

A Tragic Death

Mark 6: 14-29

Our text today deals with the horrific and tragic death of John the Baptist. Mark discussed the character of John and the tragic reason for his untimely death. The text actually deals with John's death in retrospect, sometime after it had happened.

John's untimely death is not the only tragedy revealed in the text. In fact, several commentaries present the fact that John's wasn't the only death that day – Herod's conscience also died that day. Herod was confronted with an abundance of truth, and this appears to be the moment when his conscience was seared, never again being sensitive to the Spirit of God.

While this text reveals a tragic event in time, it also reveals valuable lessons for everyone today. We will discuss the devastating effects of sin and the tragedy of neglecting the Lord. I hope our hearts are fixed on the Lord, with a committed desire to serve Him. As we discuss the [lessons](#) in the text, I want to consider: [A Tragic Death](#).

I. The Incarceration of John (17-20) – These verses deal with the arrest and imprisonment of John. Though them we discover:

A. The Reason (17-18) – [For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.](#) ^[18] [For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.](#) While we don't have a lot of detail about John's life and ministry, we do have enough to know he was very bold in his preaching and committed to the ways of God. Herod had taken his brother's wife and married her. According to historical accounts, Herod and his wife had visited Philip and Herodias in Rome. While there an adulterous relationship began, leading to Herod and Herodias leaving their spouses for each other. Being the man he was, John challenged Herod regarding his adultery, proclaiming it was unlawful for him to have Herodias. This angered Herod and he cast John in prison.

- Unfortunately this attitude and resentment toward biblical preaching has remained since Jesus' time. He was accused, arrested, and crucified because of His preaching and proclamation of His deity. Paul was imprisoned and beheaded for preaching the Gospel. The world resents biblical preaching because it confronts sin, revealing our depravity and need for salvation.

B. The Restraint (19) – [Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not.](#) While Mark typically moves at a quicker pace than the other gospels, revealing less

detail, he does offer a bit more insight to John's tragic death. While Herod was not pleased with John's boldness and condemnation, he had not yet given the order to have him executed. Matthew and Luke reveal that he feared an uprising of the Jews due to the popularity of John among them. We will discover that although Herod was angry with John, he held an undeniable interest in him. It appears that although Herod refused to admit his sin, he knew John had spoken truth. Herodias wanted John dead, but at this moment he was secure in Herod's jail.

- We continue to see this attitude revealed today as well. Many are angered when biblical preaching addresses their particular sin, and yet they know they have heard truth. Outwardly they hate the message and the messenger, but deep within, their hearts are convicted by the truth they have heard.

C. The Respect (20) – *For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.* Mark revealed the true feelings Herod had toward John. He would never have allowed his feelings to be known publicly, but Herod had a great deal of respect for John. He knew John as a holy and just man. He had watched his life and knew John practiced what he preached. Herod listened attentively when John spoke, keenly interested in his words of truth. Herod would not admit it, but the truth John shared had brought conviction. While he refused to submit to the Lord's will, it is apparent that Herod was interested in the preaching of the wilderness preacher.

- Many are like Herod today in this regard. They would never admit it, but they know God's Word is true. Some even enjoy hearing the Word preached. Like Herod they are not yet ready to abandon their life of sin, but they are intrigued by the Word.

II. The Execution of John (21-29) – Mark also revealed the events surrounding the execution and untimely death of John. Notice:

A. The Celebration (21-22a) – *And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee;* ^[22] *And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him.* During a celebration held for Herod's birthday, Herodias hatched a devious plan to kill John the Baptist. In order to fully understand the depravity involved, we need to know a bit about the family of Herod. Herodias was actually the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobolus. So, Philip and Herod both were actually married to their niece. At his birthday celebration, Herodias sent her young daughter in to perform a sensual and suggestive dance to arouse the men gathered there, knowing this would please

Herod and those gathered with him. We will discover this was all done for a specific purpose, but it also reveals the utter lack of morality and decency expected within a family unit.

- Sin always deceives and produces fruit inconsistent with the Word of God. The family unit is under attack in America, and when the boundaries for marriage established by God are abandoned, society becomes agreeable to any marriage arrangement, whether it be people of the same gender, from the same family, or a number of other options and arrangements.

B. The Conspiracy (22b-25) – Knowing her daughter’s performance would please Herod, and anticipating the accompanying reward, Herodias already knew what she would have her daughter request. Herod promised to reward her with anything she desired, up to one-half of the kingdom. Surely not expecting such a request, the young woman requested the head of John to be brought to her upon a platter.

