

Lake Cities Community Church  
Pastor Craig Schill  
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Series: On Your Mark!

**Bad News Bearers**  
Mark 6:14-29

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Years ago when I was the HR Director at Coconino Community College; I was in a meeting with my boss. She told me that a financial audit had concluded that a particular benefit we provided was, “An inappropriate expenditure of tax payer money.” So, she said it was my job to communicate to the faculty and staff that the benefit was ending. I didn’t do the audit – I didn’t make the decision – but benefits were my responsibility, so I was tasked to be the bearer of bad news.

I knew I had a tough job, because the benefit we were taking away was free coffee and water. So I wrote, “I’m sorry to let you know that effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, the College will be discontinuing the bottled water service and the “free” coffee in the employee break room (at the Flagstaff campus). After an audit of expenditures it was determined that this was not an appropriate use of college funds...” In my optimistic way, I concluded the memo with “For those who have enjoyed the water and coffee; I’m sorry to have to break this news to you. Thank you for your understanding.”

They did not understand. One employee wrote, “I must protest – my body absolutely needs the bottled water to survive.” A science faculty member added, “This is an insult – the rationale is specious.” A secretary lamented, “I can’t imagine expecting our faculty members trying to lecture all day on a dry and parched throat.” A department head fretted, “This announcement will undermine employee morale.” A particularly favorite faculty wrote, “How

about if we also eliminate toilet paper?" My friend the humanities professor added some poetry, "Water, water everywhere – and all the boards did shrink. Water, water everywhere – but not a drop to drink" (Coleridge)." And then he quoted about Jesus from a 1662 prayer book: "I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was no man, neither found I any to comfort me. I was thirsty and thou gavest me vinegar to drink."

Being a bearer of bad news can be a difficult job. Even if you know it is the right decision – that doesn't make the job any easier, or the reaction any less angry. When is the last time you had to be a bad news bearer? In business, have you ever had to tell someone that their position was being eliminated? Maybe you had to tell an overworked staff that the open position has been frozen until the end of the year. Some of you have had to enact employee discipline - reprimanding, demoting or terminating an employee. Bearing bad news may be the right thing to do – but that does not make it easy. You have to be prepared to pay the cost. Parents – how about you? How often to you deliver a message to your children, you know they are not going to like? For example: "I have decided that you cannot have a third Oreo cookie!" Or, "It is time to turn off the TV / video game / i-pod / DS." "You can only have a friend over if you clean your room." The rationale is sound, but often it is not received with the graciousness one hopes for.

To bear bad news well, you must have great courage -- and that was true of John the Baptist. In our passage today John is given a message from (his boss) God to be communicated to the ruler of the land – King Herod. The message is this: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." A benefit is taken away. This simple message set off a series of events that lead us this morning to one of the most tragic and sordid tales in all the Bible. Turn in your Bibles with me to Mark chapter 6, verses 14-29.

As we examine this passage we will see that it has three distinct movements: The introduction to this story is found in verses 14-16; the explanation of why John is arrested is given in verses 17-20, and finally a description of the events that lead up to John's death are described in 21-29. Let's begin now with the introduction.

### **Introduction: 6:14-16**

The first three words are: Mark 6:14 And "King" Herod." We need to mention briefly that Herod is not technically a king, though he wanted badly to be one. Mark assigned to him the title by which he was likely referred to by the common person, but technically he was a Tetrarch - more like a governor. He along with three of his brothers, each ruled ¼ of Palestine. Herod's area was the area of Jesus' ministry: Galilee. Next, we are told King Herod, "*heard of it,*" Heard what? Remember that this story is part of a Mark sandwich, two stories woven together to make one larger point. The story surrounding this one is the 12 disciples going out and performing great miracles and casting out demons. All this is in the Galilee area - So Herod and the people begin to wonder who he is, "*For His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." Mark 6:15 But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."* You will recall once again the central question of the book of Mark is what? "Who is Jesus?" And the people guess like an unprepared student with a multiple choice test - "Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah?" Herod makes his guess, verse 16: Mark 6:16 But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"

