

The Heart of the Gospel: Gethsemane to the Burial of Christ

Chapter 9: The Civil Trial of Christ—The Savior before Herod

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When the Jews had mentioned Galilee as the starting point for our Lord's "subversive" work, they thought that they would be stimulating Pilate to act against Christ, for Galilee had been a notorious place of sedition against Rome. This plan appeared to backfire, for Pilate did not want to be the one who sent Jesus to His death and was looking for a way to pass the problem on to someone else. Therefore, he seized upon the mention of Galilee as an opportunity to get rid of this troubling case. Luke writes, "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time" (23:6-7). According to Roman law a criminal might be tried in any one of three different jurisdictions: "at the court of his birthplace, of his domicile, or of the place of the commission of his crime. Jesus had lived and worked in Galilee for so long a time that he might be remanded to the jurisdiction of Herod."¹ If Herod made a judgment for or against Jesus that angered the people or caused a riot, then Pilate would not be blamed before Caesar. From an unbelieving, pragmatic viewpoint Pilate's decision was brilliant. From the standpoint of truth and justice it was selfish, cowardly and sinful. So, our Lord is once again moved through the streets of Jerusalem to (according to various scholars) either the old palace of Herod's father or the old palace once owned by the Maccabean rulers. The distance from Pilate's Praetorium and Herod's residence was not great and thus it would not have taken long to move the Savior back and forth between these places. It is very likely that the Jewish leaders followed Jesus to Herod's residence to press their accusations if necessary.

In the trial (or trials) of our Lord this would be the fourth time that He would be led in bonds through the streets of Jerusalem. First, He was taken to the house of Annas; then, the secret illegal meeting with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; then, to Pilate; and now to Herod. Satan arranged a two-fold antichristian witness against the Savior with two wicked ecclesiastical judges, Annas and Caiaphas, and two evil civil judges, Pilate and Herod. The apostolic church understood that there was a satanic coalition between the heathen and the Jews against the Messiah. "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Ac. 4:27-28).

The events that transpired before Herod are only recorded in the gospel of Luke:

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. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, 1107.

Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. (Lk. 23:8-12)

As we examine this section of Scripture there are a number of areas to consider. First, who is Herod and why is this appearance only mentioned by Luke (cf. Ac. 4:27-28)? Second, we want to examine Herod's perverse interest in Jesus. Third, we will consider our Lord's perfect silence in Herod's presence. Fourth, we will ponder the Savior's suffering at the hands of Herod and his wicked men. Fifth, what is the point of union in these wicked men? May the Lord enable us to profit from His infallible Word.

(1) The Herod of which Luke speaks is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who attempted to murder Christ by having all the male children two years old and under slain in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1-18). After the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom was divided by Augustus and ruled by three of his surviving sons. Archelaus was given the southern area of Herod's kingdom which included Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Philip was placed over the area of Decapolis, a sparsely populated region that encompassed the eastern section of Herod's kingdom. Antipas had authority over the northernmost region which included the provinces of Galilee and Perea. In A.D. 6 Archelaus (Herod's eldest son) was deposed because of his incompetence, severe tyranny and cruelty and was banished to Vienna in Gaul. Therefore, while Antipas and Philip retained their territories, "Archelaus' domains were reduced to a province under the rule of prefects or procurators."² This point explains why Pilate had authority over the southern section of Herod's old kingdom during the trial of Christ.

Herod Antipas figures more prominently in the gospels than his brothers because he ruled over Galilee and Perea where John the Baptist and Jesus conducted most of their preaching. He is presented in Scripture as a very wicked man who arrested and then murdered John the Baptist to please his wife Herodias (Mt. 14:3-12; Mk. 6:17-29; Lk. 3:19-20). When he first heard about the ministry of Jesus, he feared that Christ was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mt. 14:1-2; Mk. 6:14-16; Lk. 9:7-9). In Luke's account we learn that Herod wanted to kill Jesus (13:31). Although this report came from some Pharisees, Jesus accepted it at face value and called Herod a "fox," an animal noted for its cunning and deception in capturing prey. Herod likely wanted to kill the Lord because of His popularity among the people. Herod Antipas, like many rulers in his day, was dedicated to hanging on to power and fulfilling carnal pleasures. That he was a weak and indecisive leader can be deduced from the sway his wicked wife held over him. He submitted to his wife's will when he beheaded John the Baptist, whom he knew to be a righteous and innocent man. The history of Herod and his evil character must be kept in mind when we examine the Savior at the bar before Herod.

