

## **The Legacy of John the Baptist**

Luke 3:18-20

42-45

We have the privilege again this morning of opening the scriptures to the gospel of Luke. For those of you who are visiting with us, week after week we go through the Scriptures verse by verse, explaining the richness of the Word of God. The New Testament begins with four gospels, they're called, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And they are basically accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. They when taken together give the full picture. The Holy Spirit inspired each of the writers to write. They picked the aspects of the life of Christ that they wanted to emphasize, each in a unique way looking at the same great story, the same great glorious person, Jesus Christ, and yet with very, very individual nuances and insights. And when you compare them all and blend them all together, you get the full story of Jesus Christ. It's just a magnificent, magnificent account and a very full account of the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior.

We happen to be studying Luke's gospel and Luke's gospel is rich in its own right because Luke is a theologian, he is a historian, and he enriches our understanding of both theology and history as he tells the story of Jesus. But at this particular point in the third chapter of Luke, Jesus has not yet come on the scene publicly. He hasn't yet begun His ministry. But, in fact, His forerunner, His herald, the prophet who came before Jesus, is in the main position of interest. He is the main character in this part of Luke's gospel. His name is John. He's known as John the prophet or most commonly, John the Baptist.

He has come to prepare the people for Messiah. He has come to point the people to Messiah. And we have been learning about John's ministry from verse 1 down through verse 17. By external standards, I suppose the world might judge that John was a failure. He didn't appear to have a very successful career. He was isolated, to put it mildly. He spent his whole life and his whole ministry out in the Judean wilderness. His ministry was brief, lasting about a year. And painful, he was in prison for about a year. And fatal, at the end of that year his head was chopped off. So he died a very young man, in his early 30s.

And again I say, by the world's standards he might look like a rather obscure, isolated, and unsuccessful man. The fact of the matter is, he was eminently successful. Jesus said of him he was the greatest man who ever lived up until his time. And he accomplished precisely and exactly what God wanted him to accomplish to the very letter so that his eternal reward would be complete.

As we know, John's preaching was bold, it was strong, it was confrontive. He gave hard truth in that he told sinners what they really needed to hear. He called on all people to repent. He told them if they would repent from their sin, God would forgive their sins. He told them that they must believe in the coming Messiah. His boldness cost him his life. And John became the first martyr for Christ, the first of many through the centuries since who have suffered and died for the gospel, and done so at the hands of those who hate the gospel and love their sins.

So by divine standards, John is noble, to put it mildly. As I said, the greatest man who ever lived up until his time, a man who did exactly what God wanted him to do and did it completely, a man who had the wonderful, wonderful privilege of becoming the first martyr for Christ. His life was monumental, his accomplishments unequalled because of the uniqueness of his responsibility.

The story of John is fascinating. Luke doesn't tell it all to us. Let's look at verses 18 to 20 and hear what Luke does tell us. "So with many other exhortations also he preached the gospel to the people. But when Herod the tetrarch was reproved by him on account of Herodias, his brother's wife, and account of all the wicked things which Herod had done, he added this also to them all: That he locked John up in prison." Just that, and with that statement about John being locked up in prison, Luke ends his discussion of John. His account is very, very brief. It's really nothing more than a summary of John's ministry. Verse 18 summarizes the ministry as giving many other exhortations by which he preached the gospel to the people. And then there's a brief statement about the fact that he agitated Herod and Herod put him in prison.

Now Luke is not intending to be chronological here. Herod didn't actually put him in prison at this point. It was some time later that Herod put him in prison. But Luke intends to just wrap up the story of John, so he reaches forward to tell you how that story ends so that he can now turn to Jesus, starting in verse 21, and Jesus becomes the singular focus of the rest of Luke's gospel.

Now in the rest of Luke's gospel John will be mentioned, but only in reference to Jesus. Jesus will now occupy center stage and be the main character, obviously, in the rest of the story, and John becomes incidental, although there are a couple of times when he is mentioned in chapter 5, chapter 7, and chapter 9 and we'll see those as we move along.

