

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

Date: November 2, 2008

Title: The Slaying of John the Baptist

Text: Mark 6:14-29 (Gospel Parallels -Matt. 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9)

Theme: “The gospel confirms the godly and vexes the wicked.” (*The Geneva Bible*)

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Introduction:

In reading Mark's account you have to put all of the various pieces together. Many accepted Jesus as the Messiah and were spiritually regenerated. Others, like the religious and political leaders, rejected Him and were openly hostile toward Him. The narrative tells us that the city of Nazareth rejected Him. On the heels of this, He sent out the twelve. Much good was done. While they went, John the Baptist was slain. The context for victory was one of open spiritual warfare. Even while they fought for solitude and rest there was constant demand and stress. All of these elements must be considered in order to put the proper "wear and tear" on the moment.

Our story picks up the idea present in Mark 1:14.

¹⁴ Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14, 15)

While John is in prison we have the narrative of Matthew 11:1-15. It is interesting the question John asks of Jesus. The answer Jesus gives John is, "Listen to what I am saying and look at what I am doing." Both verify my status as Messiah.

¹ When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. ² Now when John, **while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples** ³ **and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"** ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. ⁶ "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." (Matt. 11:1-6)

⁷ As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! ⁹ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ "**This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'** ¹¹ "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. ¹³ "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ "And if you are willing to accept it, **John himself is Elijah who was to come.** ¹⁵ "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:7-15)

What Jesus provided for John in His answer is, “Yes, I am the Expected One.” Again, Jesus clearly identifies John as Elijah the forerunner to the Messiah.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Putting the pieces together, we see Jesus with authority over demons (5:1-20), DEATH (5:21-24, 35-43), and disease (5:25-34). Now in chapter six, Mark gives us a panoramic view of a variety of events.

- The Sin of Unbelief (vv 1-6)
- The Sending of the Twelve (vv. 7-13, 30-32)
- **The Slaying of John the Baptist (vv. 14-29)**
- The Supplying of food for the 5000 (vv. 33-45 [cf 8:1-9])
- The Storm on the Sea of Galilee (vv 46-52)
- The Summarizing of His Ministry (vv 53-56)

Its Eternal Value:

The Problem:

The Storyline:

This story keeps us on task. John the Baptist is the forerunner to Jesus the Messiah. They have killed the forerunner and they will kill the Messiah. As positive and encouraging as are the reports the disciples bring back, there is still a dark overtone to all of it. Something more is going to happen.

Questions:

1. According to verse 14, does it appear our Lord was popular and well known?
2. Who was Jesus associated with?
3. Who is being referenced in verse 15, Jesus or John?
4. What does verse 16 tell us about Herod?
5. What problem did John point out concerning Herod?
6. How strong was Herodias’ grudge against John?
7. Why was Herod afraid of John?
8. What does verse 20 tell us about Herod?
9. What does verse 21 suggest about the plotting of Herodias?
10. What does verse 24 tell us about Herodias’ daughters’ intent in her dancing?
11. What do you think Herodias’ reaction was in receiving John’s head?
12. Notice the honor paid John by his disciples. What does this tell you about John?
What does this tell you about his disciples?
13. Why is this story in Mark’s narrative?
14. What relationship does it have to the sending of the twelve?
15. What is the BIG IDEA behind this story?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that suffering is a part of God’s kingdom work.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose the path of suffering rather than that of moral compromise and conscience defilement.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in the purpose of God rather than the pleasure of men.

Outline:

I. The Popularity of Jesus (vv. 14-16)

²⁸ Immediately the **news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.** ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, **to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city,** but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere. (Mark 1:28, 45)

Notice the similar response given in Matthew 16:14.

II. The Reputation of John (vv. 14-18, 20)

John fulfills the role of forerunner to the Messiah. The Jews lived in anticipation of the forerunners appearance. With his arrival came the imminent coming of the King. It is impossible for us to fully capture the air of expectancy that engulfed the religious Jew.

A. His character

John is the Elijah of old. He is the forerunner to the Messiah's coming. He is the fulfillment of the promise.

⁴ "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "Behold, **I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.** ⁶ "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:4-6)

"The Jews waited for the Messiah. It was an essential part of that belief that, before the coming of the Messiah, Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, would come again to be his herald and his forerunner. Even to this day, when the Jews celebrate the Passover Feast, they leave at the table an empty chair called Elijah's chair. They place it there with a glass of wine before it, and at one part of their service they go to the door and fling it wide open that Elijah may come in and bring at last the long-awaited news that the Messiah has come." (William Barclay, *Mark*, 147).

Jesus openly identifies John as Elijah in Matthew 11:14.

