

The Cost of Service

Mark 6:14-29

Linda, who teaches first grade in Dallas Texas, has an interesting job, especially when it comes to helping children adjust to their first whole day of school. Little Ryan was used to going home at noon in kindergarten; so when it was time to go to lunch with the rest of the class, he got his things ready to leave for home.

Linda asked him what he was doing.

"I'm going home," he replied.

Linda tried to explain that, now that he is in the first grade, he would have a longer school day. "You'll go eat lunch now," she said, "and then you'll come back to the room and do some more work before you go home."

Ryan looked up at her in disbelief, hoping she was kidding. Then, convinced of her seriousness, Ryan then put his hands on his hips and demanded, "Who on earth signed me up for this program?" (Wanda Vassallo, Dallas, Texas, www.PreachingToday.com)

Sometimes we feel a little like Ryan when we start serving Christ. It's a lot harder than we thought. We get some criticism. and We wonder, "Who signed me up for this program?"

It is to such people that Mark wrote his gospel. His original audience was suffering under Nero's persecution for their commitment to Christ. Serving the Lord Jesus was much harder than many expected so Mark shares with them some stories from the life of Christ to encourage them.

If you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn with me to Mark 6. We're going to be looking at verses 14 to 29 which is kind of a flashback to an event that happened earlier. It is the account of the execution of John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah and the last Old Testament prophet and the man of whom Jesus said, "He was the greatest man who ever lived up until his time."

Read Mark 6:14-29:

- 14 Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."**
- 15 Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets."**
- 16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"**
- 17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.**
- 18 For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."**
- 19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;**

- 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.
- 21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.
- 22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."
- 23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."
- 24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"
- 25 Immediately she came in 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; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.
- 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,
- 28 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 away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

Back in Mark 1:14 it says that John the Baptist had been arrested and put into prison. Comparing Luke 3:19-20, shows that it was soon after the temptation and baptism of Christ that John was arrested. John has been a prisoner for over a year. The thing that triggers Mark's flashback to John's execution is that in verse 14 Mark records, **"Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known."** Heard of whom? Jesus of course. Why did he hear about Him? What did he hear? And what affect did it have on him?

What did Herod hear? Remember last time we saw how Jesus had sent out the twelve with His power in verse 7. Verses 12-13 record for us the results of the apostles' missionary field trip, **"So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them."**

This is why Herod hears about Jesus. Miracles were happening everywhere they went, people with diseases were healed, demons were cast out and the gospel was preached. There's never been anything like this explosion of miracles, the explosion of gospel preaching--it was the buzz of all of Galilee. The buzz finally reaches Herod. Look at verse 14 again, **"Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known."** What does that tell you? That everything the disciples were doing, all the preaching, all the healing, all the deliverance was being done in the name of Jesus Christ, right? Christ, of course, was the source of the power. And I think the Twelve must have made it crystal clear that the

power was not theirs, but was from Jesus. So it comes back to Herod that this name has mighty, mighty power.

Now what is happening, this explosion of power has created a buzz that is essentially saying, "This is not just another prophet." Early the word was that He's a great prophet, that's what it says in Luke 7:16. But they were getting beyond that. While prophets in the past had been known to do a miracle, even a resurrection in the case of Elijah and Elisha, no prophet ever had released this kind of explosive power where everywhere He went everyone was healed and delivered. There was no real human explanation. So word began to circulate that maybe this was someone who had come back from the dead with supernatural power. The people were saying, according to verse 14, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead." That's one explanation. They know that John is dead, by now, Herod has executed him by this point, they know that. And maybe he's come back from the dead and that's why these miraculous powers are at work in Him. He is really a resurrected, this Jesus is a resurrected John the Baptist.

What affect did this news have on Herod? When Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "**John whom I've beheaded has arisen.**" Well why does he say that? This is a projection of his deepest fear. Herod knows John, he knows him well. He kept him incarcerated in his own palace fort prison for over a year. He knew him face-to-face. He will give testimony that he was a righteous and godly man. He also knows that he had him executed in a bizarre, lecherous, wicked party to satisfy his own pride and the vengeance of his own wife. And so he projects his worse fear. This must be John back from the dead.

Where does this fear come from? Why is...why is he so afraid? Well because he had him beheaded. That's what he says in verse 16 and verse 17 you have a flashback. And the first question is, "Well how did that happen, right? He had him beheaded, how did that take place?" And so the Holy Spirit inspires Mark to tell us the story.

