

Theme: The beheading of John the Baptist is a sober reminder to Christians of the difficulties and costs of the mission we have been given by Jesus, but we must not shrink from calling others to repentance and faith.

## I. Intro - Martyred On the Iranian Border

- A. Martyrdom of our missionary planting churches in Iran
- B. It was shocking to hear - but a daily occurrence!
- C. Many reasons - religious; cultural; political; SIN!
- D. “The man whose little sermon is ‘repent’ sets himself against his age, and will for the time being be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man — ‘off with his head!’ You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to heaven.” - Joseph Parker

## II. Another Marcan ‘Sandwich’

- A. Mark likes to ‘sandwich stories’
  - 1. 3:20-34 - Jesus’ family; prince of demons; family
  - 2. 5:21-43 - Jairus; woman with bleeding; daughter
  - 3. This alerts us to read them together
- B. Jesus sends the disciples out to preach & confront evil  
They went out and preached that people should repent.  
<sup>13</sup> They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them... <sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Mark 6:12–13, 30
  - 1. He sends the disciples out to preach, drive out evil spirits, and heal the sick - just like He had been doing
  - 2. They go out and preach repentance

- 3. Verse 30 immediately follows v13 in time
- 4. But Mark ‘sandwiches’ in the story of Herod & John
  - a. Herod had imprisoned John back in Mark 1:14 - before Jesus began His public ministry!
  - b. Herod is now hearing about Jesus  
King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” Mk 6:14
  - c. Mark explains different answers to “Who is this?”  
King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”  
<sup>15</sup>Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.” <sup>16</sup> But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!” Mark 6:14–16
  - d. But the real lesson is the fate of John
    - 1. John’s fate prefigures what will happen to Jesus
    - 2. John’s fate is a picture of what happens to those who go forth and preach repentance in this sin-soaked world!

## III. A Disturbing Story

- A. The Herodians: A Twisted Family Tree  
For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. <sup>18</sup> For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” Mark 6:17–18
  - 1. There are four different Herod’s in the NT!

2. Herod the Great (Matthew 2) had 10 wives - and named all of his sons Herod!
3. This Herod is Herod Antipas, son of the 4<sup>th</sup> wife Malthace (and not really a King - irony!).
4. Herodias was the daughter of another of Herod's sons and was married to another of Herod Antipas' brothers (Herod Philip)
5. Herod Antipas met Herodias in Rome, fell in love with her, convinced her to divorce her uncle/ husband Herod Philip and marry him (her other uncle!)
6. Graphic of this twisted family tree! (JM Comer)
7. This is all against Jewish law - but very much in line with the sexual practices of leading Roman families and Kings of that time!
8. This was all being done to fulfill sexual lust and secure power - regardless of the morality, or how much it undermined the faith of Israel.

#### B. John, Herod, and Herodias

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. <sup>18</sup> For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup> So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, <sup>20</sup> because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. Mark 6:17-20

1. John preached repentance for Herod, Herodias

2. Herodias, like Jezebel, wants the prophet killed
3. The divided mind of Herod - fear, puzzlement, enjoyment, knows John is a righteous man  
In me there are two souls, alas, and their  
Division tears my life in two.  
One loves the world, it clutches her, it binds  
Itself to her, clinging with furious lust;  
The other longs to soar beyond the dust  
Into the realms of high ancestral minds.  
Goethe, Faust, Part 1, Lines 1112-1117
4. Herod is a warning of the danger of a divided mind and soul, having an attraction to truth and righteousness but being unwilling to repent of sin and embrace the Kingdom of God.

#### C. A sordid day of debauchery

Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. <sup>22</sup> When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." <sup>23</sup> And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." Mark 6:21-23

1. A birthday party - a pagan, not Jewish, celebration
2. These were drunken, debauched affairs
3. Herodias sends her own daughter in to do a hyper-sexualized dance for her uncle-stepdad
4. The girl - κορρασίω - same word as Jairus' 12-year-old daughter - this daughter is probably young
5. A drunken Herod lusts after his young niece-stepdaughter - just what Herodias expected!
6. Herod makes a proverbial offer to the girl

#### D. The shocking, repulsive outcome

She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist,” she answered.  
<sup>25</sup>At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” <sup>26</sup> The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup> So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, <sup>28</sup> and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. Mark 6:24–28

1. What do I ask for? The head of John the Baptist on a dinner plate!
2. Herod is trapped, and sacrifices John rather than losing face before his guests.
3. Herod had respected, feared, and been fascinated by John, but refused to repent and is now trapped in his own sin.
4. The righteous prophet had called for repentance from sexual and political sin, and it cost him his head. This is a sober reminder for all who point others to Jesus.

### IV. Applying the Word

#### A. Have I ‘pledged my head to heaven’?

1. This is a sobering, difficult text!
2. This is a protection against triumphalism - the whole country/world will turn to Jesus and we will rule!
3. It is also a reminder that there was never a ‘golden age’ when we did not need to call people to repentance - and when that might cost me my head!

4. The sins may change, but we are always called to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, calling people to repent and turn to Christ!
5. There are Christians today who are literally giving their lives for Christ - thank God that is not happening for us! But there is still great pressure for us to compromise and conform, and it will cost if we do not.
6. Two areas where I must ‘pledge my head to heaven’
  - a. Calling for repentance for sexual sin
    1. John specifically confronted Herod and Herodias for sexual sin - and it cost him his head!
    2. The Herodians violated biblical sexual morality in many ways - fornication, polygamy, divorce, incest
    3. There is no way John could avoid this issue - others would bring it up if he did not!
    4. Our age is forcing this upon Christians as well - the sexual revolution, LGBTQ+ revolution, and general sexual depravity.
    5. There is massive pressure for believers to compromise in this area - but Jesus warned the church in Thyatira (revelation 2:18-25) that their compromise with sexual sin would cause their lampstand to be removed!
    6. He specifically stated it would cause the death of her children if she did not stop compromising!
    7. We simply can not compromise, for the Bible is CRYSTAL CLEAR from Genesis to Revelation on this point!
    8. Standing for the truth in this area might cost me my reputation, promotions at work, or my job.
    9. Standing for truth in this area might bring difficulties for my family - from within and without.
    10. Have I pledged my head to heaven regarding standing by the biblical truth regarding human sexuality?

b. Standing for the truth before political power

1. John confronted Herod and Herodias the rulers - and it cost him his head!
2. Politicians, those in power, and our culture demand full loyalty - and do not want us to agree on one area and call for repentance in another area!
3. There is no way for a believer to do this - we must stand for the truth - even if it requires us calling for someone we support to repent!
4. We can not give out “mulligans” when “our guy” sins - we must be like Nathan or John the Baptist!
5. Standing for the truth in this area might cost me friendships, access to political power, and simple solutions.
6. In our hyper-politicized and partisan culture that is becoming increasingly difficult!
7. Have I pledged my head to heaven regarding standing by ALL biblical truth - even when that makes me critique both sides and have BOTH sides angry with me?

7. Friends, remember the reward promises to all who follow Christ! John the Baptist was hated by Herodias but loved by Jesus; he was forsaken by Herod but embraced by Jesus; he was beheaded by Herod but Jesus will place the victor’s crown on his head in the resurrection!

B. Our Covenant Table

1. This can be very challenging!
2. Remember that Christ suffered and died for us
3. Remember that He will return, we will be raised, and all will be set right

## Pledge Your Head To Heaven

Mark 6:7-30  
June 18, 2023  
Communion  
1 Peter 5:8-10

Teaching keywords: Evangelism and missions; persecuted church; prophets; suffering

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. <sup>10</sup> And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Peter 5:8–10