

THE BAPTIST BEHEADED

Wednesday, July 26

Reading: Mark 6:14-29

Mark 6:26 *The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.*
27 *So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison,*

As Jesus sends out His disciples two-by-two to preach and heal, His fame continues to grow. News of Jesus' ministry reaches the fearful ears of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. While many think Jesus is a great prophet, Herod believes that this must be John the Baptist risen from the dead. The gospel of Mark takes this opportunity to record the events of John's death.

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great (the king during the Christmas story). Antipas was a wishy-washy ruler with no backbone who was driven by his passions. He had divorced his previous wife in order to marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife and his own niece. John denounced this sinful action for which Antipas had him thrown into prison.

Herodias had a vendetta against John for his condemnation of her relationship with Herod Antipas. Throwing him in prison did not satisfy this vengeful woman, but Herod was afraid to kill him because he knew John to be a righteous and holy man. That Antipas "liked to listen to him" would have really angered Herodias.

Her chance finally came at Herod's birthday party. Her daughter danced for the king and pleased him so much that he offered to give her anything she desired. On her mother's advice, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. Though it greatly distressed him, Herod was more afraid of the opinions of his guests than of God. He had John beheaded and gave his head to the dancing girl. John had been faithful to the end!

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. "John Has Been Raised From the Dead." It appears that God was working on Herod Antipas' heart! His conscience must have been stirred by John's preaching or he would not have continued to listen to him (6:20). However, he ignored his conscience for fear of public opinion and had John killed (6:26-27). But it did not end there. Hearing of Jesus, his guilty conscience again made him think of all that John had said (6:14-16). The last time we see Herod Antipas is at Jesus' trial (Luke 23:6-12). But while he had listened to John, he only wanted to see "magic tricks" from Jesus. By ignoring God speaking through his conscience, his heart had become hard and so he treated Jesus with contempt and sent Him back to Pilate. When people continue to ignore the prodding of the Spirit they too can miss their opportunity to respond to Christ. They could end up with hard hearts like Herod Antipas. What keeps people from accepting Christ today? Can God break a hardened heart? What is our role in reaching people with the gospel?
2. "He Beheaded John in the Prison." While John stood firm in his convictions, Herod was more concerned about what others thought. Have you ever missed an opportunity to share Christ because you were afraid of what others would think? What do you need to do to have the courage of John? How can you play a part in someone's life to 'prepare the way for the Lord?'