



The St J's Group

Mark 6:14-29 - 'Severed Head'

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Mark 6:14-29

14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'

15 Others said, 'He is Elijah.' And still others claimed, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.'

16 But when Herod heard this, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!'

17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. **18** For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'

19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, **20** because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. **22** When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.' **23** And he promised her with an oath, 'Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.' **24** She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' 'The head of John the Baptist,' she answered. **25** At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: 'I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a dish.' **26** The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. **27** So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, **28** and brought back his head on a dish. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. **29** On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.



Salome receives the Head of John the Baptist by Titian

- In the opening chapters of the Bible we read that Adam and Eve lived in close relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. They had freedom to do what they liked with one rule to follow: *'And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'* (Genesis 2:16-17) We all know what happens. Stricken with guilty consciences Adam and Eve hide from God: *'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden'* (Genesis 3:8)
- Our conscience is a powerful God given thing. It is designed by God to warn us away from sin. It is, if you like, the very voice of God to those who will listen to it.
- Like Adam and Eve, Herod's conscience has been informing him that his actions are sinful particularly around the death of John the Baptist who Herod knew was a righteous man: *'knowing him to be a righteous and holy man'* (Mark 6:20)
- Herod, like others, mistakenly believes that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead: *'Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'* (Mark 6:14)
- Are our consciences pricking us at the moment? If so, what about? They will be warning us about sin that is SPREADING. Sin that is SPOILING relationships and finally warning us about sin that is SEPARATING us from our relationship with God.
- Sin ultimately leads to separation or a broken relationship with God: *'But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.'* (Isaiah 59:2)

2.5 Sin has SERIOUS consequences

- The trouble with sin is that it always starts in a small way and then it SPREADS. Having SPREAD, it SPOILS relationships, it SEPARATES us from God and has SERIOUS consequences.
- The Apostle Paul reminds all of us about the SERIOUS consequences of our sin: *'For the wages of sin is death.'* (Romans 6:23a) But we must also remember that: *'Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. God gave Christ Jesus as a sacrifice to pay for sins.'* (Romans 3:24b-25a) So we need to take our sins and their consequences SERIOUSLY and seek God's forgiveness.
- Herod should have known that he could not get away with his sin. History records that he lost both prestige and power. His armies were defeated in A.D 37 by the Nabateans and King Aretas IV of Petra, and his appeals to be made a king (urged by his wife Herodias) were refused by the Emperor Caligula. Herod was banished to Gaul (France) in A.D. 39 and then Spain, where he died.

2.6 Conclusion

- Let this gruesome story, recorded not only by the gospel writer Mark, but also by Matthew and Luke, remind us that sin still SPREADS, SPOILS, SEPARATES and has SERIOUS consequences.

3. Questions to consider at home

- 3.1 Looking at all the characters in this passage how would you describe their sins?
- 3.2 What does Paul mean when he says that *'the wages of sin is death?'* (Romans 6:23a)
- 3.3 What sins do we tend to 'live with' as individuals and as a church?
- 3.4 Can you think of a Biblical or personal example of sin that started in a small way but has then SPREAD, SPOILT and SEPARATED with SERIOUS consequences?
- 3.5 A friend tells you that he has an addiction to pornography. How might you help?

2.1 Introduction

- ‘So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a dish. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.’ (Mark 6:27-8) What a shocking ending to Herod’s birthday party! How gruesome the sight must have been for his guests, let alone his wife and daughter. But how had this monstrous act come about? What had happened to allow the severed head of an innocent man, namely John the Baptist, to end up on a platter at the culmination of Herod’s birthday party? It was sin. The sin of Herod, his wife Herodias and arguably his daughter Salome. They had all conspired in their own way to allow this repulsive act to occur. Sin had been given permission to have a field day!
- The trouble with sin, or disobedience towards God, is that it also starts in a small way and then it:
 - SPREADS
 - SPOILS
 - SEPARATES and has
 - SERIOUS consequences

