

A WICKED WOMAN AND A WEAK MAN.

– *MARK 6:14-29.* – *JUNE 10.* –

GOLDEN TEXT: – "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the spirit." – Eph. 5:18.

HERODIAS, a young woman, closely related to the reigning family of the Herods, was ambitious to become a queen; her uncle Philip, being the eldest son of Herod the Great, was presumptively his heir, and accordingly she pressed her suit, and with such success that she was accepted as Philip's wife. But at the death of Herod the Great it was found that he had disinherited his eldest son, Philip, and that Herod Antipas was made successor to the kingdom.

It was necessary that Herod Antipas should go to Rome to be invested with regal authority, and while there he was the guest of his brother Philip and of Herodias, his wife and his niece, who of course was chagrined that she had failed of her ambition. However, ambitions know no bounds, especially selfish ones, and she seems at once to have set herself to captivate her younger uncle Antipas. Her cunning seems to have been without scruple of any kind, and remarkably successful. She so wrought upon Herod Antipas that he dismissed his wife, the daughter of the king of Arabia, and then Herodias, with her own child, a girl of probably fourteen, left her husband Philip, to become the wife of Herod Antipas, and thus to attain the position of queen, which she had coveted.

The shortcomings and failures of others should become to us valuable lessons. In the case of Herodias before us we see illustrated the power of ambition, and how important it is that our ambitions be noble and true and pure. Nearly all there is of good accomplished in the world is somehow or other connected with good ambitions, and likewise nearly all the evil in the world is somehow or other associated with wrong ambitions. How important that we should learn to guard

our ambitions, our desires, our hopes, our aims: we cannot accomplish anything without hopes and aims and ambitions; hence the necessity for securing good ones. And here let us note the fact that the majority of mankind have little or no ambition, and [R2636 : page 157] therefore are passing through life in a kind of maze, accomplishing comparatively little for themselves or others. This is a wrong condition; every man, woman and child should have a noble ambition, and should labor constantly for the attainment of that ambition.

Others of the world have such ambitions as had Herodias: they are ambitious for wealth, or for social position and display, or for title and honor amongst men. These are all selfish ambitions, yet they are the powers that are moving politics and business and society every day – and we are sorry to say these are the ambitions which are moving many in the pulpits and many in various religious works. These are all wrong ambitions, and tho they may not all result as evilly as did that of Herodias they are all selfish, and all tend at least in the same general direction toward evil, and many are seduced by their selfish ambitions into doing those things which their consciences do not approve, and many such become seducers of others into evil deeds and reprehensible schemes.

The Christian has before him the only proper, legitimate and worthy ambition possible at the present time; nor does the average or nominal Christian have these correct ambitions, but rather only such Christians as are taught of God, such as hear and heed the Word of the Lord. Before these are set the most noble, lofty ambitions; they are invited into the society, friendship and fellowship of the King of kings and Lord of lords. They are invited to become his companions, his brethren, co-workers together with him in the great work he is now accomplishing, and also to be joint-heirs with him in the great work of the Millennial Kingdom which he is shortly to inaugurate. Could there be a higher ambition than this set before mortal man? Surely not. Moreover, it is an ambition which tends to develop all the higher

qualities of mind and character, for the terms and conditions of this fellowship are based upon purity of heart, devotion to the Lord, etc., so that he that hath these ambitions and hopes in him purifieth himself even as he is pure with whom he has become associated. Let us have these true ambitions before us, that they may crowd out and trample down the inferior ambitions of earth and sensuality, that lead to sin, groveling and devilishness.

Herodias, having gained her point thus far, and finding herself in the coveted position of queen, undoubtedly felt greatly elated, flushed with her success; but in the midst of this elation came the news respecting **[R2637 : page 157]** John the Baptist, and how he had had an interview with Herod the king, and in the presence of courtiers and others had declared that it was not lawful for him to have Herodias for his wife. This was a shock to Herodias. Who would have thought that any man would have been bold enough to have spoken to the king on such a subject; and who would have thought that the king would have heard him patiently, and even have seemed interested in him, and have considered him a prophet of the Lord God?

