

“When Pride Gets in the Way”

Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 6:14-29

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Mark 6:14-29 (New International Version)

John the Baptist Beheaded

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

¹⁵Others said, "He is Elijah."

And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

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

¹⁷For 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.

¹⁸For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

¹⁹So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰because 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.

²¹Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²²When 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." ²³And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

²⁴She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

²⁵At 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 platter."

²⁶The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Footnotes:

a. [Mark 6:14](#) Some early manuscripts He was saying

b. [Mark 6:20](#) Some early manuscripts he did many things

Introduction.

Have you ever had a time when pride got in the way? Many years ago, during our first year of marriage, Lorie and I lived in a garage apartment in Rome, Georgia. In the spring of that year, heavy rains came so that the creeks overflowed and floodwaters began to creep closer and closer to our garage apartment. Lorie said to me, "We've gotta get out of this house!"



I replied, "Now, honey, I've been monitoring the radio reports, and they say the rains have stopped, the floods have crested, the waters are going to recede, and there really isn't any more danger, so we don't need to move out."

Lorie answered, "We've gotta get out of this house!"

And so it went back and forth with one of the first intense arguments during our first year of marriage. I dug my heels in because I thought Lorie was calling into question my rational ability to make good decisions, and I let pride get in the way. I refused to budge, and we spent the night in that garage apartment not talking to each other, both of us angry at the other person and frustrated that our new marriage partner was so irrational or insensitive, depending on the perspective!

The next morning, we awoke only to find our garage apartment completely surrounded by putrid flood waters, and we had to wade out and make our way to higher ground. Here's a picture of me, a friend took in the park next to our apartment for the newspaper. I ate crow that day, and I learned a valuable lesson of which Larry Coulter reminded us last night – a husband needs to provide for the physical security of his wife.

Pride can get in the way, and it can lead to our undoing. We see another example of it here in our passage this morning. As we look at this story in Mark 6, I want you to notice: the immorality of Herod; the spiritual curiosity of Herod; and the pride of Herod.

I. The Immorality of Herod.

There are a great many Herods that are mentioned in the Bible, and it is difficult to keep them all straight! Here's a way to keep your Herods straight. First, there was Herod the Great. He had a great anger and he was greatly paranoid, but he did build a great Temple in Jerusalem. Then there was Herod Antipas, and he was about as likeable as antipasto can sometimes be! And there was Herod Agrippa, but he had a hard time getting "a-grip-o" things, and eventually a worm got "a grip o" him, and he died!

Today we read of Herod Antipas. He was the son of Herod the Great and his wife Malthace. When his father died, this Herod became tetrarch, which literally means "the ruler of the fourth part," a portion of the kingdom his father had ruled. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and Perea.

Originally Antipas married the daughter of Aretas IV, who was a Nabatean king, and they married sometime before 14 AD. But 15 years later Antipas made a journey to Rome, and on his way he paid a visit to his half-brother, Philip, who apparently lived in one of the coastal cities of Palestine. Antipas fell in love with his host's wife, Herodias, who also happened to be his own niece! The whole affair was rather incestuous!

She was an ambitious woman, and she saw this as her opportunity to become the wife of a king. So Herodias agreed to marry Antipas upon his return from Rome with the stipulation that he get rid of his first wife. Aretas' daughter got wind of this, and she fled to her father in tears. It is no coincidence that the Nabateans later retaliated against Herod Antipas, and this eventually led to his downfall which resulted in his exile 10 years later in 39 AD.

In the meantime, after Antipas and Herodias were married, John the Baptist began to speak boldly against their marriage. He denounced Herod because he married his brother's wife. The Mosaic Law strictly forbade the marriage to a



brother's wife with one exception called a levirate marriage involving one's deceased brother. However, in Herod's case, the brother was still very much alive, and he had children, namely Salome!

As a result of John's preaching, Herod put the Baptist into prison. He couldn't afford to have this prophet continue to stir up the people with his denouncement of the king's adulterous marriage. John was bold and unequivocal in what he said. About these things Calvin writes: *"We behold in John an illustrious example of that moral courage which all pious teachers ought to possess, not to hesitate to incur the wrath of the great and powerful, as often as it may be found necessary: for he, with whom there is acceptance of persons, does not honestly serve God."*ⁱ

How many times have you and I failed to speak the truth about a situation because we feared how the person we're talking with will react, especially if they are powerful or influential. We worry what they will think, and we swallow our words in an effort to get along and win their favor.

