THE DEATH OF CONSCIENCE

 **DATE: 4/15/2018 SS**

**TEXT: Mark 6:14-29**

**INTRODUCTION**

This passage is one of the saddest in the entire Bible

It records the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist

He was a special man, chosen for a special mission

-- He was the **“*forerunner*”** of the Messiah

-- He was the fulfillment of several prophecies

-- He was the last of the Old Testament prophets

-- He was the last martyr of the Old Testament and the first of the New

-- He was a powerful preacher

-- He was a fearless prophet

-- He was a true man of God

Jesus Christ Himself testified in **Matthew 11:11 –**

**“*Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist,*”**

While this passage reveals the details of John's death,

… it also records the death of something else

This passage records the Death of a Conscience

Our text speaks of a man named Herod Antipas

He was a wicked man who ruled over the Holy Land

His father was Herod the Great

Herod the Great was the king who had been ruling when Jesus was born

It was Herod the Great who had ordered the deaths of the infants in Bethlehem after the Wise men left

When Herod the Great died, the Roman emperor divided his kingdom into four parts

One part was given to the man in our text, Herod Antipas

He wasn't really a king; he was a “*tetrarch*”, which means “*the ruler of a fourth part*”

He demanded, however, that his subjects call him “*king*”

Herod Antipas ruled from 4 to 39 A.D.

He was banished to what is now France by the Roman emperor for demanding to be made a king

Jesus summed up the character of Herod Antipas by calling him a **“*fox*”** in **Luke 13:32** -

***“Go ye, and tell that fox …”***

We will talk more about this man and his background as we move through the passage

What we see in these verses is a picture of how a person can sin against their Conscience to the point that they are capable of anything

It’s possible to ignore the warnings of your mind until those warnings cease to be heard

It’s possible to effect one’s Conscience to the point that it no longer stands as a barrier between the individual and any sin they choose to commit

**I Timothy 4:2 *– “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;”***

That is why some people can do the things they do without remorse or guilt

They have seared their Conscience to the point where it feels nothing and no longer warns them about evil

Before we go any further, we need to talk about the Conscience

A lot of people are misinformed about the Conscience and what it does

Everyone has a Conscience (2 things about it)

Our Conscience gives us an awareness of what is right and wrong

morality - *the extent to which an action is right or wrong*

The Bible also says that God has revealed Himself to every individual through his or her Conscience

Paul wrote - **Romans 2:14, 15 –** ***“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:” “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;”***

These verses show that the Lord has placed knowledge of Himself within the heart of every human being

Humanity knows intuitively the difference between good and evil, right and wrong

Furthermore, they know from their Conscience that they will ultimately be held responsible for their behavior

And if they fail to adhere to God’s Moral Standard, they will face some dire consequences

Knowing right and wrong won’t save you though

It’s just God’s starting point

God is not obligated to give a person any more understanding than that which they will respond to in truth

**Romans 1:19, 20 *– “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them” “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by …***

***… the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”***

The human Conscience gives testimony to God's existence

How-be-it; the Conscience is an Insufficient Testimony

While Conscience testifies to God's existence, it is insufficient for a couple of reasons

1. Although Conscience indicates the existence of God,

It does not provide any personal knowledge of Him

The Conscience does not give us the identity of God

1. The Conscience is a Fallible Witness

Our Conscience is fallible because it has been corrupted by sin

The Bible speaks of the Conscience of humans as being weak

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth

**I Corinthians 8:7 – *“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled”***

That is why so many people are in such trouble today

They have adopted a philosophy that says - *“If it feels good, do it!”*

As a result, they do not live by the truth of the Word of God, but by the feelings of their flesh

They do as they please and their Conscience never bothers them

The most dangerous thing any person can do is to sin against the Truth

Paul tells us that sinning against a ***“good conscience”*** leads to spiritual ***“shipwreck”***

**I Timothy 1:19 – *“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:”***

A ***“good conscience”*** is one that knows the Truth and desires to be obedient to it