Herod is called in Luke 3:1 a tetrarch...a tetrarch. That means a ruler of a fourth of a region, ruler of a fourth of a region. There are many Herods in the scriptures. The first one we meet is Herod the Great. He is the one who was King when Jesus was born, the one who had all the babies murdered in Bethlehem. The Herod in Mark 6 is his son, Herod Antipas.

Well, here's the rest of the story. Why did he put him in prison? On account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. Now we're in to the soap opera. And if you can follow this, the first time, you're better than most. It is so convoluted.

Please notice, Herodias is not called his wife, but called the wife of his brother Philip. He married her but the technicality is it was an illegitimate marriage because she should have remained the wife of his brother Philip. He literally seduced and stole her from his brother.

Herod was married to the daughter of the King of Nabatean Arabia, a man named Aretas. But he lusted after his brother Philip's s wife Herodias. She was

the daughter of another son of Herod the Great. So she married her uncle, her father's half-brother. Philip then is in an incestuous relationship with her. Her brother, by the way, was Herod Agrippa, the Herod in the book of Acts who was eaten by worms. The whole family is caught up in incest.

Well, how did John the Baptist play into this? Oh, verse 18, "John had been saying to Herod, 'It's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'" That's what we call the direct approach. "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And he is saying this all over the place. I mean the language here, he had been saying, this is one translation, "he kept saying."

As a result of this, Herodias is really angry and so it's become a settled grudge, verse 19, against him. She wanted to put him to death, couldn't do so. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, of course. She wants him dead. He keeps saying this, he keeps saying it, he preached it publicly, it's the buzz. He says it every time he is seen by Herod. It reminds him of how horrible it is. He probably tells the guards at the prison about it. She's tired of it. She wants him silenced. She wants to put him to death. She can't do it.

Why? Because her husband is restraining her, **"for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him."** Protected from whom? From her.

Interestingly enough, when he heard him, which he must have done on perhaps numerous occasions, he was very perplexed. He couldn't understand the message of John the Baptist. He couldn't figure out what he was saying about the Messiah, about judgment. But he used to enjoy listening to him. It was kind of a curiosity. I mean, he was a very...he was a very great preacher. He must have been at the lowest level at least amazingly entertaining. And he enjoyed listening to him.

So the combination of the novelty of John and the fear of even greater consequences to come against him in the judgment of God, if he did anything to this obviously righteous and godly man, restrained him from taking his life. But he lived in fear of the man. Fear, first of all, to kill him, and then after he did kill him, fear that he'd come back from the dead.

Now that leads us to the second scene here in the flashback. We go from Herod's fear to Herod's folly. A strategic day came, it became strategic because it was Herod's birthday. Herod on his birthday gave a banquet. Birthday celebration, the Jews hated pagan celebrations, basically ignored birthdays in their culture, but the Romans made a huge issue out of birthdays. They were excuses for lecherous, lewd revelry.

So he invites to this banquet his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. This is important. His lords meaning nobles, the social elite in Galilee and Peraea, the area over which he had some jurisdiction. These would be the powerful persons. These would be the upper level tax collectors, the officials under him. They would include Jews, Jews who had bought the tax franchises, Jews who had risen in the establishment economically, the business

community, Jews who thought they could gain by having some kind of an alliance with this non-Jewish ruler. It would include those who are identified in Mark 3:6 as Herodians, people who wanted to be associated with Herod. You remember the Herodians and the Pharisees got together in chapter 3 verse 6 and were plotting the death of Jesus.

Verse 22, “When the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced.” Herod had no concern for the purity of his own daughter. Purity was not an issue in that wretched family. It hadn’t been for generations. It really never would be. As the adoptive father of this, his niece, the daughter of his brother Philip, he had no desire to protect her in any sense. For a young girl aged 15 or 16 as she probably was to dance like this was a shame, for a princess to dance like this was a double shame, for a mother to let her daughter dance like this is a triple shame. But shame doesn’t exist in the vocabulary of the family of Herod.

So she comes in to dance her evil dance when the leering men have reached the right proportion of satiation both with food and alcoholic drink, in she comes...immoral, suggestive, shameless dancing. That’s what happens. And she pleased Herod in the basest way and his dinner guests.

And so he’s going to throw his braggadocio around a little bit. He’s looped, as you would say. He’s inebriated. He’s feeling his petty power. And being excited by this girl’s dance, he says, “Ask me for whatever you want and I’ll give it to you.”

My friends, if you want to be popular, don’t follow Christ. But if you want to do something significant with your life, then serve Him with all your heart, and represent Him well wherever He sends you.

