

2025-11-09

People Do the Craziest Things

Mark 6:17-29

Last week I emphasized that people believe the strangest things. What follows that truth is, people will do the craziest things because of what they believe. What you believe matters because it will influence what you say, how you say it and how you live out your life. When people tell me that they believe in Jesus, I want to know what they mean by that. Does believing in Jesus change any of their behavior? Do their life choices show God, the world, and even themselves that they really believe in Jesus? People can say all kinds of things, but it is their daily actions that reveal what they truly believe. **I want to help people think** about what it really means to believe in God, what it means to trust Jesus and follow His teachings. It must mean something to believe in God and Jesus. Because if it does not mean anything that brings about a change in your life, then it is no different than believing in George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Remember September 11, 2001? People believed so strongly in their religious teachings that they hijacked passenger jets and force them to be flown into buildings. In the last couple of years, people have tried to shoot and kill other people, and sometimes they succeeded, all because of what they believed. Human nature has not changed over the centuries. They did the same things in Jesus' day, just in different ways.

Mark 6:17-18 *“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. Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’”* Sometimes family relations can be complicated. This is very true of Herod the Great’s family. Herod the Great was king of Judea when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1). From historical records, we know that Herod the Great was married to five different women at different times. From his five wives Herod the Great had seven sons. Three of those sons, all by different women, were Aristobulus, Antipas and Philip. Now that Jesus has grown up and is ministering in Galilee, these sons of Herod the Great are also grown men and ruling in several areas. Herod the Great died before Joseph and Mary, with Jesus returned to Galilee (Matthew 2:19-23). Aristobulus married and had a daughter they named Herodias. Philip married his niece, his brother’s daughter, Herodias. Then Antipas, who was already married to the daughter of the king of Arabia, falls in love with Herodias, his older brother’s daughter who was also his other brother’s wife. This Herod Antipas sent his first wife away, stole his other living brother’s wife, Herodias (who is also his older brother’s daughter) and married her. This family had some interesting dynamics. I do not think this family got together for the holidays.

John the Baptist being the prophet that he was took every opportunity given him to denounce what Herod Antipas had done. John the Baptist publicly told Herod Antipas **many times** that “*It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.*” These constant accusations made Herod Antipas afraid, and it upset and angered his wife, Herodias. Herodias did not want to hear it anymore. She wanted John the Baptist dead. That was the only way she could see to quiet the man. She hated John the Baptist so much that she would do anything she could to silence him. She may have even thought about hiring someone to kill him. Because Herod **Antipas feared John** the Baptist, he did not want him killed. But his wife was seeking to kill John the Baptist. The best way for Herod Antipas to protect John from being killed was to have him arrested and held in prison. Herod had John bound and kept in prison. Herodias did not like this. We can **see by the actions** of Herod and his wife what they really believed. Whatever their heritage was, their actions showed that they did not believe in the God proclaimed by the Jewish scriptures or follow His teachings.

Verses 19-20 “*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.*” Herodias wanted John the Baptist dead because of the things he said about her marriage. She divorced her husband, Philip and married his brother Antipas. By God’s standards, that was not legal, unless Philip was dead. But Philip was very much alive. I wonder what Herod and Herodias talked about at their breakfast, lunch and dinner table every day, if they even ate together. **Do you think Herod gladly listened to Herodias** as she griped and complained about that man John in prison. I wonder if Herod left some of those meal conversations to go and listen to and talk with John. Herod knew John was a just and holy man because of his words and his actions. He was intrigued by John’s teaching. Mark records that **Herod gladly listened to John** as they discussed various topics. But he was also very perplexed and bothered by what John said. Herod knew John was right in everything he said and Herod was wrong and his life proved it. Herod’s biggest problem was, **he was unwilling to change**. He knew he needed to but he could not bring himself to change his behavior. This went on for months.

