

THE REJECTED KING

Misguided Pleasure Seekers

Matthew 14:1-12

INTRODUCTION: May I ask you a question you do not often hear in church? **“WHAT BRINGS YOU PLEASURE?”**

Pleasure - happy satisfaction or enjoyment

That’s why at Chick-fil-a, they always say, “It’s my pleasure to serve you.”

And when you say, “Thank you,” they always say, “My pleasure.”

So, what brings you pleasure?

What brings you happy satisfaction? What brings you enjoyment?

Write some things down in your notes, or if you don’t like taking notes, at least make a mental list.

Some of you are getting nervous. I can tell just by looking at you. Relax, I’m not going to call your name.

But you are nervous because you are thinking, “I am not going to write the word ‘sex’ in my sermon notes!”

But it’s OK. I bet you did not know that the first use of the word pleasure in the Bible means sexual pleasure. God told Abraham and Sarah they would have a son in their old age.

Genesis 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

You know, I am experiencing pleasure right now because I have the attention of some boys in the youth group that I have never had before. Hey guys, I’m Bro. Mike, your pastor. Pleased to meet you!

So it is OK to write down **“sex”** on your list of things that bring you pleasure. Sex was not invented on the dark web. God is the One who designed sex, and He did it for our pleasure. God desired that we should have very happy satisfaction in the most intimate relationship that a husband and a wife share together.

OK, let’s move on. Some of you are getting so red you are going to go to purple in a minute and become LSU fans. So, what else brings you pleasure?

Being with friends Being with family Having good relationships

What else?

Eating I have taken too much pleasure in this one, and now I am paying the price with a long term diet to lose the weight I gained. But there is not much doubt is there? Eating gives us pleasure.

How about **Recreational Activities** whether it's playing or watching. No.o.o; nobody here derives any pleasure from watching football or playing soccer or baseball.

And I am not trying to get a complete list on screen this morning, just to offer you samples. But personalize your own list and write down words that describe what brings you pleasure.

So you are probably asking, why are we doing this? Glad you asked!

Because in our examination of Matthew 9 to 15 we came across a guy who ended up rejecting Christ. And when we read his story in the Scripture, in fact, when we read about his life in secular history, his life revolves around his pursuit of personal pleasure. I want to be able to look at this story from his life and clearly understand what God is saying to me and I want to be able to share that with you.

His name is King Herod, but he is not Herod the Great we met in Matthew, chapter 2. He is Herod's son, and he was called Herod Antipas. He has been on the throne ruling over Galilee and Perea for more than 30 years when the incident we will read takes place.

Matthew 14:1–12

1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. 7 Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. 8 So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."

9 And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. 10 So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. 12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

We actually read the end of this story in the Gospel of Luke. You remember that when Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman Procurator found Him innocent. But because the priests and the people they had stirred up kept demanding the death of Jesus, Pilate tried to rid himself of the problem by sending Jesus to Herod who was vacationing in Jerusalem.

Herod wanted Jesus do some miracle in his presence for the king's entertainment, but Jesus refused to accommodate him. Finally, as Luke sums it up.

Luke 23:11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him*, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.

So, this man, this king, like his father also rejected Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. The Lord Himself stood before Herod Antipas, and Herod could have believed. He could have repented and been the first of his family to receive forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, but he didn't.

For his father, Herod the Great, the reason was his relentless pursuit of power that caused him to reject the Christ.

Shall we say that for Herod Antipas, the reason he rejected King Jesus was his pursuit of pleasure? No!

If we did, we would be wrong! You may be surprised to learn.

I. PLEASURE IS NOT THE PROBLEM.

A. God Himself takes pleasure in certain things.

Psalm 147:11 **The LORD takes pleasure** in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

Psalm 149:4 For **the LORD takes pleasure** in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

Friend, listen! After Jesus bore our sins upon the cross, He took pleasure in what He had done. Hear these most unusual words of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, **He shall see His seed**, He shall prolong *His* days, And **the pleasure of the LORD** shall prosper in His hand.

