

Empathy for the Wicked – Herodias

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MAIN VERSES

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Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love? A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God? Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

As we're continuing the series this week, "Empathy for the Wicked," we dare to dive into the narrative of the Bible and take a look at the characters we would deem villains, the wicked, the sinners—rightfully so. This is how the authors of the Bible have presented them to us. But we dare to look at them to try to understand why they became sinners, what they have been known for. And I hope this has been edifying for you. It's been pretty neat for me to put this together, and I've gotten good feedback as a community. I've gotten to learn a lot about these biblical characters on a whole new level.

Because the characters are given to us in the narrative of the Bible, we're meant to study them. We're meant to look at them. We're not meant to simply say, "Check, they're a villain, dismiss them. I don't need to look at them. I don't need to examine them. I obviously don't need to be like them." But when we do that, we miss what the biblical authors are simply trying to tell us about these people.

Every Villain Was Human

Every villain in the Bible was a human being. Every villain in the Bible had a mom and a dad, maybe some brothers and sisters, maybe was a mother and a father. Every villain in the Bible was kind of like you. How did they become evildoers? How did the villains of the Bible become the wicked sinners of the Bible? If we choose to look away and not dive in, not even attempt to empathize with them, we may miss the thing that caused them to fall, and we may be destined to fall in the very same way because we refuse to try to learn from the examples in the Bible.

And so the past few weeks we've been examining people like Cain, people like Herod the Great, people like Jezebel, which was kind of my favorite, to try to see what was their downfall. And most of the time we see their downfall with something that maybe many of us are about to fall in ourselves, very close to home.

Herodias: Granddaughter of Herod the Great

And so today we're going to look at a woman that Matthew and Mark both mentioned. She was well-known. Josephus mentions her. Herodias, the granddaughter of Herod the Great. And if you're unfamiliar with the story, we're going to be reading primarily from Mark chapter 6, starting in verse 14 through verse 29. Herodias was the woman who wanted to kill John the Baptist and was successful at orchestrating him being beheaded.

How can we possibly empathize with the woman who is responsible for John the Baptist losing his head?

So if you join me, turn with me to Mark chapter 6. And like I've been doing the past few weeks, I've kind of presented the message and turned it more into a narrative, more into a story, so that we can use our imaginations. Can we use our imaginations today? Very good. I want you to kind of turn that on in your brain as we explore this narrative. And we're going to try to see if we can form a story where Herodias looks like one of us. And maybe you'll see something that connects with you and you can truly empathize with the wicked.

Mark chapter 6, verse 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 these miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others say he is Elijah."

So Yeshua is becoming well-known around Judea. Who is this guy? And the king here is hearing about this, and he's like, "I'm hearing about this rabbi, this crazy, zealous rabbi for God, and he's doing all these miracles. This must be John the Baptist. Has John the Baptist been raised from the dead? Because we've killed him."

And then the story—Mark kind of stops the story and he goes back.

The Trap of Guilt

Starting in verse 16: "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead, truly." So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to 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.

This is funny, verse 20. So Herod—this is not Herod the Great. This is not the guy who went to Bethlehem and killed those children. This is one of his sons. And he ended up marrying Herod the Great's granddaughter. It's going to get more complicated from here. The Herodian family was steeped in trauma.

But it's so funny because in Matthew's account, it's a little bit different. Mark seems to paint this like, this Herod, Herod Anubis, when he listened to John the Baptist, he was just confounded. "I don't like what you're saying, but I do. That's a good message. That's a good point." It's one of those situations.

Imagining Herodias

And so I want you to imagine with me, to step into the story of Herodias. I want you to imagine the day that she wakes up and sits once again at her vanity, staring into the mirror. Imagine her looking at her beauty, the power that she has inherited from her father and her father's father glowing in the mirror. With pride, she reaches down for the black ash, slowly stroking it across her eyebrows, darkening them. "This is what true power looks like," she thinks. "This is what power feels like."

She looks out the window, admiring the sunrise over the valleys of Judea. Her former husband never appreciated just how far she was willing to go to preserve the name of royalty. This isn't Jezebel we're speaking about. This is Herodias, granddaughter of Herod the Great, a man of great power, whose authority was granted even by Augustus Caesar himself. This was a woman with pride, power, and influence—the spokeswoman of the new women of Rome, if you will.