Another interesting question is why do none of the other gospels offer any parallel to Luke 23:6-12? One likely reason is that Luke is writing to Theophilus (an educated Christian Gentile who likely is from the ruling class of society) and thus is more concerned with showing the Roman judicial procedure. He may also have wanted Gentiles to know that two separate Roman courts could find nothing wrong with Jesus. Another more remote possibility is "that Antipas has been introduced, in part, for the sake of a parallel with the role of Agrippa in the trial of Paul in Acts 25."³ In any case, we can be thankful that Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit to include this encounter in his gospel.

² H. W. Hoehner, "Herod" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 3:140.

³ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1122.

(2) Herod had a perverse interest in Christ. Luke writes, “Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him” (Lk. 23:8-9). We refer to Herod’s interest in the Savior as perverse because it was not a sincere saving interest. Herod’s desire to behold the Messiah was carnal in nature. We know this both from Herod’s past and the passage before us. For our edification let us note Herod’s ungodly motives for wanting to meet the Master.

First, there is the issue of Herod’s tortured conscience. Herod had arrested John the Baptist to please his wife Herodias because John had preached against their marriage, which according to Scripture was unlawful (Mt. 14:3-4; Mk. 6:17-18). Herod Antipas took Herodias from Philip his brother (Mk. 6:18). Therefore, he was involved in adultery (for Philip was still alive) as well as incest. “The Mosaic law forbids the marriage of a brother’s wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) with the [rare] exception of raising children to a deceased childless brother by levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5; Mark 12:19).”⁴ Even though Herodias wanted John dead, for a time Herod refused because he feared the multitude who regarded John as a prophet and he knew John was a righteous man. “Herodias...wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly” (Mk. 6:19-20).

However, Herodias, through her daughter, manipulated Herod into having John beheaded in his prison cell. From this time on Herod was haunted by a guilty conscience. John had paid Herod secret visits and Herod had even toyed with the true religion. But, he never truly repented or looked to Christ. Thus, Herod knew that his act against John was very wicked. The gruesome murder troubled his conscience and he developed a superstitious obsession with John, to the point that at times he believed that Jesus may have been John raised again from the dead. “Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead.... Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ So he sought to see Him” (Lk. 9:7-9).

Given this history we can see why Herod was happy to see Jesus. Herod had a guilty conscience regarding John that increased his curiosity about and fear of the Nazarene. The Savior would now stand before Herod as a bound prisoner dependent on Herod for His freedom. A bound, helpless figure would calm Herod’s fears and satisfy his curiosity, for someone in Herod’s position would expect a bound man under the threat of death to answer questions and perform on cue.

Second, we see in Herod’s history a certain curiosity with religion. He had met privately a number of times with John the Baptizer and was, to a certain degree, pricked in his conscience regarding the truth. He even acknowledged John to be a just and holy man. He also had a strong curiosity regarding Jesus, the miracle worker. The problem with Herod, however, was that he viewed the true religion as a spectator sport. It was not something that should control one’s life, but rather something to seek pleasure in, like a sporting event or some form of entertainment. At bottom, Herod was a hedonist. He was a self-centered egomaniac who thought that everything existed to satisfy his wants and needs. Whenever the time came that he had to make a decision between truth, justice and following God or serving his own interests, he always followed the latter. His god was self. His ethic was purely autonomous and situational; his real religion was pleasure.

⁴ H. W. Hoehner, “Herod” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 3:140.

Tragically, many Americans have much in common with Herod Antipas when it comes to Christ and the true religion. They are very curious regarding the Savior and are interested in some doctrine. However, they do not have a saving interest in the Mediator. They occasionally attend church out of curiosity, but they have no heartfelt commitment to a local Bible-believing congregation. They like the idea of going to heaven. But when a decision has to be made between following Christ and their own selfish interests, they act just like Herod. They like to talk the talk, but are unwilling to walk the walk. They have what the Puritans called a mere historical faith; they regard the truths of Scripture regarding our Lord as they would a good history book. “Yes, it is very interesting. But it is not something worth making any personal sacrifices over.” This attitude explains why dispensational premillennial prophecy books and novels, which have little to do with the truth and more to do with an author’s fantasies, are so popular.

