

How Herod Lost His Soul

by H. A. Ironside

"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. " (Acts 4:27-28).

The names of Herod and Pontius Pilate are intimately linked together in the mock trial of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost mentions them in one verse in the book of Acts. God permitted them to go only as far as He Himself had predetermined, but their names are

Joined in Eternal Infamy.

They both had marvellous opportunities, such as possibly few men ever had, of meeting the Lord Jesus Christ face to face, and yet they lost their souls. Of Herod we read in the sixth chapter of Mark, verse 20, "For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." That certainly sounds encouraging, and yet the last record we have in Holy Scripture of that man is given in Luke 23:7-12;

"And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long *season*, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked *him*, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

The casual reader of the New Testament generally has some difficulty in distinguishing between

The Various Herods

who are mentioned in the records. The Herod who issued the decree to destroy the young children of Bethlehem, was an altogether different Herod from this one. That was Herod the Great. He died about the year

that our Lord was born, very shortly after the slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem. He was a monster of iniquity. Augustus Caesar said of him, after hearing of the slaughter of Herod's own sons at the command of their cruel father, "Better to be Herod's hog than Herod's son."

The early Christians had a tradition, which may or may not be true, that when that fatal command went forth to destroy all the male children of Bethlehem two years of age and under, in the hope of destroying the Lord Jesus Christ who was looked upon as a possible rival to the throne, the soldiers did their dreadful business so well that they slew Herod's favourite grandson, the only child that monster loved. He passed off the scene, and this Herod, of whom we are speaking, was one of his sons. His name was Herod Antipas. He is not the same Herod as the one of whom we read in Acts who was saluted as a god, and then was eaten by worms. That was Herod Agrippa I. The Agrippa before whom the Apostle Paul presented the Gospel message was a son of this man.

The Herod of the Gospels

The Herod about whom we are concerned reigned over Galilee and Perea from B.C. 4 when his father, Herod the Great, died, until A.D. 29 when he passed away in great wretchedness and misery upon being banished to Gaul by Caesar, the sovereign whom he served. This is the one who occupies so large a place in the Gospels. There was a time when this man seemed to have a measure of concern about holy things.

We read in Mark's Gospel that when John the Baptist began his ministry, when he came preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of sins, and men were flocking to hear him, Herod became interested, so interested that from time to time he sent for him, and asked him to give him the same message that he was giving to the people. He listened evidently with an exercised heart. No doubt many a time as John presented his solemn message, Herod said to himself, "Yes, yes, this man is right; I am all wrong. I ought to yield to God; I ought to get right with Him; I ought to turn to Him in repentance; I am a sinner, and my sins deserve judgment, and I ought to cast myself upon the infinite mercy of God acknowledging my guilt." But Herod listened again and again, as some of you have listened again and again to the message of the Lord, and, instead of that message making his heart more tender, and eventually resulting in his yielding to the call of God, the more he listened the harder his heart became. You have heard of people becoming what we call "Gospel-hardened." That is, they listen to the message from Heaven so frequently, and yet treat it with

such indifference that the time comes when it no longer makes any impression upon them. Generally there is a reason for that.

I was very much impressed by a remark that Mr. Melvin Trotter, made recently. He said, "In the last analysis there is always just one sin that keeps a man from getting right with God." What was the one sin that kept Herod from getting right with God? It was a sin that has damned untold thousands, a sin of which, perhaps, many of you are guilty, a sin, which if not repented of, will destroy both body and soul. It was the sin of impurity.

Herod and Herodias

Herod was a licentious, an immoral, an impure man. It was manifested in many ways, but particularly in this: when he was a young prince in Rome, where he had gone to be confirmed in his kingdom by Augustus Caesar, he met his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and she was not only the wife of his brother, Philip, but she was also his own niece. She was a very beautiful, a very attractive woman, and Herod allowed his heart to go out after her in an impure way. As far as the records go, she was a faithful wife to her own husband at that time, but Herod seduced her, and took her away from her husband, sent his own wife home to her father, the king of Arabia, desolate, and took Herodias to be his mistress when he came back to Galilee to reign.

When John the Baptist stood before him preaching righteousness, and calling to repentance, Herodias sat there on the throne beside him, and Herod knew that if he would ever get right with God, he would have to send home this woman, with whom he was living in such an ungodly relationship, but he had not the manhood, the courage, and the real inward desire to do it, because he was bound by the chains of his own lusts.

