



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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## The Destroyer of the Soul

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I hope you are confident and excited about what God is doing. I'm going to ask you to do what we always do every Sunday. Let's open our Bibles to the gospel of Mark, chapter 6. That's where we are. We continue to work through and walk through this gospel, verse by verse.

After we read today's passage, you're going to sense that it sounds more like a modern-day reality show than it does a story in the Bible. This story is filled with lust, revenge, regret, and even murder. There's no way you can ever accuse the Bible of being dry and boring, especially after what we are going to read this morning.

The main characters in today's passage are John the Baptist, King Herod, and his wife, Herodias. Once we get past all of the intrigue of the story, what we actually have left is a microcosm of how many people in our world interact with Jesus. Herod's and his wife's response to the preaching of John the Baptist is very similar to the way people respond to Jesus and his message today, and there are some valuable lessons for us to learn in this passage.

With that said, let's stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to pick it up in verse 14, right where we left off last week.

**'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.' But others said, 'He is Elijah.' And others said, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'**

**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. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 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.**

**But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 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.' And he vowed to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.'**

**And she went out and said to her mother, 'For what should I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' 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.' And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.**

**And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb."**

God in heaven, in the name of Jesus and in the power of your Holy Spirit, we just ask that you would open our hearts up to what this means, how we can learn from it, how you want us to live, and how you want us to change in the world we live in. God, I just pray that when it's all said and done, we would have more courage and faith in you and that we would all be more like Jesus.

God, I pray for those in this room who are just here with heavy hearts, who are here with trials and tribulations swirling all around them. I pray, God, in a beautiful and powerful moment, may they sense your love, care, and promise to walk with them every step of the way forward. God, calm our hearts now and help us to learn. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

John the Baptist is one of my New Testament heroes. This guy is tough. When I think of John the Baptist, he's kind of like the Marshawn Lynch of preachers, if you know what that means. John's a little socially awkward. He eats grasshoppers marinated in honey. He dresses in burlap sacks, I think, but he's fearless and he's unconcerned with popular opinion. He's unconcerned with public approval, and that's what I love about John.

I've always thought they should make a movie out of his life, just by the sheer fact that his death alone was a cruel execution of both hatred and corruption of power. The whole story, though, is a commentary on the world in which we live, and I want to give you one of, I think, the most obvious applications for the world in which we live and for us today, and then we'll kind of go a little deeper from there.

1. *Humanity has no explanation for Jesus.* None. The world has no category in which to put Jesus. Every generation and every civilization has struggled to explain Jesus. In verse 14, we read, "**...Herod heard of it...**" Of what did he hear? In order to know that you had to be here last Sunday or read up a little higher.

Jesus had determined that it was time to send his disciples out into the world, two by two, for a little Global Encounter Trip. He told them, "I want you to warn people that the kingdom of God is near and then call them to repent," but he didn't just send them out with a message. He sent them out with power. He empowered them to cast out demons and to heal diseases.

So, they went and scattered in the surrounding countryside and villages, and news was traveling that these followers of Jesus were empowered to do amazing things, and people were repenting and coming to faith. Then, the explanation for all that is what we just read here early in the passage.

They kind of read like a grocery store checkout lane tabloid headline. "John the Baptist is alive with miraculous powers! Elijah has risen from the dead!" You can just see those headlines at the grocery store with big exclamation points, can't you? They were trying to figure out who this guy Jesus was who gave his disciples all this power.

It says here, in verse 16, that Herod fearfully thought, "Oh no. It's John, whom I beheaded." I don't think Herod is bragging here. I think he was afraid. I think his conscience is scaring him, because Herod knows how brutal and cruel he was to John the Baptist.

Now, just as a sidenote, I believe billions of people today are still falling prey to the fake headlines, the fake news of modern scientists who are always trying to eliminate Jesus from existence. The fake news of philosophers who are always trying to humanize Jesus. The fake news of the politicians who are always trying to privatize Jesus, or the media, who is always trying to reinvent Jesus with the next cable channel special on "finding Jesus."

The only possible and rational explanation of understanding who Jesus is, what he came to do, and why he came to do it... The only logical explanation is found in the incarnation. John, chapter 1: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** Now it starts to make sense.

The apostle Paul takes that description of Jesus in the incarnation a little bit further when he writes, **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** The only way to understand Jesus is to know he has always been. He is eternal, the Son of God.

