

Introduction

All of us constantly make decisions. Some are very important decisions and some are very trivial. We have all probably made some good decisions, and we have all made some poor decisions. I have made many poor decisions in my life, and I regret having made some of them. I am very analytical so I typically ponder some of those decisions and think about how it would have turned out if I had done this or that. I have tried to learn from them and move on. Sometimes things come up that remind us of those decisions. I once made a poor decision on the final hole of the PGA Tour Qualifying tournament and it cost me my tour card for the next year. I thought about it and tried to move on. But, magazines and newspapers brought it up in conversations for a long time. In his book, *A Good Walk Spoiled*, John Feinstein devoted part of one chapter to that incident. So, we will sometimes get reminded of those poor decisions.

Some decisions are emotional, while others are more logical. Some of our decisions are made impromptu, without much thought or consideration, while other decisions are only made after much thought. Some people do not have much difficulty making decisions while others struggle to make decisions. I had a friend in professional golf that was one of the slowest players in the game. Most people did not enjoy playing with him because he took forever. His problem was that he couldn't make a decision. He would have all these thoughts run through his mind and he had a hard time deciding what to do. Eventually God freed up my friend to be more decisive.

I shared the gospel with a seventy-eight-year-old woman this week. She is a Catholic and I told her that she already believes that Jesus was born of a virgin, that He died on the cross for our sins, and was raised from the dead. I told her that even the devil knows these things, but he would not submit his life to God. I said it is not enough to believe, we must receive Christ as our Lord. She was not ready to make that decision. But, as she was leaving my office, she said that she might surprise me because she is thinking hard about this decision. I told her that it was the most important decision of her life.

Our passage today is one of the most gruesome stories in the Bible. However, the gruesome incident in our passage is not the main idea of the passage; it is background material that gives us insight into the main thought of the passage, which is Herod's decision about Jesus.

Herod hears about all the things that Jesus was doing. He hears what other people say about what they believed about Jesus. Some thought Jesus was Elijah. Some thought He was a prophet, like the prophets of old. There were some who said that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. As John considers all these things, he reflects on his past decisions and actions towards John the Baptist. Herod decided to imprison John because of Herodias, his brother's wife, who he had married. John had told them that this was not lawful, and she had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. Herod did not put him to death, but he did imprison him. Afterwards, on Herod's birthday celebration, Herod was entertained by Herodias' daughter, who danced before his guests. He made a foolish offer to give her up to half the kingdom, and she went to her mother who told her to give her John the Baptist's head on a platter. So, Herod had John put to death. Now, Herod is hearing all these stories about people being raised from the dead, and he is trying to decide what he believes about Jesus. This is not a trivial decision; this is the most important decision any of us will ever make in our lives. In Luke 14:27-33, Jesus told people to count the costs before becoming His disciple. This is an important decision. Herod is considering everything, and all his past bad decisions are now running through his mind. In our

text today Mark gives us a detailed look into Herod's mind and thought process as he makes a decision about who Jesus is. Let's read our passage.

Herod's Decision About Christ (Mark 6:14-29)

1. Herod's Decision About Jesus (Mark 6:14-16)
2. Herod's Decision To Imprison John (Mark 6:17-20)
3. Herod's Decision To Put John To Death (Mark 6:21-29)

(Mark 6:14-29) "And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." {15} But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "*He is* a prophet, like one of the prophets *of old*." {16} But when Herod heard *of it*, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" {17} For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. {18} For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." {19} Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not *do so*; {20} for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. {21} A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; {22} and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." {23} And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." {24} And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." {25} Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." {26} And although the king was very sorry, *yet* because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. {27} Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded *him* to bring *back* his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, {28} and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. {29} When his disciples heard *about this*, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb."

1. Herod's Decision About Jesus (Mark 6:14-16)

Our passage begins by saying King Herod heard of it. What did he hear? Mark goes on to say, "for His name had become well known." This is a reference to Jesus and all the things that Jesus was doing. In Matthew 14:1-2, we find that he heard the news about Jesus. He also heard of the miraculous powers at work in Jesus. In Luke 9:7, Herod heard of all that was happening, and was perplexed. The Greek word is *diaporeo* (Strong's G1280), which means thoroughly at a loss. He did not know what to think about everything that was going on. He was at a total loss.

(Mark 6:14-16) "And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known..."

