

HEROD ANTIPAS

Mark 6:14-29

I hope by this time in our study of the Gospel of Mark we are realizing that Jesus and His 3 ½ years of public ministry were extremely controversial. Many were looking for the promised Messiah; but that Messiah was completely human. Jesus' claim to be deity – to be a God-Man – was outrageous, blasphemous.

The leaders of Judaism spread the idea that Jesus was demon possessed and was performing miracles by the power of Satan (3:22). His family believed Him insane (3:20-21). The people of His hometown Nazareth insisted He was nothing more than a commoner (6:1-6).

There were three additional explanations about Jesus that were popularly believed.

Mark 8:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

In other words, many believed Jesus was one of the Old Testament prophets come back to life. In their thinking, resurrection from the dead explained Jesus' supernatural powers.

In the days of Jesus' public ministries, Galilee was ruled by a man named Herod Antipas. His father, Herod the Great, was the one who slaughtered all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to murder the child Jesus (Matt. 2:16-19). When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided between three sons; Herod Antipas was given rule over Galilee and Perea (east of the Jordan River). He ruled from 4B.C. to 39A.D. Antipas built Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee for his capital in Galilee. Tiberias and Capernaum are but a few miles apart.

Not surprisingly, Antipas heard about Jesus and what people were saying about Him.

Mark 6:14-29 (ESV)

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

Antipas locked in on the bizarre belief that Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. In the account that follows we discover the very personal reason why.

¹⁷ For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Herodias was not only Antipas' sister-in-law, she was also his niece, the daughter of his brother Aristobulus. Antipas divorced his first wife and seduced Herodias away from his half-brother Philip. It was an incestuous marriage prohibited by the Law of Moses and

John the Baptist called Antipas out on it (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). Though political concerns may have driven Antipas to arrest John, Antipas did not seem to have animosity towards John. But his wife Herodias hated John.

¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

Herod was a double-minded man tossed about by his lusts for pleasure and power. His marriage was a disaster. He was in turmoil; he knew John was a righteous man speaking truth, but Antipas couldn't bring himself to repent and do what was right. All the while, his wife was scheming, waiting for an opportunity to kill John.

Herod's birthday presented that opportunity.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² For when Herodias's daughter 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 to you." ²³ And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."

²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." ²⁵ And she came in immediately 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, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison ²⁸ and 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 his body and laid it in a tomb.

Herod was a sap. He put himself in a position to be played by his wife. She pimped her teenage daughter to arouse her husband. He gushed like a fool. In order to protect his image he murdered a righteous and holy man. There was just enough conscience left that Antipas felt guilty.

Herod's guilt caused him to miss Jesus.

Rather than research the reports and opinions about Jesus Herod reacted out of his guilt. If he had done the research he would have quickly discovered John and Jesus were contemporaries, in fact, they were related and only six months apart in age. He would have discovered that Jesus was performing miracles *before* John the Baptist was murdered so a *resurrection* wasn't the reason for Jesus' supernatural powers.

A lady once shared with me that for years she was convinced she could not be forgiven for having had an abortion and because of that she stayed away from religion. By God's grace she eventually understood that Jesus paid the penalty for her sin on the cross and that indeed she could be forgiven. Like Herod, her guilt almost kept her from the only One Who can set us free from our guilt.

We are all guilty before God because we all have sinned. Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin. We can be forgiven and transformed.

Don't let your guilt keep you from the only One Who can forgive you and change your life.