

*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In the land of Old Forgotten Vacation Bible School Songs, there exists a tune about the Devil, old Slew foot himself, that goes like this: “The Devil is a sly old fox. I wish I could catch him and put him in a box. Then, lock the door and lose the key, for all the tricks he’s played on me.” In the King’s English, that translates to: “the devil made me do it.” Unfortunately, the devil gets far more credit for where we’ve fallen short of the glory of God than he deserves. And we don’t get the credit that we do deserve. For when it comes to sin, the devil may tempt. But our natural Garden of Eden instinct is to follow. In the land of New Vacation Bible School Songs, there should, therefore, be a tune about sin that should go something like this: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go. Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay. And sin will cost you more than you want to pay.” And, church, we do not need a King’s English translation to better understand, do we? We know exactly what it means. And we get all the credit.

In the passage before us today, Mark does something he has never done before, nor will he do again. He interrupts the story of Jesus to go back in time and relay to us the story of how John the Baptist died. It’s a story that features Herod Antipas allowing sin to take him further than he wanted to go. It’s a story about Herod’s wife, Herodias, being so hostile to John the Baptist that she influenced Herod to hold the baptizer in a cell much longer than he wanted him to stay. And it’s a story about Salome, both his stepdaughter AND daughter in law, influencing Herod Antipas to the point that it cost him much more than he wanted to pay. But that’s not the end of the story. For thanks be to God, Jesus offers victory over what sin has beheaded. As a result, I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Mark 6:14-29. There’s a message the Lord has for you about sin from the life of Herod Antipas. There’s a message the Lord has for you about sin from the life of his wife, Herodias. There’s a message the Lord has for you about sin from the life of his stepdaughter AND daughter in law, who we historically know as Salome. And there’s a message the Lord has for you about victory from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And I’ll lay them out for you after we read the narrative together.

*14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” 15 Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.” 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!” 17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. 21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.” 23 And he promised her with an oath, “Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” 24 She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist,” she answered. 25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” 26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.*

## 1. Herod Antipas: Sin and Conscience

- **The Crime I Had Been Planning:** (1) It was the first crime I had planned. It happened when I was 5. (2) I knew we were about to stop for gas at Ragan’s Quick Stop and I knew where the suckers were. (3) So, I made a beeline to them. When I didn’t see Mr. Ragan, I put a handful of them in my pocket. (4) When my mom and I got to the counter to check out, he said “is there anything else you would like to purchase and put in the bag, I didn’t look in the eye when pulling the suckers out of my pocket. I looked down at my feet. My conscience got me before Mr. Ragan did. That was the end of my life of crimes I had planned.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The reality of sin – and what Herod Antipas had done to John the Baptist because of it – haunted his conscience. The reality/presence of sin has an impact on our conscience also, but in a slightly different way.
- **The Extremes of Herod’s Conscience:** (1) Herod Antipas is an interesting figure in this text because he’s not all bad, especially as it relates to John the Baptist. (2) In one respect, Mark portrays Herod as someone with a highly sensitive conscience, an individual who clearly understood who and what is righteous. Mark tells us as much in verse 20. (2) In another respect, however, Herod’s conscience was seared to the point that it allowed him to carry out something he didn’t want to do: have John the Baptist executed and display his head on a platter.
- **The Extremes of Our Conscience:** (1) An Oversensitive Conscience – Christians can have an over-sensitive conscience that brings about a neurotic sense of guilt for everything at every turn. This happens often in Christian’s lives that have a very well-defined view of sin. On the other hand, Christians who have an over-sensitive conscience do not have a well-defined view of grace, nor do they allow themselves to live in it. Jesus has given us grace for a reason and to be haunted by an oversensitive conscience isn’t one of them. (2) A Seared Conscience – This is the act opposite of an oversensitive conscience. A seared conscience is a dulled one; one that learns to live and fellowship with your demons instead of casting them out. Those with a seared conscience require God’s gifts of guilt and anguish at sinful choices. Both are God’s way of telling one with a seared conscience that He loves them enough to lead them to repentance.

