



May 2, 2021

Dear Students,

“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:37)

Did you ever make a promise you couldn't keep? Or one that you shouldn't keep? In this week's Bible reading, King Herod made a really stupid promise - and then carried it out anyways! Sometimes we make big promises to impress other people, leaving us looking foolish - or even leading us to do something sinful and wrong. God makes (and keeps!) many great promises to us. In response, the Bible reminds us to do the right thing, not the boastful thing.

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard about Jesus, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” ¹⁵ Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.” ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”

¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” ¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

- Why does Herod like to listen to John? Maybe John is the only person willing to tell Herod the truth. Herod knows John is right, and he likes to listen to him talk, but he is never willing to actually repent or change his own behavior. Listening to God's word doesn't help if you keep ignoring what it says!

²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² When the daughter

of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." ²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

- In movies, they usually make Herodias' daughter an attractive older teen or young woman. She was more likely a pre-teen, maybe eleven or twelve, but could possibly have been as old as fifteen or so.
- Why does King Herod make a promise like that? Kings were expected to be generous, but not that much! Do you think he might be showing off in front of his friends? Have you said something boastful or extravagant to try to impress your own friends? How did that work out?

²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

- Notice why Herod kills John the Baptist - "*because of his oaths and his dinner guests.*" Herod knows he's about to do something terribly wrong, but he doesn't want to look bad by changing his mind.
- Pro-tip: If you promise something you shouldn't do, don't do it!
- This is not the only story in the Bible of someone making a bad promise and then keeping it anyways - and it never turns out well. God would probably rather have you change your mind and do what's right (and live with the consequences) than do something wrong just because you said you would.
- Jesus takes it a step further by saying not to swear oaths to do something. Do it or not, say yes or say no. Just don't show off by saying "I swear to God!" or by making boastful promises.

Mark 5:22-35

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

- Does that mean all promises are bad?
- Nope! You can still make private promises to God, as the Holy Spirit leads you. And you can make important promises to other people before God - like promising to tell the truth in court, or promising to be faithful in marriage.
- And God still makes extravagant, ridiculously generous promises to us, that he will always keep! ([Here is a cool video about God's faithfulness.](#))
- Herod's two mistakes were making a thoughtless promise ("I'll give whatever you want") and then going through with it when he was asked for something evil.
- Sometimes this comes up for people who are dating - your boyfriend or girlfriend may pressure you to promise something, and you say yes to make them happy. Then it seems like you can't back out.
- Or you may one day have a boss or coworker at a job who asks you to do something that you later realize is wrong.
- Whatever happens, it's always ok to change your mind and say No! to sin. God will always help you get out from under anything that would lead you into doing wrong.

This week's challenge: Pick one of God's promises [from this list](#) and repeat it to yourself all week (you may want to print it out or put it on your phone as a reminder.)

Close in Prayer: *"Dear God, thank you for your wonderful promises! Please help us resist the temptation to promise things we can't or shouldn't do. Help us trust in you and do what's right in all circumstances. Amen."*

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