

“Crisis of Conscience”

Mark 6:14-29

Introduction

- All of us have had those moments in our lives where we face a crisis of conscience – we know what to do, we know what direction we are suppose to go, but at the same time we know there will be serious ramifications, serious consequences and so our hearts are torn

I know when I was in Bible College I was dating this girl and after awhile I just knew it wasn't what the Lord had for me.

- But it wasn't a clear cut decision to break off the relationship.
 - You see she worked at a huge Calvary Chapel, and I because of her, I started to intern there on the weekends.
 - I had gotten to know the pastor and he pulled me aside one day and said I like what God is doing here - when you graduate, I would like you to run our Youth department here
- For a young kid in Bible College a secure job at graduation was as good as it gets – overseeing hundreds of kids in High school ministry was a dream come true.
 - But at the same time everything I would read in my devotions, it seemed every class, God was speaking so clearly, you need to cut this off.

So one Saturday I decide to obey, and drive out from the Bible College to meet this girl and obey the Lord.

- But the whole drive was a crisis of conscience

Because you see I had called that pastor that morning and told him what I believed the Lord was doing in my heart

- and he said to me, I disagree, I think you are just scared of commitment
 - and I told him no I'm pretty sure, and he said back well if you do this you can kiss your future job goodbye
 - and then he threw in, have you ever read the Harvest book – (the history of Calvary Chapel)
- yes, he was in there, well he says to me, just so you know if you do this, there are always new ways to do old things –
 - I thought you killed someone in that book before you knew the Lord, are you saying you're going to kill me?

You see why - Driving out I was having a crisis of conscience

- Lord did I hear you right about this girl?
 - I mean this guy is a senior pastor and I'm just a Bible College student, maybe I didn't hear you like he apparently has
- And I really want that job, and I don't want to be murdered
 - She is nice girl that loves you and me - Maybe I heard you wrong – I don't know what to do
- It was a true Crisis of Conscience –ever had one?

Now I always get accused of not finishing my stories but the reason I don't is because the point of the story is not what I did, the point is to give you an example of a crisis of conscience so you can relate to what Herod in our text is going through – that is the point of the story, to illustrate a crisis of conscience

- but so I don't get asked 100 times between service what I did, I will tell you

I pulled that car off the freeway, and went to a payphone, because that is what you did, young people, before cell phones, and I called that pastor who gave me

such a crisis of conscience, wondering do I obey the Lord or do I stay with that girl and get the ministry job I always wanted, I called that pastor and said to him

- “Rob Salvato when do I start?” – and Christy and I have been happy ever since
 - Just kidding – that pastor wasn’t Rob Salvato!
 - No, no, no – just seeing if you are awake

No – I ended the relationship that day, my job offer was revoked, I never to got to run that youth department

- In fact it would be over a year before I would meet Pastor Rob for real this time and God would begin to open a door for me to serve Him – and through that door I would eventually meet Christy, have three wonderful kids and be sent out to Texas and start a great church out there and almost every wonderful thing that has happened in my life I can trace back to that Crisis of Conscience – where I was really pulled
 - Was I hearing the Lord right
 - I really want to serve at that church
 - But I think I have heard you Lord
 - It was a true Crisis of Conscience

And in our text today we see King Herod himself also having a Crisis of Conscience and his life will also be radically shaped by his decision

- now before we see the Crisis of Conscience we need to understand who the Herods are – this is the only opportunity in the gospel of Mark to do so and the Herodian dynasty plays such important role in the Gospels and in the books of Acts and they were the ruling family over Israel at the time.

Now there are four different Herods that have prominent roles in the bible and it is good for us to understand the difference

- **Herod the Great – 37BC to 4 AD – Picture of Herod the Great**

The one who started it all was Herod the Great

- He rules from 37BC to 4AD
 - He was the Herod alive at the time of Jesus’ birth, He was the one the wise men asked for help, He was the one who killed the babies of Bethlehem, trying to kill Jesus – Matthew chapter 2 and Luke chapter 1
 - Now that is not the Herod in our text this morning – but that Herod had some sons
- At Herod the Great’s death in 4 BC the nation of Israel was divided into four parts and the leadership was divided between his 3 eldest sons, the oldest of which got a double portion – the other two would be know as **Tetrarchs, which means “ruler over a ¼ part” – with their eldest brother ruling ½ the country**
 - The Oldest brother was named Herod Archelaus – who isn’t in the Bible other than the mention of his name in Matthew 2:22

The Second Herod who gets some Bible story time is Herod Antipas who ruled ¼ of the nation around the region of Galilee from 4 AD to 39 AD - Picture

- That is the Herod in our story here
 - And we will get back to him in just a minute – now he had a brother named Herod Phillip who was the other tetrarch – he in only mentioned by name once in the scripture in Luke 3:1 – but keep this Herod in mind for he will play into our story as well – review the 3 brothers...
- There are two other Herods in the Bible

