

THE CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE

Beware the Leaven of Herod

Mark 8:15

INTRODUCTION: Jesus warned against three kinds of leaven.

Leaven is used in Scripture to describe evil because of its quick and quiet spread. The particular worldviews and practices that Jesus labels as leaven work exactly that way,

- Often unseen, unnoticed,
- But spreading thoroughly through a person's life,
- Even becoming a dominating influence within them.

The doctrine of the Sadducees, is theological liberalism, a denial of the power of God and disbelief in the Word of God.

The doctrine of the Pharisees is traditionalism that substitutes the commandments and ways of man for the commandments of God in His Word.

The doctrine we examine today our Lord called the leaven of Herod.

Mark 8:15 NKJV Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Jesus warned us of teachings that lead to unbelief because people do not believe the Scripture is the Word of God or do not believe the supernatural power of God.

Jesus warned us of those who say they believe the Word of God and believe in God's power but who do not obey God because they put the keeping of their traditions before the keeping of God's commandments.

Of what is Jesus warning us when He says to beware the leaven of Herod?

WHAT WAS THE LEAVEN OF HEROD?

- Who was Herod?

There were many rulers in the family of Herod.

- Several of them are mentioned in the Bible.
- **The Herod of whom Jesus was speaking is Herod the Tetrarch described in Mark 6.**
 - He is **one of seven sons of Herod the Great** who slew the baby boys of Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Christ following His birth.
 - His **full name was Herod Antipas**, and he was the **ruler of Galilee and Perea** during Jesus' ministry.
- Like his father, he was a great builder, and he built the city of Tiberius in honor of the emperor on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.
- He married one of the daughters of the King of the Nabateans.
 - Later his eye fell on Herodias, the wife of his half-brother, Herod Philip.
- **He divorced his Nabatean bride, and took Herodias from his brother and married her.**
 - For this act he was denounced by John the Baptist who declared this marriage to be unlawful, which of course it was, according to the law of God. (Mk. 6:14-29)
 - Herodias was outraged at John's declaration. She wanted the Baptizer killed for his brazen declaration concerning their sin.
 - But Herod feared John the Baptist because he recognized that John was a holy man and that what John said was right.
 - So instead of killing him, Herod put John in prison but he protected his life.
 - He would sometimes send for John the Baptist and talk with him. The Scripture even says that Herod gladly heard John speak.
- On Herod's birthday, a grand party was thrown in his honor.

- All the VIP's of Galilee were there. In the middle of the party the surprise entertainment was presented.
- The daughter of his wife Herodias, Salome, began to dance, probably in most sensual fashion, for the king and his guests.
- Herod was so pleased that he promised to give her whatever she wanted, up to half of his kingdom.
- Little did King Herod suspect that after his ill-considered promise, prompted by the stirring of his lustful appetites, that Salome would slip to her mother's side and ask her advice concerning her promised reward.
- But soon she came back before the great king and in front of his guests told Herod that all that she desired was the head of John the Baptist on a platter.
- The king's countenance dropped. His heart raced. His face turned pale. He glanced from side to side at the dignitaries about him. All eyes were focused on him. The king known as the old fox had been out foxed by his own wife.
- He could not risk the embarrassment or the loss of prestige, so trying as best he could to act as if it were nothing, he sent the executioner to the prison house to cut off the head of the man that even Herod knew was a holy man of God.
- So what was the leaven or doctrine or philosophy of Herod?
 - **Not Sadduceeism.** Later when Herod heard of Jesus' miracles, he thought John the Baptist had been raised from the dead and was doing these mighty works. He believed in the supernatural and the resurrection.
 - **Not Phariseeism.** Tradition was not his guide or his norm. He did what he pleased.
 - And that is the clue. **Herod did what he pleased.** He supported what brought him pleasure. **He lived for pleasure.**
 - Another man's wife looked like she would be more pleasurable than his own so he divorced the bride of his youth and took this new filly into his stable.

- A beautiful and lewd young woman brings pleasure to the king and his raucous guests and he makes brash promises that would not be made in more sober times.

THE DOCTRINE OF HEROD WAS TO LIVE FOR PLEASURE.

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF HEROD TODAY?

