

Topic: Truth that Conquers

Subtopic: Awakening your conscience to an unseen world

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/k45ZGzemXEY>

I heard a story this week of a parent who encouraged their child to read the Bible. In the child's attempt to read the Bible from beginning to end it wasn't long before he ran downstairs, and exclaimed, "What the heck! What is this? Why is this in the Bible?!?" And as I read the Gospel assigned for today, my reaction was pretty much the same as his. What we have before us today is admittedly gruesome and bloody. So why would a story like this be in the Bible?

As I approach difficult passages like this, I have found it helpful to lay out my questions and then carefully proceed by looking for clues. By doing so, I first look at what the Bible actually says and affirms to be true. So here is what I discovered. John the Baptist was a good person. In fact, he was such a good person even Jesus commented, ***"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."***¹ In today's account, some were superstitiously speculating about the supernatural works in Jesus' ministry were possibly due to John the baptizer having been raised from the dead. Then even Herod begins to echo those same sentiments with the conviction, ***"John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."***²

The impact of John's ministry evidently lasted long after his death. Herod is a case in point. His conscience is deeply troubled, and he is haunted over by what he did to John. Then when others believed that in Jesus, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead," Herod couldn't get John out of his head. Mark then explains why. For it was Herod who 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, ***"It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."***³ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that

¹ Matthew 11:11

² Mark 6:16

³ Mark 6:18

he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was **greatly perplexed**,⁴ and yet he liked to listen to him.

This comment from Mark makes Herod more than a one-dimensional villain. Here is a person who, though he gladly listened to John, is deeply conflicted. Mark describes Herod as being greatly “perplexed.”⁵ Mark’s choice of words describes a person who is unable to decide what to do. Herod was paralyzed by indecision. He is pulled and divided, attracted and repulsed by what it may cost if he takes John’s words seriously. Herod, in this instance, is a classic example of a double-minded person. The truth John proclaimed clearly rocked his soul, knocked him off balance, and deeply affected his equilibrium. We call that experience vertigo.

All of us have had some experience with this. The truth is always painful and difficult to confront. It can cut us to the core and hurt us deeply. It can also bring healing. That is why it has to be handled carefully.

A surgeon’s knife can do marvelous things in the hands of a skilled physician, but it can also a person to pieces. That’s why when I hear people say things like, “The worst things people can do is be silent,” it just drives me crazy. Truth needs to be handled more carefully than just spouting one’s personal bias.

Our culture is not used to dealing with propositional truth. It tends to appeal to people emotionally, which usually trumps truth every time. But I also have to admit that handling truth carefully can be perplexing.

Just this past week, I found myself perplexed as to how to truthfully handle a question my wife asked. Ellen had just completed a new recipe she found on the internet. When she asked me what I thought about it, I lied and said, “I liked it.” Ellen had had a bad day, and I couldn’t bear to make her feel worse than she already did. It wasn’t until the following day, when she attempted to serve me the same pitiful dish for leftovers, that I finally fessed up. “Honey, I knew you were having a bad day yesterday, and I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.” Thankfully,

⁴ Mark 6:20

⁵ Strong’s Concordance, # 639 “aporeo”; definition: not knowing how to decide or what to do

in my case, I had another window of opportunity to clear my conscience and get the lie off my chest.

When I relate my experience with that of Herod, here is what I discovered. We all, from time to time, find ourselves conflicted, but even those tough spots present us with a window of opportunity. Herod had his window of opportunity, when day after day, he “liked to listen to him.” But he didn’t take advantage of it. He missed his window of opportunity to *be “a doer of the word, and not a hearer only.”*⁶ And it wasn’t long afterward that Herodias saw her opportunity to get her way and she took advantage of it. It came with a birthday party, wine, guests, and of course, a sexy young girl. It finally ended with the disastrous beheading of John. Every detail was a nightmare Herod would never forget. He “feared” John while he lived and is troubled by John after he dies.

John is just a single individual armed with no other weapon other than the power of truth. We can see that same power wielded by Paul when he gave a defense of his faith before Felix, the governor of Judea, who, it is said, “trembled”⁷ at Paul’s words. Then there was Agrippa, who, when he heard Paul’s testimony was “almost persuaded.”⁸

God has not left Himself without witness in the hearts of unconverted people. Fallen and corrupt as humans maybe, “*...their consciences bear witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other time even defending them.*”⁹ The existence of this faculty in our souls proves that one day we will be accountable at the bar of God. It is for this reason and we are called to “*guard our hearts with all diligence, for out it flows the springs of life.*”¹⁰

John was a faithful servant of God’s word. The fact that a person like Herod “*liked to listen to him*”¹¹ proves that John was not a raving religious fanatic. Herod recognized that John was a righteous and holy man, a person of substance, and this created in Herod a sense of holy

⁶ James 1:22

⁷ Acts 24:25

⁸ Acts 27:28

⁹ Romans 2:15

¹⁰ Proverbs 4:23

¹¹ Mark 6:20

fear. I wish there would be something in our own lives that would resemble that kind of integrity.

There is a book out today with the title, “The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion” by Jonathan Haidt.¹² Jonathan was raised in the Jewish faith, but later became an atheist. His observations about politics and religion are noteworthy because he believes that people are more convinced by authentic godly character than by the making of logical arguments. John had that kind of integrity. He was willing to suffer for the truth, and he paid the price of declaring the truth with his life. He, like many other prophets and martyrs, faced the worst this world can do. But, as he discovered, the worst this world can do to us is hasten the day when our faith becomes sight. Paul affirmed this sentiment in his second letter to the Corinthians when he wrote, ***“These light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”***¹³ John’s reward awaited him on the other side, for he was ***“longing for a better country—a heavenly one.”***¹⁴

Suffering for doing what is right is something that sometimes happens in this world. Paul, who wrote our New Testament lesson from Ephesians, was ***“an ambassador in chains”***¹⁵ for the sake of the Gospel. Everywhere Paul went, ***“imprisonment and afflictions awaited him.”***¹⁶ In his letter read today, he writes about a coming glory, as something that is part of ***“our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.”***¹⁷ That redemption included the payment of a ransom which came through the shedding of our Savior’s blood.¹⁸ In him you also, ***when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,***

¹² Published in 2012

¹³ 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

¹⁴ Hebrews 11:16

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:20

¹⁶ Acts 20:23

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:14

¹⁸ Definition of the word, redemption, See Strong’s Concordance #629 “apolutrosis”

and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁹ which guarantees our future reward.

Biblical histories of men like John the Baptist and Paul remind us that the Christian's true reward is in things that are yet to come. Our rest, our crown, our wages, and our reward are all on the other side of the grave. Here, in this world, we must walk by faith and not by sight. And when we see bad things happening to good people, we must remember that heaven will make amends for it all. For ***“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy of being compared with the glory which shall be revealed.”***²⁰ Amen.

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever found yourself in Herod's situation, when your pride would not allow you to do what you knew was right?
- When have you traded golden opportunities for something you later regretted?
- What questions do you ask when life doesn't turn out the way you want it to? How is the concept of undeserved suffering most commonly misunderstood?

¹⁹ Paraphrase of Ephesians 1:13

²⁰ Rom. 8:18