

A Case Study in the Conscience

Luke 9:7-9

December 2, 2018

Well, then I'd invite you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke and Luke Chapter 9. Luke Chapter 9. We're going to be looking at verses 7 to 9 this morning. Luke 9:7 to 9. And what we find in these few verses here is yet another instance where in Luke's Gospel here, where Luke slows us down a bit. And calls us here as the reader to pause for a bit of reflection, really. Before we read about Jesus' feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is one of the most important of the miracles in all the Gospel writers, all four of them record that miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand. And Luke wants to slow us down just a little bit so we can think about something very important before we move on and read that account. This section we're about to cover this morning, verses 7 to 9, is a section of scripture on Herod's perplexity. As he,



Herod, tries in vain really, to get a read on Jesus's identity, on who this Jesus really is.

Follow along as I read those verses, Luke 9:7 to 9. "Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening. And he was perplexed. Because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. Herod, said, 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought," or the verb is actually a continuous action here he was seeking to see, "him."

What we've read in the, covered in the previous verses, Jesus sending out the twelve in Luke, 9:1 to 6. That account really doesn't end in verse 6 where we ended last time, but rather it ends in verse 10. In verse 6 it says they departed, these are the apostles. They went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. And then we read in verse 10, you can see it there, on their return, the apostles told him all that they had done.

You can see just by that, that if verses 7 and 9 were not there, the narrative would flow quite naturally. We'd move from one thing to another. But Luke has stopped, and he's inserted this parenthesis. He's done that to slow us down, to help us to pause and reflect so that we, we'll keep reading and keep going forward with the right mentality. He's here preparing our minds as the readers for what's coming next.

One reason, for this pause, for this reflection and it's a narrative concern, in verses 7 to 9, is to explain why it is that Jesus felt the need to take his disciples and withdraw into Bethsaida you could see that at the end of verse 10 there that he took his disciples and withdrew into Bethsaida, bit of back story is going to help us to understand that. But there's also another reason that Luke has included these three verses, that has to do with a theological preparation for us, the reader.

As I said, all four Gospels contain this narrative, this healing, or this feeding narrative of the five thousand. It's a demonstration, a clear, clear demonstration of Jesus' supernatural power as he creates food from nothing. It's also a

lesson about the true identity of Jesus Christ. It's a lesson on the nature of his mission as God's Messiah. So Luke, he's very careful here to make sure that we don't miss the lesson.

By the direction of the Holy Spirit, what we're going to study today, this parenthetical insight into Herod's perplexity, his state of mind. This is what is going to prepare us and put us in the right frame of mind to make sure that we see Jesus clearly because, by contrast, Herod did not see Jesus clearly. And there's a really important reason for that. Herod's mind was clouded by guilt. His conscience was defiled, his judgment was perverted and distorted, his mind was clouded by sin and darkened by, even an act of murder. And even though Luke doesn't really dwell on it here, he records Herod's own confession there in verse 9, that he had murdered John the Baptist.

So now that there's this explosion of Messianic teaching and explosion of miraculous power all throughout Galilee, it had to send a ripple effect all throughout the region. This is the effect of Jesus sending out the twelve, verse 6, "Jesus sent them out two by two." So you have this in radiating directions,

six different groups. Jesus himself going out and teaching as well. He's a seventh, on the spoke on the wheel, going out throughout the region. So this is, this is, in this explosion of activity, Herod's evil deeds here are coming back to haunt him. All that he'd been hearing, all that was being reported to him, that all left Herod in a state of inner turmoil, mental perplexity, in fact, that is the keyword in this section that we need to understand. There in verse 7, "he was perplexed."

The same reports about Jesus and his apostles, about their ministry in and around Galilee, those reports actually resulted in the salvation of people who were very close to Herod Antipas. One of Jesus's earliest disciples, as it says in Luke 8:3, the previous chapter, it's the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, one of his most trusted servants. That man's wife, became a disciple of Jesus Christ, very early on. Another disciple was Manaen, Acts 13:1 says that Manaen was a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch. He was numbered among the prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch. Pretty close associations to Herod Antipas.

They heard Christ's Gospel. They heard all these acts of teaching and healing and power, authoritative teaching, and they believed. They believed. Very likely, Joanna and Manaen were two of Luke's sources. As we really in Luke's Gospel, and then the other Gospel writers as well, we get insight into what's going on in the palace. We get insight into Herod's state of mind, his, his thinking. It's as if we're reading his mail.

Herod here, he's in a state of mental perplexity. He's in this condition of great, great confusion. And that is because he suffered the internal turmoil of a guilty conscience. It's really the effects of his own sin. His conscience condemning and accusing him, because he's repeatedly, consistently defiled it and ignored it. According to Romans 2:14 and 15, the conscience is like a spiritual warning system. It alerts us to the way that we keep or break the law that God has inscribed on our hearts. On the one hand, we can strengthen the conscience that he has given us, educating the conscience with the Word of God, and then exercising the conscience as we listen to its warnings, respond to its cautions and its heeding's'.