We must learn from Herod’s profane and worldly example. Curiosity and religious impressions are not enough. The Son of God must never be treated as a side show at the county fair. It is self-deception to think that Christ can be relegated to a side compartment so we can live self-centered, hedonistic lives. This attitude is common today because many professing Christians do not have true saving faith and do not really love Jesus. They are not looking for the Rose of Sharon or the pearl of great price, but rather for a fire escape from hell. This point is exhibited in the answer many “evangelicals” give to the question, “What is your central hope in life?” Do they say: “My hope is in the person and work of Christ; his precious blood which washes away my guilt and sin; and the imputation of His perfect righteousness to my account”? No! They say: “My hope is in the rapture. I can’t wait to escape the great tribulation.”

It is important that we examine our hearts to see if the spirit of Herod has affected us. Do we treat Christ and religion as a curiosity or do we have a hearty trust in the Savior at all times? Do we play with doctrine as a purely intellectual exercise or do we search the Scriptures daily to be closer to the Lord and to be holier to please Him? There is perhaps nothing more dangerous to the soul than to play with Christianity as an intellectual toy, even to have been influenced by its teachings to a degree; but then set it all aside to serve one’s own lusts. As Peter says, “If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The practice of treating Christ, His church and His teachings as a vain curiosity is not new. Charles H. Spurgeon was well familiar with religious Herodians in his own day. In preaching about such people he says, “It is not likely that their knowledge of religious things will be of any use to them, but they are even eager after it; the church of God is their lounge, divine service is their theatre, ministers are to them as actors, and the gospel itself so much play-house property. They are a sort of religious Athenians, spending their time in nothing else than in hearing some new thing: hoping that perhaps some singular and unexpected discourse may be delivered in their hearing which they can retell in the next company where they would raise a laugh. To them preaching is all a farce, and, worked up with a few falsehoods of their own, it makes excellent fun for them, and causes them to be regarded as amusing fellows. Let them look at Herod, and see in him their leader, the type of what they really are or may soon become.”⁵

⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord before Herod,” 28:99-100.

Third, Herod had an interest in Christ, not for who He truly was or because of His mission on earth, but because Jesus was a kind of celebrity. The Nazarene was the talk of the town and Herod had “heard many things about Him” (Lk. 23:8). Throughout history there has always been a fascination regarding people who are famous or even infamous. Herod no doubt had heard of the Savior’s following, His amazing teaching and His frequent miracles. There was something unique about Jesus and Herod wanted to be in the presence of a person so famous and noteworthy for His words and deeds. The problem for Herod, however, was that he did not seek to behold the Lord out of a deep sense of need or out of a consciousness of guilt and sin. Herod was an adulterer and murderer, yet he did not think that he needed atonement for his sin.

The great joy of Herod to see Jesus the celebrity should be a warning to professing Christians in our own culture, which is obsessed with the cult of personality. The obsession in our society for the rich and famous has had an impact on many churches; in particular, the congregations which subscribe to the church growth movement. The trend in the last twenty years has been toward mega-churches where the pastor is a celebrity-entertainer and where everything is big and extravagant. Many churches are no longer places of worship and the exposition of Scripture, but are essentially theaters where large flashy productions take place. People do not come to church to get closer to the Savior as He is revealed in Scripture, but rather to be entertained by a celebrity preacher. Many people in these mega-churches are not following Christ; they are jumping on the band wagon of some new sensation. We know this is true because when prominent ministers are caught in situations of scandalous sin or are guilty of heretical teaching, their flocks, for the most part, remain intact. These people are the Herodians of celebrity.

Fourth, Herod was “exceedingly glad” because he hoped that our Lord would perform a miracle. Herod Antipas had very likely heard all about Jesus from John the Baptist. We must remember that John’s purpose in life was to point men to the Lamb of God who redeems men from their sins. Herod probably knew that Christ was the only One who could forgive sin. He also certainly knew that he himself was an adulterer and a murderer. Note, however, that Herod’s interest is not in truth, doctrine or forgiveness, but in witnessing a miracle. In keeping with Herod’s desire to be entertained, he ignored the central purpose of Jesus’ mission and wanted to see something extraordinary—something bizarre and fantastic that he could tell his friends. In modern terminology, we would say that Herod wanted to have an exciting experience.

