

7/19/26

Sermon Title: John the Baptist, Foreshadowing Christ

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 14:1-12

John the Baptist Beheaded

¹ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus,
² and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."
³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,
⁴ for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her."
⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.
⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much
⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.
⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."
⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted
¹⁰ and had John beheaded in the prison.
¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.
¹² John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

The author, Matthew, intentionally places Jesus' rejection in His hometown alongside the account of John the Baptist's death. He connects the rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth with the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas, the tetrarch.

The entire life and death of John the Baptist foreshadowed Jesus Christ.

John's imprisonment anticipated the suffering of Jesus, and John's beheading, in which he shed his blood, foreshadowed Jesus' death on the cross, where He would pour out His blood—and, as John's Gospel records, blood and water flowed from His pierced side.

Although Herod knew that John was a righteous man, he reluctantly ordered his execution in order to preserve his reputation and satisfy the demands of those around him.

This foreshadows the injustice of Pontius Pilate, who, though fully aware of Jesus' innocence, nevertheless sentenced Him to be crucified because of the relentless demands of the crowd.

Finally, the scene in which John's disciples reverently recovered his headless body and buried him in sorrow closely parallels the burial of Jesus, when Joseph of Arimathea, together with His faithful followers, lovingly took His body from the cross and laid it in the tomb.

When Herod Antipas heard reports about Jesus performing miraculous works, he became terrified.

He concluded that John the Baptist, whom he had executed, had been raised from the dead and was now at work through Jesus.

This reaction reveals the deep burden of guilt that Herod carried because of his role in John the Baptist's death.

His troubled conscience made him fearful when he heard about Jesus' extraordinary power.

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus,

² and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

"At that time" most likely refers to around **A.D. 29**, shortly after Jesus had sent out the Twelve disciples in pairs, giving them authority to drive out demons and heal every disease and sickness.

Jesus commissioned the Twelve and sent them throughout the region of Galilee. Empowered by the authority He had given them, they preached, healed the sick, and cast out demons.

As a result, news about Jesus spread rapidly throughout Galilee, and even Herod Antipas heard these reports.

Herod's remark that John the Baptist had risen from the dead reveals his superstitious way of thinking.

The reason Herod concluded that Jesus was John raised from the dead was that their ministries were remarkably similar.

Both proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand, called people to repentance, and boldly rebuked the corrupt religious leaders of Israel.

Matthew then explains how Herod came to execute John the Baptist.

Herod Antipas was an Idumean by descent and served as a tetrarch appointed by the Roman emperor.

After the death of Herod the Great, he ruled Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, two of the four divisions into which his father's kingdom had been divided. Since both John the Baptist and Jesus carried out much of their ministry in these regions, Herod inevitably became closely connected with both of them.

In fact, on the day before His crucifixion, Jesus Himself was brought before Herod for questioning.

Herod was known for his cunning and deceitful character.

Jesus even referred to him as "that fox."

(Luke 13:31) At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

(Luke 13:32) He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'

(Luke 13:33) Nevertheless I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

Herod Antipas's personal life was also marked by moral corruption.

He was married to Phasaelis, the daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea.

However, during a visit to Rome, he fell in love with Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip I.

Determined to marry her, he divorced Phasaelis and took Herodias as his own wife.

When Phasaelis learned of Herod's plan, she fled to her father in Nabatea.

Upon hearing what had happened, King Aretas IV retaliated by declaring war against Herod Antipas.

John the Baptist openly condemned Herod for taking his brother's wife.

Although Herod was of Gentile descent, he claimed to be a Jew.

Yet he openly violated the Law of Moses, which strictly forbade a man from marrying his brother's wife while his brother was still living.

(Lev 18:16) Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother.

(Lev 20:21) If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless.

Herod regarded John's public rebuke of his private life as an act of political opposition and a threat to his authority.

Therefore, he had John arrested and imprisoned.

At that time, the wilderness east of the Jordan, where John carried out much of his baptizing ministry, lay within the territory of Perea, which was under Herod Antipas's jurisdiction.

Although Herod wanted to put John to death, he hesitated because he feared the crowds, who regarded John as a prophet.

³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

⁴ for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her."

⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

Herod feared that the crowds might riot if he executed John the Baptist.

Why, then, were the people so favorable toward John?

There were several reasons.

First, they admired John's boldness in exposing the sins of the Jewish religious leaders and condemning their hypocrisy.

They also appreciated his courage in denouncing the Herodian dynasty, which oppressed the people under the protection of Rome.

Second, Jesus Himself spoke very highly of John.

Jesus' disciples also recognized him as a true prophet and the forerunner who had come to prepare the way for the Messiah, and they shared this conviction with others.

Finally, the people were outraged by Herod's unlawful imprisonment of John and deeply sympathized with him.

Nevertheless, John the Baptist—the last prophet of the Old Testament era—met a tragic and seemingly senseless death.

Matthew then explains how John came to be executed.

While John was still in prison, Herod celebrated his birthday by holding a lavish banquet.

