

The Death of John the Baptist

Mark 6:14-29

There's so many promises, so many promises that God gives us in His word that we hold dearly as His followers. We cling to them. They're our foundation. They're our motivation. They get us through. They're our hope as they should be. They're our anchor as we go through stormy and difficult times. And you might even be thinking of some of these promises right now, as I mention that, that fact, the fact that we have the promises of God and His word. And some of those just immediately spring into your mind as you think of them, and you think of the amazing gifts that these promises are to you and how much hope they give you, the fact that God is using everything in your life, really, to bring the best and ultimate good and His glory. That God is... He's faithful. That when the sun came up this morning, that's a reminder of the faithfulness of God, that His mercies and His compassions are new. These are promises that you have, promises that we have, the fact that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness in His word. It's not lacking. It's not incomplete in any way. It's full. It's sufficient. Amazing promises that God will not give up on you. He's faithful to complete the work that He started in you, that God is with you. "He will not leave you or forsake you." When you express faith in Him, He gave you His Spirit to reside in you. You have Him in you, thus, "God is with you..." at all times.

Amazing promises that we can continue to go through and contemplate, sing about, rejoice in, as His followers. But there's one promise that seems to get overlooked often I would say, and that is the promise of suffering - the promise of suffering. And you think, oh, yeah, it's depressing, that's why we don't want to talk about it. However, if you read the word of God, and you kind of pay attention as you go through its pages, you come across it more than once, the concept of suffering, and not just the example of it or the idea of it or the teaching of it, but the promise of it. Listen to Philippians 1:29; Paul writes, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake..." It's "...been granted to you..." as a gift, that you should suffer for Christ. It's a powerful way of putting forth this promise of suffering. Paul would later say, 2 Timothy 3:12; "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..." There's no condition in there. There's no if or maybe, except. These are the promises we find in Scripture, not just promises that

God does love us, and He will sustain us, and He does guard us and keep us, but also, the suffering will come. This is something that is not just so explicitly stated, like we just heard from Paul in Philippians, but it's also explicitly illustrated for us in Scripture, and that's what we find today. In Mark 6:14-29, we have an illustration of suffering in the life of, in the death of John the Baptist that will remind us of this reality, that there is suffering that awaits the one who wants to follow after Christ even, if necessary, it'd be suffering unto death.

So, join me in looking at Mark chapter 6, and we'll read through our tragic story this morning as we look at a man of God going to his death but ultimately for God's glory. Mark 6:14; "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.' But others said, 'He is Elijah.' And others said, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' 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. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 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. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 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.' And he vowed to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.' And she went out and said to her mother, 'For what should I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' 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.' And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb." ...this illustration of suffering in the life,

ministry, and death that we find this morning. So clear in our text and it gets prompted because of where we left off last time actually.

Where we left off last time, Jesus was having a shift in His ministry of sending out the twelve. He had been doing a lot of teaching, a lot of ministering Himself, as He Himself went around in Galilee and did the teaching, did the miracles, and worked at getting the message of the Kingdom out there and calling people to repentance. And then, as we saw last time, Jesus called the twelve, and they were no longer just disciples that followed Him, but they were apostles that were sent out as the word means, the sent ones. They became the ones that He sent out to continue to deliver this message of repentance, to expect rejection and also people that might receive the word, and to have His own authority as they would "...cast out many demons..." and heal people as they proclaim the message of repentance, to show and prove that they were operating on the authority of God in Christ, His Messiah Jesus.

And so, from that, we jump into our text and, apparently, this mission was so successful that we see the impact of the twelve in the first couple verses here. In verses 14-16, we see the impact of that mission - the impact that it had, that it was actually doing something. And this is what we noted even last time when we looked at it in verse 12; "So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent." They obeyed. We already know that from the get-go, from what we've covered, that they actually responded to Jesus and His commission to send them out.

