

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH.

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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Romans 1: 16.

SATURDAY, JULY 22nd, 1922.

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"IT IS JOHN WHOM I BEHEADED."

A Sermon by the Pastor

"But when Herod heard thereof, he said, 'It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead'."—Mark, vi. 16.

It may be that you have in your home a picture, or a piece of statuary, whose value to you increases with the passage of the years. You prized it from the beginning; but as you sit before it and allow it to speak to you, every day it has some new message: you see something in it that you never observed before. But you see nothing which was not put into the picture when it was painted. The artist lived with that picture for weeks or months. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he lived IN it. It is the reflection of his various moods. He put his soul into his work; and the explanation of its enduring fascination is to be found in the fact that it is more than a painted canvas, or a sculptured marble; it is the expression, the embodiment, of a human soul. And that is inspiration. That work of art is inbreathed by an artist's soul.

And that is the explanation of the immortality of this Book; with its difference, that it is inbreathed by the Infinite Spirit. We shall never outgrow it, until it becomes possible for God to grow old! We outgrow other things. We read a page of history, let us say, of the time of Henry the Eighth, or we see the marks of his spirit in a place like the Tower of London, and we say, "These things would be impossible to-day." But you cannot say that of any page of this history. Whether it be in the Old or New Testaments, though the externals of the story may have altered, the essential truth of it abides as a record of to-day.

"But surely," someone will say, "no one will seriously contend that prophets are murdered in civilized countries to-day, as Herod murdered John?"

I think it will be possible to show that this history is being continually repeated. Inbreathed by the timeless Spirit to Whom To-day presents no surprise, as it does to us, and written by His direction for our admonition as truly as for the instruction of men of an ancient time, this story reflects the sin of Toronto's hearts and homes, as accurately as it portrays the wickedness which reigned in Herod's palace.

I. And I begin my exposition with this statement, **WE ARE EVERY ONE GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF A PROPHET.**

I do not mean that any one here has deliberately and of set purpose consigned a prophet to death. On the contrary, you have had great admiration for the Lord's prophets, and for the life and religion they represent. You have never been an enemy of religion, but have always counted yourself among her friends. You were brought up in the Sunday School; and were early taught to respect the Lord's Day, and the Lord's house. With all this I agree, and we are therefore able to begin together on common ground.

Will you observe, then, that **Herod greatly admired John; regarded him, indeed, with profound respect; he even "feated John" and "heard him gladly."** And that describes the early attitude of many here toward religion. You were never lacking in what may be called the religious instinct. The Bible, and the Christian Church, and all the institutions fostered by the representatives of the Church, have symbolized for you the highest manifestations of life. Hence your ideals of life have always been essentially Christian. You have been generous enough, or, let me rather say, that you have been honest enough, to acknowledge that the professors of religion are neither deceived nor deceivers, but in the main are true men. Herod knew that John "was a just man and a holy." Moreover, you have actually taken great delight in the message of religion, even as Herod "heard John gladly." And you have approved of the general message and programme of the Gospel. And what visions of a holy life it has opened up before you! What storied castles of virtue you have built in those seasons of moral rapture! What holy crusades your fancy has initiated! In what glorious wars of righteousness your imagination has enlisted! You have said "Amen" to John's preaching; and you have been grateful to every prophet who has shown you "this gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter."

And now I must show you, further, that **Herod's life had been largely regulated by the prophet's teaching:** "When he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." That, too, is parallel to the experience of many. How much have we been influenced by our religious surroundings? We have done many things because of the preaching we have heard. It has stimulated our thought, and dictated our course of action on innumerable occasions. What should we be to-day but for the influence of religion? In many cases it has directly made us what we are. And that is true of many who make no profession of religion. Why, man, but for some John's preaching you would not now be even respectable—and that you know right well.

But how was Herod's attitude changed? What led him to put a stop to the preaching of the man he had formerly heard so gladly? Why do you go to church only occasionally now? Why has your interest in religious matters waned?