So, Luke not being chronological just runs sort of to the end of the story and concludes John's ministry by saying he was put in prison, and that tells us that John's ministry essentially came to an end. His ministry lasted actually about a year, so his ministry overlapped the ministry of Jesus about six months. That is to say, if we go back a little bit, he ministered for six months, then Jesus came, started His ministry, and their two ministries overlapped for about six months, then John was put in prison. He was in prison for up to a year at which time he was executed. Luke just tells us he was put in prison because, in effect, that put an end to his ministry. His place on the biblical stage as the main character ends here. John's ministry can be summed up in verse 18 as a ministry preaching the gospel to the people. What is the gospel? It's the good news, that's what gospel means. And what's the good news? God will forgive all your sins if you repent and believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Verse 21 says, "Now it came about when all the people were baptized that Jesus also was baptized." Now I want to read that to let you know that that goes back again to the work of John because it was John who was baptizing the people and it was John who baptized Jesus, as we shall see. That's only to point out that Luke's telling us the end of the story not chronologically, he wasn't locked up in prison at this time because verse 21 goes back to talking about his baptizing work and his baptizing of Jesus. Luke in verse 20 simply tells us the end of the story before it actually happened.

Now as we look at these three verses, I just want to pick three words that are very simple: Preaching, personalizing and persecution. Just three that I hope you can remember and they will help us unfold this story. Now to get the full story, and, folks, you cannot...you cannot limit yourself to these three

verses. The story is too exciting and too wonderful. This frankly is the original New Testament soap opera and just reading names like Herod and Herodias opens up this whole amazing story of what happens to John. Three words, preaching, personalizing, and then persecution sum up the story of John.

Let's look at verse 19...or verse 18, I'm sorry. "So with many other exhortations also, he preached the gospel to the people." Now we've already seen that in verses 7 to 17 for many months, from the winter of 26 A.D. to the start of the summer of that year, John was in the wilderness of Judea out by the Jordan River calling people to repent. And you remember all Jerusalem and Judea were coming out because they were excited about the Messiah's coming. They were tired of Roman oppression and they wanted the Messiah to arrive and deliver them and liberate them. And so they were pouring out when they heard that the forerunner of the Messiah was there. They were getting ready for the Messiah ostensibly. Before the Savior appeared on the scene in public, John was preaching this good news of repentance and he was baptizing people as an outward symbol of their inward repentance and this was going on for about six months before Jesus actually showed up to be baptized, to be designated as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and to begin His ministry. He showed, John did, all people their terrible wickedness, the reality of eternal judgment. He preached the wrath to come, eternal hell. And he preached that men would go there if they didn't repent without delay and believe in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He warned people to flee from the wrath to come. He warned them that they couldn't be saved by ritual and they couldn't be saved by heritage but only by repentance of heart. At the end of about six months of that ministry, Jesus came to be baptized and we'll look at that in the next section. John did baptize Jesus. At that point, God was officially identifying Jesus as the Messiah, but that did not end, as I said, John's ministry. It continued for about six months longer.

Now just one comment at the end of verse 18: He preached the gospel to the people. Now "the people," of course, refers to the Jews. Obviously they are the people uniquely in the land of Israel. They are the ones to whom the gospel was first brought, of course. But it was not limited to them and the Old Testament, and we've gone through that before, the Old Testament indicated that the gospel would be preached, the good news of New Covenant forgiveness would be preached to all people, to the nations. And a good illustration of that is the immediate move from verse 18 into verse 19 and the introduction of Herod, "Who was reprov'd by John on account of Herodias, his brother's wife."

Now Herod was not a Jew. Herod was an Idumean. He was an Edomite, not a Jew. And it indicates that John didn't limit his preaching to the Jews because the gospel of forgiveness was never limited to any people. So John's ministry continues overlapping the ministry of Jesus and he preaches the gospel to all who will hear.

Now let me take you to John chapter 3 just to get you in the flow a little bit more of the chronology of all of this. When John baptized Jesus, as I said, his ministry continued for about six months. So his ministry and the early ministry of Jesus overlapped. John continued to prepare people for the reception of Jesus through those early months. And John chapter 3 sort of fills in for us some of the history.

Verse 22: "After these things, Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea and there He was spending time with them and baptizing." Verse 23, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salem because there was much water there and they were coming and were being baptized, for John had not yet been thrown into prison." I just want to make the note that John's ministry

continued. John kept preaching and baptizing. Jesus started preaching and baptizing. And their ministries overlapped until John was thrown into prison.

There comes a little bit of a dialogue with regard to the ministry of John in verse 25. "There arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, we...He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold He's baptizing and all are coming to Him.'"