And the woman who influenced her the most was Livia, the wife of Augustus Caesar. You see, in the first century, there was a turning point for history where the Greek family structure was beginning to crumble in light of the modern age, the Roman cultivation and evolution that was taking place. And Livia, wife of Augustus Caesar, was not just some submissive wife to the greatest ruler of the world. No, she joined her husband. She stood beside him. She even negotiated on behalf of her husband. In the first century, she was involved in political matters. She truly was an icon of what a woman of Rome could and would become. This was the woman Herodias looked up to, emulated, idolized.

Memory and Loss

Herodias stares into the mirror, pushing back the memories of her father, Erastobulus. She remembers his smile, his warmth, his hug. She remembers the voice of her father finding delight in her. See, she used to dance for him as a child—at least when he was around. In this era, fathers were not really in the picture for younger children. They worked all day. They put their energy and attention toward their wives when they got home. They might be around the table for dinner, but for their young children, that was the wife's doing. The men would likely hang out with the wife, go to the chambers after dinner, and the children would be left alone. That continues until they come of age, when the men have to step forward and begin to raise their children, enter into their lives.

This always made the time that Herodias spent with her father even more precious, for he would give her moments of his attention. Every so often he would come home and instead of conversing with Berenice, her mom, he would sit in the courtyard with her. No dance was the same for this eight-year-old as she twirled around her father. She just wanted to impress her daddy. Every chance she got. Every dance ended with her falling into his arms.

As she sits there, staring into the courtyard of her childhood home, she feels the overwhelming emotions bubbling up inside of her. Pushing the feelings down, she stops herself from remembering that day once again—the day when her father was taken from her, when the royal guards of Herod appeared at the doorstep, forcing themselves in, grabbing him, slamming him to the floor. She shakes her head, pushing the thoughts away, waking herself from the nightmare that she relives daily.

A New Beginning

Imagine her refocusing, finding herself back in the real world, looking around. Divorced from her uncle—the husband forced upon her after her father was killed—now she's with the man she loves. She's with the man who empowers her. She's with the man who is proud of her. You see, she had divorced her husband, Herod II, and instead she married Herod Anubis, her other uncle. He was already married, but, well, details. He's still her uncle, but her life was heading in an amazing direction at this point. For the first time, this man of her dreams was filling the void in her heart.

In a time where husbands were chosen by others, she chose her own. Herodias—a woman who emulated Caesar's wife—did something radical. This was bold. It was even dangerous. No matter, she was a Herodian. She was power. And her new husband was a powerful overseer in Galilee.

The One Problem

There's just one problem. One problem with this. One point in her life where the trauma can fade. One problem where anxiety can be pushed down with joy. One problem where fear can be pushed down with comfort. One little complication.

A voice in the wilderness proclaiming her as a horror of sorts. Some proper prophet who has a reputation of eating insects and an occupation of temporarily drowning willing volunteers for religious rites. This man, without proper pedigree, was apparently outspoken against the royals of Galilee.

How Rome Silences Dissent

How does a powerful woman of Rome snuff out this annoying buzz? Well, that's simple. A public display of what happens when you challenge the power and authority of government. Who in their right mind would dare criticize their royal leadership? How can you call yourself a citizen when you're throwing your opinions of birth or marriage or pedigree or religion on your God-appointed leaders? There's only one way to solve this. Death. This is how we handle things in the Roman world. But there's just one problem. He's regarded as a prophet, a divine messenger, and he gains the respect of the common people.

Imagine the rumors that were flooding through the streets that she, the queen or the princess, the royal, is immoral, that she is a horrible leader, that she is against God, that she is a transgressor of God's covenant. Why? Because she would dare, dare pursue love in a world that hates. She loves her new husband. The passion that they share—what does this prophet expect from her? That she lives with a man that she doesn't love? Sure, the Holy Torah states a man cannot marry his brother's wife while he's still alive, but Roman law doesn't forbid it. And here Roman law rules. To be honest, there's plenty of worse things she could be accused of.

Into the Prison

She makes her way through the courts of the Judean fortress and down to the prison. She slowly makes her way past the guards. They stand at salute, walking deeper, deeper, deeper into the prison walls. Imagine that she grabs a torch. There's no light where she's going to descend. She slows her pace so the slave behind her does not lose pace when he's carrying the platter to serve up to this prisoner. Passing the rusted bars on her left and her right—cages made for men—she approaches the cell at the end of the corridor.

Imagine being there at that moment. She's never met him face to face. She's only heard of this accuser, but her husband put him in jail. Now she gets to meet him face to face. Imagine the stammering that's heard in the darkness as a wild-looking man, indiscernible from a beast, appears there. He was the prophet of God. This was the man. This was the man the people support as God's holy messenger.