Do you remember that **someone in Herod's house "had a quarrel against John";** or, as the margin has it, had 'an inward grudge against him.' Someone always dissented from Herod's expressed appreciation of the prophet. Someone hated him and his preaching as heartily as Herod admired them. And someone very close to you has always disagreed with your estimate of the value of the Christian religion. You know well what I mean. You have long had a struggle to hold your own against that contrary opinion. If you are less regular in your attendance upon the means of grace, it is not because you are now for the first time tempted to be careless. There was always to be heard, even in Sunday School days, in the times of serious reflection, when the soul was at home with itself, a voice which expressed a deep-rooted, inward grudge, against every voice that speaks for God in the inner sanctuary of the soul.

Alas! alas! **every human soul is married to some Herodias.** Not literally, or in any physical sense, but all that Herodias represents finds a place in every life. Herodias stands for pride, ambition, love of ease, covetousness, sensuality, the lust of self-indulgence in all its manifold forms. She stands, in a word, for Lawlessness, for the forbidden thing, for the life in which the human will is substituted for the will of God. And in this meaning of the story we have all been married to Herodias. We have taken to our hearts some forbidden thing; and that thing has established itself in the best room in the house. It has moved in all its belongings as though it intended to remain. Its presence is gradually changing the whole interior of man's soul.

Herodias does not greatly object to Herod's hearing John preach, so long as John is careful to concern himself with generalities. Few will object to the denunciation of sin in general. It is when particular sins and particular sinners are pointed out that men become uneasy. The true prophet, however, must be faithful to the individual as well as to the multitude. Therefore, sooner or later the voice that speaks for God, will speak in condemnation of Herodias, and of Herod's union with her. I mean, man, that the Christian religion is a vital thing. It will not be long content to be kept waiting upon the door-step of the soul. It will demand—whatever the voice, whether it be the Bible direct, or the sermon—the voice that speaks for God will demand to know who lives within. And when it discovers Herodias, it will thunder, "It is not lawful."

And in that day **Herod will have to make choice between Herodias and John,** between law and lawlessness, between right and wrong, between God and the Devil. You see Herod had no real controversy with John until John touched upon his relationship to Herodias. Every other point Herod readily conceded. Herodias was his idol. There the prophet touched the king's supreme affection, the pivot upon which his whole life turned. And it is just there every soul contends with God. Not in the outward trappings of life: the issue is easily decided there. Nor yet in the external features of character; consent is readily given to their being moulded into a more respectable image. It is always Herodias who quarrels with the divine voice. The battle is joined when the prophet insists that the soul be divorced from the spirit of lawlessness to which it is married.

And who of us has not preferred Herodias to John in this controversy? Herod was a great sinner, and "was reprov'd by John for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done"; but we read that he "added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison." And no doubt he was sorry to do that; but he did it. And when Herod finds that he cannot live at peace with Herodias and John at the same time, when he is compelled to make choice between them, he delivers John to the executioner that his voice may be heard no more. Of course "he was sorry," but his sin compelled him, and he murdered the prophet who had been his guardian angel in disguise.

And we all have done the same thing. When forced to a choice between obeying the voice of God, and yielding to the charms of the sin which doth so easily beset us, we have first shut up John in prison by refusing to hear him, and then we have deliberately taken some action to insure our hearing the re-proving voice no more.

And perhaps someone here did it just as Herod did it, in the hall of pleasure, and in the presence of other revellers. How many men when the wine flowed freely, when the blood was hot, and passion's fire fiercely blazed, have yielded to sin's enchantments, and in one last mad act of rebellion, by serving up the prophet's head in a charger, have delivered their soul to the devil! Thus men

become the murderers of the prophets, and, so far as they can, silence every voice which speaks for God.

II. My next point is that, **BY MURDERING THE PROPHET MEN DO NOT SILENCE THE VOICE.**

For a brief period Herod was undisturbed. No one now came knocking at his door, insisting that Herodias be expelled; and he fancied that at last he had found peace, and found it in the way of what the dead prophet had called unlawful. And many a man since then has flattered himself that he has proved the untruth of the word of God by finding peace and pleasure where the Bible said it could not be found. But who did ever find such peace enduring?

