

Sufferings Of Guilt

As we continue to study these precious words here in this Book of Luke, I am reminded that within all the busy headlong rush of the activities of daily life, we too often and too easily accept the world's explanations for the things that take place.

We forget that God is sovereign in all the activities of life. And we forget that He reaches His Hand into all the matters that are taking place as we go through our day. And by our forgetting about Him, we join with the world in all its foolish assumptions about all those matters, especially the assumption that all those things that are taking place are just random occurrences, brought about solely by the random free-will behaviors of people.

An example that I have given on other occasions, but that I'd like to give us again today is one that is given by one of my favorite bible teachers, R. C. Sproul. Sproul refers to such assumptions as believing that there are just some random "maverick molecules" always floating around out there in the air we breathe, randomly bumping into other maverick molecules causing each of the things of life to take place. Just random acts of nature, without purpose and with no one controlling any of it. "Things just happen!"

May I ask? Do you find yourself believing much the same, that the things that are happening to you are just random?

May I say that I agree with R.C. Sproul and I assure us that there is no such thing as a "maverick molecule". Everything in existence is under some form of control, and God is at the helm of that control.

So then, a question. What do these thoughts have to do with the scripture passage that I will read for us in a moment?

It's this. Not only are the things that take place all around us each day subject to the sovereign plans and control of God, even our very thoughts and our emotions are influenced and prompted within His sovereign control.

Here, within these few words of our scripture passage, we find the simple emotion of "guilt" doing a special kind of work within the mind and the soul of

this very heathen King Herod. It was as Jesus would say in John chapter 16, regarding the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit . . .

⁸ . . . when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

Here in today's passage, we see where the Holy Spirit was already at work, beginning His preparatory work of conviction of sins. Let's stop for a moment and listen in on King Herod's thought processes. This is Luke chapter 9, beginning with verse 7

⁷Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Jesus; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, ⁸and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. ⁹Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" So, he sought to see Him. (Luke 9:7-9)

It seems that King Herod had been hearing about the many activities of the Lord Jesus, because as Jesus went about the towns and country sides healing the sick and casting out demons, His ministry often drew the uncomfortable attention of the local leaders.

And so, here in our text, we read that King Herod, the local governmental ruler had been hearing reports about Jesus and he wanted to meet Him, and not because he wanted to hear the gospel, but because he was "perplexed". Something within Herod's soul was telling him to be concerned about this man Jesus, but he didn't know what it was or why it was happening.

These words, though they be only scattered thoughts in the mind of Herod, reveal some deeply hidden fears and convictions that were trying to work their way to the surface so that Herod could deal with them. But unfortunately for him, it does not seem that he took his thoughts much further.

But Herod surely did have good reason to be concerned. His behavior was finding him out. Although Herod was of Jewish birth and very knowledgeable of the laws of the Jewish faith, his behavior showed him to be of a reprobate character and he had done reprobate things.

And also, though Herod was not in the kingly lineage of David, under the provisional allowances of the Roman conquerors, Herod had been placed in this role as king over a portion of the local people of Israel.

His authority, while sometimes tenuous under the Roman oversight, actually allowed him a great deal of freedom to manage the daily affairs of his kingdom, even to the judgment and execution of those people he had deemed to merit that penalty. And that had been so with John the Baptist.

Herod, being the arrogant man that he was, could take whatever he wanted for his own. And sometime earlier, he had callously taken his own brother's wife, Herodias to be his own wife.

John the Baptist, being strong in character and conviction, had not hesitated to bring public condemnation upon Herod for his flagrant immorality.

Why did John do that? We don't know all of the reasons why, but as we said a moment ago, God truly is sovereign and He inserts His hand into all the activities of life, and this was one of them. And perhaps one of the reasons God intervened was to also bring conviction to the church leaders of that area, because it should have been them who held their King accountable for his sins.

But because of fear or some other similar reasons, the church leaders had failed in their responsibilities, leaving John to stand alone in his condemnation of Herod.

In his anger towards John, Herod had John arrested and eventually killed, beheaded as a depraved form of gift to his wife and daughter. Listen to that account. This is given to us in Matthew chapter 14,

³ . . . Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. ⁴Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

⁶But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

⁸So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."

⁹And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. ¹⁰So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. ¹¹And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. (Matthew 14:3-11)

How vile and vulgar a thing for Herod to do, to so frivolously have a man beheaded just to fulfill some lust crazed utterance.

Folks, we can be sure, God will never allow such vile acts to go without retribution, both in this life and in the life to come. But He is also generous, even to the vilest of sinners. He does not desire that anyone should perish, even one so vile as Herod who would so thoughtlessly and foolishly take away the life and ministry of one so important to God's plan of salvation.

Let me pause here for a moment and remind us again that none of this was a surprise to God. God was involved from the beginning. And God knows the hearts of men, even the vilest and most wicked of men.

And yes, John the Baptist was a precious and valuable link in the presentation of the gospel. His message was the first part of salvation, the proclamation that we are desperate sinners in need of repentance.

And, no doubt, that was John's specific message to Herod for the sin of stealing his brother's wife from him. John was God's messenger to Herod to bring him to repentance for his sin.

But as so often takes place when we do not want to hear the truth of God, we "kill the messenger". Herod had John imprisoned for telling him the truth.

John's message had also been to Herodias, to bring her to conviction for her part in the sin, but she also rejected God's message. And between the two of them, Herod and Herodias, using what was probably a sinful form of dancing, brought Herod's mind and emotions into such a vile state that he recklessly took away the life of God's faithful servant John.