A Woman Meets the Prophet

A woman has come to him. Imagine the contempt. Surely he knows who she is. Not many women have access to the prisons like this. The staring all but ignites fire between the bars. She offers a humble smile, maybe, clearly showing her lack of intimidation by his reputation.

"John, son of Zacharias, I thought it was time that we should meet. They call you the baptizer. Now you know about John. Imagine him staring back. Well, John, they call me the queen."

Imagine John relaxing, posing an apology. "Oh, forgive me, your highness. The facetious tone piercing through the silence. I am unschooled in the education of nobility. He poses a curtsy. I didn't know the wife of a prince was called a queen."

Imagine her boldness. "Your reputation, your reputation lives up to your audacious remarks and your reckless words."

Imagine John looking at her. "God have mercy on you, Jezebel," turning his back.

Herodias, keeping her composure, what she's learned, what would Livia do? How would she stand? She allows the hurtful words to pass through her. "I've come to speak to you concerning my marriage."

And John interrupts her audaciously. "So you've come to repent, to turn back to the way of the Lord. He holds up his finger as if silently asking her to wait just a moment. He gets antsy. He looks around the room, lifts his leg up. I'm a bit short of water at the moment, Your Highness. I have no way to give you the right of repentance. Maybe if you'd like to draw a bath, that will do."

Imagine her raising an eyebrow, now seeing that this is a fight of wits. "What will your followers think when they hear that you want to bathe the queen?"

John stammers, starting to realize that two years in a dark cell has numbed his wits. He's no longer able to be quick. Herodias remarks with laughter, "I don't want you here. I don't want you in this cell. No one wants you here. It looks bad. It looks bad. It looks bad for you being a

prophet of the Lord. And it looks bad for my husband, Antipas, locking up the prophet of the Lord. But not as bad as having a prophet dancing around the land, announcing to everyone who will listen that their leader's marriage is an abomination, that he's not fit to rule, that his wife"—looking sternly at him—"the princess of Judea is no better than a bar girl."

The Offer and the Refusal

Imagine John looking her up and down, suggesting but not saying.

"John, I need you to listen right now." She draws a large iron key out of her shirt. The slave behind her seems surprised. How could someone have so much authority to have the gates of the prison? "You can leave right now. You can walk out of here unharmed, untouched, and no need to look over your shoulder. You can go back home into the desert weeds and join your community, your followers. Only two years lost in this dreadful cell. You want the rest of your life back, right? Surely you want your followers back, and surely they want you back. John, they need you."

John's pose changes. He relaxes as if imagining being back among his people, among his followers. "Just give me your word. Give me your word that your lips will never utter anything about my marriage again, my life, my love again. Not to your closest disciples, not to the foreigners that pass you on the way, not to the desert creatures that crawl where you sleep. Nothing about me, Antipas, or our marriage ever again. That's all it's a simple request that grants you immense freedom."

John nods his head as if her offer hits a place in his heart, as if he's nourished the idea, as if he's about to accept. Imagine Herodias grinning with relief, awaiting his words. Then he straightens up with pride, throwing back his shoulders, no longer leaning on the wall, but stepping forward, stepping forward as if an army is behind him.

"The day of the Lord is upon us. He will topple every kingdom, every ruler, every noble that stands against his mighty reign. The royalty of this world is the royalty of garbage. It is worthless, and the wise leaders who think they control the lives of God's people, they are nothing but fools. His vengeance, his wrath will overtake the heart. They will be leveled beneath the lowest of the low, your highness. His wrath will not simply be for the Gentile pagans that have had their way with his creation, but more so, his wrath will not spare even his own people who openly live a faithless life while somehow proclaiming covenant with him. Now is the time to repent, your highness."

Imagine John speaking to her in this way in the prison, his face inches away from the bars, his arms behind them still chained to the walls. Their breath meets between the iron.

A Prophet Cannot Be Bargained With

"I see your zeal is anxious to get back to preaching repentance beside the river. So do we have a deal, John?"

"How can people repent when their leadership stands in false righteousness, proclaiming to be chosen by God, proclaiming to walk with God, proclaiming to be zealous in the ways of God, and yet refuses to fall on their knees and repent? Sure, you say that you serve the Lord, Herodias. You are the leader of this nation. You say that we're created in God's image. You say that you love the people, yet your actions show forth a prideful spirit, neither humble nor righteous in their pursuit. When a man steals something, it's sin. When a man steals his brother's wife, it's an abomination before God. Whether you are queen or princess or noble or just a lowly ruler controlled by the beast called Caesar, God's standards do not change."

