

With Jesus All the Way

Our text for today is no sweet sentimental story. It is bloody, grisly, and wicked. At the same time, it teaches us something very important about the life of the Christ-follower.

Mark 6:14-32

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." **15** But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." **16** But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." **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. **18** For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." **19** 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. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

21 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." **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. **27** And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison **28** and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. **29** When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. **31** And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. **32** And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Jesus' disciples have just been sent out on mission (vv. 7-13), but before they report back (v. 30) Mark records this tragic martyrdom, which teaches three vital truths of Christian discipleship.

I. There will be a sharp contrast between you and the powers of this world. (vv. 14-20)

Consider the two main characters in this story, Herod Antipas and John the Baptist. Herod was an extremely wicked man. He was one of the sons of Herod the Great, very ambitious, self indulgent, and proud. He divorced his first wife in order to marry his niece, who was previously married to his brother. We can see from the text he actually had a conscience, because he feels guilty and sorrowful over his evil deeds, but we can also observe that he regularly violates his conscience in order to win favor with his wife or with other people he deems to be important. He goes from bad to worse. On the other hand, John the Baptist stands out as one of the finest characters in all of Scripture: he preaches the truths of repentance, no matter the cost to him personally, and he practices what he preaches. Even Herod recognizes him as "a righteous and holy man." (v. 20)

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make us more like Jesus, which, of course, makes us less and less like the world around us. Leonard Ravenhill said, "the greatest work of God's grace is to take an unholy man in an unholy world and make him holy and put him back in an unholy world and keep him holy in it."

II. There will be gross injustices committed against you because you follow Christ.**(vv. 21-29)**

In both Matthew and Luke, when Jesus sends his disciples into ministry, He is recorded to have said, "I send you out as lambs among wolves." In Mark's account, this story serves the same purpose. We are being clearly warned of what lies ahead, not only for Jesus, but also for us. As Paul says in citing Isaiah, we are sheep fattened for the slaughter. Jesus said that whoever follows Him must deny himself and take up his cross.

III. There will be rest for you. (vv. 30-32)

In the Old Testament, Moses and Joshua, on a number of occasions, promised the people of God that they would one day have rest from their enemies on every side. Here, Jesus invites His disciples into the wilderness to give them rest; and, of course, in Matthew 11: 28-30 He invites everyone to come to Him for rest. In Hebrews, the writer explains why many in the Old Testament never entered their rest: in their unbelief they disobeyed God. Those who experience God's rest are, simply, those who trust Him. One Day, we shall experience our rest in totality, spiritually and physically; now we experience our rest spiritually as a down payment on the glory to come.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the differences in character between John the Baptist and Herod Antipas. What is most remarkable to you about each of these men?
2. Why is it important that followers of Christ be distinctive in character from those in the world?
3. When injustices occur, when should we simply quietly suffer, and when should we object?
4. Describe an instance when you were being treated unfairly and yet you experienced God's rest.
5. How does our confidence in our eternal rest affect our behavior in this life?

Going Deeper

In what type of circumstances do you tend to compromise your faith or fail to stand up for what is right and good? How can you change this?

In what ways do you need to experience God's rest more deeply in your life?