As part of the entertainment, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced before Herod and his distinguished guests, including high-ranking officials, military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee.

In that culture, dancing at a banquet attended exclusively by men often carried sensual overtones and was intended to entertain the male guests.

For a princess such as Salome to perform such a dance was highly inappropriate. Yet the fact that Herod and his guests delighted in her performance reveals the moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy of those in attendance.

Overcome with pride and excitement, Herod publicly swore an oath before all his guests, promising his stepdaughter that he would give her whatever she asked for.

According to the Gospel of Mark, he even boasted that he would give her "up to half my kingdom," an extravagant promise meant to impress those at the banquet.

⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much

⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

After hearing Herod's promise, Salome went to her mother, Herodias, and asked what she should request. Herodias instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptist, and Salome returned to the king and made that very request.

⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."

Herodias had harbored a deep grudge against John the Baptist because he had publicly condemned her unlawful marriage.

She had long been determined to have him put to death.

Although Herod was deeply distressed by Salome's request and feared the reaction of the people, he felt compelled to keep the oath he had made before his guests.

As a result, he granted her request.

He sent an executioner to the prison, where John the Baptist was beheaded. John's head was brought on a platter and presented to Salome, who then carried it to her mother, Herodias.

⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted

¹⁰ and had John beheaded in the prison.

¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.

Herod committed the foolish act of putting an innocent prophet to death in order to preserve his own honor.

Whether it was because he felt a measure of guilt or because he feared the public unrest that John's execution might provoke, Herod was deeply distressed for a time.

Nevertheless, he ultimately gave the order to behead John the Baptist.

His reckless oath became the cause of this tragedy.

Executing a person without a trial or legal judgment was unlawful.

Moreover, beheading was generally reserved only for those convicted of serious public crimes against the religious community.

Yet Herod ignored both justice and the law and carried out the execution.

Instead of confronting Herod about his wrongdoing, his guests flattered him and encouraged his pride.

In doing so, they became not only witnesses to his foolish oath but also accomplices in Herodias's murderous scheme.

Not long afterward, Herod's fortunes came to an end.

He suffered a crushing defeat in battle against King Aretas IV, the father of his former wife, and fled.

Later, after falling out of favor with the Roman emperor, he was banished by the Roman authorities to Lugdunum (modern-day Lyon, France), where he met a miserable end.

After John the Baptist was executed, his disciples came, took his headless body, and buried it.

Then they went and reported everything to Jesus.

¹² John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

In fact, this report was most likely delivered at the same time Jesus' own disciples returned from their missionary journey and gave their ministry report.

This suggests that at least some of John the Baptist's disciples became followers of Jesus.

John's disciples had already trusted Jesus because their teacher had testified that He was "the Lamb of God."

Some of them naturally joined themselves to Jesus and became His disciples.

The fact that John's disciples came to Jesus to report John's death also points to a close connection between John's death and Jesus' own death.

John's execution pointed forward to Christ's death on the cross.

The death of John the Baptist marks a significant turning point, bringing about several notable developments.

From this point forward, Jesus began to reveal more openly that He was the Messiah.

He repeatedly foretold His coming suffering and death, preparing for the climactic fulfillment of His messianic mission—the cross.

At the same time, the common people, weary of oppression, increasingly placed their political hopes in Jesus, expecting Him to be a national deliverer.

In contrast, the religious leaders and other members of the established elite grew increasingly hostile toward Him, viewing Him as a threat to their authority and influence.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

Although John the Baptist's beheading at the hands of Herod appears, from a human perspective, to be a tragic, helpless, and meaningless defeat, it was anything but that.

It is heartbreaking to see the life of such a faithful prophet end in such a cruel manner.

Yet Scripture directs our eyes beyond John to someone infinitely greater—Jesus Christ.

The entire life and death of John the Baptist served as a foreshadowing of Christ.

Throughout his life in the wilderness, John proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God."

Even in his death, he faithfully fulfilled his God-given mission of preparing the way for Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

His death was not the end but the signal that God's work of redemption was moving toward its fulfillment.

From the time of John's death onward, Jesus revealed Himself more openly as the Messiah and resolutely set His face toward the cross, where He would accomplish the salvation of the world.

John never compromised, whether before earthly rulers or in the face of death. He feared God alone and remained faithful to his calling until the very end. Although the power of this world could take his life, it could never silence the truth he proclaimed.

Whom are we looking to today, and what do we fear?

Are we, like Herod, more concerned about our reputation and the opinions of others than about obeying the truth?

Or will we become men and women of faith like John the Baptist, who refused to compromise God's Word even at the cost of his life and whose entire life pointed people to Jesus Christ?

Even if our faith brings misunderstanding, loss, opposition, or suffering, we need not be afraid, for the hope of eternal life and the resurrection awaits us.

The path John walked became the very path that Jesus walked—the way of the cross.

It is also the path every disciple of Christ is called to follow today.

May we value God's approval above human praise, love the truth without compromise, and faithfully bear witness to Jesus Christ alone all the days of our lives.