(Matt 14:1-2) "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, {2} and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

(Luke 9:7) "Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead,"

What was going on that Herod had heard about. Well, a paralytic had just been healed in Capernaum. A hemorrhaging woman had been healed. Jairus' daughter had been raised from the dead. Two demoniacs had been set free, and the one who had been possessed by Legion has gone throughout Decapolis proclaiming the great things that Jesus has done. There had been lepers cleansed and lame men healed. The blind had received sight. All of these miraculous works were the demonstration of the kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. All these works testified that Jesus had been sent by the Father, and that He was the Messianic King.

Herod had a decision to make. Who did he believe that Jesus was? People were saying that John the Baptist had risen from the dead and that was the reason for the miraculous works. Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah. Still others were saying that Jesus was a prophet, like the Old Testament prophets. That would have included Isaiah, Elisha, Ezekiel, and others.

(Mark 6:14-16) "And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." {15} But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "*He is* a prophet, like one of the prophets *of old*." {16} But when Herod heard *of it*, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"

Herod is taking all these things in. He is weighing the testimonies of what is happening. He is weighing the opinions that are being shared with him. But, Herod is also weighing His past experiences and dealings with John. When you study decision making, most experts place a high priority on past experience. We gain a lot of wisdom from our past experiences, and Herod started reminiscing about his past dealings with John. But Herod concludes that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected from the dead.

In John 2:11, Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. John records that this was the first miracle that Jesus had done. He also states that because of this His disciples believed in Him. This is in sharp contrast to Herod. He hears of lots of miracles and things that have been happening, but he does not believe.

(John 2:11) "This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

2. Herod's Decision To Imprison John (Mark 6:17-20)

We learn that Herod had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison. Mark covered that in chapter one, but we did not have any further information given at that time. John was taken into custody and then Jesus went into Galilee preaching the gospel. Scholars say that John had been incarcerated for about a year. Herod had built a massive stone fortress/palace/prison on the northeastern shore of the Dead Sea in a town called Machaerus, and this is where John had been kept. He had some privileges, as his disciples were allowed to visit him (Luke 7:18).

(Mark 6:17a) "For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison..."

(Mark 1:14) "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,"

Mark goes on to say why Herod had incarcerated John; it was on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. The Herod in our text is Herod Antipas. His father, Herod the Great, was a very evil ruler. In addition to killing all the baby boys around Bethlehem, he had killed his own son, Antipater. He had also killed all of the seventy Jewish rulers of the Sanhedrin. Anybody that appeared as a threat was put to death. Herod had ten wives and there were a lot of little Herods running around. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. and it was after this that Joseph brought Mary and Jesus back to Nazareth from Israel. Before he died, he divided up his kingdom into four parts and gave four of his sons a part. Herod Antipas has the region of Galilee. He had a brother named Philip who reigned over a region north of Galilee. But, there were other Philips, and the Philip in our text was a brother from one of the other wives of Herod the Great, and he lived in Rome. This Philip was said to be a family outcast. Apparently, Herod had gone to Rome and fell in love with his brother's wife. He took her and married her, even though she was still married to his brother, Philip. Mark records that John was in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. Mark does not call her Herod's wife, but Philip's wife. Why was John put in prison? Well John had said that it was unlawful for him to have his brother's wife. Leviticus 18 covers all kinds of incest, but verse sixteen specifically deals with not marrying your brother's wife, which is what Herod had done. John had preached against this and this had offended Herodias. She had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death.

(Mark 6:17-19) "For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. {18} For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." {19} Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not *do so*"

(Lev 18:16) "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness."

Herod is very conflicted. His wife, Herodias, has a grudge against John. She wants John silenced, and the best way in her mind is to have Herod to execute him. But Mark records that she has not been able to do that. Apparently, she has tried to do this, but has been unsuccessful. There are several reasons why Herod has been reluctant to put him to death. Mark gives four reasons why Herod is reluctant. First, Herod knows that John is a righteous man. People may not like our message, but they do respect our life message. Herod respected John's righteous life. Second, Herod knows that John is a holy man. Third, Herod enjoyed listening to John. Apparently, Herod would call John out of his prison cell and have him come talk to him. Fourth, Herod is afraid of John. Therefore, Herod kept John safe. The safest place for John was in his prison palace at Machaerus. Scholars say that Herod actually lived in Tiberius, which is southwest of the Sea of Galilee, very close to where John had been baptizing and preaching. Tiberius had been built on top of a cemetery and Jews would not go there. Machaerus is about 86 miles south of Tiberius so John has been kept safely away from Herodius. Herod is very conflicted. His wife has a grudge against John and wants him put to death. She has a root of bitterness and bitter people are not easy to reason with. Bitter people can be very aggressive, stubborn, and difficult. Herod is in a difficult situation, but that is the last thing on Herod's mind is to put John to death. Herod makes a decision to imprison John, which is a compromise. He has no justification for imprisoning him, but this decision keeps John safe, and out of the way of Herodias.