In order to understand why Herod’s desire was so perverse we must define the word miracle and explain the purpose miracles serve in Scripture. A miracle is a sign or wonder from God (cf. Ex. 7:3; Dt. 6:22; 34:11; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 135:9; Jer. 32:31; Dan. 6:27; Jn. 4:48; Ac. 2:43; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4) that serves to authenticate the inspired teaching or command of God’s authorized representative. The miracle certifies that the prophet, apostle or evangelist has truly been sent by God and that his words or teachings must be accepted as divinely inspired. Miracles are supernatural events that are obviously not natural, everyday occurrences. (Now that the canon of Scripture is closed, the sign gifts which served to authenticate the messenger of divine revelation have ceased.)⁶

⁶ B. B. Warfield writes, “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also, as a mere matter of course.... God the Holy Spirit has made it His subsequent work, not to introduce new and unneeded revelations into the world, but to diffuse this one complete revelation through the world and to bring mankind into the saving knowledge of it.

Some important things to note regarding miracles or signs are that they are not arbitrary. They are not accomplished to satisfy our curiosity or to entertain us and they are not an end in themselves. Generally speaking, they pointed men to the truth of divinely inspired teaching. Specifically, they pointed men to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Herod Antipas was not interested in learning about the cross of Christ. He did not care about the truth of the gospel. Therefore, his desire for a miracle simply for the amazement factor was very sinful. He was treating the work of the Holy Spirit in pointing men to the Redeemer as a circus act.

Today Herod's philosophy toward miracles has become widely popular within the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. In most Charismatic churches the biblical purpose of miracles has long been forgotten and thus signs are treated as ends in themselves. They are not performed out in public in front of everyone in order to authenticate a true messenger of God; but rather are an integral aspect of many Charismatic "worship" services and "revival" meetings. (Keep in mind, when we speak of modern Charismatic miracles we are referring to *pretended* manifestations of the Spirit, not true miracles.) Miracles are performed today not to point men to Christ but as part of the health and wealth gospel. In other words, people are taught that the Savior suffered and died to make people healthy and wealthy. Just like Herod, people go to church to see a miracle, but they are not interested in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture or in the true gospel of sovereign grace.

What is important in these churches is having a wonderful experience, not in learning the truths of Scripture. Tragically, most Charismatics place having an experience (a supposed charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit) ahead of biblical truth. As a result, theological precision, detailed creeds and confessions, systematic theology, careful exegetical preaching and the great biblical achievements of the Protestant Reformation have been cast aside. When the Bible is used, it is twisted to fit in with one's experience. For many, the Bible is ignored because it lacks the excitement and immediacy of a "spiritual experience." Like Herod they fail to understand that authentic spirituality comes only from a belief in the truth, not from watching an exciting miracle. Like Herod they confuse spirituality with excitement, emotion and external phenomena. God, however, is interested in one's faith in Christ and the personal godliness that grows out of the Holy Spirit's application of the Word of God to the heart (Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2; etc). Herod had heard the Word of God regarding Jesus directly from the greatest Old Testament prophet and had rejected it. Therefore, Herod's desire for a miracle had more in common with sorcery and witchcraft than true religion.

The neo-pentecostal paradigm with its Herodian view of experience is one of the most dangerous religious movements against orthodox Protestantism to arise in the last one hundred years. Because it has set having an experience above Scripture and doctrine, it has been used of Satan to bring together professing evangelicals with modernists and especially Roman Catholics. The unifying factor is no longer correct doctrine or detailed confessions that summarize and organize the truths of Scripture; but rather the subjective pseudo-mystical experiences that

As Abraham Kuyper figuratively expresses it [*Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, E. T. 1898, p. 368; cf. pp. 355 ff.], it has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own, to meet his separate needs; but He rather has spread a common board for all, and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He has given to the world one organically complete revelation, adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all, and from this one completed revelation He requires each to draw his whole spiritual sustenance. Therefore it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed." (*Counterfeit Miracles* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1918) 1974], 25-27).