As we read in verses 14-16, one more time; "King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known." So, we see that the name of Jesus had actually started to become so well-known and popular, people were speaking of it, and it's basically, like, it had gone viral in some sense. It was officially to that level. Right? It officially hit a million views or something of that nature. This is popular. Not only was this idea, the concept of the Kingdom, popular with John the Baptist's preaching and doing his ministry, but now you had this kind of explosion as it multiplied beyond just one man, beyond just John, beyond just Jesus, beyond and to the twelve that had been sent out two by two, so much so that we have this man Herod here, who heard of the name of Jesus that had become so well-known that even the kind of political and the leadership of the day that was inaugurated and put in place by Rome over the Jews, they even, who had no desire to care for religious things, they

started to hear of this. It came to them. So, we learn about this man named Herod. And so, the question then becomes, which Herod are we talking about? And this is something that is unnecessarily confusing because of the sinfulness of Herod the Great and many others. Anyhow, we'll get to a nice little family tree later to sort that out for you.

But for now, the Herod we're talking about here is not Herod the Great, this is Herod Antipas, and he's the one, if you look at the region of Israel here, he's the one that is in control of the purple. That's his jurisdiction, the region of Galilee up there in the north and the west a little bit, and also to the east of the Jordan River, the region of Peraea. This is Herod Antipas. He's the one in our text that we're finding here. So, when it says Herod, it's Antipas, and he's the one that's in control of Galilee and Peraea. There're other Herods; not only did I mention Herod the Great, the one that tried to kill all the babies in Bethlehem after Jesus was born, but after him, he was succeeded by more of his children, more of his sons, and they all had Herod for a name. So that was really confusing and helpful for us. Alright? So, Herod Antipas is the purple. The brown region that's to the east of Galilee when you look at it, that brown region is Herod Philip. And then the pinkish-reddish region, that's the rest of Samaria and Judea where the temple was that's Herod Achelous. So we have all these Herods that are in power, and it wasn't really like Herod the Great anymore where you had one man as the puppet king over the Jews, you now have it split and fractured into several men that are active as kind of puppet rulers over their region of Israel. Thus, were dealing with Herod Antipas, and it makes sense because a lot of John the Baptist's ministry was down at the Jordan River as you can see where he reigns there in Peraea, and also a lot of Jesus's ministry is up in Galilee. These are the two regions where he's in charge. He starts to hear about this, and the information is coming to him and getting pumped to him as he hears about the name of Jesus and this mission that the twelve are carrying out.

There become different theories that arise because of this. They say, what is exactly happening? What is the explanation? Alright. Why is this taking place? Why is everyone talking about this Jesus guy? So, one of the first theories become John the Baptist is back from the dead. John the Baptist has been resurrected. He's returned as it says in our text, "Some said, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.' " We know that in the life of John the Baptist, in his ministry, he actually didn't do any miracles. He didn't do any of these kind

of supernatural things, but they suspect this, when they hear of all these miraculous signs that are now taking place that were really because of Jesus and the disciples, they say it's John the Baptist from the dead, and the reason why you have these miracles is because he's, like, the ghost, and so anybody that knows anything, a ghost that comes back or someone that is able to come once again even after dying, they have some supernatural ability. This becomes the first theory that is promoted for what is happening. Why is the name of Jesus - why is this message of the Kingdom - why is repentance - becoming so talked about and well-known? And they say it's because John the Baptist is back from the dead. You and I don't understand as we read through Mark. We didn't know he died, and so we're going to cover that today as we've already read, but this is the first theory that is proposed.