This is a tragic story. It is always tragic when people do not know who Jesus is - and that tragedy here is tied to another tragedy - the murder of a prophet of God - the beheading

of John the Baptist by “King” Herod. I was at the Dallas Theological Seminary bookstore a few weeks ago and it is a beautiful *seminary bookstore* set in a beautiful old Greek Orthodox chapel. It is a place that serves some of the top scholars and brightest minds with deep theological works, Greek and Hebrew texts. It is a sacred place. And so I you can imagine my surprise when at the check out stand I saw them selling *Christian bobble head dolls!* Daniel, Noah, Esther. And I immediately thought of our passage this morning and I wondered... How inappropriate! Would they dare? Would they dare make a John the Baptist *bobble head?*

### **Reasons: 6:17-20**

So John the Baptist is beheaded, and prior to that, arrested. Why? We turn to the second part of our passage, verses 17-20 for the answer. [Mark 6:17](#) For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. [Mark 6:18](#) For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” [Mark 6:19](#) Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not *do so*. [Mark 6:20](#) for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

This is the biblical equivalent to *Days of our Lives*- a soap opera. You see, Herod met his brothers Philip’s wife Herodias and decided that he wanted to marry her. To do this he divorced his own wife, and Herodias did the same. Two families were destroyed to bring Herod and Herodias together. It was The Scandal of the day – but what could you do; he was the “king”! But that doesn’t stop John the Baptist from bringing his message: “That is not right! It is an offense to God!” Herodias becomes frustrated because though Herod has him arrested

he won't kill him; and actually protects him and enjoys listening to him! Herod in the story plays the passive husband – doing just enough to get by, and Herodias as we will see plays the part of the domineering wife manipulating everyone to get her way. All this is an offense to God – The law was clear, [Lev. 20:21](#) 'If *there is* a man who takes his brother's wife, it is **abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness**. I like the way one commentator put it: "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" (*The Servant Messiah*, 23).

### **Story Leading to John's Death - 6:21-29**

**We move now to the tragic day – the third part of our story. Here is what happened:** [Mark 6:21](#) A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; [Mark 6:22](#) and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." [Mark 6:23](#) And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." [Mark 6:24](#) And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl's name, according to Josephus is Salome. She is probably a teenager. She is beautiful and young – probably somewhere between 12 and 14 years old. Archaeology has uncovered three coins that bear her name and actually show us her face. One of the few NT characters we actually have a picture of! Now she is not Herod's biological daughter, but his brother's daughter. The setting is Herod's birthday, and all the important people are there. The wine flows - the party gets wild. Herodias, I believe, knowing her passive, lustful husband well, sees an opportunity and sends her daughter to dance for them. You might ask – "How does Herodias know that Herod



will end up promising ½ the kingdom?" I feel sure that Herodias has seen this happen before – she knows her husbands weaknesses well, and instead of protecting him – exploits him. Sin is left to rule without restraint. They are drunk with wine, full of lust, part of a great manipulation that includes more than likely the sexual exploitation of a child.

On Thursday I was at the Henry Wade Juvenile Justice Center as part of my Leadership Rowlett class. When a child in Dallas County is involved in a criminal offense, this is where they are taken. They age range is 10-17. In 2008, they received 1,406 10-13 year old children, 4,699 14-15 year olds, 3,637 16 year olds and 746 17 year olds. The average length of stay is two-weeks. It was fascinating to tour the building and sad to see some of these children in their gray and blue prison clothes. Barbara Roberts, the Deputy Director of Institutional Services told us you have to consider in many cases that the kids come from very dysfunctional homes. She said when she first arrived she received a girl who was arrested for prostitution – and later found out it was her mother that had been running the business out of her house. That is the unspeakable evil and despicable action of Herodias – using her daughter Salome to manipulate these men for her own purposes. Pick up in the story in verse 25.

