

Theme: Ironies of the Passion: “He Had Been Wanting to See Jesus”

Luke 23:6-12 (EHV)

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad. For a long time, he had wanted to see him, because he had heard many things about him. He hoped to see some miracle performed by him. ⁹ He questioned him with many words, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the experts in the law stood there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Herod, along with his soldiers, treated him with contempt and ridiculed him. Dressing him in bright clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² Herod and Pilate became friends with each other on that day. Before this they had been enemies of each other.

If you had the choice to do anything you wanted to today, what would you do? What would you fill this full day of freedom with? Go skiing? Take a bike ride? Drive along the coast? Go to a concert or sporting event? Maybe you’d rather stay at home and all you want to do for the day is read, or maybe binge watch the latest TV show you’re into. Is it safe to say that what you came up with likely had something to do with entertainment or relaxation? It’s telling, isn’t it, how important entertainment is to us in general. What does what we do with our time say about us? But this isn’t a new thing. It’s not something unique only to our day, or our society. People with money and freedom have always struggled to fill the hours of their days. During this season of Lent, we’re focusing on the ironies of the passion. Today, Herod Antipas, a man who could do almost anything he wanted, had an unfulfilled desire for entertainment: **He had been wanting to see Jesus.**

Wanting to see Jesus is, of course, a good thing! There’s no irony there. But in Herod’s case, the irony is that he wanted to see Jesus for the wrong reason.

Maybe we should first identify which Herod we’re talking about. King Herod the Great ruled when Jesus was born. He’s the one the wise men came to see. He was the one who murdered the children around Bethlehem. He died soon after that. The Herod spoken of in our text was his son, Herod Antipas. Antipas only ruled Galilee, the northern part of Israel and a territory across the Jordan River called Perea. His brother, Archelaus, had reigned in Jerusalem for ten years, but the Romans tossed him out and put in a governor. By this time, the governor was Pontius Pilate.

Now, it was actually Herod Antipas who had engineered the downfall of his brother Archelaus. He had married one wife and then replaced her with his niece—who was already married to one of his younger brothers. Then, when John the Baptist had accused him of adultery, Herod threw him in prison and later killed him. Herod was not a nice man. This man needed Jesus! And low and behold, our text tells us that he’s going to get to see Him. Luke tells us in our text, **“When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad. For a long time, he had wanted to see him, because he had heard many things about him. He hoped to see some miracle performed by him” (v. 8).**

And there, dear friends, is the tragic irony of today’s account. This wicked, blood-thirsty, power-hungry, sinful man has the Savior of the world standing before Him—true God Himself in human form—about to die on the cross for Herod’s many shameful sins, as well as for the sins of the entire world, and all Herod wanted from Him were magic tricks! How sad.

Jesus, of course, had not come to be Herod's court magician, or to be our entertainer. He came to be our Savior. Jesus had no intention of showing Herod any miracles that day. Our text tells us, "**He [Herod] questioned him with many words, but Jesus gave him no answer**" (v. 9). So Herod did what all spoiled children do when they get bored. "**Herod, along with his soldiers, treated him [Jesus] with contempt and ridiculed him. Dressing him in bright clothing, he sent him back to Pilate**" (v. 11). Herod sent Jesus away without ever really understanding who it was he was speaking with.

Do you see the lesson for us in the tragic irony of Herod's attitude and actions? God had come and stood right in front of him! God has come to us—here in His own house! Do we see him today? Do we see him in his Word? Do we see him when we celebrate the Lord's Supper? Are we satisfied with the greatest miracle in all of history: God becoming one of us to save us from our sins and give us eternal life—or do we want something else when we come to church?

Do we think church should be more entertaining? Are we like spoiled children who want to be wowed and awed 24 hours a day, even during our hour of worship in God's house? Do we demand to be spoon-fed our faith so that it's dumbed down and palatable enough for us and our modern sensibilities, viewpoints, and tastes? The truth is, being Jesus' disciple takes work! It takes discipline to actually listen and pay attention in church. It takes commitment to study and grow in God's Word and understand the difference between the soul-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and what our society passes off as spirituality. We live in a culture that has too much wealth, too much free time, and too many entertainment opportunities that compete with listening to the simple truths of God's Word. Let's ask ourselves, honestly, "Are we turning into Herods?"

We have, at times, haven't we? We have often put entertainment, free-time, and pleasure above God and His Word. When we do come to His house for worship, we must admit that at times our minds have wandered when we should have been listening and paying attention to God's Word. Have we wished at times that our time at God's house would be more entertaining, or that we'd get to see Him do more miracles for us—you know the ones we want to see—instead of "just" the miracles of faith and forgiveness He has given us, or the miracle of His body and blood present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper that He provides for us constantly. Even though there have been many times when we were satisfied with God's Word, we haven't been perfect. If God would play the recording of our hearts and our attitudes toward His Word on Judgment Day, the only verdict he could render is guilty!

But He won't! He won't because Jesus has taken our sin away. Jesus, that beaten, bloody man standing next to Herod, let all this happen to Him so that he could carry our sins to the cross. There Jesus paid for Herod. He paid for us. There, at that cross, God has forgiven us, even for our discontented hearts and minds.

Jesus stood there in our place. He was mocked and refused to defend himself so that we won't have to defend ourselves on Judgment Day. Jesus went to the cross even for Herod and Pilate and the priests who were accusing him. When that day was done, every sin of every sinner ever was paid for. *Our* sins were paid for. The Holy Spirit uses that "Good News," the Gospel, to work faith in our hearts to believe it and make that forgiveness and freedom in Christ our own. This is the place where we hear that. The heart of our fellowship, the source of our love for one another, and the source of our love for God is hearing about that forgiveness. Let's continue to hear that good news together!

We Americans have more freedom and wealth than any nation in history. As Christians we have an even greater freedom: We are free from the power of sin and the threat of hell. As Christians we have even greater riches: Eternal life in heaven. What will we do with that freedom? What will we do with that wealth? On our own, we could only waste it—wishing for entertainment, searching vainly for something new, constantly looking for all the wrong things in all the wrong places. But we are not on our own. God has called us by the Gospel. He has given us faith. Through that Gospel, He teaches us to treasure these rich gifts. By God's power, we want to see Jesus—and for the right reasons. Come and see your Savior here! Amen.