When people know the Truth and reject it in favor of their own standards of right and wrong, they sin against a ***“good conscience”***

That is what we will see in our text

This part of Mark records ***The Death of Conscience***

Plan on being in Sunday School each week as we look at the *lessons* contained in these verses

As we move through this text, allow the Lord to speak to your heart

Obey His Word when He speaks to you and do not sin against your own conscience

**“THE DEATH OF CONSCIENCE”**

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. HEROD’S “CONFUSION” – vs. 17-20 …**

(We will come back to **vs. 14-16** at a later date)

When Herod Antipas heard about the ministry of Jesus and about all the miracles He was doing

Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead

First, we need to consider the background for Herod's belief that John had somehow come back from the dead

(**vs. 17-29** form a parenthetical passage)

We are transported back in time to the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist

Mark recounts for us how John died

These verses reveal a soul in conflict

Herod is fighting a battle between his flesh and soul

He’s Confused and Conflicted; and that is clearly revealed in these verses

First, let’s look at …

**A. How Herod ‘Beheld’ John – vs. 17, 18 …**

Herod held John in high regard, respect

(You are going to find that hard to believe after I show you some things)

We are told that Herod arrested John for preaching against His sins

He had married the wife of his brother

Let’s take a moment to consider Herod's family tree

It would be better described as a palm, since it doesn't really branch

The name **Herod** means *hero-like* and is more of a Title than a name

This family was of Idumean origin and thus alien to a certain extent to the Jews, yet was Jewish in faith

**Idumea** was the land between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, bordering the Promised Land

The Edomites where located in this region

These where the descendants of Esau

And we all know that Esau was a profane man

**Hebrews 12:16 *– “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright”***

It was the Edomites who wouldn’t let Israel pass …

… thru the land during the exodus

* Again, Antipas is the son of Herod the Great
* Herod the Great had at least five wives; and bore sons and daughters by all of them

* Among his half-brothers were Aristobolus (Who by-the-way was killed by his own father) and Philip
* Antipas, the man in our text, married the daughter of Aretas I an Arabian king

* Philip married Herodias, the woman in our text, who was the daughter of his half-brother Aristobolus

She was his half-niece

They had a daughter named Salome, the girl who danced for Antipas, her double half-uncle and step-father

* Philip was disinherited by his father Herod the Great

He and Herodias moved to Rome

* Antipas and his wife visited his brother in Rome and Antipas fell in love with his half-niece and sister-in-law Herodias

They had an affair and both left their spouses and married one another

Confused yet? I am … sounds just like society today

It was this arrangement that John repeatedly condemned

**v. 18 - *“For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife”***

The phrase **“*had said*”** suggests repeated times

Every time Herod was around, John preached against incest and adultery from the Word of God

(So don’t tell me that the preacher doesn’t have the right to preach pointedly)

Herod was upset by this preaching

It seems that Herodias was even more upset

**v. 17 –** ***“For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her”***

So Herod had John thrown into prison

This is not the proper response to biblical preaching!

When a preacher takes the Bible and preaches the truth

There will be times when he will get a little too close to where we are living

When this happens, we have several choices

**1.** You can ignore the message

That’s a dangerous place, because that is what leads to a Dead Conscience

**2.** You can attack the preacher

That is also a dangerous place because God will deal with those who do

**Psalm 105:15 *– “Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm”***

Besides that, if the preacher is preaching the truth,

He is really just delivering the mail

If you have an issue, you should take it up with God

**3.** You can bring the need to the Lord

You can let Him work in your life to bring you to a place of repentance and blessing

**I John 1:9 …**

We are quickly approaching a time when preachers in this country are going to be persecuted for the message we preach

If a liberal Congress has its way, preachers will be imprisoned if they preach against homosexuality and the transgenders

Even the Gospel itself is being called “*hate speech*” by those who reject the Lord Jesus

The days are coming when those who dare stand for the Truth are going to face hardship and persecution

You say, doesn’t sound like High Regard to me (Wait)

**How Herod ‘Beheld’ John**

**B. How Herod ‘Helped’ John – v. 19**

***“Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:”***

While Herod disliked the message John preached,

Herod protected John from the murderous ambitions of his wife

She refused to forgive John for what he preached and she held hatred in her heart for the man of God

Herod's confusion is clear to see

He hated the fact that John was telling him the truth about his sins, but still he wanted to keep John around

This same love/hate relationship exists in churches between the preacher and some of those he preaches to

They hate it when he exposes their sins

Yet, they do not hesitate to call him when they have a need in their life

Some people are as confused as a termite in a yo-yo!

