, and that affected his beliefs.