

On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean.⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him.¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies. (Luke 23:6-12)

He Had Been Wanting to See Jesus

If you had your choice of participating in any activity available within a day's drive of our church, what would you do? Go skiing? Go to a ball game? Visit a museum? How about staring at a box with pictures? How many hours a week do you spend watching TV? I spend way too many. Who would've ever imagined that a people with as much freedom and as much money as we have, would dedicate so many hours every week to watching a box with moving pictures? And the same point could apply to surfing the internet. I think that's one of the great ironies of our time. I think it's ironic how important entertainment is to us in general. What does it say about the time we have available to us? But that isn't new. People with money and freedom have always struggled to fill the hours of their days. This year during Lent, we're focusing on the ironies of the passion. Tonight, Herod Antipas, a man who could do almost anything he wanted, had an unfulfilled desire for entertainment: **He had been wanting to see Jesus.**

I.

Luke says, "**From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.**" Jesus led prostitutes and tax collectors to repent and then he warmed their hearts with God's love. Jesus' preaching made the crowds hang on his every word. Jesus amazed the great teachers of the law when he was only twelve years old with his knowledge of God's Word. **Herod had been wanting to see Jesus. He hoped to see a miracle.**

Maybe we should 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 murdered the children around Bethlehem. He died soon after that. This man 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.

Even though he didn't rule there, this Herod, Herod Antipas had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. While he was there, one of his political rivals, Pontius Pilate, sent a famous prisoner to see him: Jesus. Luke tells us that Herod was delighted because for a long time he had wanted to see Jesus. Understand, Herod Antipas 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 into prison and later killed him. Herod was not a nice man. Yet, he wanted to see Jesus!

Now by itself, that wouldn't be ironic, because Jesus came to reclaim sinners. But Herod didn't want to see Jesus to give his guilty conscience peace. He had another reason. You see, Herod hadn't really wanted to execute John the Baptist. He liked listening to him, even though he didn't understand John's preaching. But his new wife hated John. When her daughter danced for Herod and pleased him so much that he swore to give her anything she asked for, her mother got her to ask for John's head on a platter. Herod complied. But just then, Jesus began to become even more famous than John was. Herod concluded that Jesus must be John the Baptist come back from the dead. Ever since that time, he had been trying to see Jesus. Not because he was sorry for what he had done – Herod wanted to see the miracle worker who could even come back from the dead. What an incredible waste! The one person who could've made a difference in the life of this blood-thirsty, power hungry man actually came to him and all Herod wanted were magic tricks!

That shouldn't surprise us. People with freedom and money get bored very easily. Why do you think TV and sports and video games are billion dollar industries? It's the nature of sinful man to be restless and

discontent. The newest, best thing that would ever come was standing before Herod. Never before in the history of the world had God come in human flesh. God hid his glory and power in the body of the man who stood bound before a petty king who was no more than a puppet for the Romans. But it was almighty God that stood there in that body that was already bruised and bloodied – in that body that would be dead before that day was over. And Herod completely missed it

God had come. God has come. Do we see him tonight? 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? Or do we want something else when we come here? Do we think church should be more entertaining? Are we like spoiled children who want to be wowed and awed and spoon-fed? The truth is, being Jesus' disciple is work! It takes discipline to pay attention in church. It takes commitment to study and grow and understand the difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ and what our society passes off as "spirituality." But we live in a culture that has too much wealth and too much free time and too many entertainment opportunities that compete with listening to the simple truths of God's Word. Are we turning into Herods?

We have no defense for hearts that aren't committed to hearing the Word of God. We can make no excuse for minds that wander and wish we could be doing something more entertaining. 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 on Judgment Day, the only verdict he could render would be guilty: guilty of wanting to be spoon-fed, guilty of wanting to see miracles, guilty of disengaging our minds and our hearts over and over again. The punishment for guilt is hell.

