
Beyond Redemption

“And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time” (Luke 23:7).

After Pilate announced to the chief priests that his interview with Jesus had resulted in his finding no fault in Him (Luke 23:4), these rulers of the Jews, in a kind of panic, erupted in an outburst. Pilate’s ears were bombarded with loud, vehement, chaotic voices barking out a litany of accusations. Mark must have put it mildly when he said, “The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly” (Mark 15:3). Among these charges was the repeated claim that this Jesus had been stirring up “the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee” and reaching into Jerusalem (Luke 23:5).

In that moment of clamor, the word “Galilee” made its way through the maze of noise to Pilate’s mind. In a flash, he must have remembered that Herod was in town and that Jesus, because of where He had done most of His teaching, might be under his jurisdiction. Luke said, “And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time” (Luke 23:7). Herod had traveled from his residence in Tiberias to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. His presence, he thought, would gain him favor among the Jews. Little did he know that this visit to Jerusalem would involve him in the greatest trial of history. Neither did he realize that he was about to have his one and only opportunity to engage in a personal conversation with Jesus. Thinking that Herod would know what to do with Jesus, Pilate hurriedly sent Jesus to him. When Jesus was taken bound before Herod, the second stage of the Roman trials began.

This dignitary before whom Jesus would stand was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1). He had received his position upon the death of his father, Herod the Great. This was the notorious king who had decreed, upon hearing of Jesus’ birth from the wise men, that baby boys under two years of age be killed. In keeping with the expression “like father, like son,” Herod Antipas was ruthless, despotic, and vain. He had received an education in Rome, alongside the son of Emperor Tiberius. Through his education, he had become highly cultured, especially in the realm of the fine arts. At another time, when he visited Rome to ingratiate himself to those who were in power, he fell in love with Herodias. This Jezebel of the New Testament was the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Later, driven by his illicit love, he banished his Arabian wife and persuaded Herodias to leave Philip and live with him. He was given to having lavish and pretentious banquets where he could display his wealth and power. With the passing of time, he became more and more tightly chained to his baser appetites.

He had a brush with truth when he called John the Immerser into his presence to hear what this desert man was saying to the people of Judea. Herod was intrigued by his message, but he had no place in his heart for the truth. When John rebuked him for his illicit marital relationship, telling him, “It is not lawful for you to have her” (Matthew 14:4), irate Herod was prompted by Herodias to put him in prison. Some months later, during a night of intemper-

ance and revelry in celebration of his birthday, Herod became passionately aroused by the dance routine of his stepdaughter, Salome. Senselessly, he offered her whatever she wished (Matthew 14:7). Guided by her mother, Salome asked that John's head be presented to her on a platter. Matthew wrote, "Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests" (Matthew 14:9). It must be that for some time after this vile decision, he was haunted by what he had done (see Matthew 14:2).

Having his seat and residence in Galilee had put Herod in a position to hear of the preaching of Jesus, for Jesus had preached and taught perhaps as long as two years in Galilee. The common people had heard Him gladly. He had healed the sick and the paralyzed, and He had cast out demons from those who were possessed by them. His fame had spread throughout that region; however, Herod had never had a personal meeting with Him.

When soldiers escorted Jesus to Herod's chamber, Herod was glad. He welcomed this opportunity to see Him. The text says, "Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him" (Luke 23:8). His interest was not in the truth that Jesus taught; Herod was too enslaved to evil for that. No, he wanted Jesus to entertain him with a miracle of some kind. He had no thought of serving God; he wanted God to serve him!

The text says that he began to ask Jesus questions. "And he questioned Him at some length" (Luke 23:9a). His questions must have been empty, meaningless questions, the kind of questions that a paragon of iniquity would ask. Jesus did not dignify them by giving an answer to any of them. Luke said, "But He answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9b). From His arrival to His departure, Jesus said nothing to Herod. At this point, the chief priests and the scribes, who had followed the procession to Herod's hall, began "accusing Him vehemently" (Luke 23:10). In other words, Herod allowed his unique moment with Jesus to degenerate into a shouting spree in which Jesus' enemies said anything that entered their minds in their

attempt to condemn the Son of God. The angels must have wept; God must have turned away His eyes from this brawl of irreverence and blasphemy. How is it possible for men, made in the image of God, to become so hardened and degenerate?

Descending even lower, Herod signaled to his soldiers to make sport of Jesus before they took Him back to Pilate. Luke wrote, "And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate" (Luke 23:11). Herod perhaps never understood the horror of what he had done. His heart was too diseased to grasp it. He even permitted the event to inflate his corrupted spirit. Luke said, "Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other" (Luke 23:12). In all the annals of history, there is no event that has sunk lower—that has been more controlled by Satan, that more epitomizes wickedness—than the cesspool of iniquity that we call Herod's "trial" of Jesus.

As we look at this scene from the distance of two thousand years, we tremble. We see a soul that went beyond redemption, a man to whom Jesus could say nothing. He talked to Annas, to Caiaphas, and to Pilate; but to Herod there was nothing He could say.

Herod had already crossed the line of condemnation before Jesus was taken to him. Through his immoral life, Herod's heart had grown so corrupt that he could no longer think a righteous thought. His heart had become like rotten wood; the sword of the Spirit could no longer carve it. His heart could not entertain any godly sorrow or have a flickering desire to repent. He was unaware, as is true of all who reach this state, that his unresponsiveness to Christ was a sure sign that he had passed the point of no return.

Herod had been so completely eaten up by sin that even the greatest of all opportunities, an actual conversation with Jesus, could not bring him to his senses. He had descended to join the ranks of those described by Paul: "And they, having become callous ['past feeling'; KJV], have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Ephesians 4:19).

Herod had passed the time when Jesus would try to teach him. There is no more chilling or fearful thought in the New Testament than the thought of God giving a man over to sin. Paul pictured such a scene with a repeated phrase in his catalogue of sin in Romans 1: "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity" (v. 24a); "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions" (v. 26a); "God gave them over to a depraved mind" (v. 28b). Jesus was the greatest and most compassionate soul-seeker that has ever graced this earth. He was perfect in His methods and in His love, but He did not say anything to Herod. He knew that offering any hope to this twisted, grotesque, sin-riddled human being would have been casting the pearls of salvation before swine. When Jesus got to Herod, Herod had already

sold out his soul to sin.

Eddie Cloer



Herod reveals to us the awful possibility that a man can close the door of his life to Jesus Christ. He put himself on the side of immorality, lust, murder, greed, and selfishness; and these evils decimated his heart. He opposed any voices of truth, righteousness, and justice that had sounded within his soul. He followed a course in life that rendered him insensible to the Savior's love. When he saw Jesus, he had no appreciation for Him. All he could do was ask frivolous questions, suggest that He entertain him, and laugh and make sport of Him. Herod stands forever enshrined in God's Word as a darkened portrait of the end result of sin.