

95-06-04Mark

Good morning again for the wonderful privilege of studying your word. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose mission it is to make the truth of your word real to us and to enable us to be changed by it, to empower us to live a life that pleases you and glorifies our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that our study this morning will further that purpose in our lives, for we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Open with me the word of God this morning to Mark chapter 6. This has been a fascinating gospel to study. Mark in the four gospels is especially emphasizing the role of Jesus Christ as the servant of God. We know that Matthew emphasizes him as the King of Israel.

Luke's focus is generally summarized as presenting Christ as the Son of Man. John's particular theological emphasis is demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The attribute or the facet of Jesus' life and ministry that we can most closely identify with ourselves is Jesus Christ as the servant of God.

We ourselves have been called to be servants of God and children of God. Seeing the ministry of Jesus Christ in this book is particularly helpful to us. We should be seeing a lot of practical outworkings of this study in our lives because Jesus Christ is our example in this particular way.

I thought this would be a good place, since we are almost halfway through our study of Mark, to step back for just a moment and think about the broad outline of the book as we've seen it thus far. We have seen Mark open with the ministry of John the Baptist. Unlike Matthew and Luke, we don't start at the birth of Jesus Christ.

We start at the beginning of his active ministry. And that is announced by John the Baptist. And the first half of chapter 1 gives us the testimony of John the Baptist.

We're going to see that each section of the book bears witness, bears testimony to Jesus Christ. That first half of chapter 1 is the testimony of John. If you were with us this past Wednesday night, we studied a little bit about the witness to Jesus Christ as it's revealed in scripture and we saw that there are many witnesses to Jesus Christ, both then and now.

They are explicitly stated in scripture as being witnesses and John the Baptist is one of them. This is the one that Mark starts with. Then in chapters 2 and 3, the last half of chapter 1, in chapters 2 and 3, we saw Jesus fulfilling the witness of the Old Testament, the witness of the law and the witness of the prophets.

We saw him present God's view of the Sabbath. We saw him encounter the religious leaders in Israel's day, the men who were best equipped to identify Jesus Christ from their knowledge of the law and their knowledge of the prophets. So following the witness of John the Baptist, we have the witness of the Old Testament that Jesus fulfills in the last half of chapter 1, chapter 2, and

chapter 3. We saw the religious leadership in Israel faced with these witnesses and we see them waffling.

We see them balanced on the fence. They haven't quite made up their minds about Jesus Christ, but we see the balance begin to tip toward rejection. Then in this chapter 4 that we studied not long ago, we saw the testimony of Jesus' words.

That's where we encountered the seed parables and the longest teaching section that we have seen thus far in Mark. The words of Jesus Christ testified. The people heard those words and what did they say? We've never heard anything like this.

Never have we heard someone teach with such authority, not like the scribes, not like the Pharisees. There's a ring of truth. There's a ring of reality and there's a ring of authority in these words.

And Jesus Christ brought life to the Old Testament scriptures and he brought life to the truth of God and presented it to the nation, to the people of Israel. Then in chapter 5, we saw the testimony of Jesus' works. We saw him address Jairus' daughter.

We saw him address the woman with the issue of blood. We've seen him still the storm. We've seen him cast out demons.

The works of Jesus Christ that have been presented throughout the book, we saw a concentrated picture of Jesus' works there in chapter 5. Now in chapter 6, we start to get a foreshadowing of what the result of this testimony is going to be. What has Israel had? Testimony of John. Testimony of the Old Testament.

The testimony of the words of Jesus Christ. The testimony of the works of Jesus Christ. Jesus goes to Nazareth, his hometown.

It's a little microcosm of Israel. And the rejection that Jesus encounters in Nazareth is a warning of things to come. It tells us that this testimony that has been so carefully brought to Israel, so completely presented to Israel is going to be largely rejected.

It is foreshadowed in this episode where Jesus returns to his hometown and they say, they recognize the testimony in 6.2. Where did this man get these things? What is this wisdom that is given to him in such mighty works that are performed by his hands? They've seen the testimony. It's clear. They can't get around it.