On the other hand, we can warp the conscience by starving it of the truth. We could weak the conscience by, weaken the conscience by educating it according to a wrong worldly standard; that causes the conscience to misfire, to fire and give us warnings about some other standard, that happens all the time. We can deaden the conscience by ignoring its promptings, by silencing it. We can harden the conscience as well, 1 Timothy 4:2, searing it through hypocrisy and false doctrine, overloading the conscience with guilt so it's subdued and muted.

That's Herod. He is the case of a seared conscience. And that seared conscience completely undermines any ability that he would have to come to a right conclusion about Jesus and the Gospel. That is what we're seeing in Herod's perplexed and troubled in verse 7. He's in a state of total bewilderment, confusion. He is utterly at a loss. That's what the word means. Luke, he does not want us to be caught in the same confusion. That's why he's included this account here. Especially as we're about to read about one of Jesus' most significant and instructive miracles in all of Scripture. He does not want our, our consciences to be cloudy in the least.

So by reading this case study on the conscience, before we enter into that narrative, we're going to be able to clear our conscience before God; come to a right conclusion about Jesus and the Gospel. What mercy of God isn't it? And even in the pages of scripture, as we're reading through, he causes us to pause for a moment, to reflect, to think and ponder just a little while. So as we consider the text, we want to look at this in basically three points. You've got them there in your bulletin, the context of Herod's perplexity. The cause of his perplexity. And finally the cure for Herod's perplexity. So we've got the context, the cause, the cure. We'll start with the context of Herod's perplexity, point number one.

We're going to begin by going back a little bit in scripture, so turn back to chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel, chapter 3. This is the section on John the Baptist's Ministry. This is prior to the baptism of Jesus Christ. And look at verses 19 and 20. We want to get a little bit of the back story here, and understand the context of Herod's perplexity. We're going to see this first in Luke 3, and then we're going to turn back to Mark 6 in a moment, and just see what explains his perplexed state of mind.

Starting there, though, with Luke 3:19 and 20 it says, "Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by John the Baptist for Herodias, his brother's wife." Okay, that's, that's not good. Indication of adultery, brother's wife. Indication of an, kind of an incestuous kind of a thing, and knowing who Herodias is, and that she's a part of the same Herod family tree, it's not only adultery, but it's an incestuous adultery. Very confusing state of circumstances here. So John the Baptist reprovved Herod for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, and he added this to them all that he locked up John in prison. And we're going to unpack that a bit, this whole sorted affair this morning. But first I want you to see the significance of what Luke has written right here.

John, as a prophet, he has reprovved Herod. He doesn't say anything in his mind, like, hey, let's leave religion out of politics here now. I don't want to get too involved in that. No, he's gonna dive right in. He reproves Herod. We need to understand that this is a grace of God, because if Herod repents and listens to the prophet of God, you know what happens to the land? Righteousness prevails. Oh for a humble repentant,

political leader. Amen? Rather than responding in humble repentance. Rather than repenting of all the evil things that he had done, Herod ignored his conscience. He ignored the conscience that came through the prophet of God. He chose instead to silence the prophet's voice by imprisoning him at the castle Machaerus.

Herod is characterized here as a man who refuses to listen to the Word of God. He ignores the internal cry of his conscience. He ignores the external voice of the prophet of God. He just will not listen and heed the warnings that God has put into his life. Silencing the prophetic voice that is the culminating sin of all Herod's sins. Everything that happens after this point, it's just a downhill slide into further depravity. Herod has cut himself off from the gracious Word of the living God as spoken through the prophet John.

Now, let's get back to more of this back story. Turn to Mark's Gospel and this is the fullest account we have of the three accounts of Herod's sin. Mark chapter 6. We're going to start reading in Mark 6 at verse 12. Mark 6:12 and following,

12, just read a couple verses here at first, and make a comment. So they went out. This is the apostles and proclaimed that people should repent. They cast out many demons, anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. That's parallel. This helps orient us. This is exactly parallel to where we are in Luke's Gospel, Luke 9:6 and following.

And just as we read in Luke 9:7, Mark 7:14 tells us right there at the beginning, King Herod heard of it, he heard of it. King Herod here is also known as Herod Antipas. He's one of the sons of Herod the Great. Matthew and Luke refer to him almost exclusively as Herod the tetrarch. He rules in Galilee, which is west of the Sea of Galilee, and he rules also in Perea, which is southeast of the Sea of Galilee. This Herod Antipas, he had half-brother named Phillip. He's also identified as Herod Philip the First, or simply Herod the Second, taking his father's name. But Philip, this brother of Antipas, he married the daughter of his half-brother Aristobulus. He married the daughter of that half-brother, she's a real peach of a gal named Herodias.

