

## Mark 6:14–29

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[ 0 : 00 ] Mark 6, verse 14 through 29. King Herod heard of it, for Jesus 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. But others said, he is Elijah.

And others said, he is a prophet like one of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard of it, he said, John whom I beheaded has been raised.

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. For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe.

[ 1 : 08 ] When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed. And yet he heard him gladly. But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

For when Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guest. And the king said to the girl, ask for me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.

And he vowed to her, whatever you ask me, I will give you up to half of my kingdom. And she went out and said to her mother, for what should I ask?

And she said, the head of John the Baptist. 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.

And the king was exceedingly sorry. But because of his oaths and his guest, he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

[ 2 : 22 ] He went and beheaded him in the prison and 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 his body and laid it in a tomb. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Good morning. Great to have you here. Sometimes the strangest of texts fall on the most unlikely of days. Here we are on Father's Day, but it's a stepfather giving a gift to his wife on behalf of her daughter.

And a meal becomes the Baptist's head on a platter. Well, happy Father's Day to you all. It's a strange story, isn't it?

Seemingly out of place. I mean, if you put your eyes on what immediately came before and what follows, it almost feels like an intrusion, an insertion, an excursus, something that a writer of a 10-page paper would only keep in to make sure they could get the page count according to what the teacher desired.

[ 3 : 53 ] I mean, look at verse 12 and 13, the very finishing moment prior to the reading today. So they went out, that is the disciples, proclaiming things, that is teaching that people should repent, casting out many demons and anointed oil, many who were sick and healed them.

And then you get to verse 30, which seems like it ought to have been the very next verse. The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

So the frame of the narrative is the disciples, the 12-fold embodiment of Christ's mission, gaining return.

And now this story in the middle on John. You might think it must be based on some tradition that there's this John material that Mark just couldn't get on without sticking in somewhere, and so he stuck it here.

But in actual fact, as strange as the story at first appears, I've come to think this week that Mark is a master storyteller, and that the insertion of this story at this moment within the frame of the disciples accomplishing Christ's mission has great intention and purpose concerning his subject, Jesus.

[ 5 : 38 ] You know, Mark's been saying for a while now that Jesus is the Son of God come down. He's going to claim that the Son of God that came down is the Son that God raised up.

And this descending Son and this rising Son gives a portrait of his authority and rule over everyone. Welcome to a side story, then, meant to provide a parallel picture of the majesty and glory of Christ. It's almost impossible to understand, though, unless you begin to get something of Romans and their superstitions.

Roman citizens were superstitious, especially when it came to things like gods coming down or mystical resurrections taking place.

Romans held a pantheon of gods. Jupiter was the chief god over the twelve gods, but there were others like Mercury or Venus, Vulcan, who stood ready to help or assist or hinder you, depending upon how you treated them.

[ 7 : 08 ] So Romans were always placating the gods, lest they insert themselves in an unwanted way in their own life. But their superstitions ran beyond the fear of awakening the gods.

It also included a superstitious fear of the already departed. Not only could the gods come down, but the human dead could be reborn, resurrected in spirit, and reinsert themselves into the land of the living in ways that would assist you or in ways that would disturb you if you had done something bad against them or evil along the way.

That is what would account for Herod's understanding of Jesus. This purported God who had come down could be nothing less than John the Baptist, now raised up.

The departed one now having this mystical spirit within him to irritate him, to torment him, to, in one sense, call his own kingdom into question.

Now Herod, if you know anything about him, he was half Jewish, half Edomite, but according to the text here, he's all Roman.

[ 8 : 38 ] He's all Roman. Take a look, 14 through 16. When Herod heard of it, that is, the disruption of the spiritual order taking place through the ministry of Jesus and his newfound men.

When King Herod heard of that, that is, Jesus' name having become known. Some said, well, he's John the Baptist raised from the dead.

That's why the miraculous powers are at work. Others said he's Elijah. Others a prophet. But when Herod heard it, he said, no, no, he's not Elijah. Not a prophet.

I'm half Jewish, but I don't think he's any of those that were promised in their scriptures. This guy, this guy's John the Baptist raised from the dead.

He's here to threaten my rule. He's here to disturb me on account of what I did to John. I'm haunted by Jesus because of the guilt I have with John.