**How Herod ‘Beheld’ John**

**How Herod ‘Helped’ John**

**C. How Herod ‘Heard’ John – v. 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”***

Here is the most amazing verse in this section

Herod did not like the fact that John exposed his sin,

Yet, he still wanted John around

Let's examine that thought

**1.** Herod ***“feared”*** John

Herod had a reverential fear of the Baptist because he knew that John was a genuine man of God

He knew he was holy and righteous

**2.** Herod **“*observed*”** John

That is, he kept John the Baptist safe and under constant guard

He didn't like that John expose his sins, but he didn't want anything bad to happen to John either

**3.** When Herod heard John preach, **“*he did many things*”**

This can be interpreted two ways and I think both should be considered

**a.** When Herod heard John, he was perplexed

That is, what he heard caused him great conflict

He heard the Truth and recognized it as such

**b.** Herod did some of the things John told him to do

He may have reformed his life to a certain point,

But not the point of giving up Herodias

The Truth touched Herod's heart and he tried to dull the pain of conviction by doing some good things

**4.** The most amazing part of this verse tells us that Herod **“*heard him gladly*”**

The idea is that Herod *enjoyed* hearing John preach the Word of God

He didn't intend to change his life and surrender all to the Lord,

But he liked the preacher and he loved to hear him preach

King Herod is one confused man!

There are many people just like Herod in our churches today

Let me explain

They get caught up in the preaching or the personality of a man, but they miss the point of the message

They like to hear their favorite preacher preach, but they have no intentions of doing everything the Bible is telling them to do

That’s a dangerous way to live one’s life!

When God speaks to our heart, He is extending Grace!

He is showing us that He cares for us, that He loves us and that He has a better plan for our life

When He points out our errors in the Word of God, He does so because He loves us and wants to change us for our own good

Don't be like Herod and play around with the things of God

Herod kept John and treated him like he was a pet

He treated the Word of God like he could do as he pleased with it

Nothing dulls the Conscience any quicker than saying *no* to the Word of God

And don’t think by not doing anything, (Being neutral)

… When God requires a response

That there won’t be any consequences

If the Lord has been speaking to you about any area of your life, you need to heed His voice and obey His Word without delay

To do otherwise can lead to serious consequences!

 **HEROD’S “CONFUSION”**

**II. HEROD’S “CRIME” – vs. 21-29 …**

These verses chronicle the tragic death of John the Baptist

He was a mighty man of God, but he was sacrificed on the altar of Hatred, Self-gratification and Lust

Let's look in on the events surrounding John's death

**A. It Involved a ‘Sinful Dance’ – vs. 21, 22a**

***“And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;” “And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced,”***

Herodias had been biding her time – “***a convenient day”***

Just waiting for an opportunity to see John the Baptist put to death

She saw her chance at Herod's birthday bash

This supper was nothing more than a drunken party for Herod and his men

When they were drunk with wine, Herodias sprung her trap

She sent in her teenage daughter Salome to dance for Herod and his friends

This particular dance would have been a very suggestive, sensual, dance designed to inflame the passions of the men in the room

These dances were usually performed by prostitutes hired for the event

Her dance had the desired effect, for Herod and those with him were captivated by the beautiful youngster

***“and pleased Herod and them that sat with him,”***

This act reveals the wickedness that was in the heart of Herodias

Imagine putting your daughter on display in that fashion

Imagine sending her out to dance in front of lustful men!

What wickedness! People are no different today!

