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Scripture: Mark 6:12-29

Sermon Topic: The Power of a Guilty  
Conscience.

Text: Mark 6:16 -- "...when Herod  
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Proposition: When stimulated by Jesus'  
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Dates written: Feb. 1-3, 1972

Dates and places used:

*Feb. 6, 1972 - Oakland Park, Fla.*

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Feb. 2, 1972 - [illegible]

### Introduction:

1. A proud father phoned the newspaper and reported the birth of twins to his wife and him. The girl at the news desk didn't quite catch the message, and asked "Will you repeat that?"

"Not if I can help it," the Dad replied.

2. The Scripture of today tells of an incident in which the main character, or the villain, did not want to repeat what he had done either. Unlike the father of twins, this character was ashamed of what he had done, and rather wished it hadn't happened, and that people did not know anything about it. This villain was the ancient King Herod who lived just prior to and during the ministry of Jesus.

I. The immediate thing bothering ~~the~~ conscience of King Herod was his guilty conscience.

1. We have read the story today as our Scripture. You remember how it said that when news came to King Herod of the healing and other works which Jesus was doing, he immediately said "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." He was mistaken, but the

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story does indicate that John had a terrifically bad case of guilty conscience. It shows that he had been thinking about the terrible thing he had done; probably in a moment of drunkenness and to please his beautiful stepdaughter who had asked him to have the head of John the Baptist brought to her on a platter. Many a motion picture has attempted to portray this intoxicated minute of fascination on the part of the fat and aging king with the lithe and sinuous motions of the beautiful dancing girl, and the horrible and immediate results when he kept his word given in a moment of thoughtlessness.

2. I sometimes wonder if many of our modern authorities in our own state and area are not bothered by similar guilty consciences, or ~~think they certainly~~ should be. The immediate cause of this speculation is the recently-publicised ~~xxxxxx of the~~ Pitts-Lee case in northern Florida in which two black men were condemned to death for a murder they said they did not commit. Appeals stayed their execution for several years. Now it comes out that the present state attorney suppressed evidence in which the key witness reversed her story and indi-

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cated that she was not even a witness at the slaying for which the men were condemned. Why would the state attorney suppress such evidence? The reasons are about the same as those of King Herod: <sup>HAVING</sup> fascination with the situation of power to convict, a determination to look good in the eyes of the beholders (Herod to keep his word; the attorney to seem to be an efficient law enforcer who gets convictions and later because of this gets votes for higher and higher office). Not often enough does the <sup>CHARACTER</sup> ~~guilty conscience~~ of the <sup>A</sup> corrupt and power-hungry politician cause him to wiggle in the hold of his own guilty conscience. It does happen often enough, however, to keep our faith in the innate goodness of ~~the~~ <sup>MUCH ABOUT</sup> human personality.

3. In the case of Herod, the news of the character and works of Jesus was what stirred his conscience. This still happens, that people who have done evil are brought to reexamine the past, to repent, to try to make right that which they can, because they ~~first~~ come to know Jesus Christ, <sup>AND</sup> to have faith in him.

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II. As with Herod, a guilty conscience can cause a person to imagine many untrue things.

1. With the Florida primary elections coming up next month, many stories about politics will be heard. A good one from Indiana perhaps can illustrate what we're trying to say here. At this time years ago in that state, votes were freely bought and sold, sometimes for money, sometimes for whiskey. A farmer asked his hired hand how he voted in a local election. "Well," said the hired hand, "the Democrats came around on election day and offered me a quart of whiskey for my vote, and about the time I wuz deciding the Republicans came by and offered me two quarts."

"Easy to see who you voted for," the farmer commented.

"Nope, you're wrong," said the farm hand. "I voted for the Democrats. I figured they wuz the least dishonest."

The farmhand was revealing his own dishonesty, but also a bit of guilty conscience about it, wasn't he? He was also given to imagination over the relative degrees of honesty and dishonesty, stimulated by his guilty conscience, making him wish to identify with the better of the two parties, ALTHOUGH

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there obviously was not any difference in their real degree of dishonesty.

2. A guilty conscience does cause people to imagine untrue things. Part of this is the process which psychologists call "rationalization," whereby we try to justify our unjustified actions. Part of this is because the guilty conscience can cause an acute sensitivity to stimuli which the honest mind would not even note, and then see in these imagined things much that is not real. Mental hospitals are full of people with guilty consciences, guilt complexes. However, too often their guilt is not really as great as they imagine it and this is simply the exaggeration of normal feelings which is the essence of their sickness.

### III. A guilty conscience can cause a person to regret his past actions.

1. Herod's words which are our text make him sound sort of relieved: "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." Obviously he regretted his past ~~action~~ ~~of~~ ~~having~~ ~~Herod~~ John killed and was hopeful, as well as imagining, that Jesus was John come back. If this were so, then Herod need no longer feel

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2. People do regret past wrong actions. Mental breakdowns, suicides, and much public service and philanthropy are ~~often~~ motivated by regret over the past, by guilty consciences. The last items, public service and philanthropy, illustrate that

IV. A guilty conscience can cause you to do things to make up for, or atone, for such wrongs. *It leads o r drives to many actions.*

1. A TV installer drove out to the back woods to deliver a new TV set. "Now this will have to go on the roof," he said, pointing to the antenna.

"Like I said, Zeke," said the wife to her husband, "one thing leads to another. Now we have to put a roof on the house."

2. One thing does lead to another in this matter of guilty conscience. Once you regret what you've done, you look for ways to ease the sense of guilt. One of the most effective ways is to try to make up for the injury you've performed. Herod is not recorded as having been able to do that of course. But sometimes we do believe

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that people who give a great deal of time to public service in hospitals, churches, community work, etc., are driven by ~~many~~ perhaps-unrecognized (by themselves) motives, among which quite often is a feeling that they must "pay," or make up for, past wrongdoing. We have the suspicion, too, that large gifts to charitable, service and religious organizations sometimes are conscience money. A guilty conscience often causes people to try to do good things for those whom they have hurt.

#### Conclusion:

1. Our thinking about "the power of a guilty conscience" has been brought to mind today by the story of Herod's reaction to the work of Jesus, which was stimulated by his remorse over his ordering of the beheading of John the Baptist. Herod's immediate thought and feeling, expressed in the words about Jesus, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised," ~~were~~ unrealistic words of hope, ~~which~~ remind us of our unrealistic view of things, when we are goaded by heavy loads of guilt. ~~We have recognized~~ that this type of regret often will goad us to do good things for those we have harmed, or for people like them.

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2. We must recognize that our own guilt feelings may be aroused by what we hear about Jesus; but that this same Jesus is the best source of faith which leads to healing and help of such guilt. Turn to <sup>JESUS</sup> ~~him~~ and find "the power of a guilty conscience" considerably lessened, because the guilt is forgiven and your motivation is positive. <sup>TO</sup> <sup>BE</sup> <sup>CALM</sup>

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