[ 9 : 48 ] What's the reasoning? What did he do? Why would he be troubled with Jesus in his understanding that the spirit of John is working against his own reign?

Well, you always pay attention to the little words in stories. At least I do. And I love these little words like the word for. These prepositions that provide the reasons for what people think.

And you have one right there at verse 17. Right when you need one. But why does he think he's John raised from the dead? 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.

For, there's a second one. For John had been saying to Herod, it's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted him to be put to death, but she could not.

For, Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. All those little words are explaining to us, the readers, why Herod was troubled with Jesus.

[ 11 : 14 ] Because of what he had done to John. He had sent John to an early and violent, unwarranted death.

And Herodias is wife of illicit making. For Herodias, if you're not familiar, had actually been married to Herod Antipas' brother, Philip.

And so, this Herod grabs hold of the wife of his brother in ways that would seduce her. That she would divorce him so that he could marry her.

And now he's in a completely illicit relationship. And John the Baptist, of course, called it out. He refers probably in his preaching to Leviticus 18, which highlights a marriage of this sort is untenable. This is not good. It's against the word of God. And so, what happens is, John the Baptist is preaching against the Tetrarch, the ruler of a complete quadrant of Rome.

[12:40] That's what I call speaking truth to power. It's one of the things I love about John the Baptist. He just said it like it was.

Let the chips fall where they may. So, in summary, what you have is Herod's guilt. Herod wanting to gain something from God's word.

Notice it says that when he heard him, verse 20, he was greatly perplexed and yet he heard him gladly. He wanted something from this preacher who he knows, notice, was both righteous, verse 20, and holy.

I want something from him. But he failed to live his life in conformity to the word preached by him. Herod's guilt. Herod's guilt. His guilt. He bound, incarcerated, and executed someone he knew to be righteous and holy.

[13:58] He delivered him at a young age over to an unwarranted and violent death. He had seduced his own brother's wife.

He had taken her as his own. And while he feigned to leave a place for John, protecting him, at the end of the day, he would not conform to the teaching of God's word.

Now, I want to pause here for a moment and think about what Mark is doing. Mark has already showed us five controversies that Jesus had with religious leaders that we said were precursors of what will be five controversies he'll have with religious leaders when he arrives in Jerusalem.

Now, he's showing us the opposition to Jesus' ministry, not through five controversies, but by a worldly leader on the early end of his ministry, while he's far away from Jerusalem, and it is going to mirror the same controversy Jesus is going to have when he arrives in Jerusalem with another worldly leader named Pilate.

Now, we're going to see that in a moment, but it's really interesting for me then to look at this story and ask yourself, what is the master storyteller doing?

[15:50] Having just shown you that the ministry and authority, the activity of Jesus would be resisted by religious leaders, he's now in this story showing you, and he will also be resisted by those who have worldly power.

He's guilty and he knows it and therefore Jesus is keeping him awake at night. In a word, he's got a lot of regrets because he's got a lot of guilt, which is then worth asking for ourselves, what do we do with our regret and our guilt and where do we go?

John, and therefore Jesus, is a threat to the unrepentant, even those who feel the regret and rejecting him.

Herodias, well, it's not her guilt that accounts for this gift she wants of John's head on a platter, it's her grudge.

Herod's guilt, Herodias' grudge. You can see her there in verse 19. She had a grudge against John and wanted him put to death, but she could not until, verse 21, an opportunity came.

[17:29] The telling of verses 21 to 28 is extraordinary. Probably better read by you than told by me, but Herod has a party.

He invites the leading men of his cabinet. He invites his military leaders, and then the third group listed here is the entourage, which is always in tow with those in power, and there is this dance, seductive dance, by Salome, Herodias' daughter, meant to provoke the king's appetites, and then in this wistful way of extreme power, he says to her, what do you want for what you've done tonight? You've entertained us exquisitely. Our appetites are whetted. Hyperbolically, I'll give you half the kingdom. She runs out to her mother.

I did the dance. What's the gift? And Herodias says, my opportunity has come. Tell my husband, your stepfather, I want the head of the Baptist on a platter now.

See, this is a grudge. Well, we have grudges, but this is her grudge. There is a certain twisted joy.

[19:13] I'm going to call it an unhappy, unhealthy happiness when we see evil befall our enemies. enemies. There's a willful gratification when hurt comes to those who have harmed us.