There was still another voice in Herod's home; it was the voice of a servant. I will describe it as of the masculine gender. This servant had come from a far country, where another language was spoken than that spoken in Herod's house. But the servant had so long waited on Herod that he had fallen into his ways, and quite generally approved of what his master did. He had been so long away from home that he had forgotten his native tongue, and nearly all his country's ways. But when John came preaching repentance, this servant of Herod's recognized the voice as speaking the language of holiness which he had so completely forgotten. Old memories were stirred, so that many irregularities were noticed which had long been overlooked. It was this servant who persuaded Herod to hear John preach; and who, having heard him, reminded him of the sermon, and prevailed upon him to do the many things "which the sermon enjoined." The servant's name was Conscience.

And now, after John's death, another strange voice is heard, and evidently the voice of a prophet. And everyone is asking who he is, until even in Herod's palace the report is heard. And Conscience is at no loss to identify the speaker. The voice is the same as John's—it is a voice from God! Therefore, Herod said, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead."

Thus it is also in our own experience, that the voice we had thought, and secretly hoped, had been silenced forever, is heard speaking again from the dead. We have marvelled at this, that men so different from each other, so widely separated in their spheres of service, so remotely related in their outward situation, should yet seem to speak the same message. And so the miracle of the Bible in which the same voice is heard speaking by a multitude of human lips and over a lapse of centuries, is a perpetual miracle. There is no getting away from the voice. Here is a man who has tried it again and again. Somewhere in a land across the sea he heard the trumpet blast, "It is not lawful." And he silenced the voice. But here on the other side of the world he hears it again. And he has been startled as Herod was startled. Sin cannot escape its divine rebuke. God will not leave Himself without witness.

How suggestive is the fact that **no creed, no philosophy of life which Herod could devise, could avail to silence the voice.** For Herod was a Sadducee, whose cardinal doctrine was that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but all his brave theories are dissolved in the fear of having to face a prophet whom he had murdered.

And we shall be no more successful than he. No system of theology, no philosophy of life, can unwrite the facts of life. No bloody axe can silence God's witness in the human soul. You cannot bury a John the Baptist so deep that he will not rise again in another voice and make himself heard. Ah! but I know what you will say. You have cut loose from such ancient superstitions; you have no fear of being further troubled on the score of your Herodias. You have formulated a creed agreeable to your own desires; and that creed makes

no provision for the resurrection of troublesome prophets! But you cannot escape the rebuke of sin. If the word be God's, He will never want for lips to speak it. And in spite of your pretensions, He will yet wring this cry of terror from you, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead."

And Herod was right; it was John; for all prophetic voices which had spoken since man's first disobedience, found resurrection in Him; "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us in His Son." Every reproving voice that has spoken in God's behalf repeats its warning whenever the Gospel is preached.

III. In our failure to silence Heaven's reproving voices, behold **AN EVIDENCE OF THE PERSISTENCE OF GRACE.**

The severest judgment that can overtake any man is no judgment at all. For the sinner to escape detection is an inestimable calamity. "Because sentence against an evil is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." And it is Mercy who refuses to let a man alone in his sin. Ah, sinner, it is Mercy who worries you; it is Love that will not let you go!

It was thus Christ regarded the multiplied warnings of Heaven. The Bible abounds with witness to this truth. "I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice." "And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you. All these things shall come upon this generation." And Jesus described the householder who let his vineyard out to husbandmen, and sent unto them many servants, and "last of all" his son.

And this is the crowning mercy that the Son of God has come, to deliver once again and for the last time, the message spoken by all the murdered prophets of the world. If any have failed in faithfulness or clearness of testimony, the world will be left without excuse when He has spoken. Yes, I repeat; all voices speak again in Christ, and in the Gospel Mercy excels herself; and utters her last clear call to life.