The next one is in verse 15; "But others said, 'He is Elijah.'" So, who is this Jesus man that's coming? It's John the Baptist coming back from the dead. "But others said, 'He is Elijah.'" And you might know your Bible well enough to go, okay, Elijah - there's quite a gap between where we are in history and when Elijah was. I don't think this really makes sense. This is a weird guess. Actually, it fits in well with the expectation of the average Jew in Judaism and in Israel. If we look back in the Old Testament at the book of Malachi, we have this promise of Elijah to come. This prophecy that really forms, and this is Malachi the last prophet of the Old Testament stating (Malachi 5:5-6), "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." This was an expectation, so much that people even when John the Baptist came on the scene, they came up to John, they said, are you Elijah? Are you the Messiah? Who are you? And the same thing now happens with Jesus. Jesus comes stirring the pot with His ministry and what He's doing, and people are suspecting maybe this is the Elijah, the Elijah that would come first and get everything ready for the Kingdom to come, God to set up His Messiah and His King over the entire earth. This is possibly what's taking place. Jesus would continue to be asked this as He talks to His disciples later in His ministry. He tells them, "Who do people say that I am?" And the disciples continue to respond some people think You're Elijah, some people think You're the fulfillment of this promise here from Malachi.

There's a third theory that comes up in our text; "And others said, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.'" ... "...He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." And this is just simply a reference to an idea of someone like a Jeremiah. That's what we find in Matthew 16:14, once again, when this question is asked of His disciples, the disciples report to Him, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets [of old]." ...one of these men of God that have come to change the course and the tide of the nation, spiritually speaking.

These are the different theories that are at work and at play, and so in our text, we then ask, which one does Herod buy into? Herod Antipas, we find out, really becomes the one that's responsible for killing John the Baptist, and that greatly influences his conclusion. In verse 16, "But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'" Herod, as we see and as we find in our text, has this deep guilt and sorrow for putting to death John the Baptist, and it haunts him. It haunts him for the rest of his days, really. It haunts him, so much so that when he hears of all this kind of interesting, miraculous stories and spread of Jesus' name and the miracles that go with it, he thinks, great; this is what I get. It is John the Baptist back from the dead, and now he's doing even more. Now he's even more impactful, and now he's even doing miracles with it. This is Herod's conclusion. This is Herod's nightmare, and it's coming to pass.

Interesting to note as a side note here, there's a cool thing happening here. When Mark puts this out and gives us this information, there is a clear link in the continuity between the ministry of John the Baptist, the ministry of Jesus, and the ministry of the twelve. They're all on the same page. They're all doing the same work. You don't have John the Baptist out here that's saying half the things that are right then half the things he just kind of makes up, and then Jesus coming and kind of setting the course straight, and the apostles going and saying things that are half right, half true, again, but you have them all so consistent and on the same page with each other, so unified. That's why people are guessing, I think this work of Jesus is John the Baptist, or the twelve, or the John the Baptist, because they're all preaching the same thing. The Kingdom of God is coming, and you need to repent. There's a clarity; there's a consistency in the message. It's a good thing that Mark is noting for us, and also, we see Mark giving us an update on the mission of the twelve. Clearly, they had obeyed, and it was a successful

mission, and this give us the springboard into, what ever happened to John the Baptist?

What happened to John the Baptist? We did not hear of much since chapter 1, and this is where Mark goes next. The imprisonment of John the Baptist is what we find in verses 17-20 - the imprisonment of John the Baptist. This is where we left off if you recall in Mark chapter 1. So, read our verses again as we get a little more information than we did in chapter 1. Verses 17-20; “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. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 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.’” This gives us more details and more information as to, not just the imprisonment, but how it all came about.

This is where we left off. In Mark 1, the last that we saw of John the Baptist was that he was arrested - that he was arrested. He was doing this ministry that was plentiful and abundant as far as people were concerned. They were coming out to him, being baptized in the Jordon River. They were repenting. They're asking what they could do, and he was steering them away from their sin into getting prepared and ready in their hearts and their lives for the Messiah to come. And then he was arrested. This gives us the details. How did this come about? Simply put, John the Baptist is arrested because he rebukes Herod Antipas for the way that he lives his life. Specifically, he rebukes Herod Antipas for an affair that he has and getting divorced from his wife and marrying the wife of his brother Philipp. And you start to go, I'm lost. Don't worry. We'll try and clear this up for you a little bit.

