

Death of John the Baptist
Mark 6:14-29
April 14, 2013

Introduction

We are turning to Mark 6:14-29. This is the only account in Mark that does not feature Jesus Christ. This time Mark shines his focus on John the Baptizer, the forerunner of the Lord. It is a tragic story—one that mirrors Israel's history and future. It is tragic because Israel was given a unique privilege of being God's chosen people and recipients of His revelation, but they rejected His message and messengers. God sent them prophets to rebuke them, and time after time, they killed His prophets because they did not like the message. This is the ultimate tragedy—they killed the Baptizer who is the last of the prophets and then they killed Jesus who is the Prophet of prophets.

Matthew 21:33-39 *Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

God has sent prophets and messengers to the people, and they responded by killing them. They ultimately kill His Son whom He has sent. Jesus had pronounced woes to the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and for their participation of murdering Jesus.

Matthew 23:29-38

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

The Jews were aware of that their ancestors had killed the prophets, so they say that they would not have done it if they were there.

³¹*So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.*
³²*Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!*

However, Jesus says that they are complicit to what their forefathers did because they will do to Jesus Christ and His messengers as they did to the prophets of old.

³³*You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berehiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.*

For all the men murdered because they bear God's message, they will be guilty of shedding them all. This is a horrific and tragic indictment against Israel. The rejection of John the Baptizer is the picture of the rejection of Christ Jesus whom God has sent on earth as Savior.

Mark 6:14-29 *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." ¹⁵Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" ¹⁷For*

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. ¹⁸For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰because 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. ²¹Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²²When 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." ²³And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵At 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." ²⁶The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

I. Herod's Fear (14-20)

¹⁴King 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." ¹⁵Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

- King Herod heard about this
 - What is "this"?
 - Jesus' sending out the Twelve to do intern work
 - His fame has now caught Herod's attention
 - Herod is in Tiberius—city on the eastern shore of Galilee
 - No mention of Jesus ever doing ministry there
 - No religious Jews lived there because it was built over cemetery
- Jesus' name had become well-known
- John the Baptist has been raised from the dead
 - This is Herod's fear—because he had killed John the Baptist
 - He was afraid that John the Baptist had come back to life and will come back to him
- Elijah
 - Because of the explosion of miracles done by the Twelve, people thought that Elijah had come
 - Malachi (4:5) states that Elijah will come and herald the Messiah
 - John the Baptist is an Elijah type!
- King Herod

Luke 3:1 *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—*

 - Herod was a tetrarch—ruler of 1/4th of a region
 - Herod Antipas—son of Herod the Great
 - Herod the Great
 - Edomite
 - Started the temple project
 - Had 10 wives and numerous sons
 - Murderous—responsible for ordering massacre of 2 year old baby boys in Bethlehem after Jesus was born
 - When he died—his kingdom was divided among four rulers (when angel told Joseph to go back to Israel because Herod has died—this is Herod the Great)

¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

- John's arrest
 - When was he arrested?
 - Very early in Jesus' ministry—after His temptation

Matthew 4:12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

- He was arrested in Aenon (near Jerusalem)

John 3:23-24 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. ²⁴(This was before John was put in prison.)

- Why was he arrested?
 - Because he spoke against Herod's marriage to Herodias
 - Note: Herodias is still considered Philip's wife
 - Herodias is Philip and Herod's niece (granddaughter of Herod the Great)
 - Philip (not to be confused with Philip of Iturea) lived in Rome
 - Herod and Herodias married each other (unlawfully—and incestuous)
 - John had been saying
 - Publically and continually
 - And personally to Herod
 - Bold judgment preaching

¹⁹So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰because 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.

- Herodias wanted John the Baptist dead—very ambitious woman and vengeful
- Herodias could not have John killed—why?
 - Herod was afraid of him—superstitious that if he had killed John the Baptist then God would be on to him
 - Not only was he afraid of John—he was puzzled by his message
 - Did not understand the message of repentance and sin
 - He actually enjoyed listening to John the Baptist preach

II. Herod's Foolishness

²¹Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²²When 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." ²³And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

- Herod throws a birthday party
 - Jews did not celebrate birthdays—considered it pagan
 - Romans loved birthday celebration—excuse to get drunk, eat much, and sin much
 - Herod gives the party to many high ranking men—Jews including

Note: John was beheaded at Macherus according to Josephus, the Jewish historian. This location is east of the Dead Sea. There were Jews in attendance.

- Daughter dances
 - Shameful and suggestive dance—no regard for her purity

- Herod's foolish oath
 - Herod enjoyed her dancing so much that he bragged to her in front of his guests
 - Herod could not have given her half of his kingdom since it was not his to give—only Rome could have given such promises—foolish bragging

²²When 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." ²³And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵At 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." ²⁶The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

- Herodias gets her wish—she now can have John the Baptist killed
- Head on platter—wow what nice folks these people are
- Herod had to follow through with his oath because he did not want to appear weak in front of his guests

Matthew 14:12-13 *John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.*

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

- Jesus hears about it and is now presented with the reality that His death is near
- The details are striking between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ
- The Jews did not kill John the Baptist—Herod did, but they stood by and did nothing and probably encourage Herod to do so
- The Jews did not kill Jesus—the Romans did, but they agreed to His death and asked for Him to die
- Herod tried to kill Jesus later on, but he couldn't

Luke 13:31-32 *At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to Him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill You." ³²He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach My goal.'*

- Herod finally meets with the King of kings, but rejects Him

Luke 23:6-12 *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. ⁷And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. ⁹Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. ¹⁰And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. ¹¹Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹²That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.*

Conclusion

It's a horrible tragedy when such privilege is given and privilege is spurned. They went on to chase the prophets and the preachers of the gospel until eleven of the twelve Apostles were martyred. And the persecution even went on after that. The rejection of the true gospel is so tragic.

You say, "I would never do that." You might want to join the speech of those in **Matthew 23** who say, "We're not like those people, we would never do that. We would never do that."

Look, if you reject Jesus Christ, you stand with the executioners. You either embrace Him as Lord and Savior, or you reject Him. If you reject Him, you put Him to shame by that rejection. You stand in agreement with the rejecters and the crucifiers.

But Jesus welcomes your repentance, and welcomes you into His Kingdom if you turn from your sin of rejecting Him, confess your sin, acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior and receive His forgiveness. You go from death to life, from darkness to light, from blindness to sight, from hell to heaven, from tragedy to bliss, this is the gospel. They put Him on a cross in rejection but in that very act of dying on the cross, He paid the penalty for all the sins of all who would ever believe. And if you believe, then you're part of that all. The point of application here is make sure you are on the right side of how Jesus can be treated, rejected, or received. To as many as receive Him, He gives the power to become sons of God. What a promise.