Yes, the union between Philip and Herodias was the joining together of an uncle and a niece. Together they had a daughter. Her name was Salome. Herodias, she's an ambitious woman. She has a lot of, let's just say she's high maintenance, she's, ah, got some interests and desires. She had a little problem. Her husband, the hapless Phillip, he failed to rule over any part of Herod the Great's territory. The problem was a lot of Herod's sons failed to rule over what they wanted to rule, but the problem was, with Phillip, he seemed to be okay with that. He lacked the family trait of ruthless political ambition. Seemed to be content to live as a private citizen in Jerusalem and Rome. He's wealthy, in Rome, well fed, but he was a foreigner and there a virtual nobody.

That didn't suit Herodias at all. She wanted out of Rome. She wanted back to Jerusalem, where she could climb up the social ladder. So Herodias hitched a ride home with her other uncle, Phillip's half-brother, Herod Antipas. As tetrarch of Galilee and Judea, Herod Antipas could rely on a pretty significant stream of tax income. He had political alliances that he wanted to maintain and keep. That meant a lot of wining and dining and feasting. So she looked forward to the luxury,

the licentiousness in a land where her family connections actually mattered for something. No one regarded her in Rome. Back home, she was somebody. One small obstacle. Both she and her, Herod Antipas were at the time of their coming together, they were married.

Antipas had a wife. She was a Nabatean Princess named Phasaelis. She's the daughter of King Aretas, or Aretas, King of Petra. It's located in modern day Jordan. So Herod and Antipas, they conspired together to divorce their spouses and marry each other. When Phasaelis Herod Antipas' wife found out about Herod's plans to divorce her, she quietly made her way back to the Machaerus Castle, which is perched up above the eastern edge of the Dead Sea. It's on the western frontier, though, of her father's Kingdom. And her father Aretas had troops stationed there, waiting close by to escort her back to Nabatea. Aretas, the king, her father, soothed his anger over this whole sordid affair by preparing his troops for war with Herod. He's going to go and get some payback, that's coming.

In the meantime, Herod Antipas and Herodias, with her daughter Salome in tow, they got what they wanted. They divorced their spouses, they married each other. And like all high profile marriages, divorces and remarriages, all of that's conducted in the public eye. When that became known to John the Baptist, as I said, he didn't stay quiet about it. He spoke about that sin. He spoke openly about that sin. He condemned it. He spoke of issues of sin and righteousness and judgment, as all faithful preachers must do. And he called for repentance immediately.

Well, as you might imagine, John's prophetic ministry didn't sit well with those newlyweds, kind of ruined the honeymoon. Rather than, as I said, respond in humility, rather than respond in contrition and repentance. This Herodias she was enraged. Her blood boiled. Wanted him dead. Herod, like many men who are unwilling to confront an angry wife, he preferred to take the approach of mollifying her. He failed to do what was right. And he added this sin to all the other evil things that he'd done, all of his intrigues, all of his extortions, all of his murders, as Luke wrote, "he locked up John in prison." That was the final straw.

John was imprisoned shortly after Jesus' baptism. We found from John 3:23 that John was baptizing near, in an area near Salim, and that location of his baptism ministry is right in the middle of Herod's two regions. Galilee to the northeast, Perea to the south and southeast. So John the Baptist, with his faithful prophetic ministry, he's the proverbial fly in the ointment. Herodias did not want him drawing attention to their illicit marriage. Herod Antipas didn't want him stirring up trouble with the good citizens of Galilee and Perea. After all, if they turned on him, well there goes not only his tax income and not only his power and authority, but could there, could go his head as well. So John is cast into Machaerus dungeon. That's where John eventually died.

Let's keep reading just a little bit further. Look at Mark 6:14. "King Herod heard of it." Heard of what? Heard of all those miracles, all that teaching for Jesus had become known. "Some said John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That's why these miraculous powers are at work in him. But others said he's Elijah, and others said he's a prophet like one

of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard of it, he said John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Several popular opinions there about Jesus' identity. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of old. Notice which option stands out most prominently in the mind of Herod Antipas. He's got this superstition. He's feeling the guilt of his evil deed. And now Mark moves on in the record here to expand on the nature of Herod's crime. Look at verse 17, "For it was Herod, who had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Phillip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' Herodias had a grudge against him, wanted to put him to death, but she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed." There's that word again, and yet he heard him gladly.

Matthew tells us further in Matthew 14:5 that although Herod wanted to put him to death, so we see that Herod was a bit

in agreement with Herodias, it's just that he also had a caution, a check, in his Spirit. What was that caution in check? According to Matthew 14:5, "He feared the people because they held him to be a prophet." Not only that, but Mark here tells us that Herod feared John the Baptist as well.