Can you imagine John speaking like this to the granddaughter of Herod? Remember how he spoke to the leaders and the Pharisees and the Sadducees beside the river? So bold with his tongue. Some might call him a jerk. "You son of Satan. Seed of the serpent. You brood of vipers. The religious. The ones who are known, or at least supposed to be known for giving to the poor. The ones who are supposed to be known for being the image bearers of God. The ones who outwardly live as if, wow, look at them, they're blameless. You brood of vipers."

In [Genesis 1](#), there's a lineage of the woman and there's a lineage of the snake. Which one will you be? I know who you are, you brood of vipers. You think your bloodline means something because you're a son of Abraham? Look at these rocks on the ground. God can raise these up to be the covenant people of God.

Imagine him focusing all of that energy to this woman that wants him to be quiet. "Stop proclaiming Torah to the people. Stop shining your righteous light on leadership. Ignore this and go back home and you can be free."

"Negotiations are always hard for your kind, but I trust in time you will soothe your fanatical zeal. You think you can have the life that you want and live in this world? It doesn't work that way, John."

She motions for the slave to set down the platter beside the cell. "It's because of me that you get a meal much nicer than your usual slush. What can I say except, you're welcome?"

Herodias exits the cell. Everything goes dark. Darkness. Silence.

The Father's Approval

She hears her father humming. Imagine her hearing the tapping of his foot on the ground. Imagine her hearing her father clapping his hands. It's a fast beat. He's laughing. He's gazing at her with such acceptance, love, delight. She had never had his attention for this long before. She twirls for him. She's so happy. She feels the joy of his acceptance. She jumps in the air and lands on his lap, looking up at him, looking into his eyes.

Imagine her hearing the voice of her father, "I love you, Herodias. I'm so proud of you. You are my daughter."

The acceptance of her distant father fills her heart. She experiences nirvana, Eden right there.

But the music comes to a halt when the door is kicked in. The sunlight disappears. Darkness reigns. Dim light. All she hears is screams. Screams as her father is ripped from her arms. Screams as Herod's royal guards hold him down. Screams as one guard holds his arms while the other puts his hands around his throat. Screams as his eyes look to the sky and lose focus, life flowing out of him. Screams as the guards walk past her, leaving the lifeless body of her father next to her. Screams coming from her own lungs. She wakes up sweating, grabbing the covers on her bed, the void, the emptiness, the pain, the shock fully present in her chest, and she looks down to see her husband beside her, slight comfort as she grasps his hands while he still sleeps.

A Nightmare and a Complicated Legacy

See, Herod, her grandfather, Herod the Great, took everything from her all over a false accusation of conspiracy. Her grandfather was told that her father, his son, was conspiring against him, so he killed him. Herod the Great, her grandfather, was the man who tore a hole in her heart, even at a young age. It only brought temporary peace knowing that Herod the Great died in agony in Jericho, a mystery illness, constant pain. It caused him to go insane and try to stab himself, to kill himself, but he was stopped—slowly dying. Good, she thought. The pain in her heart remained, however.

She missed her dad, or the idea of her father. She finally felt like she had impressed him as his daughter the day that he died. Finally, he noticed her. Daddy loved her like Mommy did. Even though it had been so long ago, she missed the idea of what it would be like to have her father around today.

Imagine her in bed, sweating, wrapping her arms around her husband, just trying to fill that void of comfort and fear. At least she has him, and at least he loves her.

A Political Marriage Built on Love—But Also Power

See, this is the man that was married to a princess that was in an allegiance to another king, but they fell in love. And both being married didn't stop them. They chose to pursue a different marriage, to break covenants, to break treaties. He divorced his wife of 15 years. She divorced her husband. They work so well together.

Her ex-husband, yeah, he wasn't going to be as great of a leader as her new husband. He wasn't as in line to become the greater ruler. He was just going to rule a lesser land. So, yeah, she has a man that loves her, but she also has a man that will give her power, that will rule over more. Why wouldn't she choose that? Why wouldn't you choose that?

Imagine the morning dawn coming up. She could smell the salt from the Dead Sea right outside her window. Imagine her descending back down one more time.

Good morning, John. The dark figure moves out of the corner. Do you even know it's morning, John? You've been in here for two years. Does time even become entombed in these walls?

