

### Jason Upchurch - Mark 6:19-29 - The Good News Is Worth Dying For - Part 3

I've titled this sermon The Good News is Worth Dying For because we need to be reminded from time to time that faithfulness to Jesus might cost you your life, like his faithfulness cost him his.

By God's grace we live in a time and place where not many people have to fear for their lives because they follow Jesus. There are some places in the world where when you become a Christian you become a target. In many middle eastern countries the moment you get baptized you're considered a traitor to Islam and a marked person because that's when you put on the jersey, so to speak, of King Jesus.

But we need to be reminded that when Christ calls us into his Kingdom we are not promised a better fate than he himself faced.

Paul says that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God. He said that right after he had just been stoned by a crowd of people for preaching the gospel.

Jesus says if anyone loves his own life more than me he is not worthy of me.

Christianity isn't just a nice little feature we add to our lives that has no real world implications. No when we turn to serve the living God it causes the world to push back all the more.

And we see that here with Herod and John the Baptist, don't we?

We are continuing our look at this section in Mark's gospel that is really a very unique insight on many levels. It's really a side story of the thoughts of Herod as Jesus sends out the disciples to preach the gospel. It's his reaction to what is going on. And in the middle of the side story there's also the back story of the death of John the Baptist. The faithful forerunner of the faith.

Here we learn about the fate of John the Baptist. He is called the greatest of all the prophets, he is the faithful forerunner of Jesus the Messiah and he is ingloriously executed at a birthday party for Herod Antipas as the result of an elaborate scheme by wife that includes a sexually provocative dance. What a downfall.

But John isn't the center of this story, it's actually Herod Antipas. I won't regale you with all the background from last time, but this Herod is the son of Herod the Great.

And in the midst of this side story and back story we have an incredible look into the heart and mind of Herod, the unbeliever. We see things about his thought life and heart as an unbeliever that we only have rare glimpses into from the gospel. We started our look last time.

We saw that believers are way more religious than we give them credit for - we began this last time and I want to continue on it for this time.

And we saw 3 truths about unbelievers.

1) Unbelievers see what Christians do - Herod had his eye on Jesus and his followers. He knew about what was going on. Unbelievers do keep tabs on Christians individually and the church as a whole.

2) Unbelievers have faith in something - Herod had a very weird theology, many unbelievers have very weird theology. We don't need to shy away from telling them the truth because what they believe is probably stranger than what we believe.

3) Unbelief is often rooted in sin - Herod arrested John because he had illegally married his brother's wife and John was calling them to repentance. Unbelievers often refuse to come to faith because it means forsaking their sin.

We're going to continue that this morning. The next truth about unbelievers is:

4) Unbelievers are often in turmoil about the gospel. This is perhaps one of the strangest truths we see here about Herod. **Read 19-20**

Isn't this interesting? Herod Antipas is a very conflicted man. There's a lot of turmoil over his situation. He's married to his brother's wife. He knows that's a scandal. He's not ignorant or unaware. Even at that time that would have been quite the scandal. So what he's doing with his brother's wife is wrong, he knows it.

At the same time, his wife wants John dead. Literally, the original language says she had it in for him. She wanted him dead. She was tired of the judgment, tired of the preaching, tired of the conviction for her sin and she wanted him dead.

Don't ever underestimate the visceral reaction people have when you tell them the truth. She's case in point.

And the only earthly protection John had at this point was Herod himself. Herod was the wall between Herodias and John. She was unable to kill John because her new husband - her illegal husband - would not let her kill him.

Talk about confusion and tension in the household. Why doesn't he kill John? **Read 20**

This is amazing. King Herod feared John. He didn't fear the crowds, he didn't fear the repercussion of killing John. He feared John himself. Why? Because he was a righteous and holy man.

John's character and conduct, his purity and his holiness, were a threat to Herod. Herod had the authority to strike John down, to kill him. He wouldn't have had any political pushback from Rome. And even after he killed John there was no response. He had basically unlimited power over this crazy preacher from the wilderness. But he feared John because of John's righteous life.

Listen very carefully: as much as our lives and preaching can have a negative reaction, our obedience to Jesus can also be a powerful weapon in the world.

Whether you know it or not, whether you see it or not, people see you and they are often in turmoil about Jesus because of what the Spirit is doing inside of you.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne: "It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."

I would add that it's not just a holy minister, but a holy Christian. You know what kept Herod from killing John sooner? John was holy and righteous and so Herod kept him safe.