Herodias, she had no such conscience. She had no qualms like that. But Herod knew he was a righteous and holy man. He's conflicted here. He's tormented, he's torn, greatly perplexed. So to appease his wife, to get some peace at home, while he listens gladly to John, he'll come to his wife's point of view. You could just silence him, even if it means his death.

Look at verse 21, verse 21 says, "but an opportunity came." Opportunity? Opportunity for what? Well, Herodias had a grudge, verse 19, "she wanted to put him to death, but she could not," because Herod's, whatever's left of his conscience is still in the way. Oh, but an opportunity came. Verse 21, "It came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when

Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests." There's the opportunity right there.

The dancing girl, not named, her name is Salome. It's not the Salome who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, but this is the daughter of Herodias from her former marriage to Herod Philip the first. This Salome in Scripture, she has the dubious honor of being a great dancer. She's a lewd performer before a drunk stepfather and a group of drunken, lustful men. So-called nobles, military commanders and leading men of Galilee. Really?

Herod Antipas has gathered these nobles, military commanders we can understand, nobles leading men of Galilee? No wonder it's time for Jesus to head toward Jerusalem, toward his crucifixion. Herod's hosting all of them for his birthday party at the Citadel called Machaerus, where John in fact is imprisoned. Machaerus has been called a Herodian Pleasure Palace. It was built that way. Hungarian archaeologist Gyoza Voros. If I can slaughter that name any further, I would

probably repeat that. But I won't. But this Hungarian archaeologist, he's an expert on Machaerus.

He says that this palace, it says quote, "included a courtyard with a royal garden. A Roman style bath, a triclinium, which is a long dining table with plush couches along three sides for fancy dining, dining. It had a formal peristyle that's rows of columns surrounding the courtyard, lined with porticos." You can imagine in your mind's eye if you think about some Roman scene of luxury and avarice, pleasure, that's this scene. So gorged with food, inebriated with wine, Herod called for his stepdaughter. The offspring of his wife's former union.

Interesting that he cares nothing for her dignity. Shows he despises her and he sets her forth, sets her in front of all these drunken men as yet another object to be consumed. Leered at by drunken eyes. Salome does what's required of her. She dances her dance pleases the guests. Herod here feeling proud, probably in a bit of a lightheaded stupor, he decides to flaunt his magnanimity, as a royal, before this gathered crowd.

Look at the rest of the verse 22, "The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish and I will give it to you.' And he vowed to her. 'Whatever you ask of me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother 'For what should I ask?' And she said 'The head of John the Baptist.' She came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.'"

Yet another girl seeking approval from people above her. With haste, immediately. Those words indicate agreement. She's doing what she wants to do as well. That Herodias, Herodias here, she saw her opportunity, she took it. Alfred Edersheim reflects on the scene. He says, "Silence must have fallen on the assembly. Even into their hearts such a demand from the lips of little more than a child must have struck horror. They all knew John to be a righteous and holy man. Wicked as they were in their superstition, if not religiousness, few if any of them would have willingly lent himself to such work. And they all knew also why Salome, or rather Herodias, had made this demand." End Quote.

Interesting how sin totally undermines moral authority. Faced with the gruesome, macabre request. What's Herod going to do? Look at verse 26, "The king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her." Well, at least he's a promise keeper. He gets right to it. Verse 27, "Immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison. Brought his head on a platter. Gave it to the girl. And the girl gave it to her mother." Gruesome scene.

Herod Antipas issued the order to one of the attendants. The attendant related to a servant. Servant informed the guards, the executioner. And where they were perched up in the citadel, the palace, you had to go down the hill. Down below the citadel, this palace where Herod feasted with his guests. It was on the east facing slope. It was a walled town where about 1000 or more people lived. And that town obviously provided for the palace up above, but also it acted as sort of a buffer in the event of an invasion, any attacking force would come from below and would have to go through the town, which would slow them down a little bit as they killed and pillaged and plundered. And as, their, in

their attempts to reach the citadel above, it was down there in the town where the dungeon was located.

Interesting, isn't it, that Herod put John where an attacking force, such as maybe the anticipated anger from the Nabatean king Aretas. He put John as a buffer between him and an attacking force, hoping that John would be killed in the invasion. He didn't need to wait, did he? It didn't require an attacking force to deal with Herod's little problem. All it required was a failure to resist sin. You need to see this clearly. It was a failure to resist sin that led to this murder. It was a failure to listen to a nagging conscience. It's a failure to confront his wife. It was a refusal to listen to God's voice through the prophet John.