But what do they decide about it? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this the son of Mary? And aren't his brothers and sisters here with us? And they begin to dissemble and they begin to explain it away and to say, this can't be anything new. This can't be anything special. We know him.

And they find a way to dismiss him. They find a way to discard this testimony that has been

brought of Jesus Christ. So Jesus sends yet another testimony to Israel and this is what we studied last Sunday.

After the testimony of John and the testimony of the law and the prophets and Jesus' words and works, now Jesus is going to send his disciples in pairs in the mouths of two or three witnesses a matter is established in Israel. So Jesus sends pairs of disciples throughout the land here in verse 7-13. He said, don't take anything with you.

Don't create a distraction. You are bearers of a message. And the message is simple.

Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. A simple message, a straightforward message. But it's a message that draws a negative response.

Why? Because the message is wrong. If we were Israelites in this day, could we have seen all of these testimonies and somehow missed them, somehow explained them away or dismissed them as not being pertinent to us, not being valid? We saw last week that the problem in Israel is that this message implied a problem. If you send a testimony and it says, change your mind, that tells us that our mind is wrong.

There's something the matter with us. How can there be something the matter with us? We are the people of God. We are Israel's chosen race.

We're the seed of Abraham. We are the light that shines in the world. It's the pagans.

It's the Gentiles. It's the Samaritans. It's the people across the Jordan that need to change their minds and get on board and become people of God.

Why is he sending us a testimony that says, change your mind? Absurd. Ridiculous. Get the hints, is the response in Israel.

We don't like to look at ourselves. We don't like to consider the possibility that we have been wrong or that we are wrong. We have found a set of traditions or we have found a set of practices that's comfortable, that fits well with the lifestyle we've chosen and the goals and the priorities that we have set and we don't want something to come in and upset the apple cart, do we? We don't want to have to change.

We don't want to have to consider the possibility of unseating these long-standing habits and ways of thinking and ways of living. It's too hard. It's too unsettling.

It's disturbing. So we find ways to dismiss it. We find ways to reject it and ignore it and explain it away.

This is what happened in Israel and we should not look down our nose at the Israelites because we do the same thing, maybe not in every area of our life, but in some areas of all of our lives.

We do this. We are like that hard-packed soil that doesn't want to admit the seed, the seed that's going to bear roots that are going to break up our hard spots and make us productive.

It's our choice. We choose what to do with the testimony of the Word of God even now. It's very interesting because you would expect that right after chapter 6, verse 13, where Jesus has sent out the disciples and they went out and preached that people should change their mind, what a radical message.

Change your mind. And they cast out many demons and they anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. We would expect that the next verse in this chapter would be verse 30.

Look down at chapter 6, verse 30. After they went out and they cast out demons and anointed the sick and healed them, then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. We would expect to get the results of this mission.

If we're not going to get the details and Peter went here and James and John went there, then we would expect that verse 30 would be next. And yet we have this section, verses 14 through 29, that is seemingly inserted into what would be a very nice, complete account of the life and ministry of Christ and His disciples. Well, as usual, we scratch our heads and we say, why is this? There has to be a reason why God has inserted verses 14 through 29 right here at this particular time.

As we glance through it, we see that it's an account of the death of John the Baptist. We say, well, that's nice to know. I kind of wondered what happened to old John.

He said the Lord would increase and he would decrease. Well, how exactly did that work itself out? And many times we come to this section of Scripture and we say, well, this is an interesting side note. I'm glad to know what happened to John.

I was always kind of curious what whatever became of him. And we find this out and then we go merrily on with our study of Mark. This is a very important section of Scripture.

This section is the key to understanding what Mark is trying to get across as he recounts the testimony of the witnesses and the response to that testimony. So we're going to see this morning how important this particular section is to the message that we find in the Gospel of Mark. Let's quickly familiarize ourselves with the contents of this section.

