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“A royal marriage forbidden of God”



The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on February 13th 2005.

“John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife,” Mark 6:18.

There truly is nothing new under the sun. The depraved nature of man leads him in the same circle of rebellion and iniquity, generation after generation. The incident before us finds its echoes in the news of the royal marriage recently announced. The planned marriage of Prince Charles and Mrs. Camilla Parker-Bowles and that of King Herod and Herodias are contrary to the law of God. Both involve a union between two people whom God said were ineligible to marry. Both couples were determined to defy God.

Herod and Herodias not merely defied God but became guilty of the murder of a faithful minister of Christ, John the Baptist.

Charles and Camilla have not had such a faithful representative of God in their company, but rather they are surrounded by such time-serving reprobates as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. He has organised a form of service of blessing for the union. Whatever the source of this “blessing”, it will not come from God.

Both Charles and Camilla have acknowledged adultery while married. The behaviour of Prince Charles in particular is reprehensible. He entered upon a marriage with Diana, Princess of Wales, while he was engaged in an adulterous relationship with Mrs. Camilla Parker-Bowles. He took his marriage vows with the full intention of continuing that wicked liaison. What will become of our nation when this adulterous liar becomes king? May God spare the nation from that curse! Charles I was a rascal who brought much grief and suffering upon the nation, and his son, Charles II, brought even more misery and was a great enemy of the gospel. It would appear that if there is a Charles III, he will continue that trend and bring a greater blight upon the kingdom than either of his forebears did!

The circumstances of this planned marriage ought to be a cause for shame and remorse within the royal household and the nation generally. Instead, a statement by the Queen said: “The Duke of Edinburgh and I are very happy that the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Parker Bowles are to marry.”

It is but another step in the nation’s downgrade. Let us learn from the Scripture before us.

I. SIN REQUIRES REBUKING

What a faithful servant of God John was! There were many reasons which he might have used to remain silent. Doubtless, he would have had thoughts such as these cross his mind, for the great men of God were but men at best and were subject to the same temptations as lesser mortals.

1. Given the persons involved it might be wiser to say nothing.



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Despite the social status of those involved, John believed that he must obey God rather than man and rebuked the sins of these royal personages.

2. Herod seemed to have regard him, therefore it would be wise to say nothing.

Herod did indeed have some measure of regard for John as verses 20 and 26 indicate. "For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly" . . . "And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her." But this did not deter John from his duty. He was more conscious of pleasing God than pleasing men.

3. His ministry was almost over.

John knew his ministry was nearly over. The Redeemer of Whom he was the forerunner, had come and His ministry had begun. John could excuse his silence on this basis, but he did not yield to such a tempting compromise.

4. The Messiah had come, let Him speak out.

John could have left the matter at the feet of Christ. Many Christian ministers today excuse their silence in the face of the sins of the nation by pleading the sovereignty of God. "He is on the throne", they say, "let Him intervene!" None of these possible excuses counted with John. He had his eyes on a Higher King and a Greater Throne.

It is so like the story of Hugh Latimer before Henry VIII. Latimer preached to the offending of the king and was commanded to return the next day and repeat his sermon in such a manner as to please the king. The next day, Hugh Latimer addressed himself before he preached, "Latimer, bear in mind that you stand before the king of England, who, if he wills, can take off your head. Be careful therefore of what you say." He continued, "But Latimer, remember that you also stand before the King of Kings Who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Fear Him, Latimer." Such was the reasoning of John the Baptist.

II. SINNERS HATE TO BE REBUKED

Herodias was the chief culprit and she hated John most fervently for his bold rebuke.

1. Sinners by nature care nothing for God's views.

It is self they serve and not the Almighty. Their wants and desires reign supreme in their being. The Holy Scriptures contain numerous records of man's resentment of God's rebuke for sin. "Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God," 2 Kings 17:13-14. "Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations," Nehemiah 9:26. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof," Proverbs 1:24-25. "But they re-



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fused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear," Zechariah 7:11. Men would rather that God kept His opinions to Himself!

2. They react with bitter resentment to being challenged even by God. They hate being thwarted. They deem the likes of John the Baptist a trouble-maker. "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" 1 Kings 18:17. Micaiah was hated for the same reason. "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so," 1 Kings 22:8. The Lord told His servant Jeremiah just what it was that he would face as he proclaimed God's rebuke to that sinful generation. "For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee," Jeremiah 1:18-19. The Lord complained of the impudence of His people in the days of Ezekiel: "But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted," Ezekiel 3:7. The attitude of Herodias was not new but rather manifested the universal resentment of men against the rebuke of the gospel regarding their sin.

3. This hated practice is an essential aspect of the gospel ministry. Men sin without thought of the consequences. They must be told and that in a manner in keeping with their sin. Sin is considered a light thing, a trifling thing by men but not by God. "And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him," 1 Kings 16:31. "Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose," Ezekiel 8:17. Sin is inconsequential in man's estimate, therefore he cannot understand the manner of God's response to it and resents it bitterly.

III. SINNERS HAVE LITTLE REGARD FOR THE WORDS THAT WOULD DIRECT THEM TO HEAVEN

Both Herod and Herodias should have thanked John for his wise and good and kind words. They did not, but rather united to murder him. In so doing, they murdered their own souls.

1. John was not the victim here but the two rebels. John went to heaven.

They went to hell. Indeed, the conscience of Herod troubled him from that day and it still troubles him at this very moment! He felt himself pursued by his sin and eventually it overtook him and he is presently paying the price of his folly in rejecting the wise and good counsel of John.

2. Herod's conscience especially troubled him when he heard of Christ.



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“And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him,” Mark 6:14. picture What a picture is here presented of the future troubling of sinners when Christ comes. The words of John the Baptist were echoed by Christ. When the Saviour comes to judge men, He will repeat the very words of warning uttered by His many servants throughout the ages. But more than that, He will act so as to demonstrate that the warnings were true and should have been heeded by sinners!

3. The words of John, should they have been obeyed, would have carried the pair to heaven.

As it is, his words will condemn them. How simple were John’s words. “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” These words called for a heeding of God’s law. These words called for an ending of the wicked union. These words called for a seeking of pardon from God. In rejecting John’s warnings and imprisoning him and then murdering him, Herod added sin to sin. “But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison,” Luke 3:19-20. What an account Herod has one day to give to the Lord! account

As many in the nation rejoice at the news of the forthcoming marriage, let us bear in mind that these two foolish people are but adding sin to sin and they must one day give an account of it all to the Lord. Let all recognise that this is so. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God,” Romans 14:12. “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment,” Ecclesiastes 11:9. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,” Matthew 12:36. The few pleasures that sin engenders are by no means worth the eternal punishment that it brings upon the head of the sinner. Weigh these things carefully and you will see the wisdom of obeying the gospel call to faith and repentance.