

Luke 3:19, 20. John's Imprisonment.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

The sermon highlights the dangers of loving sin and the importance of following God's commands, using the example of Herod's imprisonment of John the Baptist.

Scripture: Proverbs 29:25, Matthew 5:29, Matthew 14:5, Mark 6:20, Acts 5:29, Romans 2:15, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Hebrews 4:12, 1 John 1:9, 1 John 3:20

Topics: "Sin And Consequences", "Pleasing God"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the last discourse of John the Baptist, focusing on the impact of John's preaching on Herod, who despite respecting and reforming parts of his conduct, refused to give up his sinful ways. Herod's actions highlight the struggle between worldly pleasures and eternal salvation, showcasing how one sin can lead to another. The imprisonment of John by Herod not only insulted God but hindered the spread of the gospel, emphasizing the grave consequences of hindering the proclamation of God's word. The fear of man and conscience restrained Herod from killing John, prompting reflection on the motives that drive our actions and the importance of seeking to please God in all things.

Transcript

The beautiful discourse that we lately read was the last discourse of John the Baptist that we find in the Scriptures. Soon after delivering it, he was cast into prison. It was Herod who imprisoned him. This Herod was the son of that Herod who slew the babes of Bethlehem, and he resembled his father in wickedness. As he was the governor of a fourth part of the land of Canaan, he is called a tetrarch, (which means the governor of the fourth part of a kingdom.) The Romans had made him governor of Judea. He had heard John preach. We are not informed whether he had gone into the wilderness to hear him, or whether he had sent for John into his palace; but we are told what effect John's preaching produced upon him. If we refer to Mark's gospel, we shall find an account of the sort of impression it made upon him. (Mark 6:20.) "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy." Herod had a reverence for the character of John; though a wicked man, he respected John. This affords us a lesson. Perhaps we feel a respect for some holy men, yet this is not a proof that we are holy ourselves.

Herod did more than this--"He observed John." He took notice of what he said; he remembered it. Unconverted people are often struck with the sermons they hear. But Herod did more still--"He did many things." He reformed many parts of his conduct. Perhaps he showed more kindness to the poor, more

attention to public worship, or more justice to his subjects. We are not informed what were the things which he altered; but we know that he altered not a few, but many things. Have we altered many things in our conduct, since we heard the gospel? It is well if we have--it is well if we read the Bible more; if we give away more; if we have left off openly breaking the Sabbath; or using profane language; or partaking of worldly amusements; but none of these things prove that we are converted.

But Herod did more still; "Herod heard John gladly." He took delight in his instructions. Was not that a good sign? It is a good sign if we take pleasure in listening to a faithful preacher, or to a pious friend, or in reading good books; but it is possible to do so, and yet to love sin; for though Herod heard sermons gladly, when John told him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, he was angry. Herod had committed a great crime--he had divorced his own wife, that he might marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; he could not bear to part from her. This was the sin he would not give up.

What a faithful preacher John was! though he knew that Herod had power to kill him, he feared not to tell him the truth. How difficult it is to act like John! A minister knows that he shall give offence to sinners, if he speaks to them plainly of their sins. As long as he speaks in general terms, he does not offend them; but as soon as he points out the peculiar sins of each class of people, then he makes them enemies. When he reproves tradesmen for selling on the Sabbath, young people for frequenting places of worldly amusement, the poor for committing secret acts of dishonesty, the rich for living in pride and luxury, then he is hated for his interference. But how wicked it is to be angry with a faithful minister for pointing out our sins! If we do not turn from our favorite sins we shall perish. Herod would not pluck out his right eye, which was Herodias; he would not go with one eye to heaven, he preferred going with two to hell; he preferred his pleasure upon earth to everlasting joy.

See how one sin leads to another. Herod added this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Great as was the crime of marrying his brother's wife, the sin of shutting up John in prison was greater in God's eyes. And why was it greater? Because it was an insult committed directly against God; for God considers his children as himself. Whoever injures one of them, injures Him; for they are as dear to him as the apple of his eye. Besides, by shutting up John in prison, Herod hindered the preaching of the gospel; and thus he murdered men's souls. It is a dreadful sin to hinder the spread of the gospel. How much those will have to answer for, who have discouraged people from hearing the gospel!

Herodias was more bitter against John than Herod himself, and would gladly have prevailed upon the monarch to kill him. But there were two reasons which prevented his committing this crime; the fear of man, and his own conscience. We find in Matthew's gospel, 14:5, the following words--"And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." The fear of man often prevents people following the commands of God, but it sometimes for a season hinders the wicked from doing bad actions. Herod's own conscience also made him unwilling to kill John, for the conscience of sinners restrains them as well as the fear of man. May we be kept from sin by better motives than those of Herod! The love of God in our hearts would make us hate every sin. Let us inquire whether there is any sin we refuse to part with. If we are not seeking to please God in all things, we cannot have confidence towards him--our own hearts condemn us, and "God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." 1 John 3:20.

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