That's amazing. Even in their heart of hearts the unbelieving world knows you don't just go around killing holy people. Why would you do that? And it gets even more conflicted. **Read 20**

It seems as though Herod would go and have conversations with John. He would hear him, he would converse with him. And John's message stayed the same in private as well as in public: repent, it's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

And Herod is perplexed. That's an important word for us.

NIV has puzzled - I think that misses the idea a little bit. I like perplexed, he's struggling to put it all together.

On the one hand he heard him gladly. Herod knew the message was right. He knew it was true. He liked talking with John. John certainly didn't get to call the shots. It was Herod who initiated the conversations and he liked what he heard.

But at the same time Herod is stuck. What John says is good, but it's also convicting him of sin. He knows better than what he's doing. So he's perplexed, that's a rich word.

-**John 13:22** When Jesus tells the disciples there is a betrayer, they are perplexed.  
-Paul was perplexed in **Gal. 4:20** about the Galatians accepting false teaching.  
-The ladies who went to anoint Jesus's body Sunday morning but found 2 angels sitting there were perplexed.  
**(Luke 24:4)**

This kind of tension is what often happens in unbelievers when they hear the truth of the gospel and they know it's true but they can't bring themselves to accept it. They're in turmoil.

And let me encourage you: it's okay that they're in turmoil. They need to be in turmoil.

But listen, emotional turmoil doesn't mean someone is saved. We need to be careful not to wish people into heaven just because they're in turmoil. Emotional turmoil doesn't get anyone to heaven. Even hearing the gospel gladly doesn't get anyone to heaven.

We saw a few chapters ago in the parable of the 4 soils that one of the soils receives the Word of God with joy. That's the 2nd soil, the rocky soil. They love the word, they love hearing it and rejoice over it for a small season. They grow up and die when hard times come.

Initial responses to the gospel, or listening to the gospel gladly is not conversion. It's not salvation.

We know this with the parable and with Herod, but I think a lot of times we try to console ourselves with our friends or family. "Well, so and so knows the gospel and they seem like an alright person." That's not salvation. "Well, they don't reject Jesus." Well, do they proclaim him gladly and unashamedly as Lord no matter what comes?

Listen, someone who has been transformed by the gospel is someone who gladly proclaims Jesus. Who gladly confesses Jesus. They're not perplexed about Jesus. They're not on the fence about Jesus. They're not still working things out.

No, they proclaim him boldly and unashamedly as Lord. And, their life has been transformed as well. They have renounced their evil works and ways. Not just confessed them and languish in them. No they turn from them and view them as disgusting and exceedingly sinful.

There's nothing about Herod's life that indicates any kind of change. Oh sure, he's sorry when he has John's head chopped off. But he still does it, doesn't he?

But this is the behind the scenes of unbelievers. Unbelievers are often in turmoil.

#### 5) Unbelievers are ruled by their passions. **Read 21-23**

So this birthday party that Herod throws would have been very lavish and extravagant. He's invited the top brass of his administration as well as other people of note in the region. It's a who's who gala of opulence and decadence.

And usually at these kinds of events there was some kind of central entertainment to keep the guests pleased. It could be music, speakers, dancers, all kinds of different options.

Interestingly, Mark tells us that this birthday was a calculated plan of Herodias to kill John. **Read 21**

This is incredible. Do you see this? "An opportunity came." This was Herodias's chance. Everyone is gathered together, she knows how parties go and she knows that Herod is impulsive so she can set up a situation to trap her own husband in a way to get rid of John.

How does she know he's impulsive? Herod married **her** - his half-brother's wife. That's crazy. She knows he's weak, specifically with sexual immorality. So this is her chance. Everyone is there, so there's witnesses to any vows he might make. And so she sends her own daughter out to dance before the crowd.

This is craziness of the whole situation. His illegitimate wife, sends her own daughter - Herod's niece - out to perform what most people agree is some kind of lewd, erotic dance for the whole crowd including her uncle. And he is so provoked by his own step daughter/niece that he blurts out to her an oath to give her whatever she wants. And not just that, but he doubles down on it: up to half the kingdom.

You guys, this is lewd. This is disgusting. Herod is absolutely ruled by his own passions. This is not a matter of intelligent thought or careful consideration. This is pure emotion and passion and apparently it's so predictable in Herod, Herodias knew it would happen and uses her own daughter to set the trap.

Being ruled by passions is a common thing of unbelievers.

**Tit. 3:3:** For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, **slaves** to various passions and pleasures.

We were slaves to various passions. That's what ruled us and what rules many unbelievers. You ever get in a discussion with unbelievers about what they think or believe or why they do what they do and quickly you find they're just feeding their own passions.