You may not be accepted in this world, but in the next, where it counts, there will be many who will “welcome you into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9). They will be the people you have led to the Lord, either directly or indirectly, and they will be eternally grateful to you for your witness and service for Christ.

When Texas pastor, Jim Denison, was in college, he served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. While there he attended a small church. At one of the church’s worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized.

During the service, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, “Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.” (Raymond McHenry, *Stories for the Soul*, Hendrickson, 2001, p.48; www.PreachingToday.com)

She understood the price of serving Christ. Do we? Maybe if we did, we wouldn’t quit so soon when the hard times come, or when people get critical and we face the sting of rejection.

Anything worth doing is going to have opposition, especially when it comes to serving Christ. If we take a stand for Christ and seek to serve Him, we will be insulted. we will be rejected.

And SOME OF US MAY DIE. Some who serve Christ will lose their lives. Some will be martyred for their commitment to Christ. John the Baptist was. He boldly proclaimed the truth and in the end lost his head for it.

Mark 6:14-18 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (NIV)

You see, Herod had divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias, who had divorced Philip, her husband. and John the Baptist had the gall to tell Herod he was wrong, that he had disobeyed God's law.

Mark 6:19-20 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled b; yet he liked to listen to him. (NIV)

Even though he didn't like the truth, he respected John for his boldness in telling the truth. You see, even though people don't always appreciate the truth, they have to respect it in the end.

Mark 6:21-29 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. (NIV)

John the Baptist lost his life because of his stand for the truth, and many still lose their lives today for the same thing. The Christian History magazine reports that "more people have been martyred for Christ in the past 50 years than in the

church's first 300 years." ("Persecution in the Early Church," Christian History, no. 27; www.PreachingToday.com)

Now, that's not so much happening in our country, but around the world people are losing their lives every week because of their commitment to Christ. Although, it DOES happen here in our own country occasionally.

On December 9, 2007, Matthew Murray shot and killed Tiffany Johnson, 26, and Philip Crouse, 24, at a Youth With a Mission (YWAM) training center in the Denver suburb of Arvada. He later killed two at the New Life Church in Colorado Springs...

Despite the deaths, YWAM is resumed its missions training program the following month, and not one of the 120 who signed up dropped out of the program. Director of the Arvada YWAM, Peter Warren, spoke with Christianity Today about the shooting...

Matthew was in the building for half an hour talking with students, and then he asked to spend the night. Tiffany was called to the front because she handles hospitality. Normally, they would not have someone spend the night without knowing them or arranging it ahead of time. After that, Matthew said, "Then this is what I've got for you," pulled out a gun and began shooting.

After firing a few shots, he had his foot in the door, and at some point his foot slipped and he fell back. The door slammed shut on him and automatically locked, so he could not get back in again. Right then, other staff and students were driving up and saw Matthew banging on the door, trying to get back in. When Matthew saw them, he ran away.

After [a] student performed CPR on Tiffany, she regained consciousness and asked [another trainee named] Holly, "Is it bad?"

Holly said, "Yes, it's bad."

Tiffany looked at Holly and her boyfriend, Dan, who was also shot, and said, "We do this for Jesus, right guys? We do this for Jesus." (Sarah Pulliam, YWAM Director Describes Shooting, Forgiveness, www.Christianity Today.com, 12-19-07)

She is one who right here in the heart of America lost her life because of her service for Christ. Now, thankfully that doesn't happen often, but it does happen. Some do give their lives serving Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, who gave his life for Christ in a Nazi concentration camp, once said, "Christ kept himself from suffering till his hour had come, but when it did come he met it as a free man, seized it, and mastered it. We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian History, no. 32; www.PreachingToday.com)

My friends, let's choose to serve Christ no matter what happens, because as believers we are not victims; we are free in Christ to do what's right in the face of any danger.

We will be insulted, we will be rejected, and some of us may die. But in the end, it's the only way to live!

Donald Wildman put it this way: "At the very heart of the Christian gospel is a cross – the symbol of suffering and sacrifice, of hurt and pain and humiliation and rejection. I want no part of the Christian message which does not call me to involvement, requires of me no sacrifice, takes from me no comfort, requires of me less than the best I have to give. The duty of a Christian is to be faithful, not popular or successful." (Donald Wildmon in NFD Journal; Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no.10; www.Preaching Today.com)

How about you? How about me? Will we choose to serve Christ or take the easy way out? God can use us in powerful ways, but we must be willing to pay the price.