people, regardless of belief, have in common. This sad truth is demonstrated by the following story told by John MacArthur, Jr.:

A close associate of mine attended a charismatic businessmen's meeting in Chicago where a Catholic priest testified that Mary had given him the gift of tongues while he was saying the rosary. Then the charismatic pastor leading the meeting got up and said, "What an amazing testimony! Aren't you glad God isn't bound by our ideas of what's doctrinally acceptable? Some people would try to dismiss this brother's testimony just because it doesn't jibe with their doctrinal system. But how you get filled with the Holy Ghost doesn't matter, as long as you know you've got the baptism!" The audience, numbering in the hundreds, broke into wild, sustained applause. No one seemed to question whether that man's testimony, so obviously in conflict with biblical truth, might be spurious.⁷

In our day when there are Herodians warming the pews of many churches, we need to search our hearts and ask some probing questions. Are we in love with Christ as He is revealed in the Scripture; or, are we in love with the spectacular? Do we look to Jesus as Savior and Lord; or, are we looking for a magic talisman to bring us health, wealth and more material pleasures? Are we treating the majestic Son of God as a mere ticket to the Holy Ghost circus; or, are we praying for the Holy Spirit to deepen our love, faith, knowledge and commitment to the King of kings? Are we looking to the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible, as our standard for faith and life; or, have we exalted subjective experience and vague impressions above the authority of Scripture? While Charismatics believe they are part of the greatest revival in history, the truth is that they are ushering the church into a new dark age of ignorance, superstition and charlatanism. Remember, John warns us that many who professed faith in Jesus because of the miracles were not true believers. "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:23-25). These people were astonished at our Lord's miracles and were even intellectually convinced that He was the Messiah. But Jesus knew that these people were not to be depended upon. Yes, they were greatly excited by the miracles, but they were never truly converted. The Savior knew that their hearts were not right in the sight of God even though they had a wonderful experience and their feelings were moved. Beloved, beware of the modern Herodians.

(3) Luke says that Herod questioned Jesus with many words "but He answered him nothing" (Lk. 23:9). This silence raises a question. Why was our Lord willing to speak to Pilate and tell him about the nature and purpose of His kingdom, but not willing to speak even one word to Herod Antipas? There are a number of reasons why the Savior refused to speak.

First, Herod had already heard the truth from John the Baptist on a number of occasions and had refused to repent. Herod had denied the Word of God by his base lifestyle, his continued adultery and his worship of sinful pleasures. Herod had even struck down the great prophet John with the sword. He had silenced the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Mk. 1:3; Mt. 3:3). Men quell the voice of prophets in order to banish the Word of God from their presence. They murder the voice of God because they cannot tolerate the bright, shining light of the truth upon their darkened lives. Since Herod had trod John the Baptist and the gospel he preached underfoot

⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 16-17.

as worthless rubbish, Jesus had no intention of wasting words on this heartless, truth-murdering profligate.

If Herod had been an ignorant heathen who was sincere in his questions, our Lord probably would have given him some instruction. If Antipas had some conviction in his soul and wanted to believe in Christ, then Jesus would have spoken to him the words of life. But the Savior knew that Herod was a hardened reprobate who had already emphatically and repeatedly rejected the truth. Therefore, our Lord had no intention of satisfying the curiosity of this satanic dog. The Mediator in His absolute silence was simply following His own instructions to His disciples: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Mt. 7:6). “Dogs and swine are those who, after the gospel has been preached to them retain their vicious, filthy nature.”⁸ The pearls represent the gospel and the great truths of the Bible which must be treated with reverence and respect. We are commanded not to set forth the precious mysteries of the faith to men who already despise them and will simply trample God’s beautiful, pure gospel pearls into the mud. Christ teaches that not only will such people not benefit from the truth, but they will abuse our goodwill and mistreat us. It is for this reason that our Lord instructed His disciples: “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words [i.e. receive the truth of the gospel], when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Mt. 10:14; cf. Mk. 6:11). Spurgeon writes,