Oh, how many men down through the centuries have been ruined in the same way. John the Baptist was aware of the real trouble; he knew why his words made so little impression upon Herod, and so one day as he came into the presence of this haughty tetrarch, John pointed the accusing finger at Herod and said, "You have no right to have her; she is the wife of another man. You are sinning against God; you are sinning against her; you are sinning against her husband; you are sinning against society; you are sinning against your own soul in going on in this unholy relationship. "What was the result? Herodias flamed with anger. She said, "That man is accusing me in accusing Herod. If Herod is a sinner, I too am a sinner. If Herod is doing wrong, I am doing wrong, and I won't allow any man to accuse me in this way

without having my revenge on him."

So powerful was the influence of this woman, that she persuaded Herod, who had become as putty in her hands, to lay hold on John, and to cast him into prison—in prison for telling the truth! Herod knew John told the truth; Herod knew he was wrong; he knew he was guilty; but he was a coward, and was bound by the chains of his lust, and his impurity kept him out of Heaven. What sin is it that stands between you and the salvation of your soul? What sin is it that keeps you from saying to God,

"Nay, but I yield, I yield,
I can hold out no more;
I sink by dying love compelled,
And own Thee conqueror."

You know the sin of impurity is everywhere to-day. It is like

A Festering Sore in Society.

With all their outward veneer of culture and politeness and social etiquette, these days are as rotten and filthy in the sight of God as the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, or as the days before the Flood; and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has told us, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26). We are living in just such times as described. If you are one who is bound by the chains of impurity, whatever form those chains may take, God help you to come to the place where you will acknowledge your sin, and seek deliverance before you find at last that you are ruined body and soul and spirit, and lost for eternity.

Herod's Birthday Tragedy

One wrong step easily leads to another, if not repented of. Herod found this out. The sin of impurity led to the sin of rejecting the Word of God, imprisoning the servant of God, and at last of murdering him. Then you remember that solemn incident given in the fourteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, and again in the sixth chapter of Mark. I will read from Matthew: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus." Some years had gone by; Jesus had come forth from the seclusion of that little home in Nazareth. He was going up and down the country preaching the Kingdom of God accredited by the marvellous signs that proclaimed His Messiahship. Herod heard of Him, and at once his conscience became uneasy.

Something had happened. John had been put to death, and that in the

most cruel way, and Herod said, when he heard of Jesus, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and, therefore, mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. . . . And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, "Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger." And the king was sorry.

He realised he had been put in a tight place. He was carried away by his admiration of this flippant little godless butterfly who had been dancing before him and his court. He had made the promise without thinking what it might involve. He had said, "Tell me what you want as a reward," and she said, "Mother, for what shall I ask?"

This was the hour for which Herodias had waited; now was the time to get revenge on the man who had told her the truth, who had unmasked the iniquity of her life, and Herod's life. And she whispered, "Tell him to have the head of John the Baptist cut off, and presented on a charger"—really, on a dinner-plate. She asked for it as for a mere trifle.

For a moment

Herod Was Terrified;

again his conscience was awakened, and he said, "Whatever shall I do? " But for his oath's sake, and because of those that sat around, he said, "I will have to carry it out." What a contemptible character, afraid to come out and say, "No, I have made a tremendous mistake, a fearfully wicked blunder, and cannot carry out such a vile oath." Instead he said, "I cannot have these people think I say one thing and do another. No matter what Almighty God thinks, I shall have to keep my face before these people," and so he sent for the executioner, and had John the Baptist beheaded, and his head brought on a charger to the daughter of Herodias; she brought it to her mother.

Can you imagine anything more gruesome? Does it not show what she really was? Here was this little frivolous doll, who could spend her time dancing before this crowd, and you would think that she was so dainty that the very sight of blood would fill her with disgust. Yet she comes to her mother bearing the bloody head of the preacher of the Word of God.

You can understand the feeling of Spurgeon when someone asked him, "Do you think there is any harm in dancing?" He answered, "What a question to ask a Baptist minister when the first Baptist minister had his head danced off!"

Oh, the vileness of it! I can imagine how Herodias gloated over it, and said to herself as she looked at those cold, silent lips, "They will never accuse me again; they will never again say to me, 'You are living in impurity;' they will never again charge me with my sin." She forgot that she was going to face that man some day at the Judgment bar of God.

I think I see Herodias as she stands before that

Last Great Tribunal;

and I see John the Baptist there with his blessed Lord; as she comes before that throne, suddenly her eyes get sight of him, and she shrieks, "Let me get away into the darkness; anywhere from those accusing eyes. That man who dared to stand before Herod, and me, and say, 'You have sinned,' and I thought I was rid of him, and that I would never see him again, but there he is! Hell itself will be a refuge if it will only hide me from that face!" But she has to endure the consequences of her sin eternally!

