

## **CLOSE-UPS OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARK - Part eleven**

Wednesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 - 7:00 p.m.

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There are two accounts in today's passage. The first is the account of *the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod*. The second is the *feeding of the five thousand*.

**The beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29) - *When righteousness seems to go unrewarded***

- 1) **Mark 6:14-18 - Notice the power of a righteous life to reach the conscience of wicked people** - "King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." [15] But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." [16] But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." [17] For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. [18] For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Even though John is dead and buried Herod still has this whole incident on his mind. It's harder than one thinks to shut the voice of God out. Herod has been living in fear. He's running when there is no human enemy chasing (**Proverbs 28:1 - "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.**) There's a seed of guilt that is turning Herod into an irrational coward. So it does with all of us. The joy and freedom that sin brings are only *apparent*, not *real*. Inwardly, sin rots the soul and gnaws away at the foundation of peace.

There's a lesson here. Nobody has to listen to God's truth about their sin if he doesn't want to. But there's a terrible price to pay. Everything that makes you truly great inside begins to disappear. You become small. Confidence evaporates. Nothing is worse than the unescapable bondage that guilt brings when God's truth is pushed aside for our own fleeting convenience.

- 2) **Mark 6:19-20 - Notice how *interest* and *knowledge* can still exclude genuine *faith*** - "And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, [20] for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly."

***Notice how far Herod went in response to John without really yielding his heart.*** He was interested in what John had to say. He probably knew inside that John was right. He even felt guilty about his own sin. But he was unwilling to forsake his sinful actions. ***Knowing*** the truth and ***responding*** to the truth are two very different things.

This is the kind of hearing that Jesus spoke about in **Mark 4:18-19 - "And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, [19] but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."**

Compare the faith of Herod with the kind James describes in **James 2:18-19 - "But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. [19] You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"** The proper attitude is described in **Psalms 119:128 - "Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way."**

- 3) **Mark 6:22-29 - Sometimes there's little outward reward for a life of solid righteousness in this twisted world** - "For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." [23] And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." [24] And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." [25] And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.[26] And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. [27] And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison [28] and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. [29] When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb."

John's head wouldn't have been served up on a platter if he had simply been willing to shut up about Herod's fallen moral standards. Compromise could have been so simple and inviting. After all, was Herod's personal life really John's business? Did everyone have to live life the way John wanted? But John's whole life was motivated by a consuming passion for **God's glory**. Most of us aren't as fuelled by it anymore. John felt that his own life was expendable. But his zeal for God's glory wasn't. A thirst for acceptability and political correctness can easily shut the voice of truth from the public square. The message of the gospel isn't just about receiving eternal life. The message of Christ, as we see in the witness of His forerunner John the Baptist, necessarily comes as a rebuke to the stubbornly proud of this world.

- 4) **The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44) - How to do a lot with a little:**

**Mark 6:38 - Take stock of all of your resources** - "And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Leave nothing out. Most of us are too quick to conclude that we can't do anything really substantial for God.

This is an important point. It's not enough to just pray and "leave it all in the Lord's hands." God may also expect us to think and sacrifice. What has He given you to work with? What is in your hand and heart right now? What are you good at? What are your interests? What are your resources? Notice that the disciples are more focussed on their **lack (6:36-37)**. Jesus keeps pointing to what they do have to work with (**6:38**).

- 5) **Mark 6:41 - Always begin any venture with a thankful heart** - "And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all." This is not just a positive attitude (atheists can be positive). Thankfulness takes God into the picture and ventures out in faith. God's goodness and faithfulness in the past are seen to be tokens of His ongoing grace in the future. This attitude of heart puts needs into their proper framework.

- 6) **Mark 6:39-42 - Start working with what you have** - "Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. [40] So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. [41] And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. [42] And they all ate and were satisfied." Use it. Don't let fear and discouragement keep you from beginning. Set things in motion even though

you can't yet see the end of the journey. You will rarely have all of the resources when you first start out. God usually wants us to exercise faith. He stretches us beyond our present resources before He makes up for our lack.

- 7) **Mark 6:37, 39-40, 41** - ***Obey Jesus and keep in touch with Him*** - Once you've begun, don't lean on your own understanding. Listen for His voice. Do what He says without hesitation. Stay in His Word. Keep with His people. Watch and pray. Don't allow the situation to absorb the energy that you should be placing in abiding in the Vine. That's where your future is secured.