**It Involved a ‘Sinful Dance’**

**B. It Involved a ‘Senseless Declaration’ – vs. 22 b -25 …**

And **(vs. 22 b, 23**) **- *“the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee”* *“And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom”***

With Herod's passions inflamed by the girl's dance

He promises to give her anything she desires, up to half his kingdom!

It was a foolish boast designed to make Herod look good in front of his guests

The girl runs back to her mother to seek her advice on what she should ask from the king

Her mother, without hesitation, tells her daughter to request the head of John the Baptist

The girl runs back and reveals her own heart when she tells Herod she wants John's head

And She does so by adding her own twist to the request

She tells him that she wanted it now and she wanted it served up on a plate

**vs. 24, 25 – *“And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist” “And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist”***

That phrase ***“by and by”*** means *give me at once*

***“a charger”***is *a plate of a platter*

**It Involved a ‘Sinful Dance’**

**It Involved a ‘Senseless Declaration’**

**C. It Involved a ‘Shameful Deed’ – vs. 26-29 …**

Herod realizes immediately that he has made a mistake

**v. 26 a – *“And the king was exceeding sorry;”***

He should have said - “*I promised you a gift, not a murder!*”

But, he is afraid of losing face in front of his guests,

**v. 26 b – *“yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her”***

**v. 27 – *“And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,”***

The grisly trophy is then presented to Salome

**v. 28 *– “And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother”***

And, with that, the Baptist is dead!

His disciples come and take his body away for burial

**v. 29 – *“And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb”***

As we watch Herod in these verses, we are witnessing the Death of his Conscience

He refused to accept the Word of God and change his ways

He listened to John preach repeatedly but said “*no*” to the Word

Now, he has crossed the line and done the unthinkable

He has put this man he both feared and admired to death, all because of the anger of his wife

This is a tragic scene

There are several lessons for us here, if we will listen to them

* These verses reveal the devastating power of hatred, bitterness and unforgiveness

It is better to follow the command of God and forgive those who hurt you than it is to be consumed by bitterness and hatred

**Ephesians 4:32 –** ***“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”***

**Matthew 18:21,22 *- “Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me,***

***… and I forgive him? till seven times?” “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven”***

* These verses reveal the dangers involved in the use and abuse of alcohol and mind-altering drugs

They will take control of your life, lower you inhibitions and lead you to do things you never would have thought of doing otherwise

**Proverbs 23:29, 30 –** ***“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?” “They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine”***

* These verses reveal the danger of peer pressure

Just because others do stupid things, does not mean that you have to follow their lead!

Just because others drink, use drugs, engage in pre-marital sensual activity and other things, does not mean that you have to do it too!

You have nothing to prove to your so-called friends!

By the way, not everyone is doing it if you aren't!

* These verses reveal the danger of not controlling your tongue

What you say can harm you and it can harm others!

**James 3:6** tells that it’s the tongue that lights the world on fire (and not in a good way)

***“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”***

**HEROD’S “CRIME”**

**HEROD’S “CONFUSION”**

**III. HEROD’S “CONSCIENCE” – vs. 14-16 …**

When Herod heard about Jesus and what He was doing,

His Conscience made one last attempt to point him toward the truth

But, by this time, his Conscience has been so ignored and abused; it is hardly functioning at all

Let's listen to the last gasps of a Dying Conscience

**A. His ‘Conviction’ – v. 14**

***“And (when) king Herod heard of him; (for His name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in Him”***

As soon as Herod hears about the Miracles, the Message and the Ministry of Jesus,

The Conviction begins

Herod immediately assumes that Jesus is John resurrected from the dead

It is amazing that he would leap to this conclusion

Let me tell you why …

Herod was a member of the party of the Sadducees

The Sadducees denied the supernatural and did not believe in the resurrection

Another amazing thing is the fact that John the Baptist did no miracles during his ministry

Herod assumes that the miracles could only be done by a man returned from the dead

The guilt over what he did is eating him alive

He knows he killed an innocent, decent and good man

His Conscience is bothering him and he is sure that John the Baptist has come back to haunt him

That is the power of guilt! It will eat you alive

You can't run from it. You can't hide from it

You can't escape its words

It shows up when you are alone

Guilt comes calling in the dead of night

It gnaws at the soul and eats away at the mind

The only solution for guilt over past sins is to bring those sins to Jesus

When they are brought to Him, Jesus forgives the sin and removes the guilt

He can set you free from the monster of guilt!