¹⁴ "And if you are willing to accept it, **John himself is Elijah who was to come.**

On the Mount of Transfiguration in Mark 9, Elijah with Moses appears to Peter, James and John.

⁴ **Elijah appeared to them along with Moses**; and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and **one for Elijah**." ⁶ For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" ⁸ All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. ⁹ As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. ¹⁰ They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. ¹¹ They asked Him, saying, "**Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?**" ¹² And He said to them, "**Elijah does first come and restore all things**. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ "But I say to you that **Elijah has indeed come**, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him." (Mark 9:4-13)

Jesus clearly identified John as His forerunner. Those who received John would receive Jesus. Those who rejected John would reject Jesus. In modern Judaism, Elijah's chair is also referenced to the rite of circumcision.

B. His courage

"He was imprisoned for challenging the degenerate moral behavior of the royal family." (Eusebius, "Ecclesiastical History, 1:11 in *ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Mark, 79*).

Like Nathan of old, John was called by God to challenge the degenerate behavior of national leaders. "He was a child of the desert and of the wide open spaces, and to imprison him in the dark dungeons of Machaerus must have been the last refinement of torture. But John preferred death to falsehood. He lived for the truth and he died for it." (William Barclay, *Mark, 154*).

III. The Conflict within Herod (vv. 16-18, 20, 26)

It is interesting to see the relationship between Jesus and Herod as recorded for us by Luke. Notice the progression of thoughts in Luke's account.

⁷ Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and **he was greatly perplexed**, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, ⁸ and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. ⁹ Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" **And he kept trying to see Him**. (Luke 9:7-9)

(This statement is unique to Luke)

³¹ Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for **Herod wants to kill You.**" ³² And He said to them, "**Go and tell that fox,** 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.' ³³ "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. (Luke 13:31-33)

(This statement is unique to Luke)

⁷ And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ **Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.** ⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. ¹⁰ And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹² **Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.** (Luke 23:7-12).

Jesus knew Herod was a fox. This was not a term of endearment.

"This epithet for the cunning and cowardice of Herod shows clearly that Jesus understood the real attitude and character of the man who had put John the Baptist to death and evidently wanted to get Jesus into his power in spite of his superstitious fears that he might be John the Baptist [come back to life]." (A.T. Robertson's *New Testament Word Pictures*)

For several years Herod was desirous of seeing and hearing Jesus. His motive was one of curiosity. It was not his intent to come to Jesus for redemption.

A. Herod had a guilty conscience (v. 16)

Herod knew he was wrong in the death of John. "His fears got the best of him and so Herod settled down on this nightmare. He could still see that charger containing John's head coming towards him in his dreams. Herod had ordered it done and recognizes his guilt." (A.T. Robertson's *New Testament Word Pictures*)

"Whenever a man does an evil thing, the whole world becomes his enemy. When Herod heard of Jesus, the first thing that flashed into his mind was that this was John the Baptizer whom he had killed, come back to reckon with him. Because the sinning life is the haunted life, sin is never worth the cost." (William Barclay, *Mark*, 146, 147).

B. Herod had a soiled conscience (vv. 17, 18)

Herod knew he was wrong in taking his brother's wife Herodias. Herodias was both his niece and his sister-in-law.

“Seldom in history can there have been such a series of matrimonial entanglements as existed in the Herod family. By marrying Herodias, his brother’s wife, Herod had broken the Jewish law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21) and had outraged the laws of decency and or morality.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 150).

The Law is clear, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, **she is your aunt**. You shall not uncover the nakedness of **your brother's wife**; it is your brother's nakedness” (Lev. 18:14, 16).

Herod was wrong on multiple accounts.

C. Herod had a perplexed conscience (v. 20 [Luke 9:7])

The New American Standard correctly translates the idea and not the King James Translation. Luke 9:9 says that Herod “tried to see Him.”

Luke 9:7 uses the phrase, “He was much perplexed.” It is an imperfect suggesting an ongoing problem. The word “perplexed” means, “To be thoroughly at a loss, unable to find a way out,” only in Luke's writings in the N.T.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

Herod pictures for us the “heart” in Mark 4:16, 17.

¹⁶ “In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, **when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy**; ¹⁷ and they have no firm root in themselves, **but are only temporary**; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, **immediately they fall away**” (Mark 4:16, 17).

D. Herod had a grieved conscience (v. 26)

“He was caught once again between his conscience and his environment. Like many since his day the environment stifled his conscience.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

The word “very sorry” is used only five times in the New Testament. It is used of our Lord’s emotional suffering in the Garden before the cross (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34). And it is also used of the rich young ruler’s response to our Lord’s invitation (Luke 18:23, 24). It speaks of an internal turmoil.