In chapter 6, verse 14, now King Herod heard of him, heard of Jesus Christ, heard of the ministry of the disciples. Here's this ragtag band of men. There's at any given time, there are many dozens of people around Jesus Christ, but he has picked out six pairs of men.

He sent out six missionary teams, six evangelism teams, six pairs of men with the message change your mind, the kingdom of God is at hand. Well Herod is a sharp ruler. He has his points of contact, he has his listening posts, he has his sources of information and not much can go on

in this region without him finding out about it.

So before long, the stir that is created by this man Jesus and his six discipleship teams comes to Herod's notice. Herod heard of him for his name had become well known. Herod said, John the Baptist is risen from the dead and therefore these powers are at work in him.

Well we didn't even know John had died so we need some further explanation of this. Others said it is Elijah, others said it is the prophet or like one of the prophets. But when Herod heard, he said this is John whom I beheaded.

He has been raised from the dead. For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Phillip's wife, for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not. For Herod feared John knowing that he was a just and holy man and he protected him. When he heard him, he was confused, but he heard him gladly.

Now if your Bible says that he did many things, it's an understandable problem in the Greek, but what this really says is Herod couldn't make up his mind about John. He was filled with consternation. He couldn't decide pro or con.

It was the subject of a lot of thought in his mind. He was concerned, he was confused, but he heard him gladly. Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers and the chief men of Galilee.

When Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you. He also swore to her, Whatever you ask, I will give it to you, up to half my kingdom. So she went out and said to her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The king was exceedingly sorry, yet because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought, and he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl.

The girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb. Suddenly, in the midst of our account of Jesus and His ministry, His training of the disciples, His commissioning of them for this specific journey, this special journey that called for special instructions, unlike their normal practice, they were to go without provisions, they were to go without an extra coat or an extra pair of sandals.

They were not to distract from the message that they bore, an urgent mission to tell Israel to change their mind. Right after those instructions and right after that mission, those men being sent forth, we have this account. Herod shows up.

John the Baptist shows up. What can this all be about? First of all, let's find out a little bit about Herod. If you know anything of the history of this time in Israel, you recall that the name Herod first crops up in the New Testament in connection with Jesus' birth.

The wise men go and see Herod, and Herod winds up slaughtering the two-year-old and under infants in a section of Judea, and this is where we first encounter the name. That Herod was Herod the Great, and Herod the Great was descended from the Edomians. Do you know who the Edomians are? They're the Edomites, the descendants of Esau.

Edomia is Edom, and that should carry a lot of freight in your mind if you remember all of the prophets in the Old Testament talking about Edom and how they would continually be at enmity with Israel, would be a thorn in their side down through history. This is exactly what took place, and here is Herod. He is an Edomian, and Herod was quite an impressive individual in terms of his accomplishments.

His era began about 45 years before the birth of Christ. In 125 B.C., John Hyrcanus, who was part of the Maccabees, the Hasmoneans, that came and tried to restore some vitality to the life of Israel, the independent national life of Israel. John Hyrcanus came and established a presence in Israel in terms of government and so forth, and he also subjugated Edom.

He defeated the Edomians, and he tried to make them Jewish. So over there in Edom, they enforced circumcision on all the males, and they said, we're going to bring you under the Mosaic law, and we're going to make you act just like Israelites. We're going to try to bring you into the fold.

Well, he had not read the Old Testament. He didn't know that Edom would always be at enmity, that they could never be absorbed or subjugated by Israel. And what this did was even further encourage the hatred and the division between Israel and Edom.

No one likes to have circumcision enforced upon them. No one likes to have the Mosaic law inflicted on them as a requirement by government. But they were never truly Jewish, and later on, Herod the Great's father, Antipater, came to power.

He was appointed to be a governor in this area of Israel, around Judea and so forth. And there was a lot of political machinations going on. Antipater allied himself with part of the Hasmoneans for a while.

