

Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ

The Death of John the Baptist

Last time...Jesus concluded His instruction for His 12 disciples and us, and Israel during DoL with the seriousness of the mission (eternity is at stake!) as characterized in binary terms:

- confess or deny
- peace or sword
- Jesus or family
- find or lose

This time...having received their instructions from Jesus, the missionary teams go forth... as does Jesus

And the seriousness of the mission, as characterized in those binary terms, is “played out” by John the Baptist and Herod Antipas

- confess or deny
- peace or sword
- Jesus or family
- find or lose

We will be based in Mark 6, Matt 11, and Luke 9

Luke 9

v1-2... The calling and instruction (v3-5) of the 12 disciples in Luke’s account

v6 And they...the 12 disciples after receiving instruction from the Lord...departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.

Mark 6

v7... The calling and instruction (v8-11) of the 12 disciples in Mark’s account

v12-13 they preached: repentance...as did John the Baptist and Jesus
repentance: to think differently, to change course, to return to God

and they healed: spiritually and physically

The 12 disciples preached and healed...by the power of God given them (v7)

Their mission trip was successful because

- the number of converts? (How many does Scripture say?)
- the power of God and their faithfulness/obedience

Matt 11

v1 He departed...teach...preach:

All of Ch 10 is Jesus giving to His 12 disciples their calling and instruction for that calling (Ch 11:1 seems like a better place for a chapter break)

Includes Ch 10:23 (near term fulfillment)

He sent the 6 mission teams...in advance

He then followed them, on this 3rd teaching tour of the Galilee

His focus: the words the Father gave Him to say

teach: believer

preach: unbeliever

Looking back, Jesus' Galilean ministry started not quite 2 years previously... with the arrest of John the Baptist

Matt 4:12-13a Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum

Mark 1:4 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

Luke 3:19-20 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison

Now, shortly after the 1st Mission Trip without Jesus comes news of the death of John the Baptist

John the Baptist's life and death are bound up in the ministry of Jesus Christ

The chronological trail takes us to Mark 6 (Matt 14 and Luke 9)

Mark 6

v14-16 king Herod:

- son of Herod the Great (who tried to murder the infant Jesus)
- aka Herod Antipas or Herod the tetrarch
- ruler of Galilee, the fourth part (tetrarch) of his father's dominion (Matt 14:1 and Luke 9:7)

[Tetrarchs]

- his capital was Tiberias, a city he built...a beautiful setting on the west shore of Sea of Galilee
 - reputation of being among the most vile of Roman cities in the Empire
 - Roman historians write of its luxurious and sensuous lifestyles and exceeding wickedness
 - Herod seized the land (cemetery), dug up the graves, and built his city
 - when common, decent folks would not move into his city, Herod Antipas emptied prisons and jails to establish a population
 - there is no record of Jesus Christ ever going to Tiberias

heard:

of Him... of Jesus (stated explicitly in Matt 14:1)

Word about Jesus had travelled far and wide, His reputation was well-known

- words: teaching as one having authority, not like the scribes
- miraculous works
 - raising the dead (twice)
 - healing physical infirmities by touch or with merely the spoken word (countless)
 - casting out devils (countless)
 - command over the wind and the sea

And now, 6 mission teams with power and authority over physical and spiritual infirmities caught Herod Antipas' attention

Finally, Jesus is following after His mission teams, teaching and preaching... no man having ever spoken like this man

Note: another example of the Biblical pattern of "6+1"

Another detail in Luke 9:7...Herod Antipas was perplexed – troubled by a guilty conscience...because

John the Baptist was risen from the dead...mighty works...in him:

These are rather strange things for Herod Antipas to say

- he is risen from the dead...John the Baptist is dead (has been martyred/murdered) and Herod believed in resurrection
- attributing the fame and the mighty works of Jesus to a resurrected John the Baptist...who
 - announced the coming of Jesus, saying he was not worthy to untie Jesus' shoes
 - was only recently murdered, having been in prison during all the words and works of Jesus

Therefore not everyone in Herod's court accepted his version of Jesus' fame

others...Elijah...prophet...as one of the prophets:

Some attributed all these things to Elijah

Mal 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:
And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,
and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

All Jews were waiting/looking for Elijah

Some attributed these things to an unnamed prophet (Elisha?) or someone "acting" like a prophet

One thing is certain – John the Baptist is dead...beheaded by Herod Antipas

Notice that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, simply state the facts, leaving out any personal disgust or condemnation or judgment of "the bad guys"; will do so when it comes to Judas Iscariot

Luke's account of the death of John the Baptist is very brief...3 verses

Matthew's account has more details

Mark's account is the most detailed

Again, all 3 accounts taken together give us the full story from God's perspective

How did we get to this point, the death of John the Baptist?