God himself confirms the incarnation when, at Jesus' baptism, God speaks from heaven in a voice and declares, "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." Listen to him, God in the flesh. That's what the Bible does for us. It glorifies Jesus Christ as God in the flesh. It's the only way to explain him. The people in Jesus' day were desperately trying to make sense of him, but they were trying to understand, and for that, I want us to give them credit.

I know some of you sitting in this room right now are on the same exact path as some of the people right here in this passage, trying to figure out who Jesus is. I am so glad you're here, and I say that with every ounce of sincerity in my heart, because it is worthy of your soul to figure this out. The most important thing about any human being is what their opinion of Jesus is. The answer to the question, "Who is he?" has eternal significance.

2. *The gospel offends the human heart.* Christianity forces us to think things about ourselves that we don't want to think about. The message of Christianity is like a high-definition mirror that you hold up to your heart. That's what Hebrews 4 says.

**"...the word of God..."** The message of God, God's Word for us, the gospel. **"...is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit...and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."** That's what God's Word does. It exposes the intentions of our hearts. When it does, **"...no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."**

I want you to listen to John the Baptist preach in verse 18. Look at it again. It's simple. **"For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'"** Now, we don't know how Herod and John got together, but more than likely, it sounds like Herod makes his way out to the banks of the Jordan to hear the greatest preacher of his day.

Apparently, one day, John the Baptist is preaching and he notices, up on the hillside there, Herod and his entourage, sitting up on his high horse. John doesn't hold back. John doesn't back down. You see, Herodias was Herod's brother's wife. In fact, other sources tell us Herodias was actually Herod's niece, which, in other words, makes this marriage of Herod an adulterous and incestuous matrimony. This was scandalous even in this pagan culture.

John condemns his lifestyle. He won't agree with it. He won't sympathize with it. He won't celebrate it. He won't pretend their adulterous, incestuous relationship isn't harmful or destructive. John, in essence, calls Herodias and his wife to repent and to be forgiven. In verse 17, apparently, this is embarrassing to Herod's wife. Word is getting back to her. So, to appease his wife, Herod locks John up.

In verse 19, we're told that Herodias has a grudge against John and she wants John dead. She wants John the Baptist eliminated because he refuses to love her life choices. Now, the point for us today is clear. Church, the gospel reminds all of us that life isn't ultimately about us. It's not about me. It's not about just you. We're really not at the center of our own universe. The gospel puts us in a world that is ruled by an authority, the Lord God of heaven and earth.

The gospel tells us we don't belong to ourselves. We don't have the right to write our own rules and live whatever way we want to live. God has lovingly put boundaries into the world that are meant for our joy and protection, and that was John's message, and it landed John in prison and eventually with his head on a platter.

Now, listen. This is for you and me. Sharing this message, this true gospel, either personally or corporately as a church, is never going to win us popularity contests, and we have to accept that. In fact, I would say we need to embrace that. People are very offended when they hear they don't have the right to write their own rules and live however they want to live.

The next scene shifts to Herod's birthday party, but before we get to that, I want you to look at verse 20, because I think verse 20 has the most packed into one verse in this whole passage. **"...for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard [listened to] him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he [listened to] him gladly."** That is a very telling little verse. I think the main application of those words in verse 20 is simple.

3. *Don't ever ignore the Holy Spirit's conviction.* When the heart is pierced with guilt, when we feel the guilt and weight of our sin, it is God's grace telling us something is wrong. Something is drastically wrong, and it can be eternally dangerous to ignore this warning light of the heart. So, let's look at Herod and see the warning signs the Holy Spirit is turning on in his heart, four things that should never be ignored when the Holy Spirit uses the gospel, the message, to convict the unbeliever.

A. *Don't ever ignore the fear that comes from the gospel message.* It says right there, first off, in verse 20, **"...Herod feared John..."** When John preached, he was like a bright light that was shining into Herod's dark heart. John preached the truth, and the truth left Herod's sinful, lustful heart exposed, and it was frightening. John preached about the eternal punishment and torment of hell. John preached about the coming wrath and fury of God upon the sins of mankind, and it was frightening. Herod feared John.

In the same way, fear is a very natural response in our world when it comes to coming into contact with Jesus and his message, because he is the Light of the World, after all, and Jesus said **"...everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his [sin] should be exposed."** You see, in the presence of Jesus, we are powerless to justify ourselves.

Jesus says, "What good would it do if you gained the whole world but forfeited your soul in hell?" Don't ignore that fear. It's God's grace telling you something's wrong. Something is wrong in your heart. Something is wrong between you and God.