They were having a brother-to-brother war, and he took one side. If you ever want to read a real soap opera in terms of politics, read the story of Antipater and the Hasmoneans and the going

back and forth of power in this region. And people intermarrying, and some of the Hasmoneans intermarried with the Herods.

One of Antipater's wives was Mariamne, who was of the household of the Hasmoneans. And so now Herod is going to have some children who are part Jewish, even though he himself is Edomite. Some of his children through Mariamne are Jewish.

They're part of this Hasmonean line, and this becomes important later on. But this is a very vicious family. And as these brothers fought for a time, one of the Hasmonean brothers was high priest in Jerusalem.

Even though he wasn't a Levite or anything else, he was politically appointed to be the high priest. And he served for a time, and then power shifted, and he was out of favor. And his own brother came in and said, I don't want you to be the high priest anymore, and in case power shifts again, to keep you from being high priest, I'm going to cut off your ears.

And so Hyrcanus II, who had been high priest, got his ears lopped off by his brother so that he could never again serve as the high priest who had to be physically perfect. So this is the sort of family and the sort of people that we're dealing with. Later on, as Herod the Great came to power, he wiped out all of the Hasmoneans that he could find, which didn't endear him to the Hasmoneans in his own family, that he could not kill his brothers and sisters that were descended from that.

But he wiped out some 45 followers of the Hasmoneans, Antigonus and so forth. He also, as he came to power and tried to consolidate his power, he tried to gain favor with Rome, and he tried to enrich himself. One of the things that Herod the Great is famous for, according to Josephus, he is the one that found and plundered the tomb of David the king.

They often try to find David's tomb. I read an article recently that some archaeologists have dug a big tunnel under Jerusalem, and they think that they have found the tomb of the kings, and that this is where, although they've been denied access because it's under some dome of the rock or something. But according to Josephus, David's tomb was a well-known site around the time of the birth of Christ, and Herod plundered that tomb and took the riches out of it, and added them to his collection of plunder.

Herod the Great, however, after his episode with the wise men, and after wiping out the two-year-old children and so forth, he developed a very vicious and incurable disease, and that disease made him miserable and eventually led to his death. He was so miserable, this disease was so loathsome, that he even tried suicide, but he failed. But he eventually died from this, and his son was appointed in his stead, one of his sons.

And this son ruled for a time, and then power shifted once again, and another one of Herod the Great's sons, Antipater, came to the throne. And here we are back with our study in Mark, because

this Herod that we're going to see dealing with Herodias and John the Baptist, this is Antipas, this is Herod the Great's son. Now Antipas was the son of Herod the Great by Malthus, his wife Malthus.

Herod the Great had several wives. Malthus was a Samaritan woman. So Herod Antipas, and this is important, Herod Antipas, the Herod of Mark chapter 6, is half Edomite and half Samaritan.

This has symbolic value in our story, so keep it in mind. Herod is not Jewish, he's Edomite and Samaritan, everything the Jews hate. And his half-brother Philip had married their mutual niece Herodias.

Think of this, you have Herod Antipas, you have Herod Philip, you have another son of Herod the Great. This son has a daughter named Herodias. She marries her uncle Philip, and they stay married for a time.

In the meantime, Herod Antipas marries a daughter of the king of Arabia, the king Aretas of Arabia. While in Rome, the niece and the other uncle meet and fall in love and decide that they are going to get married. So the niece of Philip leaves Philip, who she's married to, and goes and marries her other uncle Antipas, who gets rid of his wife, the daughter of the king of Arabia, which makes the king of Arabia very angry and he attacks Israel.

Again, it's a huge soap opera. I really am glad we don't have to spend any more time on it than we do. But it's important because this is where Herodias comes from.

Herodias is Antipas' wife and his niece. And she herself has a daughter by this marriage previous to the other brother. And I don't know what that makes Salome to Antipas.

I can't figure out. He's a second niece once removed or something. But this is the situation as John comes to prison.

Now in Israel, what do you think is going to be the level of acceptance of Herod Antipas and his wife Herodias? Very little. Herod himself is an Edomite and a Samaritan. He has married his brother's wife, which is strictly forbidden.

