

20. John the Baptist Was Put to Death

In our last topic, we saw that Jesus sent out the Twelve to help them learn that He would supply their needs as they trusted in Him. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn these same lessons. While the disciples were ministering in the villages and cities throughout Galilee, we see that Herod had put John the Baptist to death, because Herod wanted to save face.

We read that Herod had begun hearing about Jesus. Mark 6:14-18 says, “Now King Herod heard *of Him*, for His name had become well known. And he said, ‘John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.’ Others said, ‘It is Elijah.’ And others said, ‘It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets.’ But when Herod heard, he said, ‘This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!’ For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’” Here, we see that Herod had a different response than most of the people when he heard about Jesus.

Herod immediately concluded that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. We see that he thought this because his conscience was bothering him. Luke 9:9 says, “Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ So he sought to see Him.” He wanted to see if this was John or not. Meanwhile, we see that the rest of the people were coming to different conclusions. Some of the people said that Jesus was the Prophet. These people came to this conclusion, because Deuteronomy 18:18 says, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” The Lord had spoken this to Moses when the people did not want to hear God speak directly to them from Mount Horeb (Sinai).

Other people said that Jesus was Elijah. Malachi had written, in Malachi 4:5-6, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” These people thought Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy. At the same time, other people said that Jesus was like one of the prophets. These people thought back to what they had learned from what was written by prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They recognized that Jesus spoke with authority, not like the scribes. Matthew 7:28-29 says, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes usually quoted the opinions of others.

We see why Herod had come to a different conclusion than any of the other people. John the Baptist had told Herod that it was wrong for him to have married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod and Philip both had a half-brother named Aristobulus. Herodias was the daughter of this half-brother, so she was a niece to both Philip and Herod. Leviticus 18:16 says, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; *it is* your brother’s nakedness.” This meant that both Philip and Herod were guilty of incest with their niece. Herod was guilty of double incest,

because Matthew 14:3-4 says, “For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Because John had said to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’” Herodias was also guilty of incest with both uncles and had left Philip to marry Herod. As a result, she hated John the Baptist when John told Herod that he was guilty of sin, because that meant she was just as guilty. The guilty conscience of Herod was the reason why he immediately thought John had risen.

Herodias wanted John killed because she was so angry. Mark 6:19-24 says, “Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he *was* a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee. And when Herodias’ daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you.’ He also swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.’ So she went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist!’” Herod had probably put John in prison to try to please Herodias and also to protect John from her.

However, we see that she was trying to find some way to get Herod to put John to death, because she could not convince Herod to kill him. Herod was afraid of John the Baptist, because he realized that John was a holy and just man. As a result, Herod protected him from Herodias. Herod was very willing to listen to John because of the great struggle that was going on in his heart. Herod was convicted by his guilty conscience. At the same time, he was controlled by the lust he had for Herodias. As a result, his mind was filled with confusion. James 1:7-8 says, “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

We see the terrible consequences of being a double-minded man by what happened on the birthday of Herod. Herod decided to celebrate his birthday by inviting all of the men that held high civil offices, all of the high-ranking military men, and all of the social leaders in the area of Galilee to his birthday party. The daughter of Philip and Herodias, Salome, came into the birthday party to entertain Herod and all of his high ranking civil, military, and social party leaders with her dancing. To impress these leaders, Herod offered Salome whatever she wanted for pleasing these men - up to half of his kingdom.

Salome then went out and talked with her mother. Matthew 14:8 says, “So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, ‘Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.’” This was the opportunity for which Herodias had hoped. This was her opportunity to get revenge, because she held it against John for saying it was not lawful for Herod to take his brother’s wife. Hebrews 12:15 warns of the consequences of bitterness, when that verse says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Herodias had allowed bitterness to take root in her life, and now, she had her opportunity to take revenge by having John the Baptist killed.

We see what Salome did after she talked to her mother. Mark 6:25-29 says, “Immediately she came in 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.’ And the king was exceedingly sorry; *yet*, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard *of it*, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.” In front of all of the other men, Salome made her request to immediately receive the head of John the Baptist on a platter. We see that Herod was overcome with sorrow when he heard the request. He knew that John was a just and holy man, and that he would live with guilt for a long time.

However, Herod was more concerned about not being embarrassed in front of all of these leaders. In that day, when a ruler took an oath, that oath was considered sacred, so Herod was afraid to break his oath in front of these men. Herod immediately sent an executioner to the prison to cut off the head of John and bring it to him on a platter. The executioners were not regular soldiers. They were the personal bodyguards of Herod. In fact, his regular army was away fighting against the army of Aretas, the king of Arabia at that very time. Herod had been married to the daughter of this king and had divorced her to marry Herodias. As a result, the armies of the two kings were at war because of the humiliation Herod had caused Aretas by divorcing his daughter.

The executioner went to the prison and did as he was commanded. He beheaded John in the prison, brought the head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. The girl then took the head and gave it to her mother. Due to his guilty conscience, Herod really wanted to see Jesus to make certain it was not John the Baptist risen from the dead. Herod had to wait a long time in order to get the opportunity to see Jesus. Throughout that time, every time he heard about Jesus, it brought him fresh guilt because of what he had done to John. Luke 23:6-8 says, “When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And 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. Now 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.” Herod certainly gives us a picture of the effects guilt can have in the life of a person. Meanwhile, the men who had been disciples of John the Baptist heard what had happened and came and got the body of John and placed the corpse in a tomb.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand what happened to Herod, so they can understand and explain the effects of guilt to others. That will give them many opportunities to help others come to Christ for forgiveness. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain the effects of guilt to others.