Just a reminder - Herod Antipas rules over the purple region there, and then Herod Philip rules over the brown region that you see as they kind of butt up next to each other. So, these brothers, or step-brothers if you will, are related. So, what we find when we look at a family tree to try and clear things up is that, long story short, the family of Herod the Great is a messed-up family. It's what you find. Right? It is just absolutely in shambles. I mean, you think your family has issues. This is it, right here. This one takes the cake for sure. Herod the Great had many women therefore he had a lot of

sons as well, and here's just a few of them. This isn't all of the family tree and how it all works, but I've circled there the appropriate names for us in our story and how this all connects.

So, to begin with, Herod Philip marries Herodias; already issues out the gate because that's his niece. Alright? So, he's marrying Aristobulus' daughter, Aristobulus being his step-brother. And so now, he's marrying his step-niece so to speak; already incest and bad stuff happening from the get-go. Herod Antipas's married to another woman that's not in the picture and that's, luckily, not in the family. However, Herod and Herodias start to hit it off, and they want to have a relationship. Herodias divorces Philip, and Herod Antipas then divorces his wife to be with Herodias; so now, Herodias is leaving her uncle to be with her other uncle Herod Antipas. Alright? A very mixed up and terrible situation; even an outsider from, you know, just from looking at this, kind of, goes that's wrong. You just don't do that. But on top of that you have this thing called the Law. You have the Old Testament, and you have the requirements that you can find in Leviticus and other places - very clearly states that this is not how families should operate. This is not the way that they treat each other or their wives or their property, any of this. Right? This is all completely wrong.

That's what John does. John calls out Herod. It's pretty straightforward. Right? In our text in verse 18, he says, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Alright? This isn't like the sly friendship, get to know them, approach and then kind of ease it in there, this is the direct approach. Right? This is wrong. This is wrong that you're with her. You can't be with your niece. Alright? ...especially when she was with someone else. You can't do this; its unlawful. So, John was probably... It says, really, that he was doing this... it was more than once. Alright? This wasn't just a onetime thing. He "...had been saying to Herod..." He was regularly telling Herod, you can't do this. This is not pleasing to God. He was probably also giving more information, like, from the book of Leviticus, quoting Leviticus 18:16, Leviticus 20:21, that continue to spell this out. Not that you need it, but it's there, clearly communicated; this is not okay. This is not what should be taking place.

Herod Antipas and his new wife Herodias respond in the way that they would. They're angry. They're mad. They want people blessing their marriage, not calling them out on it. So, they take John and throw him in jail.

That's what lands John in jail - because of him rebuking Herod for his unlawfulness. Notice in verse 19, we learn a little bit more of the situation; "And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death." In Matthew, we also learn that Herod felt this way too. He did not like John at all. They were both at a point where they're ready to kill him. However, there's a little change and a hang-up because the overall opinion, in view of the common man when it came to John the Baptist, was positive. People generally liked John the Baptist, and so, if you, not only imprisoned him, but then you killed him, you might get a lot of people that are mad at you. And being the political ruler that he was, he needed to be careful about this. So, all he did was keep John the Baptist in prison.

But over time, you can tell things change. In fact, Herod starts to warm up. Herod Antipas warms up to John the Baptist, starts to like him because we learn that Herodias is the one with the grudge against him, and she's the one that wants to put him to death. Our text goes on at the end of verse 19, and says, "But she could not..." She couldn't. She has the power, but she can't put him to death. Verse 20; "...for Herod feared John..." Over time, Herod apparently warmed up to John, appreciated John, respected John, a lot for who he is and, really, what he did. Verse 20 continues, "...knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe." So, Herod Antipas viewed John the Baptist so highly that he actually viewed him as "...a righteous and holy man..." He knew that to be clear, and so much so that he was willing to keep him safe when he was in jail, keep him safe from his crazy wife Herodias that wanted to kill him. He protected John the Baptist because he knew John was a special man of God.