All the kindly voices of the past, speak again in Christ. Listen to Him, and you shall find that father and mother, and darling child, are risen from the dead, and call again to you. And what messages have come to turn us away every one from his iniquities. What gracious providences, what chidings and expostulations, what chastenings, what exhortation, what tender entreaties come out of the past when Memory is awakened and Conscience is aroused! And all these urgings toward the light are echoes of the one Voice, elements in the same message: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It remains for me to speak one awful word of warning, and I have done. Herod heard so much about Jesus that he greatly desired to see Him. Yet he never sent for Him, nor went to Him. He feared to hear more clearly the voice, which, conscience told him, would speak the same message as John. But at last Christ was sent to him by Pontius Pilate, that he might judge Him as he had judged John. And Herod was glad to see Him, "and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him." But when "he questioned with Him in

many words, He answered him nothing." And never again will that voice speak in mercy to him! How terrible the reflection that it is possible at last to have the blood of our murdered prophets upon us in everlasting condemnation of our folly! There is a repose of soul which is an evidence of reprobation; there is a religious insensibility which is a kind of moral coma, an atrophy of conscience. Indifference to the claims of religion, coupled with the undisturbed companionship of Herodias,—of the possession of the unlawful—is never the result, as is so often supposed, of an intellectual deliverance from supposedly superstitious alarms: it is oftener due to the silence of judgment, already begun, when the Voice refuses longer to speak in Mercy, and the sinner is permitted, unhindered, unconsciously and enjoyably to drive on to the precipice!

For Christ's is the last voice. He will have no successor. Other prophets speak again in Him; but when He shall be silent, there shall be a famine of hearing the word of the Lord! And when He no longer restrains, men shall go on wildly into sin; until the Judgment is set, and then shall the text again be true, and the voice of the Prophet whom men spurned will pronounce the sentence of death on all unbelievers.

"We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our Future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.

"The tissues of the Life to be
We weave with colors all our own,
And in the field of destiny
We reap as we have sown.

"Still shall the soul around it call,
The shadows which it gathered here,
And, painted on the eternal wall,
The Past shall reappear.

"Think ye the notes of holy song
On Milton's tuneful ear have died?
Think ye that Raphael's angel throng
Have vanished from his side?

"Oh no? We live our life again;
Or warmly touched, or coldly dim,
The pictures of the past remain,—
Man's works shall follow him."

"GIVE ME A RIDE?"

Sometimes when on the road a motorist will meet with boys and girls who cry, "Give me a ride, Mister?" They are out to play. They do not care which way they go so long as they can get a ride. The other day we saw a man about to cross the street who appeared to be turned toward the same direction in which we were travelling and we offered him a lift, but he replied, "Thank you, but I am going in the opposite direction."

Thus, too, on life's highway our response to the overtures of those we meet will depend upon whether we are waiting for a ride or are going somewhere. There is no virtue in making a labour of life. There is no merit to

be gained by trudging along the dusty road until our feet are sore just for the sake of walking. There is no wrong in riding providing the chariot is going in the right direction. The main thing is that we should steadfastly set our face to go to our Jerusalem. Let us stand by our principles; let us press toward the mark; let us continue in His word; let us declare plainly that we seek a country. But so long as we are directed toward truth and righteousness, let us gratefully accept the lifts which are offered. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of Angels." There are many going our way! Do not refuse their ministry: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Yes, the Narrow Way is thronged with divine ministries. He who said, "I am the way," also said, "I will give you rest"; and He who said, "I am the truth," also promised, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Let us try to learn to be good and to do so easily; to be true amiably; to be strong tenderly; to be faithful and just mercifully: let us always ride when the chariot is going our way! That is the meaning, in principle, of the admonition, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

But beware of the religion which is looking for a joy ride, which cares nothing about direction, if only it may ride in ease. This is the way of compromise and moral neutrality. This is the way of spiritual declension, and barrenness, and dispeace, and, in the end, utter spiritual destitution. Let us say "No" to the invitation to ride, however luxuriously and swiftly, when the carriage is travelling in a direction opposite to the word and will of God. It were better to walk toward "bread enough and to spare," than to ride toward want; better to plod toward honour than to ride toward shame; better to walk out of Egypt with Moses into freedom, than to ride with Pharaoh into the sea of judgment. We do well to enquire of ourselves, are we out for a ride? or are we going somewhere?