2.2. Sin SPREADS

- The trouble with sin is that it always starts in a small way and then it SPREADS. Small steps to begin with, and then if unchecked, it can unfortunately become habit forming.
- The Herod we are dealing with here is not the Herod who met the wise men and slaughtered all the baby boys in Jerusalem. That was Herod the Great who ruled from 37 b.c. to 4 b.c. but we are dealing with one of his many sons, known as Herod Antipas, who ruled from 4 b.c. to A.D. 39.
- When Herod the Great died, the Romans divided his territory among his three living sons, Archelaus, Philip and Antipas who was made tetrarch of Pera and Galilee.
- All of the Herods had Edomite blood in them, and, like their ancestor Esau, they were hostile towards the Jews. They practiced the Jewish religion when it helped fulfil their plans and enhanced their power and wealth.
- The Bible doesn’t tell us how Herod’s sin starts but we can probably guess. No doubt at some family gathering Herod Antipas, who was married at the time to the daughter of the Nabatean king, Aretas IV, of Petra, allowed his eyes and his mind to feast on his half brother Philip’s wife, Herodias.
- Looks and thoughts move onto conversation and time spent together and eventually leads to Herod Antipas divorcing his wife and Herodias leaving her husband Philip. Antipas and Herodias are then married and have a daughter named Salome.
- John the Baptist publicly denounces this union: ‘For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ (Mark 6:18) and is arrested for his denouncement: ‘For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison.’ (Mark 6:17)
- Herodias nurses a grudge against John and wants to kill him but can’t because Herod is protecting John: ‘So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him.



But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.’ (Mark 6:19 - 20a)

- In a drunk filled moment having allowed his own daughter to please his birthday guests: *When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.* (Mark 6:22a) Herod then promises her anything she wants: *The king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.’* (Mark 6:22b)
- Herodias seizes this moment for her revenge. We are not told, but maybe she had planned this all along: Salome asks her mother *‘What shall I ask for?’ ‘The head of John the Baptist,’ Herodias answered.* (Mark 6:24)
- Antipas is now caught in a vice of his own making. He does not wish to look foolish in front of his birthday guests: *‘The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head.’* (Mark 6:26-27a)
- That is the trouble with sin, it always starts in a small way and then SPREADS. In Herod’s case a lustful passing glance at Herodias ends up with:
 - divorce from his first wife,
 - the arrest of John the Baptist,
 - the revenge of his new wife Herodias, and finally with
 - John’s head on a platter at his own birthday party.
- What about us? A little sin can be the first step in our turning away from God. It is not the sins we don’t know about but the sins we ‘live with’, that cause us the greatest trouble. We must never let sin go unchallenged. Is there unchallenged sin in our lives SPREADING like a deadly cancer? If so, we need to confess these sins and ask God to ‘break the chains’ and the control these sins have over us: *‘Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.’* (Psalm 107:13-14)

2.3 Sin SPOILS

- The trouble with sin is that it always starts in a small way and then it SPREADS. Having SPREAD it then begins to SPOIL. The enemy always peddles the lie that sin does not matter - but all sin SPOILS something. Consider all the relationships that are SPOILT by Herod’s sin with Herodias and the subsequent arrest and beheading of John the Baptist.
 - i) Herod’s relationship with his first wife and the family of the King Aretas IV of Petra is SPOILT.
 - ii) Herod’s relationship with his half brother, Philip and his own family is SPOILT.
 - iii) Herod’s relationship with Herodias. She must have known what she was doing as she allowed their relationship together to blossom and grow. Herod must have been aware of her grudge against John the Baptist. Their relationship is SPOILT.
 - iv) Herod’s relationship with Salome. Jewish law strictly prohibited a woman to dance before a group of men. What loving father or mother would have allowed Salome to do what she did at Herod’s birthday party? His relationship with his daughter was SPOILT and finally
 - v) Herod’s relationship with the nation was SPOILT. One of Herod’s tasks, as king, was to be a role model to the nation.
- As we consider our own sins - what relationships are they SPOILING?

2.4 Sin SEPARATES

- The trouble with sin is that it always starts in a small way and then it SPREADS. Having SPREAD, it SPOILS relationships and then it SEPARATES us from God.