

SITTING ON THE FENCE

Text: Mark 6:14-29

Last Sunday evening we were watching the movie *The Greatest Story Ever Told* since it was Easter and we had never seen the movie before. As a person who has taught Sunday school for years and been a preacher for over 20 years, I can't help but notice the things that don't line up with the scriptures. I'm not trying to be critical, I enjoyed the movie but there was something that got my attention. It was the relationship between Herod and John the Baptist. In the movie they were was anger and animosity for John coming from Herod but the Bible doesn't describe Herod's feelings that way. The scriptures we just read state that Herod feared John and that he heard him gladly. The only reason that Herod arrested John was because his wife despised him and wanted him dead. Herod never intended to have John executed, he respected him too much and was confident that John was a prophet.

I have been preaching now for over 20 years and there are four main responses that people have to hearing the word of God:

- **Indifferent** – Jesus said in the parable of the sower that some hear but don't understand what they hear. In other words, it doesn't sink in and the devil's agents eat up that seed so they don't ponder it. They leave the same way they came. Never forget that people heard Jesus preach and didn't get it. Many heard Paul preach and were never converted. The message seems to have little to no effect on these people.
- **Angry** – The word of God is designed to enlighten sinners to their condition. Sinners are in darkness...they know they're not perfect but they have no idea how they look in the eyes of God. They think they're alright and if anyone makes it, surely, they will. The word and the Spirit of God confronts us about our condition and enlightens the sinner that they are wrong and facing the wrath and judgment of God. Herodias, Herod's wife fell into this category. John preached against their illegal and immoral marriage and it made her mad. She hated John and wanted him dead. Stephen told the council that condemned Jesus to death the truth about their condition and they stoned the life out of him. Some people get mad at the message!
- **Repent and believe** – Some people hear the message in power and it finds good ground in their heart. They don't get mad at God or the preacher, they just accept the things that have been preached to them in faith and the message, anointed by the Holy Spirit, produces godly sorrow in their hearts and they are moved to respond by repenting and exercising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter preached boldly on the day of Pentecost and he told the crowd that day that they had crucified and slain the Lord of glory but that the Father had raised him from the dead. The Bible then records in **Acts 2:37-38** Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. **Acts 2:41** Then they that gladly received

his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

- **Sit on the fence** – There are those that hear the message and are dealt with by the Holy Spirit but they don't want to make a decision. They are bothered and know that they should repent but something holds them back so they try to be neutral. They either are afraid of what other people might think of them, or they have a pet sin that has a strong hold on them and they're trying to find a way to have Christ in one hand and hold on to their sin with the other hand. But you cannot stay neutral when the gospel is preached. You're either responding to or you're rejecting the call of God. The danger in sitting on the fence is that these people play games with God that eventually hardens them and their love of sin forces them to make the wrong choice.

People in the Bible that sat on the fence:

- **Herod Antipas** – He was a man controlled by lust. He divorced his first wife after visiting his brother Phillip and falling for his wife...Herodias. She left Phillip to be married to Antipas. John the Baptist confronted him about this illegal and immoral marriage which made Herodias furious. She would've had John killed immediately but Herod feared John. Herod feared John, he respected him, he observed him and the Bible says that he did many things when he heard him(meaning that he was moved to reform some of his behavior). But he never repented! Reformation is not repentance. He had a case of the Sunday morning do-betters. When people fall under conviction, their first move is to reform their behavior but that isn't salvation by grace. It's a sad and deceived attempt to please God with their own works! Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a gift that must be received by repenting and believing on Christ as your only hope of salvation. Herod never repented of his sins and when his birthday was celebrated, the daughter of his new wife danced before him. His lust was aroused by his step daughter and he promised to give her anything she wanted to the half of his kingdom. Her mother instructed her to ask for John's head and Herod sadly chose to stay with his sin instead of responding to the truth!
- **Pontius Pilate** – The Roman prefect who had been promoted by Caesar to rule Judaea and keep the peace. He was a brutal man known for using violence to the populous in check. His first and only encounter with Jesus was the day he stood before him to be judged. The chief priests and Pharisees brought Jesus bound to him demanding his execution. As Pilate questioned Jesus, his curiosity was aroused. No man had ever spoke like this before. He said his kingdom was not of this world, that Pilate had no power against him at all except that it was given to him from heaven and that to this end was he born. Jesus said he came to bear witness unto the truth and everyone that is of the truth would hear his voice. Pilate asked "What is truth?" Pilate was completely convinced that Jesus was innocent. He believed that he was the king of the Jews because he kept referring to him as such. When the Jews said that he made himself the Son of God, that made Pilate more afraid of him. Pilate did everything in his power to release him or push the responsibility to someone else, but the decision kept falling to him. Then the crowd

said something that pushed the pressure point for Pilate..." If you let this man go, you're not Caesar's friend: whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!" Pilate craved power and position and he knew pleasing Caesar was the way to get it. Even though he washed his hands publicly and declared himself innocent of the blood of Christ, he still was the one that gave the command to crucify him. He finally chose power and position over Jesus Christ.

- **Judas Iscariot** – A disciple that was chosen by Jesus to be with him. Judas is an enigma because we don't know much about him. He's a mystery because we don't understand how a man could walk with the Lord, hear him preach, see his miracles and still betray him. He didn't have the Lord fooled though he was crafty enough to deceive the others. Jesus treated him as a friend even though he knew he was a devil. The Bible records that Judas was a thief. A thief secretly and unlawfully takes the goods and property of others. The thief differs from a robber in that the robber steals open face. Judas had an innate desire for what wasn't his. He walked with Jesus and the other disciples for a few years and was the treasurer of the group. When Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus with costly ointment, Judas could not control himself. He spoke up calling it waste and wanting it sold to "give to the poor". He only wanted the money in his bag so he could steal some of it. When Jesus reproved him in front of everyone, he immediately sought the opportunity to betray him for money. He even asked the counsel "What will you give me to betray him?" He chose 30 pieces of silver over the Son of God. Satan deceived him into believing Jesus wouldn't be harmed but when he knew that he would be crucified, it made him sick. The silver lost all of its luster and he threw it on the floor of the temple, went out and hung himself. He betrayed Christ with a kiss. It's been said that Judas kissed the door to heaven, yet went through the door to destruction!

People today that sit on the fence and won't repent, it's not that they are struggling to choose heaven over hell. They are struggling with choosing Christ over their sin.