(Mark 6:20) "for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him."

In Hebrews 12:15 we are exhorted to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. Herodias has been offended. She has been offended by truth. John has not wronged her in any way. He has just proclaimed truth, but she has been offended, and a root of bitterness has sprung up. This root of bitterness is called a grudge in our text, and the fruit of this root of bitterness is death. She wants to put John to death. When a root of bitterness has sprung up, all reasoning goes out the window. Offended people are difficult to talk to. They twist every conversation and take things out of context. The keys to these roots of bitterness are to prevent them from occurring, and second, to deal with them as early as possible. The longer they grow, the more damage they do. In both cases, forgiveness is the biggest component. When offenses are not dealt with, and issues resolved and forgiven, a root of bitterness can start growing. In our account today, John is going to lose his life, and many people were defiled in the process.

(Heb 12:15) "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."

3. Herod's Decision To Put John To Death (Mark 6:21-29)

So, Herod made a decision to keep John incarcerated. He got to listen to him occasionally, and he was safe from Herodias, who wanted him put to death. However, even though John was imprisoned, Herodias was not satisfied. She kept waiting and looking for an opportunity to get her will done. In verse twenty-one, it says a strategic day came. The Greek word is *eukairos* (Strong's G2121). *Eu* means good or well and *kairos* means a time or season. The word *chronos* means time, as in the hour of day. The word *kairos* generally refers to the characteristics of that time. If we talk about the trees blossoming, we are referring to the springtime. If we talk about the leaves turning color and falling off the trees, we are talking about a characteristic of the fall season or time. That would be *kairos*. The word *eukairos* here refers not only to the day but to the characteristics of this day. It was a celebration of Herod's birthday, and there was a banquet given with lots of military commanders and the leading men of Galilee in attendance. It was a festive occasion where the daughter of Herodias was going to dance. It would be safe to say that there was plenty of wine being consumed. Most of the other Bible translations use the word *opportune time*. In Colossians 4:5, when Paul encourages us to make the most of the opportunity, the same Greek word, *kairos*, is used. In evangelism, we are to recognize the season that people are in and do the appropriate things to help win them to Christ. For Herodias, it was an opportune time, and it was a strategic day. It was the perfect setting for her to implement a devious plan.

(Mark 6:21) "A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee;"

(Col 4:5) "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity."

After Herodias danced, Herod and his distinguished guests were pleased. Herod was probably inebriated when he said to the girl, ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you. He then added, whatever you ask I will give it to you, up to half of my kingdom. The kingdom was not really his to give away; he was under Tiberius Caesar, and he only had what Rome allowed him to have.

(Mark 6:22-23) “and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.” {23} And he swore to her, “Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom.”

Herodias' daughter went to her and said, “What shall I ask for?” I am sure that her mother had already instructed her to come to her when Herod made an offer. She knows her husband, and she knew that she would have this opportunity. Herodias also knew what she was going to request. She was going to ask for John's head on a platter. It was common at that time to bring the head of the person being executed as proof that it had been carried out. So, Herodias had her daughter make the request.

(Mark 6:24-25) “And she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” {25} Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

Mark records that the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. The Greek word used is *perilupos* (Strong's G4036), which means very sad. He was sad, but he did not have what the Bible calls godly sorrow. Paul wrote about the difference in his second letter to the Corinthians. He said the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. Herod did not have a godly sorrow that would lead him to repentance. He could have humbled himself before his guests and said that he had made a foolish offer and that this was not something that he could do, but he did not do that. He was going to proudly stand by his oath that he had made, and not humiliate himself before his guests. So, he carried out the request and they brought John's head back to Herodias. This tells us that they were at Machaerus, the palace/prison by the Dead Sea, as it did not take long for the command to be carried out.

