

## More Storm Clouds on the Horizon

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus' response to the weak and even hostile reception he received when He went back to Nazareth, His hometown. His response was to leave that place and take His ministry to other villages. He also sent out His twelve disciples on a training mission, He told them to travel light so they could experience the miraculous provision of God, He told them to preach the good news of the kingdom and to demonstrate the power of the blessings of the kingdom by healing the sick and setting people free from their demons. Where they experienced rejection, He told them to shake the dust of that place off their feet and to take their ministry elsewhere.

We notice that both Jesus and His apostles had a three-dimensional, three-pronged ministry. First, they preached, or proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and called people to repent of their sins. Second, they healed the sick. And, third, they cast out demons. This formula remains consistent throughout the gospels and continues throughout the New Testament.

The message that the Jesus and His apostles preached was also three-dimensional. God has come to save His people. People are called to turn from their sins. People are invited to turn toward God and open their hearts to Him. Following the death and resurrection of the Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost the message was centered on the sacrifice and victory of Jesus Christ. He is the means by whom God has come to save His people. He conquered sin and death through His death and resurrection. Through believing in Him and by receiving Him, we become the children of God and are given everlasting life. In either case people are called to turn from their sins, and turn toward God, to turn from their sins and be converted to a new way of living.

As I was looking at our Scripture passage for this morning, I noticed once again that it is put together in a particular way. If you were here for the message about Jarius's daughter and the woman with the bleeding disease, I pointed out that that passage presents a story within a story. The story about the woman is sandwiched on either side by the story about Jarius and his daughter. Well we have another sandwich this morning, but I don't think any of us are going like what's in the sandwich.

Bob Thompson's uncle Carl used to eat Limburger and onion sandwiches, but the stuff in this sandwich is even grosser than that. Half the bread of this sandwich is found in Mark 6:12-13: Speaking of the apostles, Mark tells us "They went out and preached that people

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should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." The other half is found in Mark 6:30: "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught." The subject at either end of our Scripture lesson today is the training mission of the apostles. In verses 12-13 they go out preaching that people need to repent from their sins. They cast out demons and heal the sick; and, then, in verse 30 they come back to Jesus and report what happened. The bread of our sandwich this morning is all about the mission of the apostles.

Sandwiched in the middle, however, is the story about king Herod Antipas, and his beheading of John the Baptist. As the story unfolds, John the Baptist is already in the king's custody. He is kept in a dungeon and brought out once in a while for the king's amusement. But, the reason Herod imprisoned John was that John had confronted him concerning his illegal marriage to his sister-in-law, Herodias, who also happened to be his niece. Herod was guilty of adultery, incest, and betraying his brother all at the same time. We must also understand that Herodias, if anything, was even worse than Herod. She was a willing party to Herod's lust and no doubt enticed him to have her. In fact, it was at Herodias who was most offended by John's call for repentance and Herodias who insisted that John the Baptist be punished. She wanted John executed from the beginning, but Herod wanted to protect him because he liked hearing him. There is nothing on "The Young and the Restless," or "As the World Turns," that is worse than what we have here.

The immediate circumstances leading up to John's murder are equally disturbing. Herod throws a birthday bash in his own honor. Knowing something of Herod's character we can be sure it was a gluttonous, drunken, and lewd affair. The highlight of this soiree was to have his niece, grand niece, and stepdaughter, for she was all of these things at the same time, come and perform a dance in front of his lowlife guests. Her exotic dance routine must have been quite exotic because Herod was so pleased with her performance that he offered her anything she wished, up to half his kingdom. One gets the feeling that the girl's mother, Herodias was engineering the whole scenario from the get-go, for as soon as the girl gets the king's promise, she goes to her mother to see what to ask for. Her mother, Herodias, tells her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a dinner platter. So you see why I said that we wouldn't like what is in this sandwich. John is murdered because he called the king and his whore to repent. He is killed for the lust of a man and for the spite of a woman. It is very nasty business.

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But why does Mark choose to tell this story here? And, what if anything does it have to do with us? First of all, we need to identify the common thread. What does the story about John's execution have to do with the mission of Jesus and His apostles? What is the common thread? I would submit to you that the common thread is the message of repentance from sin. Jesus and His apostles called for repentance from sin and John the Baptist called for the repentance from sin. I would further assert that Mark constructs this thought train sandwich to remind us of the cloud that overshadows the ministry of Jesus and His apostles. There are great and greatly evil forces in this world that will seek to kill the message of repentance and if killing the messenger is required to kill the message, this evil will not hesitate. The story about John's demise brings the cross of Jesus close. It also warns of the persecution that awaits the apostles and all who dare to call people to turn away from sin. It is never a popular message.