Now here are some of John's disciples and they're saying to John, "Look, Jesus has started His ministry, the one you pointed to, and everybody is going out to Jesus." There's a little bit of a...of a sort of a personal wound here, a little bit of jealousy maybe that the crowd is beginning to shift now to the Messiah and John's beginning to lose that prominence that he had, and certainly that's as it should be. But John knew it and he answered them, verse 27, and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it's been given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ but I have been sent before Him." Remember last week I told you John never claimed to be the Messiah and here he affirms that he never claimed to be the Messiah. He said, "I have told you all along I am not the Messiah but I have been sent before Him." And then in verse 29 he illustrates it another way, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice."

He is saying, look, I'm like a best man. I'm like the friend of the bridegroom. I am glad for the bridegroom to enjoy the bride. I'm not jealous.

In other words, I have an attendant responsibility. I'm not the main character here. And then in verse 30 he sums it up in that great statement, "He must increase, but I must decrease." I am on the diminishing end of this thing. I am fading away and He is ascending to the rightful place. This is a great testimony on the part of John of the preeminence of Jesus Christ. John begins to fade, Jesus moves more into the forefront. John began his ministry in the land of Judea, and Jesus is also in the region of Judea baptizing, actually His disciples. Jesus' disciples were doing the baptism, actually physically doing it but it was the baptism associated with the preaching of Jesus. These overlapping ministries continued since John was not yet thrown into prison, but he was fading. John had no jealousy. John manifested only humility. He clearly exalted Jesus Christ as superior to himself. He was not in competition with Jesus whatsoever and he gives six reasons for the superiority of Jesus. This is a great section. Six reasons for the superiority of Jesus in verses 31 and following.

First, His heavenly origin. "He" verse 31 "who comes from above is above all." He's saying, look, He came from above, He came down. This is an affirmation of His deity. "He who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all." I'm human, I'm earthly; He's heavenly. And that's the first point of His superiority.

The second one comes in verse 32. "What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness and no man receives His witness." What he's saying there is He's omniscient. He knows things that nobody knows. He knows truth that none of us know. He knows divine truth personally and experientially.

Verse 33: "He who has received His witness has set his seal to this that God is true." What he means by that is He knows the mind of God. He has the mind of God.

In verse 34 he adds, "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure." That is to say He has a heavenly origin, He is omniscient, He knows divine truth personally and experientially. He knows the mind of God and the Word of God, speaks the words of God, and He is one with the Spirit of God in an unlimited way. That is He has received the Spirit without measure. He has the fullness of the Spirit, obviously, because He is God, He shares the essential nature with the other members of the Trinity.

Verse 35, he adds that He is God's true heir. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. I'm not the heir of God. His Son is His heir.

And then verse 36, "He alone is the Savior. He who believes in the Son has eternal life." You can believe in John and you're not going to have eternal life. You believe in the Son, you have eternal life. "He who doesn't obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him."

So, John gives this monumental speech on the essential nature of Christ, which sets Him apart from himself. He is of heavenly origin. He is omniscient regarding truth. He knows God's mind and God's Word. He has the Spirit of God without measure. That is He is one with the Spirit of God. He is God's true heir and He alone is the Savior. So there is a...there is a transition going on as John's life and ministry begins to fade and Jesus begins to ascend and that's exactly the way it should be and John sums it up by saying, "He must increase and I must decrease."

Now in Matthew, turn to Matthew 4 for a moment as we construct to the story. One of the things that I enjoy — you probably know this — is studying the gospels like this and putting together the puzzle. That was what I did most of this week, was put all the pieces of this puzzle together so that we could get the chronological flow of this ministry of John and how it interfaced with the work of Jesus.

The ministries are overlapping. Jesus goes through His baptism. Jesus after His baptism went through His temptation. Then He had some early time of ministry and they ministered mutually in two different places. There was a descending ministry in John's case and an ascending ministry in Jesus' case. And then Matthew 4:12...Matthew 4:12 says, "Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee." That's a key verse. This is where Jesus launches His full public ministry. He had ministry. It was the early stages of ministry overlapping with John, but once John went into prison and that was the end of John's ministry. He never came out of prison. Once he went into prison, Jesus then stepped into a full public ministry. The work of the great prophet was over.

And that's where we could leave the story, except Luke won't let us leave it there. Let's go back to Luke because he adds just a few comments in his imitable way that open up to us an incredible soap opera. Verse 19, let's call this the personalizing. John was preaching but his preaching got very personal and verse 19 says, "When Herod the tetrarch was reproved by him on account of Herodias, his brother's wife, and on account of all the wicked things which Herod had done, he added this also to them all that he locked John up in prison," and we'll get to that in the next point.