What wonder Herodias was angry with John the Baptist, and sought to wreck upon him her vengeance! Had she plotted and planned for years to reach her present position, and was she to be thwarted now, and to be cast out at the word of such a man as this? Moreover, if she were now cast out, it would mean a worse condition than ever, for of course she could not with decency go back to her husband Philip, and expect to be kindly received of him. Hence, if Herod should give ear to John the Baptist, and should permit his message to influence him, it might mean that Herodias would become an outcast. Can we wonder, then, that the evil ambition which had thus far ruled the woman's heart should now move her against the great prophet? We could only say that it would be the legitimate fruitage of such evil ambitions as she had for years been cultivating at the expense of every principle. It had not hesitated thus far at anything, and why should it hesitate even at murder, now in its greatest extremity?

So it is with all evil, selfish ambition – the tendency is always downward, going from evil to evil, from sin to sin, from crime to crime. On the contrary, the ambitions which are inspired of the Lord tend always upward and upward, higher and higher – whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are in harmony with God – this is the tendency and impulse of the ambition which God inspires, the wisdom which cometh down from above, which is first pure, then peaceable and easy of entreatment, full of mercy and good fruits.

Herodias had sufficient influence over her husband to secure the arrest and imprisonment of John: but apparently she was chagrined that she could not accomplish her desires to the full in securing his death. This was not so much because Herod had a mind of his own, but rather, as the narrative declares, because of his fear. He knew John to be a righteous man and holy, and, as the Revised Version expresses it, "kept him safe" – possibly fearing that if John were set at liberty Herodias would find agents for his destruction. Apparently John was granted unusual liberties in prison, for his disciples had opportunity to come to him and to bear messages to and from him; and the intimation is that Herod was perplexed respecting how he should deal with him, and occasionally sent for him and heard him with interest.

Herodias concluded that this was a dangerous **[R2637 : page 158]** condition of things, and again her tact and shrewdness came to her assistance. Herod's birthday was approaching, and knowing that it was generally celebrated she proposed to make a special effort on that occasion to secure her ends. These birthday feasts were occasions of carousal; the king would be surrounded by the notable men of his realm; all would be considerably under the influence of wine, and then would be Herodias' opportunity for securing her wishes. She was crafty, however, and realized that John had an influence upon the king that to some extent at least off-set her own. She realized then that the king knew well her heart, and that he would hesitate to make a broad

and liberal offer to her, and so she prepared her young daughter, educated in Rome, beautiful, attractive, that she should take the place before the king of the ordinary dancing girls who usually served on such occasions of revelry.

This was supposedly a rare treat, a high honor to the king, that his niece, a young lady of refinement, should take the position ordinarily occupied by one of a low class. The ruse was successful; the king and the court were charmed with the girl's beauty, and Herod's mind, inflamed with the wine, was generous and unselfish to the extreme. It was customary to remunerate the dancing girls liberally on such occasions, in proportion to the dignity of the entertainer and now how liberally should he treat this one, who had so bewitchingly pleased himself and the company, and who was his own niece and step-daughter? He would ask her what she would like to have, and in her natural hesitancy he would press the matter upon her, to mention whatever it might be, even to the half of his kingdom; and then boastfully he would make oath to his liberality. The girl, no doubt, was instructed of her mother what to expect, and yet the crafty woman had kept the design wholly within her own grasp. Her daughter should not know in advance, lest she should make some error; she should merely first have the king's word that she would have her desire; then she was to come to her mother and receive instructions. Childlike, she seems not to have had great ambitions and wishes of her own, and hence she at once adopted her mother's wish, and asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

How horrible it seems, that anyone should have such a desire, such a murderous condition of heart! How strange it seems that a refined, educated woman should have such sentiments as would prompt such a request! Yet it was but the natural operation of the evil in the fallen heart. As the Apostle James says, the beginning of temptation is to be drawn away of desire, of ambition – enticed thereby. Then, when desire (ambition) has conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death. – James 1:14,15.