But popular or not, God's people are always called to repent and to preach repentance from sin. The reason that this is such a central part of who we are and what we do is that God is holy and sin separates us from God. Sin is also the great destroyer of human life and families.

Herod Antipas is a perfect example of what happens to a person who refuses to turn away from sin. When God's word puts a finger on our sin and we don't repent, there is a downward spiral, characterized by at least five stages. #1 sin makes us stupid. Did you ever notice that sinners like to surround themselves with people who approve of what they are doing. As the old saying goes, "birds of a feather flock together." Their desire for approval also makes them stupid. Herod threw himself a birthday party and offered up his stepdaughter as the chief entertainment for his drunken guests. Then he made a stupid boastful promise, never dreaming what it would lead to. To save face, he had to commit murder. **Sin makes people stupid..**

The first thing that happens when we refuse to turn from sin is that that sin makes us stupid. The second thing that happens when we are unrepentant is that we become paranoid. Sin makes us paranoid. Fear grows and distorts reality. Herod Antipas knew that he should not have had John the Baptist put to death, and the sight of John's head on that platter, haunted him. When he heard of the things Jesus and His disciples were doing, how they were preaching repentance from sin and how they were performing exorcisms and healing the sick, Herod quickly came to the conclusion that Jesus was John the Baptist, raised from the dead and this possibility scared him senseless.

I've noticed over the years that some of the biggest roughest guys and toughest women, who have lived very lawless and sinful lives, and pretend to fear nothing are pretending indeed. When death comes knocking at their door, all the bravado goes out the window and they shake and weep like babies. **Sin makes people paranoid.**

When king Herod refused to turn from his sin, that sin made him stupid and his sin and guilt made him paranoid. The third thing that happens for those who will not repent of sin is that their sin multiplies. Herod started out lusting after Herodias, his brother's wife and that lust led to incest and adultery. When Herod refused to repent of his incest and adultery, that led to his abuse of an innocent man, which led to a desire to find justification among his friends, which led him to host a wicked drunken party, which led to foolish boasting, which led to murder.

Sin you see, is like a cancer. Left untreated it will multiply and spread until it consumes us. Herod and Herodias were consumed by sin. **When people do not turn from their sin their sin will multiply.**

Sin makes us stupid, and paranoid. And, unrepented sin multiplies within us. The longer we let it go, the more likely it is to consume us. The fourth thing that happens when we refuse to repent from our sin is that our sin destroys our soul. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. The thing that gets our attention when we look at Herod Antipas is that for all his evil there was, at least in the beginning, a glimmer of good. Mark 6:19 and 20 say, "So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him."

I don't know about you, but when I read this I get the feeling that Herod Antipas, for all his wickedness, was not that far from the kingdom of God. He knew that John the Baptist was a righteous and holy man. He protected John from the full wrath and spite of Herodias. He kept John around, at least partly, because he liked to listen to him. **There was hope for Herod.**

Yes, I think there was hope for Herod, but he didn't have the strength to embrace that hope. Instead, his sin made him stupid and fearful. His sin multiplied until it turned him into a murderer. By the time Herod hears about Jesus, Herod is a hollow man. His soul is gone. He has forfeited his soul for his lust toward Herodias and for his own pride.

When we refuse to repent from our sin, that sin makes us stupid, and paranoid. When we refuse to turn from our sin, that sin will multiply and consume us. Finally, unrepented sin will bring us to the exile of hell. As you can imagine, Herod Antipas continued in his immorality and got so depraved and made so many other stupid decisions that even the Romans couldn't stomach him any longer. He was deposed of power and exiled to Gaul in A.D. 39. The Jewish historian Josephus states that Herodias went into exile with him. How would you like living with the likes of her? In other words, he was exiled to a hell on earth while he lived, and because he would not repent of his sin, he was surely exiled to hell when he died. **The wages of sin is death and an everlasting exile in hell.**

The chief subject of our Scripture lesson this morning is repentance from sin. Unrepented sin makes us stupid and paranoid. Unrepented sin multiplies like cancer. Unrepented sin leads to the death of one's soul and leads to hell. The followers of Jesus were commanded to preach repentance from sin, even at the risk of their own lives. Repentance from sin is that important.

This fact should cause us to search our souls today. Is there any sin in your life that you have been refusing to forsake? God has brought conviction many times before and He is convicting you of that sin again right now. Will you turn from that sin today and let it go before it destroys you? That is the question. The Lord Jesus waits for your answer. Whatever your sin may be, will you lay it down at His feet? You need to lay it down.

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Mark 6:12-30

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