Personalizing, the boldness of John knows no limits. He was not just a general preacher. He didn't just preach to the audience, he preached to individuals. And in this particular case he reproves a man identified as Herod the tetrarch. Now we've already met him. Go back to chapter 3, verse 1, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and also an area called Perea and we discussed quite extensively the

features that identify this character by the name of Herod, Herod the tetrarch.

This Herod is known predominantly in the New Testament as Herod Antipas. He is the son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great is the patriarchal Herod who had all of these different sons and split the kingdom up and passed them around among his sons. One of the most complex things to follow in studying the New Testament is...is the Herodian dynasty, trying to find all of the ways in which it weaves itself through the history of the New Testament. But Herod Antipas is one fixed figure. Herod Antipas became the ruler of Galilee and Perea when his father died in 4 B.C. And he ruled for 42 years. So from 4 B.C. to, you know, about 39 A.D., you had this man as the king, as the petty king, but nonetheless the king over the area of Galilee and Perea. That's a long time that encompasses the entire ministry of Jesus Christ. From the birth of Christ to the death of Christ this man was in power. He was the full brother of Archelaus. Archelaus was another son of Herod whose territory was later given to another Herod by the name of Herod Agrippa.

This Herod the tetrarch, or Herod Antipas, is the familiar Herod that you're reading about when you read the New Testament. He was a non-Jew. As I said, he was an Idumaean, or an Edomite, or a descendant of Esau and in that sense he was despised. And he was hated by the Jews because he built his capital city, Tiberius... Some of you have been with me to Tiberius, a beautiful town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. That city was originally built by Herod in honor of Tiberius Caesar and it was built, much to the chagrin of the Jews, on top of a cemetery. Then, to make matters worse, he put up idols in public places and if there's anything we know about the Jews after they came out of Babylonian captivity, they were purged of any interest in idolatry and this was a great offense to them. So they had nothing but hatred for this man. You probably know him most because of the role he played in the death of Jesus Christ. I have been going through that because, as you know, I've been writing a book called *The Murder of Jesus* and one of the fascinating elements of that is the role that Herod played in the trials of Jesus at the end of His life that led to His execution. So you see Herod involved in that in the 23rd chapter of Luke, which we'll do some time in the Millennium, I think, if we get to the 23rd chapter of Luke.

Now he's called a tetrarch here. He's called a tetrarch. Literally *tetra* means ruler over a fourth. And there was a dividing of that area into four parts, as we discussed back in verse 1. I won't go through all that again. There were four people in responsible areas. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, that's one part. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. His brother, Philip, was tetrarch of the region of Iturea, Trachonitis. And a man named Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene. So originally there were four parts. But tetrarch became simply a word that meant a petty king, a small-time ruler, a ruler of low rank. Remember, Judea, Samaria and Idumaea were ruled by Archelaus and then later by Pontius Pilate. Iturea, Trachonitis ruled by Philip. Abilene, as I said, which is in the northwest area, was ruled by Lysanias. And Herod ruled over Galilee and Perea for all those 42 years. And actually, it's Mark 6:14 where he is called a king. So he took the title to himself and the people adopted it.

Now the fact that he was a king might have deterred some preachers. And I mean, how high are you going to go in your diatribe against sin and how direct are you going to be, and how personal are you going to be? Are you going to go right nose-to-nose with the man who has power over your life and tell him what he needs to hear? Well John...it wasn't because John was unkind, it was because John was compassionate. The gospel, keep this in mind, folks, the gospel is a message of repentance but it's a message of repentance for the — fill in the blank — forgiveness of sins. And the most kind thing you could ever tell anybody is God will forgive all their sins if they will repent, right? That's the good news. This is not bad news, this is very good news. And while the truth is hard because it must

expose sin, it is at the same time merciful because it brings forgiveness. And John directly reproved this man Herod. He reproved him. That is a present passive participle and I say that because a present passive participle means continual action. What you have here is an indication that this is something John probably did regularly, regularly. He continually exposed the sin of this man. He challenged the moral character of his ruler. He challenged the moral character of this Idumean and it says at the end of verse 19, "On account of all the wicked things which Herod had done." And they aren't even listed for us. You can study history for yourself and you can find out the man's life would make a black mark on a piece of coal.