But God is not going to play that tape. God is not going to review our sins on Judgment Day. Instead, God is going to rule that we never let our minds wander here. God is going to declare that for every moment of our lives, we were totally and completely committed to hearing and learning his Word, and living according to all that he says. Why will God issue that finding? Because Jesus has taken our sin away. That's the irony of Jesus standing next to Herod. The spoiled prince thought he had power over the Son of God – but it only seemed that way. Jesus let all this happen to him so he could carry our sins to the cross. There, Jesus paid for Herod. If he paid for Herod, he paid for us. God has forgiven us, even for our discontented hearts and minds.

II.

One of the ironies about the entertainment culture we live in, is that we often make mindless entertainment more important than things we really care about. The first year my wife and I were married, the only TV we had was in Spanish because we were living in South America. During that first year, we didn't really speak enough Spanish to enjoy it. So, we spent lots of evenings playing games and talking. Some of that was probably due to being newlyweds, but I think we lost something when television assumed a greater role in our lives. Now, our marriage is not in trouble. But it's easy for a stupid thing like TV to eclipse the spouse we treasured on our wedding day. Herod's sin blinded him. He put entertainment ahead of the gift God gave the world. **Herod had been wanting to see Jesus. God wanted to show him his Savior.**

Luke says, "**He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.**" In ancient times, kings kept wise men at their courts. Herod thought Jesus could answer all the hard questions his wise men couldn't. But Jesus wouldn't play ball. While Herod was trying to enjoy his prisoner, the leaders of the Jews were there "vehemently accusing him." They were trying to distract Herod. The worst thing they could imagine was Jesus doing a miracle and getting Herod on his side. But they need not have worried. Jesus had no intention of showing Herod any miracles that day. So Herod did what all spoiled children do when they get bored. He and his soldiers mocked Jesus. They hung a royal robe over his shoulders and insulted him. And then, Herod sent Jesus away without ever understanding who he had really been talking to.

Jesus didn't have to hold his tongue when his enemies launched those vehement accusations. He didn't have to let this Roman puppet and his puny soldiers abuse and insult him. If he had offered a defense, no court in heaven or on earth could have condemned him. But Jesus let this petty king abuse him and then send him back to Pilate because he loved us. All this was another step to the cross for him and to life for us. But Herod never saw that. Neither did Pontius Pilate who sent Jesus to him, hoping to get rid of a political headache. Neither man made a real effort to understand who Jesus was. So both men missed their Savior that day.

The sad thing is, both men thought there was a silver lining to this lousy day. Before this, they had been enemies. But when Pilate sent Jesus to him, Herod finally got to see the miracle worker. It turned out to be a big bust from his perspective, but that wasn't Pilate's fault. Pilate didn't get rid of his problem. He still had to

judge Jesus. He still had to weigh his political future against doing what he knew justice demanded. But Herod didn't make him look any worse to the Jews. So they put aside their differences. What an irony: they thought that was the best thing that happened on the day Jesus died for them!

Are we ever like these men? Do we ever walk away from this building thinking that the best thing that happened here was that we got to see some people we like? Are we ever disappointed because we don't have enough youth activities or we just don't feel close to these people? Do we ever think about leaving this congregation because the church near our home seems so much more comfortable? God does want us to love each other here. But even if we never get close to one person in this room and even if we never feel totally comfortable here, God still shows us Jesus here. Isn't that worth the trip?

Yes! Because Jesus stood in our place. He was mocked so that God won't mock us in hell. He refused to defend himself so 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 believer and even of every unbeliever was paid for. Our sins were paid for. In the gospel, the Holy Spirit proclaims Jesus to us. Now, we are free. We are forgiven. We belong to Jesus. This is the place where we hear that. The heart of our fellowship, the source of our love for each other, is hearing about that forgiveness. Through that gospel of forgiveness, God creates feelings of friendship and comfort. Hear that good news together!

We Americans are freer and richer than any nation in history. But there's a greater freedom than freedom of speech. There's a greater wealth than money. We Christians are free from the power of sin and the threat of hell. We Christians are rich with the promise of eternal life. 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 fellowship in all the wrong places. But we are not on our own. God has called us by the gospel. He's given us faith. Through that gospel, he teaches us to treasure these rich gifts. By God's power, we want to see Jesus. Come and see your Savior here! Amen.