

Luke 9:7-9

Sermon: **Criminal mind**

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INTRODUCTION

1. To recall, after the apostles received instructions from Jesus, they went out to preach to their people about the kingdom of God. During their journey — at another location — Herod became alarmed when he heard from the people that John the Baptist had been raised. What exactly happened to John, we will learn in the following text.

1.1 As before, we will compare the text from Luke with the other Synoptic Gospels. Although Matthew described the event between Herod and John in more detail, Mark goes even deeper in his description.

1.2 Alright, let us compare the texts.

1.3 **(Luke 9:7-9)** Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because some were saying, "John has been raised from the dead," others were saying, "Elijah has appeared," and others, "One of the old prophets has arisen." Herod said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised!" And he was trying to see him.

1.4 **(Mark 6:14-16)** King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known; and he said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and therefore these miraculous powers are at work in him." Others were saying, "It is Elijah," and others, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised!"

1.5 In Matthew 14:1-2, Herod confirms his suspicion to his courtiers. In other words, after he heard from the people that perhaps John had risen or some prophet, he himself concluded that it was John who had been raised.

— You can sense the fear in Herod as he declares this statement to his court. —

1.6 Before we move into the details of the events that prompted Herod to behead John the Baptist, I will briefly talk about Herod himself and who he was. Herod the tetrarch, or Herod Antipas, was one of the three sons of King Herod the Great. When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided among his three sons. Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee¹ and Perea² (4 BC – 39 AD).

1.7 From the biblical accounts, we can conclude that Herod Antipas was a rather immoral man; for example, he married his brother's wife — for which John the Baptist rebuked him publicly. Likewise, he loved power and glory, and he cared deeply about what others thought of him.

CRIMINAL MIND

2. Alright, let us move into the actual event where John was executed.

2.1 (Mark 6:17-29) Now Herod had ordered John to be arrested and bound and thrown into prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had taken as his own wife, for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore, Herodias held a grudge against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and protected him. When he heard him, he was very perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him.

Then an opportune day came, when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles, high officers, and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want, and I will give it to you!" And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" She said, "The head of John the Baptist." She returned immediately to the king and requested, "I want you to give me John the Baptist's head on a platter right now."

The king was grieved, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to refuse her. He immediately sent an executioner and commanded him to bring John's head. So he went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard of this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

2.2 What an event — we can draw many lessons from it. Right at the start, we see the reason why Herod decided to put John in prison. He put him in prison because John publicly rebuked Herod for committing a great sin before God and the people — marrying his brother Philip's wife.

¹ The Jews originally called Galilee *Galil*. During the Roman Empire, the region was divided into Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, which covered the entire northern part of the land and was the largest of the three regions. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled Galilee as tetrarch during the era of Jesus Christ. Galilee was the homeland of Jesus for much of His life.

² *Perea* ("the land across") was part of Herod the Great's kingdom on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley, stretching about a third of the way from the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. Its traditional boundaries were the Arnon River (Wadi Mujib) and the Hieromax (Yarmouk) River. Herod's kingdom was later divided by the Romans into tetrarchies, with Herod Antipas receiving both Perea and Galilee.

2.3 In Matthew 14:5 it says that Herod wanted to kill John, while in Mark we read that Herodias hated John and wanted him dead. So, did both of them want him dead? Perhaps.

2.4 But another question follows: who actually wanted to kill him at any cost? In my study, I realized it was the woman, not the man; and that made me sad. Why? Because of my mother, and because of all women in the world.

2.5 I believe we are all accustomed to seeing men as the villain — through news stories, movies, and history, where rulers have inflicted harm on other peoples. Unfortunately, perhaps on a personal level, we have experienced men as the villain... In general, men throughout history have often represented themselves as aggressive, violent beings. I myself was like that. Because of all this, I instinctively accepted that Herod was the one who killed John. And he did, but he was only the executor; Herodias, I believe, was the criminal mind behind it all.

THE GRACIOUS HEART OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

3. In the following passages, I will attempt to support my theory that “Herodias was the criminal mind behind it all.” But before I do that, a few words about the heart of John the Baptist.

3.1 The text tells us that Herod enjoyed listening to John when he visited him in prison.

3.2 Someone might say, *“Wait a minute, Daniel, Herod was visiting John in prison, and John would speak to him about God’s righteousness even though Herod himself had imprisoned him?!”* Yes, John loved his enemy. According to the Law of Moses, if John truly believed he was a faithful Israelite, he had to do this.³

3.3 In other words, even though the man he wanted to help had thrown him into prison, it did not stop John from loving him with the truth of God. He reflected God’s grace itself because he knew that he himself had been touched by that same grace, which made him a child of God. He wanted that same joy for his greatest enemy at that moment.

