

JOHN, WHOM I BEHEADED

Mark 6:14-29 (Key Verse 16)

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

In today's passage we are first going to learn how Jesus and his disciples' ministry had impact on the people in Israel and king Herod. The people were greatly moved by the power and authority of Jesus and his disciples, that they even thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, some said he is Elijah, while others claimed he is a prophet from long ago. While the people were filled with joy and peace at this news, King Herod trembled in fear, saying: *“John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”* Why did Herod tremble with fear? He trembled, because when John the Baptist preached to him the message of repentance, he refused to repent and killed John. Therefore, we are going to learn from John the Baptist who challenged a prominent figure like Herod, what attitude we should have as servants of God entrusted to preach the gospel of Jesus to campus students and the world today. We are also going to learn from Herod how sin penetrates one's heart when we refuse to repent and ignore the truth of God. I pray that God may have mercy on us to receive one word from today's passage.

The passage today begins after the victorious return of Jesus twelve disciples from a mission field, Jesus disciples went out and preached that the people should repent, they drove out many demons and healed many sick people. The disciples went out with nothing but a staff and returned victoriously. When they returned word about them, and Jesus' ministry spread all over that it even reached King Herod. This Herod was the son of King Herod the great who killed babies under the age of two in Bethlehem when he heard Jesus the Messiah was born. Now what word reached King Herod? Let us look **verse 14-15**: *“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.””

When the people witnessed the powerful ministry of Jesus and his disciples, some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. They thought this way because of the consistency of John the Baptist’s ministry with Jesus’ ministry. John preached the gospel of repentance, saying: *“Repent for the kingdom of God is near”* when the disciples went out, they preached the gospel of repentance as well. This also says a lot about John the Baptist’s attitude towards God and his gospel ministry, he was filled power and authority, he was bold and did not compromise and so when the people saw the authority and miraculous powers in Jesus’ disciples they said: *“John the Baptist has been raised from the dead.”* They thought John the Baptist’s spirit was still working with more power from the dead.

Others said Jesus is Elijah, why? Elijah was one the most powerful prophets through who God revealed his mighty power. In **1 Kings 18**, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and defeated them by calling on the Lord who miraculously set fire on a sacrifice that was deeply immersed in water. The prophets of Baal on the other hand cut themselves and could not even create a spark on their sacrifice. Jesus was said to be Elijah because of the great power and authority that he had, because of the great miracles he performed, driving out demons, evil spirit, his powerful messages, and great walk with God. The people also said he is Elijah for it was prophesied that Elijah would come first before the Messiah in **Malachi 4:5**: *“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”* The prophesy was about John the Baptist who has already come.

People also claimed that Jesus is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago. This suggested that Jesus was just like one of the prophets in the Old Testament. This reports about Jesus suggest that the people recognised that God’s power was with Jesus, but still they thought he was just a man with God’s power and his word, just like John the Baptist and the other prophets

of long ago. Jesus is not just an ordinary man, he is God with power and authority over all things, that is why he could even give power and authority to the disciples to drive out demons and heal the sick. That is why Jesus' ministry could shake the entire nation of Israel like a spiritual earthquake. Without Jesus Christ, our ministry cannot have power, it is through Jesus that our ministry can have power. John's ministry had power because Jesus was with him, and so is Elijah and the prophets of long ago. For us to have power and authority as servants of God here on Wits campus, we need to depend on Jesus Christ, we need to obey his commands and leading, then our ministry will flourish, it will shake the hearts of campus students.

How then did Herod respond when this report about Jesus reached him? Let us look at the **key verse 16**: *"But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"*" When Herod heard about Jesus, he was reminded of John the Baptist whom he beheaded. Instead of being blessed by the report of what Jesus has been doing, he trembled with fear. The tone of King Herod's response tells us that he was filled with so much guilt and fear, even though he was king with so much power and authority, he trembled before Jesus. Does it mean Herod felt bad for killing a person? Does it mean he was different from his father who killed babies under 2 years when he heard about Jesus the Messiah who is born? Herod was still a terrible king, he certainly would not have a problem with killing any other man. But John was not just any other man, there was something about him that left Herod with so much guilt and torment.

To understand where Herod's guilt and torment comes from, let us look at the encounter of Herod with John the Baptist. First, let us look at **verse 17-18**: *"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. / For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."*" Even though Herod was a great King with all power and authority in Israel, even though he was an evil man, John the Baptist preached the message of repentance to him and urged him to repent. For at the time Herod had taken his brother

Philip's wife Herodias to be his own. John the Baptist did not compromise preaching the gospel, even if it could cost his life. With boldness he went to Herod and rebuked him for what he was doing was unlawful according to the scriptures. In **Leviticus 20:10** it says: *"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."* John did not remain silent before unrighteousness but rather he spoke the truth even if it cost him his life.