But there was one thing that stood out in all of it and that is indicated in verse 19 by the account of Herodias, his brother's wife. Now marital problems were not new to the Herods. Herod the Great, are you ready for this, had ten wives, ten wives. So we wouldn't really expect his son, Herod Antipas, to have a very high standard for sexual conduct, or marriage. And he didn't. And this story about Herod and Herodias is the . . . is the first soap opera in the New Testament.

Now let me tell you a little bit about him. Herod was powerful. Herod was ruling under the authority of Caesar. He ruled actually that area, Galilee and Perea, from the Mediterranean coast in the north to east of the Jordan, from the Sea of Galilee in the north, down to the tip of the Dead Sea. So that is the area where Herod was ruling. Judea, Samaria was on the western coastline, the very place where John ministered.

So John was really taking on his own dictator, his own ruler. Now Herod lived in the town of Tiberias which he had built on the cemetery. There is no record, by the way, and I find this fascinating, that Jesus ever visited that town, and the Sea of Galilee is a small place. You can literally stand at one end and see the other end, stand at one side and see the other side and you can traverse that lake in just a very brief time if you're driving. You could do it in a reasonable amount of time if you were walking. It's not a very... It's not a severely large area. So when you think about it, all the villages and towns around that area would be areas and towns that Jesus was very nearby and yet in His entire life of ministry in the Galilee, He never once is reported to have gone to the town of Tiberias.

Perhaps He stayed away to avoid Herod, since it was his father, remember, it was Herod's father, Herod the Great, who had massacred every male baby around Bethlehem to prevent another king coming. And it was also his father who had murdered his own family; he murdered much of his own family. It was his father who had murdered all the leaders in the land whom he feared might try to take the throne even after he was dead. And he also murdered, and this is amazing, the whole Sanhedrin. His father was a murderer and a killer. And it may well be that in an effort to not exacerbate the situation and not elevate the hostility of Herod toward Himself, that Jesus just avoided that, wanting to be faithful to the divine timetable to die only when it was in the Father's purpose for Him to die.

But here it says John confronted this man, this wicked man, this evil man whose list of wickedness is too long for Luke to even write. It's just enough to say that there were some...some large, large accumulation of wickedness. "All the wicked things" is all that Luke tells us. This man in the midst of all this wickedness had one particular sin that was blatant and public and that had to do with his relationship to a woman named Herodias, who was his brother's wife.

Now to sort out the story, turn to Matthew chapter 14, Matthew chapter 14. You're going to find this fascinating. We'll see if we can hustle through this. Matthew 14:1, "At that time Herod the tetrarch

heard the news about Jesus." Now when we pick...we pick it up in Matthew 14, Jesus has already begun His ministry. And John has already been put in prison and John is already dead. When you come to chapter 14 of Matthew, that's all in the past.

But when Herod hears about Jesus...it's starting to filter down. Jesus has been ministering since His baptism now, probably over a year. John has been imprisoned, probably been in prison now, well we don't know exactly how long. He's been executed. That's all in the past. Now Jesus is ministering. John's out of the picture. Herod is living in luxury. Herod is living in his opulent laziness, paying little attention. He wasn't a Jew anyway. The twelve are around preaching. There...there's preaching by Jesus and the twelve, there's healing, there's loosing people from demons and it's starting to stir the country. And, you know, the...the Jews resent Herod greatly and he...he resents them as well. The Jews resented Him for a lot of reasons. He was the son of Herod's fourth wife, Malthace, who was a Samaritan. Now if you know anything about how the Jews felt about the Samaritans, you know why they would hate this product of a Samaritan woman and an Edomite father. This is about as bad as it can be. The Edomites were cursed in the Old Testament and the Samaritans were hated because Samaritans were a race of people that were the product of Jews who were disloyal to Judaism who inter-married with pagans and produced the half-breed race called Samaritans. And they hated them so much that when anybody in the south wanted to go the north, they would go clear around the country of Samaria because they wouldn't put their feet on that cursed land. That's why it was so incredible and explicable that Jesus first revealed who He was and preached the gospel to a Samaritan woman, of all things. Not only would it be amazing that He spoke to a woman but a Samaritan woman. They hated the Samaritans. And here was this Herod the tetrarch, the child of an Edomite, who were cursed in the Old Testament, and a Samaritan woman who were hated by the Jews, a hated Gentile descendant of Esau who had married a despised Samaritan, especially noxious...noxious to the Jews.