A few years ago, we learned that even someone like Billy Graham can do this. Billy is one of my great heroes in the faith, but even he was not immune to this temptation. Tapes from the Nixon White House years recently released revealed a moment when Nixon expressed racial prejudice and railed against the Jewish-controlled press in this country, and Billy remained mostly silent and seemed to go along and share Nixon's bigotry.

To his credit, when Dr. Graham was asked about these things and he heard the tapes himself, he replied, "I don't know what I was thinking. I am so ashamed I said nothing, and I apologize to every Jewish person I offended by my words as well as by my silence."

We've all been there. We've done the same thing. But you and I should be willing to speak the truth, even when it is unpopular, even to the powerful, even when it may cost us something. John sure did.

II. Herod's Spiritual Curiosity.

Herodias had not taken John's condemnation of her marriage lightly, and she was infuriated by him and wanted him dead. As T.W. Manson has written, Herodias knew that *"the only place where her marriage certificate could safely be written was on the back of the death warrant of John."*ⁱⁱ

However, Herod protected the Baptist. There was a curiosity the king had with John. Motivated perhaps by fear and recognition of John's righteousness and bold character, Herod refused to allow him to be put to death. He was struck by the purity of John's character, and he feared the Baptist as the bad fear the good. Herod liked to listen to John, but he did not fully understand the things the prophet said, and he was greatly puzzled in his mind and heart.

Here we have an example of a person who has a hunger for spiritual things, but he doesn't have the capacity or the desire to fully take them in. He comes to the edge of the water of the knowledge of God, but he refuses to drink and really take it in to himself. How many people have you known like this? How many of us, if we are honest, are like this ourselves?

I remember a young man I met at SMU many years ago who was involved with our university ministry back in Dallas. His name was Ben. When I first met Ben, he was on the swim team, he was majoring in Business, and he had such a curiosity and an interest in spiritual things. He came by all the time, and he wanted



to talk about metaphysical matters and what the Bible had to say about various topics. But Ben never would come to the point where he was ready to commit his life to Jesus. He loved to discuss, he loved to search, he loved the conversation, but he wasn't willing to commit and trust in Christ personally himself.

The last time I saw Ben he was involved in a destructive lifestyle, he was battling drug abuse, and he had dropped out of school. Ben reminds me of a sermon that J. Wilbur Chapman once preached at the turn of the last century. It was titled "*Almost Persuaded.*" He spoke about people who are interested in Jesus for a season, but it doesn't last. They come close to making a commitment to God, they are almost persuaded, but in the end they fail to take the final step. They love to talk, they love to search, but they are reluctant to commit. That's the way Herod was. Are you?

III. The Pride of Herod.

Herodias finally got the opportunity she was waiting for. When Herod celebrated his birthday with a banquet, he invited the military and political leaders of his kingdom. At this festive occasion Herodias' daughter, whom we learn from other sources was named Salome, danced for the entertainment of the guests. The dance was probably racy, and Herod and his dinner guests were pleased with her performance. Herod was so delighted that in a boisterous manner he offered Salome up to half his kingdom, and he sealed his words with an oath.

The girl left the banquet hall to seek the advice of her mother, and Herodias quickly took advantage of the situation and revealed the premeditated nature of her murderous plans. She told Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The grim detail of "on a platter right now" appears to be Salome's own idea. What a pair these two made.

Herod was conflicted. He was reluctant to grant the request, but because of his oaths and his many dinner guests, he did not refuse her and he called for John's execution. A guard beheaded the Baptist in the prison of the castle, and he brought back his head on a platter. It was presented to Salome who in turn gave it to her mother.

Here we have a sad case of a person who does the wrong thing for all the wrong reasons. Herod wanted to save face. He was more concerned with what other people thought of him than he was in doing what was right! Sadly, the opinion of others was more important to him than the opinion of God, and he went against his conscience!

Aren't we all guilty of this at one time or another? All of us struggle with peer pressure, whether we are 7-years-old or 87, and we cave in to the opinion of others far too often. Many years ago when I was in high school, there was a snow day which canceled school, very much like kids enjoyed in Dallas last week. It rarely snowed in Atlanta when I was growing up, so my friends and I were thrilled to have the day off. We were hanging out one afternoon trying to think of something fun to do, when one of the guys came up with the bright idea of going down to the local golf club, hotwiring some golf carts, and going for joy rides in the snow. Something inside me said this wasn't a good idea, but I was afraid to speak up because I didn't want to rock the boat, I didn't want to appear like a stick-in-the-mud or a kill-joy, and I wanted to go along and be accepted, so I said nothing.