Disclaim all fellowship with those who will not have fellowship with your Lord. Be not angry; do not denounce with bitterness; just “*shake off the dust of your feet,*” and go elsewhere. Don’t depart to rail at the people in private; but let them know that you quit them because they refuse your message. Do this openly, and in the most solemn and instructive manner, hoping that your departing act may be remembered. It is to be feared that we treat rejecters of Christ in a sadly trifling manner, and do not hold up their rejection of our King to the detestation it deserves. We ought to let impenitent sinners know that we consider them out of our fellowship. If they will not hear, we must make them see that we disown them, and count them to be unclean, because they refuse Christ Jesus. How little of this is done by the smooth-tongued preachers of today!⁹

Jesus saw in Herod a man “so mean, cunning, cowardly, and heartless, that he viewed him as a fox to be let alone rather than a lost sheep to be sought after. He was a tree twice dead, and plucked up by the roots. All the Master did was to maintain an absolute silence in his presence; and, let him question as he might, ‘he answered him nothing.’”¹⁰

Second, Jesus knew that Herod wanted a performance and He did not come into this world to entertain men, but to save them. Antipas viewed his court as a theater and the Savior as a circus act. For this reason our Lord gave him what he deserved—pure silence. It would be good for ministers and elders to learn from Christ’s example and stop turning the church into a theater for crass entertainment: skits, music performances, jokes and various frivolities. While the Master said not to cast pearls before swine, modern churchmen think churches should be made into swine troughs to give the unregenerate masses what they want. In the matter of sacred truth, let us follow Jesus and not cater to the Herods of this world.

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 291.

⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 121.

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord before Herod,” 28:103.

Third, Herod had known about our Lord for over three years and had had plenty of opportunities to hear Him preach; yet, Herod had passed these opportunities by to indulge his own sinful pleasures. Jesus had a very open public ministry. He preached in synagogues, on hillsides, by Lake Galilee, in the temple precincts, on flat plains, in boats and houses. If Herod wanted to know the truth, then why did he not sit at the feet of the Master? Antipas did not hear the Son of God preach because he didn't want to hear the truth. He simply didn't care. He was a busy ruler; he had parties and great feasts to attend. Herod had treated the Messiah as of no importance and the Word of God as irrelevant to life and thus he despised the truth. Now that he had Jesus before him in bonds, on terms acceptable to himself, he was ready for a little intellectual stimulation. But having despised hundreds of opportunities to hear the truth from God's own Son, the door was now closed. Christ had no intention of rewarding his habitual shunning of the truth. The Savior was silent before him. Nothing! Not one word!

What a warning this scene should be to every one of us. How many people are there who have wasted years upon years refusing to attend a Bible-believing church and thus have willingly refused to hear about Jesus Christ and His gospel? "Beware how you waste opportunities. Dear hearers, beware how you waste your Sabbaths. There may come a day when you would count all your wealth to have another invitation to Christ, but it will be denied you; for you must die, and the voice of mercy will never ring in your ears again. They that will not when they may, shall not when they would. Many will knock after the Master of the house has risen up and shut to the door; but when he shutteth, no man openeth. The door was shut on Herod."¹¹ If you do not look to Christ today with the eyes of faith and trust in His perfect sacrifice for sin and glorious resurrection, then the time will come when you will agonize over your Herodian ways. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27).

Fourth, Herod approached Christ as a proud prince instead of as a poor beggar. Whenever we come to Jesus we must always do so from a position of complete humility, as helpless sinners in need of grace and mercy. Our Lord is no respecter of men; He is not in the least impressed by political power, riches, talents or fame. He will answer the prayers of a poor, diseased, blind beggar who acknowledges his sin and admits that he has absolutely nothing to offer God. But he will not listen to those who are proud, who think that God must answer to their so-called personal righteousness or good works. Therefore, the Savior said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mt. 9:13). This passage makes it clear that not to those who consider themselves worthy, but rather to those who understand that they cannot save themselves and are in desperate need of salvation that the gospel invitation is carefully applied. "It was sinners, the lost, the straying, the beggars, the burdened ones, the hungry and thirsty, whom Jesus came to save."¹² Our Lord was critiquing the Pharisees' works-righteousness religion with satire. To everyone who thinks that their own good works, or subjective righteousness, play a role in salvation Jesus says, "I will not save you." Those who think they are qualified are disqualified. Only those who are poor in spirit shall enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3). Herod who likely had already heard the gospel from John, who had been confronted by the baptizer regarding his scandalous sins, was not sensible of his guilt or his condition. He was not hungering or thirsting after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). He was not begging God saying, "Turn thou me, and I will be turned" (cf. Lam. 5:21). He did not think he was sick and saw no

¹¹ Ibid, 28:104.

