

# Political Reformation: The Story of Two Kings – Mark 6:14-44

**Introduction** – This is Reformation Day and also the Sunday before our state and national elections. One of the cries of the reformation was “semper reformanda,” which is quite a different attitude than simply “throw the bums out,” the mentality of much political activism today. Let us consider a passage that compares and contrasts the story of two kings and then suggest some ways to think about this with regard to what Scripture requires of the civil servant. I am assuming the scriptures speak to matters of civil government, something the Reformers, as well as the framers of our Constitution, had to deal with in some detail.

**One Kind of King** (Mark 6:14-29) – The first half of the book of Mark regularly asks the question, “who is this Jesus?” Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, wonders if Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead (v14). Others wonder if He is Elijah returned, the Prophet promised in Deut 18, or one of the other prophets (v15). The air was thick, therefore, with political expectations: was the Messiah coming?

**Herod Antipas** – was one of the sons of Herod the Great. He was actually not a king, but a tetrarch (a lesser title) of a subordinate province of Rome. This Antipas had divorced his first wife and taken his half-brother's wife, and so we have the reasons for John's pointed rebuke (v18, Lev 18:16).

**A Feast of Sorts** – Herodias hated John (v19) and set up a plot for his murder. At Herod's birthday, her daughter dances in what appears to be a lascivious manner. Herod, hot, bothered, and most likely drunk, makes a public rash vow (v23). Herodius had an immediate answer (v24) and the daughter adds her own macabre (and important) detail (v25).

**Type-Casting** – If Jesus (or John) is possibly Elijah, then Herod and Herodias are, of course, the new Ahab and Jezebel. He is wicked, but she manipulates him from behind the scenes. Historians tell us that Herodias was the striving, ambitious one who later persuaded Antipas to start calling himself a king, getting them both exiled to Spain, where they died. The spirit of Elijah still spoke through Elisha while Ahab and Jezebel were defeated. Consider: what kind of shepherd/king was Ahab?

**Another Kind of King** (vv30-44) – This is followed by the story of another King. The disciples return from going out to preach the gospel (v30, see vv12-13). Jesus shows compassion on them, wanting to take them away that they might rest (vv31-32). But the multitudes seek Jesus and find Him (v33).

**The Shepherd King** – Jesus is far more than he appears, and has far more. Having compassion on the multitudes, He teaches them until the day was far spent (vv34-35).

**Another Feast** – The disciples are concerned as it draws late, for there is no food for this great crowd (vv35-36). But Jesus has a plan, receives what the disciples have, blesses it, multiplies it, and feeds the five thousand (vv37-44). These two stories are rife with contrasts.

**Who is this Jesus?** – Remember, this section began with this question. Jesus had compassion on the multitudes for they were like sheep without a shepherd, calling to mind the promises of the Old Testament. In Num 27:15-18, another politically charged time as leaders are being changed, Moses prays for a successor that they “*may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.*” Joshua is selected. Not a priest, but a king-like ruler.

**Who is this Herod?** (1 Kings 22:17) – When God condemns Ahab through Micaiah the prophet, he describes Israel under Ahab as “*sheep that have no shepherd.*” Herod's civil leadership was unrighteous – just like king Ahab.

**Exile and Promised Deliverance** (Ezek 34) – The multitude found itself in a deserted place without food and without a shepherd. In the midst of the exile, Ezekiel condemned the shepherd/leaders of Israel (vv1-6) and pronounced judgment upon them (vv7-10). Then God promised that He Himself would be their Shepherd (vv11-16). A new David will be their Shepherd, and God will be with them (vv23-24).

**Reclining on Green Grass** (Mark 6:39) – And so this Good Shepherd has them lie down in green pastures – and feeds them (Psalm 23). This Shepherd who would prepare a table for them in the wilderness, even as John had been murdered (his valley of death), will be their King of kings and Lord of lords. And He will do so by laying down His life for the sheep.

**An Election Sermon?** – Yes, for here we have the story of two kings. One stands autonomously, refusing to acknowledge the law and prophetic Word of God in civil affairs (or personal lives of political leaders), while One bows His knee to the authority of the Law and His Father. One consumes his sheep while One feeds His sheep. One scatters, another gathers together – one exploits, another protects.

**No Autonomous Behavior** – John spoke out against Herod's refusal to submit to the Law of God. There is such a thing as the separation of church and state, but there is no rightful separation of God and state. However, we behave as though law is law because the highest authority (humans) have declared it to be so. Our courts, legislatures, and executives act as though there was no absolute, transcendent, personal Law and Lawgiver. And because of this, there are no absolutes – Rex Lex (the king is law) instead of Lex Rex (the law is king).

**True American Idolatry** – What is really going on with this philosophy of government? Nothing less than idolatry. Man is imbuing a created object (the state) with powers that only God possesses: namely the authority to declare what is good and evil, righteous and unrighteous. Or, consider: Who does America turn to in times of crisis? Behold your god.

**The Subservient State** – None of this is a rejection of the state in and of itself, which is a gift, the deacon of God. But as the deacon of God, it must submit to Him. And this is why we need a great political reformation and not simply a rearranging of the furniture.