Notice the end of verse 20; "When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly." It's interesting because some people explain this as, really, Herod Antipas interacting with John the Baptist, and in hearing him talk about, you know, high moral calling and following God and His character and the Law and all this teaching, and for Herod Antipas, he thought it was cool, but at the same time it was confusing. And so, he liked him. He liked the guy. He liked hearing him talk, and it was fun to interact with him, but he's just kind of perplexed and confused by some of the things he was saying, but he still "...heard him gladly." Seems like this might be a poor translation into our English text actually. When you have the phrase here, "When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed..." Another way of translating that is "he did many things." These two words look so similar in

the Greek, it's very easy to confuse them. So, it's very possible instead, that the text... it should be reading, "When he heard him, he [did many things], and yet he heard him gladly." And so instead, what you have is this picture of Herod Antipas interacting with John the Baptist and using him like a counselor or an advisor.

So, as he's going about doing his duties of ruling over Galilee and Peraea, he interacts with John the Baptist, and he realizes this is a man of God, and he knows his stuff. He's actually worth listening to, and so he uses him. He listens to him, and based on what he hears, he acts, and he does things, and "...he heard him gladly." Overtime, this explains this warming up to John the Baptist that Herod Antipas did, and this is probably what's taking place; imprisoning him initially because he's mad at him, but then keeping him safe and using him while he's in jail as a counselor and advisor. It's interesting, seems like Herod becomes one of these people that potentially is like the rocky soil that interacts with the man of God, hears the word of God often, and kind of responds initially with joy and almost favorably towards it, but it never really takes root as far as we can tell, and never really changes his life. He never really commits fully to it, but he enjoys the presence of John the Baptist and having him around.

This obviously is not enough as our text will go on to show. We learn that there are more difficulties that come with the ill will of Herodias. We still have Herod Antipas' wife Herodias that has this grudge against John the Baptist and wants to see him killed, and this remains an issue. We read how this unfolds in verse 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. 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.' And he vowed to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.' And she went out and said to her mother, 'For what should I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' 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.' " Herodias had this grudge against John the Baptist. She did not like this man of God. She wanted to see him eliminated, and so this grudge remained and remained. But also, at the same time, Herodias is not dumb. She's smart. She's sly. And so, as she's thinking through this, she recognizes an opportunity. As their text says in verse 21: "But an

opportunity came...” And as we read through this, and we get to the end of it, we see this is clearly something that she has orchestrated, and she’s thought through. She kind of gathers all this together and uses it as a chance to get her revenge.

It all begins with Herod’s birthday banquet. Herod has a birthday banquet. This is not at all a Jewish custom. The Jews didn’t, really, even celebrate birthdays, it seems like. What we do find is that the Romans did this, and they did it in excess. They did this... it was kind of like this pagan thing and an opportunity, really, to indulge in debauchery and terrible living of immorality and drunkenness and everything else that comes from those things. Really, what you have happening here is, with this birthday banquet, you don’t have a Jewish custom or even really a custom from the word of God that’s honoring Him, you have Herod just looking like the Romans; and you have Herod copying them and doing what they do, throwing a party, a party for the sake of indulging in the flesh is what is taking place here. (So, I don’t think there’s a birthday cake.) He gives a banquet, and who does he invite? ...all these top people, nobles, military commanders, leading men of Galilee (that’s where he ruled) and brings all these people together to kind of show off and impress them with this party that he could throw.

