

The afraid sinner

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[0 : 00] that I've just had with the kids of phobias, of things, of fears, of things that we might be scared of. Because the reality is, as I said to the kids, the kids, as young ones, we have fears.

The reality is, so do adults. We all have fears, don't we? But sometimes those things are different. Adults might not fear the dark or something, but we do fear there's other things. We might fear illness, or we might fear losing loved ones.

We might fear a situation when we don't have enough money, or we might fear perhaps our kids not being happy. And some of those are genuine fears. They're real fears that we have.

But the reality is, just as I said to the kids, that we can allow our fears to control us. We can allow our fears to control us. What I mean by that is, we make decisions based on stopping our fears coming true.

We can make decisions based on stopping our fears coming true. And in this passage this morning, we meet a man, we meet a man who is full of fear.

[1 : 20] And more than that, he's not just full of fear, but he's controlled. His fears, he's got lots of fears, he's controlled by his fears. That man is Herod.

What we realise is that this man's life, who is, he's supposed to be the most powerful man in Israel, has fears at every corner. And that he's not really in control.

It's the illusion that he's in control. He likes to think that he is. He likes to think that he's all powerful, but actually he's controlled by his sin.

He's controlled by pleasing others. He's controlled by the love of fame, of prestige. And he's controlled by the fear of missing out on life's temporary pleasures. So I just want to look briefly at the three fears that we see in Herod's life.

The first thing that I want us to look at is that he's afraid of Jesus and John. He's afraid of Jesus and John. Now we know that news of the ministry of Jesus has started to spread.

[2 : 25] Last week you might remember that we looked at Jesus sending out the twelve apostles. And I can take it that what it means from that is that because they're working in his name, and they're doing ministry all over Israel, is the reason that his Jesus ministry has become more well known throughout the land.

But because of this ministry that's going about, there's become rumours of who this Jesus man is. Because it's the apostles and they're not all meeting Jesus face to face now, there's people doing ministry in his name.

There are rumours about who this Jesus man is. And we read the three. Some are saying that it's John the Baptist raised from the dead. There's some are saying that it's Elijah.

There's an old prophecy about Elijah that Elijah would return. And the third rumour is that this man Jesus is just like a prophet. He's just like an Old Testament prophet from before.

Verse 16, what we read is that Herod has heard these three rumours, and he picks the first one as the one that he thinks is right about this man. Verse 16, but when Herod heard this, he said, John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead.

[3 : 47] What is the option that Herod picks? He picks the one that is the most threatening for him personally. What he thinks is that John, whom he murdered, is back.

That it's Herod's mind, he's playing tricks on himself. That perhaps John's ghost, in the form of another man, is here to haunt him. Now, it might seem a bit far-fetched that that is what Herod believes.

The reason he believes that is, why is that? It's because he has a guilty conscience, and he believes, we presume, in retribution.

Ultimately, what Herod must think is that he deserves some sort of comeuppance for what he's done to John. Herod has a guilty conscience, and he's fearful of this man, Jesus. He's fearful of God. Faithful of God, not in a way that brings wise living, but in a way that is scared of recrimination. It's scared of God's judgment, because he knows that he deserves it for what he's done.

[4 : 53] But not in a good way. In a way that is scared of recrimination. That's fear number one. The second fear, Herod, is that Herod fears of missing out on what he's perceived as his best life.

He's scared of missing out on temporary pleasures. What we see is the second and third fears, which we'll look at, apparently, in Herod's life. They come in circumstances that surround John's murder.

Herod does have a high opinion of John. We know that. We know that he thinks that John is a man of God. We know that, verse 20, he feared John, protected him, anointed him to be righteous and holy, that he liked listening to him.

Nevertheless, verse 17, it's Herod that has him arrested and thrown into prison for telling him some whole truths. Herod had married his brother's wife, and John's saying, you know, you shouldn't be doing that, Herod.

When I say, John had been saying to Herod, it's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Now, we might think that John here is interfering in somebody's private life, but the reality is John's not doing this to Herod just to have a pop at him.

[6 : 04] He's not doing it just to stop his phone. But John is warning Herod for his own God in the hope that Herod might see sense and live as God intended.

He's saying, Herod, look, Pat, you shouldn't be marrying your brother's missus. You shouldn't be doing that. It's not right. The aim, what is John's aim in doing all this?

It is restoration. It is restoration. Unsurprisingly, Herod doesn't seem that way. John's embarrassing him, making a public spectacle, spectacle of his private life, curtailing his phone.

And Herod fears the repercussions of listening to John, of listening, of living God's way. That one, he'll miss out on his phone, he's having, and two, he'll lose his new wife.