— That was the kind of man John was. I truly admire his actions, and I hope that one day I can reflect something similar in my own life. —

PLANNING THE MURDER

4. Alright, let’s return to Herodias. After realizing that Herod had no intention of killing John, she had to change her tactic. The text tells us: “And on a suitable day”—a suitable day for whom? I believe, for Herodias.

4.1 Herod’s birthday was the perfect opportunity for the criminal mind to achieve its goals. Herodias knew when Herod’s birthday was and had roughly planned in her mind:

³ Leviticus 19:18

“Okay, you don’t want to kill John, but you will—and I know when and how. I know where you are weak, Herod: your glory as king, your word in front of other nobles, your eyes that love a woman’s body. I know how you looked at my daughter when you met her, I know your eyes follow her body as she walks through our halls. I know you, Herod. I will use that knowledge. I will tell my daughter to practice dancing every day until your birthday. The greatest and most beautiful gift you can receive from me will be that my daughter—who dances seductively—represents me, as a devoted and generous wife, to her king. I won’t reveal my ultimate motive until the very end; I must play this game wisely and patiently. I will tell everyone only what they need to know. But John’s head, which I want on a platter—that I will keep for last.”

4.2 While I have no proof that Herodias thought exactly like this in her heart—I’m not a mind reader—context allows us to conclude: “Herodias, you are the criminal mind behind John’s execution!”

SALOME

5. The day came when Herod prepared a grand feast for all his guests, and during the celebration, Herodias arranged for her daughter Salome to be presented before everyone to dance—as I said, I believe, a provocative dance.

5.1 The text tells us that the dance greatly pleased Herod and the other guests. Because it was very important to Herod what the nobles thought of him, he made a gesture in front of everyone present, believing that Herodias’ daughter must be rewarded for her great contribution to his birthday.

5.2 We read that he said he would give her whatever she wanted, even up to half his kingdom. The question arises: did Herod literally mean to give her half the kingdom? I don’t believe so; I think with this statement he only wanted to show how much he valued what she had done for him in front of everyone. In other words, the generosity of the king matched the situation, and everyone approved of praising Salome.

5.3 A similar event occurs with Esther and her king Ahasuerus, who promises her up to half the kingdom, but she knows he does not literally mean it.

5.4 In other words, she understood that at that moment she had gained great favor from the king himself, and because of that, she felt free to invite him together with Haman to the banquet she had prepared for them.⁴

5.5 Returning to the event: immediately after Herod said he would give her up to half the kingdom, Salome decided to go to her mother and asked, “*What should I ask the king?*”

5.6 I will repeat: I believe that Salome did not know about her mother’s plan until the very end; Herodias hid it from her. Likewise, Herod and everyone else will soon realize who the person is that will now be given anything she desires — even half of Herod’s kingdom. In other words, Herod will soon understand that Salome is merely a mediator in the whole scheme.

⁴ Esther 5:1-5 — I warmly recommend reading the book of Esther to see how she saved her people from the impending disaster that threatened them.

HERODIAS' PLAN COMES TO LIGHT

6. I have a feeling that in that moment Herod already suspected what Salome was going to ask of him. He knew that Herodias wanted John dead. And unfortunately, his suspicion proved true. When Salome asked her mother what she should request from the king, Herodias told her: *"Ask for the head of John the Baptist!"* Salome showed herself to be just like her mother — she did not refuse the command; she willingly went to the king and, without the slightest hesitation, asked for John's head.

6.1 It seems that in those days you could ask for someone's head on a platter without any difficulty. My goodness, what insane people. What kind of regime was this, where a queen felt free to demand someone's head on a platter — and to do it in front of all those present?

6.2 What must Herod's feast have looked like if everyone approved of the queen's evil deed? Personally, I believe it was the kind of celebration where you could visually witness the kind of depravity the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah lived in before God burned them with fire. But that is only my opinion.

6.3 I got carried away a bit, forgive me. Let's return to the event: Salome approaches the king and tells him that she wants John's head on a platter. The text tells us that this saddened King Herod.

6.4 It seems it did not sadden him enough, because right after that he commanded the executioner to go and bring John's head.

6.5 Why was he not saddened enough? Because his word before the nobles mattered more to him than doing what was right. In other words, if Herod had truly been sorry to do it, he would have refused Salome's request — even though his reputation before the nobles might have been endangered.

DON'T MESS WITH HERODIAS

7. Alright, let's continue. After the executioner beheaded John, he brought the head on a platter and placed it into Salome's hands, who immediately delivered it to her mother. Like all criminal minds — throughout history and even today — Herodias desired public glory for her magnificent plan. She also wanted to demonstrate to everyone how far she was willing to go when someone dared to threaten her reputation and everything she had built throughout her life.

7.1 When I think about it more carefully, Herodias actually showed everyone who the true ruler of Galilee and Perea was. She possessed the mind of a king — which means she ruled over everything that had been assigned to Herod after his father's death.

