

Scripture: Mark 6:14-29

The Bible says, "The fear of man is a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). I remember the time of my engagement ceremony. I was very nervous because there were many different people involved in our marriage. And I was afraid of people. I was naive about my mother and thought, "This is the kind of thing I want her to provide for me. But she had her own ideas, and she didn't do what I wanted her to do. Fear makes people blame. I blamed my mother. I blamed her for trying to make the engagement ceremony look nice. The next day, we had a Christian engagement ceremony officiated by our pastor. We sang hymns and made promises before God. In the eyes of those who attended, it may have been presentable. But there were fathers and mothers there who were hurt by my words. And God saw it all. In the book of Exodus, it says, "Anyone who blasphemes against his father or mother must be killed" (Ex. 21:17). I had no choice but to ask God and my mother to forgive me, but if I thought about God's will, there was another way to deal with my mother. It is a shameful failure, but when I think of Herod in this morning's passage, I am reminded of my own past, in which I made great mistakes. Let's get into the Bible study. I will talk about two things: "content" and "message."

1. Contents - Herod's Failure

A man named John the Baptist was a pioneer of Jesus, but it was a king named Herod Antipas who ruled the area - (Perea) - in which John was active. His wife, Herodiah, was originally the wife of Herod Antipas' half-brother, Herod Philip. However, when Antipas visited Philip in Rome, he persuaded Philip's wife, Herodias, to become his wife. After obtaining Herodias' consent, Antipas immediately sent away his own wife and took Herodias as his wife. He took his brother's wife. This was morally problematic, but above all, it was a violation of God's law. John the Baptist could not overlook the fact that the ruler of the Jewish nation was openly breaking the law, and as we see in verse 18, he shouted the words of condemnation against Herod in the land of Herod Antipas. So Herod seizes John and imprisons him in the fortress of Maceris, which was on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. But Herod could not lay a hand on John while imprisoning him. John was popular among the people. Herod could not kill John and have the people riot. Not only that, but verse 20 says, "And Herod said to John, 'I am going to kill him. 'Herod, knowing John to be a righteous and holy man, feared him and gave him protection...and...when he heard John's teaching, he listened with great perplexity but with delight" (20). Herod, on the one hand, hated John, but on the other hand, he was willing to listen to John's words calling for "repentance. John's words may have made Herod feel something that connected him to God. As far as Herod was concerned, his feelings toward John were mixed. For Herodea, however, they were not. She was estranged from John, whom she blamed for their sins. The history of Herod's family is "a history of incest and murder. She is also a member of the Herod family. She was raised in such an environment. So, she may have had no resistance to the idea of killing. She wanted to bury anyone who got in her way, and at that time, the perfect opportunity came. On Herod's birthday, his daughter Salome danced in front of everyone. Herod was delighted by the dance and made a rash promise. Herodea took advantage of the promise and had John killed.

2. the message

What does this passage tell us?

(1) Do not kill the Word of God.

In verse 16, Antipas says, "Herod heard a rumor and said, 'That John whom I beheaded has come back to life'" (16). Fear. Why did Herod think "John had come back to life" when he heard the rumors about Jesus? I believe he felt blame and fear for having killed John. Herod wanted to silence John and

kill him. But John, who was captured, now preached "repentance of sins" to Herod in prison. I believe that he did so out of love for Herod. That is why "Herod...when he heard John's teaching...was perplexed, but listened with joy" (20). However, Herod killed John as a result. There, Jesus appeared in Herod's dominion - (at his feet) - and began to evangelize. Herod felt in Jesus the "resurrection of John" because Jesus spoke the same words as John. Herod was told, "Repent of your life that ignores God, and turn back to Him." But Herod wants to kill Jesus as well. John spoke the Word of God - (God's request) - to Herod. But Herod killed John so that he would not hear the Word of God. A preacher said. "That means you have killed the Word of God.' Let me use that word myself. Following in John's footsteps, Jesus also spoke the Word of God. Herod tried to kill Jesus as well. That also means that he tried to kill the Word of God. But Herod - (the evil of the world) - tried to kill the Word of God, but the Word of God was passed on from John to Jesus, and it works on Herod. And when Jesus ascends to heaven, the Word of God is passed on to His disciples to be spoken. The disciples are also persecuted. But one after another, the word is passed on and spoken. The Word of God continues to live and work in the hands of God's providence. The Word of God does not perish. In Hebrew, "word" is also translated "fact. The Word of God works and goes on becoming a fact, just as the Word of God does. Because it is such a word, we can trust and hang on to the Word of God.

