



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Promises, promises, promises. One of Rodney's favorite quotes. He used it again on me this weekend when Emmett asked if he could stay at our house for a week. I excitedly told him, next year when you are a bit older. After the boys left to go home, Rodney asked me what on earth, I was thinking promising our young grandson he could come and stay with us next year. We were so tired after his 3 day visit; we are still getting caught up on energy. He is a wonderful little boy but one with so much energy. It would be hard to keep up with his desire to go, go, go. And so, although I hated Rodney's reminder that we cannot always do what we want to do, I appreciated his dose of reality.

Our Gospel lesson for today is also about a rash promise made by Herod. It was a rash promise made without much thought. One that ultimately, Herod would regret making. One he would want to take back. One that was a huge mistake.

Have you ever made a rash promise? One you wanted to take back even before all the words left your mouth. You were instantly sorry you made the promise and now were stuck. Do you have to honor it, or do you disgrace

yourself by not going through with the promise? I think we have all, at one time or another made a rash promise, one that caused regret.

Herod was no exception. He threw a big party to celebrate his own birthday, inviting all the important people he could. As the entertainment for these officials was the erotic dancing of his stepdaughter. She, like many women throughout the Bible was unnamed in Mark's Gospel, although we come to know her as Salome from other writings. At any rate, she is a pawn in the scheming of her mother, and it was quite obvious that she is of special interest to the men attending the party, as well as Herod. And so here is where the rash promise comes.

Herod offers her anything she wants because she was successful in arousing him and his guests. It was a rash promise that anything could be hers including even half of his kingdom. After all what would a beautiful young woman want? Jewels, clothes or a new sports chariot. At first Herod was not worried. His rash promise was after all too impress his guests with his supposed generosity and wealth.

The young gal was so surprised that she sought her mother's help in answering or asking for her reward. And her mother had just the answer. She told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. WOW. Can't imagine that was what any young girl would want, but she abides her mother's request and even throws in to put it on a platter keeping with the banquet theme.

Herod is stunned to say the least. Our text says that "the king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her." Herod had to save face here, although he held John in prison, the king had had no intention of killing John. On the other hand, his wife despised John for calling her out as a wicked woman.

You see Herodias found John's opposition to her marriage unacceptable. The Herod family tree is quite disturbing. Herod the Great married several women who bore him seven sons. Herodias is the daughter of one of these seven sons and married two of the other seven sons, which means that both of her husbands are also her uncles. You see, Herod the Great was quite paranoid and murdered three of this seven sons as he feared that they would try to unseat him. The remaining 4 sons were married to Herodias or her daughter. So, you can see why John would be critical of Herod because his marriage to Herodias violated Torah law and would only have been legal if the brother had died. Wow what a messy family.

Back to Herod's rash promise. Giving Herodias' daughter her heart's desire was out there. Everyone heard the promise. So, to renege on it would have had Herod lose face. He could never live it down. And so, he bit the bullet and had John killed. He had to make good on his rash promise because his strength was all wrapped up in the approval of others and his own self-will. Herod was not a religious man and had no one else to rely on, but himself.

A great lesson for us to learn. That when we make rash promises we will have to live up to them even if we see we have no other way out. In fact, you might really be in trouble not only if you try to rely on your own ability, but if you take the advice of others. My suggestion would be to look to the only one that can give you strength to deal with the situation. Our Lord has made many promises to us. One of those promises is that he will walk with us through any challenging times in our lives.

In fact, that is the one thing that we can rely on is that God always keeps his promises. They are not rash promises, but rather promises that can be relied on. Did you know that according to a schoolteacher Everek R. Storms from Canada, that in the Bible there are a total of 8810 promises, of which 7487 promises are by God to man? And if you did not attend our last Bible study, you really missed it. We used a Max Lucado book called, Unshakable Hope: Building Our Lives on the Promises of God. It was an extraordinarily good study with videos from Lucado himself, a great book and wonderful study guide. Several of the folks that were involved in this Sunday morning Bible study group, thought that it was well worth the time. In fact, if you want to read the book, I do have a copy to lend out.

In this book Lucado says, "Because life is filled with problems, God's Word is filled with promises." In the study we looked at several of God's promises that can help us as he says, "equipping us to overcome difficult circumstances, experience lasting security and make wise decisions." Lucado certainly convinced us that God's promises can help us through difficult times. He concludes that "Since his Word is unbreakable, our hope is unshakable." What a great way to think about God's promises. On the jacket of the cover of the book, Lucado asks? "The circumstances of life or the promises of God-upon which are you standing?"

Herod could not stand on the promises of God, so he had to go it alone to get out of the mess he made when he promised anything to his stepdaughter. Herod did not know God like you and I do. Herod did not have God's strength

to lean on. His power was of the world in which he lived. Have you ever heard the adage, “the bigger your pride, the harder it is to eat crow?” I don’t know about you but eating crow does not sound like an option I would appreciate.

I would rather humble myself and call on Jesus to give me strength to face those I have let down by my promises and then work with them to fulfill my original intentions. Giving your word and not keeping it does not always mean you will not be forgiven. Remember God’s promise that His grace is sufficient. It is sufficient not only to help you fulfill your promises but if you default on a promise as well. God’s grace here is not a free pass to go back on promises. But there are just some promises that are impossible to keep, even if they were not rash promises.

An example from Dr McLarty. A young man goes off to college. All his life he has aspired to be a lawyer, like his father. “Son, get your degree, go to law school, pass the bar, and there will be a place for you in my firm,” he is told. So off he goes to get his education. But, wouldn’t you know it, he takes psychology 101 and, in his heart, he knows this is where he belongs. He is a people person with understanding and compassion and a heart for others.

He wants to be a social worker, not a lawyer, but he knows it will break his father’s heart. Besides, implicitly he promised his father to pursue a law degree. Can he responsibly go back on his word? Can he break this long told promise to this father?

You see, sometimes the most thoughtful promises made with the best intentions can be difficult, almost impossible to keep. But God knows what is in your heart and he can help walk with you through situations where you are unable to keep the promises you’ve made.

So please be careful with the promises you make. Yes, we will probably continue to occasionally make rash promises like I made to Emmett or Herod made to Salome. But the Good News here folks is that our hope does not lie in the promises we make but rather in the promises made to us by our God. All 7487 of them!

Friends, if you put your trust in Jesus and stand on God’s promises, you will experience the joy of abundant life here on earth as you await the greatest promise of all, the gift of eternal life in heaven with Jesus. AMEN

