

Mark 6: 14-30; “A Just and Holy Man”, Sermon # 34 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 30th, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.

The great object in living the Christian life is to be faithful. To be a Christian does not always mean that you will be safe in this life. It does not mean that you might not die a violent death. We see here that John the Baptist's head ended up on silver platter because of the sins of Herod and Herodias. And not one of us, I am sure, would choose that fate. Does this mean that John should have been quiet about the sins of Herod and Herodias? If he had been quiet, he might never have met that end, we think. But let us consider this truth; it was because he was faithful to the calling which God had given him, that he was put to death by King Herod. In order that we might be faithful like John, there are 4 things which we should take notice of from this text. The 1st is that, in order to be faithful, you cannot have a guilty conscience. The second is; that in order to be faithful you must learn to speak up about sin. The third is; that in order to be faithful you must learn to swear righteously. And the fourth is; that in order to be faithful you must learn to honor the righteous dead.

1st of all – In order to be faithful you cannot have a guilty conscience. (Verse 14)

King Herod had now heard of the name of Jesus. But not until after he had John the Baptist put to death. Jesus' name had become well known because of the many miracles of healing which He had done. People were talking about Jesus and they were trying to explain how it could be that He had the power to do these things. And Herod when he heard of Jesus said, “John the Baptist is risen from the dead”. Now this should show us the ability of the unbelieving mind to draw wrong conclusions upon spiritual matters. Herod's conclusion makes no logical sense; yet he asserts that it is so. John the Baptist had supposedly risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in Jesus. What Herod was believing in was a sort of spiritual re-incarnation. He knew that John was a powerful preacher; he now sees that this same power is in Jesus. John and Jesus were relatives after the flesh. They were contemporaries in their age. There was no way that he could have physically become another person as Herod was suggesting. It was all a figment of his perverted imagination. I believe that it was because Herod had a guilty conscience that he was thinking this way. He was superstitious and he was ignorant. He wanted very much to have John back again, seeing that it was he who was the one who had reluctantly ordered his death. He wanted very much for the truth of John's violent death to somehow be erased from his conscience with a wave of his hand; or in this case, by making a strong assertion that John was still alive in the person of Jesus. Again; he was making up an alternative reality to the true one which he now was trying to deny. John was dead; there was no bringing him back physically now. But Herod would try to bring him back by his own false, self-deceived assertions.

Let us apply this to our own day and time. I believe that this is what many unbelieving people do when they have a guilty conscience. They have done something that is sinfully wrong, but in order to deny the sinfulness of it, they resort to making up a new supposed reality, which is an entire fabrication and a lie. I believe that this same thing is taking place in our own day, in the hearts of many people who are existential in their view of life. A person who is existential is a person who lives their life for this life. They live their life apart from God because they do not want to believe in the truth of the Bible. They do not want to believe that there is right and wrong. They do not want to see themselves as sinners. They do not like it when a preacher addresses their conscience and tells them that the way that they are living is wrong. They think to themselves: “There is no right and wrong; there is only what is...” And this way of looking at life may include re-incarnation, or a hundred other false religious beliefs that a person might

manufacture. This gives that person the false idea that somehow they will not have to personally face the judgment of God at the end of their life for the things that they have done in their body, or thought with their mind. Existentialism and making up your own religious reality is simply not true. It is not true to the Bible or the created reality which God has made. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and then comes the judgment. (Hebrews 9: 27)

You and I should not be afraid to speak the truth to people who know not God. They need somehow to wake up to the fact that God is real. Perhaps God will use you to say a word on His behalf. God really did create all things; even them. And, He is evaluating each person's life as to whether the things that they do are right or wrong; good or bad. He has placed a conscience in their being so that they will know and understand, in some measure, whether what they are doing is good or bad. If you want to share the gospel and the truth of the word of God with others around you, you must remember that many people need their conscience to be instructed, as Herod's was, by John the Baptist. You must learn to deal with your own conscience by bringing your soul, your mind, your heart, and all your feelings to Jesus Christ. And once you become a Christian you will then begin to learn to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. It is His obedience which is perfect; not yours. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Him. And no one comes to live their life with a clear conscience without having that conscience cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ. Let me ask you whether your conscience is clear in regard to heeding the words of Jesus? If you are trusting in Him your conscience will be cleansed from all sins and past mistakes. And you will become a more confident person when, by Christ's grace, you learn to engage Him in faith and to do what is right consistently.

Secondly – In order to be faithful you must learn to speak up about sin.

