



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 110 - A Ruler Caves, a Shepherd Cares (Mark 6)

The Ambition of Herod Antipas

The ruler that Mark calls "Herod" was actually Herod Antipas, son of the famous King Herod the Great, who had tried to kill the infant Jesus. In his first will King Herod named Antipas his successor. But shortly before he died King Herod changed his mind and wrote a second will that gave half his kingdom to Antipas' older brother, Archelaus. This decision left only one-quarter to Antipas himself.

Antipas was an ambitious man, who kept scheming to get his hands on his father's entire kingdom. You can learn more about Herod Antipas at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1597&letter=A&search=herod%20antipas>.

- What are some of your ambitions?
- How do you determine if an ambition is God-pleasing or not?
- Where do you draw the line on what are and what are not appropriate ways to fulfill your ambitions?

When John accused Herod of crossing the line by marrying his half-brother's wife Herodias, Antipas had him arrested. Though Herodias pressured Antipas to execute him, "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe." There in prison John kept telling Antipas he needed to put Herodias away. Obviously, God's Word was having an effect on Herod because we read "When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly." But Herod still wasn't ready to set aside his selfish earthly ambitions or his new wife quite yet.

- What effect has God's Word of warning and promise had on you?
- What sinful ambitions have you seen Christian friends struggle to set aside?
- What situations do you wrestle with?

Herodias felt no such pull from God's Word. She kept pressuring Antipas to destroy John and finally found her opportunity through her daughter's infamous dance. She took advantage of her husband's rash and uncertain vow made in front of important people. When pressed between God's Word and his earthly ambitions, honor and reputation, Antipas caved in and gave the order for John's execution.

- How much pressure do you feel from friends and family members who don't share God's priorities?
- How can you resist their influence while maintaining your relationship with them?
- When might it be necessary to end that relationship?

Jesus' Own Ambition

Jesus has a driving ambition of His own. It moved Him to leave His place in heaven and become one of us. It drove Him to preach the Good News, heal the sick, cast out demons and cleanse lepers. In time Jesus' driving ambition to save us from our sins and restore our relationship to His Father led Him to the cross and empty tomb for us.

- How much thought do you give to your eternal future as you live out your life day by day?
- What things do you find yourself focusing on?
- What would you describe as pressing needs in your daily life?

Jesus understood the earthly needs that press hard upon us and sometimes distract us from our heavenly goal. The people around Him were preoccupied with those same needs. That's why an important part of Jesus' ministry was healing the sick, driving out demons and restoring loved ones to their grieving families.

- Compare the good times in your life when all your needs are met with those times when money is tight, relationships are strained or your health is failing.
 - When do you find yourself more focused on seeking God and living the life He wants you to live?
 - What reassurance can we take when we see how important Jesus considered it was to meet peoples' needs—often before sharing the Gospel with them?

In fact, we see that concern as we watch Jesus multiply food to feed the hungry crowd gathered before Him. He still concerns Himself with providing our daily bread—often multiplying food throughout His creation. Consider how many apples an apple tree bears in its lifetime when it really only needs to produce one seed that can replace it when it is gone.

- Where else do you see God multiplying food and the other resources we need to live on earth?
- Have you ever experienced God's miraculous provision in your life? Describe it.

After meeting the needs of His crowd—healing the sick and driving out demons—Jesus often spent hours teaching about the Kingdom of heaven. In doing so He pointed people to that wonderful future in the new heavens and the new earth where there won't be any more needs or problems, and we will live with our God forever.

- How does weekly worship help you lift your eyes to your life's end—and beyond?
- What daily needs can you help your friends and neighbors meet so they can more clearly hear the Gospel message?

Jesus' greatest ambition and His most important goal was to restore our relationship with His Father by taking our sins on Himself and setting us free by His suffering, death and resurrection. He calls us to enjoy His salvation and make heaven our own ambition when He says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).