

He Enjoyed Listening

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There are going to be many souls on that great and terrible day of judgment who will stand before the throne of God with a list of credentials and accomplishments. There will be great religious leaders who will say that they only taught some false doctrine. There will be lukewarm Christians who will claim that they did pretty good. There will be millions of souls who say that they came close to the kingdom of Heaven, but simply had a hard time taking those few necessary steps toward salvation. And there will be Herod, who enjoyed listening to the truth being taught, but ended up following the advice of the world.

Herod, the curiosity-seeker

Consider Mark 6:14-29, in which the events of the death of John the baptist are described. After being accused of participating in an ongoing adulterous relationship with his brother's wife, Herod orders John imprisoned, although he is on the verge of execution because of the enemies he has made – indeed, it seems that part of Herod's heart told him to execute him, anyway (Matthew 14:5), but his motives appear conflicted. While he was desirous of being rid of the pesky prophet, he also understood that John was a good and righteous man, beloved by the multitudes, and blameless of any punishable crime. For the sake of himself, he kept John alive, but had to deal with incessant complaint from the woman of his adulterous relationship, Herodias.

Notice a few things about Herod. *"For Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe"* (Mark 6:20). There is some credit that must be given to Herod for realizing the purity of John. We are told by Christ that no man born of a woman ever came to close to the kind of holiness and fidelity that John the baptist cultivated in his life (Matthew 11:11). But what good does recognizing John's holiness do if Herod will not act on this knowledge? Truly, this example should dispel any idea from people's minds that simply respecting Christianity is an appropriate response to its call of righteousness. Often, we hear unbelievers say that they "think Christ was a great man," yet they do not heed his teachings. Others will say that they respect all the religions of the world, and consider Christianity to be among the greats, yet will never become a part of it. Beyond that, we may have neighbors, co-workers, close friends or relatives who "respect" us for being such good Christians, but do not want that life for themselves. One writer said, *"Many a hardened sinner maintains, like Herod, a reverence for men of God, and yet, like him, they go to perdition"* (A Commentary On Matthew And Mark, McGarvey, 302). In the scriptures, it appears that Herod wanted it all: he wanted to keep his wife, although they were in an adulterous marital arrangement, but he also wanted to feel like he was a good man by listening to John sermonize. However, our Lord tells us that we cannot serve two masters and please either one (Matthew 6:24). Eventually, Herod would have to choose between his relationship with Herodias, or his sense of allegiance with John.

"And when he heard him he was perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him" (Mark 6:20). From these words it becomes apparent that Herod was never truly interested in the state of his soul, as far as salvation goes. He was a curiosity-seeker.

He wanted to study new things, and he enjoyed hearing about the Gospel without being convicted by it. In this world of objectivism and human wisdom, we meet a lot of curiosity-seekers – they are the ones who show up one Sunday unannounced, sit in the back and observe, and leave immediately following the service. They are also the ones who sit down for a Bible study, but have no intention of “being converted.” They only want to have their ears tickled by something new and interesting. The Athenians were curiosity-seekers, too (Acts 17:19-21).

The problem with this type of person is that they never end up putting their foot down on anything. While they may know a lot, and study every religion in the world, they never find a firm base and plant themselves in anything, neither truth nor falsehood. By doing this, many hope to just avoid judgment altogether. Christ tells us, however, that anybody who does not stand with Him is necessarily against Him (Matthew 10:38). Those who spend their entire lives “just curious” about the truth end up like the foolish teachers of 2 Timothy 3:7, who are *“always learning yet never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth.”*