Another Herod mentioned in the Book of Acts is Herod Agrippa 37AD – 44AD - picture

- He was the great grandson of Herod the great, through his eldest son Archelaus, Archelaus also had a daughter who will play into our story today, here name was Herodias
 - Herod Agrippa was the one who killed James, and imprisoned Peter, and caused much grief to the early church
 - Now he had a son that is the last Herod mentioned in the Bible

There is one other Herod in the Bible and that is Herod Agrippa the II – who ruled from 44AD – 70AD – picture – known as Agrippa

- He is the one who will try Paul, send him to Rome
 - A sorted family – but none was quite as bad as the Herod Agrippa of our story today

So if you are drawing a diagram on your notes – Herod the Great at top (the one who killed the babies in Bethlehem) – he has many kids, but we focus on three – Archelaus (Matt 2:22), Herod Antipas (who is the Herod in our story today), we has a brother Herod Phillip – Under Archelaus, has a son, Herod Agrippa – killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts chapter 12) – Under Herod Agrippa, he had a son Herod Agrippa II, who tried Paul the apostle in Acts 25-26) – clear as mud

- well today is the story of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the great
 - whose brother Archelaus was the father of Herold Agrippa, but Archelaus had a daughter by the name of Herodias who was first married to her uncle Herod Phillip

Well apparently she was a very cute niece because her other Uncle, Herod Antipas, seduced her and got her, his sister in law/niece, to leave his brother Herod Phillip and marry him

- and if you are grossed out by all of this, number one, it gets worse, but secondly you are not alone
 - John the Baptist was very bothered by this and he was not one to hold in his feelings or be politically correct
 - He speaks out against Herod Antipas that his stealing his niece/sister in law from his brother to be his wife was sin

Letting the ruler of the region, plus his niece/sister in law/now wife have it – landed John the Baptist in prison

- what a prison it was

Machaerus Fortress

- He was bound at the desert dungeon fortress of Machaerus
 - Now as the pictures cycle through, **#1 - the first one is the ruins as it looks today**
 - **#2 - The second photo is from a distance**
 - **#3 - And the third one is an artist rendering of what it would have looked like in Herod and John the Baptists' day**
- It was built on a hill overlooking the Dead Sea, it had thick walls, flanked by towers 240 feet high
 - There was a palace on top – but that would not have been John the Baptist view

There was a dungeon below where you can still go today and see the iron hooks John would have been chained to – Machaerus Dungeon

- John's view would have looked more like this - **(Pic #1)** – without the wall caved in letting in all that great light
 - Or like this guy **(Pic #2)** posed here with the iron chains that still exist

Here, in this desolate place, Herod and John faced off

- And in the end John kept his conscience, kept his integrity but lost his head
 - And Herod took John's head but lost his conscience
 - And our story is a story of a Crisis of Conscience – a story that is played out over and over again in history and in our lives and we can learn much

If you are taking notes and haven't used up all the room from the family tree of Herod, I want you to notice three things from our text today

A Crisis of Conscience - Mark 6:14-29

#1 – A Stirred Conscience – March 6:17-20

#2 – A Torn Conscience – Mark 6:21-29

#3 – A Second Chance – Mark 6:14-16, Luke 23:6-12

- lets consider those one at a time

A Crisis of Conscience - Mark 6:14-29

#1 – A Stirred Conscience – March 6:17-20

- Herod was intrigued by John, interested in him and what he had to say and so Herod protected John from his wife/niece/sister in law – Herodias who had no such feelings toward John

And the reason I think Herod was so stirred by John is because John spoke the truth

- I'm sure Herod was always surrounded by political ladder climbers who blew nothing but smoke and false praise his direction
 - It must have been refreshing to hear the truth
 - His soul knew this was right what he was hearing, the Spirit was stirring his conscience

And I share this with you because I don't think John the Baptist knew that

- I'm sure between Herodias yelling all type of profane things at him, losing her mind and the King turning a blind eye to it, not letting her kill him but allowing him to experience a living hell, the last thing John the Baptist thought – I bet this couple is close to salvation, I bet God is stirring the conscience

But I mention that to you, because neither do you when you share truth with your family, your neighbors, your friends

- I think we have all been there where we share truth with a loved one, with a friend, and we think – "I hope this gets through"
 - But their reaction is horrible – they yell, they scream, they cut off the relationship with you
 - And it is so easy to get discouraged – ah, wow, that was not what I was expecting
- And the enemy starts to discourage you from praying for them or ever sharing with them again

But I want to you to learn this from our text today – people whose conscience is being stirred, they are not always going to react the way you think

- The reason is, it has been said, "the truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable"