B. *Be sure not to ignore the righteousness of Jesus.* Especially for those who are still trying to figure out who Jesus is, don't ignore his righteousness. It says right here in verse 20 that Herod knew John was **"...a righteous and holy man..."** Verse 20 tells us the real reason Herod arrested John was to keep him safe from his own wife.

It says he knew John was righteous and holy, so he kept him safe. He had John arrested because he knew his wife was so infused with hatred for John that she was going to plot a way to get him killed. So, he locks him up, basically, to keep him safe. Interesting. You see, John may have been

blunt and direct, but he was a good man. He walked the talk. When Herod looked at John, he saw everything in John that he wasn't.

Again, in the same way, when you sincerely look at Jesus, you see pure love. You see pure sacrifice. You see pure good in Jesus, and I would say to those of you who are still trying to figure out who this Jesus guy really is, don't ignore his perfect, sinless, holy life, because it's in his perfect sinlessness that we find our only hope. He is the only one capable of approaching God on our behalf for our forgiveness. Rejoice that Jesus is sinless. Don't ignore it!

C. *Don't ignore the agitation that comes from the gospel.* It says here that Herod was "**...was greatly perplexed...**" Some of your Bibles say *agitated*. Others say *disturbed* in verse 20. John's message of sin and repentance kept Herod up at night. Folks, this is the work of our God-given conscience. This is exactly what separates you and me from the animals.

Don't let the evolutionists tell you you're nothing more than just a more highly evolved animal. See, that's just a kind of a little sneaky way of just trying not to deal with what our hearts and minds know is true. Don't ignore the uncomfortable grace of the Spirit's condemnation. This is the flashlight into our souls that leads us, ultimately, to God's forgiveness and salvation.

D. *Don't ignore the hope.* It says here that Herod listened to him or "**...heard him gladly.**" This is amazing, when you think about it. In the midst of his fear and the agitation, there was something about John's message that drew Herod in. Church, that's the power of the truth. "**You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"

Herod is listening to John and he's hearing the truth about his own heart, about God and his holiness, and about the need to repent, and I think Herod, down deep in his soul, is sensing, "There is freedom there. There is freedom when I come near to God, freedom to be forgiven from all my shame, guilt, lust, and junk, and to live in the light and not pretend I'm someone I'm not, and to actually just come clean, be forgiven, and start over." I think that was hopeful to Herod.

I would say to the person who has heard the gospel or read the Bible only to have the light of God's truth about Jesus give you glimmers of hope, do not ignore that. The cross of Jesus is the grace that takes away our sin and our guilt. It's the grace that makes all things new in our life. Don't ignore the nagging sense of hope that Jesus and the gospel give to your heart.

Now, after verse 20, the whole story turns tragic. Here's the main idea. This is the main point. When you go to Applebee's for lunch today and the waiter says, "What did your pastor talk about?" this is what I want you to tell him.

4. *Pride is the real destroyer of the soul.* Pride destroys our capacity to do what the heart knows is right, and that's why the Bible calls pride one of the seven deadly sins. The Bible teaches us that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. I'm not very smart, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it's not a good thing if God's opposing you.

The whole story goes sideways when Herod decides to throw himself a birthday party. His wife sends in their daughter as cheap entertainment for the troops. The troops are thrilled. Herod wants to really impress his guests, so he makes an outlandish offer to his daughter, not out of any love for her, but out of his desperate craving for their approval.

The daughter doesn't know what to ask for, so she runs to Mom. In verse 25, Mom is the perfect, living picture of how cancerous bitterness and hatred can become. She wants John's head because her love for her sin, for her own pleasure, was infinitely greater than her love for her own soul.

But I want to focus on Herod just one more time. Let's leave Herodias over there for a minute. I think verse 26 is the bombshell of the passage. Look what it says. Verse 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."** Herod was exceedingly sorrowful. This is a deep, moaning grief. The word here describes that chest pain kind of sorrow, weeping, and grieving.

I believe it's because Herod can see through the prison bars of his own prideful heart. He can see John was a good man, he was righteous, and he was right. Herod knows his lifestyle was sinful. It was not only immoral and sinful, but it was a complete rejection of God's love and grace. Every time Herod listened to John preach, his heart raced with conviction and hope, and now he's grieved with regret at the request of his daughter and wife.

Let me tell you something. This is the completely wrong kind of sorrow, for the Bible tells us there are two kinds of sorrow. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 7, we read that godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without any regret, whereas worldly sorrow produces death. Because Herod's sorrow is worldly sorrow, his pride leads him to kill John rather than lose face with his friends and his daughter.