Even the weak and despicable Herod was shocked by the request. He had been trapped, and he saw it; he realized at once that this was a scheme on the part of his wife, and that now, as on former occasions, she had proven more than a match for him. What would he do? Would he resent such infamous conduct, and denounce his wife and her daughter as murderers, plotters against innocent blood of a righteous man? Would he take his stand for justice and for truth, and resolve that now, seeing the depth of wickedness into which he had been ensnared, he would strive to turn about in his course, and follow the advice of this prophet of the Lord, and reform?

No; he had not sufficient character for that; and from his wrong standpoint of view duty appeared to lie on the other side: First, had he not given his word, and should not the word of a king, given on his birthday, and at a feast, and in the presence of his chief generals and supporters, be inviolable? Moreover, in his maudlin condition he had riveted the matter with an oath, and now from his wrong standpoint pride asserted itself, and would not permit him to take the right course. Here again we see in an exaggerated form a principle which applies daily to worldly people in all of their affairs. They have a wrong standpoint before their minds. It is a standard of pride and self-esteem and love of approbation of others, and not a love for righteousness, for truth, and of deference for the Lord; and hence many have found themselves like Herod, led step by step, by what seems to them to be fate, and as they would say, beyond their control; but such matters are beyond the control of men because they are not under the proper control, because they are not the Lord's people; because they have not given their hearts to him. Therefore the affairs of life, instead of working for good to them and bringing them valuable lessons, helpful and elevating, are bringing them experiences which lead downward continually. The lesson here for the Lord's people is to make a proper start, to recognize the Lord, his will, his word, as the standard of justice and of truth, and to walk accordingly. A further lesson is, that wherever we may be, wherever the truth may find us, in a downward course, the only proper method is to at once recognize the voice of the

Lord, the voice of right, as paramount, and to obey that voice, regardless of how matters may seem or appear to fallen fellow men.

That the king was sorry is indeed an indication that his heart was not utterly corrupt, but that he should yield to what he knew to be wrong, through pride, is an evidence of utter lack of character. History shows that a certain amount of retribution came **[R2637 : page 159]** upon these guilty people forthwith: the sending back of his first wife led to a war between Herod and his father-in-law, the king of Arabia, in which Herod's forces were worsted seriously. Later on Herodias prompted Herod to apply to Rome for an enlargement of his dignity and power, but his application was rejected, and instead he was dethroned, lost all his title, power and influence, and the only redeeming quality noted in the case of Herodias is that she shared Herod's loss and banishment. Poor woman! Perhaps finally she learned that earthly ambitions are much like the apples of Sodom; perhaps she learned the folly of the course she pursued, that it brought no true joy, no true blessing, but only excitement and one disappointment after another. Perhaps, too, King Herod learned some lessons. We read that he heard of Jesus and his **[R2638 : page 159]** wonderful works, and that superstitiously he concluded that this must be John risen from the dead. Altho not a Jew, but of the family of Esau, he nevertheless had some knowledge of God and of the hopes set before the Israelites, and possibly his evil experiences brought him some valuable lessons.

So with many of the world in the present time: their experiences are bad, and yet they impress lessons upon themselves, and upon others, which ultimately may be of service, of value. As we look at their mistakes let us learn to profit by avoiding them in our lives. Let us remember, too, that all ambitions and temptations are not on the large and terrible scale of this picture before us, yet that the same principles are involved. Let us learn to recognize principles, whether operating in little things or in great ones, and that he who is faithful to right principle in small things will be faithful in greater trials. Let us first of all learn that the proper course for us is to consecrate ourselves

to the Lord, and then seek to have the lawful and laudable ambitions which he will inculcate through the Word.