This passage, by placing the record of John's martyrdom between the disciples' missionary work - (between verses 12-13 and 30) - tells us that there are forces of evil that seek to persecute the Word of God, yet the Word of God continues to speak powerfully, the victory of the Word of God, and such things.

But that is not all. In the church at the time this gospel was written, there were people who cried out "Crucify Him" at the time of the crucifixion, and there were people who repented from that and joined the church. The disciples also betrayed Jesus at the time of His crucifixion and fled, abandoning Him. In other words, I believe that the people of the church at the time the "Gospel of Mark" was written were in the midst of such repentance that they, too, had abandoned and tried to kill those who spoke the Word of God. No, I can't but think that we are "living in the days of struggle against the desire to kill the Word of God" again. Killing the Word of God would have meant giving in to persecution and abandoning the faith. But more than that, I believe that there must have been a struggle of faith against the desire to kill the Word of God by denying it in their hearts, despising it, not living by it, and so on. In that sense, this passage speaks to us. "Are you not trying to kill the Word of God?" We may not abandon the Word of God or our faith because of life-threatening persecution. However, in the midst of various problems and troubles, we may be so blinded by the problems that we kill the Word of God. In the midst of trials, are we killing God's Word by ignoring it, by not believing it? I think that is the question that needs to be asked.

One day, I was having a hard time thinking about something, and I sighed in a daze. Then my wife said to me, "The Bible says, 'Let God take care of your worries' (1 Peter 5:7). What happened to the words in the Bible that say, "Give your anxieties...to God" (1 Peter 5:7)? What happened to that verse? 'Oh. I was killing the Word of God," I thought. It was a word I was willing to hear. But many times we are killing and stifling the Word of God in the midst of our real-life problems. I once read the testimony of a pastor in "The Gospel for a Million," and the story of his son who died of cancer at a young age still haunts me. Before he died, in the midst of the pain of his illness, he said to his wife, "The Bible says, 'What God does, He does. As the Bible says, "Everything God does is beautiful in its own time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11)...(even if) you are not healed, rejoice in that too as a beautiful thing, a good thing." When his wife replied, "I can rejoice," he said, his face beaming with joy. Everything God does is timely and beautiful. I love those words. But I am often so preoccupied with my worries that I kill the words. When I chew on these words, I am moved to realize that the God I believe in is the God who

does beautiful things in the right way at the right time. At the same time, I feel as if he is saying to me, "Do you trust in me?"

We are not in a time of persecution. However, I think of the testimony of Mr. Shigeru Morishige, who came to this church as I have mentioned many times. He went to Sado Island and there he saw the monument of Kirishitan martyrdom. As he looked at the inscription, he thought to himself, "If I had lived in this time, I would not have been able to live in this time of faith. If I had lived in this time, would I have kept my faith and become a martyr? Or would I have abandoned my faith? At that moment, there was a thin voice of God that echoed in his heart. I did not give you birth in that time period, but in this time period. He said to the voice, "Isn't that unfair? People risked their lives in those days. I didn't risk my life. Then he heard the voice again. It was as difficult then as it is now to follow me. Only those who trust in me can do it. At that moment, he was convinced by God's voice, thinking of his own lack of living up to God's Word in his everyday life. We are placed in this time, not a time of persecution. We are invited to live our faith to the fullest in this time. Certainly we have many worries. But Paul says, 'Every trial you have met is not unknown to man. For God is faithful, and He will not subject you to trials that you cannot endure. Rather, He provides a way out along with the trials so that you can endure them' (1 Corinthians 10:13). The original context of these words is "Even if you suffer, God will surely provide a way of escape if you continue to walk in faith. Where we hold on to the Word and continue to walk with hope, there is always an answer. There are problems. But in the midst of them, I want to exercise faith and live by God's Word to the best of my ability, so as not to kill God's Word. God must take care of us."