- Sin knows no limitations or boundaries. Nothing is assumed off limits to the desires and intents of a wicked heart. Much misery and suffering have come as a result of sin and its ungodly desires. John was innocent, but he was hated for his preaching. Herodias was determined to silence the voice of her accuser, even if it required a senseless murder.

C. The Command (26-29) – Herod regretted offering such and reward and was very sorrowful regarding her request, but he would not deny it in front of such a gathering. Knowing it was wrong, Herod commanded the execution of John to be carried out immediately and his head be brought on a platter and delivered to the damsel.

- Pride and arrogance have caused much devastation. Many agree to actions that are wrong simply because they refuse to admit their own need. Bitterness and hatred, left alone will grow and fester until they lose all compassion for others. Herodias prompted such a senseless murder because of hatred and pride hindered Herod from preventing such a tragedy.

III. The Affliction of Herod (14-16) – I skipped over the opening verses intentionally. I wanted to deal with them last as we consider the devastating effect all of this had on Herod and the remainder of his life. Notice:

A. His Assumption (14) – *And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.* This verse is speaking of the fame and popularity of Jesus as this time. When Herod heard of

Jesus, he immediately assumed John the Baptist had come back from the dead and was performing great miracles among the people. This reveals that although time had passed since the execution, Herod was still haunted by the injustice he had caused.

- Sin provides pleasure for a season, but it always ends in destruction. Many today refuse to heed the Word of God and yet their lives are lived in turmoil through conviction of sin. In the silent moments of life the Spirit of God speaks to their hearts. They ponder the truth they have heard and the reality of eternity. They may never admit it, but they wonder about death, salvation, eternity, heaven, and hell.

B. His Affirmation (15-16) – Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. ^[16] But when Herod heard *thereof*, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. Some of the Jews thought Jesus must have been Elijah or one of the prophets of old come back from the dead, but Herod would never be convinced that He wasn't John the Baptist. Herod believed the man he had executed had risen from the dead and apparently had returned to torment him.

- For me this is quite tragic. Although Herod refused the message of John and the truths of the Gospel, through his own admission he believed in the resurrection of the dead. He believed in a foundational truth of the Gospel and yet refused to see Jesus as the Christ, Savior of humanity. Many today continue this path of confusion and deception. They believe there in existence beyond the grave and yet they refuse the only means of eternal life. They know their sin is wrong, and even feel guilty about it, but refuse to repent and seek the Lord for salvation. No doubt this state of confusion and denial will continue as long as men live upon this earth.

C. His Rejection – This is all we have in this passage concerning Herod, but he is mentioned again in [Luke 23:6-11](#). Following the Lord's arrest and condemnation by the Sanhedrin, He was taken before Pilate to be examined. Pilate, not desiring to make a ruling in the case, sent Jesus to stand before Herod, hoping he would decide Jesus' fate. As Jesus came before Herod that faithful day, Herod made no mention of faith or belief in Christ. He only desired to see some miracle performed. Herod was interested in entertainment, not salvation. As far as we know, Herod died lost in his sin. A man who had witnessed the truth, chose to reject it in order to satisfy the flesh.

- Did you see the progression of Herod's conscience? While John was alive, he respected John and desired to hear him preach. At that moment the Spirit was clearly dealing with his heart. Upon hearing of Jesus, Herod assumed He must have been John resurrected from the dead. Again he was confronted with truth, but made a conscious decision to reject it. Each time he rejected truth, his heart was hardened more toward the Gospel. By the time Jesus stood before

him, just prior to the crucifixion, his heart had become completely hard. His conscience had been seared, and I believe he had been turned over to a reprobate mind, unable to see the things of God or the way of salvation.

Conclusion: This is a tragic and sobering passage of Scripture. The life of an innocent man ended tragically due to hatred, bitterness, and pride. The heart of a convicted man died within him long before he took his last breath. That heart of stone sealed his eternal destiny. No doubt Herod would love to hear John preach one more time and call on him to repent, but that opportunity will never come. He rejected truth and now he is dealing with the eternal consequences.

We too must respond to the truth we have received. I am thankful the Gospel was presented to me and by faith I responded unto salvation. As believers, are we concerned with those like Herod who have heard and yet have not responded? Have you responded to the Gospel? If not, don't put it off. It is tragic to develop a hard heart and become insensitive to the leading of the Spirit.