

Mark 6:14-29 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him."¹⁵ But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."¹⁷ For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her.¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not,²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.²² For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."²³ And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist."²⁵ And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.²⁹ When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Announcements:

1. Member's Meeting 12/12/21 short right after service
2. Christmas Eve, 4:30

Mark 6:14-29 | The Final Prophet (Advent I: Hope)

This Sunday of Advent is all about, Hope. You see hope implies that things aren't the way you want them to be. Hope means that, as things are now, you are suffering, but through the suffering something more glorious awaits. So we don't despair, but look forward in hope. Today we're going to look at the story of John the Baptist, to see an example of resolute hope even in the face of death.

Our discipleship always carries these two things together, suffering and glory, and these two things are shown so completely in the life of John the Baptist. He endured incredible suffering not for his own glory but for the glory of God.

1. Rumors

Mark 6:14-15 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

The effectiveness of the witness of the 12 apostles in the surrounding villages is noted in the news of Jesus making it all the way up to the King of the region. (Technically tetrarch, so like a quarter of a king, but if you were under him he was the king). The rumors were traveling around as people were hunting for the right category to explain Jesus. Perhaps John the Baptist rose from the dead? Their ministries seem to perfectly compliment one another. Perhaps he is Elijah returned, or perhaps Jesus is another prophet sent by God. Of course none of these are the case. Jesus is something far stranger, God himself incarnate.

King Herod of course doesn't have the category of Word made flesh. But he does show us that Jesus is the type of person we can't even consider without our own histories and stories rushing to the forefront. Among the available rumors, King Herod doesn't even need to make a decision. He knows, and it's a threat to him.

Mark 6:16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

You see King Herod was particularly haunted by Jesus' forerunner John the Baptist. John is the picture of a life bent on seeking the glory of Christ. Herod is a picture of a life bent on seeking his own glory. The two will always collide.

2. Triangles

Mark 6:17-18 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

The conflict centered on Herod and his wife Herodias. Herodias was King Herod's brother's wife, but Herod married her. One of the objectors to this marriage was John the Baptist, who outright stated that this marriage was unlawful. Now why was it unlawful?

Leviticus 18:16 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.

I know what you're thinking. John, what are you doing holding non-believers accountable to the law of God? This question exposes a bit of a mix up that has taken place in our evangelicalism. We think that God's law is something that you either opt into or you don't, therefore we shouldn't call people outside of the church to reckon with something they

themselves don't adhere to. But we've lost sight of the reality of God's law as something we all are under. This is the first call of the gospel, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The whole world is shilling out ways to deal with the feeling of guilt and shame that everyone carries around, and many of them are attempts to convince yourself that the guilt and shame itself is a lie. This is really just a trick to move the shame one step back and cause you to become ashamed of your shame. Repentance is agreeing with the reality of your shame while trusting the Lord to deal graciously with you in the midst of it. Likewise we must understand that living in accord with God's law is good. It is good for the world, it is a happy thing to seek righteousness. John could have said it didn't matter because Herod was a non-believer anyway.

But don't you see? To do so is to right off Herod completely. We are of course patient with the sin of all people, we ourselves know what sin is like, how deeply enslaved we are, but that doesn't mean we don't engage with the reality of our condemnation before the Lord.

Mark 6:19-20 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe...

The problem for John arises, as all problems always do, in a relational triangle, this one is between John, Herod, and Herod's wife Herodias. Herod has a certain fear of John, the type of fear I'm sure you all know when you meet a person of greater character than you. Herodias views John as a problem, a threat to their marriage. John is seeking the Lord. But notice, in seeking the Lord he becomes involved in these human, even political affairs. I wish we could fly below the radar, but discipleship is costly and ours is a job of proclamation.

3. Hope

This triangle comes to a critical moment, as Herodias proves herself willing to take advantage of the vulnerability in Herod's character. Let's set the scene. It is Herod's birthday. He has invited all the leading people of Galilee, as well as his nobles and military commanders. Emperor's birthday's were national holidays, it makes sense that Herod would ape the tradition for himself. Part of the entertainment for the evening was Herodias's daughter dancing. She must have danced well because everyone there enjoyed it. Herod made a vow to the girl, in the presence of everyone, to ask for whatever she wished that he might give it to her, borrowing the expression "up to half my kingdom."

Mark 6:24-25 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." ²⁵ And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Herodias sees the moment that she has been given. Her husband is pinned against the vow he made and the opinion of the crowd in front of him. Her daughter is manipulable and naive. Herodias is shrewd and seizes this opportunity to have John the Baptist removed from her life completely. Now remember, John at this point was already in prison because of Herod. But it seems as though the prison was not enough because Herod couldn't bring himself to kill John. This amounted to what must have been intense conflict between Herod and Herodias and both of them likely thought that the issue was because of John. It wasn't. It was because of their fraudulent marriage. Did you know that when two people have an issue with each other, it often manifests in an object outside of both of them?

Mark 6:26 And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.

Look, both John the Baptist, and Herod had values that they weren't able to abandon. There is no such thing as a person that lives without values, that lives outside of some law. Herod's value was pragmatic for his benefit and own reputation. John served the Lord. And in Herod we see that when you serve anything other than the Lord, your values become incomprehensibly twisted. He wrongfully bound himself with the illusion of generosity. And he probably even considered his following through with it as a testament to his strength of character.

At any moment John could have simply taken it back. Why that fight? Why then? His faithfulness belonged to the Lord. You see, this is the reality of serving God in a world of corruption. We are declaring a king in a world of kings. John became the object of other people's corruption. Should he have been more winsome? More tactful? There are times when there is no such thing. The king sent for John in the prison, and he was beheaded and his head was brought in on a platter for Herodias's daughter. Here is where the passage ends,

Mark 6:29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

John's ministry ended. He was a fool right? It didn't accomplish anything. They are still married. What's the difference. John is dead, in a tomb. John's ministry was about making a way for the Lord. It was a ministry of preparation for Jesus' arrival. This story began, with Jesus' own disciples proclaiming the message of Jesus, and in Herod's mind he becomes haunted by John the Baptist at the proclamation of Jesus. And Jesus will go to the same fate as John. He will be killed by the state, ordered by a conflicted man who chose to serve the crowds instead of the Lord. His body will be placed in a tomb. But three days later, he will rise again. When John looked into death, he was looking into the unthinkable hope of Jesus, that because of Jesus there could be life on the other side. That is hope. A light in the darkness.