This is really, like, a man’s event if you think about it. Often times, when they did these events, these parties, these opportunities to indulge, it was a bunch of men there. So what happens is then we have a girl come in. This is kind of out of the blue, but Herodias’ daughter comes in and dances, and her dance pleases Herod and his guests. And you might think, oh, nice, a little ballet of some sort. This is sweet. Right? This is not the case at all actually. We’re not certain, we’re not confident of who even Herodias’ daughter was or her age, but we do know that she would have been old enough to probably partake in what would be this kind of just seducing, a dance of seduction, coming in and not doing a cute little dance, but a dance to please the eye of the men that were drunk there already - very similar to the book of Esther when you have the opening scenes there and the drunk men and wanting these woman to come and dance. It’s indulging in the flesh, immorality completely. Herod and his guests are pleased by this dance, and this allows Herod an opportunity to try and show off, to impress the men that are with him, and he says, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you...” This already from the beginning is kind of a silly statement for him to make because at best he’s a puppet governor. I mean, he’s not in full control. He doesn’t even

have the authority to give these things. Rome has put him there. He inherited it, and it's not even his to give. He can't do anything, and yet here he is being drunk and kind of motivated, based off this dance by this girl, that he's offering up whatever she wishes; "And he vowed to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.'" He doesn't have this authority to do, but he does try and impress the people there.

"And she went out and said to her mother, 'For what should I ask?' " Herodias doesn't hesitate. She already knows this is the chance, this is the opportunity that she orchestrated by sending her daughter in, and she immediately answers, "...the head of John the Baptist..." And we see Mark using this word in verse 25; "And she came in immediately with haste to the king..." Herodias knew what she was doing. This was a plan. This was a work, an effort, on her part to finally get her revenge on John the Baptist as this girl "...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.'" This is the immediate request, and it forces Herod into a place where he has to give an immediate response - an immediate response. He doesn't have time to think about this and to consider it and what he might say and do. He has to respond in front of everyone.

We look at our verses, and in verses 26-29, we read, "And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb." Immediately! Look at this sorrow that sweeps over Herod, right away, continuing to show this is the relationship he had with John the Baptist - a positive one. He appreciated John. He respected John. And he didn't recognize the folly that he'd just committed by using this opportunity to impress the people around him and offering this young lady a chance for him to give her whatever she wants.

He really painted himself into a corner. His hands were tied. He had to respond. I mean, in this situation, what are his options? He could not honor her request and look like a fool to everyone else there as they say, why would you even offer this and try and impress us and then say never mind can't do that for you? It's your prisoner, just kill your prisoner. Why is that

an issue for you Herod? Or, he could've humbled himself and told her, no. But he doesn't do that either because he's overwhelmed and overcome with something greater, not the respect for the word of God that John the Baptist would've been teaching, but instead a desire to be really esteemed and revered by his peers, by these men. He cared too much about what they thought, about his guests, so he had to cave and give in. One commentator states, "Herod is revealed to be an immoral, vacillating, and pathetic ruler, who takes the easy way out to save face rather than standing up for what is right. He is the antithesis of John, who spoke truth even at the risk of his life." Herod is forced to give an immediate response to this request. He has the executioner sent. They go, do the deed, and bring back and kind of parade John the Baptist's head on this platter at this banquet, at this feast - fits in with the debauchery and debased immorality of the event. You can continue to see that Herodias had her hand in all it. When the girl... you think maybe she also didn't like John the Baptist for some reason, but she takes the head of John the Baptist and gives it to her mom Herodias, immediately. It's not for her. It's for her mother. Herodias got what she wanted in all of this.

And we see in verse 29, "When his disciples [John the Baptist's disciples] heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb." You can't help but start to just, kind of, note some parallels almost, here, some parallels between the persecution and the death of John the Baptist and what would be the persecution and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. One commentator writes it this way, "In stark contrast to the debauchery of the proceeding scene, John's loyal disciples now come and give him an honorable burial. The scene parallels and foreshadows the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea after his equally ignoble execution performed by another unethical and vacillating tyrant." Just like you have Herod Antipas trying actually to protect John the Baptist, but because of the people, he has to give in to their demands and see him killed. So, too, will we have Pilot who tries to protect Jesus but then has to give in to the people's wishes and what they want. And you have both these men going to their death, and at the same time, the disciples and people coming, giving them an honorable and right burial in a tomb for their bodies.