## 2. Herodias: Sin and Hostility

- **Brightest Flashlight on the Market:** (1) They don't make flashlights like they used to. I used to camp with a 1.99 flashlight. Now people can camp with an Imalent MS 18. It's the brightest light on the market. (2) I'm sure some kid somewhere has one and has already used it for the oldest trick in the summer camp book: shining the light into the eyes of campers sound asleep. (3) And their reactions are the same as they've always been: hostility. (4) John the Baptist was the Imalent MS 18 in his world. Herod's wife Herodias didn't like the flashlight very much either.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Explosive anger and hostility when confronted is the surest fruit of the reality of a seared conscience that delights in evil. Herodias hated John the Baptist because he told the truth. She didn't like the truth, so she had him killed.
- **The Nursing of the Grudge:** (1) The text says Herodias nursed a grudge. It's the idea of consistently harboring, mediating, and ruminating on ill feelings toward someone to the point that it motivates to actions. (2) There were several reasons Herodias was hostile to John the Baptist. But the main one concerned her marriage to Herod Antipas. When Herod the Great died, he split his kingdom up among 4 of 13 sons. Herod Antipas was one of them. Another one, Philip, lived in Rome as a private citizen. He was married to Herodias before she became "Herodias." They had a daughter: Salome. While in Rome Herod Antipas had an affair with his sister-in-law, Herodias, and convinced her to leave Philip and marry him. She did. And when John the Baptist began preaching a baptism of repentance, he used the first couple as an illustration. (3) Herod Antipas listened because he knew what he was saying was the truth, but he didn't have the courage to walk in it. Herodias was hostile to the message because she had no regard for the truth. As a result, the nursing of the grudge was born.
- **Responses to Truth-tellers in the Bible:** (1) David to Nathan: "have mercy upon me oh God according to your lovingkindness. Wash away my iniquity and forgive me from my sin (Ps 51). (2) Herod Antipas/Ahab: Passiveness and submission to those who nurse grudges: Herodias and Jezebel. (3) Hostility to the Point of Nursing a Dangerous Grudge: Caiaphas towards Jesus, Paul towards Stephen, Jezebel towards Elijah, and Herodias towards John the Baptist. (4) How respond not only tells us a lot about our character, but it also tells us whether we really value truth or falsehood.

## 3. Salome: Sin and Scheming

- **The Worst Church Tragedy in History:** (1) The church has been on the wrong side of history many times in history. But its lowest moment came in Germany during WWII. (2) The church knew where the trains they heard rumbling outside were going: they were going to concentration camps. (3) But instead of doing something about it, most insisted on playing the music a little bit louder when the trains passed by so they would have to hear it or think of it. (4) That's how evil prospers in our world: it requires participants. Those who may not hatch the plans. But don't mind turning the music up when the train passes. (5) Salome is a lot like that.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Herodias' nursing of hatred required unassuming and pliable participants to be carried out. It required someone like Salome, who is not recorded as having animosity towards John. Her sin, therefore, was that of participating.
- **The Participation Script:** (1) It required a leader. It wasn't Herod Antipas. It wasn't Salome. It was Herodias. (2) It required a powerful figure in a powerful position who should have been the leader but wasn't. That was Herod Antipas. Herodias was the one doing the leading. (3) It required an army of unassuming workers who were oblivious to the plot: Salome was one of those, as were those who carried out the order. Thus, the reason she asks her mother what she should ask for.
- **How Sin Gives Birth in Groups, Even Among People Who Desire the Lord:** (1) It usually starts with a word that's planted intentionally from a schemer (unbeknownst to the group); (2) Instead of being dismissed as idle chatter or gossip, the idea of the one(s) hostile becomes the idea of the group. (3) Before you know it, the group has become involved in a scheme they didn't know what they were involved in.

## 4. Jesus: Power and Victory

- **Step into the Water:** (1) There is victory for the Christian, who walks the narrow way. There has been a prize appointed, for the soul that does not stray. I want to live for Jesus. Be all that I should be. So, I can rest with Him forever. Live eternally. Step into the water. Wade out a little bit deeper. (2) The victory of Jesus over sin makes it possible.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Herod was haunted because he thought John the Baptist had risen from the dead. He hadn't. But Jesus would. For he alone holds the power over sin and death. And Mark wanted his readers to know that by the way he structures the passage.
- **The Jesus Inclusion:** (1) When Bible writers penned the Scriptures, they did not use Bible verses. Bible verses, in fact, didn't appear in any Bibles until the Geneva Bible in the 1500s. (2) As a result, what they did to let readers know what verses belonged together was frame the material with book ends. They were verses that featured similar material at the front and back ends. (3) Mark uses that method here. Notice he begins the passage in v 14 with Herod's haunting and fear that John the Baptist had returned from the dead. But notice also he ends with mention of John the Baptist's disciples taking his body and laying it in a tomb. (4) The reality was it wasn't John that had reason from the dead. It was someone greater than John: Jesus. His disciples were not carrying his body and putting it in a tomb either. They were carrying his message forward. (5) And one day, there message would include this: Jesus was laid in a tomb. But he arose.
- **The Jesus Implication:** (1) When we think of sin, we think of a dulled and seared conscience. We've all had one at some time. (2) When we think of sin, we think of anger and hostility at being confronted. We've all been there. (3) When we think of sin, we think of schemes. We've all participated, knowingly or unknowingly. (4) But the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus can change all of that. He, and he alone, has the power to pierce the darkness and behead the sin that so easily entangles us. (5) Praise be to Him for victory and for the new life He made possible for us by His atoning work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.