You go back to Deuteronomy 18.6 and so forth. Don't get connected up with your brother's wife. It is an abomination.

So he's not a popular man even though he tries to curry favor in Israel. He builds buildings and gives gifts and benevolences and things. Everyone hates him.

Everyone despises him. This is important for our understanding of this section. So this is where we find ourselves.

Now John the Baptist, what does he do? He preaches the truth. What is the truth about Herod

Antipas and Herodias and so forth? They should not be married. This is what we find in verse 18 of chapter 6 of Mark.

John had said to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Well, no one got angrier over this than Herodias. Herod doesn't seem to have been as afflicted in his conscience about this as Herodias.

But Herodias is extremely angry. And in verse 19, Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod's regard. So this is where we find ourselves.

Now, what I want to suggest to you is a principle from Scripture. Do you remember over in Ezekiel and over in Isaiah and in some of the other prophets, when God wants to deal with a nation, who does He go to? Who represents the nation and sums it up? It's the king, right? God addresses Himself to the Egyptians. And over in Ezekiel in chapter 30 and 31, I think, He talks straight to Pharaoh and He says, Pharaoh, this is what I'm going to do to you.

And by talking to Pharaoh, He's talking to the whole nation of Egypt. Remember the king of Tyre in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28? This is what I will do to Tyre. And He talks to the king.

We recall over in Exodus chapter 9, and it's quoted in Romans 9, God says to Pharaoh, for this reason I have lifted you up, that I might demonstrate My power in you. He's talking about the whole nation of Egypt, isn't He? He's talking about the ten plagues and the deliverance from bondage and so forth. But Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, sums up and represents the entire nation, doesn't He? That's the principle we have here.

Who is the king of Israel right now? It's Herod Antipas. He's the king. He is the political leader.

He is the one that God has given political authority in Israel. He represents Israel. And notice the situation we have here.

Here is Herod. Think of him as embodying or symbolically representing the people of Israel. Here comes a preacher of the truth, John the Baptist.

He presents them with a message. Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand. What is the response of the people that we've seen thus far in Mark? Have the people at large really made up their mind about John? Have they really made up their mind about Jesus Christ? They come and they listen.

They're amazed. They have some consternation. They're not quite sure what to make of it.

But they come and hear Him gladly, don't they? They come and flock to hear Jesus Christ by the seaside. They flock to Him in the synagogues. They flock to Him when He's doing miracles.

What does it say about Herod and his relationship to John here in verse 20? He knows that He's

a just and holy man and He protects him. And when He hears him, it confuses Him, but He hears him gladly. This is the response of the people of Israel to the message that John and later on Jesus Christ Himself brings.

Then we have Herodias. Herod took Herodias to himself. Herod has embraced Herodias.

It's Herodias who produces this plot, isn't it? It's Herodias that schemes against John the Baptist. It's Herodias that bears the greatest ill will and animosity. It's Herodias who holds this message, You can't have your brother's wife, against John.

And I would suggest to you that in the situation in Israel in this day, as Jesus goes about teaching and preaching, the response of the religious leadership in Israel to Jesus Christ is very similar to the response of Herodias to John the Baptist. The people of Israel have embraced and taken to themselves this form of religion, this tradition of man, this accretion and distortion and permutation of the law of Moses. Herodias and the religious leadership in Israel have a very striking similarity in their attitude toward the truth and the messenger of the truth, don't they? Who is it that plots and schemes against Jesus Christ and eventually has Him arrested and crucified? Is it the people of Israel or is it the religious leadership in Israel? It's the scribes and the Pharisees and the Herodians and those who set themselves up as leaders.

Those whom the people of Israel tolerate as their leaders, embrace as their leaders. So isn't this interesting that Mark chooses to include this account of Herod and this account of Herodias and their dealings with John the Baptist because like Herod, Israel is being faced with a testimony. Israel is being faced with a testimony to the truth and they've got to make up their minds.

