

Daily Bible Study

“True Wickedness & True Greatness”

Mark 6:14-29

June 20 - 26, 2010

THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY – As we continue on in our study of the Gospel of Mark we take for our text, **Mark 6:14-29** as we look at a lesson “*True Wickedness & True Greatness*”. This text of Scripture recalls for us the death of John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod. We are using the title “*Wickedness & Greatness*” because it summarizes for us so well the “*wickedness*” and sin that we see in The Kings Birthday party and the plot to murder The Baptist and the title also is meant to cause us to reflect on the character and “*greatness*” of the man John as well. We do understand that John the Baptist was indeed a sinner as all fallen men are but it was Jesus who said of Him, “*Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist*” (**Matthew 11:11**). John the Baptist was a great man of God; a great prophet. He was consumed by a desire to be obedient to God and His calling upon him as well as live a humble life that pointed only and in everything to Jesus Christ. He was a man of great courage who spoke the truth of God without fear and worry as to the acceptance of it by others. He loved God and truth more than his own reputation which is not something that is said easily of a man. As Barclay put it, “...John was the man who preferred death to falsehood. He lived for the truth and he died for the truth.” Here is Mark’s record of this great man of God’s death. **Mark 6:14 - 29** “*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.” 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.” ²³He 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!” 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.”*

The Word Applied & Suggestion for Prayer: Father God, thank You for the example of John the Baptist. Teach me from Your Word this week. Thank You that John loved Jesus more than himself. Help me to learn to be humble, yet courageous and stand for truth like John did.

TUESDAY – **Mark 6:14-16** “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!” The disciples have just been out preaching and working miracles as Jesus had instructed them and commissioned them. We see in this text that word has reached Herod concerning Jesus, His work and power, as well as the work of His disciples. There is apparently some excitement being generated and some news going around concerning Jesus. The *King Herod* mentioned here is the son of *Herod the Great* who was in power when Jesus was born and attempted to take His life in the story with the wise men from **Matthew 2:1-19**. The *King Herod* in our text is also called and referred to as *Herod Antipas*. It is of no surprise at all that *King Herod heard of Him* as we think back to all we have seen and heard of Jesus doing in the opening chapters of Mark and the beginning of Jesus ministry. The incredible and truthful things that could be told are astounding; sick people healed, demon possessed people delivered and set free, storms and the power of nature subdued with a word, the dead raised to life, etc.... It is of no doubt that when Herod heard of these things along with the words of other witnesses of great feats; there was question in his mind as to the identity of this man. We see that some thought Jesus was *a prophet* or *Elijah* of old while we read in the text *when Herod heard, he said, “This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!”* Here we have the twisted and fallen remark from a man dominated by a guilty conscience. This man, King Herod dominated and lost in sin and wickedness had murdered the man Jesus said was the greatest prophet born among women and to make it worse, he knows it was sinful and wicked yet we see no repentance and brokenness just a guilt laden conscience. How about, “God, forgive me for my wickedness”, or “I am sorry Lord for putting to death this man who was right about my sinfulness, forgive me”! We read nothing like that, merely a man tormented and lost in sin to the point he utters this morbid statement about John whom he had beheaded being back alive. What is amazing about this incident is that Herod hears these wonderful reports of the miracles of Jesus and His men and his conscience is so struck for murdering John that the more he dwells on his own sin and these incredible miracles he actually is persuaded that John is risen from the dead and doing these things. He is so certain that he tells his servants this is what has taken place according to **Matthew 14:1**.

The Word Applied & Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for the cleansing power of the Gospel to suave and heal a tormented soul and conscience. Thank You for the blessed assurance that the punishment for all our sin was placed on Jesus on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

