



## **Luke 9:7–9**

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9 But Herod said, ‘I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?’ And he tried to see him.

## Reflection

Today's passage comes from Luke 9:7–9,

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There is a pivotal moment in the Old Testament when God reveals his glory to Moses. This is how the moment unfolds. God

says to Moses,

19 And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' 21 Then the Lord said, 'There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.'

Later on Moses' face would glow from the experience, even though he'd only seen God's back. Moses may just have been the greatest figure in the Old Testament but this privilege of course is nothing compared to that of the New Testament believer. Paul reminds us of the glow of Jesus' face that we have seen in 2 Cor 4:6 where he says,

6 For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

In Jesus, we have seen God face-to-face. But back to Moses and this pivotal moment in history when God reveals himself to him, and his goodness passes before

him. Reading from Exodus 34:6–7,

6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’

Now we could chat about these words of self-disclosure from the Living God for an entire sermon series, let alone the next few minutes. But today’s passage reminded me of them, and in particular that last line, that has caused people to stumble

down throughout the centuries.

he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'

If God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. If God maintains love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. If God is perfectly righteous and just, not leaving the guilty unpunished; then how is it that that he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation? Especially, when elsewhere he says things like this,

16 Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put

to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin. Deut 24:16

The answer here is that the sin has consequences that often outstrip the person who commits it. In this case God is reminding us that ‘as the father goes, so goes the family.’ Which brings us to today’s passage.

Herod’s father was a piece of work. The Herod in our passage’s full name is Herod Antipas. His father, known as Herod the Great, was a piece of work. He has variously been described by people of his times as ‘a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis,’ ‘the evil genius of the Judean nation,’ and as someone who was ‘prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbound-

ed ambition.’ Referring to his Jewish heritage, Caesar Augustus reportedly joked that he would rather be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son – safer by far being his pig than his son. You see, Herod grew increasingly paranoid in his later years, and had many of his own family members imprisoned and executed, so that he could hold on to power. We see signs of this in Matthew 2, when he ordered the wholesale slaughter of every boy in the region of Bethlehem aged two years or younger because of the wise men’s prophecy that a king had been born. At his death, Herod the Great, with Rome’s approval, divided his reign between three of his remaining sons. Herod Antipas was given the lesser title of tetrarch and ruled in Galilee and Perea. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the apple didn’t fall far from the tree. Because so of-



ten, as the father goes, so goes the family.

Herod Antipas was much weaker than his father, but he was just as wicked. He seduced his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. He was married at the time and divorced his wife of 15 years to have her. The pair were well suited, Herodias being a wicked and vengeful woman. Perhaps the best window into the pair is what they did to John the Baptist. It was Herod's birthday. John was confined in the prisons for daring to preach against the ethics of Herod's new marriage. Herod didn't seem to mind so much, but Herodias was another matter. In a scene of drunken debauchery and lust, Herod ends up presenting John the Baptists' severed head on a platter as a gift to his daughter-in-law. All to the amusement of his dinner guests and to

the delight of his wife. As the father goes, so goes the family.

And yet what the Scriptures reveal of Herod Antipas is a man with a tortured soul. Herod liked to listen to John, knowing him a righteous and holy man (Mark 6:20). He even protected him of sorts from Herodias until he was duped by her that fateful night; and he was saddened by John's death. It seems that John's effect on Herod made him eager, as we read in today's passage, to see Jesus. And yet ultimately he's ambivalent towards Jesus, who refuses to even speak to him or perform a sign in his presence. But, in sum, Scripture leaves us with the impression of a conflicted individual; a tortured soul who is ultimately very much a creature of his father. As the father goes, so goes the

family. Exodus 34:7,

... he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'

Herod the Great no doubt influenced the future of his son. But Scripture teaches us also that Herod Antipas, and every child of wayward parents, are ultimately culpable for their own sin.

## **Think**

Perhaps you are a father; or you have a father like Herod the Great. As the father goes, so often goes the family – for good and for bad. Consider this morning that

the consequences of your life will extend to the third and fourth generation. There's an idea bigger than yourself to meditate over today. What patterns can you put in place in your life to influence future generations of your family for Christ? What sin are you let to relinquish that may handicap and haunt your children's children? Your anger? The harsh words you so often have for your husband? The amount of alcohol you consume?

But don't forget the goodness of God revealed so long ago to Moses – the Lord, the Lord, our compassionate and gracious God whose grace is powerful enough to break the cycle. As the father goes, so goes the family – and if you've given your life to Jesus, then your Father is the God of the Universe who abounds in steadfast

love and faithfulness, forgiving and forever healing wickedness, rebellion and sin. His love is powerful enough to break the cycle.

## **Pray**

Pray this morning for the children of abusive parents like Herod Antipas. Pray first and foremost that they might be delivered from evil, as Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. Then pray that they would encounter Jesus and come to know their Heavenly Father. Pray that the cycle would stop with them and that they would model their true Father's love to any children that they might have. May God's goodness and glory pass before the eyes of their children, in the way they love and care for them; and through their

children, and their children's children, and their children's children's children, go out into our world.