Fears that he won't be able to have his cake and eat it. The fear is that if he follows God's way, he will miss out on the temporary pleasures, the temporary satisfaction, that sin promises.

[7 : 14] So two fears. The final fear for Herod is the fear of man, fear of losing his reputation. And what we see, Herod's, what do we see in the episode?

Herod is a complete food. Let's set the scene. It's Herod's birthday. Everyone who's anyone is invited. It's a big do. You can imagine the raucous affair, wine, champagne on tap, food of the highest quality, no expense spared, Herod's putting on a show.

He's saying to all the people he's invited, from the whole of Israel, we see that they've come all the way from Galilee. He's saying to them all, look how great I am. Look at how powerful a man I am, that I can put on such an amazing show.

And after perhaps a few too many, he wants Herod's daughter to dance for him, highly suggestible. And he makes the foolish promise, verse 22. The king said to the girl, ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.

And he promised her with an oath, whatever you ask, I'll give up, I'll give you up to half my kingdom. It's just a phrase, a way of speaking, that what he's really saying is, to Herod's daughter, ask for anything.

[8 : 21] I'm the king. I can give it to you. The daughter we know confers with her mother, and they conspire to ask for John the Baptist's head. The Herodias is obviously still irked at the judgment that John pronounced earlier.

They ask for it right now, so that Herod can't change his mind. And it is the faint man, fear of losing reputation, because Herod does not want to do this.

He doesn't want to. Verse 26, the king was greatly distressed, because, but because of his, this is the reason why, because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse it.

Herod knows what he's about to do is wrong, but he fears the opinions of his guests more than he fears God. He fears the loss of reputation. He wants to be known as the big man with all the power. He just said he'd give this girl anything she wants, and now he can't do it. What kind of a king is that? What do we, and what we realise from this fear of man, is that Herod's not actually powerful.

[9 : 27] He's controlled by the opinions of the crowd. Three fears in Herod. Fear of John's retribution, which is actually fearing God's judgment, because he has a guilty conscience.

Fearing the loss of temporary pleasure, of living his best life, of losing his wife that he shouldn't have married. And then finally fearing man, fearing the loss of reputation among the men who's invited to his party.

Herod's not powerful. He's controlled by his fears. It is his fears that direct his actions and his life, and he makes terrible, foolish choices. He's like a dog on a lead.

You know, a dog on a lead is controlled by the owners. Can't run where it wants. Herod is controlled by his fears. His fears are like a lead around his neck, like a dog, that are pulling him where he should go.

He thinks he's in charge. You know, you see the aggressive dog that's pulling on the lead, that thinks it's the one in charge. No, no. The owner's in charge, leading the dog.

[10 : 35] Herod's like a dog on a lead. And the lead, and the one who's in charge, is his fears. Now, don't get me wrong, all the fears in Herod, they're all different, but what's common to all of them, like we've said, is that they are directing Herod's actions.

Fears of this sort is what takes people away from living as God intended. At its most severe, it causes people to reject God, to reject Jesus, and to reject people who are associated with him. Herod gains the world. He gains the world, but he loses his soul. And whilst his sin against John, and against God, is horrendous, what you realise is that behind the facade, he's just a scared, weak man.

Not powerful. He looks powerful, because what he can do, to John, there's an illusion of power, because he goes through with it, but deep down on the inside, in his heart, he's weak and scared, and he has no power.

Now, we won't face Herod, but as we mentioned last week, followers of Jesus, followers of Jesus, continue to face rejection today. And people who reject us, can see like they're powerful to us.

[12 : 00] We can fear them, and it can seem in our minds, that their rejection, that their acceptance, is really important to us, because we can almost project, a level of importance, onto their opinion, of us.

And we think that, as we see people around us, who don't follow, oh they're, they're a really important person, they've got it together. And their rejection, can seem hard, but the reality is that, this is true for every single person, when you peel back the layers, of someone's heart, what you see, with every single person, is people are driven by fear, who like to think, that they're in control, but are anything but.

Doesn't that change the way, that we see people, who reject Jesus, and reject us, that their opinions, don't actually matter, because deep on the inside, they are scared, and weak people. When we start to see people like that, deep down, even the strongest person, on the outside, inside, is scared like everyone else. It changes how we see, it changes how John the Baptist, even sees Herod, because in the midst of this, what do we know, John the Baptist, cares for Herod's soul.

Isn't that amazing? John the Baptist cares, for his future murderers, soul. That's why he's telling him, you shouldn't be doing this, Herod. He cares for his soul.