IT IS UP TO US TO DECIDE WHAT WE WILL DO WITH THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN US

8. In this regard, most men throughout history have achieved what they wanted through strength and loudness. Intimidation has always come easily to men, and throughout the ages they have obtained what they wanted especially from the weaker sex — from women. And I say this to our shame.

8.1 That being said, while the majority of men gained what they wanted in that way, a small percentage of men possessed above-average intelligence — enough to rule the world with nothing more than their words.

8.2 But that gift is not given only to men; it is given to women as well. And the women who possess that gift rule over those who are, by nature, violent.

8.3 Highly intelligent women certainly exist — Herodias was one of them — but what they choose to do with that gift is up to them.

8.4 While Herodias chose to use her gift for selfish and evil purposes, Esther used that same intelligence for what is good, noble, and righteous in God's eyes. And that is why I wrote above (see §§2.3–2.5.) that this realization saddens and surprises me. Because if I am right, it means that every woman in this world — including my own mother — carries the potential to become in one way or another like Herodias, or like Esther.

8.5 Now I speak only to us men: if we have an Esther for a wife, let us be wise and allow her to guide us indirectly toward what is noble and righteous before God.

8.6 But if we have a Herodias for a wife, let us not be like Herod — let us stand firm and refuse to let her destroy what is good in God's eyes, even if it costs us something.

— The reverse, of course, applies in both cases. —

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN TO BE IN GOD'S IMAGE, NOT OUR OWN

9. As we move toward the end, there is no doubt: Herodias shaped her daughter into her own image. Salome was slowly but surely becoming just like her mother. In the biblical sense, the curse in Herodias' household, unfortunately, continued into the next generation.

9.1 Application for us: are we truly aware of how much we influence the lives of our children? When they are little, we are their idols.

They are like sponges — absorbing every movement, every facial expression, our character, our worldview, our values, our desires, our ambitions; do we really understand the responsibility we carry while raising children? From my own experience — many times we do not.

9.2 And that is why I say this to both fathers and mothers: even if we are not Herodias, even if we have not turned our child into a monster who can, without hesitation, ask for someone's head on a platter, we nevertheless shape our child into our own image.

We shape them into the image of gossip, into the image of judging others; into the image of: "Son, it's fine to have many women!" Into the image of: "Daughter, find yourself a rich husband so you can buy whatever you want — because that is the purpose of a woman's life."

In fact, in today's culture, women can achieve all that on their own — so yes, women no longer need husbands to achieve what society calls "the main purpose" of their lives.

9.3 Let's list a bit more. The image of: "Son, support our football club and hurt others for it!"

The image of: “Daughter, don’t argue, you don’t know anything — I’m your mother, and even when you’re sixty, I will still be right. Listen to your mother always!”

The image of: “Son, my dear son, always stay by your mother; I will make you a cripple so that you never leave home!”

The image of: “Son, love your homeland, love the faith handed down by your fathers; hate others and their customs!”

The image of: ‘It’s perfectly fine, son or daughter, to be gay!’

The image of: “Our church knows best; everyone inside it belongs to God, while those outside are cursed and beyond salvation!”

9.4 I could list thousands of ways by which we ruin our children — let us not do that!

Let us teach them about God’s righteousness; let us guide them to remain steadfast in faith when the time of testing comes; let us prepare them, throughout their growing years, for the life that awaits them afterwards.

Let us love them, encourage them, protect them while we can. Let us warn them when they do wrong. Let us ask their forgiveness when we wrong them.

Let us teach them to argue for what is good and righteous. Let us create in our home a culture where constructive discussion is always welcome (of course, when they are old enough to engage).

And then let us release them. When the time comes for them to spread their wings and leave home, let them go — knowing that we have done our best to plant in them the values we ourselves live by: the values of the Gospel.

ELIJAH

10. With that said, let us slowly move toward the conclusion of this sermon. We read in Mark 6:15 that the people were saying that perhaps Elijah had risen. Why Elijah?

10.1 Here we see proof that the Pharisees were not entirely mistaken in their teaching of the people. They knew Malachi 4:5 — “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

10.2 The people who had been instructed by the Pharisees, hearing John the Baptist arrive on the scene and understanding that the promised Messiah was already present — the King of Israel from the line of David, who would rule forever and righteously over the kingdom of God — connected all of this in their minds with the promise from Malachi.

10.3 How did they make the connection? They knew that if the coming of God’s kingdom was about to be fulfilled, Elijah must come before the Day of Judgment to prepare the hearts of the people so they would be ready for the coming of the King. And that is why some said that Elijah might have risen.

10.4 Of course, we today know — from our perspective — that the real Elijah will come before Jesus’ second coming, when He will truly reign over the whole earth.

10.5 Finally, in Luke 9:9 we read that Herod wanted to see Jesus. The fame of Jesus had reached Herod’s ears, and when you appear on the radar of a king who will do absolutely anything for his own

glory and his own throne, that does not exactly work in favor of Jesus and His teaching. But more on that in the next sermon.