**Look at 1 Pet. 4:2-3** for a minute. All throughout the Bible we're called to give up living by our passions. Stop being ruled by our emotions and base desires. **Read 1-6**

Do you see the huge contrast between the way we are to live and the way Gentiles are to live? As the people of God - the true Israel of God - our lives are to be radically different than the unbelieving Gentiles.

Sensuality: people are driven by their senses; feeling good all the time. Can't ever feel bad; so they spend money and time and effort all on them. Sensuality in the Bible also usually assumes some sort of sexual immorality that drives their hearts.

All of these things are what control the Gentiles - the unbelievers.

Christians aren't to be guided by emotions or passions or by whatever makes us feel happy. That's not the controlling factor of our lives. The controlling factor of our lives is the will of God. So much so that people should be shocked that we don't participate with them in these things.

And Peter gives us the reason we don't lose control like this: because we understand judgment is coming. **Read 5**

Listen the gospel has always been preached - even to Abraham in seed form - because judgment is coming. The good news of faith in God's promises has been preached to every generation in one way or another that people might repent from their sinful passions.

It's this same preaching that got John killed. Herod's whole life was passion and his whole party was passion. This is what unbelievers do. This is what we did before we were saved. Maybe not all of this, but much of it. We just followed one passion after another.

And what Christ has called us into is self-control, sober-mindedness, critical thinking, purity. Where we earnestly pursue the will of God with clear minds. **Turn to Mark 6.**

Unbelievers are in turmoil about the gospel / ruled by their passions.

6) Unbelievers are often given to extreme violence. **Read 24-28**  
Barbaric.

By the way, I hope you're connecting just how scheming and deceptive Herodias was in all of this. She waited for the opportunity. She enticed her daughter to dance for Herod. But the daughter didn't know why she was doing what she was doing. She was just a pawn in this whole thing. Once the oath is given, she goes and asks her mom what she should ask for and it's her mom that tells her to have John killed.

Game/set/match. Who's really ruling in Galilee and Perea? It doesn't seem to be Herod, it seems to be his conniving wife.

And things get violent very quickly. She asks very specifically for John's head on a platter right now. She wants blood right now. At the party? An execution at a birthday party? Absolutely. Herod gave the oath do it now before everyone leaves and he can wiggle out of it.

Side: the only other time a birthday is mentioned in the Bible is in **Gen 40** - it's Pharaoh's birthday. Do you remember what happened there? The chief baker was killed just as Joseph had predicted.

Both instances are filled with violence. And unbelievers are often extremely violent.

I don't think we quite appreciate today how easily people are given over to violence. Maybe it's because we don't see it as much or are insulated from a lot of it and so we think it doesn't exist.

It's easy to think that violence is something that a less civilized society had but we're civilized now and are above that.

That couldn't be further from the truth. Many times people are restrained - by the grace of God - from violence but given the opportunity it's amazing how often violence breaks forth in the human heart.

I mean think of Herod: he was at the height of civilized society. All the nobles and military commanders are there. This is the upper crust of society. And he's beheading a man who everyone is convinced is a prophet from God.

On multiple occasions Pilate had many Jews killed because they were planning brutal attacks against him.

Stephen was martyred after a brief sermon in the book of Acts, the apostle James was put to death.

You look throughout church history and you'll see scores of people - usually nobility and people in power - who have Christians put to death because of our beliefs.

The apostle Paul was a self-admitted murderer: **Acts 22:4**: I persecuted this Way to the death...**Acts 26:10**: I not only locked up many of the saints in prison...but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them...and I punished them in raging fury against them.

And whatever your take is on the millennium, part of the description of it is that it's filled with people who have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God and those who did not worship the beast or the image. (**Rev. 20:4**)

Especially in groups, especially when there's peer pressure it is amazing the depravity of the human heart. Lutherans in Nazi Germany signing off on the execution of their Jewish neighbors, to politicians in American defending rampant destruction of our cities during riots.

Don't believe for a minute that extreme violence can't break out even now against believers.

And listen: you need to be prepared to stand firm in the Lord in that moment. To not bend the knee to sin or depravity or falsehood. But to stand with the long line of saints - like John the Baptist - who loved not his life even to the death.

**1 Pet. 4:12-14**: Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Listen, if God has called you to exit the world through martyrdom, go out as a faithful saint. One who stands firm in the faith, firm in the Lord, looking to Jesus for the joy that was set before him.

The good news of the gospel is worth dying for.

**Pray**