Do we speak the truth to our Bible students, or are we concerned they will leave our ministry? Or hate us? John spoke the truth even before the corrupted world of his time and challenged people to repent, he challenged even their king Herod. To be an effective gospel workers like John we need to be ready to lose anything to preach the truth of God. Without this attitude we will distort the message of God to protect ourselves from counterattack. For the word of God to be effective, we need to tell it like it is, and then people will be challenged to repent from their sins. When John spoke the truth, Herod was challenged and to silence John, he put him in prison.

Why did Herod put John into prison, silence him and not repent from his sin? Let us look at **verse 19-20**: *"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[b]; yet he liked to listen to him."* When John preached the message of repentance to Herod, he was touched and deep down in his heart there was a desire to repent even though he was a terrible king. This is because the message of God has power to challenge even the worst sinners. But because of Herodias who was adulterous, who betrayed his husband Philip for fortunes she influenced Herod who was moved by lust. Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. Herod feared John for he knew he was a righteous man, because of that he could not kill John but rather put him in prison to protect him. But still this was not enough, what he needed to do was to repent. When it comes to sin, covering up does not work, what we need before sin is repentance.

In **verse 20b** it says: *“Herod liked to listen to John.”* This is good, but without repentance it did him no good, instead the absence of repentance led him into much deeper sin. Coming to worship service every Sunday, participating in Bible studies and testimony writing is very good, it is a blessing that God gave to the UBF ministry. But without repentance, we cannot grow, we cannot experience the blessing of God, we need to pray for the spirit of humility and repentance so that we do not end up like Herod. So that we do not become habitual Christians, but genuine Christians who allow God’s word to work fully in our hearts.

What happened to Herod when he refused to repent, what kind of deeper sin did he fall into? Herodias did not stop looking for ways to kill Jesus, and eventually an opportune time came. This happened during Herod’s birthday, and because Herod loved partying and hosting prominent figures such as high officials and military commanders and leading men in Galilee. He hosted a banquet and invited these prominent guests. During this party Herodias planned for her daughter to dance for Herod and his guests, she was so evil that she even manipulated her daughter to do this dance for Herod and his guests. Herodias did this for she knew that after Herod has had a few glasses of wine, while Herodias’ daughter dances for him and his guests he will carelessly and impulsively say something foolish that she can use to get what she wants out of Herod. And indeed, things happened just as Herodias planned. In **verse 22-23** it says: *“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.”*” Herodias’s daughter was still immature, she did not know what to ask the king for, she could have asked for half the kingdom which would be great fortunes for her. But instead, she went back to her mother who told her to ask for John the Baptist’s head. The mother was manipulative and used her daughter to achieve her evil ways, she used her daughter to try get John killed.

How did Herod respond when Herodias daughter said to her: *"I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."*? Let us look at **verse 26-28**: *"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. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, / and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother."* Herod was greatly distressed because he did not want to kill John the Baptist, as we learnt before he protected him and enjoyed listening to him for, he knew he was a man of God. Deep down Herod was touched by the message of John and wanted to repent but did not. Repentance is all about action, it is not about how we feel or what we desire to do, but rather is about taking action. If we do not take action, sin will continue to drag us deep into the mud. Even though Herod had a desire, because of the absence of repentance, lack of action. He could not overcome the trap that Herodias had plotted for him.

Herod could not repent initially when John rebuked him and urged him to repent, because of his sin of lust for Herodias and not wanting to disappoint her. And now because of his careless promise and oath he made before his guests, he did not want to lose his honour and pride and so he gave in to the request of Herodias's daughter. He murdered an innocent man, John the Baptist. Deep down he did not want to murder him, deep down he wanted to repent, but he was not courageous enough to do righteous things even though he knew what was right. For a foolish reason he killed John the Baptist. When we refuse to repent, when we harden our hearts when the word of God is clear, we open a door to a dark world filled with sin. We open a door to a corrupt life of sin. King Herod was a prominent figure, but because of his failure to repent he became a miserable man, he was tormented by guilt and could not lead the people of Israel. He could not have courage to stand up for the truth, but rather just lived to please people even at expense of his soul.

Conclusion:

After Herod had beheaded John the Baptist, his disciples heard about it and came and took his body and laid it in the tombs. At this point it looks like evil won the battle, Herodias got what she wanted, and John the Baptist lost his life. However, this is just a shallow way of looking at the situation, a deeper look reveals great victory in John the Baptist's courage to stand up for the truth even at the cost of his life. From John the Baptist we could learn that in order to make an impact as gospel workers, to save people's lives we need to preach the message of repentance even if it costs us our lives. This is what the disciples of Jesus did, this is what Jesus did and many people turned from their life of sin and lived a blessed life. Furthermore, because of John the Baptist's decision to challenge Herod to repent, today we could learn the consequence of not repenting, we could learn how we could be led into deeper sin when we refuse to repent. We could learn that we cannot remain between truth and sin, but we should repent and live according to the truth. I pray that God may have mercy on first to repent and not harden our hearts and secondly to preach the gospel of repentance with courage, even if it will cost us our lives.

Amen.

Key Verse.