But this time he's in his thirty-second year of rule and he heard about Jesus and he is distressed about it. And you'll notice how distressed he is in verse 2. "He said to his servant, 'This is John the Baptist and he's risen from the dead and that is why miraculous powers are at work in Him.'" Well, here's a paranoid guy. He thinks Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead. He's come back from the dead, guess why? If he's come back from the dead, who do you think he's after? Herod thinks he's after him. After all, he's the one that chopped off his head.

Now... Now Herod did not originate that idea that Jesus was a resurrected John. Herod didn't originate that. In Luke 9:7, "Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening. He was greatly perplexed because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead." So the word had gotten around that this might be John that had risen from the dead. And Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded, but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see him. He wanted to see him to see if it was, in fact, John because he knew John well. He had been in prison for about a year before he was executed, or up to a year. So it wasn't that he originated that, it was just that there was this rumor that this Jesus was actually John risen from the dead and that rumor, frankly, terrified Herod. Mark 6:14, King Herod heard, his name had become well known, people were saying John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.

Well that gives you some idea of how prominent John was. But Herod when he heard of it said, 'John whom I've beheaded has risen!' exclamation point. So the guy was in a state of paranoia because he thinks John has risen from the dead. And why is he in a panic about this?

Well, let's...let's do a flashback. Verse 3 goes back to tell you why he was so afraid. "For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip." Now we go back to understand Herod's paranoia. Now we're going to go back to find out why he is so frightened at the prospect that John may have risen from the dead. Now just a footnote, John did not rise from the dead. Jesus is not a resurrected John. Jesus is Jesus, greater than John, as John pointed out in the third chapter of John's gospel that I read to you earlier.

But this...this gives us the story. When Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. "For John had been saying repeatedly to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" You've got to love John. You've got to love John. I wish...I said this last week, I wish we had some Johns who would stand up to prominent people. And he kept saying this in the public venue. "This is not lawful, this is not right. You cannot have this woman."

Now John's boldness was a call to repentance. He is... He is calling this man to repent of this sin. And he's going to tell him, of course, in that process that there is forgiveness; if this pagan, wicked, small-time king will only repent, God will forgive him and his eternal soul will be saved.

A little background. It tells us in verse 3 that Herodias is the wife of his brother, Philip. Now, just try to follow this if you can. This is a test. Herod was married at the time to the daughter of the king of the Nabataean Arabs, Aretas by name. Aretas was the king. Herod had married his daughter. But Herod had a brother in Rome named Philip. He had two brothers named Philip, one was Philip the tetrarch who was ruling in that area, as I mentioned, Trachonitis and Ituraea. But he had another brother named Philip who was in Rome. He was a private citizen. He was kind of a business person. He had no rulership. And he was disinherited. He never got any of his father, Herod the Great's, land or rule because he was very, very despised, apparently by his own mother. So, there was a lot of that going on in the Herod family since there were ten wives and these sons were born from these different women. So there were two Philips; they were actually half brothers. One was a ruler and one was a private citizen in Rome.

Well the one in Rome, Philip, had a wife by the name of Herodias. Get this. She was the daughter of another son of Herod the Great by another woman. So his wife is his half sister. This is... This is really sordid stuff. Philip was one generation from the loins of Herod the Great. I guess she's two generations from Herod the Great, so they're connected in that fashion. This is incest. So John certainly had every right to condemn this marriage. He could have condemned the marriage to Philip because, in effect, Philip has married his half sister and this is what would constitute incest by any definition. It's very clear that there was more to it than that, however, because in order for Herod to marry this woman he had to divorce his own wife after he had seduced this woman so there was adultery involved. There was a divorce involved. There was incestuous relationship involved.

And so John just confronted it head on. It all kind of happened because Herod apparently, if we put the history together, made a trip to Rome and he met his brother's wife, who was also his near relative, and he persuaded her; he seduced her, and then he persuaded her to leave Philip and be his wife. And to do that he had to divorce his wife, she had to divorce her husband. And they went through all of that stuff and he wound up with her, took her back to his area in Galilee.

Now the result of the seduction of Herodias and the divorce of his own wife was irritating to Aretas.

Remember now, he had been married to Aretas' daughter and the ruler of the Nabateans was so bitterly resentful of what he had perpetrated against his daughter that he made war against Herod and heavenly...heavily defeated him. And Josephus, the historian, says some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God and that very justly as a punishment for what he had done to John. Interesting, you find that in Josephus' *Antiquities* that the Jews thought that the reason Aretas came in and was so easily able to defeat Herod was because God was using him as an instrument of judgment for what he had done against John.

