

Sermon for Sunday, November 7, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D, Pastor
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"THE CURE FOR SIN"

Text: "And the king was sorry: nevertheless. . ." St. Matthew 14:9

"And the king was sorry. . ." I don't suppose there are any more tragic words in the English language than the words, "I'm sorry." I remember reading once in the paper of an incident that happened some years ago. A mother stood at the door waving good-bye to her three children as they started off to school. A driver came around the corner driving too fast and lost control of his car. When it was all over the three children lay dead. Every year on the anniversary date of the accident flowers were delivered to that home--they were from the driver--a driver who could never forget and who, in some small way, was trying to say, "I'm sorry." But his sorrow could not bring back the three children and the mother never knew about the flowers; she was in a home for the incurably insane.

There is something terrible and irrevocable about sin. Do you remember the words of Omar Khayyam? "The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on. Nor all your piety nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out a word of it." No, no matter how sorry you are, no matter how much you regret it, a sinful act, an unkind deed, a thoughtless word--none of them can ever be undone for sin always leaves its terrible scar.

Herod put John the Baptist to death and he was sorry for it. It must have preyed on his mind and many a night he must have laid awake, staring sleeplessly at the ceiling, wishing it were not so, wishing he could undo the terrible thing he had done. The Bible says that Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead." He was so anxious for John's death to be undone that at the first excuse he was ready to believe that John had risen from the dead. Have you ever had that sort of experience? Have you ever done something so dreadful that you are ready to believe that somehow it has all been made all right?

Let me say something especially to you young people this morning. Be very careful about what you do with your life. It is a terrible thing to have to live with something all of your life that you are sorry for but can never undo. Life is hard enough without adding to its burden the crushing weight of a sorrow for some sin that will forever mark and mar your life. Recently I read the book entitled Collision Course. It tells the story of the sinking of the Andria Doria. The captain of the Andria Doria did not take all of the precautions he should have taken as his ship with almost 15,000 persons aboard sped through the fog. And when it was all over and his ship rested on the bottom of the sea, the captain never sailed again. He said, "When I was a boy, I always loved the sea. Now I hate it and never want to see it again." His career ended in tragedy and sorrow. If he could have done it over, I am sure he would have acted differently. But sorrow and regret will not bring to life dead men and women and children nor will a proud ship ever sail again. Be careful--be so very careful--what you do. Sin can forever ruin your chances for joy and happiness or destroy your chances for a useful, fruitful life.

How do you suppose Herod got in such a jam in the first place that he would commit murder? Let's examine what the Bible says about him. Notice first that he was already living in sin. The Bible says that "Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, 'It is not lawful for thee to have her.'" The thing to be learned

here, I think, is the sober lesson that sin breeds sin. Look, for example, at a person hooked on drugs. His uncontrollable desire, his desperate need, for a "fix" breeds other sins. He begins to lie, to cheat, to steal as he passes to the very depths of degradation. So it was that Herod's first sin led inevitably and inextricably to others. You will find this to be true in your own experience. One sin leads to another until we are entwined in a web of a disaster of our own weaving.

The second thing the Bible tells us is having committed himself to a sinful course of action, he didn't have the courage to admit he was wrong. It was Herod's birthday and his wife's daughter danced at his birthday party. He was so pleased with the dance that he promised "with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she being before instructed of her mother, said, 'Give me here John the Baptist's head in a charger.' And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake..." No, he didn't have the courage to back down, to admit he was wrong.

Do you find it hard to say you have been wrong? Isn't it difficult to say, "I made an error and I must reverse myself." I remember reading once of a man who entered into a business deal with several other men. After he had put up his money, he discovered that the men were involving him in something that was really unlawful. Two possibilities were open to him. To stay in and make a profit or pull out and lose his money. And what would you have done? This man chose to stay in. And when his sin was discovered he could not face his family or friends and committed suicide. He had been unable to admit to himself that he was doing wrong. So he committed himself to a course of action that led to disaster not only for himself but for all who loved him.