THE WITNESS FUND OFFERING.

There was a most generous response last Sunday from the members of the church who were at home. Many are away on holiday who will yet be heard from. It will not be too late at any time to give to this fund, but it was thought wise to have a certain amount in hand before committing ourselves to the regular publication of a number sufficiently large to permit of its circulation to all our pastors.

One of the most encouraging features of the offering was the response of not a few to the suggestion that any who could not give should assure us of their prayers. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people can make them mutually trustful of each other. It is an infallible sign of the presence of the Lord when members realize that the first and great and indispensable contribution which any of us can make to the progress of the Lord's work is always spiritual, and not material. And our members feel that; and when overtaken by unemployment or sickness, or other adversities which deplete the family purse, they know that their presence and prayers in the Spirit are an invaluable contribution to the church's life.

There were some, also, who, giving a little now said they would give more later, and other promised to give later who could give nothing now. And those who were able to give and did give, assured us of their prayers for the blessing of God upon the printed message of **The Witness**. For all these loving acts of fellowship the Pastor and officers are profoundly grateful. What a church! What an esprit de corps! What a unity of the Spirit! What a fellowship in the Gospel!

"Like a mighty army moves this church of God;
Brothers, we are treading, where the saints have trod:
We are not divided, All one body we,
One in hope, in doctrine, One in Charity."

Last Sunday was the sixteenth day of July. What folly to propose a special offering in July! Was it? We will not give exact figures, as the returns are as yet incomplete, but, with a few contributions sent in in anticipation of the appeal, our Witness Fund offering last Sunday was not far short of six hundred dollars. There was also \$75.00 in hand contributed for a "Sermon Fund" before **The Witness** was launched. Most of the contributors to this fund have consented to the transfer of their gifts to **The Witness** fund, and we are sure the others will also consent, as it amounts to the same thing. We have therefore in hand about \$650.00 in **The Witness** fund. This we consider magnificent for the summer time. But let us pray it double! Thank you, everybody! And above all, thanks be to God!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Monthly Business Meeting. By motion of the church on June 7th it was decided to resume the monthly Business Meeting in July; in accordance with this expressed will of the church, a business meeting will be held at the close of the Prayer Service on Wednesday evening, July 26th.

The Gospel Car is one of the best known cars in Toronto, and although it is only about three months since it first appeared in the city, multitudes have seen it, and many thank God they have heard the message which is being sounded out from it, for hearing they have believed; and believing have passed from death unto life. This is the greatest business in the world, and Christ himself said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" It cannot fail, so let us put ourselves, our time, and our money into it and receive the thirty, sixty and one hundred fold returns. We preach Christ and Him crucified, and we wish to say that there is a great need in this city for the Gospel of Christ, and if the multitudes will not come into our churches to hear it, we mus go to them.

The Church Calendar

For the week beginning Sunday, July 23rd, 1922.

SUNDAY

10.00—Prayer Service in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.

10.30—Communion Service.

11.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.

3.00—The Bible School will meet.

Lesson for the day: Daniel and the Lions. Daniel 6:1-28.

2.30—Open-Air Work with the Gospel Car, starting from Jarvis Street Church.

3.00—The Parliament Street Bible School, at 250 Parliament Street.

5.30—Open-Air Service on Gerrard Street.

6.00—Prayer Meeting in Church Parlor.

7.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.

7.00—Service at Parliament Street Branch.

MONDAY, WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY—8.00—Prayer Service.

THURSDAY—8.00—Open Air Service, Gerrard St. gate of Allen Gardens.