

## What Do You Get for Faithful Service To God?

### Mark 6:14-29

**Introduction:** 1) What are the rewards, the spiritual perks, for faithfully serving our God?

What are the blessings for a life of devotion to King Jesus?

2) Jesus will actually address this later in Mark's gospel in 10:29-30 where He says, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." Did you notice one particular word that seemed out of place, the word "persecutions."

3) You see sometimes the rewards and spiritual benefits for faithfully serving our God is persecutions. It may even involve losing your life and having your head served up on a platter!

4) On March 2, 2011 Shahbaz Bhatti, age 42, and the only Christian serving in Pakistan's cabinet, was brutally murdered when at least 4 gunmen sprayed his body with gunfire. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for his assassination and a note from the terrorist network said the attack was a "fitting lesson for the world of infidelity, the crusaders, the Jews and their aids .... This is the fitting end of the accursed one which [will] serve as an example to others. And now with the blessing and aid of Allah, the mujahedeen will send all of you, one by one to hell." For his part Shahbaz Bhatti knew the risk he was taking as a devoted follower of King Jesus. In a video he made a few months before his martyrdom, he said, "I want to share that I believe in Jesus Christ who has given His own life for us. I know what is the meaning of the cross. And I'm ready to die for a cause. I'm living for my community and suffering people and I will die to defend their rights" (*World*, 3-26-11, p. 15). And, he did.

5) Yes, you may lose your life for faithfully serving King Jesus. You may actually lose your head as John the Baptist found out.

6) Mark 6:14-29 is something of a parenthesis and flashback that records the imprisonment and execution of John the Baptist. Interestingly only 2 passages in Mark are not about Jesus, and both are about John (cf. also 1:2-8). John is the forerunner of Jesus' message and ministry. He is also the forerunner of his death. Mark's account of John's death is significantly longer than the parallel accounts in Matthew 14:1-12 and Luke 9:7-9. Jesus has just warned the 12 apostles that their preaching would not always be welcomed. If there were any doubts about this, the brief ministry and end of John the Baptist would leave little, if any, doubts. The cost of discipleship is great indeed.

**Transition:** There are a number of valuable lessons we can learn from this tragic miscarriage of justice, a tragedy that will in many ways foreshadow the miscarriage of justice experienced by our Savior when He was put to death and executed on the cross. In both cases cowardly men capitulated to pressure and put to death God's man.

When you faithfully serve our God:

**I. Expect that some will fear you. 6:14-16**

- When a man or woman of God is doing the work of God we can anticipate a variety of responses. Some may praise us for our good works. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:16, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Others may oppose and reject you (6:11). And still others may actually fear you, not liking what you say or do, but being unable to deny that it is God who is at work in you. This was the reaction of a man Mark

sarcastically refers to as “King Herod,” a title Herod demanded from the locals but never received from Rome.

- The King Herod of 6:14 was actually no king at all. He was Herod Antipas, a tetrarch or ruler of ¼ of his father Herod the Great’s kingdom which he received when his father died in 4 B.C. He ruled over Galilee and Perea until A.D. 39. Antipas had requested the title of King from Emperor Augustus and was soundly turned down. Interesting, his nephew Herod Agrippa received the title of king from Caligula in A.D. 37. Antipas’ adulterous wife Herodias became jealous and egged on her husband to request again the title for himself. This ultimately played into his dismissal and exile.
- No wonder this wicked, hen-pecked politician did not know what to do with a man like John. He feared him (v. 16) and he was “greatly perplexed” (*NIV*, “puzzled”) by him.

**Transition:** How do we respond if we find ourselves in such a mess of confusion and intrigue?

**1) Let your good works honor you. 6:14-15**

- Herod had heard of the ministry of Jesus and the 12 (v. 14), specifically “Jesus’ name had become known.” Again, their miraculous works were not denied. Neither did they lead to faith in the case of Herod and his family.
- Perhaps he called an emergency cabinet meeting or took a poll. Three options were quickly put on the table concerning the buzz about this new prophet (remember this is a flashback) named Jesus: 1) It is John the Baptist raised from the dead; 2) He is Elijah; 3) He is a prophet like those of old.
- Preaching and doing the work of the kingdom caused serious jitters in Herod’s court and kingdom. Like Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth, Herod wondered at the source of

his “miraculous powers.” And, his conclusion comes closer to the truth than those drawn by the Nazarenes. Still, it was inadequate.

- Jesus, John, the 12, Elijah, the prophets all allowed their good works to honor them. So evident where they that even their enemies could not deny them.