Edersheim again writes about the irony of his crime. He says, "Unfaithful to his God, to his conscience, to truth and righteousness. Not ashamed of any crime or sin, he would yet be faithful to his half drunken oath, and appear honorable and true before such companions." Herod's desire for the approval of man. For a superficial sense of peace with his wife. Fearing men, not

God, all of that led him to ignore his conscience and silence the prophet of God, and in the end to murder him outright. Profound and far reaching effects that the fear of man has. Geographically speaking, Machaerus was about as far away as Antipas could put John.

To get John as far away from the people of Galilee and Perea possible, Machaerus was perfect place. It was located in the southern part of Perea, was perched atop a high peak in the mountains that were north east of the Dead Sea. Machaerus was a strategic fortress that provided Herod the Great and then his son Antipas with the advantage of being like the first line of defense for any attack that's coming out of the east. Also, it's visibility from any of the other six citadel fortresses located on the western side of the Dead Sea, it's a perfect vantage point.

From Alexandria in the north and Masada in the South, there was a line of seven fortresses that guarded Jerusalem, the major city to the West that was also visible from Machaerus. In fact, one writer says you could see the fires, the smoke rising from

the temple in Jerusalem from Machaerus. So a lookout, stationed on the bastions of Machaerus, they could spot any attack coming from the east. They could send warnings to the other fortresses. Smoke signals during the day, fire signals during the night. They could send signals to those other citadels, warning them of an attack. Machaerus is the chief of those seven citadels, providing all the early warnings necessary for any attacks against the territories, ultimately any attack against Jerusalem.

It's rather ironic when you think about it and for a ruler who is so appreciative of warnings, that he would silence the warning of his conscience, the warning of John the Baptist. He silenced the prophetic Word when the prophetic Word was sent to activate his conscience. When the warnings came about spiritual danger, about spiritual devastation and destruction, Herod chose to silence the messenger. He put him in the dungeon of the very castle that it was erected to a warn him of danger.

Perhaps that's why the people, as Josephus tells us, when the Nabatean king Aretas finally did attack, Herod Antipas. This

is after the death of John the Baptist after the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection and those events. But when Aretas finally did attack Herod Antipas, and Antipas's forces suffered a devastating defeat. Through a series of events led to Antipas's eventual demise, his fall from power, his banishment and exile at the hands of Caligula, the Emperor. And both Herod Antipas and Herodias died together in exile in Gaul.

The people knew, as Josephus says beyond any doubt, that this was the judgment of God upon the wickedness of Herod Antipas, because of what he did to John the Baptist. But what led to the demise of Herod Antipas? You need to understand it wasn't political intrigue. It wasn't defeat in battle. What led to his demise was way more basic than that. Herod Antipas suffered a fundamental spiritual problem that led to his downfall.

Turn back now to Luke 9:7. Let's get the rest of the story. We'll look at point two. The cause of Herod's perplexity. The cause of Herod's perplexity this is point two in your outline. Simply stated, the cause of Herod's state of mind, his

perplexity, his continued mind dominating perplexity, was a defiled conscience. Herod had dulled and ignored and damaged and ultimately silenced his conscience. And as we read, and read in verses 7 and 9, it created a profound perplexity in him, a deep and abiding consternation, a continuing vacillating confusion about the true identity of Jesus Christ.

I'm going to give you, as you can see in your outline there, I'm gonna give you a few sub points to illustrate the cause of Herod's perplexity, which is going to walk us through the text. You can just fill in those blanks in your outline and your bulletins as we walk through versus 7 to 9. Let me give you a sub-point A. Sub-point A. Dulling the conscience causes internal confusion. Dulling the conscience causes internal confusion. Verse 7, "Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead." Okay, so in the flow of Luke's Gospel. That's the first hint Luke gives us that John is dead. Before this, we didn't know that we just left, he was left in prison, chapter 3. Chapter 7, he sent emissaries from his prison cell, asking, "Are you the Christ?" And he gets his answer from Jesus, this affirmation. Now we find out he's dead?

It's a fact that's confirmed in verse 9 by Herod's own testimony. Notice it was said by some that John was resurrected from the dead. In fact, Herod's evil deeds are well known. His murder is well known. This is a man who has spent his life dulling his conscience with sin, and a lot of sin. Herod Antipas was prideful to the core. He was ambitious and greedy. He's corrupt and unjust. He's immoral, lascivious, and as we just read, he counted murder, get this, he counted murder as a lesser crime than breaking a rash promise to a teenage girl.

Perhaps a better way to state that, Herod Antipas had vowed to give Salome whatever she wanted, namely up to half of his kingdom. He had in his power to give her exactly that. Whatever was his to give but listen, the head of John the Baptist was not his to give. Herod ought to have rebuked his stepdaughter's request. In the presence of all his guests, because they all knew John was righteous and a holy man. More than that John's a prophet of God and he bore the marks of divine ownership, of divine commission. How dare he. Herod's real crime is that he did not fear God. He feared man.