¹² William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 426.

need for a physician (Mt. 9:12). If we are to receive salvation from Christ then we must come to Him as naked beggars with nothing in our hands. We must look away from ourselves and cling to Him by faith alone. Herod's arrogant self-sufficiency and refusal to acknowledge his guilty record and wicked heart shut him off from the fountain of life.

(4) We need to examine the abuse and suffering that our Lord endured at the hands of Herod and his soldiers. Herod Antipas had looked at the Savior as a curiosity. He wanted dearly to be entertained by some miracle. As noted, he looked at the Messiah as a person would look at a famous circus performer. He wanted amazing signs and profound teaching. Yet, the Lord gave Herod nothing; He stood there silent. How does Antipas respond to this silence? Interestingly, he does not condemn Jesus. There is no shouting in anger. There is not even any evidence that Christ was beaten or threatened with violence. Instead, Herod and his men proceed to mock Him. Herod had wanted our Lord to perform as in a theater. The Savior's refusal did not stop Herod from attaining the entertainment that he so desperately desired. Luke writes, "Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate" (23:11).

Herod, the entertainment seeker, became the director of his own mock comedy with Christ as the star and his bodyguards as laughing stage hands. Antipas and his soldiers made sport with the Mediator by repeatedly ridiculing and mocking Jesus. They laughed and giggled as they insulted the Son of God. They mocked our Lord's kingship by placing a gorgeous, radiant garment on Him. It is possible that "Herod put it on Christ as a kind of caricature of the so-called *toga candida* in which according to the Roman custom those persons were dressed who presented themselves as candidates for this or that official office. If this interpretation is correct, Herod would have been mocking Christ by ludicrously making him a candidate for the kingship. Naturally the motivation for such conduct would have to be found in the charge of the high priest that Christ had wanted to regard himself as king."¹³ However, it is much more likely that Herod simply found it amusing that a man in bonds, with no visible supporters, with a face disfigured, beaten and bloodied, covered with dirt, spit and sweat could claim to be a king. He was probably thinking, "Well if you claim to be a king, then here is a shining, beautiful robe. Here, we will make you a king." After the robe was placed on Jesus they circled Him, laughing and jeering at His humiliation.

At one time Herod had feared Jesus, thinking perhaps He was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. But now that Antipas saw the Savior in His state of deep humiliation, he was relieved. Not understanding the necessity of the cross, the Lord's battered face and bound hands brought him relief. His fear and curiosity turned to contempt. The Man he once feared, he now considered to be a fool; a man worthy of ridicule; a man willing to suffer and die for nothing. First Pilate and now Herod looked upon Jesus as a misguided religious fanatic, a fantasy king of

¹³ Klaas Schilder, *Christ on Trial*, 407. There is some speculation regarding the color of the robe that was placed on Jesus. Some writers speculate that the robe was white because the Greek word (*lampros*) used to describe it means literally "bright/shining/radiant." "The medieval writers delight to dwell on the fact that Herod arrayed our Lord in white and afterwards Pilate clothed Him in red. Is he not the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon? Is he not matchlessly white for innocence, and then gloriously red in his atoning blood? Thus, in their very mockery, they are unconsciously setting forth to us both his spotless holiness and his majestic royalty." (Charles H. Spurgeon, "Our Lord before Herod" 28:105) While the belief that the robe was white has a long standing tradition, there is no good reason from the Greek text to make that assumption. Any expensive cloth that was shiny and bright whether white, yellow or red, etc. could have been used. It is likely that Jesus was dressed in a gorgeous purple robe to mock His kingship and after He was taken back to Pilate the same robe was used by the soldiers of Pilate. Pilate's soldiers would not use their own expensive material and certainly they would not ask Pilate for some of his expensive cloth.

nothing, a man of supreme absurdity. Thus Christ was “a reproach of men, and despised by the people” (Ps. 22:6).

