



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full
Mark 6:14-29
November 3, 2019

Knowing that we are all missionaries—that every Christian is sent out by the power and authority of Christ to her or his own communities, so as to reveal the kingdom of God at work in the world—we are ready to go, no?!? Lightly packed; sandals strapped; staff in hand: we are eager to proclaim his peace throughout our society!

“Well, wait a minute,” Mark seems to say through this week’s flashback account of John the Baptist’s death. “Have you fully considered the costs?”

Into this week’s text we enter, then, encouraging you to begin by reflecting on the question: *How has your following Jesus cost you on your journey of discipleship?*

14 *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.” 15 But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”*

17 *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. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 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.*



21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 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." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 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." 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. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison 28 and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Mark 6:14-29

Notes:

Commentary Notes:

vv. 14-16. With the sending out of the twelve apostles, and their work of healing and anointing by Christ's authority, comes (as we have seen throughout Mark) an inability to fully comprehend the true identity and miraculous power of Jesus. It is this confusion and speculation of the people that gives rise to the flashback account of John's death.

The King Herod of these verses is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, and tetrarch ("ruler of the fourth part") of Galilee and Perea. Note that he was *not* actually a king, and it was his thirst for that title that led to his downfall. Mark thus seems to be using the title of "king" quite ironically.

Discussion Questions:

Discuss: If Mark is using the term "king" ironically (see commentary note), consider: What does modern Western society look for in a political leader? What do we believe a king/president should be?

Study: Read 2 Kings 2:1-12 to understand the Elijah assumption.

vv. 17-18. Mosaic law prohibited a man from marrying the wife of his brother, except in the case of Levirate marriage (Dt 25:5-10). The Jewish historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, makes clear that Herod marrying to Herodias, in having to first divorce the daughter of King Aretas, eventually led to war; John's preaching thus was quite politically relevant (see Strauss's *Expositor's Commentary*).

vv. 19-20. Mark makes clear the contrast between Herodias bearing ill will to John the Baptist, seething over the prophetic word, and Herod Antipas's glad hearing of the word of rebuke and instruction.

vv. 21-23. With a birthday banquet, Herodias finally gets the opportunity to manifest her grudge.

Of note here: Mark's readers would very likely have heard these verses in an ironic sense, knowing that Herod was not a true king, and that he ruled only under the auspices of Rome; the kingdom, then, was not his to give away!

Discuss: What do you think Herod is feeling, hearing of Jesus—having put away one prophet only to have another of greater power arise?

Study: Read Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21. What is the context of these verses? What is the overall ethic? Read 18:1-5, 20:22-26 to get an overall sense.

Reflect: Chrysostom, the 4th century Bishop of Constantinople, writes in his *Homilies on the Statues*: "John saw a man that was a tyrant overthrowing the divine commands on marriage...We learn from John to admonish our fellow servant as an equal." Reflect: Do you have discipling relationships that are substantial enough to allow sisters/brothers in Christ to speak truth to you? If not, consider joining a CG.

Discuss: Why do you suppose that Herod heard gladly John and his rebuking word?

Confess: Ask the Spirit: are you, akin to Herodias, harboring any personal grudges? How might you pursue healing and restored relationships?

Confess: What are the vices that lead Herod and Herodias down the destructive path that leads to murdering John the Baptist? Now turn the passage inward on yourself: have you been guilty of similar sins? Share if you feel comfortable, confessing and receiving afresh his forgiveness.

vv. 24-25. The pace of the narration quickens as Mark provides just the story's action. Note that Mark does not indicate any surprise from the daughter upon the mother's grisly request. In fact, the request of Herodias is only strengthened: the daughter adds that she wants John's head "right now" and "on a platter." This apple does not fall far from the tree.

v. 26. Herod's sympathies for John as a righteous man meet their limit in his concern for his oaths and guests. We see a weak and vacillating ruler concerned more about his own honour than about human life.

vv. 27-29. The desire of a murderous, scorned wife is swiftly carried out by the king's command. What began as a birthday banquet has become a macabre banquet of death, with the only platter mentioned served being that of John's head. So it is that the John with whom the gospel of Mark began meets his end. And yet, as John receives the honour of a proper burial, the memories of John are far from dead.

This, then, is the meal of the kingdoms of the world, in sharp contrast to the meal of God's kingdom that is the feeding of the 5,000, in the next text.

Reflect: This story is a clear example of the importance of keeping the right company. Without absolving Herod of any of the blame of the story, one wonders: Had Herod not been surrounded by the likes of Herodias and her daughter, would the story have had a different end? In this respect, what are those discipling relationships encouraging you to grow in "righteousness and holiness"? If you lack such good company in your life, what is the Spirit calling you to do to remedy the situation?

Discuss: Herod certainly provides a study by contrast. Considering this passage as a whole, how do we see the identity and character of Herod contrasting with that of Jesus? How is Mark providing a study of leadership and authority?

Discuss: Knowing what you know about Jesus' passion (about the final week of Jesus' life), how do the events reported here around the death of John the Baptist prefigure those of the death of our Lord?

Discuss: Why do you suppose that Mark placed this account of the death of John sandwiched between the sending of the 12 (6:7-13) and their subsequent return (6:30)? At what might Mark be hinting?

Pray: In an oversimplified sense, this narrative, through the eyes of John the Baptist, is one of "bad things happening to good people." Pray that we, as the family of FBC, would be sufficiently humble, grace-filled, and courageous so as to minister to those who feel like they fall in this category.