Well this was only the start of Herod's problems. He had caused divorce. He had committed incest. But Herodias was a curse to him. When Caligula came to the throne in Rome, the Philip who had been tetrarch died and Caligula gave it to another Herod by the name of Herod Agrippa. You meet him in Acts 12. This moved Herodias to bitter jealousy, so she forced Herod Antipas to go to Rome and try to seek the title of king so she could be called queen officially by Rome. Herod resisted but she won, he set sail, going because she forced him to go to try to become the king. Agrippa had beat him to Caligula and they lost out. And they not only lost out, but Caligula took Herod's province, took Herod's power, all this wealth and banished him to exile with Herodias until he died. So really it was a bitter day when Herod seduced Herodias. It cost him bitterly.

Now all of this stuff, and you don't need to know anymore than that, probably don't even need to know all of that, all you need to know is divorce, seduction, incest and John goes face-to-face with this, confronts it. And he does it repeatedly. A.T. Robertson said, "It cost him his head but it's better to have a head like John and lose it, than have an ordinary head and keep it."

Let's...let's look at the prison part. In Luke 3:20 it says that Herod put him in prison, locked him up in prison. But it begins by saying, "He added this to everything else." In other words, if you look at the end of verse 19, he did a lot of things that were wicked, but he added this to that, and the Greek construction here means, "the crowning wickedness." Of all the wretched, wicked, vile things this man had done, seduction, incest, etc., all the other stuff is not mentioned here, he added this, on top of everything else, here's the crowning thing, "He locked John up in prison." Josephus tells it was in Fort Machaerus. Fort Machaerus was seven miles northeast of the Dead Sea. It had two dungeons there where John, as I said, spent up to a year and also had a summer palace because in the area there were some hot springs, some warm springs, so it was a good place to spend time. He had a summer palace there. He also had the dungeons there and that's where he put John.

I guess you could say what William Barclay says is true, "It's always dangerous to rebuke an eastern despot." It may still be so today. And by his rebuke, John signed his own death warrant. He's a man who fearlessly rebuked evil wherever he saw it.

So back to Matthew 14 verse 5. It says that he wanted to put him to death. Herod wanted to put John to death once he got him in prison, but he was afraid of the multitude. After all, the whole country thought he was the forerunner of the Messiah. They had been going out there to get baptized. They'd heard him preach. They regarded him as a true prophet. At this point Herod would have killed John because he was so...he was so angered by the insult of the guilt that John had heaped upon him, but he feared the consequences. So he winds up keeping him in prison almost a year because he's afraid of the public response and outcry.

But that was not enough for Herodias. If Herod was embarrassed, then Herodias was seemingly more embarrassed. Verse 6 tells the amazing story. "When Herod's birthday came, the daughter of

Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Now this sordid story we all know. To fill in the blanks, Mark 6:19. "Herodias had a grudge against John and wanted to put him to death and could not do so, for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him he was very perplexed but he used to enjoy listening to him." Amazing, Herod knew he was a holy man, he knew he was a righteous man, and he liked to listen to him, and he kept him safe.

So for that time, Herod became his protector. You know, that's... That's a real honor to the integrity of this man, John, that even the man he confronted knew he was right and knew he was holy. But Herodias, she wanted him dead.

"So, on the birthday of Herod, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod." "Pleased" is a euphemism for sexual excitement. The dances these girls danced were immoral, suggestive, seductive, shameless dances. I mean, it kind of goes like this. There was a party. There was a party with a lot of drinking and feasting. And as they got drunker and more satiated, they brought out the dancing girls. A birthday party in that ancient world was all male. It was a stag party, if you will. Feasting, drunkenness, climaxed by sexual stimulation by dancers. Really, for a princess to do this was amazing. But to do this was common stuff. Herodias was willing to take her daughter and have her do this to excite Herod because she wanted revenge on this man who had publicly shamed her.

Josephus tells us the daughter's name was... Do you remember? Salome, that's not in the Bible, but Josephus, the historian, tells us that. So Herod's birthday, *Herodotus dais*, came to be a proverb for excessive festivals in ancient days in Roman history. This was one major wild party this man held. She learned her incestuous lessons very well. By the way, Salome, according to Josephus, later married her uncle. It pleased Herod. It lit his fire in his drunken, gluttonous stupor he was seduced, losing all dignity, losing all sensibility, losing all rationality and wanting somehow to be the big, magnificent benefactor before everybody and show somehow his great generosity, he became prey to his own wretched lust and he made a stupid promise. Verse 7: "He promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked." And that hatched the plot. "And having been prompted by her mother," was all set up, "she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.'"

