

OPENING IMAGE: Does everybody have their seat belts on? We're going to begin this message in 3rd gear with 2 Case studies I've put together. These case studies explore the relationships between some unlikely combinations. Our first case study explores the relationship between Herod the Great and John the Baptist.

Case Study 1 Herod and John the Baptist

Herod: First, there is Herod. He came from a wealthy family. By 25 he was governor, by 30 he corrupted and controlled the court system through assassinations. The Romans named him, "King of the Jews" and the name Herod means Hero. Herod outperformed Solomon and built a bigger temple. He raised a platform that was the size of 25 football fields. The temple walls were 1000 feet long and 10 feet thick. This guy made Jerry's world look like a children's play pen. Herod murdered an entire city of baby boys because he felt threatened. Herod, was the epitome of ego, power, and a sex driven WORLDLY living. Herod was as worldly as they get.

John: And now we look at John the Baptist. *Matthew 3:4-8a* *4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.* John did not mince words and he did not hold back. If Herod is the epitome for worldly living, John is the epitome for godly living. Confronting people about their sins, not caring what anyone thinks of him, very honest, very real.

Typical Response: The church is a hotly debated topic. Often times you hear people asking the question: Why don't more people come to church? The default response is usually, "well people who don't go to church are attracted to worldly things and because the church isn't worldly they don't come to church." People who don't come to church have sin in their life and coming to worship God will only expose that sin and disrupt their life so they don't want to do that. If this is true, then you would think that Herod wouldn't want ANYTHING to do with John. You would think Herod, wouldn't want to listen to John. You would think that Herod, this ego driven, worldly man would stay as far away from John as possible. Let us turn to the Biblical witness.

Relationship: *Text: Mark 6:18-20* *18 John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (yes, John doesn't hold back again) 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, (why, why, why, why, details, details, details) 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.*

What we see in the Biblical account this that this WORLDY MAN was attracted to a holy man. Woah. You would think Herod wouldn't want to wake up early on a Sunday to hear what John had to say. You would think Herod wouldn't want to hear or endorse what John had to say because it spoke against Herod's worldliness but that's not what the text says. It says he liked to listen to him. Let's turn our attention to our second case study.

Case Study 2 Jesus and Sinners

In speaking of Jesus *Hebrews 4:15* says, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are —yet he did not sin.* Let us read, how Jesus was known. *Luke 15:1* *Now the tax collectors and sinners (addicts, druggies, perverts, party animals, you name it), sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”* *The most holy man in the Bible welcomed and ate with sinners. * He was called a friend of sinners. * The most holy man in the entire Bible attracted great multitudes of unholy people.

Conclusion: You would think 1. If the worldly people didn't want to be around holy things then they would stay away from people like John the Baptist and Jesus. 2. And you would think if they were looking for sharper graphics, better stage lighting, that they wouldn't hang out with Jesus who was homeless or John who did not read GQ magazine but instead pursue Herod?

Key: If we could understand how it was that Jesus and John drew in unholy people then we might begin to understand how we as a church might reach those who we consider lost.

A Life That Speaks: What was it that attracted unholy people to these holy men? There are a number of things but ultimately, it was what they said and did, the things they talked about **brought value to the table** and the way they lived their life **was intriguing**. The way that they interpreted the world around them **was FASCINATING**, it was filled with awe, and wonder. Their message was intellectually plausible and also heartwarming. The stories they offered about reality were rooted in space time history and there was evidence. The way they lived their lives was **ALLURING**. But let's not stop there. It isn't just what they said and did but it was also **HOW** they said it. John the Baptist clearly had his own personality, Jesus told stories like no other. These guys were in town and in tune with how God made them to be!!!!!!!

Subject: Let's fast-forward to 2,000 years later. Here we are in 2012. We've got an endless amount of magazines, music, movies, TV Shows, political outlets and websites that often times offer an interpretation of life that is false and unhelpful. Is the way that we're responding alluring, intriguing, or attractive? Does our life speak hope? Does our life speak attractive truth? How are we responding in our personal lives and how are we responding as a community of believers?

Worship:

We gather here on Sunday and the goal is to offer a legitimate interpretation. Now, how exactly do we do that? Well, we're going to take a moment to think about the way these services are structured. When we gather here on Sunday's our services are broken up into 5 movements.

1. Gathering around the Word (Call to Worship, Singing) This is where we get our minds right. Get our head in the game, recognize what we are doing.
2. Preparing for the Word (Confession, Offering) We confess our sins and receive forgiveness. Get clear with God. Admit our faults and be ready for the new way he might have us turn.
3. The Word (Children's Message, Sermon, Prayer) This is the time in the service where we are ready to be decentered. This is the time in the service where we take all those

messages we've heard and allow God's way to rub up against them. This is where we learn (our mistakes aren't the dominate theme of our life, this is where we learn that we are called to forgive our neighbors. This is where we are decentered and called to follow this new way of Jesus. This is where we are called to not to be lazy, this is where we are called to watch our eyes, to watch our families to watch our money. To live a bright hopeful life in the midst of chaos.