Verse 15 says: "So they went out and preached that people should repent." "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them." We see here that John the Baptist would be forerunner of our Lord, who would go before Him, preaching and addressing men's consciences and telling them to repent, to turn from their sins and turn unto Christ. He would preach about the duties of fathers to their children and children to their fathers. He would tell those who were disobedient to turn to the wisdom of the just. He would point men to the power and source of doing these things; the Lord Jesus Christ, the very One whose Father was giving him the same kind of spirit and the same kind of power as Elijah. John may not have called down fire from heaven, but he spoke with the very same power and authority in his preaching as Elijah did. This is what is meant when some of these people said, "He is Elijah." Others said rightly that Jesus was "the Prophet". You can see what this means if you turn with me back to Deuteronomy 18, verse 15. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren." "Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'" "And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.'" "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." "And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him." So here we see that some did consider Jesus to be "the Prophet", the One who had God's words in His mouth, the words which every man ought to heed.

But to be faithful as one who would follow Jesus meant, that as a preacher, John would have to preach against the sins of the prominent people of the government in that day. John had to say to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." You see here that John was faithful in reproving even the sins of a king. Let us understand that it is the duty of ministers to reprove the sins of those whom they minister unto. But it is also their duty, where necessary, to reprove the sins of those who are in government; even prominent politicians. And, it is also the

duty of every Christian to pray for the courage to speak up against sin. John knew that it was incest as well as adultery that Herod was committing. Neither one of them wanted to hear this, or to receive it from John. It says in verse 19 that Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not. In Matthew 14 we find that Herod also held this against John because it says in verse 3, "For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife." "Because John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" Then verse 5 says, "And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." This fact is not mentioned in Mark. In fact, in Mark's gospel we find in verse 20 that, "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." Now this is quite a contradiction from what I just mentioned to you is written in Matthew, that Herod wanted to kill John.

This leads me to assert to you this morning that sinful, unbelieving people are often a bundle of contradictions. The thing that may be true of them at one time may not be true of them at another. This is why a preacher and a minister must speak up and tell people of their sins. And it is why all Christians must learn to be faithful to look at themselves and see if they are consistent in their own life and in their own witness. Do you speak against sin when someone else is trying to justify themselves in it? We must all pray to know the right way to do this, and be faithful to God and to his truth. An unbeliever like Herod is a bundle of contradictions. He will hear the word preached; he may even hear it gladly, and even do certain things to mend his foolish ways. But in the end, when his pet sin is touched upon by the preacher, he is ready to kill him. But in a believer, this ought never to be. The believer is the one who looks at his own heart and life first. He says, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness." And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it." (Psalm 141: 5) A just and holy person knows that he will fall into self-deception if he tolerates any one known sin. He knows that he cannot excuse himself if he commits any sin and hides his sin from others.

I think of Romans Chapter 2, where Paul is reproofing those who self-righteously judge others, when they themselves are guilty of the same sins. He says in verse 1 – "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." "But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." What things is he talking about? In chapter 1 he speaks against the homosexuals in verses 22-28. He speaks in verses 29-31 about those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge. And since they did not want to retain Him, He gives them over to all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, and maliciousness. They are filled with envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful. Now Paul is saying that whoever you are who judge, if you do not deal with any one of these sins in your life, whether you consider yourself a believer or a religious person, or not; you will fall under the judgment of God if you will not repent of it. Verse 3 says, "And do you think this O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

So let us all think about our own heart and our own life before we go to speak against the sins of others. But having a clear conscience in that, the next step is to speak. If a preacher lifts up his voice and declares to men what their sins are, and what they deserve, and what they will receive if it is not repented of; the person who hears it may repent. This is the hope and prayer

of the one who preaches or speaks to others about their sins. May each Christian here consider those whom they love, for their good. No doubt you will get into trouble with some, if you do this. But love will speak and love would hold others back from sinning. Proverbs 24, 11 and 12 says this: “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.” “If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it?” “He who keeps your soul, does He not know it?” “And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?” At the very least you can pray about it. 1 John 5: 16 – “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.” So, having prayed, you may have opportunity to speak. James says that we should take this kind of initiative among those who are professed Christians. James 5: 19 – “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

Then 3rdly – In order to be found faithful, you must learn to swear righteously.

(Verses 21-28)

It says in verse 21, “Then an opportune day came...” There will always come an opportune day for each person to be tested in regard to the truth of whether they believe in God and Christ. It will be a time when God will test and Satan will tempt. It will be a time when the truth of what your heart is really willing to do, will be revealed for others to see. Will your willingness be to do the right and speak up against the wrong? You cannot remain casual or neutral about sin. You either approve of it, or you do not approve of it. You will either love the brethren or you will not love them; you will either protect them when they are hated, or you will not. Herodias was a person who was looking for an opportunity to have John to put to death. She found that opportunity on Herod’s birthday. “Make sure, your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32: 23) You will remember that in verse 20 of our text it says that “Herod feared John because he knew that John was a just and holy man, and so he protected him.” But there was something that he loved more than listening to, and protecting this godly man, and that was his sin.