WEDNESDAY – Mark reports Herod’s bizarre statement about John the Baptist and now he realizes that he must tell the details of John’s death that he had not yet mentioned. He writes; **Mark 6:17-20** “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." 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." The opening portion of our text has given us a look at a very confused man. We see Herod's admission (*whom I beheaded*), his tormenting confusion and guilty conscience (*he has been raised from the dead*), and in this portion amazingly we see there had been some sense of desire and aspiration in Herod to hear John while he was still living (*And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly*). Sacred Scripture like nothing else can define, dissect, analyze and take us deep into the conscience, specifically here that of King Herod. We read that John had been put into prison *for the sake of Herodias...* Who is *Herodias*? Let's attempt to unpack this sinful mess. *Herodias* was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She had married her father's half brother, her uncle, Herod Phillip. She was *King Herod's* brother Philip's wife and therefore the niece of both of these brothers. *King Herod* (Antipas) of our text, had his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia; but he and *Herodias* became infatuated with each other and *King Herod* and *Herodias* planned for her to forsake her husband and live with him, and that he would also put away his own wife (Josephus [*Antiquities*, 18.5,1]). Without necessarily having all the twisted details in order it is suffice to say that *King Herod* and *Herodias* were in an adulterous (**Romans 7:2-3**), ungodly, illicit, incestuous (**Leviticus 18:16, 20:21**) relationship and John the Baptist rebuked Herod for being married to her ("It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife"). *Herodias* wanted John dead but *Herod feared John* and knew, *knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him*. Although he knew better and was even rebuked for it, he still sinned in this manner and also *bound John in prison*. As Tertullian said speaking of the soul not being bound, "No prison, however, could take away the freedom to walk the path that leads to God."

The Word Applied & Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me to understand that true freedom goes far beyond circumstances that I can see, feel, and observe with my senses. Also teach me I am a depraved sinner that is capable of heinous sins apart from Your sustaining and restraining grace. .*

THURSDAY – So far we have seen that *Herodias* had failed to persuade *King Herod* to destroy the Baptist. John had rightly and courageously admonished even the very King for his sin. We should take note of this responsibility to lovingly and humbly admonish one another (**Romans 15:14, Colossians 3:16**). Now we read, **Mark 6:21-23** "*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."* In these verses we see the horrible wickedness of the sinful, depraved human heart as *Herodias* seizes this moment, *King Herod's* birthday as an *opportune* time to satisfy her sinful desire to have John the Baptist killed. There was a banquet taking place and all the important big-wigs were there to celebrate. Sacred Scripture then tells us that *Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced*. Here we see so clear and vividly "*True Wickedness & True Greatness*". John the Baptist, *a just and holy man* is in prison while King Herod, his friends, *Herodias* and her *daughter* are involved in a time of sin and debauchery. The language and words in the original used to describe this scene and the reaction of

Herod and those with him to this *dance* help inform us that it was it was most likely highly sexual in nature, in modern vernacular, a striptease if you will. *King Herod* appears to be a man who had no concern for morality as in front of his guests, who also were *pleased* and enjoyed the perversity, danced most likely lewd and naked, his “step-daughter”. Also it is quite incredible that *Herodias* would have her own daughter go in and be an object of lust like this. We see the strength of hatred and sin in this horrible scene. Then in the atmosphere of sensual pride and sin *King Herod* swears an oath to give the girl “*Whatever you ask me*”. Read **Isaiah 3:16-26** to see what God says concerning the moral decay of sinful men and women.

The Word Applied & Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to be fully captivated by Your glory alone. Thank You that You forgive the broken & repentant of all sins, even sin like this.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY – **Mark 6:24-29** “*So she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist!” 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.*” We learn it was actually the wicked *Herodias* behind this plot for it is she who instructs the girl when inquired of to ask for, “*the head of John the Baptist*”. This sinful, rebellious, and wicked woman needs to fulfill her quest for revenge on John. John truthfully proclaimed God’s mind in relation to these royals sin and *Herodias* is actually lashing out against God Himself as all mankind does when we sin. Remember, it was Jesus who asked Saul on the Damascus road, “*Why are you persecuting ME?*” From the words, *at once* and *Immediately* we see again the shrewdness of *Herodias* moving quickly while the King’s mood was such that he was still acting foolish; as under a spell of the lustful, lascivious seduction. The King is faced with a dilemma. He feared John and knew him to be God’s man, yet he put his credibility on the line with his bravado and braggadocious statement to his step daughter. As A.T. Robertson, renowned Greek scholar has put it, “He was caught once again between his conscience and his environment. Like many since his day the environment stifled his conscience.” Rudolf Stier says of this wicked King Herod: “This man, whose inner life was burnt out; who was made up of contradictions, speaking of his kingdom like Ahasuerus, and yet the slave of his Jezebel; willingly hearing the prophet, and unwillingly killing him; who will be a Sadducee, and yet thinks of a resurrection; who has a superstitious fear of the Lord Jesus, and yet a curiosity to see him.” How pitiful is sinful man? Mark closes informing us John’s disciples go and give their beloved decapitated teacher a proper burial.

The Word Applied & Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for Your powerful Word. Your truth does and will forever conquer; even physical death of Your servants can’t stop it.