He wanted peace with his wife and he wanted the respect of the guests. He's not thinking clearly because he dulled his conscience. His internal sense of morality is completely confused. Sub-point B in your outline. Ignoring the conscience cultivates impotent speculation. Sub-point B, ignoring the conscience cultivates impotent speculation. Or you could jot it down this way. Empty speculation. Fruitless, vain speculation. All those words will work. He was perplexed, verse 7, "Because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had arisen." We know where the first idea came from. Popular level, and everyone saw the depth of Herod's wickedness and executing not just, not just an innocent man, but, this one whom everyone regarded as a true prophet.

Even Josephus, he's not in any way considered a faithful, fastidious Jew, but even Josephus acknowledged John the Baptist as a prophet. And recorded the popular view that Herod's downfall was a judgment on God, or from God on his treachery against John. But some others said that Elijah had appeared. Notice the change in verb. It's not raised from the dead like

the other two verbs. Elijah never died, right? God transported him to heaven, second Kings 2:11, in a whirlwind, chariots of fire. He never experienced death.

Still others believed, spread rumors, the power of Jesus and the apostles is evidence that one of the prophets of old had arisen. Perhaps, Jeremiah, that was some proposed that, Matthew 16:14, fulfilling the prophecy of Moses from Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord Your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers, it's to him you shall listen." That's what Moses said.

Different opinions. Herod's tied up in his mind. He's listening to all these different opinions. He's unable here to come to a conclusion. It's all though, it's all speculation for him, it's speculative. There's nothing but impotent, vain, utterly fruitless pondering and speculation. His wheels are turning but getting him nowhere. Why? How so? Because all those suggestions, all those opinions, all those speculations about the identity of Jesus, all those thoughts about the nature and the power of his ministry. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the

ancient prophets, fulfilling Deuteronomy 18:15; all those views, they held one thing in common, Messianic fulfillment.

That's the thread that ties all those views together. Everybody knows this is a sign of Messianic fulfillment. They're off base, they're off target with who he really is, but Messianic fulfillment is in the air, everybody's thinking about that. So for Herod to listen to all those opinions and then totally miss the importance of what's happening. Ignoring his conscience for so long, disregarding the protests of his offended conscience for so many years, when it time, came time to think clearly, precisely, biblically, he could not. He'd been dulling his conscience, he'd been ignoring his conscience, and all along he'd been damaging his conscience. That's sub-point C. Damaging the conscience clouds divine illumination. Sub-point C, damaging the conscience clouds divine illumination. Look at verse 9, "Herod said 'John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?'"

What's the evidence of a damaged conscience? Here's some evidence it doesn't fire when it ought to fire. The fact that

Herod can make that statement, make that admission, and not be stricken to the core with guilt and shame over his murder of John the Baptist. He's completely moved past that point. It's just like, yeah, the other day, you know, I gathered some taxes, had a feast, had a few friends over, beheaded John the Baptist, got the mail. You know, he's just he's just moved on.

It's as if this is insignificant in comparison to satisfying this curiosity he has. This is manifest proof that his conscience isn't working properly. It's damaged. It's affecting his ability to see what is so clear and obvious. God sent forth the Messiah, but first God sent John the Baptist, the forerunner who came, to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, Luke 3:3.

John was very clear, Luke 3:16 to 17 he says, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming. The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, to gather the wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." John

had been saying this over and over and over again. There is a division coming. There is a separation coming. There is Holy Spirit baptism, yay wonderful. Holy Spirit falling from heaven. Bless us all, and there's a Holy Spirit, oh there's another baptism, baptism of fire, of judgment.

Such clarity, such power in John's message. And get this God allowed Herod Antipas a personal audience. A frequent audience with this prophet. Crystal clear illumination is before him, such as very few in history have had the privilege. And Herod's dull, disregarded, damaged conscience is not gonna allow him to discern that this Jesus, this is the one, that John has been telling him all about. Yet notice, Herod's conscience isn't completely gone. It's not damaged beyond total repair. You can see evidence of that in this fact, of the three options, John, Elijah, or some nondescript prophet. Which opinion did Herod wrestle with the most? The one that most plagued his conscience?

One more, dulling the conscience causes internal confusion. Ignoring the conscience cultivates impotent speculation. Damaging the conscience clouds divine illumination, and finally,

sub-point D, silencing the conscience culminates in murderous disposition. Silencing the conscience culminates in murderous disposition. Look at verse 9 again, "Herod said 'John I beheaded but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought," or he was seeking, "to see him." The final disposition here, the final settlement of the question about Jesus' identity, it's hinted at, at least for Herod, in that sentence, and he sought to see him, that is significant.