(Mark 6:26-28) “And although the king was very sorry, *yet* because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. {27} Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded *him* to bring *back* his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, {28} and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.”

(2 Cor 7:10) “For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

In James 4:17, God tells us “to him who knows what is right and does not do it, it is sin.” Herod knew that it was wrong to imprison John. He was a righteous, holy man who had not done anything worthy of imprisoning. Herod also knows that it was wrong to put John to death. Herod knew the right thing to do, but decided to do the wrong thing because his pride. When making decisions, we always need to do what is right.

When John's disciples heard what had happened, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb. In Matthew's account, he records that they took away his body and buried it. Then, they went and reported it to Jesus.

(Mark 6:29) “When his disciples heard *about this*, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.”

(Matt 14:12-13) "His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. {13} Now when Jesus heard *about John*, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard *of this*, they followed Him on foot from the cities."

When Jesus heard about John He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself. John was Jesus' cousin, but more than that, John meant a lot to Jesus. John was the forerunner who went ahead of Jesus to prepare the way. John was the one that God had used to baptize Jesus and to declare that this is the Son of God. John had declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. John was the one that stated that Jesus existed before him, and that he was not worthy to tie his sandals. In Matthew 11, Jesus said that John was more than a prophet. He said that "among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist." Jesus went on to say that John was Elijah who was to come. Jesus had the greatest respect for John and He went to a secluded place to grieve over his death.

(Matt 11:9-14) "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. {10} This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' {11} "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! ... {13} For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. {14} And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come."

Conclusion and Applications (John 1:27-34)

As we end this morning, let me remind everyone of the main point of the passage. Herod has heard of all the things that Jesus has been doing. As he hears about all these things, the imprisonment of John and the execution of John came to his mind. These are the thoughts that are running through his mind as he tries to decide what he believes about Jesus.

Herod has reason to be concerned. He knew that John was a righteous and holy man. He knew that John was a preacher of righteousness. He feared John, and now some people are telling him that John has risen from the dead. Herod has a natural fear of John coming to him and judging him for his marriage, his lifestyle, for imprisoning him, and for putting him to death. John has some fears and concerns.

But I want to draw attention to the message of John the Baptist. John did not elevate himself, but he preached Jesus. He said that "He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." John preached that Jesus was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John preached that Jesus had a higher rank because He existed before John, even though John was older in the flesh. John preached and "testified that this is the Son of God." There is no doubt in my mind that John had preached repentance to Herod, and that he had preached that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah. When Herod said that Jesus was John the Baptist, who had been resurrected from the dead, he was ultimately rejecting John's message and rejecting Jesus as being the Messiah.

(John 1:27-34) "*It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.... {29} The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! {30} "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' {31} "I did not

recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." {32} John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. {33} "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' {34} "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The question for you this morning is the same question that Herod was trying to answer. Who do you believe Jesus to be? Was Jesus just a prophet? (Mark 6:15) That is what some people in our text were telling Herod, and this is what the Muslims believe? Was Jesus just the son of a carpenter and the brother to James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? (Matt 13:55) That was what the people of Nazareth believed? Was Jesus doing these miraculous things by the power of Beelzebul? (Mark 3:22) That is what the scribes were believing? The real question is who do you believe Jesus to be?

If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, and that He died and was raised from the dead, you can receive Christ this morning. Just tell God that you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and ask Him to come into your life and to forgive you of your sins. Confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior this morning.

Have you already received Christ? Is Jesus your Lord? Have you surrendered every area of your life to Him? If He is Lord, seek His kingdom and His righteousness first. Let's pray.

Introduction (Luke 14:27-33, Mark 6:14-29)

1. **Herod's Decision About Jesus** (Mark 6:14-16, Matt 14:1-2, Luke 9:7)
2. **Herod's Decision To Imprison John** (Mark 6:17-20, Luke 7:18, Mark 1:14, Lev 18:16, Heb 12:15)
3. **Herod's Decision To Put John To Death** (Mark 6:21-29, Col 4:5, 2 Cor 7:10, Matt 14:12-13, 11:9-14)

Conclusion and Application (John 1:27-34, Mark 6:15, Matt 13:55, Mark 3:22)