

Theme: "The People of the Passion" – Herod

Luke 23:4-12 (NKJV)

⁴ So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." ⁵ But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place." ⁶ When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. ⁷ And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. ¹⁰ And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. ¹¹ 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. ¹² That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

One of the great blessings and benefits that we can gain from our study of these "***People of the Passion***" of Jesus Christ are the lessons we can apply to our own lives. It really is incredible when you think about it, that even though these people lived almost 2000 years ago we can learn from the examples of their interactions with Jesus—whether positively or negatively—and we can gain something we can apply to our lives *right now* in the 21st century! The lessons we will learn today from our study of **Herod** and His reaction to Jesus are particularly relevant to us in our day. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bless our study.

The **Herod** we are studying today was not the same Herod who was king when Jesus was born. That was Herod the Great. Herod the Great was a very capable and ambitious ruler who ruled over all of Palestine under the direction of the Roman government. He was the one who built the incredible temple in Jerusalem (which was one of the wonders of the ancient world) and several other massive palaces and fortresses throughout the land of Israel. Herod the Great was also vicious and bloodthirsty. He killed one of his own wives and three of his nine sons, but was probably most notorious for his slaughter of all the baby boys under two years of age in the region of Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth (**Matthew 2:16-18**). After his death, Palestine, the region Herod the Great ruled, was divided amongst three of his sons.

The **Herod** of our text was one of these three sons. His name was **Herod Antipas** and he was made ruler over some of the northern sections of Palestine: the regions of Galilee (where Jesus spent much of His life) and Peraea. We know a little more about this **Herod Antipas** from other Gospel accounts. The Gospel of Mark tells us that he had heard of Jesus earlier in His ministry as Jesus' fame spread throughout Galilee because of the many miracles He had been performing. We also learn from that same section of Mark that **Herod Antipas** knew John the Baptist. We read from Mark chapter six,

Now King Herod heard of Him [Jesus], for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore Herodias held it against him and 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 (Mark 6:14-20).

Unfortunately, we learn from the rest of that account that **Herod Antipas** did eventually give in to his wife's evil demands and had John the Baptist beheaded.

Even though **Herod** had heard of Jesus, our text indicates that this was the first time he had ever met Jesus (v. 8). If you remember from last week's sermon Pilate, the Roman governor of that region, was all too eager to "wash his hands" (figuratively and *literally*) of the responsibility of judging Jesus. Since **Herod Antipas** was in Jerusalem at this time because of the Passover, and since it was not an unusual thing for Roman rulers to send accused people to be tried in the places where they made their homes, Pilate sent Jesus to **Herod**. Our text tells us, **When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time (v. 6-7).**

Now, when **Herod** finally gets his chance to meet Jesus there is no trace of that fear in him like there was when he first heard about Jesus. Apparently, his conscience was no longer pricked with guilt because he had beheaded John the Baptist, even though he knew **"that [John] was a just and holy man" (Mark 6:20)**. No, this time, we are told in our text, he was *excited* to see Jesus, **"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" (v. 8)**. We no longer see in **Herod's** character a man who listened **"gladly" (Mark 6:20)** to the words of a preacher of God's truth like he had with John the Baptist, but rather a man who lived for pleasure and amusement. Certainly we see that Herod still has a great deal of religious curiosity. Our text tells us that **"he [Herod] questioned Him [Jesus] with many words" (v. 9)**. But that was all it appears to be, curiosity, and not a search for truth.

When **Herod** was blessed with the opportunity to meet the Lord of Life, the Son of God Himself, he did not see Jesus as the Teacher of Truth (cf. **John 14:6**), but rather as a religious "novelty" who would satisfy His curiosities. He did not see Jesus as His Savior from sin; rather, He saw Jesus as entertainment. He treated Jesus like He was some sort of court jester or traveling "magician," whom he hoped would perform some "eye-popping" magic tricks, or perhaps even one of the miracles he had heard so much about (v. 8). When Jesus refused to perform like a circus clown for **Herod**; when He refused even to satisfy His curiosities by **"answer[ing] him nothing" (v. 9)**, **Herod** was insulted. He takes Jesus' silence here as an "inability" to perform, and no doubt saw it as "proof" that Jesus was a fraud. Because Jesus refused to cater to Herod's wishes we are told in our text, **"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" (v. 11)**.

How sad! What a wasted opportunity for **Herod** to experience God's grace and hear of his soul's salvation in Jesus! The lessons we learn from the tragic example of **Herod Antipas** are fairly obvious, but do we always realize how directly these lessons apply to us individually?

First of all, we are reminded once again, as we have been in our previous sermons in the examples of Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, that simply being "around" Jesus doesn't guarantee salvation. In **Herod's** case we are shown that even "curiosity" or even an "interest" in Jesus doesn't necessarily constitute saving faith in Him as Savior. To have an "interest" or "curiosity" in Jesus and "religious" questions, or to go about from church to church and from book to book in a quest to find "something new" or "interesting" does not bring about salvation. That is only found in Jesus and in His true nature and mission as the world's sacrificial Savior, which **Herod** never saw or heard.

God did not give us His Word, the Bible, to satisfy our "religious curiosities" or to give us something "interesting" and "entertaining" to read. Even though the Bible often does those things for us—it is "interesting" and many of the Bible accounts are very "entertaining" (just think of how many movies have been made on Biblical subjects. Obviously Hollywood understands the Bible's "entertainment value!"), and the Bible does answer many of our "religious questions" and "curiosities." However, these are by no means the main purpose of the Bible. Instead, God's Word and the Gospel message of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection that it contains is the **"truth" (John 17:17)** and **"the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16)**! Jesus has the **"words of eternal life" (John 6:68)** and

He's put them right in front of each one of us! He has put them in our hearts through His gift of faith! How much better is that than simply "scratching the itch" of our "religious curiosity"?!