We are all guilty of this--often we are unable to admit that we are wrong. One of my favorite psychologists is Dr. Hobart Mowrer. He has a paper entitled, "But I'm Vulnerable." Dr. Mowrer says that in the therapeutic group situation a person must dare to drop his facades, his masks, to be honest about himself, to dare to expose himself and to reveal what he is really like inside to a group of what Dr. Mowrer calls "significant others." And in this process something healing begins to take place. But the average person coming into such a therapy group at first refuses to drop his mask, to expose himself, to make himself vulnerable to others. And after all, how many of us are really willing for others to know us as we truly are? But Dr. Mowrer suggests that a person is exposing himself to a far greater risk. You see, if one is not willing to admit his sin, he represses it, he buries it in the unconsciousness and in the sewers of the soul. There it festers and boils and rises up again to destroy us. Yes, unable to admit we are wrong.

But there is a third thing the Bible tells us about Herod and about ourselves. Not only was he unwilling to admit to himself that he was wrong, he also let his actions be determined by what others would think. Listen to the Bible, "and the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." Who would be at the King's birthday party? Why, only the most important people, I suppose. And Herod did not want to lose face before them. He did not want to be embarrassed by going back on his word in front of his important friends. So, though he knew it was wrong, he chose to sin and murder because of what others would think.

How often are our actions guided by what others will think? Are there things you do--sometimes things you really don't want to do--because of what your friends will think? But when the final day of judgment comes and we stand to give an account of our lives and our actions, who will it have been more important to please--our friends or God? George Orwell has written a book entitled 1984. In the story, the

average man has been reduced to a mindless robot, trapped in a world where love is forbidden by government decree, hatred is aroused against one's own will, and two-way television has made privacy a punishable crime. The State is represented as "Big Brother" and every where are giant posters saying, "Big Brother is Watching You." Here, in the extreme, is the pressure to conform--to be like everyone else--to do and say and think and act as everyone does. But Jesus says, "He who hears my word and does it, is like a man who built his house on a rock." In eternity we shall not be called upon to answer to what our friends think, but we shall be called upon to answer to God.

The fourth thing I would like for us to notice about Herod is what he tried to do with his sin. He ordered that the body be buried and the disciples of John came and the Bible says they "took up the body, and buried it." Isn't this what we all try to do with our sin? We try to bury our sins in forgetfulness; we try to push our sins down in the unconsciousness; we try to hide it in some recess of the heart. We sin in the darkness of the soul, thinking that no one will ever know; thinking that our sin is hidden and forever covered up. But that isn't all that the Bible says about the burial of John, for it goes on to say, "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus." God always knows. Sin may be hidden from others and we may even hide it from ourselves for a time, but it cannot be hidden from God. Yes, God knows what is truly in our hearts.

Make no mistake, you cannot sin and hide it from God. Some day we shall be called upon to answer for our lives--not just the good things that have been done out in the open, but also for the little mean things, the ugly things, the dark things of our lives. As the Bible puts it, every man shall be judged according to his works.

Now the king was sorry for his sin. He was sorry, but he committed the sin just the same. He was sorry, and when it was over he wanted to bury the whole thing and forget it. But Jesus knew about it. Being sorry was not the cure for Herod's sin. Being sorry isn't the cure for your sin--or mine.

The cure for sin is forgiveness. The cure comes at the foot of a cross on a lonely hill called Calvary. There a man named Jesus laid down his life. He didn't have to die but he chose to die. He died your death and he died mine. There he payed the price of our forgiveness and he says to us, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Now there are all kinds of sinners! Tall ones, short ones, thin ones, fat ones, rich ones, poor ones, mean ones, young ones old ones. We are all sinners. This morning we have been talking about a man who was a sorry sinner. I imagine you and I fit into that category. We are sinners, we know it, and we are sorry about it. But being sorry for sin isn't enough. The only cure for sin is forgiveness. The only kind of sinner to be is a forgiven sinner. God wants to do that for all of us this morning--he wants to do that for you. He gave his only son to die for the sins of the world and that includes your sins, and--thank God!--it includes my sins too.

It isn't enough to be sorry for your sins. You must also be forgiven. God wants to forgive you this morning. He wants to be the Saviour of each one of us. In return, God asks you to give your life to him, to put yourself in his hands and to let him direct and control your life. No, being sorry for your sin isn't enough. We need to be forgiven and we need to put our lives in the hands of someone who will lead us in the pathways of God. And that is the only cure for sin.