- Some people we share truth, we share lovingly the reality of their situation and the reaction, not good
- And we automatically think – what a hard heart, but it might be that God is stirring their heart
 - You know if you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, what a horrible illustration, but if you do that – the one that barks the loudest is probably the one you hit
 - The same things holds true spiritually

You share truth with someone and they start barking back at you – you are tempted to be discouraged

Don't be – it may be they have a conscience that is stirring

- Keep praying for them, keep fasting for them
 - Keep as the Lord leads, sharing with them in love, but love with truth
 - And let God continue to stir their conscience, like God was doing through John the Baptist in Herod's life
- Don't give up, because the enemy isn't giving up, look at what happens next in verse 21

A Crisis of Conscience - Mark 6:14-29

#1 – A Stirred Conscience – March 6:17-20

#2 – A Torn Conscience – Mark 6:21-29

- Herodias, Herod Antipas' wife/niece/sister in law, saw her chance in the form of this birthday party
 - She knew what to expect from these all male birthday parties – the drinking would turn to sensuality and then normally that is when the court dancers and prostitutes would enter
- But as bad as that would be morally – the Herods go even worse
 - Herodias sends her daughter into that environment
 - Mother of the year award for Herodias

Now this daughter, Josephus tells us was named Salome

- and she was the daughter of Herodias and Herod Phillip
 - so she was Herod Antipas' step daughter and niece as was his wife (you know your family is dysfunctional when your wife and step daughter are also both niece)
- well Salome danced for him, she pleased him
 - and she got Herod to offer her anything she wanted up to half the kingdom

So Salome asked her Mom, “what do I ask for?” and Herodias has won – “the head of John the Baptist”

Herod was grieved, his conscience is torn, the scripture says “he was exceedingly sorry – it was the same Greek word used to describe Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane

- You remember, when Jesus knew if I had any chance of going to heaven and you too, He had to die for our sin
 - But He said to the Father, if there be any other way, and Jesus was in agony the scriptures tell us
- Same word – Herod was in agony
 - What do I do?
 - John a good guy – John is speaking the truth
 - My wife/niece/sister in law, she is not a good girl – what do I do?

- Herod's conscience is torn
- He knew the right thing to do, but did not know how to do it

And these critical moments will happen in our lives – where we know the right direction, and our lives will be shaped by the decision, but we fear consequences and fall out – or like Herod we fear man

- what will my friends think? What will my boss say?
 - Listen the book of Proverbs says...

“The Fear of Man is a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” – Proverbs 29:25

- You will have to decide in your life, many times in your life, if you are going to elevate what man thinks of you above the Lord
 - Every time we do our lives are snared, it never leads to freedom and ease like we think

No – that comes Proverbs says, as we trust the Lord

- Lord I don't know how this is going to work out
 - I don't know how this will be received
 - But I know I have your Word to me
 - I know what you want me to do
- So Lord I am not going to elevate everyone else's opinion above Yours
 - I will not let the fear of man
 - Or who knows what it is for you?

The fear of failure, the fear of being misunderstood, the fear of rejection

- whatever it is – fear will not make things better, fear will not make things easy
 - it is only faith – not that walking in faith is easy, that's not what I said
- But when I say, Lord I choose to trust you above my heart, above my fears
 - You will find – that place is safe

When faced with a conscience torn on what to do – most give in to what seems easy and Herod was in that company

- so not to lose face, He puts the only man speaking truth into his life to death
 - what a sad end
 - but it actually gets worse, for there is one more part to this story and it is where we began, back in verse 14

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- you see our whole story today was a flash back, that Herod Antipas had once he first heard the name of Jesus

Historians have written that there was an uncanny similarity in the likeness of Jesus and John the Baptist

- And so when this preacher for Galilee came on the scene, many thought it was John the Baptist back from the dead
 - Herod needed no convincing that was true
 - His conscience had been bothering him ever since he gave in to his wife/niece/sister in law's demands
- Now doubt as decision came his way, Herod would look out across the Jordan valley and think, what would have John told me to do
 - What would have been insight in my life right now
 - What did I do, putting him to death

And then Herod hears – there is this preacher, whose seems a lot like John the Baptist, He just tells it like it is

- and He looks like John the Baptist
 - and some say that is because they were cousins, but Herod was convinced, no – John is back from the dead

Now obviously we know Jesus was not John the Baptist rising from the dead, they lived at the same time for most of their lives

- but the Lord was using Herod's conscience and the rumor mill of the day, (it's John, he's back) – God was using those things, I believe to stir Herod conscience one more time, to give him one more chance to repent
 - what would he do when he met Jesus?
 - What would Herod do when he met this one he was convinced was John the Baptist back from the dead? – turn to Luke 23