Listen again to His promise – **I John 1:9**

**His ‘Conviction’**

**B. His ‘Confession’ – vs. 15,16**

***“Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets” “But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead”***

Some people around Herod and around the region were saying that Jesus was Elijah or one of the other prophets

Herod is convinced that Jesus is none other than John the Baptist

Then, Herod makes a startling Confession

He says **“*whom I beheaded*”**

That **“*I*”** is an *emphatic, personal pronoun*

Herod is saying – “*whom I and I alone beheaded”*

Herod is confessing his guilt, but he is not seeking forgiveness from the hand of God

There is Confession, but there is no Repentance!

Thus, there is no Salvation!

There is only the Death of Conscience and Herod stifles the last effort of his wounded soul to call him to God

It is one thing to know you are guilty of sin

It is another thing altogether for you to get honest about that sin

When you get honest about your sin and confess it to the Lord, He will forgive your sins

When there is a desire to repent, and turn away from sin, there can be salvation

But, when He calls and you ignore that call, choosing to remain in your sin, there is nothing left for you but judgment

God can cleanse and restore and give new life

But, He only does these things in the face of a **“*good conscience*”** that longs to do right

When His call is ignored, the Conscience begins to die

If the call is rejected long enough and often enough,

The Conscience will die altogether

At that point, God may call, but His voice will not be heard

At some point God just gives them up to their own way

**Romans 1:24-32 …**

Do not destroy your Conscience by ignoring the call of God

**His ‘Conviction’**

**His ‘Confession’**

**C. His ‘Condemnation’ – Luke 23:6-11 …**

The final mention of Herod Antipas in the Word of God is in these verses

Here, Jesus had been arrested and had appeared before Pontius Pilate

Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas because Jesus was from Herod's jurisdiction

When Jesus appears before Herod, all Herod wants is to see Jesus perform some miracle

He doesn't care about the truth; he is just looking for some entertainment

The Lord Jesus refuses to even speak to Herod

God has finished with him and there will be no more calls for him to repent

God has nothing more to say to King Herod!

There will be no more opportunities for him to be saved

He has sinned away his day of grace and he is doomed

Herod's Conscience is so scarred that he has no compassion for a condemned man

He and his men mock Jesus

They adorn him in a king's robe and send Him away

Thus ends the story of Herod Antipas!

He has ignored the truth and killed his own Conscience

There will be no hope and no salvation for Herod forever

It is a dangerous thing to turn God away

When you do, you are not guaranteed that He will ever speak to you again,

**Genesis 6:3 –** ***“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years”***

**Proverbs 27:1 –** ***“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”***

Each time you turn the Lord away, it hardens your heart more and more

Billy Graham often quoted: *“The same sun that melts the butter hardens the clay.”*

Eventually, you reach the place where the Conscience dies

When that happens, you will never hear His voice again

Please do not play around with spiritual matters

If He is speaking to your heart, do as He is calling you to do

**CONCLUSION**

The Death of Conscience is a tragic event because the Death of Conscience usually leads to the Death of a Soul

When you refuse Jesus and the Gospel, there remains no hope for your salvation

There is nothing in one’s future but the terrible effects of sin and the horrors of Hell

Has the Lord been speaking to you?

Has He been calling you to come to Jesus for salvation?

Has He been calling you to get before Him and get your spiritual life back in order?

Has He been calling you to turn away from some sin in your life?

If He is calling you, please do not do like Herod

If He is calling you please come to Him today and do what He us calling you to do

The time for obedience is right now

**HEROD’S “CRIME”**

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