

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

MARK 6:14–29

Monday – The Shadow of Death (Mark 6:14–29)

Mark places this story between the sending and return of the disciples, using his “sandwich” technique. While the Twelve proclaim the kingdom, Mark tells us John’s grim fate—executed by Herod at Herodias’s request. The placement is intentional: faithful proclamation can lead to suffering and death. Herod’s guilty conscience makes him think Jesus is John raised from the dead. John’s death foreshadows Jesus’ passion: both face weak rulers who give in to pressure, both are “delivered up,” and both are buried by disciples in tombs. Mark reminds his persecuted readers that following Jesus means speaking truth to power, even when it costs everything.

1. Why does Mark interrupt the narrative of a successful mission to tell this grim story? What does this placement suggest about faithful discipleship?

2. How does Herod’s guilty conscience reveal the inescapable nature of unrepented sin, even for the powerful?

3. How does John’s martyrdom (sympathetic but weak ruler, political betrayal, burial by disciples) prepare us to understand the cross?

Theological Prompt:

Faithful prophets who announce God’s kingdom often suffer at earthly powers’ hands, foreshadowing Christ’s greater suffering.

Practical Application:

Consider what truths you might be called to speak even when doing so puts you at risk.

Prayer Prompt:

Ask God for courage to speak the truth, even when it’s costly, and pray for persecuted Christians today.

Tuesday – Rival Kingdoms (Mark 6:17–20)

The conflict between Herod and John went beyond just sexual morality. Herod, like his father, rebuilt the Temple and sought recognition as king of the Jews. But John's baptism movement overshadowed the Temple by offering forgiveness without the Temple system and announcing a different kingdom. John's rebuke—"It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife"—challenged Herod's suitability to be God's anointed. The story illustrates sin operating on multiple levels: Herodias's revenge, Herod's lust and pride, and the daughter's involvement. Yet Herod is strangely conflicted—he feared John as righteous and holy, protected him, and "heard him gladly," even while keeping him prisoner.

4. Herod feared and protected John while imprisoning him. Given that Herod cherished royal ambitions while John's movement upstaged the Temple and announced a different kingdom, why does prophetic truth threaten entire power structures, not just personal morality?

5. How do you see sin compound and multiply through Herodias's vengeance, Herod's lust and pride, and the daughter's complicity? What does this teach about sin operating in isolation versus community?

6. Contrast Herod's banquet (exclusive, violent, ending in death) with Jesus' feeding of five thousand (inclusive, compassionate, bringing life). What does this reveal about God's kingdom versus worldly kingdoms?

Theological Prompt:

God's kingdom challenges all rival kingdoms—political, economic, and spiritual powers claiming ultimate authority.

Practical Application:

Examine where you have sought human approval or earthly power over faithfulness to God's kingdom.

Prayer Prompt:

Confess seeking human approval over faithfulness, and request freedom from reputation-seeking that compromises integrity.

Wednesday – Echoes of Elijah (Mark 6:14–16)

This story intentionally mirrors the Elijah-Ahab-Jezebel narrative. Both John and Elijah dressed alike, lived in the wilderness, and challenged royal corruption. Both faced wicked queens determined to kill them. However, there's a key reversal: Jezebel failed to kill Elijah, but Herodias succeeded in killing John. This illustrates the growing darkness in Israel's relationship with God's prophets. The people speculate that Jesus might be Elijah returned, and Jesus later identifies John as the Elijah prophesied in Malachi 4:5–6. John fulfills this role by preparing the way for Jesus. The pattern of Elijah-Elisha-John-Jesus demonstrates that prophets prepare the path for something greater.

7. Jezebel failed to kill Elijah, while Herodias succeeded in killing John. What does this reversal suggest about Israel's darkening relationship with God's prophets?

8. How does John as the new Elijah (Malachi 4:5–6) prepare us to understand Jesus as the greater one who comes after?

9. How does John's ministry and death point beyond itself to Jesus? In what ways are we called to be forerunners preparing others to encounter Christ?

Theological Prompt:

God works through patterns—Old Testament prophets like Elijah foreshadow John, who points beyond to Jesus.

Practical Application:

Reflect on how others prepared the way for you to encounter Christ, and how you might serve as forerunner for others.

Prayer Prompt:

Thank God for those who prepared the way for you to know Christ, and ask how you might serve as a forerunner.

Thursday – The Cost of Discipleship (Mark 6:14–29)

Mark places John's death between the disciples' sending and return, creating a sober frame around their successful mission. Norman Perrin noted this pattern: John preaches and is delivered up; Jesus preaches and is delivered up; the disciples preach and will be delivered up (13:9–13). John's death seems meaningless—no glorious martyrdom speech, just a silent beheading to satisfy a grudge. Yet his death was not in vain. He fulfilled his God-given role as forerunner. The disciples claim his body and bury it in a tomb, an act of faithfulness that foreshadows what happens with Jesus. Loyal discipleship continues even in the face of death and apparent failure.

10. How does Mark's placement of John's death between the disciples' sending and return challenge triumphalistic expectations of Christian ministry?

11. What does the repeated pattern—John delivered up, Jesus delivered up, disciples delivered up—teach about following Christ?

12. How do we find meaning when faithful service leads to apparent defeat rather than visible success?

Theological Prompt:

Faithful discipleship doesn't guarantee earthly success; following Jesus means taking up the cross and being "delivered up."

Practical Application:

Examine whether you expect faithful obedience to always produce visible success rather than possible suffering.

Prayer Prompt:

Pray for persecuted Christians worldwide. Ask God to sustain them and use their witness.

Friday – Identity and Mission (Mark 6:14–16)

The passage begins with speculation about Jesus' identity: John raised from the dead? Elijah? A prophet? These questions resurface at Caesarea Philippi (8:27–30), making identity central to Mark. Though Jesus is absent from this narrative, he hovers in the background. Everything about John's story points forward to Jesus' fate. John serves as herald and foreshadowing—what happens to John will happen to Jesus “in a bigger way.” Mark tells John's death as a flashback, creating a jarring interruption mirroring how death and suffering interrupt our expectations. The word “deeply grieved” (περίλυπος, *perilypos*) appears only twice: describing Herod's sorrow and Jesus' anguish in Gethsemane.

13. Why does Mark frame Jesus' identity through comparison with John and the prophets? What does this suggest about understanding who Jesus truly is?

14. How does John serve as both herald and foreshadowing of Christ? What does it mean that what happens to John will happen to Jesus “in a bigger way”?

15. How does Herod's grief over the results of his own sin contrast with Jesus' grief in taking on the world's sin?

Theological Prompt:

Jesus' identity is fully understood through the cross—he is the suffering servant who dies purposefully to accomplish salvation.

Practical Application:

Consider how suffering and the cross shape your understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

Prayer Prompt:

Meditate on Christ's willingness to follow John's path to death and beyond. Thank Jesus for embracing suffering for our salvation.