Mark 6:25 Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." Mark 6:26 And although the king was very sorry, *yet* because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. Mark 6:27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded *him* to bring *back* his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, Mark 6:28 and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

Because of Herod's embarrassment over his rash promise, he sends the executioner – the deed is done and the grisly trophy is presented to his daughter who gives it to the mother. Beheading with a sword was the way Roman citizens or people of prominence were killed. The lower-class people were crucified. John's death, *as horrible as it was*, was more merciful than the death Jesus would face. Bringing the head on a platter was a way to humiliate John the Baptist – by adding his head (as it were) to the menu of the party. The party that started with laughter and drinking ends in shame and death. Ultimately sin always leads to death.

In this sad story there are only two verses that contain anything positive. John's courageous proclamation of God's truth in verse 18, and John's disciples actions in verse 29: [Mark 6:29](#) *When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.* John is at least given the honor of a proper burial – foreshadowing for us the death and burial of Jesus to come in a few chapters.

## **Application**

There is the story in all its sad detail. What lessons can we pull from these verses? In my study I have come to the conclusion that there are many secondary lessons and one main lesson. Let me briefly run through the secondary lessons: (1) Sin is destructive. Sin, as pleasurable as it seems always ends in destruction and death. What a simple, but powerful lesson that is for us – stay away from sin! (2) The second lesson follows with a specific sin - Lust is never satisfied and will ruin you. Herod's lust ruined his first marriage, his second marriage and his career. Men – don't give up your fight against lust – because if you do it will destroy you. If you need help today in this area of your life please talk with me or one of our elders. (3) The third lesson is for women – Respect and don't dominate your husband. As bad

as things were, if Herodias would have respected her husband's desire to keep John the Baptist safe – things would not have gone from bad to worse. But her frustration with her passive husband leads her to use every means in her power to get what she wants, and this is a great temptation for many women today. Women - respect your husbands – and trust your situation to the Lord. (4) Do not involve your children in your sin. You might say, “What! Never!” But it happens all the time. Have you ever told your child who answers the phone, “Just tell them I am not here.” Have you ever given your child pirated songs or software. Or have you ever lied about their age to get a discount? We can ruin our children with hypocrisy. (5) Do not get drunk with alcohol. When alcohol takes over your life – nothing good will come of it. This story probably does not happen, if alcohol is not involved - for good reason the Bible says – “Do not get drunk with wine” (Eph 5:18). (6) Don't make rash promises. Be very careful what your promise. I really struggle with this – I want to be encouraging and generous. “Yes – what a great idea! Let's do it.” Just remember to add these words: “If the Lord wills.” Remember that you have to check with your spouse, or boss or the Lord. Promises made too quickly lead to embarrassment and disappointment. (7) Listen and act upon godly truth. Herod and Herodias could have and should have listened to John the Baptist and repented of their sin and done the best they could to sort out the mess. But, like us, they did not want to swallow the bad news. In addition, Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist – and it began to stir something in him as he learned about Jesus, but he never becomes a Christian – he does not act on the godly truth he was learning. He tastes but does not consume. Listen and act upon godly truth.

Those are all secondary applications. The main point of the passage I believe comes from the context – that Jesus has sent out his disciples to preach and proclaim the truth, and

while they are doing that Mark tells this story and thereby says to them and to us.

**“Courageously follow Jesus, no matter the cost.”** As you go out, Mark is saying, you will not always be received with joy – but with rejection, but *no matter the cost – like John the Baptist –* courageously follow Him. Remember that sometimes the good news sounds like bad news to an unbeliever. Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was another Christian who followed Jesus and lost his life. He said, “To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.”

So in the end, the tragedy of our story is not the death of John the Baptist, but it is the tragedy that Herod and Herodias find themselves on the very doorstep of God’s revelation, yet they continue to be enslaved and deceived and destroyed by sin. The glory of this story is that John the Baptist courageously followed Jesus God to his death, faithful and true to the end – setting a model for you and I. Let’s pray.