What did Herod do when he was faced with this testimony, when he was faced with this messenger of the truth, John the Baptist? He couldn't make up his mind. He locked him up. He couldn't have him out there actively accusing him, but he wouldn't execute him.

He feared him. He knew that he was a just and holy man. So he sits on the fence.

He keeps John in prison where he can go and hear him anytime he wants. He hears him gladly. It's fun to listen to John spout these words of doom and gloom and repentance and so forth.

Does Herod ever commit to the message of John the Baptist? He hears him gladly, but does that message make a difference in the life of Herod Antipas? He sits the fence, doesn't he? He won't reject John and kill him. He won't turn him loose and let him preach. He won't respond to the message.

He won't reject the message. He sits the fence. No one can sit the fence for very long in the plan of God.

God will force us to commit one way or the other. That's what happens here. On a propitious day, on an opportune day, things are brought to a head.

And who brings it to a head? Herodias. Who is going to bring issues to a head in Israel? The people of Israel, they come and they hear Jesus Christ. They like to watch Him do miracles, but they're not committing one way or the other, are they? They're sitting the fence.

Isn't this interesting? We've never seen anything like this. What is this mighty power? What is this mighty work? They don't want to commit one way or the other, but God will force them to commit because the religious leadership in Israel is going to make an issue of Jesus Christ in the same way that Herodias makes an issue of John the Baptist. What happens to Herod when he finally is forced to decide? We see this down in verse 25 and 26.

Immediately she came with haste to the king, saying, I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The religious leaders in Israel will one day call for Jesus Christ to be executed. The king was exceedingly sorry.

I didn't want this to happen. I liked the status quo. I liked being ambivalent and not taking sides, not being forced to commit.

But because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse. And the religious leadership in Israel will eventually incite the people of Israel to take a side. And they're going to say, Give to us Barabbas.

Crucify him. Crucify him. Give to us the thief.

Give to us Barabbas. They won't be able to sit the fence much longer. And the executioner will come in the form of Rome and will crucify Jesus Christ on the cross.

And the disciples of Jesus Christ, like the disciples of John, will take his body, bear it away, and lay it in a tomb, just as we find in verse 29. So this is a foreshadowing. The people who received the gospel of Mark into their hands in the early days of the church, by and large were believers.

They had already been evangelized. They knew about Jesus Christ. They knew of his crucifixion, his death, and his resurrection.

And to readers of this gospel, Mark wrote it to fill them in on the details of the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ. And so they come to this to find out. And when they get to this section and they see Herod and they see Herodias and they see the parallel between that and the people in Israel, it forces them to the same place that it forces us.

I'd like to give you just a few points in conclusion. Four points of comparison. First of all, with Herod.

Herod feared John. He respected him. He knew he was a just and holy man, didn't he? The people of Israel recognized Jesus Christ.

They heard the authority in his voice. They recognized his ability to cleanse and to heal. They figured him for a just and holy man.

He's a prophet. He's Elijah. He's John the Baptist.

Come back, they said. We today can respect and recognize the holiness of the Word of God and the plan of God and the purpose of God in our lives. We can give it its proper evaluation and say that's just, that's holy, that's the right thing.

Just as Herod did. Just as Israel did. Secondly, Herod had embraced something he knew was wrong.

He had married Herodias. He had made a liaison with something that was illegitimate and improper and patently wrong. Israel in Jesus' day had embraced something that was illegitimate, the false system of worship, the false system of religion that was accepted and uniformly thought to be okay by all of the people.

No one would throw rocks at you if you engaged in being a Pharisee or a scribe or following their teachings and their practices, brushing the dirt two times but not three on the Sabbath and so forth. It was acceptable. No one would say anything bad about you.

In fact, they would praise you for embracing that. We today can do the same thing. There are human traditions.

There are false standards of Christianity. There are false measures of spirituality that are socially acceptable in Christian circles that we have embraced, that we sometimes follow, that we refuse to analyze in the light of the truth. Third, John came and pointed out the evil in Herod's marriage.