Before I move on from this, I would also like to acknowledge the constant presence and power of satan, the evil one, because he ever and always has a controlling part in such matters as this. According to the warnings given to us in

Ephesians chapter 6, satan and his demons were working in the minds and hearts and bodies of each of the people involved, Herod, Herodias and Herodias' daughter.

And now, here sometime later, the memories of those vile and vulgar acts and behaviors were stirring within Herod's soul bringing him guilt and fear.

And here too, we can see that Herod was aware that his sin could reach beyond the simple accountability of earthly retribution, on into another realm beyond the confines of this world, into that realm where people who die from this life go to be.

And these words imply that Herod believed that people could come back from that realm to exact vengeance for the foul deeds done against them. Listen again!

⁷ . . . Herod was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, ⁸and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. ⁹Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9:7-9)

Folks, this was "guilt" rising to the surface and doing its work in the heart of Herod. Guilt is such a useful instrument in the hands of God. If received in the right way, guilt can bring a person to repentance for the sins they commit. And also, if it is received in the right way, it has the ability to even reach past repentance and actually draw men into a relationship with Christ.

Notice the words here at the end of verse 9,

⁹Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" So he sought to see Him. (Luke 9:9)

Herod sought to see Jesus. This, most likely, was God's Holy Spirit drawing Herod to Jesus. God draws men and women to Himself, but unfortunately for us, He does not usually force us to come.

And unfortunately for Herod, there is no further indication in these scriptures that He ever saw Jesus, except for those few moments at Jesus' trial just before Jesus was crucified.

And that is sad, because as vile and awful as Herod was, God still wanted him to know the real truth about Jesus. Perhaps this moment of conviction, or perhaps at a time like it later was that moment when God no longer drew Herod to Himself; because there truly is a time when God will stop contending with the soul of a man or woman.

He tells us that in Genesis 6. There we are told

3 . . . the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever. (Genesis 6:3)

As we look carefully at Herod's life, it seems that he might have been getting so close to being so reprobate that God might not continue to contend with His soul. I'm reminded again of the warning given in Hebrews chapter 6. Listen!

⁴For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

There is no evidence that Herod ever got really close to believing in God, but though that may be true, these words pronounce the judgment that is given against all men. This is perhaps another way that God "shakes the dust off His garment" in judgment against sinful reprobates.

But folks, again, the emotional strain of guilt for sins we have committed is a useful instrument in the hands of God. It is simply one more way of reaching out to us to bring us to repentance and we really do need to listen for His "still small voice".

The question for you and me today is, "Is God doing the same thing with us , with you and me?" Are we possibly holding onto un-confessed sin? Sin, if left to remain within our hearts might bring us to a point of reprobation, a point where we will no longer recognize our sin as being something that is wrong?

That can happen folks. If we are truly saved, then our sin will not be of the kind that can take us into hell, but it may be sin of the kind that can displease the Lord and cause Him to withhold the pleasant peace that He wants to give to us.

In some ways unrepented sin is like many of our physical diseases. If it's left untreated, it is so infectious that it can grow and mal-effect other areas of our life. We can become depressed, or perhaps, even worse, we can become so calloused in our behaviors that sooner or later, God will cease to contend with us about our sinfulness. He will simply leave us to suffer our sufferings.

Does that sound wrong to say about God? No! God is generous, and yes, He will continue to contend with our souls about many of our sins. But some of those that we desire to keep, He will surely let them remain to do their work in us, sometimes leaving us without good health, or a broken family.

And some of us will barely get into heaven by the "skin of our teeth". Those words in 1 Corinthians 3,

¹³ . . . the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)

Folks, all throughout these scriptures, we can read where the Holy Spirit works through our conscience convicting us of sin and righteousness and judgment, guiding us away from those sins that seek to take control over us and urging us on to love and good works.

So, let me encourage you and me to let the God given guilt do its work in our souls. I pray that, as with Herod, fear of retribution from the realms of God, or whatever other form of anxiety that might be produced within us will take place and will lead us out of our sinful condition into repentance.

If you, if I begin to experience guilt and fear for sins that we are holding onto, God's plan of repentance is ready and available to us. We simply need to cry out to Him, asking Him to forgive us for our sins, and then turn from doing those sins anymore.

And folks, on some occasions, it might also be necessary for us to go back to other people and make amends and restitution for some of our sins. And if it is truly profitable to the Lord and to all those concerned, we should do that.

We need to seek the heart of God on all those matters and carefully follow the unction of His Holy Spirit.

But folks, we must understand that while some of our responses might be defined by our circumstances, “repentance” is not an option. If the Holy Spirit is reaching into our heart and convicting us of a sin, “repentance” is what God is requiring of us. And that will be so for every sin that we commit. We must never allow ourselves to live with unresolved guilt. Unresolved guilt will exact a heavy penalty upon our souls. We must immediately go to God with our sin. And if we will do that, He will surely forgive us! Listen carefully to this promise that God gives to us in 1 John 1. There He tells us

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (John 1:8-9)

Before we close, may we pause and take just a few more moments of quiet searching, asking God to look deeply into our souls, and to reveal to us any manner of sin that we have been holding onto, and to bring us to repentance for that sin. Please close your eyes and pray quietly to yourself, and then I'll close us in prayer.

Let's pray.