The world is full of people who are "curious" about God and "religious things." In fact, God has put that "curiosity" about Him in the hearts of everyone by nature **"so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us"** (Acts 17:27). But not many are truly seeking God or the truth. Many people are simply looking for some sort of religion that "suits them," that fits their "style," or very simply, tells them what they want to hear. We've probably all come into contact with people like this before. One Lutheran writer wrote this about such people,

"A man who has no religion may yet have a great deal to say about religion; and there are people who like to hear themselves talking far better than to listen to any speaker, however wise." (Stalker, R. E. Golladay, e.d. *Lenten Outlines and Sermons*, p. 87).

Let's not be too hard on these people. We are all like this at times, aren't we? By nature we all have a little **"Herod"** in us that would rather have our frivolous, meaningless curiosities satisfied than come face to face with some serious truth from God Himself. The cure for this type of attitude can only be found in the One who stood right before **Herod's** eyes and still stands right before our eyes in His Words and proclaims to us, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life"** (John 14:6).

The other lesson we learn from **Herod Antipas** is the danger of living for pleasure. **Herod's** desire to be entertained shut up his soul to deep spiritual truths. He had no time for the profound seriousness of this trial, or for the silence of Jesus, and had no interest in His true nature and mission. To **Herod** life was a "party;" it was all "fun and games."

Here is where I believe we have the greatest application for ourselves from this text. Much like **Herod Antipas** our society as a whole has become addicted to pleasure and entertainment. The people of our country spend hundreds of billions of dollars on media and entertainment each year. We are living in a culture and in an age that is *addicted* to pleasure and entertainment! We demand it in every area of our lives: we demand it from the smart phones we carry around with us at all times, we demand it while we are driving, we even demand that our work is enjoyable! We demand entertainment from the smallest things in life, like advertising and commercials, to the greatest—even from religion! Never mind the importance of the truth that's being conveyed, if it isn't entertaining we won't listen to it, or watch it, or even pay attention to it!

Now, please do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong in and of itself with entertainment or pleasure. Which one of us doesn't enjoy entertainment of various forms: movies, music, theater, concerts, vacations, recreation, and sports? I know for myself, I enjoy all of those things. I'm also not trying to say that any entertainment in a worship service is wrong in and of itself, or that if we go to church and we enjoy it or are entertained by the music or the pastor's message during the service that it's automatically wrong. It certainly *is* wrong if that is the *goal* of our church. The church's "goal" as commanded by Jesus Himself is to **"preach the Gospel"** (Mark 16:15), not to entertain. We also need to honestly examine and search our hearts and perhaps, even our methods, and ask ourselves: If Jesus is not entertaining to me will I still listen?

When Jesus refused to entertain **Herod**, but rather just stood before Him in silence, **Herod** rejected Him. In fact, he did more than that, **"Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him"** (v. 11). What **Herod** didn't realize was that the very *worst* thing Jesus could have done for Him was to comply with His demands for entertainment or to satisfy his curiosity. If Jesus had, **Herod** would have not seen the true nature and mission of Jesus and Jesus would have simply confirmed **Herod's** view of Him as some sort of court-jester-magician. Worse than that, if Jesus had complied with **Herod's** demands and entertained Him with some miracle or magic trick **Herod** probably would have let Him go or invited Him

to stay in His court to be His personal entertainer. He certainly would not have mocked Him, beat him up and then sent Him on His way to be crucified. But that's exactly what Jesus came to do!

God did not become man to entertain us, but to speak the Truth. He did not come to this earth to escape, but to suffer the very punishment of death and even hell itself for the sins of **Herod** and all people. **Herod** took Jesus' silence as evidence of Jesus "inability" to perform and proof that He was a "fake." In reality, this silence from Jesus at that moment was the absolute best thing for **Herod** and the entire human race!

Entertainment is what it is: It is amusement; it's fun and it isn't serious. Truth is much more important and it is serious; it is a matter of eternal life and eternal death. Do we, like **Herod**, treat Jesus like a TV show and expect or demand "entertainment" from Him? I know what I do when I expect entertainment from something, like a TV show, and it doesn't deliver: I turn it off!

Do we, like **Herod**, expect or demand miracles or some sort of sign from Jesus to prove Himself to us, and treat God like a "vending machine:" We put our money in (offerings), push a button (prayer), and expect to get what we demand? Well, how do we treat a vending machine when it doesn't give us what we want? I remember one job I had during college had a vending machine in the break room that was notorious for getting chips and candy bars stuck in the mechanism just as it was about to dispense it. I know what most people did to that vending machine when it didn't work: They kicked it, punched it, shook it violently to try and jar the item loose, and if that still didn't work they usually kicked it again, cursed it out and walked away. That's *exactly* how **Herod** treated Jesus when He didn't give him what he demanded!

How about us? Do we view and treat Jesus like He is the Son of God; or like He's a stage magician and "turn Him off" if He doesn't entertain or interest us any longer? Do we view and treat Jesus like He is our perfectly good, all-knowing, all-loving Friend, Protector, Provider, and Savior; or like He's a "vending machine" and kick at Him and curse Him and walk away when He doesn't give us what we demand? May God's Holy Spirit always lead us to listen to "silence" of Jesus: His "**still small voice**" (**1 Kings 19:12**) of the Gospel which tells us, "**I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep**" (**John 10:10-11**). Amen.