Verse 21 “*Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.*” It was Herod’s birthday. What do you give a king who has everything, including a prophet of God in prison. There was plenty of food and alcohol. Everyone was having more than they should. It was typical that slave girls would dance at these parties for entertainment. I will let you use your imagination as to what happened at these parties and I doubt if it goes far enough. Then something very unusual happened, something that never

happens in a king's court. The princess, the daughter of Herodias came out to dance. Whatever she did, she pleased her step father and all the other men at the party. Herod was so impressed that he vowed to his step daughter who was also his niece, *"Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you"* (6:22). Then Herod said it again, with the qualifier, *"up to half my kingdom"* (6:23). What would you ask for? The only reason Herodias' daughter danced before the king was because her mother told her to. It was only right for the daughter to ask her mom, *"What should I ask for?"* (6:24). It was no surprise when the mother asked for the head of John the Baptist. She was full of hatred for the man. **The expression of hatred is violence and killing.** This is why Jesus could teach, *"whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment"* (Matthew 5:22). Later in his life, the apostle John would write, *"whoever hates his brother is a murderer"* (1 John 3:15). Herodias hated John because of her own sin problem. She did not want to deal with her sin problem. She allowed **her hatred to control her life** in wanting John the Baptist dead. I wonder if Herod, in his conversations with John the Baptist, told him how his wife hated him. I wonder if Herod asked John, do you hate my wife? I can see these conversations happening. John was wanting everyone to repent (Matthew 3:2). He wanted people to change their lives, showing they repented (3:8).

Verses 26-27 *"And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought."* Words matter. What we say matters. **John the Baptist** could have stopped saying what bothered Herod and his wife Herodias and none of this would have happened. There were many people from all backgrounds who were bothered by what John preached. Many of them were convicted of their sin and repented, some seeking guidance in what repentance looked like (Luke 3:7-14). As a prophet of God, who got his convictions from God, John could not be silent. He had to speak God's truth. **Herodias** could have ignored what John said or at least, not let it bother her. But she let it bother her and rightly so. God's conviction should have led her to repent and change. Instead, she let it feed her hatred and she gave into her hatred.

Herod had the responsibility and the power to do what was right and to change all of this. He went and had many conversations with John the Baptist while he was in prison. John would have spoken the truth openly, encouraging Herod to do what was right in God's eyes. Herod heard all kinds of right and moral things from John. But he never repented. As a **husband**, Herod was responsible to lead his family with right thinking and moral behavior. Instead, he was more interested in power and self-gratification. As a **ruler**, Herod was responsible for justice for all people. Instead, he was the law. People did what he said. When he made a vow, or drew a line in the

sand, he had to keep it so that other leaders respected him and feared him. The prison was at the palace. The executioner did not have far to go or far to return. People do the craziest things because they believe some strange things. Herod gave his step daughter what she asked for. What a gruesome thing at a birthday party. The daughter gave her gift to her mother. Do you think they celebrated now that John was dead? I am sure they did. That is what hatred does. What Herodias would someday find out was, just because John was silenced, her sin problem did not go away. Even though Jesus never spoke of this illegal marriage, it did not make it right before God.

Words and actions have consequences. Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist, but because he made a vow in front of all the other leaders of the community, right or wrong, he kept his vow so that these leaders would fear him. **Herod only feared John** (Mark 6:20). He did not fear God. Jesus said, *“do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28). Jesus wanted people to respect God and His power in judgment. He would go on to say how important people are, that He values our lives. Yet it is also true that what we say and do matters. Our words and actions have consequences. Jesus said, *“whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven”* (10:32-33). Our confession is not only in words it is also in our choices and lifestyle.

Herod and Herodias acted like any other sinful people in the world. They loved those who loved them and they hated those who did not agree with them (Matthew 5:46). Christians are to do some crazy things, not the crazy way of the world. Jesus taught us to **love** those who like us and also to love those who hate them. That is crazy. He taught us to *“pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”* (5:44). These actions show we are children of God. He taught us to **be peacemakers** (5:9). He taught us to **be content** in a changing and chaotic world (Philippians 4:11-12).

Questions to ask yourself: Are you following Jesus or the world with your actions?

Actions to take: Choose Jesus. Show your faith by your actions. Speak God’s truth.

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