- Philosophers have given this doctrine a name: **Hedonism – the philosophy that the pursuit of pleasure is the goal of life.**
- Not often labeled as such but is such a popular philosophy that there are many popular phrases that illustrate this mindset.
 - The me generation
 - I did it my way
 - Go for the gusto
 - YOLO – you only live once
 - It doesn't get any better than this
- **The follower of this deceptive philosophy will blatantly disobey the commands of God**
 - **Not because he or she does not believe they are God's commands like the Sadducees and liberals.**
 - **Not because she or he is steeped in some rigid tradition which he honors more than the Word of God like the Pharisees and traditionalists.**
 - **But because God's commands are a barrier to what they want.**
 - He wants his booze
 - so he ignores Proverbs 23:32 At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. (NKJV)

- and disobeys Ephesians 5:18 which says "...do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit," (NKJV)
- She wants more money than God knows is good for her to have
 - so she steals
 - or gambles
- He wants sex outside of marriage
 - so he flirts until he finds someone of the same desire
 - or he turns to pornography
 - or to harlots
- and we could go on and on
- Listen, my friend. **Do not think that just because**
 - **You believe the Word of God**
 - **And you are not hung up in traditionalism****that everything is OK.**

If you disobey the commandments of God simply because you want to do things your way, you want your pleasure, you want what you want, you have fallen into the deceitful trap called the leaven of Herod of which the Lord Jesus strongly warned us.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO LIVE THEIR LIVES FOR PLEASURE?

- **Sin can indeed bring pleasure; but it is always only for a season.**
Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, (NKJV) or as KJV puts it Hebrews 11:25 ... the pleasures of sin for a season (KJV)
- **Herod's pleasure was soon gone.**

- His offended father-in-law attacked Herod's territory and gave his army a sound defeat. Herod's reputation suffered greatly.
- His nephew denounced him to the Emperor Gaius as a plotter and subversive.
- Gaius removed Herod from power and sent him into exile where he died.

Galatians 6:7-8 NKJV Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

CONCLUSION: People who are very intellectual and academically minded are especially susceptible to the leaven of the Sadducees: theological liberalism.

People who are very religious are especially susceptible to the leaven of the Pharisees: traditionalism.

But far more people, including some who are intellectuals or traditionalists, are susceptible to the leaven of Herod: living for pleasure rather than God.

The sad story of Herod reminds me of an even sadder story. I reminded you of this story back during the pandemic when we were only having online worship. So I don't know how many of you were tuned in or if you were if you were paying attention while drinking your coffee and nibbling on Sunday morning breakfast.

This man whom we read about in Holy Scripture was a man

- Born as a miracle baby.
- Set apart as man especially dedicated to God, even while he was still in the womb
- While still a teenager, the Spirit of God entered him.
- God gave him such supernatural physical strength that he killed a lion with his bare hands.

By now many of you know that I am talking about Samson. And God did all of this so that Samson could deliver God's people from the oppression of the Philistines.

Seldom has a man had such a noble beginning.

But Samson did not have a noble ending, nor even a noble life.

- He was an embarrassment to his parents.
- He was an unwise judge.
- His actions caused the name of the Lord to be mocked and reviled.
- The Spirit of God became so grieved with Samson that He departed from him.
- He gave away his greatest gift while in the arms of a prostitute.
- Samson utterly failed to do the one thing for which he had been born; and Israel remained under the cruel, oppressive hand of the Philistines.

Why would a man like Samson have such a sad ending to his life?

The same reason Herod did.

Because he lived his life for personal pleasure.

He thought little or nothing about God's purpose for his life. Every decision he made, Samson did what he WANTED to do,

- Not what God said to do.
- Not what would further the purpose of God for his life.
- Not what benefited or blessed others.

EVERYTHING WAS FOR HIS OWN PLEASURE!

Folks, the Lord Jesus, who loved us enough that He would go to the cross and die in our place said to each of us,

“Pay attention. I am warning you about common, dangerous perspectives on life that could be your ruin.” Jesus says, “I don't want that for you. I want you to have a full and meaningful, abundant life and then live with Me forever.”

So He says,

- “Listen, believe God’s Word. It is true.
- Don’t just do according to the traditions of man.
- And don’t just live for your own pleasures and desires.

Instead, trust Me. Let Me be your Lord and Savior.

Let Me give you eternal life and forgive your sins.

And follow Me. Do what I say, and I will show you what a really abundant life is all about.”