4. Response to the Word (The Lord's Supper, Baptism, Installation of Elders/Deacons, receiving new members). This is sort of a starting point for response. In the service there is an actual response that comes as a result of hearing the fresh word. This is just one act of response that we build off of throughout the week.
5. Taking the Word into the World (sending)

Why Do We Do What We Do? At the end of the day, this entire service is designed to help us worship God. We do this by singing songs about reality, proclaiming truth about the way things are and how they ultimately will be. We are proclaiming a hopeful interpretation on life found in Jesus the Christ. This is what our Sunday services are all about. Which raises a DIFFICULT question: Does our worship service communicate truth to the Duncanville community in a way that is helpful and meaningful?

No Compromise: Please don't misunderstand the question. I'm not asking, "Are we exchanging the truth for something that people want to hear so that we can reach more people in the Duncanville community?" I am NOT asking if we are watering the message of the Bible down so that it will be friendlier to the ears of non-Christians. I'm asking, are we speaking, are we singing, are we worshipping God in a way that is reflective of the example we see of Jesus and John who did not water down the message but proclaimed it boldly and yet were attractive, persuasive and relevant?

No Excuses: Now some of you are thinking, how could we be like Jesus or John? If that's the case, why are we even here? Let's just close the church down and move on. Jesus himself said that his followers would do greater things that he did! Unless we get our minds around his words then what are we doing here? Well, we'll never do the kinds of things Jesus did. Jesus is the example of space time history and he calls US to take his legacy further! Are you up for that on a Sunday morning?

Affirmation + Challenge: If you look around at our congregation you should see people from all walks of life. You should see people of different political persuasions, tax brackets, skin colors. That's what church is all about. It's about God's world-wide family. But again we must ask, are we communicating God's message to God's world-wide family? I think we are but I think we still got a lot of work to do. How do we go about doing this work?

2 Contexts Bible & Culture: Missionaries who go off to foreign countries have to do 2 types of background work at the minimum. The 1st background they have to research is the background of the Bible. They do this in order to understand what's important, what the conversations are about. The 2nd background work they have to do is on the region and culture they staying with and there is entire books on how to do this. Just a few weeks ago the Walters, a family on

mission in China got up and sang us a song in Chinese. They understood that they cannot impact the culture unless they speak a language the culture understands.

Home front Culture: I'm afraid what's happened stateside, is we've classified everything under, we're traditional, but what that really means is, we only know about our own culture. We only know about what's important to us. We talk about how the church isn't growing and yet we aren't dealing with the cultural issues that exist in our context. What kind of message do the people on Oreole Street need to hear? What rhythm best communicates to the people on Freeman street? What service could be done to really impact the people on Willowbrook road? Well I don't know I haven't met anyone who lives on the street, and why is that? Hanging out at the church too much?

Illustration: I love the way Anna Murphy puts it in this month's newsletter when she says, "If you don't change and grow, you become stagnant. We as a church must do the same. Our Duncanville dynamics have changed, unfortunately our church dynamics have not. We must each pray that the Lord leads those in the community who are searching for a Christian experience to our doors. We are a loving, caring, praying congregation and welcome all God's children (warts and all, as the saying goes)." – Anna Murphy, August 2012 Newsletter

Accountability: Now before we get on our oh man...this is what the church needs to do. Before we start a new committee about how the church can change. Before we get on our horse and start calling the shots for what the church needs to do lets make it personal. It begins with each one of us individually. Paul said, be in the world not of the world but he didn't say create a little bubble where everybody thinks the way you do. Are you in regular contact with people who disagree with your religious views? Are you in regular contact with those who take you out of your comfort zone? Maybe you are and you are thinking, all that ever happens when I hang out with people like that is long arguments. Congratulations, you win the award for being most like a Pharisee. Or maybe you hang out with people who are different then you and then you get heat because you are entertaining bad people. Congratulations, you win the award for being most like Jesus.

Duncanville Worship: I've been to some good worship services in Duncanville, most of them have been here but have you ever seen any of the plays Duncanville High School puts on? Or if not the plays, have you seen the high-hats performances? God is being glorified no doubt.

No Excuses!: So, saying that worldly people just don't come to church because they're too sinful or because they're attracted to bigger better shows JUST doesn't cut it biblically. So we, as a community of believers cannot use the excuse, that the outsiders are just too worldly, lazy, tired, whatever. Maybe if we want to grow as a community not just in numbers but in spirituality, we ought to throw that thinking right out the window and start asking whether or not we are serious about being followers of Jesus!

Die to Self: Some of you are thinking, but hey that case studies falls short because in the end, both of those holy men were killed. You are right, they died but their death unlike so many others brought about new life. They died so that a new message could make its ways and be known in the world. They died and we're called to die as well. We're called to die to the way we

worshiped God growing up. We're called to die to the vision of the church we have and be open to vision that God has! We're called to die to our control games. We're called to die to our Christian bubbles. We're called to die to you fill in the blank. Friends, the best sermon is next weeks. The best song is the one that we haven't yet written. Did you know at one point in history every song in your hum book was BRAND NEW and there was a line out the door of people protesting against bringing these NEW songs and losing the traditional stuff! There was a line of people saying the church is becoming too worldly by accepting these hymns that you. What is old today was once brand new. What are we passing down to the next generation? Are you up for that on a Sunday morning?

Conclusion:

At some point, we gotta stop and ask ourselves. Are we living more like John the Baptist or are we more like Herod? Herod was entertained by John but Herod didn't take his message seriously. Christians are known for being entertained by the world but never taking it seriously. LETS REVERSE THAT TREND!