You see, pride does this to us. It makes us care more about what others think of us than what God thinks of us. Pride makes us more concerned about our reputation than God's reputation. Herod is that person in our life, in our world, who has caged themselves into the corner of unbelief, into the corner of rejection of Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity.

It's safe in that cage. It's safe to back themselves into a corner of saying, "Jesus and the Bible... You can just take it and you-know-what." They back themselves into this cage with all of their friends and they just feed on each other's resistance of Jesus and the gospel. The amount of humility required to repent and leave their sin to follow Jesus is too frightening. They would rather lose their soul in hell than lose face with their friends.

You know people like that. Maybe you were like that until you repented and came to Christ. Jesus said, "What will it profit you if you gain the whole world but forfeit your soul in hell?" He came to warn mankind that the biggest problem in life exists inside you, not outside of you. He came to tell us that we all have something destructive inside of us that leads to our death. Not just our physical death, but worse than that, our spiritual death, being separated from God for all eternity because of our sin.

That's what's inside every person. That's the destructive force Jesus came to save us from. The Bible teaches that we can't do anything about that apart from the personal rescue of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's not a thing we can do about it. There are no second chances after death. There's no possibility of finding some other way.

See, the Bible tells us the doorway to God's forgiveness and salvation is a bloodstained cross. The only key in the whole universe that unlocks that door is repentance. You see, God is holy, and sin must be punished, and so Jesus' death on the cross was a substitutionary death. He died in our place. He came to take our punishment for us. He came to pay the price for our guilty sin with his own sinless life to save us from our condemnation and our damnation. The only key that unlocks the door to God's forgiveness and eternal life, again, is repentance.

You'll remember in Acts, chapter 2, Jesus has died. He has risen from the dead. He has appeared to the apostles and disciples, and he gives them their mission. He says, "I want you to go to Jerusalem and wait, because there's going to be power that's going to come upon you in the person of the Holy Spirit," and then Jesus ascends.

He gives them their mission to go now and make more disciples of him. They receive the Holy Spirit and Peter preaches the first sermon in the New Testament after the resurrection of Jesus, and it's the same message John the Baptist preached. It's the same message Jesus preached.

When he was done preaching that message about the death and resurrection of Jesus being our only hope, the people in the audience stopped and just said, "Peter, what do we have to do to be saved?" He gave them two things. He said, "Repent and be baptized, all of you, for the forgiveness of sins." The message hasn't changed. It's the same message we have today.

I would say if you're not a Christian in this room right now, you're still trying to figure out who Jesus is, if you have not surrendered to the Savior of your soul, then I would invite you to respond immediately. Not tomorrow, not later today. Right now is the time of salvation for you. If you are sensing in your heart that agitation, that fear, and maybe even that hope that finally, you can just stop trying to pretend, come to Jesus and let him cleanse you, forgive you, and give you a new, abundant life, I want to give you a chance to do that.

I want to lead you in a prayer of repentance, and then if this is your heart's desire, when this service is over, there are going to be people standing here who want to give you something to go home with today. I'm going to ask that if you pray this prayer, before you leave, you'll walk up front on your way out and just say, "I believe. I want to be baptized. What do I do?" They will give you something to go home with and help you take those next steps. Would you bow your heads with me?

Some of you in this room... Your heart is beating a little faster. You know it's true. You've heard it before. It's mixed with fear. There's some agitation there, knowing the safest place in the world is to be close to God, and yet you've tried to write your own rules for so long. Today, you need to walk away from your rules. Your heart is beating because there's hope. Finally, there's true hope.



If that's you, I want you to say, between you and God, a prayer that sounds like this. Repeat after me.

"Dear God, I admit I'm a sinner, and I thank you for sending Jesus to die for me. Right now, I repent of all of my sin and I receive Jesus as my Lord and my Savior. God, I want to love, worship, and serve you the rest of my life. Help me to know what that looks like. In Jesus' name, amen."

If you just did that business with God, here's his promise to you. He has heard your prayer and you are now a child of God by faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, and his death and resurrection. I want to encourage you, if you were sincere about that, don't walk out of this room without at least coming up here and grabbing one of these gifts we have for you.

There's a free Bible for you. There's some steps on what to do next. We would love to get any information from you: an email or a phone number where we can start talking to you about what it looks like to be baptized. I hope you'll do that before you walk out of this room. This is the greatest day of the rest of your eternity.

What a great day we've had today! This is the most important part we've had, and then, as we've looked ahead as a church, I hope you're excited to be a part of what God is doing here. I can't wait to see you next Sunday. We'll see you then. God bless.