As our Lord moved closer to the cross, His humiliation deepened. Although Luke says nothing about physical abuse in Herod’s court, the soul sufferings of Jesus no doubt were great. The sinless, “delicate and sensitive mind of our Master was perhaps, more touched by what he suffered in the palace of Herod than by the rougher [physical] torture.”¹⁴

The fact that Herod went from curiosity to open contempt and derision regarding Christ should not come as a surprise. Many people who express curiosity about the Savior and Christianity for a time and even attend church for a while turn upon the Master and reject Him. In their rejection of the truth they feel the need not simply to walk away, but also to ridicule. We often encounter reprobates who make fun of the Bible; who use pseudo-scientific theories to laugh at the teachings of Scripture.

Why do people who reject Jesus also think that there is a need to ridicule and insult Him? The answer to this question lies in the fact that, deep down, people know that what they are rejecting is true and therefore they must convince themselves that they are going down the right path. “The case of Herod is not uncommon; there are many who once received good impressions, and who once struggled with strong convictions, who are now grown hard, scornful and hostile. They would not *obey* the truth, and therefore they tried to *disbelieve it*, and they have succeeded. Now, alas! No sermons make them tremble, no afflictions touch their hearts, they are steeled against warnings and persuasions, against mercies and judgments.”¹⁵ It is a dreadful thing when men willfully deceive themselves and sear their own consciences with a hot iron.

The self-deception involved in convincing oneself to push the truth out of one’s mind has saturated every aspect of our wicked anti-Christian culture. This reality is evident in how secular humanistic scientists twist the abundant, perspicuous evidences for creation into proofs for macro-evolution. Their methodology and findings reveal their vitriolic hostility to the doctrine of creation and orthodox Christianity that stands upon it. They ridicule creation *ex nihilo* by an infinite personal God, while they argue that man is the descendant of pond scum. They embrace that which is unscientific and absurd because they do not want to answer to a holy, righteous God who judges sin and because they want to take the place of God. They want to determine what is right or wrong. They mock the God of the Bible to assert their godhood as the pinnacle of evolution. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (Jn. 3:19-20).

(5) There is a compatibility among wicked men. Luke says, “That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other (Lk. 23:12). There had been a longstanding rift between Herod and Pilate. Yet with the trial of Jesus there is a change of relationship for the better. “The cause of the enmity between these two men is unknown. Some think it may have been the massacre of the Galileans. Luke xiii.1. It probably grew out of conflict in regard to their respective jurisdictions.... The courteous act of Pilate in sending Jesus to be tried before Herod, and the equally courteous return made by the Galilean prince in remanding Jesus to Pilate’s judgment-seat, it would appear, furnished the occasion for the renewal of friendship. Both these men agreed in despising Jesus, and insulting Him, and were utterly unbelieving as to His claim to faith and respect.”¹⁶ The circumstances of

¹⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord before Herod,” 28:105.

¹⁵ Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, 653.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 652-653.

the trial and this reconciliation were something that deeply struck the apostolic church. They understood that in it part of the twenty-second Psalm was fulfilled (see Acts 4:23-30).

It is a common thing for men of very different worldviews, personalities and faiths to join themselves together in opposition to Christ. The reason for this is that the gospel is the mortal enemy to falsehood whatever its form. In modern times the atheistic naturalist is often found rubbing shoulders with people who hold the most absurd, superstitious beliefs such as astrology, reincarnation, auras, witchcraft and the like. The atheistic socialist/communist movement in America has merged with the left-wing hippie earth-worshippers in opposing the Savior and His law-Word. They have a common interest in their hatred of the resurrected King. In state schools, which claim to be neutral toward religion, children are taught how wonderful and superior the American Indians were despite their rank idolatry and crass superstitions. They are instructed in the “beautiful” culture of Islam and so forth. Yet, Christianity is scorned as a religion for close-minded fools. Men whose covenant father is Satan are willing to lay aside their differences in order to oppose Jesus Christ and His gospel. The Pharisees joined with the Sadducees in opposition to the Master. The Jews joined forces with pagan Rome against God’s Anointed. Today the secular humanists have joined together with eastern mystics, African-American modernist Baptists, Protestant liberals, Roman Catholics and Gaia worshipping hippies against the cause of God and Christ. It is important that the church of Christ is aware of this fact so that we are not complicit in the pluralism that is out to destroy us.

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