He pointed out that it violated the law. Jesus came preaching, change your mind. There's something wrong in Israel.

You've embraced the wrong form of worship. You have embraced the wrong traditions and the wrong rituals. You've gotten away from the truth.

And that happens today. Every time we place ourselves under the teaching of the Word of God, if it is truly the Word of God, it ought to step on our toes. It ought to puncture our pride.

It ought to seek out and find those hard spots in our soul. If you sit under the sound of the teaching of the Word of God and you don't feel conviction from time to time, find a different teacher. Find a more accurate representation of God's Word because that's what God's Word is designed to do.

What does 2 Timothy 3:16 say? I'm sure most of you can quote it. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for what? For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction. We like to kind of browse through that rebuke and correction, don't we? That's what it's for.

That's what it does. If you listen to the Word of God and it doesn't rebuke you and it doesn't correct you, if I study it and present it and it doesn't rebuke me and correct me, something is wrong. We've gotten away into some false system.

We have embraced Herodias if we let that happen in our lives. It ought to convict us. It ought to puncture us.

It ought to hurt us. It ought to step on our toes. If it doesn't, something is wrong.

None of us have reached sinless perfection, have we? Therefore, the Word of God ought to seek out and find those areas of correction and rebuke and instruction and righteousness that we need. If it isn't happening, make a change. Change your mind, John says.

Change your mind, Jesus says. Herod failed to make the choice when it came down to choosing between his dealings with Herodias and her family and the right thing to do. He chose wrong.

He assassinated the messenger. He got rid of the source of the truth. He killed John the Baptist.

The Israelites in Israel will no longer put up with Jesus Christ. They're going to follow the guidance of their religious leaders and have Him crucified. Eliminate the messenger and you eliminate the message.

They don't want to hear it anymore. We today run that same risk. We encounter that same danger.

We have to be careful to not reject the message or the messenger. There are many wonderful, faithful teachers of the Word of God. There are many sources of good instruction in the Word of Truth and we need to expose ourselves to them on a regular basis.

How badly do we want to change our minds? How badly do we want to repent and enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom of God? The extent to which we want that is the extent to which we will expose ourselves to the Word of God and make it the object of our faith. If we don't want that very bad, if we don't think we need it very badly, the Word of God isn't going to be important to us. The plan of God and the purpose of God, the character of God, knowing God, won't be very important to us.

Attending when the Word of God is taught won't be very important. Seeking it out on the radio or in books or in other good sources, other good teachers in our community and over the airwaves won't be very important to us because change isn't important to us. The issue that this section of God's Word brings before us is crucial.

All of us need to change our minds. All of us face the issue of the truth. It rebukes us, it corrects us, and it forces us to choose.

We will either accept it or reject it. We will either embrace it or we will crucify it in our own souls. The great opportunity that we have is to not make the mistake that Israel made and not make the mistake that Herod made.

To see the truth for what it is, God's blessing on us, God's power at work in us to change us and to mold us into the image of His Son and embrace that. Make that our priority. Make that our goal in life.

Seek it out and let it change us. Let it grind off our rough edges. Let it break up the hard spots in our soul.

But it's like they told me when I decided to go to the Naval Academy, you have to want it or you'll never survive the process. We have to want it. God confronts us this morning like John confronted Israel, like Jesus Christ confronted Israel.

And it's our choice this morning. Let us together commit ourselves to making the right choice and to letting God have His perfect work in us. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You again for the privilege of studying Your Word. We thank You for the power of Your Spirit that is active within us to use these things as a sharp sword to pierce to the dividing asunder of our souls and our spirits, to criticize the thoughts and intents of our hearts, to expose those areas where we need change, where we need to repent, where we need to renew a fresh set of priorities that reflect Your priorities and Your plan. We pray that the things that we've looked at this morning will be the agent of change within us.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will use them to mold us and make us in the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For we ask it in His name. Amen.