We went down to the Standard Club, we broke into the shed where the carts were kept, and we hotwired 4 of them. For 45 minutes we had the time of our lives. However, it quickly came to an end. What we didn't know was that the shed had a silent alarm, and it wasn't long before the police arrived and we were all arrested for grand theft and taken down to the Atlanta city jail (which isn't a very pleasant place to be!).

I'll never forget what one parent said when the police called our folks from the station, "Well, they can't be in too much trouble, because they are with Peter." I knew the idea was stupid, I knew we shouldn't do it, but I was too afraid to speak up. That was then. From that point onward, whenever I had a misgiving about a dumb idea, you better bet I spoke up and let it be known. I was determined never to let peer pressure put me in a place where I compromised my convictions or went against my conscience again. It was a valuable lesson to learn the hard way.

Conclusion/Application.

As we close this morning, let me ask you a few questions. Is your life marked by purity like John's? In a day when we are tempted to compromise and embrace the morals of everyone around us, may our lives be marked by purity and truth! It is so easy to lose our edge in this regard, it's easy to just go along with the crowd, and the world urges us to compromise our convictions and satisfy our desires. "Everyone's doing it. Why should I be the only one who's left out? And what difference does it really make anyway?" we think to ourselves. But it does make a difference, my friend. Don't give in! Don't give up! Do the right thing, even if you're the only voice in the wilderness.

Are you curious about Jesus, or have you come to the place where you have decided to follow Him? Like Herod, we may feel drawn to spiritual things, we may be attracted to the person of Jesus, but we are afraid that it might cost us if we really accept the truth of Christianity and believe it for ourselves. And we're right! It will cost us a great deal, because Jesus said you must lose your life to find it! You can't have it both ways. You can't keep a foot in two worlds as Herod tried to do. It's like trying to straddle a dock and a canoe. You can't maintain that position for very long, or else you will wind up a mess in the water!

Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are luke-warm -- neither hot nor cold -- I am about to vomit you out of My mouth!"* Elijah asked the people of his day, *"How long will you waver between 2 opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him."* And Joshua said, *"Choose this day whom will serve. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."*

Finally, let me ask, do you worry more about what other people think than what God does? If it is the right thing to do, do it, regardless of what others may say. Don't let the voice of people drown out the voice of God in your ears or in your heart. Be faithful to the Lord and to His Word, and strive to hear the Lord say on the last day, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Today is Valentine's Day, and on this day people the world over people will celebrate love in its many expressions. It all began in the 3rd century with a humble follower of Jesus Christ named Valentinus who was more concerned with what God thought of him than he was anyone else. In the year 270 AD, the Roman Emperor Claudius II ordered all the citizens of the Empire to worship only the 12



Roman gods, and he made it a crime punishable by death to worship any other god including Christ. But Valentinus was dedicated to following Jesus, and not even the threat of death could keep him from his worship of the Lord. For this, he was arrested, put in prison, and sentenced to die.

During the last weeks of Valentinus' life, the jailer noticed that this humble man was a person of great learning and knowledge, and he asked if his daughter, Julia, might be brought to the prison and if Valentinus would be willing to teach her. Julia had a keen mind and she was eager to learn, but she had been blind from birth and never had the benefit of an education. Valentinus agreed. He read to her the history of Rome, he described the world of nature, he taught her mathematics, and he told her about the love God in Christ. She began to see the world through his eyes, she trusted in his wisdom and found comfort in his quiet strength, and she gave her life to Christ.

One day Julia asked Valentinus if God really heard our prayers, and he assured that God heard each and every one of them. Julia went on to say she prayed that God to give her sight because she so wanted to see all the things Valentinus described to her. They prayed together, and suddenly there was a brilliant light in the prison cell. Julia's sight was restored, and they praised God together. It was because of this miracle Valentinus was later made a saint.

On the eve of his execution, it is said Valentinus wrote a letter to Julia, and he urged her to stay close to God and to love Him with all her heart. He signed it, "From your Valentine." The humble martyr was executed for his faith on February 14, 270 AD. It is also said Julia planted a pink-blossomed almond tree near his grave, and it remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship to this day.

People like Valentinus and John the Baptist remind us how important it is to make sure the voice of God sounds louder in our ears than the voice of our neighbor. May their good example inspire us to live lives of purity and grace to the glory of God regardless of the cost. If we do, it will be a Happy Valentine's Day, indeed, friends! Amen.

ⁱJohn Calvin, *Commentary of an Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 2, p.222.

ⁱⁱT.W. Manson, *The Servant Messiah*, p.40.