There's a perverse pleasure when a long-held grudge against someone is gratified. And this is the night where Herodias' grudge is gratified.

There's a delight when the head that now rests upon the guillotine belongs to the one who made it a point in their life to put your head on the chopping block.

These are the heartfelt sentiments that we might be sad to admit, but are true to our human nature. When evil befalls our enemies, we're pleased and we can go on with life as he would have it.

So if Herod's guilt was wedded to his regrets in which he would not conform to John's preaching, Herodias' grudge is wedded to resentment for having to be called out and not living under the prophetic voice of God's word.

[ 20 : 45 ] This is what's happening in the text. John, then, is also a threat for the unrepentant even when filled with regret.

And Mark is now telling this story framed around the identity of Jesus because this is a prelude of what will happen to God's own son.

God's Let me put it this way. If you think John the Baptist preaching is a threat, Mark is saying Jesus preaching is the greater threat. If you think John the Baptist had some kind of Old Testament like authority that could get up in your grill and tell you how to live and where you were going wrong, he's saying Jesus' authority far exceeds that.

Remember, in the first chapter it was John the Baptist who said there's one coming after me who's mightier than I, I'm not even able or worthy to untie his sandals.

So for John, I mean for Mark, John is here and Jesus is here. And the day will come later in the story where this prelude finds its climactic moment, not before Herod, but before Pilate.

[ 22 : 07 ] commentators have long noticed the parallels between this story and that one. Lexical parallels, analogical parallels, and taken together intentional parallels.

Herod bound John in 617, the same is done to Jesus before Pilate in chapter 15, 1. Both John the Baptist and Jesus are said to be delivered over to those who have worldly power.

Both stories, this one and the Jesus narrative with Pilate end with the righteous, holy, innocent man in a tomb.

Herod has John reluctantly beheaded, the text says, to satisfy his oaths and his guests and he did not want to break his word.

Pilate likewise is caught in his own words. Can I give you Barabbas? What can I give you? And he's caught in his own words and therefore giving Jesus over to death.

[ 23 : 16 ] And both John and Jesus are said in these texts to be raised from the dead. John in mystical form, Jesus in bodily form to reign forever more.

Where is this moving? Where is John going with this smaller story within his larger story? He's basically asking you and me the same question now. So what are you going to do with Jesus? You're going to hold a grudge when God's word calls out your life against his own teaching? You're going to conform?

Is he an irritant? Is he someone that you are intrigued by? as long as he's back there and not coming into your own world?

What are we to make of all of this? Let me put it this way. Read this story suddenly with yourself having to emulate the characters within the Jesus frame.

[ 24 : 27 ] Read it with yourself when Jesus says repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Read it yourself when you understand that Jesus' teachings according to the word of God call out the life you would rather live outside of his word.

It's an amazing thing. I've been able to do that this week. Think through my own life. Wherein are we holding grudges against Jesus?

Where am I wanting to accommodate him but not conform to what he would have me do and be? Are there times where I would bury him under a cemetery lawn so that I can lead a life of my own choosing?

These are the things that Mark would have us wrestle with this morning. What are we doing? What are we doing with the word of God? What are we making of Jesus?

What happens when he challenges my thinking? Do I resent him? Do I want to get out from under him? Do I just want to go on without him?

[ 25 : 43 ] What am I doing with my guilt? Where am I going with my grudge? All of it directed toward him who according to this gospel has all authority having been raised from the dead in bodily form?

Think of our own shorter catechism question. What are we to make of Christ's exaltation? That is his resurrection. The answer is Christ's exaltation consisted in his rising again from the dead on the third day, his ascending up into heaven, his sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in his coming to judge the world at the last day.

Jesus is a threat to all who are unrepentant, even those who learn to live without him with regret. I guess all I want to say to you and to me is that we need to repent before resurrection returns and our regrets would remain everlastingly.

Heavenly Father, what a strange story, but we know that this world did rise up against your son, and what happened to John the Baptist happened to Jesus, and yet your gospel proclaims that he indeed was raised from the dead and has all authority.

[ 27 : 34 ] In that resurrection then, may we fall and live out our lives in accordance with your word. May we never try to get out from underneath your teaching, or get away from your leading.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.