And so in the end he found that he could not continue to protect John. It is portrayed very graphically for us on this occasion of his birthday. He had given a feast for his nobles, his high officials, and the chief men of Galilee.” And Herodias’ daughter came in and danced for them. And it so pleased Herod and those who sat with him that the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.’ “He also swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.’” What a foolish and rash vow he made there. It was a vow made in the passion of the moment. It was a sensual and adulterous passion that apparently led him to this vow. It was his heart of adultery that led him to that place where he swore rashly and could not turn back from it. It reminds one of verse 23 of Proverbs 7 where it speaks of the immoral woman who entices the young man to sin. The verse says, “As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know that it would cost his life. Herod did not realize that it would cost him John’s life and his own soul in the process. Herodias’ daughter immediately goes back to her mother and asks her, “What shall I ask for?” How strategically all this fell together to give Herodias the very opportunity that she was looking for, to have John killed! “Ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” When she asked, it says that Herod was “exceedingly sorry”. He was sorry, but not sorry enough to repent of his rash oath. He had gone too far, and so to please her and his dinner guests, he let his oath stand, and he sent an executioner and commanded that John’s head be brought. It was given to the girl, who then gave it to her mother.”

Herod should have thought for a moment. Was it in his power to take a life unjustly because of a vow that he made? No it was not. He should have confessed to his dinner guests and to the girl that he had sinned in swearing an oath to her such as he had done. He should have repented of the oath. There was provision for this under the law if he had cared to have known. Leviticus

5: 4 says, “Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters.” “And it shall be when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he had committed, a female from the flock, a lamb, or a kid of the goats as a sin offering.” “So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.” This would have been the proper procedure under the law.

But Herod was more concerned to save face before all of his dinner guests and to be in favor with his sinful wife. And so he lost his soul. How I pray that none of us here today will ever do the same. Herod killed the prophet-preacher to save face. He was sorry but it was not the sorrow that produces a real repentance. It is good for us to remember that all sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven men if they will confess them and forsake them. But take care, it says in the book of Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14 that you “pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, or Herod we could say, who for one morsel (in this case a dancing girl) sold his birthright (sold his soul), for you know that afterward when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” We do not find that Herod even sought repentance, or had any tears. When you swear, and there are times and occasions when a Christian is at liberty to take an oath, the Lord Jesus says, “Let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”, for whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” Do not swear at all unless it can be that clear, Jesus says in Matthew 5: 34. Swear righteously, or else swear not at all.

It is the best thing that you can possibly do, if you would swear righteously, to take the oath of allegiance to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. That is the right way to swear. Listen to God’s taking an oath in Isaiah 45: 22 –“Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!” “For I am God and there is no other.” “I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.” And we know that Paul quotes this verse in relation to the Lord Jesus in Philippians 2: 11. “Every tongue should confess,” should take the oath, that they will receive the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in Him, and follow Him. Will you not remember this dear Christian; the faith that you confess is confessed in the beginning as an oath. It is that you will believe in Jesus Christ, and hold fast your confession of Him throughout the rest of your life. This confession is an oath of allegiance to Him, to His cause and kingdom, that you will follow Him according to His word, in accordance with His grace.

And then finally – In order to be faithful you must learn to honor the righteous dead. (Verse 29)

“When John’s disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.” How loving and thoughtful these disciples were, of the one who had led them and pointed them to the Lord Jesus as the only Savior of sinners. So too, you must not take lightly the passing away of the righteous; those who have taken their stand for truth and righteousness and sought to promote it with their life and strength. In Isaiah 57: 1 and 2 it says, “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil.” “He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” I trust that when the opportunity presents itself that you will honor the righteous dead, even when it might be dangerous to do so. It was dangerous to identify with John and with Christ when they died. But there were faithful men who honored them by giving them a decent burial and giving them a highly esteemed place in their hearts and minds because they were faithful in their life. It says in John Chapter 20 – “After this, Joseph of

Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission.” “So he came and took the body of Jesus.” “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.” “Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” “Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.” “So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.” You can see here that both of these men overcame the fears that they once had; the fear of man. They had been once been secret disciples for a time, but when the occasion of Jesus’ death presented itself, they denied themselves and picked up their own cross to follow Him. By His grace they rose up to do the right thing. They honored their Lord. And if you would be faithful to Christ; be faithful to Him in this same way. Remember to honor the righteous dead. You will be honoring the Lord Himself when you do so. And the Lord says that those who honor Him; He will honor. 1st Samuel 2: 30