



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 6: 14-29

Mark

"John's Martyrdom"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, our passage this morning is in Mark chapter 6. So if you have your Bibles, turn to that passage and we will look this morning at verses 14 through 29.

And King Herod heard of it – a reference to previous verses where our Lord's power has been displayed, and He sent out His disciples, and they have been healing and casting out demons. And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"

For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; and when the daughter of Herodias – and her name we know from Josephus, not from the text itself, but from the record that Josephus has given us, which has been very illuminating as to the whole background of this particular passage, as well as others. He tells us that her name was Salome. So, when the daughter of Herodias herself

came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we bow now in a word of prayer?

[Prayer] Most gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for this time of study that we have together this morning. Thank You that we can gather together as a people, as the body of Christ, people chosen from the foundation of the world, redeemed from the foundation of the world, naturally purchased in time by the precious blood of Your Son. Not through any merit of our own, Father, as we reflect back upon that great work that Your Son performed and accomplished for us. We are really reminded of our unworthiness. You did not look down through time and see a people that were meritorious, a people who had amassed works or who had generated faith that called forth Your love and Your kindness and Your grace and mercy for us. