

## ***Luke: Meeting Jesus Through Others' Eyes***

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

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**TEXT: Luke 9:7-9**



Good morning, Beloved. You may be confused at the beginning of the sermon about the identity of the character in this passage. It's easy to get confused because there are six Herods in the New Testament, and there's even one Herodias. It's hard to keep track of these different personalities and players, but this life and this meeting with Jesus actually have much to teach us this morning. I want to ask you: Do you believe that people who hold political power need Jesus? Do you believe that people who sit with and have been entrusted with tremendous wealth or social influence need Jesus? Do you believe that people who sit in positions of society, that people often admire, respect, sometimes loathe, actually within them and underneath that picture of power have a great need and longing? That should change how we relate to them. In our passage this morning, we have a powerful man who seeks to meet Jesus. I think that God has much to teach us from His Word through this passage.

We are going to look this morning at Herod's life and how that life intersects with Jesus and where it goes. We start in the middle of his life in our passage. In Luke 9:7, we read:

*"Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed."*

He was confused; he was unsure. The Greek term that's used here could be translated as, "He was at a loss" about what to make of it. People were saying one thing; others were saying another. Can you imagine conflicting and competing public opinions? Strain your powers of imagination and imagine the conflicting public discourse about the identity of Jesus. Some said He was John; some said Elijah; others, one of the prophets. In Luke 9:9, we read that Herod

said:

*“John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see Him.”*

It wasn't just a single searching.

“Who is this man, and why does he want to meet Jesus?” This is Herod Antipas, and he is mentioned five times in the Gospel of Luke. Let me tell you about his family of origin. His grandfather was an Idumean chieftain from the area that’s southeast of Israel. His name was Antipater. Antipater, though he was from Idumea, had a small army. None other than Julius Caesar was campaigning in the region, in Egypt. Julius Caesar was surrounded by an army and about to be killed, and this Idumean chieftain named Antipater came and helped him and protected his life. So Julius Caesar said, “Let me say ‘thank you,’” and he said “thank you” in a first century Roman way by granting him citizenship and naming him the governor of Judea.

Antipater gave areas of the surrounding country to his sons, one of whom we know as Herod the Great, who was governor of Galilee. Herod the Great became a king by the decree of the Roman senate. His kingship was absolutely dependent on Roman patronage, and that's critical for the storyline this morning, because his kingship is illegitimate. He sought legitimacy throughout his life. He wanted to produce a ruling class to establish a dynastic line. What do you do if you need to produce a dynastic line? You marry ten women. So Herod the Great had ten wives. He had ten wives to produce a number of sons.

His first wife Doris was from Jerusalem, and she produced a son named Antipater, which is the Greek way of naming. Sons are named often for their grandfather, so grandfathers and grandsons have the same name.

Herod the Great’s second wife, was a woman named Mariamne, and she was a Hasmonean princess. She was a descendent of the priestly line in Israel. Herod wanted to marry her, because marrying her would bring him into this line of legitimacy, which he so craved. She bore him two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus.

Herod's fourth wife was a woman named Malthace. She was a Samaritan. She bore two sons, Archelaus and Antipas, who is central in our passage. Antipas was born in 21 BC. His father had been king for sixteen years. Herod Antipas, like all first century royals, was sent to Rome to grow up with the Roman imperial extended family, to receive an education among them, and to be groomed for this future rule in succession. During his stay in Rome, he stayed, together with his brothers, in the house of an orator and historian named G. Asinius Pollio.

Then came the first major crisis of his life. It happened when he was sixteen years old. What a great life—the first major crisis at age sixteen. In 7 BC Herod the Great discovered a plot against him from his two sons Alexander and Aristobulus, who were tired of waiting for their father to die so they could become king. Herod convened a court that was actually held in Beirut, Lebanon, and he condemned his two sons and had them strangled to death publicly in Samaria, so they were out. Herod changed his will, and he named Antipater, his first son, as sole heir. But then in 5 BC, Herod discovered a plot against him by Antipater, and he had him imprisoned. He changed his will for the fifth time, and he named Antipas as sole benefactor and heir. This is, if you're in high school, the best case scenario. You're 16 years old, and you've just been named the sole heir of your father's kingdom. But here comes the crisis. Five days before Herod the Great dies, he has his son Antipater killed, and he changed his will for the last time. In this new will he split up the kingdom, and he named Archelaus as ethnarch, not king, Antipas as tetrarch, or governor, of Galilee, and his half-brother Philip as tetrarch of the northern territories. This was a devastating blow for Herod Antipas.

If you're into Bible study and you have a study Bible, there are maps usually at the end of a study Bible. If you're a map addict like me, then you just crave these biblical maps. I had the privilege just a few months ago to work on a project that produced a set of maps to go with the *Casket Empty* Bible study that I worked on, and it was a really fascinating and enjoyable process when we made seven maps to tell the New Testament story. We created these maps, and this



is a map that you have to have for understanding the New Testament world. This map shows the division of Herod the Great's kingdom. You can see that Archelaus is given the best parts, Judea and Samaria, shown in orange. Herod Antipas' territory is in green, and he has Galilee and Perea. His brother Philip has the northern area that's in yellow.

Herod inherited this when he was 17 years old, and he began to rule in Galilee. His annual income was 200 talents. If you recall from Jesus' parable, one talent is career earnings, so an annual income of 200 talents is approximately \$280 million. If you're 17 years old, you have to give this some thought. His section of the kingdom is less than that of his brother. His brother Archelaus' annual income is 600 talents, so he is earning just south of \$1 billion a year. Most people don't do well with that kind of income.

Herod begins to rule in Galilee as tetrarch, ruler of a portion of the kingdom. He re-fortified the city of Sepphoris, and he renamed it Autokratoris, which means “the ruler,” in honor of Augustus, his patron. The city in Galilee that he built looked like this, which is an archaeological reconstruction. It was a spectacular city. Josephus called it the ornament of Galilee. It's a city that emerges in the hills of Galilee, and it sticks out for its ornamentation. It has temples to the Romans and Roman gods. It has palatial streets with colonnaded, covered sidewalks, and it even has a spectacular theater that you can see in the distance. Herod Antipas spent a



number of years building this city. Across the valley, looking at Sepphoris as it rises up, is Nazareth. This is the view from Nazareth, looking across the valley at Sepphoris. There is another builder, growing up in Nazareth, another builder of cities, another who is a master craftsman, and He is not only someone who is seeking to be called King, but actually is born as a King. Nazareth is a small village, maybe 100 or 200 people, and it looks across at the major project of this man who seeking to be called King.

When Antipas was 27 years old, in AD 6, his brother Archelaus was banished for incompetence. He thought maybe the kingdom would be given to him, but instead the Romans came and ruled by direct Roman rule. Herod married a Nabatean princess, the daughter of King Aretas IV, to secure his southern flank and to marry into another royal line. He continued to demonstrate his loyalty to Rome. After the Emperor Tiberius began to rule, then Herod Antipas built a new city on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee in Tiberius' honor and named it Tiberias. As he was starting the construction, he ran into a great problem. As he was working on it, digging the foundations for these buildings, he stumbled onto a massive cemetery. Human bones made the new city defiling for devout Jews to go to or visit, and they refused to move there, so Herod had to pay people to move to his new town.

He promoted the city in coins. This is one of Herod's coins celebrating the accomplishment of the city of Tiberias. Notice on one side that his name is written all around the edge. It says “a coin of Herod the tetrarch.” In the middle you see a palm branch, which is the symbol that's used to recognize the legitimate king. We will be waving palm branches next Sunday, and they won't be for Herod. On the other side of the coin, you can see the Roman victor's wreath, and inside it says the name of the city Tiberias.



It was AD 29. Antipas was 49 years old, and then came the second major crisis of his life. He was on his way to visit Rome, and he stopped to visit his half-brother Herod Philip, a Herodian son who lacked political ambition. Philip's mother was Mariammne II, who was a priestly descendant with royal ties. Herod Philip's wife was the daughter of Aristobulus, Herod Antipas' half-brother and Herod the Great's son by Mariammne I of royal priestly descent. His brother's wife's name was Herodias. Yes, she was Herod Antipas' niece, and, yes, she was his brother's wife, but she was wealthy, she was beautiful, and she was ambitious, and Herod wanted to marry her. Josephus says that he lusted after her, and she set one condition: that he publicly divorce the daughter of King Aretas IV. And he did it. His Nabatean wife learned of his intentions, and she went to the fortress of Macherus, the palace fortress overlooking the Dead Sea, which is on the border of her father's kingdom. Once she was there, she slipped away into the night and returned to her father, who was furious at the public insult of having his daughter be divorced.

King Aretas was not the only person who was outraged. AD 29 was an important year for another voice. Luke tells us in Luke 3:1 another mention of Herod:

*“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee....”*

Here he is: *“Herod being the tetrarch of Galilee.”* In that moment, Beloved, something astonishing happened. The Word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. This is the first time in 400 years that God's Word came. God had not spoken to His people by the power of the Holy Spirit since the prophet Malachi. The Old Testament ends with mention of one coming in the Spirit and power of Elijah, who will call people to repentance, and all of a sudden that Word comes to God's people through the voice of John in the wilderness. He is the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness, *“Prepare the way of the Lord,”* calling all people—people with a lot of money, people with no money, people with high social position, people with none—to repent and prepare their hearts for the arrival of God Himself. John knew that Antipas' actions were deeply offensive to God and a violation of His Word.

Does God's Word address people who hold social and political power? Absolutely. Is everyone accountable for what they say and do? They are. John knew from Leviticus 18:16 that *“you shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife.”* He knew from Leviticus 18:21 that *“if a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity.”* In Leviticus 20:23, we read that God says:

*“You shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.”*

The Bible has the highest view of marriage, and it has such a high view of marriage because

marriage reflects God's love for His people. God is against a political marriage and divorce and remarriage for the sake of social prestige, and it is a gross violation of His Word.

John spoke publicly, *"It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."* Herodias was furious. She goaded Herod, and he seized John and bound him in prison at the very same place where



his first wife had fled—the palace fortress of Macherus, overlooking the Dead Sea. Herod was afraid of John. He was afraid of John because he knew that people saw him as a righteous and holy man. It's a strange thing about people who hold political office, that their political office depends on not offending the people who support them in that. So they change what they say and do and think, depending on

what they think we think, which is weird, isn't it? It's that way in the first century; it's that way now; and it will be that way for our grandchildren. Herod didn't want to displease the people who supported this position.

Then he had a birthday, and it was a big one, his 50th birthday. The ancients thought that was your best decade. The reason they thought that is that they believed you had lived enough to have some wisdom, but you still have some vitality to do something with it. So they thought that your 50s is your best decade. We live in a society that thinks we peak around 18 or 19, right? Herod was having a birthday that was a big birthday party. We're not talking about cake and party favors. This is one of those moments when the \$2-80 million really is an advantage. He had a huge party, and he invited his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee, and there was plenty to eat, plenty to drink. There were girls. It was everything. Herodias' daughter came, and she danced. In a drunken stupor Herod Antipas said, *"Whatever you ask me, I'll give you, up to half my kingdom."* So the girl asked her mother, "What should I ask for?" Her mom said, "You ask for the head of John the Baptist on a plate," so she did. Herod was grieved, but he did not want to displease his guests, so he sent an executioner who beheaded John. They brought his head on a plate. This is the man that Jesus said was the greatest man who ever lived till the kingdom of God bursts forth.

John's disciples came and took his body and gave him an honorable burial, and they came and told Jesus, and they withdrew to the wilderness, and they grieved. They grieved, and Jesus had compassion on the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom of God. He went through all the cities and the villages, and He proclaimed the good news that the reign of God, the righteous rule of God, has arrived, and you have to turn from the way that you're going and believe. And people did. The word of this preaching came close to Herod's household, because Luke tells us that some prominent women

were healed of evil spirits and disease: Mary, called Magdala, from Magdalen and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was Herod's household manager. When you make \$2.8 billion every year, you have to have someone who keeps track of that, right? Chuza did that, and his wife listened to Jesus' preaching and was healed and began to follow Him, and she began to support His ministry.

Jesus called the Twelve and gave them power and authority, and He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, that the rule of God, the righteous reign of God and His promised Messiah, is at hand. This leads to the third great crisis in Herod Antipas' life. It's our text. It's in the middle of his life. He is 50 years old, and he hears about what's happening. He is perplexed; he is at a loss. He doesn't know what to make of it. People were saying it's John the Baptist, resurrected from the dead. It's a prophet, like one of the old. In Luke 9:9, we read that Herod said:

*"John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see Him."*

This is a critical line. The verb is in the imperfect tense, which means that it was a repeated action. It means, Beloved, that for a moment there was an opportunity, a moment of openness, a window when Herod paused in his life, and he wanted to meet Jesus. This is critical. It's critical when the circumstances of your life culminate to a point where you become interested in meeting Jesus. And when that happens, I plead with you to get to Jesus, because you don't know how long that window is going to stay open. When you have stirring in your soul and interest to meet Jesus, you must get to Jesus and meet Him. And when you meet Him, you must recognize in Him true greatness, true kingship, the builder of an everlasting and glorious city that will never turn to ruins. When you meet Jesus, you must see in Him the One to whom you owe the highest loyalty. You must see in Him the image of the living God and the key to your life's having real significance and lasting importance. And when you meet Him, you must hear from Him the announcement: *"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent [turn from this way of destruction] and believe in the gospel."* You must meet Jesus and turn away from political or personal ambition and apologize to God for any of the ways that you've disregarded His Word, and you must give your life to Him, because if you don't do that, if you delay, if you remain on a self-directed path, patterned after the appetites and excuses and excesses of earthly power, Jesus will suddenly start to look like your enemy instead of your Savior.

Herod delays, and the next time we meet him he's 53. He waited three years. In Luke 13:31, we read:

*"At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, 'Get away from here, for*

*Herod wants to kill You.’”*

This leads to the fourth major crisis of Herod’s life, when he finally does meet Jesus. Herod meets Jesus in Holy Week after Jesus had been arrested and brought before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Pilate asked Him this question that I hope you appreciate the gravity of a little bit more. In Luke 23:3, we read:

*“And Pilate asked Him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And He answered him, ‘You have said so.’”*

That is a way of answering “yes.” He is the real King, the legitimate one.

Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee and was from Herod Antipas’ jurisdiction, and he sent Jesus to meet Herod. Herod had long desired to see Him. He had heard about Him. He was hoping to see Jesus do a sign. Jesus was silent in his presence, the King of glory face-to-face with the tetrarch. Herod, because he had delayed, now finds his heart hardened, and he does not recognize the true King standing right in front of him. Not only does he not recognize Him, but he treated Him with contempt and mocked Him. Herod, when he does finally meet Jesus face-to-face, utterly disdains Him. The language here tears me up. The ESV says, *“treated Him with contempt.”* The text says that Herod looked at Jesus and *“reckoned Him as nothing.”* He looked face-to-face with the Savior of the world, who rightly receives the adoration of all nations, and Herod counted Him as a zero. Then he mocked Him, and then he wrapped a glittering garment around Him and sent Him back to Pilate to be crucified.

Herod's rejection of Jesus leads him to the fifth and final crisis of his life. King Aretas was deeply offended and dishonored by Herod’s treatment of his daughter, and so he gathered up his army and defeated Herod Antipas in battle. Josephus explains why he lost, which is fascinating. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that Herod's army was defeated justly as divine punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist. Amazing. Herod was defeated by Aretas, and his kingdom shrank. Then he was bypassed in succession. His nephew Agrippa was suddenly named king. There is a new emperor, Caligula (formerly Gaius), who granted Agrippa the status of king. He gave Agrippa the territory of Archelaus, and he gave him the territory of Philip, and all of a sudden Herod Antipas’ nephew becomes king, and he was deeply upset about it.

Herodias was furious and said, “You’d better go to Rome and plead your cause, because your nephew just got appointed king, and who are you?” So he went to Rome, and as he journeyed to Rome, his nephew Agrippa heard he was headed there. So Agrippa decided he probably ought to go. Agrippa went to Rome, and he got there first, and he told the new Roman Emperor, “You know, my uncle is on his way here, but I have to tell you a couple things about



him.” One of those just happened to be that “he has 70,000 sets of armor for soldiers, because he is planning to revolt against you. You might want to ask him about that.” So Antipas came before the court of the Roman emperor, and he offered all his gifts, and he tried to posture himself as one to honor the emperor. The emperor said, “I just have one question. Do you have 70,000 sets of armor?” He couldn't deny it, so he was banished to Gaul, the absolute western edge, as far away from the area that he was ruling that he could be. His territory was given to his nephew. His wealth was confiscated. After he arrived in Gaul, Caligula sent a small group of soldiers and killed him. In the end, he lost everything.

Do you and I have things that we can learn from this meeting? I think we do. Let me suggest three:

Number one: ***Meeting Jesus here reminds us that earthly politicians need Jesus.*** That's a serious thing. Whatever your favorite variety, all of them need Christ. Political power is fleeting. It's often accompanied by corruption. Contrary examples are rare, and this should not surprise us. Hardly anyone today can keep the Herods straight in their mind, and they are largely forgotten. What should concern us about those who hold political or social power is that those in these positions at some point will want to meet Jesus. If that's true for them, that will be true for all of us. And if that's true for people who hold political power, that means we should relate to them as people who need Jesus. They need to be prayed for, not criticized. They need to be held accountable, not given a free pass. They need to be related to as human beings, though, because they don't hold a lasting power, and they know it.

Number two: For all of us, ***meeting Jesus, when the desire, the impulse, arises, it must be pursued diligently.*** When that happens in you or that happens in your friend or family member or classmate or colleague, and you sense in them that all of a sudden they are interested in Jesus and want to meet Him, then you must go to Him. You must lead a friend to Him as soon as possible, because you do not know how long that interest will remain. When the soul of a man or a woman or a child opens and all of a sudden Jesus seems interesting or appealing, and there is interest in knowing Him, then you must get to Him and not only get to Him but give your life to Him. Don't delay. Jesus burst into my life when I was 16 years old, and I wasn't even in position to inherit a kingdom and to have an income of \$280 million. He burst in, and He just captured my heart in a night. I didn't even know what would really be involved, but He captured my heart, and that decision has completely changed the trajectory of my life.

Number three: ***When we meet Jesus, we meet the King of kings*** and that's a phrase that we use. It's a scriptural phrase, but that phrase means so much more when you look hard and long at an earthly king or an earthly ruler or someone who aspires to that. As large and influential as

a person like Herod Antipas is seen in his generation, there is Someone of much greater glory, much greater power, much greater wealth. There is Someone who is the King of kings and whose kingship is carried out in the most beautiful of ways. The King of kings—we celebrate His coronation next week. We will waive palm branches next Sunday to recognize the legitimate King. As King, He will go and take the sin of the world on His shoulders and offer His life as a ransom for you. That's what royal greatness looks like to Jesus Christ. Everyone who receives Him and welcomes Him as King shares in His everlasting Kingdom. That Kingdom is on display as His people gather and worship.

The last mention of Herod the tetrarch in the New Testament is a mention that gives us hope. In Acts 13, the church was gathered in Antioch. It's that city where the Christians were first called Christians. In Acts 13:1, we read:

*“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”*

Prophets and teachers were there. Barnabas was there, as was Simeon, who was called Niger for his darker skin, Lucius of Cyrene from North Africa, and Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch. The last mention of Herod Antipas in the New Testament tells us that his best friend came to know Christ and ended up as a leader in the church. Herod Antipas hardened his heart and scorned and mocked Jesus when he finally met Him, and he lost everything. But someone along the way introduced his best friend to Jesus, and he met Him, and he gave his life to Him, and his life has everlasting significance. He met the King of kings and served Him. So I just want to ask, will you? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we're humble before You, King of kings and Lord of Glory. Lord, when we see a life, there is always much to learn, and, Lord, in response to Your Word, we pray for those who hold office in our world. We pray that they would not be enamored with prestige or earthly power, but we pray for leaders in our society and leaders in the countries represented here that they would come to know You and that You would open windows in their souls to receive Your invitation of forgiveness. We pray, Lord Jesus, for each one of us that You would stir us, Lord, to meet You and to give our lives to You, not to delay, and that we would be attentive to the lives around us who are seeking You. Use us, Lord, as instruments of introduction. Lord, it is right for us to worship You now as King of kings, and we proclaim Your goodness and Your power. We thank You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God of Glory, we give You our praise.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.