This happened immediately after His death, while friends and family were putting His body in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, the soul and spirit of Jesus took the soul and spirit of the repentant thief to Paradise in Sheol just as Jesus had promised.

There, even while the Christ awaited the resurrection of His body, He saw all the Old Testament believers who had trusted God's promise to send a Savior and

had been waiting here in Paradise for the sacrifice to be made that would take away all their sin and grant them forgiveness and life forever in the presence of God.

And I can picture Jesus looking out at that vast sea of saints including Abraham and David, Sarah and Rachel, Joseph and Judah, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Rahab, Ruth and Boaz, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all of those who believed their message. Tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of people, who by faith received the promise of God, standing on the hills of Paradise, seeing for the first time their Lord, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, fresh from laying down His life upon the cross for them.

And I can picture tears running down the cheeks of our dear Lord, tears of joy, as happy satisfaction, the pleasure of the Lord, fills His soul, because by His death upon the cross, these captives will at last be set free.

And when He marches triumphantly out of that tomb on Sunday morning, they will follow Him. Maybe He chuckles as He thinks, "I'll let them pass briefly through the streets of Jerusalem, as I escort them to their new home with streets of gold in Heaven."

The Lord takes pleasure in those who trust Him.

The Lord takes pleasure in those who receive His salvation.

B. Therefore being made in God's image, He has made us also to take pleasure, to experience a happy satisfaction in certain things.

Even the law acknowledges this.

Deuteronomy 23:24 "When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, **you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure**, but you shall not put *any* in your container.

PLEASURE ITSELF IS NOT THE PROBLEM.

So, what is the problem? What happened to Herod who killed John the Baptist and later mocked the Lord Jesus? Clearly what the Holy Spirit chose to tell us about him has something to do with pleasure. What is it?

He wants us to see

II. PROBLEMS CAN COME IN THE WAY WE SEEK PLEASURE.

Herod's problem was the problem Solomon described in Ecclesiastes. Solomon was experimenting with the purpose of life. Trying different things to see what brought fulfillment.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 **Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure**, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.

Solomon confessed that there was a season in which he thought he deserved to have or to do whatever would bring him pleasure. He said, "Man, I have worked hard, and this is my reward!"

You know, I have never been able to identify much with Solomon in being exceedingly wise, but I painfully identify with him here. It's one of the reasons I have to be on this diet I'm on trying to lose this excess weight.

Sometimes I get to thinking like Solomon. "Man I have really worked hard today and I deserve whatever I want to eat." And when I get to thinking like that, Popeye's Fried Chicken becomes my Pleasure Palace.

Does this kind of thinking sound familiar?

- Do you recognize it in others you know?
- Do you recognize it in yourself?

And do you see this does not just apply to eating.

- It can apply to shopping.
- It can apply to playing sports.
- It can apply to watching sports.

For Herod, the application was sex.

The problem for Herod or for anybody is not that they find pleasure in sex, any more than the fact that eating brings pleasure, or shopping, or sports, or watching a football game. The fact that those things produce the feelings of happy satisfaction is not wrong, nor is it really the problem.

The problem was the way Herod sought the pleasure that comes from sex.

Herod was married to Phasaelis, the daughter of the King of Nabatea, but he began to be attracted to Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. Each of them divorced their spouse and married each other.

When John the Baptist condemned their new marriage as unlawful in the eyes of God, Herod did not much care what the preacher said, but Herodias was incensed. Herod arrested John and kept him in prison to please her.

You see, the problem was not that either Herod or Herodias sought the pleasure that comes from sex. The problem was the way they both sought it – not with their spouse, but with somebody else's spouse. The fact that they tried to legitimize it by, divorcing, getting married again, did not change anything in the sight of God.

In fact, did you notice, that when the Holy Spirit introduced Herodias to us through Matthew in verse 3, the Holy Spirit does not call her Herod's wife but his brother Phillip's wife!

Matthew 14:3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of **Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.**

This the Spirit said in spite of the fact that both Herod and Herodias had been legally divorced and remarried.