[13 : 34] He knows his heart is rotten, that it's hardened, but maybe it could be softened. But it can't. It doesn't. It's hard.

It helps us to be, this helps us to see, people the way Jesus saw them, who looked, who only looked at people's heart. That, now, just to pause here, I just want to say, that doesn't mean, that what people do, when they reject us, and they reject Jesus, it doesn't mean, that it isn't still awful, horrendous, and painful, and hurts.

We're not dumbing down the sin, he does still chop off his head. It is still awful, and this man, is, what he does, is horrendous. We're not suggesting, that we should somehow, feel sorry for his actions.

But what we are, but what we are saying, is that, we can still see, back, what this man is driven by, he's driven by, his fears. And, on the inside, he is a scared, weak man.

On a deeper level, the reason that we know, that people are scared, and weak, is because, on a deeper level, we know that we are, we are, just the same.

[14:53] We know we have a relationship, with the one who calms the storm, and yet, we still fear missing out. We still fear man's opinion of us, and sometimes forget, that Jesus is always for us.

Our fears get the better of us, and direct our choices. Of course we do. But every day, Jesus is removing our fear, and replacing it, with a growing knowledge, of his love.

And he doesn't put a lead, around our neck, to pull us where he wants. He doesn't need to. What he does, is he makes himself, so irresistible to us, that we can't help, but follow his way.

And what we see, is that is the life, of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, does not have a dog lead, around John the Baptist's neck, but John the Baptist, is a model disciple, that follows Jesus, because Jesus, and the living God, are so irresistible, to him.

You contrast, the fear of Herod, with John the Baptist. John is the model disciple. Does John fear Jesus? Yes he does, but not in the way, that Herod does. He doesn't run from Jesus, he has an awe, and a reverence, for him.

[16:04] No, he lets Jesus, come to him, baptises him, in the Jordan, knowing, that he's unworthy, to tie his sandals. And yet, obeys what Jesus does. Does John, fear missing out?

Well he does, he fears, missing out, on seeing Jesus, as the king, on the throne. At one point, he even questions, is he, the king, even doubts, at one point.

Does John fear man? Well to that one, we can say, no he doesn't, he fears God. He has the reverence, and the awe, for God, for Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away, the sins of the world.

He's compelled, to do God's work, to lose his reputation, to lose his life, for the name of Jesus, because he finds, Jesus irresistible, and follows, the living God, to that end.

Herod saves, his life, gains the whole world, but loses his soul. John loses his life, has nothing in the world, but his soul is saved. John foreshadows Jesus, takes up his cross, murdered, because he cares, for Herod's soul.

[17:09] He's the model disciple. Following Jesus, is costly. It means denying yourself, sinful, temporary pleasure. It means letting go, of your reputation. And it means hearing, Jesus commands, and being obedient, even when we don't feel like it.

But it's worth it, because everlasting life, depends on it. Now, one of the things, I love in life, and you might know this, is I love chocolate.

I absolutely love chocolate. To me, it's like its own food group. Now, having said that, I know that I have to deny it. From if, like, maybe not every day, but at least, all day.

I probably, I reckon I have chocolate, at least every other day. I know that I have to do that, because if I don't do that, I'll put on weight, and I need to deny it, to stay healthy.

I sacrifice, my love for chocolate, for the sake of my health. We sacrifice, to honour Jesus, but also for the sake, of our spiritual health.

[18:17] If you let no reputation, control you, it's no good, for your walk with the Lord, because what happens, is your reputation, has become your God, because you'll do anything, to keep it.

Look out, look out, for where your fears, are controlling you. And so, as we come in for landing, we see two men, we see Herod, and we see John the Baptist.

Herod, controlled by his fears, like a dog, and a weed. Jesus, who finds, John, who finds Jesus, irresistible, and is controlled, because he, only wants to follow her, who only wants to, prepare the way, for the Lord.

Something to think about, this week, is how, how does that, how does that respond, to how we see people, who we fear, of rejecting us, because we're associated, with Jesus.

We pray. Almighty God, we thank you, for John the Baptist, and the model, disciple that he is. We thank you, that he did, lose his life, and gain his soul, for the sake of Jesus name.

[19:38] We thank you, that he loved Herod, even though Herod, would murder him, that he cared for him. And I pray, that we, would be a people, that, would be able, to forego, our reputation, for the name of Jesus, and for the care of souls, who don't know you.

We know that, we're all in the same boat, and we all have fears. I pray that, that we would not be controlled, by our fears, but that we would find you, irresistible, and follow you.

That we would deny, our self pleasure, for your glory. So we ask for this, in the name of Christ. Amen.