## 2) **Let your good works haunt them. 6:16**

- Popular opinion had narrowed the actions of the identity of Jesus to 3: John, Elijah (cf. Mal 3:1; 4:5-6; Mark 1:2-3), or a prophet. The latter was the generally held opinion of the common people. He must be a prophet Not so with Herod. Why? Verse 16 explains the reason. (Read).
- Herod was convinced and haunted that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead whom we are now informed in Mark was executed by beheading by Herod. This miracle child born to a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth in their old age (Luke 1:5-56), who was uniquely called by God from his mother’s womb, and whom Jesus said was the greatest man who ever lived (Matt 11:11), Herod had wickedly put to death. And, it haunted him!
- John was a man of great courage and moral fiber. Herod was not. John was a man who loved God and boldly proclaimed His Word. Herod was not. John denounced sin wherever he saw it and called people to repentance and a radical change in life. Herod would do neither and in the end murdered an innocent man and God’s prophet. And, it haunted him, and rightly so. John’s blood was on his hands.
- We need not defend ourselves if we walk with God privately and publicly. We need never utilize the methods of violence and coercion as we represent King Jesus

and extend His kingdom. Our good works will honor us before men, and our good works will haunt those who oppose us, if not now, then in eternity.

## **II. Expect that some will try to stop you. 6:17-20**

- We now move into the lurid events that led to the execution of God's man named John. It is an all too familiar story of sex, power, pride, lust and revenge. Herod may have been weak and paranoid. His wife Herodias, on the other hand, was conniving and ruthless. She would stop at nothing to get her way, even if it meant prostituting her daughter and taking the life of the man of God.
- The events that now unfold are lurid, seedy and slimy. Jerry Springer, Jersey Shore, All My Children and Modern Family have nothing on this 1<sup>st</sup> century zoo of a family. Divorce, adultery, incest, drunkenness, striptease dancing and murder characterized the Herod's.
- "Sin on steroids" might be a good way to describe these misfits.
- And, in all of this you see a man consumed with a guilty conscience that will continue to haunt him for not doing the right thing.

### **1) Guilt will drive some to oppose you. 6:17-18, 20**

- The gist of this bizarre situation is summarized very brief in v. 17. Here are the details: Herod Antipas had met his niece, yes his niece, Herodias (they were not creative in name choices back then) in Rome. At the time she was married to his half-brother Herod Philip making her also his sister-in-law. Are we confused yet? He evidently seduced her (or she him!), she left her husband, and they married. This, of course, was a clear act of adultery.
  - Herodias divorced Philip and that caused trouble.

- Further, Antipas divorced his first wife, the daughter of Aretas IV, ruler of neighboring Nabataea, and this caused trouble. It became an occasion for political tension, turmoil and eventually war, a very costly one for Antipas.

- Add to this Leviticus 18:16 which says, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.” And Leviticus 20:21 which says “If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless,” and you have a sinful situation that demands the man of God to speak. And John did (v. 18). Repeatedly!
- Verse 18 indicates that John said this more than once. “He had been saying.” This prophetic pronouncement greatly offended this 1<sup>st</sup> century Jezebel (v. 19). And, it caused problems for her weakling husband with the woman he now slept with! So Herod had John arrested and imprisoned. Still, Herod knew in his heart John was right. Verse 20 is amazing if you think about it: 1) Herod feared John; 2) he knew he was a righteous (*dikaion*) and holy (*hagion*) man; 3) he kept him safe; 4) he kept hearing (listening) to him; 5) he was greatly perplexed (was in distress, anxious, puzzled and disturbed); 6) he heard him gladly.
- John had no fear of the powerful and influential, and he boldly confronts them in their sin. Herod, in contrast, feared and was fascinated with John. He found a strange attraction in his preaching. Still, though he could not help but listen, he was too weak and sinful to obey John’s message. He just did not know what to do with John. Unfortunately his Jezebel knew exactly what she wanted.

## **2) Hatred will drive others to oppose you.      6:19**

- The disposition of Herodias is succinct and to the point:

- 1) She “had a grudge against” John the Baptist. The word grudge means “to have it in for someone.”
  - 2) She “wanted to put him to death.”
  - 3) “But, she could not” and v. 20 explains why. Her weak husband kept him safe in prison. Any assassination plan would have to be put on hold.
- T. W. Manson says it so well, “Herodias felt that the only place where her marriage-certificate could safely be written was on the back of the death-warrant of John the Baptist” (Edwards, 1861). He was safe in prison, but all she needed was an opportune moment and she was willing to wait until it presented itself.
  - Our text provides an insightful contrast between John the Baptist and Herod Antipas that sets the stage for the final act of this tragedy:

<b>John the Baptist</b>	<b>Herod Antipas</b>
A hair-coated prophet	A gorgeously robed ruler
Austere and simple	Flamboyant and ornate
Righteous	Debaucherous
A prophet without price	A man who could be bought
Moral courage	Spineless coward
A clear conscience	A troubled conscience
Maintained his integrity and lost his head	Forfeited his integrity and lost his soul
A man of the Spirit	A man of the flesh

Jesus and Pilate will provide a similar contrast when our Lord endures His passion for sinners.

### **III. Expect that some will attempt to destroy you. 6:21-29**

- We now move to Act III of this theatrical tragedy. One intuitively has the sense that things are not going to turn out well for John and that his days are numbered.