Twice it tells us here in the text that Herod heard something. Back in verse 7 Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening. And here in verse 9 he asked, "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" And now Herod is at the point where he believes, "I've heard enough, now I need to see." Herod didn't need to see anything. He'd really heard all he needed to hear. He heard everything that was necessary to come to a decision about Jesus Christ. Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, she had heard enough to follow Jesus as a faithful disciple. Manaean, his own lifelong friend, he'd heard enough to repent and believe, believe and be saved. Herod too, he didn't need to see. He needed to hear with a good and honest heart.

He'd heard enough. What he needed to hear, he heard enough to be saved. But he had not listened with the ears of faith. Herod had merely heard with his natural ears. He thought he had the measure of the man. He thought he understood the, the situation and the implications of what was happening all through his territory. So he's through using his natural ears. He thinks he's heard all he needs to hear. Now he wants to see with his natural eyes. He wants to see Jesus. He is seeking, the verb indicates again, a continuous desire, a continuing abiding interest, a seeking after. You know, by the grace of God, one last incredible privilege given to him, granted to him by God, Herod Antipas finally got his chance to see Jesus for himself.

Wanna to turn over there and look at it? It's in Luke 23. Luke 23 we'll just look at this quickly. This. Obviously getting toward the time, this is the crucifixion, this is the trial. We're entering the scene here as Jesus on trial before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea and Jerusalem. Some of the Jews told Pilate in this attempt to persuade him to execute the death sentence on Jesus. They said, "He stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." And then this in Luke 23:6 and following, "When Pilate heard this, he

asked whether the man was a Galilean, and when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jeru, Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him." There's the connection back to Luke 9.

Long desired to see him. Why? Because he had heard about him. Oh, but that's not enough for him to believe. "He was hoping to see some sign done by him." What does the Bible tell us about those who seek signs? Jews seek for signs, right? Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after signs." Impress me, Messiah? Show me something cool. Show me something I can believe in, and I'll consider whether or not to put my faith in you. That's how they thought.

So look at verse 9, Herod questioned him, "Herod questioned him at some length, but Jesus made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently accusing him, and Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him, then arraying him in splendid clothing. He sent him back to Pilate," and notice that little footnote there, "Herod and Pilate became

friends with each other that very day before this they had been in enmity with one another."

Interesting how opposition to Jesus makes former enemies, friends. So Herod got his wish. He was able to see Jesus. Proving that he belonged to an evil and adulterous generation, one that seeks for a sign. Herod sought a sign; his ears failed him, his eyes didn't see what he wanted to see. Such a sad, sad story of tragedy. He was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39. That means that Herod Antipas watched the entire story of Christianity take shape right in front of his eyes. He saw everything. Heard the reports, was taught directly by John, and he saw Jesus for himself.

Commentator James Edwards offered this insight, "Had Antipas desired to hear Jesus? Perhaps a seed might have been planted that could have led to faith," Luke 8:4 to 15. "But he hankers for a spectacle, and if Jesus will not provide one, Antipas will provide one himself by mocking Jesus. Those who require a spectacle eventually make Jesus into their own liking, and they will both mock and hate what they have made."

If you ponder that for a little while, you'll see how insightful that comment really is, because that's the result here. The murderous disposition for all those who spend their lives dulling, neglecting, damaging, and silencing their consciences. By sinning against the conscience, people turn friends into enemies, turn enemies into friends. They end up destroying the only one who can save them, as Herod did. Listen, we want to let that lesson sink in a bit, because sinning against conscience can have such devastating results.

Let's hurry to third point. The cure for Herod's perplexity. The cure for Herod's perplexity. For a non-Christian like Herod, sinning against conscience will ultimately lead, unless there's repentance and salvation, it will ultimately lead to eternal destruction. It'll lead to the forfeiture of the soul. Now for a Christian, though, the Lord will not let us fall away from salvation. But I have watched as Christians ignore the cry of their consciences. And with sadness, I've seen devastating effects in their lives, in holiness, in relationships, or even both. For some, it's led to shipwreck in the faith.

The Spirit of God applies pressure. We are wise to humble ourselves and repent, and repent quickly, when our conscience cries out. But I've seen some people, even Christian people, who refuse to deal with the nagging conscience. Instead, they run away from what's troubling them, and they try to ignore the pangs of conscience. Pride sets in. We dig our heels in deeply. We refused to budge. That's neither wise nor healthy, and it can be very destructive.

After warning people to listen to the Word, to heed its warnings and its exhortations, Jesus said this, giving this important instruction in Luke 11:33 to 36, "No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. When it's bad, your body is full of darkness." The eye here represents the conscience, the mind, the judgment. Jesus says, "Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

Here is one summary encouragement to you, beloved. Don't darken your conscience. Pay very careful to be receptor of light, the eyes of your soul. Make sure your conscience is clear. And do that often. Be very attentive and regular in cleaning the windows of your soul so that as much light of God can, as possible, can shine through the windows of your soul.

