

# **“John’s Martyr’s Death” – Mark 6:17-29**

## **Wednesday 12/19/18 – Jeff Lyle**

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No other human life on the pages of scripture is quite like John the Baptist’s life. His birth was announced by the angel Gabriel. His life was the fulfillment of prophecy by Malachi and Isaiah. He introduced Jesus Christ as God’s son to the world. He intentionally shrank his own ministry and influence so that the mission of Jesus could take center-stage. In the end, John was thrown in prison for preaching righteousness, and in the prison he struggled with powerful doubts about Jesus. As we come to the last scene of his life, he does not speak a word. In full surrender to God’s plan, John passes from this world into the next as the first recorded Kingdom martyr in the New Testament. Let us learn, not only from how John lived, but how he died.

### **I. John Was an Unashamed Prophet (17-18)**

#### **A. He was willing to declare what is right (18) - “For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.”**

It would have been easy for John to give powerful Herod a free pass. Why rock the boat? Herod was unlikely to ever repent, so why did John not simply focus on the general population in Israel who would still listen to what John had to say? How tempting it is for believers to fall silent on moral issues. When the rich and powerful flaunt their vices in the face of Christians, it is possible for the Church to fall embarrassingly silent. John did not feel that there was any legitimate reason to hold his tongue, so he denounced Herod’s flagrant and open sin of stealing his brother’s wife and marrying her himself. It is clear that this was not a one-time indictment from John, but there were multiple occasions where John spoke about it. Modern believers need to consider that sometimes God will call us to boldly and unapologetically make a public stand against sin. He may even have us call individual offenders out for their indifference to biblical morality.

#### **B. He was willing to suffer for what is right (17) - “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.”**

Herod was notorious for being a shrewd political leader. He was a master manipulator who employed cunning in order to retain the power assigned to him by Rome while, at the same time, holding favor with the Jews. One historian indicates that Herod became alarmed that John the Baptizer was calling him out for marrying his brother’s wife. Herod reportedly felt that it weakened his favor with the Jews and might lead to rebellion. For this reason, Herod incarcerated John. With a public reputation of being shrewd and powerful, John well-knew what he was getting himself into when he exposed Herod’s sin. Clearly, he did not regard his own comfort and security as being more important than his calling to call all people to personal repentance. John was no respecter of persons. He did the hard work, knowing there would be a high price attached to it.

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### II. John Was an Object of Fury (19-25)

**A. John’s boldness agitated people (19-20a) - “And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe.”**

There is no surprise that Herodias, Herod’s unlawful wife, was bitter toward John for his indictment of her marriage. She wanted something done about him, namely his execution. Herod was hesitant to give his wife what she desired. Inwardly, Herod knew that John was right. He knew that John was a prophet sent from God. Herod knew that his marriage was immoral and unlawful. Because of this, and also in order to keep peace with all the people who revered John as a God-sent prophet, Herod delayed any final decision about John. Sometimes, God will release into the Kingdom a perplexing person who will not play by the cultural rules. Some people will hate that person. Others will be displeased, but not wanting to dismiss the message of that person entirely. John agitated his cultural, stirring up issues that caused the need for people to decide where they would stand.

**B. John’s ministry intrigued people (20b) - “When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.” Herod had many interactions with John**

While John was incarcerated, he had multiple occasions to dialogue with Herod. For whatever reason, Herod invited John to speak with him. We can imagine that the wicked ruler offered John a ticket to freedom if only John would walk back his indictment of Herod and his wife. Herod listened to what John had to say each time, eagerly desiring those meetings. When those interactions concluded, Herod was left in a state of confusion and spiritual perplexity. Whatever might be said of John by Herodias, her husband was intrigued by this powerful prophet of God.

**C. John’s message infuriated people (21-25) - “But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias’s daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” 23 And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” 24 And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” 25 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.”**

While Herod could seemingly tolerate John, Herodias never overcame the sting of bitterness from John’s exposure of her unholy marriage. When opportunity came, the scorned woman seized it and called for the death of her enemy. Harnessing an offer from Herod to her daughter, Herodias

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secured the death warrant on the Baptizer. John would be executed. Christians who are called to the lives and ministries of a forerunner need to be prepared for suffering, persecution and possible martyrdom. The culture that is dominated with the spirit of the age will never embrace righteous living and messaging. No actions will be viewed as too severe to silence the coming generation of Kingdom prophets. The book of Revelation reveals untold numbers of martyrs who will give their lives for refusing to recant their faith or renounce the name of King Jesus. The fury of the nations will characterize the end of the age. Many holy servants of God will die.

### III. John Was a Kingdom Martyr (26-29)

**A. Everyone makes their choice (26) - “And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.”**

Herod was remorseful but not repentant. He chose his wife over his conscience. Refusing the call of God to repent and enter into righteousness, Herod hardened his heart and signed the execution warrant that would result in John’s decapitation. He made his final choice.

**B. There are consequences to righteous living (27) - “And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison...”**

Christians must settle their hearts on the reality that God will not always allow for us to escape persecution, suffering and mistreatment. Jesus prophesied that the end of the age would include His followers being turned over to authorities, betrayed by loved ones and losing their lives for His sake. We are to count the cost ahead of time so that we will be prepared when the most severe actions of unbelievers come against us. John was ready. He knew His assignment and finished it unto the end.

**C. The wicked rejoice for a season (28) - “...and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.”**

One might imagine how happy Herodias was to see the severed head of her enemy. She felt that she had won. The prophet would be heard no more, and the message would be sent to anyone else who dared to speak out against her or her husband. The wicked mistakenly view temporary gains as permanent victories. In the end, every single rebel soul will look upon the Son of God and confess with their mouths that He is Lord of all. Unfortunately for them, it will be a confession that is tardy. Those who reject Jesus may experience temporary pleasures for a season, but when the vapor of their life fades, there is only judgment awaiting them.

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Herodias sealed her fate. John graduated to glory, but Herodias is not heard of again on the pages of Scripture. To this very day, she regrets what she chose.

### **D. The righteous press on in hope (29) - “When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.”**

It is difficult to imagine how heavy were the hearts of John’s disciples as they claimed his mangled, headless body for burial. He was faithful. He was courageous. He was the human hinge that swung open the door of the Kingdom to all who would enter. The one whose voice had proclaimed hope, truth and power was not to be heard by them anymore. Yet, John’s greatest proclamation was still pulsing throughout Israel. He had pointed all to Jesus and Jesus was increasing before all the eyes of the onlookers. These disciples would bury their beloved John and then they would need to follow the One who was greater than John. The door to the Kingdom was open. The forerunner had completed his assignment. There was now no other figure that would share the spotlight in Israel. Jesus was the object of all Kingdom attention and He would live and die to provide permanent entrance into the Kingdom that John was the first to announce. John finished well. So must we.