Scripture gives us some of the back-story in the subsequent verses,
secular history (ala Josephus) gives us more

Josephus, a Jewish military officer commissioned by Rome to write a history of the Jews, recorded the imprisonment and beheading of John the Baptist in Herod Antipas' winter palace/fortress, Machaerus, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea

v17-18 Herod had...laid hold on...bound him in prison...not lawful:

Prior to John's imprisonment, as recorded by secular historians, H. Antipas had

- visited his half brother Philip in Rome
 - inherited wealth but no dominion from his father
Herod the Great
 - not to be confused with another brother Philip the tetrarch
HQ-ed in Caesarea Philippi, the city he built
- fell in love with Philip's wife, Herodias
 - granddaughter of Herod the Great
 - by Philip had a teenage daughter, named Salome
- enticed Herodias to return to Judea with him...she had greater ambition than to be merely the wife of a rich man
- divorced his wife
- married Herodias

This adulterous and incestuous "arrangement" outraged the Jews

John the Baptist boldly rebuked Herod Antipas and Herodias for their adultery and publically called upon them to repent

John the Baptist (Spirit-filled and Spirit-led) was uncompromising on the Word and holiness of God, regardless of the potential worldly consequence

Herodias did not take kindly to either John the Baptist's "sticking his nose into their business" or his public denunciations, so she nagged her husband until he had John the Baptist arrested and thrown in prison

Note: It was during this imprisonment that John the Baptist sent a few of his disciples to Jesus, questioning if in fact Jesus was the Messiah as he John had proclaimed

We studied that in Matt 11:2-30...occurring in the ministry of Jesus after

- SoM
- healing the servant of the centurion at Capernaum
- raising from the dead the son of the widow at Nain

In the chronology...Matt 14:5

Herod Antipas was none too thrilled with the rebuke of John the Baptist...

But tempered his rage because he feared the people, who loved John the Baptist and regarded him as a prophet of God...who

- broke 400 yrs of silence from heaven
- was courageous enough to stand up to corrupt leaders,
both Gov't and Religion

Therefore, due to fear, Herod Antipas opted to throw John in prison

He risked insurrection (for which Rome had Zero tolerance) if he killed John the Baptist and “ignited” a Jewish rebellion against the Roman occupation...so he “satisfied” himself (or more likely, his wife) by imprisoning him

v19-20 Herodias had a quarrel against him...killed him but she could not:

Herodias burned to kill John the Baptist;

she held a murderous grudge against him and will not let go of it

True to her character, she probably nagged and nagged her husband to execute John, but he would not (for career/life considerations)

In fact, she would have done it herself but her husband wouldn't let her...

he was “wise” to his wife's evil genius and kept John the Baptist from her murderous rage

Herod Antipas, besides fearing the Jews, feared John too;
a career-ending and life-threatening problem

Yet we get the impression that Herod Antipas held John the Baptist in high regard

- just
- holy
- watched him
- listened to him, gladly

It is as if Herod was fascinated by this very unusual, fearless, courageous man who actually lived according to his beliefs without hypocrisy or political gamesmanship

“heard him gladly” because Herod Antipas occasionally invited John the Baptist to preach the Word of God in the semi-private setting of his court

In a Roman prison for speaking the truth boldly,
not wasting his breath or words to tickle the ears of the hearers,
John the Baptist preached courageously and faithfully as led by the Holy Spirit,
not knowing which word might be his last

Was Antipas' fear of John a mixture of fright (a political liability and danger) and respect?

Was Herod Antipas a hearer of the Word of God but not a doer, deceiving himself?

Was he adamantly not willing to let go of the sin and the debaucheries of his lifestyle?

Was Antipas an earlier version of Agrippa (Acts 26:28) or did he just not believe the message of this man he “admired”/respected?

v21-23 on his birthday...daughter...pleased...half of my kingdom:

Time passed...not quite two years...while

- Herodias stewed about John
- Herod Antipas observed and listened to John

Then, Herod threw a birthday party

(an excuse for a vile drinking party so loved by the Romans)

for himself, inviting the Who's Who of his little realm

And always on the docket for such an event in those days:

a voluptuous, erotic, solo dance by a young woman

The dance was sensual and sexually seductive to inflame the lust of men

On this occasion: the dancer is Herodias' daughter, Salome

(Herod's step-daughter)

Salome's dance pleased her step-father VERY much...creepy and disgusting!

It must have been some dance because, in a drunken and foolish outburst,

Herod Antipas tells her to name her fee...up to half of his kingdom

Happy Birthday to me!

Alcohol makes one stupid

- rational thought is impaired
- self-control is first compromised, then lost

Side note to capture the sense of "up to half his kingdom:

Last September, Matthew and Kathryn sitting at kitchen table with Olivia.

Olivia leans over to Kathryn and says, "Uncle Matt is so cool!"

Matt's heart melted and would have given her anything she wanted,
up to half of his kingdom!

But, back to the Biblical account, that is not the emotion stirred in Herod Antipas
by Salome

v24-26 what shall I ask...head of John the Baptist:

In Mark's account, Herodias' daughter, given the functional equivalent of a blank check, runs to mommy to get her advice on her "fee"...
and her mother, stewing with murderous hatred for and holding a grudge against John the Baptist, says, "The head of John the Baptist!"

