

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 7-5-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Mark 6:14-29

<sup>14</sup>King Herod heard of [the disciples' preaching,] for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." <sup>15</sup>But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." <sup>16</sup>But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

<sup>17</sup>For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. <sup>18</sup>For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." <sup>19</sup>And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup>for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. <sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>When his daughter Herodias 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." <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." <sup>25</sup>Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." <sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

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Between Jesus' sending out the disciples with authority over the unclean spirits (which was in our reading last week) and the joyful return of the disciples, we get this grisly story about the demise of John the Baptist. John, remember, inaugurated the Gospel of Mark—his ministry of baptism prepared the way for Jesus' coming. Apparently, the ministry Jesus himself did which Jesus empowered the disciples to do, as well, bore a strong resemblance to John's own ministry. Whether Herod believed Jesus was a literal resurrected version of John the Baptist or whether he merely recognized in Jesus' ministry echoes of John's ministry is unclear.

This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was the ruler in power when Jesus was born who, according to Matthew's gospel, sent the Magi to find the infant Jesus and ordered the slaughter of the innocents. Herod the Great died when Jesus was as toddler and his sons took over his territory, which was split into four parts. Philip and Herod Antipas (both mentioned here) took charge of two of these territories. Apparently, the apple didn't fall far from the tree—Herod Antipas was capable of similar brutality to his father's.

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Evidently, John's ministry took on other elements of ancient prophetic ministry, namely the calling out of Herod for his sins (see for comparison 2 Samuel 12). Rather than responding with contrition, though, Herod had John imprisoned, but refrained from ending his life. This was likely a pragmatic attempt to placate the crowds, for John was reportedly highly regarded by the people. Herod also seemed to feel an affinity toward John, so his charisma may have preserved his life. The word translated as "perplexed" here means

“at a loss”—Herod could not make sense of John’s words. That fact may give us clear insight into Herod’s frame of mind. He was baffled by words about morality and legality. An image of Herod as morally void begins to emerge. He seems to have valued political expediency and popularity over faith and religious teachings.

**<sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>When his daughter Herodias 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.” <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” <sup>25</sup>Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” <sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.**

Commentators and artists portraying this story over the years have sensualized and eroticized the girl’s dance. There is nothing in the Greek that suggests her dance or the response to it were sexual in nature. The word for “danced” merely means “to dance.” It is the same word Jesus uses in Matthew 11:17 and Luke 7:32 in his teaching about his own generation. Again, there is nothing inherently sexual about this word. The same goes for the word “pleased” to describe Herod’s reaction to her dance. This word can also be translated as “found approval.” It simply means they approved of her dance, whatever form it took. There is nothing to imply sexual pleasure derived from the dance. Likewise, the term “girl” can mean a little girl or a maiden or young woman. So it is unclear how old Herod’s daughter actually was. It is possible she was an unmarried young woman of adult age who performed a lascivious dance for Herod and his guests, but it is equally possible she was a little girl who danced much as we might ask a child to sing or dance at a party today so that others can admire their talent or cuteness. In any case, Herod made a promise he could not easily keep, but which he could less easily break, leading him to comply with his wife’s wishes to have John killed.

**<sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.**

The response of John’s disciples, much like the death of John at the hands of a politically powerful person, foreshadows the death of Jesus and his disciples’ response to it. From this passage, we get a foreboding sense that Jesus’ own demise is a possibility since he is seen as continuing the work of John. Likewise, those who follow Jesus must be aware that their work could prompt persecution and retaliation, as well.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Why do you think Herod decided it was more prudent to murder John than to go back on his oath to his daughter?**
- 2. Why do you think commentators have sexualized the girl’s dance and Herod’s reaction to it?**
- 3. What do you think is the Gospel (the good news) in this gruesome passage?**