Listen, that's the goal of our instruction, right? First, Timothy 1:5, "Love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Let me give you several points that really correspond to what we've just read. Number one, first, don't dull your conscience. Don't dull your conscience; Sharpen it, inform it, educate it, teach it. Repeated exposure to God's Word, regular instruction in God's Word, that helps to make sure you don't dull your conscience, you educate it and keep it informed.

Second, don't ignore your conscience. Number two, don't ignore your conscience. Having educated it, listen to it. Having informed it with God's Word, instructed or or listened to it,

heed it. Humble yourself before God. This is really the issue. It's an issue of humility and pride. Pride keeps us fixed on our own opinions; humility causes us to bow before the Word of God. To bow before the conviction of conscience, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It means, you need to ignore idle, empty speculation and listen to the single voice of wisdom, it's God's voice in Scripture.

Third, don't damage your conscience. And don't damage it through repeated dulling and ignoring of it. Don't damage your conscience. Strengthen your conscience, yes, through repeated regular education in the Word of God, but also strengthen your conscience by heeding the warnings, by listening to the promptings of your conscience. If you cultivate a healthy conscience, unlike Herod, you will be clear minded to respond to divine illumination when it's brought to you by the Spirit of God and the Word of God and the preaching of the Word and the teaching of the Word.

Finally number four, don't silence your conscience. Don't silence your conscience. Instead, turn up the volume. You want

your conscience firing at a level ten. You almost want the cries of conscience to deafen you, they're so loud. A healthy, well informed, active conscience it's your safeguard against flagrant sin. Someone with an educated, well headed, strong conscience. Rather than looking for that next spectacle, he quiets himself before God, he listens carefully to the Word of God, and he walks in the happiness of holiness.

What does an educated, sharp, active conscience tell us? What does it say to us? First it tells us God is absolutely holy and we're defiled with sin. Tells us there's "no one righteous, not even one that all of sin and fall short of the glory of God." What does the conscience tell us? Active, sharp, loud. Number two it tells us we cannot cleanse ourselves from our own sin. We've served sin, sin pays wages. There's a paycheck coming. The wages of sin is death. The paycheck is truly in the mail.

What does conscience tell us when it's loud and active? It tells us, third, that by the grace of God, by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, by faith in nothing at all in

ourselves. It tells us that by faith in him the punishment of our sin is absorbed, the wrath of God meted out against him is sufficient to forgive us. Tells us that in him the glory of God is attained and attained perfectly. It tells us that as Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, pleasing God completely, if we're found in him, we'll be found pleasing God in all righteousness. It's not a righteousness of our own, but one that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

So what does a sharpened, educated, informed, loud crying out conscience tell us? God's holy; we're sinful. We can't cleanse ourselves from our own sin. But by the grace of God, by faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work, all of our sin can be forgiven completely and wiped away. Not only that, but every single point, smallest point, a jot and a tittle of righteousness is fulfilled in us by faith in Jesus Christ because he fulfilled all righteousness.

And lastly, what is an informed, sharpened, educated, loud conscience tell us? Fourth, "that all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our

behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”
Tells us that full and final salvation, complete, sufficient,
perfect in every way is ours, if we'll repent and believe.

Also tells us though that all who refuse to repent and
believe, they will share the fate of Herod Antipas. They'll
share the fate of wicked Herodias. They'll share the fate of all
who dull and ignore and damage and silence the conscience. They
will suffer eternal death is the final sentence in the Lake of
Fire. May God awaken consciences now to saving and sanctifying
effect. Amen? Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you so much for the lesson and such a
costly lesson it was. But the lessened, the lesson of Herod
Antipas and Herodias and Salome. We thank you for teaching us
through the sins and the hard heartedness of others. The pride
and the arrogance, the unwillingness to humble self and repent,
unwillingness to deny self; we thank you that we can learn
through those lessons. Looking down on the pages of Scripture to
see your holy Word speak so clearly, firmly, in black and white.
We pray that you would soften all of our hearts.

For some in here, we pray that it would lead to salvation. That initial repentance that leads to life. That they would find saving grace in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And never fear you again in a craven fear way, but fear you instead with holy reverence and awe. Knowing that you are the God who could have condemned them to hell and cast them forever away, but you've turned into the God who now is Father and Savior and friend.

We pray for those of us who, who do know your saving grace and that initial repentance unto salvation. We pray, Lord, that you would not let us fall into the rut of a hardened heart. That we would not have a, a damaged conscience, but you would help us to educate our conscience through your Word, to listen to the promptings of your Word and your Spirit to listen to an active, loud conscience.

And that by your grace, you'd sanctify us to your pleasure, to the, to holiness that pleases you. And really, to broadcast to a watching world a testimony of a transformed life. We love



you. We thank you for what we learned this morning. Please use it to good effect for your glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, amen.