The Prison Visit

Looking down, she sees the platter untouched. You don't like what I've prepared? Fine. I'll see what I can do. You know that was cooked in the king's kitchen, right? Maybe we can find you some crickets or something, if that's more to your liking.

Imagine John looking at her, looking behind her and saying, I can't speak to you. John remains silent. John, free yourself from these walls. Tell me what it will take. What do you want from me? I have control of Antipater's ear. What do you want? Do you want to be the ordained prophet of the palace? Do you want wealth? How about we fund a school for your ministry in the wilderness? You can train up other prophets. John, you're pretty bold. The people love you. Why don't you get involved with politics? That would be a successful route. We will endorse you. Imagine how you could advance the kingdom of God throughout Judea then.

John remains silent.

At Wit's End

At wit's end, this is a woman that's used to getting what she wants. Okay, how about my baptism? My husband and I will submit to you in your baptism before everyone.

He laughs.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice as he looks at her.

Imagine Herodias laughs in disbelief. John, did you just quote Solomon and out of the same mouth lecture me on holy marriage? Who's double-minded here, John?

Imagine her words piercing John. John reflecting back, empathizing with Elijah when Jezebel sent the letter.

Herodias, being overwhelmed, snaps. John, taken back by her passion.

He's taken care of us. He's proud of me. You know nothing, prophet. You know nothing of pain. You know nothing of loss. You know nothing of family, of love, or children. Do you even know what it's like to sacrifice for someone else?

You haven't married your love. You haven't pursued these types of relationships. You've committed yourself to God.

John interrupts: And you didn't marry your husband for love. He's closer in line with the throne. He has more power. That's what you seek after, just like your mentor, Livia. Your last husband was demoted in status, so you, being power hungry, chose to talk a man into divorcing his wife so that you could be closer to power, to lord over your subjects. You know nothing of love, woman. Your husband will abandon you just like he did his wife.

Imagine in that moment she's reminded of the loss—the man in her life whom she'd wanted to believe was all-consuming. She feels as if maybe her husband will leave her one day. She begins to tear up, holding the torch away from her face.

You have no idea how hard it is to be a Herodian, John. You have no idea what I go through. I was mentored by Livia. My father sent me to Rome to be educated, and I was mentored by the wife of the greatest empire of the world. You have no idea what my life is like, but I am a strong woman. I have power, and I will command your attention.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. You will always be found wanting in your unrepentant state, always searching.

Imagine Herodias. Just imagine her boldness. Not this fear, but the passion.

Drop your self-righteous condemnation, prophet. You're far from home, but at least I'm whole. At least I have a piece of God.

He smiles with reassurance as he completes the Psalm of Proverbs.

Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share in the blunder of the proud.

At that moment, Herodias begins to have these emotions. This man will not give her what she wants, and he's threatening her. He's threatening everything that she's lived for. He's threatening everything that she has obtained and fought for.

The Voice in the Darkness

She begins to hear a voice in her head. It's a man's voice, but not a familiar one. He's going to take everything. He wants to take your throne. He wants to demote your status. He's conspiring against you. You know what to do.

Imagine Herodias looking at him. One last time, John, will you free yourself or not?

Silence fills the cell.

So be it, as she begins to walk away. As she grabs the railing for the staircase, imagine she realizes whose voice that is—the voice of her grandfather.

The King's Rash Oath

The story continues in verse 21. Verse 21. Mark chapter 6.

I want you to go right now and ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

So she did. She hurried back.

I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

The king was greatly distressed. What's he going to do? He didn't want to kill John. How bad would this look? But because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.

So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in prison, and brought it back on a platter. He presented it to the girl. She took it and presented it to her mother, Herodias.

This is Herodias. And we see here, if some of you caught it, we see how Mark directly connects Herod Antipas to Ahasuerus, making a rash vow in the midst of a busy party, committing to it

due to the pressure of his guests. Anyone notice that? I'll give you up to half my kingdom. That's from Ahasuerus and Esther.

See, in the story of Esther, his wife is banished as a result of his rash vow. But in this story, Mark tells it in such a way that his rash vow doesn't banish his wife. His rash vow kills a man that he didn't want to kill. And that's definitely a theme worth exploring.

Herodias's Complicated History

But today, I want to focus our energy into attempting to dive into the life of Herodias.

Now, obviously, I spent a lot of time conflating the story. And I took the facts that we know about Herodias throughout history. We know a lot about the Herodian family simply because of all the divorce contracts, the marriage contracts, the treaties. They were a very political family, and they definitely defined dog eat dog.