- Though often attributed to William Shakespeare, the statement was actually penned by a man named William Congreve in a play entitled “The Mourning Bride.” The provocative words: “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”
- Though she had not been rejected by John as a lover, Herodias had been condemned as a treacherous and adulterous woman by the preaching of this man. John had called her out, and she will now have her revenge. How far she is willing to go to get it is truly amazing.
- It is said that “revenge is best served cold.” In John’s case it will be served as his head on a platter. Herodias’s power over her wimp of a husband beckons us to remember Jezebel’s influence over weak-kneed Ahab in seeking the death of Elijah and murdering the man named Naboth (1 Kings 19, 21).

**1) Accept that the ungodly will use ungodly means to get you. 6:21-23**

- An opportunity presented itself. The occasion was a big birthday bash Herod gave in honor of himself! It is interesting to note that the Jews of that day viewed birthday parties as pagan celebrations. Herod, obviously, did not care. The text informs us he had invited the “important people”, the “movers and shakers” of his little kingdom. They are identified as his nobles (*NIV*, “high officials”), military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.
- No doubt the room was filled with lots of drinking and a rowdy atmosphere at this stage birthday gathering. The time was perfect for Herodias to hatch her plan to get the head of the Baptist.
- Verse 22, the daughter of Herodias enters the room filled with men. There is little doubt she was sent by her mother. There is little doubt Salome (we learn her name from extra-biblical literature, Josephus to be precise) danced in a sensual



and seductive manner that greatly appealed to the lustful desires and passions of this room full of unregenerate, pagan men.

- Most likely she was only in her teens. She was the daughter of Herodias and Philip. Thus she was Herod's step-daughter and niece! This is how low Herodias stooped. She cared more about the head of John the Baptist than she did the dignity and reputation of her daughter. And, she got what she hoped for.
- Salome's dance pleased Herod and his guests (v. 22). In fact he was so moved he said "ask whatever you wish, and I will give it to you, up to half of my kingdom." Parroting the language of Esther 5:2-3, he utters a proverbial saying promising, indeed, binding himself, to a generous gift for her performance.
- The ungodly has used ungodly means to get what she wants, and in God's mysterious providence, she does.

2) **Accept that the ungodly may get your head on a platter.** 6:24-29

- A courageous prophet is undone and meets his end at the hands of a devious wife, a manipulated daughter and a cowardly king.
- Verse 24 Salome goes to mommy and says "for what should I ask?" The quick and unhesitating response: "the head of John the Baptist."
- Verse 25 "immediately with haste" she goes and says, "I want ... at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." Lit. the object of desire is delivered at the very end of the verse: "I desire that you give me immediately on a platter the head of John the Baptist!" Salome added, it appears, the phrase "on a platter." Like mother like daughter it appears.

- Verse 26 Herod was sad but spineless and he could not afford to lose face in front of his guests.
- Verse 27 Immediately, the executioner is sent and John is beheaded. At least it was quick and painless.
- Verse 28 The executioner → Herod → Salome → Herodias. It's done and John is gone! Note, the girl carries the head to her mother.
- Verse 29 is anticlimactic and sad beyond words: his disciples came when they heard, took his headless body and laid it in a tomb.
- Herod feared displeasing his wife and losing face with man more than he feared God. Pride took him down just like it did Satan and Adam. Herodias feared and hated John because he was right and she knew it. There is no indication she thought he was wrong. He was right, she knew it, and she did not care! John was a nuisance to her conscience and a cancer to her reputation. He had to go. His head on a platter would solve all her problems, or at least she thought so.
- Amazing is it not? John the Baptist was declared by Jesus to be the last and greatest prophet. And yet, he died in his early 30's, never performed a single miracle, and had a public ministry that lasted only about a year.
- Bad things do happen to good people. Life is often unfair. The righteous do suffer. And yes, sometimes good things happen to bad people. But never forget, God sees. He knows!
- Matthew 14:12-13 record for us the reaction of Jesus to the death of his cousin and friend and forerunner John. "And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus. Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew

from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.” No doubt he was grieved. No doubt He hurt. No doubt He wept. He did not forget! Note well also Luke 13:32-33, and Jesus’ opinion of Herod, “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 finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’” And finally see Luke 23:8-9, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he [Jesus] made no answer.”

**Conclusion:** Death cannot silence a life. Murdering someone will not put an end to their witness and testimony. Remember the saying, “Being dead, yet he still speaks.” Today no one names their son Herod. Millions, on the other hand, bear the name of John. The fact is one’s tombstone may serve as a trumpet, one’s grave a megaphone of a life well-lived for the glory of a great King whose name is Jesus. Throughout history the message of the martyrs continues to ring loud and clear. These choice servants of Jesus are a wonderful source of strength and encouragement. None fulfills that assignment better than John the Baptist. Herod and Herodias may have received his head on a platter, but our Lord received his soul into heaven for all eternity. John lost his head but Herod and Herodias lost their soul. In the end, you tell me who won and who lost? Bad things do happen to good people. But, great things happen to godly people who put it all on the line, even their head on a platter, for the truth of God’s Word and the glory of His Name!