In Matthew's account, in Matt 14:8, a premeditated plot by mother and daughter is implied..."before being instructed of her mother"

By all accounts, both mother and daughter are

- evil and wicked
- God-less, without morals
- nasty, pro-murder vs pro-life

Herod Antipas is informed by his wife's daughter...his step-daughter...
of her fee for her arousing dance...which she demands be paid right now

Gulp!

Open mouth, insert foot!

Imagine the deadly silence and horror in the room of Herod's court!

The inner conflict of Herod Antipas being watched by his court:

his oath and his pride vs his fear of John and his fear of the multitude

With eyewitnesses looking on and his personal honor at stake, he knows he has painted himself in a corner...he must "pay" the "fee", no matter how much it grieved him

Herodias got one over on him...the alcohol had resulted in him relaxing his "wisdom" to his wife's evil genius

He may have been shrewd, but Herodias was even more shrewd

Bugs Bunny:

Ya gotta get up pretty early in the morning to out smart me.

Elmer Fudd:

I got up at a quarter to five.

Herodias must have got up at a quarter to four!

Herod was duped by his own wife

Suddenly, Worst Birthday ever!

v27-28 immediately...beheaded...head in a charger...daughter...mother:

Herod Antipas

- feared the multitude that loved/honored John as a prophet of God
- feared John, a just and holy man
- did NOT fear God, having no regard for the Word of God he heard

He immediately gave the order to execute the innocent-of-any-wrongdoing John the Baptist and had his head “triumphantly” delivered to daughter/mother

Herodias: Happy Birthday to me!

John the Baptist was given no time to prepare to “meet his Maker”;
John didn’t need any time, he was ready, having counted the cost to follow Jesus the Messiah!

Q: John the Baptist was a man of God doing the will of God.
Why did this happen, why did God allow it to happen?

A: His ministry was over; he had prepared the way for the Messiah.
A man of God in the will of God is immortal...until his work is done.

It was time to go home i.e. the Sovereign God was in complete control

Herod Antipas...and his wife and her daughter...are guilty of murder
And that of a just and holy and innocent man

That is the backstory of v14-16

Herod’s conscience is haunting him...thus his explanation of Jesus’ fame in v14
And was he perversely comforted by v16?

v29 disciples heard:

When John the Baptist’s disciples heard the news coming out of Herod’s birthday party, they

- retrieved and buried their master’s headless corpse
- went to the Galilee and told Jesus the news (Matt 14:12)

A “final word” about Herod Antipas in this tragic scene: Luke 9:9

He desired to see Him...who?

Jesus...with the same curiosity he had about John the Baptist

But he would not see Jesus until Pilate sent Jesus to him for trial

(Luke 23:4-12)

But that is not the “end of the story” for Herod Antipas and Herodias

In time, the Jezebel-like Herodias proved to be the downfall of her husband, Herod Antipas

She was cunning, ambitious, cruel, immoral, and vengeful...a evil and nasty woman

Under Caesar Caligula

- 4th of Roman Caesars
 - Julius Caesar
 - Caesar Augustus
 - Tiberias
 - Caligula
 - Claudius
 - Nero
 - One of history’s most iconic bad guys, Caligula ruled Rome for just four years but exhibited enough cruelty and lunacy during that time to live in infamy
- another son of Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa (before whom Paul appeared in Acts 26) was given the title “king”

Herodias was jealous...in her blind ambition, she wanted to be a queen

She nagged/connived her husband to go to Rome and so petition Caligula

Herod Agrippa learned of this and warned his friend Caligula about the real motive of Antipas’ visit

Caligula banished Herod Antipas and Herodias to Gaul (modern day France)

And a postscript on like-mother-like-daughter Salome:

She would later marry her step-father’s brother, Philip the tetrarch son of Herod the Great
(not Philip her father, another son of Herod the Great)

The Herods: A wicked, incestuous, evil family

Application

The seriousness of our mission (Matt 10), played out by

<u>John the Baptist (free)</u>	and	<u>Herod Antipas (bound in chains)</u>
feared God		feared man
confess		deny
peace		sword
Jesus		family
find		lose

Lessons we can learn from John the Baptist about being a fruitful, remnant-minded disciple of Jesus Christ regarding the seriousness of our mission:

- Spirit-filled, Spirit-led...courageous and bold
- uncompromising on the Word of God, regardless of potential worldly consequences
- live lives governed by the Word and Spirit of God
- speak the Truth, even if our words might be our last
- always watching, always ready
 - to give an answer to every man that asks a reason of the hope that lies within
 - to meet Jesus face-to-face

John the Baptist was faithful in his ministry...even though he doubted it for a season and spent about 2 years in prison

The success of the mission is faithfulness...results from the mission belong to God

We cannot be faithful to God without the power of God, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led as John