Follow Herod's history, and you will find that he sinks lower and lower into iniquity. When Jesus was warning His disciples of the vile corruptions of the times, He said, "Take heed, beware of

The Leaven of Herod."

What was the leaven of Herod? It was corruption of the worst kind, corruption that would destroy society, that would gloss over the vilest iniquity as though it were something not worthy of divine disapproval.

Herod was the only man of whom Jesus ever used a sarcastic epithet. He was drawing near to Jerusalem for the last time. His disciples had said, "Do not go down to Jerusalem, Herod is there, and he will seek to kill you." But Jesus said, "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke 13:32). That is the only time Jesus ever used an epithet like that about anybody. "Go ye, and tell **that fox.**" He was a shifty, cruel character, past description.

When the Saviour stood before Pilate, and the Roman governor wanted to get rid of the responsibility of giving sentence concerning Him, he

overheard somebody remark that He was from Galilee, and like a drowning man, clutching at a straw, he said, "From Galilee? I hear the tetrarch from Galilee is in the city.

He and I are enemies, but this may be a good opportunity to make up with him. I will recognise him, because this man comes from Galilee."

So the guard took Christ to Herod and when Herod saw him, there was a little of that old-time quiver that was in his heart when he listened to John. One more opportunity had been vouchsafed to him to get right, and we read, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad." It was as though he said, "Now, this is the one I have been so afraid of. I thought it was John the Baptist, but if it were he, I would have heard from him before now. I would like to see Him do some great miracle."

Christ Silent Before Herod

And we read, "He questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing." Can you not visualise the scene? The vile, voluptuous, licentious, corrupt tetrarch of Galilee sitting upon his throne, and standing before him the blessed Christ of God! And Herod said, "Why, I am glad to see you; I wonder if you cannot answer some questions for me." He put question after question, but Jesus did not even open His lips; He gave no reply. What did it mean? Did not Jesus care for this man's soul? Was He not as ready to help him as He was to help others? This man had lost his soul; he was as good as checked for Hell. He had sinned against light and knowledge until now there was no possibility of bringing him to repentance, and so Christ met each question in absolute silence.

Had Herod said to Jesus, "Master, I am so glad to see You. They tell me You consort with publicans and sinners, and O Master, if there is a sinner in this land, I am he. So filthy, so impure, so immoral, so unclean; Master, is there healing, is there cleansing, is there help for a sinner like me?"

Jesus would have said, "Herod, I have come, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. You are just the man I came to save. Are you ready to part with your sin? Are you ready to send that wicked woman back to her home? Are you ready to confess your guilt to her husband, to face your iniquity? If you are, Herod, let me tell you something. I am just on My way to the Cross, and there I am going to offer myself a Sacrifice for your sin, and you may be cleansed from every stain." Yes, He would have had a message like that for Herod if there had been any repentance. But Herod had

Gone by Redemption Point

in the river of life, so hardened was he in his sins. So when there was no answer, Herod turned carelessly away. "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him." And then Herod joined in actual persecution, and "with his men of war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate."

That is the last Herod had to do with Jesus until the Day when he stands before the Great White Throne! There he will see sitting upon that Throne in awful majesty, the very Man that once stood before him in Jerusalem, the One who could have saved him, the One who could have cleansed him, if he had only been in earnest, if he had only repented, if he had truly desired deliverance from his sin. But alas! alas! Herod will have to hear from the lips of the Son of God, the awful sentence, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

"Just One Sin"

Friend, do you realise what an easy thing it is to lose your soul? Just cling *to one sin*; just let *one sin* come between you and God. Possibly some one is saying, "But you mistake the nature of your audience if you think we would stoop to the sin of which Herod was guilty." Very well, if you know that to be true, if you know that you have never been guilty of these things, never stooped to these things, what other sin is it that is standing between you and your God?

When the Word of God is brought home in power to your soul, and you hear a voice within saying, "*Now* is the accepted time; behold *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2), and conscience says, "Yes, I ought to yield to God," what is it that rises before you, and you say, "Oh, *but—but*—if I become a Christian, I cannot go on with that; I cannot do that any more; I will have to give that up, and I am not prepared for that." You love that sin more than Christ; you love your sin more than a place in Heaven, and, therefore, you will have to sink with your sin into outer darkness, unless God in mercy still gives you repentance.

"Often He has called thee
To accept salvation,
Often He has waited
At thy heart's closed door;
Outside still He's standing;
Now His Spirit's striving.
Will you heed His knocking,

Let Him in to-day?

"Pardon's day is passing,
See the light is going,
Heaven's doors are closing,
Mercy will be gone.
Thy soul's chance is flying,
Soon thou wilt be dying;
Saints of God are crying,
'Oh, be saved to-day!'"

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