This girl is probably 16, 17. She wanted it, please notice, now. "I want it right now on a platter." There was not any desire to wait until Herod was able to think more clearly, or out of his stupor, sober and in control. She wanted that head and she wanted it now. He was too proud to break his public oath. He was trying to show how magnificent he was, how magnanimous he was and he had cornered himself. His folly was going to cause him to commit an enormous crime against a man he knew was godly, against a man he knew was holy, against a man he knew spoke the truth because he knew the truth that John confronted him about. He is morally impotent. He is witless. He is a fool. He is weak. He is in pride. His cup is filled with iniquity. And the cost of marrying this woman has now risen to great heights.

And so, in verse 9, "Though he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oath and because of his dinner guests." I mean, you really don't want to disappoint the dinner guests. Isn't that amazing what compelled this man? You can see the utter absence of character. He was more concerned about his reputation among his dinner guests, the rest of the drunken sots that were in there. So the drunken, lustful man, seduced by his wife's daughter into a stupid lack of courage, results him in murdering the man of God. Verse 10, "He sent and had John beheaded in the prison,"

right there, right then, "and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother."

What a horrific way to end the party. Matthew Brotus wrote, "When the dish was brought with the bleeding head on it, no doubt she took it daintily in her hands, lest a drop of blood should stain her gala dress and tripped away to her mother as if bearing her some choice dish of food from the king's table. It was not uncommon to bring the head of one who had been slain to the person who ordered it as a sure proof that the command had been obeyed. When the head of Cicero was brought to Fulvia, the wife of Marc Antony, she spat on it and drawing out the tongue that had so eloquently opposed and condemned Antony, she pierced that tongue with her hair pin with bitter gibes." Jerome refers to this incident and says that Herodias did the same with the head of John. Spit on it, pulled out the tongue and pierced it.

And so, this wicked desire of the Herods to silence the man of God. John was murdered. Murdered about a year after he had been in prison, murdered and his ministry and his life was over. But, believe me, he went to his glorious reward and he stands as a model, a permanent model for faithful, uncompromising preaching. Doesn't he?

A lovely note ends the ugly scene. Verse 12 of Matthew 14, "And his disciples came," those would be the followers of John, those who were down there with him in the wilderness while he preached and baptized. "They came and took away the body and they buried it and they went and reported to Jesus." They knew Jesus would want to know. By the way, neither Herod nor Herodias accomplished anything by killing John. They couldn't rid themselves of their sins, could they? And they certainly couldn't rid themselves of their guilt. If you go back to verses 1 and 2, that's why the panic sets in in the first place because Herod's afraid that the rumor could be true and John is back from the dead and Herod is paranoid with torment. He could silence the voice of John, but he couldn't kill the truth.

Herod wanted to see Jesus to see if he was John, but he never did. When he saw Jesus finally, it was when Jesus was sent to him at His trial and Herod contributed to His execution. But he did receive a message from Jesus, he did. And Luke tells us about that. I'll close with that. He did receive a message from Jesus. As I said, Jesus never saw him. Luke 13:32, we'll see this later, but just sort of a preview. Verse 31 says, "The Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Go away and depart from here because Herod wants to kill you.'" You better get out of here, Jesus, Herod wants to kill You.

And He said to them, "Go tell that fox," go tell him, "behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow and the third day I reach My goal. Nevertheless I must journey on today, tomorrow, and the next day for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem."

You know what He's saying? You may have killed John, my friend, but you cannot kill Me until My work is done. Herod did eventually participate in His execution, but he wasn't able to participate until Jesus' work was done.

Well, that's the end of the story of John. Herod wound up with all the earthly power and went to hell. John had all the heavenly power and went to heaven. Very often, you know, the price of boldness is public rejection, but it's also divine glory, isn't it? And I don't think I... Just as an epilogue, I don't think any true preacher is concerned about popularity. That's never been the goal of a true preacher. The

goal of a true preacher is to speak the truth at any price, right? That's why John provides such a great example for us. So John, who came on the stage in such a prominent way goes off the stage and next time the story begins with Jesus.

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