(2) Fear God

Another thing this passage teaches us is the fear of God. Herod wanted to kill the Word of God, but another thing we notice in Herod's appearance is.... In the parallel passage, "Matthew 14:5," we read, "Herod wanted to kill John, but he feared the crowd" (Matthew 14:5). He feared the people. Verse 26 also says, "The king was very distressed, but he did not like to deny the girl's request, partly because of his own vow and partly because of the people in attendance" (26). (26) He was afraid his reputation. But Herod was not just an insensitive, ruthless, and arbitrary tyrant. He had smelled the truth in John's words. But in the end, he killed John and had to feel blame and fear for what he had done. As I said, he could not reverse his rash vow in front of the people there. In a sense, I believe that his heartache was God's warning to him, "That is not God's will. But he stifles that voice. Instead of fearing God, he fears people. He chooses people's reputation. He fell into the trap because of fear of man."

The Gospel of Mark, through the figure of Herod, asks us, "Are you more afraid of man than you are of God? What about us? Someone once said, "Japanese people are not afraid to look people in the eye. Japanese people are brought up to live in the eyes of others and to be concerned about what they say." I myself was brought up to be told to be like other people so that I would not be laughed at. In this sense, I think that at the root of the Japanese people - (perhaps this is an overstatement) - there is a kind of place where people have become gods - (this is Japanese religion). Certainly the fear of people seems more sincere. I too fear people. However, living a life that is only concerned with what others think or how they evaluate you is constricting. Above all, as the figure of Herod teaches us, if we retreat from the fear of God and choose to fear others, we will not be able to live the way we should live, and we will lose sight of what is important.

I once heard a story about a man who tried to die because he was afraid of having a short nose. It was a long time ago. After graduating from elementary school, he immediately moved from Niigata to Tokyo and entered the household of a decorator in Ueno. Day after day, he saw his own face reflected in the silversmith's work that he was polishing, but in any case, his nose was short. His colleagues said to him, "You are good. Even if it rains, the rain won't hit your nose, and even if you fall down, you won't get a bruised nose," but he had nothing to say in reply. He felt no longer like living and, after much

consideration, decided to die. One night, with the intention of dying, he went to the cemetery in the mountains of Ueno, sat down on a gravestone, and sadly thought, "Oh, this is the last time. Then, from the direction of the statue of Mr. Saigo, I heard the sound of drums and the singing of a hymn, "Just believe...all who believe will be saved. I thought, "It would not be a bad idea to listen to the Yayaso Church at least once before I die," so he went to the temple and heard a sermon by members of the Salvation Army (a sect of Christianity). As he listened to the sermon, he began to feel ashamed but not because of his short nose. He said, "It is not my short nose that I am ashamed of or saddened by. It is that my heart is stained with sin before God. Then he began a new walk in faith. He feared God. When he did so, he no longer cared about his reputation before others. He had freedom.

The fear of man is a snare. The way to escape that trap is to fear God. When one truly fears God, one can determine what is truly important. Herod lived the opposite way. He had the opportunity to repent. John should have spoken of repentance over and over again. If Herod had repented and chosen to fear God, there would have been a different way to live. But he does not repent until the end. He lived that way and ended up being exiled by the Roman emperor, who cared about him. People change. People's hearts change. The world's values change. But God does not change. I think it is important to fear God correctly in order to live a better and freer life for the one time we have. Not only that, but eventually there will come a time when all people will stand before God. It is our hope that our life of faith will be a life of rightly fearing God.