But that is not all. It was Herod's birthday, and they had a party.

- Do not get into your mind birthday cake with candles and decorative balloons.
- Don't think of a cookout with friends and funny cards and gifts about getting old.
- In fact, in the lands occupied by Jews, birthday parties were not common.
- The birthday party was a pagan, Gentile thing, and it was quite different than any birthday party you have ever attended. At least I hope that is true!
- These were parties in which gluttony, drunkenness, exotic dancing, and sexual indulgence were common.
- The featured dancer, Salome, was the daughter of Herodias and the niece of Herod Antipas.
- When Matthew tells us that Herod was pleased with her dance, the word used was a euphemism for "sexually aroused."

It all happened just as Herodias had planned. She had hated the Baptizer from the moment he dared to denounce her adultery with Herod. True, Herod had put him in prison, but he wouldn't kill him because the Jews believed John was a prophet of God.

But this woman, rivaling Jezebel of Old Testament times in wickedness, wanted John the Baptist dead! She was not above using the sensuality of her own daughter to achieve her evil goal. She had prompted her ahead of time, because she knew how her lustful husband would respond. So when Herod called out in front of all of his highfalutin political friends who had gladly come to his licentious celebration, that he would give to Salome whatever she wanted, she was ready with her answer, "I want the head of John the Baptist on a platter – here, now!"

The Scripture says that the king was sorry.

- Not sorry as in repentance.
- Not sorry in that he cared for John the Baptist.
- Sorry he had been tricked.
- Sorry he would now endure more hatred and scorn from the Jews.
- Maybe sorry for what God might think.

But he was not sorry enough to impact his actions. He would not be made to look the fool in front of his friends.

As if it were nothing, he gave the order to behead John the Baptist and bring his head on a platter and set it before his niece. In short order, it was done. John's soul and spirit went to Paradise, awaiting the Savior whose coming he announced. His followers and friends came and retrieved his body and buried it.

But Salome took the platter on which rested the head of the prophet of God and set it before her mother, the fruit of the way Herod had sought his pleasure.

PLEASURE ITSELF IS NOT THE PROBLEM.

THE PROBLEM WAS THE WAY HEROD SOUGHT HIS PLEASURE.

So, what is the right way to seek pleasure?

Would you believe, the Bible actually tell us?

Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

III. WE SHOULD SEEK OUR PLEASURE IN GOD HIMSELF.

- **Only in God is there fullness of joy – complete satisfaction!**
- **Only God offers pleasures that last forever.**
- **He will show us this path, the path of life.**

- **The path of life is Jesus.**

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, the truth, **and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

- **We begin walking the path of life when we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior.**
- **We continue walking the path of life by walking in Christ.**

Colossians 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, **so walk in Him**,

What does this mean relative to the earthly things in our lives that offer us pleasure?

1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

- It is OK to get pleasure from eating, but I must eat for the glory of God and therefore I cannot fail to take care of my body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

- It is OK to get pleasure from sex, but we must be sure that we keep sex within the boundary of marriage that God has established.
- It is OK to get pleasure from shopping, but we must not let that make us poor stewards of what God has entrusted to our care, preventing us from giving God our tithe or giving to the good work of God according to His gifts to us.
- It is OK to get pleasure from playing basketball with the guys or doing scrapbooking with the girls, but we must be sure this does not keep me from being the husband God wants me to be, the mother God wants me to be, or keep us from spending proper time in His Word and in prayer.
- It is OK to get pleasure from watching a football game, in person or on TV, or a movie or other show. But we must be sure that what we watch does not draw us away from the things of God, either because the content is ungodly or because we spend time doing that when we should be worshipping God or learning from His Word.

CONCLUSION: This is not hard. It is not complicated. There is no long list of rules to be learned.

If we put our trust in Jesus,

Walk continuously with Him,

Doing all we do to the glory of God,

We will find we have our greatest pleasure, our greatest satisfaction in Him,

And that pleasure will last forever!

The story of Herod reminds us what happens when we don't.