Turn to Luke 23 and we will see, verse one for context

- Herod finally gets his moment with Jesus – and what does he do?
 - And he questions Jesus
 - He mocks Jesus
 - He puts Jesus in a robe and parades Him around
 - And He sends Jesus away

Herod stood in the presence of God and felt nothing

- For his conscience, though at one time was stirred, then torn with what to do, and as he heard of this Jesus, a second chance for his conscience, to repent, to get right
 - But we can clearly see that by the time Herod was in front of Jesus it was too late – His conscience was dead
 - Herod had had a crisis of conscience and Herod had chosen foolishly time and again – to deny his conscience, to deny the work the Holy Spirit was trying to do in his heart
 - And as he stands in the presence of God – Herod feels nothing and mocks the God of Creation

You see friends - It is possible for all of us to keep denying what God wants to do in our lives, thinking it will have no effect

- And God graciously continues to reach out to us, continues to stir, continues to speak the right way
 - But if we keep ignoring, keep denying, keep shutting our ears and our hearts to the witness of His Spirit - eventually something is going to die inside
 - And though we stand face to face with God, we will feel nothing!

And I am preaching to you today as a warning

- You know we were talking in our staff meetings as a church how sometimes we gather and it is like God is just among us
 - if you missed last Wednesday Night – I'm sorry we don't have a time machine, but that was one of those nights
 - and I don't say it pridefully because I do every Wednesday Night – this one was different, God was moving
 - and we think why is that?

And sometimes it just has to do with the passage we are studying – we teach the Whole Bible and so some days we are looking at radically touching passages

- you know sometimes we are going through passages about the women with the issue of blood being healed, Jairus' daughter being healed

- And sometimes we get assigned – the “Beheading of John the Baptist” – thank you for that Pastor Rob by the way

But I say all that to say – we can think, well that wasn’t very warm and fuzzy this morning

- “something in me is going die if I keep denying the Lord’s voice”
 - “thank you for that encouraging Word Pastor Jason, is Pastor Rob up next week” – yes

Sometimes we are going to be encouraged and lifted up in the Word and sometimes we are going to be challenged and warned

- and this is one of those times
 - maybe you are far from God today – you know things are not right, you know you are headed in a wrong direction – you have made so many mistakes

Friend you are not here by accident – God is giving you another chance – to respond to His work in your conscience, to respond to His Spirit

- and if that is you, don’t keep denying His calling
 - stop plugging your ears, and doing your own thing
 - Today is the day to respond to Him
 - Before something dies inside and it’s too late
 - Today is the day of Salvation
 - And I am going to give you a chance to respond in just a minute

But before we do, this doesn’t just apply to those who aren’t walking with God at the moment – every one of us are in danger of tuning God out

- of when we are in those crisis of conscience moments, we back down and make excuses and turn from the Lord and if we are not careful we may find ourselves where Paul describes some in I Timothy 4 as...

“having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,” – I Timothy 4:2

- that we used to hear the Lord so clearly
 - we used to long to be in His presence
 - and we delighted to do His will
- but I went this direction at this crisis of conscience
 - and when this one happened I went that way
 - and now I just feel like my heart has been seared
 - what I do? – What do we do

Well – Good news for you and me, God is patient, but you are here on purpose this morning too

- Because in I Timothy Paul tells them what to do in that place

A seared Conscience? – What do I do?

#1 – Exercise yourself toward godliness – I Tim 4:7

- Now Paul is not saying there is something wrong with physical exercise – there is not – the doctor says hey for your heart, for your health, you need to do a little physical activity
 - Well Dr. Paul is saying – you have a seared conscience – you need to do a little spiritual exercise
 - I think we have walked away a little from the spiritual disciplines of prayer and devotion and fasting - But if there is something wrong with my conscience I need to get back to the basics

- Later in verse 13 Paul is going to say give attention to reading – I think it is a lost art today to just sit down and read the Bible
 - We have our devotionals, we have our books about God – those can be so helpful – but just sit down and read the scripture
 - Many places the Word is compared to water that can cleanse – it can cleanse a seared conscience

#2 – Be an example to the believers – I Tim 4:12

- Maybe you have been sitting on the sidelines for the a while – and you sense it – you sense something is wrong
 - Well time to jump back and not criticize who others are or how others are behaving, but just you be the example
 - I have always been challenged by the thought – what if everyone else in this church was just like me
- I know that would be crazy but I don't mean personality
 - But what if everyone prayed as much as you
 - What if they gave the same percentage
 - What if they served in as many ministries
 - What if everyone was just like you?
- For some that answer is – amazing – but if not – be an example

#3 – Give yourself entirely to these things – I Tim 4:15

- Very few of us know what it is like to be given totally to something – you that were athletes, served in the military, or were in total bondage to sin you know – so like that for Jesus
 - And not only won't you have to worry about a seared conscience, but as Paul says, other people around you are going to get saved
 - I love it