Do you think Herodias had a complicated life? Yes, she did. Do you want to know how messed up her life was? You ready? You don't have a choice. You ready? I'm just going to go through the pattern of her life real quick, okay? Okay, so...

Herodias' great-aunt, Salome I, manipulated her grandfather, Herod, into killing Herodias' grandmother, Miriam I. We spoke about her a couple weeks ago. More than a decade before Herodias was even born. The great-aunt was also Herodias' grandmother since Salome's first daughter, Bernice, was also Herodias' mother.

Herodias' father, Aristobulus, was by all accounts very good looking. He was wildly popular among all the Judeans, but that popularity made his father, Herod, very nervous. So Herod's oldest son, Antipater II, used that jealousy of this nice, handsome younger brother and told Herod that he was conspiring against him. So Herod killed him by strangulation when Herodias was only eight years old, illustrated in the story.

After her father was executed, Herod decided his granddaughter, Herodias, should be married to her uncle, Herod II, who was second in line for the throne after her uncle Antipater II, the one who got her father killed.

The Herodian Family Politics

Herod engaged Antipater II to Herodias' sister. So now her sister is married to the uncle that conspired and had her father killed. Thanksgiving dinner was not fun. And Antipater II, the uncle who got her father, Aristobulus, killed by convincing Herod that he wanted to kill him,

actually did try to kill Herod a couple years later. Herod executed him as well. Herodias' husband, Herod II, her first husband, should have been next in line for the throne. The power was going to be hers and his. But because his mother, Herod's first wife, knew about the assassination plot, Herod removed Herodias' husband, Herod II, from the line of succession altogether. Herod named Archelaus, the oldest son of his fourth wife, as his new heir. Herod II and Herodias had a daughter. Her name was either Herodias after her or Salome after her grandmother. History is kind of mixed in that. After her grandfather died, Herod the Great, Herodias' uncles all traveled to Rome to argue before Augustus Caesar over who got to be king. And that's when Augustus divided the kingdom into quarters, giving half to the eldest son of his fourth wife, Archelaus, and a quarter to Herod Antipas, and a quarter to Philip. Nothing for Herod II, which is her husband at the time. That's got to sting, right? Archelaus proved to be worse than his father, and he was disposed after about a decade of being a terrible ruler. And that territory was converted over to the province of Judea, and it was Roman-ruled, complete with a Roman governor entering into the first century. At some point after Antipas became the tetrarch, the ruler over Galilee, he divorced his wife, and he married Herodias. After Antipas and Herodias married, her daughter, Salome, married her uncle-brother-in-law, Philip the Tetrarch. So her daughter actually ended up going up to be in great power. Okay, exhausted yet? Was that a lot? That's like a snapshot of just a few things that we know about her life.

What We Know About Herodias

What we know about Herodias comes to us because of her story and how it weaves among all of the stories of the Herodian kings. She was always there in the background. Herodias is mentioned in the Bible really only because of her divorce and remarriage. She was born into a family of schemers and plotters, a family of whom power and security must be achieved at all costs. Imagine being in a family that is never a safe place. Parents and grandparents were killed, uncles were prospective husbands or would-be assassins. You don't know. Mothers, sisters, and cousins were swapped routinely to serve interest of whichever man they were currently in line of succession to be king. Herodias grew to womanhood knowing her family as the people who manipulated her to get what they wanted. Another family shaped Herodias, though, and that's a family who had a huge influence on many women in the first century. See, Herod sent his sons with Miriam I to be educated in Augustus' house in Rome. His lineage went to Rome to be educated by Caesar's household. It's no doubt that Julia or Livia, Augustus' wife, would be a mentor to these women, a strong woman. Though Herodias was a Jew, she was raised a Roman, and that's how she viewed the world, with power and might. So that's who she grew up to be.

Mark's Herodias

Mark's Herodias in the book of Mark is cunning, vengeful. She's a woman who saw John as an obstacle to her power and position. When her husband wouldn't execute him, she took matters into her own hands. In just a few brief verses, we see how Herodias demonstrated her ruthlessness, the ruthlessness that was foreshadowed by her grandfather, Herod the Great. It's incredible. She reminds you a little bit of Jezebel with the pursuit of power. How can we empathize with this woman? Well, she was just doing what most of us likely already do in a way. She worshipped something other than God, to put it frankly.