“He was caught once again between his conscience and his environment. Like many since his day the environment stifled his conscience.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

“Many a man has done things he afterwards bitterly regretted because he had not the moral courage to do the right. Many a man has made himself far worse than he is because he feared the laughter of his so-called friends.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 153).

IV. The Venom of Herodias (vv. 19-25, 27, 28)

“A banquet of death is set out with royal luxury.” (Ambrose, “Concerning Virgins,” 3.6.27 in *ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Mark*, 80). Herodias was an embittered woman and a political whore. She did what she wished and rejected responsibility. She would be held accountable by no one. Thus she sought to silence John. Yet, as Thomas Kelly notes, “The hound of heaven will relentlessly pursue its prey.” She will silence the tongue of John, but not the voice of God.

A. A mother’s insanity

She “literally, **had it in for him**. This is modern slang, but is in exact accord with this piece of vernacular Koiné.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*) She appears to be the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament Jezebel. She is a woman of wickedness.

“‘A day well appointed’ for the purpose, the day for which she had long waited. She had her plans all laid to spring a trap for her husband Herod Antipas and to make him do her will with the Baptist.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

B. A daughter’s immodesty

“What could she have learned from an adulteress but the loss of modesty?” (Ambrose, “Concerning Virgins,” 3.6.27 in *ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Mark*, 80).

“It was toward the close of the banquet, when all had partaken freely of the wine, that Herodias made her daughter come in and dance in the midst (Matthew). ‘Such dancing was an almost unprecedented thing for women of rank, or even respectability. It was mimetic and licentious, and performed by professional [prostitutes]’ (Gould). Herodias stooped thus low to degrade her own daughter like a common [prostitute] in order to carry out her set purpose against John. The [slushy groups] lounging on the [sofas] were thrilled by the licentious dance of the half-naked princess.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

“The fact that she went and spoke to her mother proves that she had not been told beforehand what to ask. The girl’s question implies by the middle voice that she is thinking of something for herself. She was no doubt unprepared for her mother’s ghastly reply.” (A.T. Robertson’s *New Testament Word Pictures*)

V. The Wretchedness of Herod (vv. 22, 23)

“A girl dances, a mother rages, there is rash swearing in the midst of the luxurious feast, and an impious fulfillment of what was sworn.” (Augustine, “Harmony of the Gospels,” 2.33 in *ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Mark*, 80).

The speech of Herod is hyperbole. The same language is used by King Xerxes to his queen Esther in Esther 5:3 (cf. Esther 7:2).

Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you, Queen Esther? **And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you.**" (Esther 5:3).

Because Herod has a divided conscience, he was wretched in soul. **Herod is more to be pitied than despised.** He was a slave to his fleshly appetites and ravenous vanity. Can you not see the darkness and rage in his eyes that furrowed his brow and tormented his soul?

"By our own words we may needlessly place ourselves under grievous moral necessity, so that Satan snares us through our own words freely spoken. Such tragic misjudgments continue to plague those who become captive to their own appetites." (Chrysostom).

Herod's own conceit and pride kept him from doing what was right. He broke the proverb and failed to correct his problem. His sin cost John his life.

² If you have been snared with the words of your mouth, Have been caught with the words of your mouth, ³Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor. (Prov. 6:2, 3)

"He cut off the head, but he did not cut off the voice. He curbed the tongue, but he did not curb the accusation." (Chrysostom, "Baptismal Instructions," 10.26-27 in *ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Mark*, 80).

VI. The Burial of John (v. 29)

¹²His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went **and reported to Jesus.** ¹³**Now when Jesus heard about John,** He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. (Matt. 14:12, 13).

"In Latin, speculator, from specular, to look about, spy, properly denotes a sentinel; and as these sentinels kept guard at the palaces of kings, and the residences of Roman governors, so they were employed in other offices besides guarding, and usually performed that of executioners. As, however, we learn from Josephus, that Herod was at this very time engaged in war with Aretas, king of Arabia, in consequence of Herod's having divorced his daughter in order to marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and as this event occurred at an entertainment given at the castle of Machaerus, while his army was on its march against his father-in-law; we are furnished with an additional reason why a speculator, or sentinel, should have been employed as an executioner; and

are thus enabled to discover such a latent and undesigned coincidence as clearly evinces the truth of the evangelical narrative." (*The Treasury of Scripture*, Mark 6:27)

John's death was honorable.

Shepherding the Sheep (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. For what have you suffered?
2. Do you see how the purpose of God in the redemption of mankind includes hardship and difficulty?
3. Let us pray for continued resolve in our pursuit of God's redemptive purpose for the world.