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## **THE POWER OF A WOMAN**

**- MATTHEW 14:1-12. - MAY 22. -**

**Golden Text: – "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."  
– Proverbs 16:32.**

JOHN THE BAPTIST, because of his boldness and courage as a servant and mouthpiece of God, was a thorn in the side of King Herod and his courtiers and the great of that day. Herod and the high priests and the more prominent people considered John the Baptist and Jesus fanatics. Doubtless they would have made away with them quickly, had it not been for their fears of the people. The common people heard the Master gladly and declared that "never man spake like this man"; the same common people believed John to be a prophet.

We will not undertake to say whether John exceeded his commission or not when he reprovved the King and Queen. As a rule, however, we believe it to be the wiser plan for Christian ministers to speak forth the Word of God fearlessly and plainly, without attempting personal application – allowing each hearer to apply the message to his own heart. Herodias fortunately represents an uncommon class of women. She was governed by boundless ambition. She married the man who, for a time, seemed in line for promotion to a kingly position. But when the title was given by the Roman Emperor to his brother, Herod Antipas, she inveigled the latter by her charms and, deserting her husband, became Herodias the "Queen." John the Baptist, while fearlessly denouncing sin, felt led to make a personal application of his teachings to King Herod.

Some have assumed that Herod had requested John the Baptist to visit the palace and give a talk on the reforms he

advocated, and that, in this connection, the Prophet pointed out the error of the King's conduct, saying that it was not in harmony with the Divine Law that he was living with his brother Philip's wife. Herodias heard of this and realized that if the King accepted such counsel it would mean that herself and her beautiful daughter Salome, would become outcasts from the palace and be without a home, as it would be impossible for her to return to her husband, Philip. The power of Herodias over the King led to John's imprisonment. Her next move was to effect his death, for she realized her position insecure so long as he lived. John's fearless speech might yet influence the King.

This ambitious, wicked, artful woman plotted murder, and the King's birthday celebration was her opportunity. **[R4609 : page 154]** She forwarded the arrangements for a great banquet, at which were present the nobles and princes of the land. Wine was in plentiful supply. She well knew that the wine would inflame the passions and relax the moral tone of the company. So she had her beautiful daughter, Salome, specially prepared and attired, and instructed her to perform one of the obscene dances common to the East on such occasions, but not commonly indulged in except by the lower classes, and never by princesses. The occasion was to be a rare one. It was intended to influence the King exactly as it did – to admiration and a boastful offer to the girl of any gift she would ask. The plan succeeded to the letter. The King's words were, "Ask of me a gift, even to the half of my Kingdom" – possibly a suggestion of his willingness to make her his true Queen.

Following her mother's instructions, Salome reported the matter at once, inquiring of the mother what gifts she should request. We can better imagine than describe the surprise of the girl when told by the mother to request "the head of John the Baptist on a platter." We may conceive what a disappointment this would mean; what visions of the beautiful and precious

things it would destroy! – with what surprise Salome must have asked as to why this gruesome gift should be given. We can imagine the mother hissing to her that the death of John the Baptist was the most necessary thing in the world for them both – that without it any day might see them hurled from conditions of affluence into the abyss of degradation and poverty. We can imagine her saying, "This, Salome, is the priceless gift which you must ask from the King." And the power of the woman over both the King and the daughter was wonderfully exemplified in the result. Salome went gaily again amongst the company of nobles whom she had charmed, and in a loud voice accepted the king's offer of whatever she would choose, even to the half of his Kingdom, and stated that accordingly, the gift should be the head of the Prophet on a platter.

The King's conscience was not quite dead. He was grieved; but his pride as well as his subserviency to Herodias controlled him. He reasoned that for a King to give his word of honor in the hearing of nobles and princes and then to repudiate it, would be to him a lasting shame. Ah, what an illustration of how "the fear of man bringeth a snare"! What a lesson we read in this! – that a man's first responsibility is to his God and to his conscience, whatever the cost. Tradition has it that Herod was haunted with fear the remainder of his days. It is in line with this that when he heard of Jesus and his mighty works, he expressed the conviction that somehow, the spirit or power of John had passed to Jesus.

Our lesson brings before us two strong and two weak characters. John and Herodias were strong characters, the one for the right and for God, the other for selfish ambition and sinful indulgence of it. The one swayed his nation for their good and prepared the worthy remnant to receive Messiah's message. The other swayed the King and her daughter to infamy, murder and disgrace, and terribly blackened her own character. John's reward lies in the future, when he, as a member of the Ancient

Worthy class, will come forth to a "better resurrection" – to be associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the earthly phase of the Millennial Kingdom.

Herodias, surely continuously unhappy, finally persuaded the King to a course which led to his banishment, in which she shared. Her future, according to the Bible, will be a resurrection to shame and lasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2.) Inasmuch as she degraded herself and missed grand opportunities, we may assuredly know that she will come forth in the Millennium greatly handicapped by her improper course in the present life. It may take centuries, even under the favorable conditions of Christ's Kingdom, for such a deeply-dyed character to purge itself of the shame and the lasting contempt and to rise gradually to true nobility and human perfection, or, failing so to do, to die the Second Death, "everlasting destruction."

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