She Worshipped Power

Herodias, despite the trauma of living within a family shaped by mistrust, broken alliances, and morphing definitions of love, she leaned on the only goals she knew to pursue. Herodias worshipped power. She worshipped control over situations, atmospheres, and other people. It was not just what her family taught her to pursue. It was her whole life experience. It was the only thing that brought any type of security to her being. And I like to think that she hated her grandfather. I like to think that she hated Herod the Great. She hated him for killing her father. We don't know that. We don't know. But what we do know, we do know she became him. She became him. Herod saw his sons conspiring against him in his throne. Herodias saw John as conspiring against her in her throne. What is the solution?

We Become What We Pursue

See, there's a paradox at work in the human condition. It's ingrained in the story of [Genesis 1](#) all the way through Revelation. We become what we pursue. We are molded by what we put our energy into. What we give our energy and attention to transforms us. What we allow our thoughts to meditate on molds us. Has anyone ever become the thing that they hated most? Maybe you don't want to raise your hand. Has anyone ever known someone to become the thing that they hated most? Parents are often an easy example to poke at. More common than not, many of us have had experiences with parents that we deem as negative. Whether divorce, addiction, abuse, physical or verbal, maybe just short tempers, whatever the scale is. It's a common social phenomenon that we curse actions of our parents and we swear that we will never, ever, ever, ever be like them. Never. Never. And then we find ourselves in our adult life with the camera reel turning, watching our parents do the thing that we most hate, and it's no longer their face. It's ours. When our hate, when our obsession or energy has more attention in our soul than God's character, we are molded into it.

[Psalm 115](#) has an amazing, amazing example. [Psalms 115](#) verse 4, it says, And verse 8, And those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them. So this is one of the few sections of scripture that is speaking about a people that is literally putting their energy, their thoughts, their time, and their focus into molding a physical idol. You see that? It's their pursuit. This is what they're focused on. And the psalmist here is making a connection that just like the idols they create in worship, they can't see. Just like the idols that they create in worship, they can't hear. So too are the people worshipping that have worshipped them. They've become blind and deaf to God's character, his reign and his kingdom. We become what we pursue. It's a type of worship. When we pursue something, when we put more energy into something other than God's reign in our lives and in creation, when this happens, we cease to reflect the image of God and instead we reflect the image of whatever it is we worship, what we pursue.

The Mirror of What We Worship

Those who pursue money increasingly define themselves in terms of it, increasingly treat others not as human beings—as others made in the image of God—but as customers or partners or debtors. Those who pursue sex tend to define themselves also in said terms, and they begin treating and identifying others as objects or potential objects instead of human beings. Those who pursue power define themselves in the terms of it, viewing others as either competitors, collaborators, or pawns that they can control. They cease to be image bearers. You cease to be a fully human being that God made you to be. You actually conform to an animal. A non-human. That's why [Daniel 7](#), when he's talking about the beasts that roam the world and afflict mankind, they're not literal beasts. It's speaking about the kingdoms of the world that are no longer human. They're no longer reflecting God's image. They're only self-serving, seeking after self-interest at other people's expense. Animals. The beasts that we're supposed to rule over, we have become.

Herodias was trapped in a world where power was God, and she worshipped it. When mankind dismisses their calling to become God's image bearers, they no longer rule over the world. They become subject to it. Where are you? This is the question of the Bible that constantly presses out towards our hearts. Are you an image bearer, shining forth the light, the justice, and the love and the reign of God's kingdom? Or are you a beast of the field, being reigned over by something else? See to the woman, see to the serpent. It's a unique paradox that surrounds this motive. As humans, we tend to become what we hate, as in the story told by Herodias. She became the thing that killed her father. Far too often, we become what we hate. We become the

abusive father. We become the alcoholic mothers. We become the judgmental co-workers, the apathetic citizen. Far too many times, we look identical to the politics or the agendas that we claim to hate and be against.

What We Hate, We Become

President Trump gave his State of the Union address today. Three people sat up. That's good. There's a lot of emotions over the politics in our country right now. There's a lot of hate that surrounds the politics in our country right now. And social media is such a fascinating thing because it's always a good outlet to see the true side of someone. And I see people that talk about loving Yeshua and representing God and being God's image bearer, but the morning after the president gave this address, I saw things. My mother is a very strong woman. I learned a lot about focus and endurance and patience from her, believe it or not. I saw things that I would be embarrassed for my mother to see posted about the women that were seated at the address. Vile images and comments about them, names that should never be directed at another human being from someone who claims to be a believer. And it caused me to stop and truly reflect on my own life. See these comments from people. In their profile picture they're wearing a talit and their job or occupation is servant of Yahushua or something. And it's like, if what you're saying is true about these people, then why do you look the same? It caused me to stop and reflect on my own life.