Suffering, this example of suffering, it is not something that we just see examples of in Scripture, and think to our self, I'm glad I didn't live in that time. This is something that is real, something that is, actually, promised for

the followers of God, something that the prophets of old had to deal with. The men of God and faithless Israel were persecuted, and they suffered - John the Baptist, persecuted, and suffered to the point of death. Jesus the Messiah our Savior suffered. The apostles, the book of Acts, the early church - suffering. And what do the Scriptures teach us? You, too, will suffer. We are to walk in His footsteps, walk as He walked - the One who went to the cross and suffered and died.

This still takes place all over the world even if you feel like you don't see it or feel it. Go back into the early 1900's for an example - John and Betty Stam. Let me read you a little bit about their life and death; "In 1934, John and Betty Stam were new missionaries to China, with their 3-month-old daughter, Helen, working in the small eastern town of Tsingteh in Anhui Province. The town's magistrate came to the Stams and warned them that the Communists were coming for them. After John confirmed this, the Stams prepared to leave. However, the Communists caught up to the Stams and when the soldiers did, they demanded all the money the Stams had; and it was handed over. The Communists then arrested John and took him to their headquarters. They left Betty and baby Helen ... in the Stams' house. The soldiers later came back and took Betty and Helen ... and they were taken to be with John.

That night, John Stam wrote a letter to China Inland Missions authorities, but it was never delivered. The letter was found later bundled up in some of Helen's clothes. It stated that the Stams were being held by the Communists for a ransom of \$20,000. John Stam also wrote to the mission authorities of how he and his wife had been captured, then wrote, 'Philippians 1:20: May Christ be glorified whether by life or death.' "

John, Betty and Helen were then taken to the local prison where some of the prisoners were released to make room for the Stams. The next morning, the Stams were forced to march 12 miles west with the soldiers, to the town of Miaoshou. The group stopped for a night, and Betty was allowed to tend to Helen; but in fact, Betty instead hid her daughter in the room inside a sleeping bag."

"The next morning, John and Betty were being marched down the streets of Miaoshou to meet their deaths. Curious onlookers lined both sides of the streets. A Chinese shopkeeper stepped out of the crowd and talked to the

Communists, trying to persuade them not to kill the Stams. The soldiers ordered the man back into the crowd, but he wouldn't step back. The soldiers then invaded his house where they found a Chinese copy of the Bible and a hymnbook. He was led alongside the Stams to be executed for being a Christian. After marching for a short while longer, John Stam was ordered to kneel, and he was beheaded. His wife and the shopkeeper were killed moments later. Baby Helen was rescued two days later by underground Christians who came to the town to bury the bodies of John, Betty, and the shopkeeper.”

There is suffering. There is persecution. It's real. This is the expectation for followers of Christ. It continues to happen, and you think, this isn't what I'm facing this week, tomorrow, today. You think it doesn't apply. I'm not in this time. I'm not in Biblical times. I'm not in this place, this location, where they hate in that manner and carry it out in that fashion. It's important for you and I to be convinced of this promise so that when the suffering does come, you're ready. Your mind has been guarded. You're prepared, and as Peter says you're ready for action rather than letting the suffering come upon you in whatever form it might take, maybe not physical, maybe financial, maybe in some form of your own health, your own body shutting down. I don't know, but when it does come, you're ready. You're ready for the suffering because you know what has been promised to you, that it is promised for the followers of Christ to suffer, been granted to you to suffer for Christ's sake, but also to remember that God Himself is the anchor for you in those sufferings. How did John the Baptist endure? How did Jesus endure the suffering? For the joy set before Him, considering being in heaven with God the Father at His right hand as Jesus endured the cross. We, too, must be understanding that suffering is coming (maybe we're in the midst of it right now), and it will come, but we can endure because we know the promise of it, and we also know the One who can deliver us from it so we can be with Him one day. May that hope get us through whatever suffering we are facing now or we will face.