Here we have someone who hates liberals more than they love God, or someone who hates conservatives more than they love God. You become what you put energy into over God and the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. That's just the way it is. Yes, stand up for what's right. Always stay honest. Always speak out concerning injustices. Always. But the moment that you allow hate to consume your heart, you lose. The moment you can never trade your anger for pity is the moment you lose.

What You Put Energy Into

I appreciated Brother David's message the other week. He spoke about abortion. Such a horrible, horrible thing that a mother would ever be placed in any type of position to ever consider. Do you remember what David said when he was up here? What David preached? How many of us pray for the mothers who have made that choice? How many of us are praying for the mothers who are considering that choice? How many of us think: can they find redemption? Are they outside the scope of God's grace and love? Was Herodias outside of forgiveness, grace, love, and acceptance by God? Was she too far away for God to reach? Are we not petitioning for

people, including ourselves, to be conformed to God's image? Or do we just want to get passionate about something and get a good hate going?

Many times we like to wear the badge of an image bearer. It makes us feel nice, does it not? It makes us feel righteous sometimes. But whose image are you bearing?

Whose Image Are You Bearing?

I don't come here to condemn you. I've asked myself that many times a day. Whose image are you bearing? And you know what? Sometimes when I ask myself that question, I refuse to answer myself. I refuse because I know it isn't always God. It's not always God.

And the moment we can acknowledge that is the moment we have the ability to change. That is the moment the Spirit, the same Spirit that raised Yeshua from the dead, can raise us from the dead if we choose to acknowledge it. If we choose to acknowledge that I'm here to show God's example to the world, then when I hate someone, I shouldn't be looking like them. I should be different.

And a lot of you guys are probably still thinking in political terms right now. No, step out of that.

Your Allegiance to Another Kingdom

Paul writes a letter, Philippians. He says, you've pledged your allegiance to another kingdom. So the whole book of Revelation is about that. There is a bigger kingdom than what is represented in a government and a flag here in this land. The whole book of Revelation is a reminder that you have pledged your complete allegiance to a kingdom that is not of this world. That is where you hold your allegiance. That is where you hold your allegiance over anything else. That is your first priority.

What does a citizen of that kingdom look like? What are the words that they speak? What are the prayers that they pray? What is the legacy that they leave behind?

Worship team, you guys can come up. I ran long.

The Choice Before You

If we can only get to the point where we acknowledge that we're not deserving of a Savior, maybe that's a good start for humility to go before that said Savior and say, hey, allow me to

reflect you in this world.

Herodias made a decision that day, not unlike anything that any of us have ever made, to choose to be self-serving instead of self-sacrificing. Would you choose—I have a question—would you choose to follow and emulate Yeshua if you had the chance? Would you choose to follow and emulate Yeshua if you really, really, really had the chance? Really, really, really? Really? You do. It's right outside those doors.

It's choosing to pray for the broken world instead of joining and matching it with the same hate and corruption that you hate about it. It's choosing to support and lift up others despite the decisions that they have made and choosing to view everyone as a person made to reflect God.

You're either feeding someone to reflect the image of God or you're blocking it. You're doing one of the two.

Only He Can Fulfill This Vocation

So I don't know where you're at today. Maybe this has been a complete waste of your time, but maybe, maybe you realize that you're pursuing something that is dehumanizing you as an image bearer. Maybe you're pursuing something in your life that's preventing God's image to be seen and reflected into the world. Maybe you are becoming what you're pursuing today, what you're giving all of your energy and focus into.

You have to be fully human and accept the vocation of what an image bearer does to show Yeshua to the world.

So please stand as we conclude in worship. We have a prayer team off to the side. I don't know what you've been through this week, but we have a prayer team that is here dedicated to you to support you, lift you up, and wherever you're at, encouragement, take advantage of that.

Make Us an Image of You

The longer we pursue things other than God, the more we will be conformed to an image that is not His.

Alvina Malkinu, our Father, our King. Father, we thank you for this time together. We thank you for your word, the narrative, the inspired words that are here today that we've explored. Father, make us an image of you. Make us an image of you. The Spirit that Yeshua told us we could have, give it to us. Give it to us so that we could shine your love and justice, your kingdom in a

world that is far from it. Conform us and mold us. Break us to mold us back to your image. In the name of Yeshua, we pray.

Shalom. I'm Matthew Vandrells and I hope you enjoyed this message.

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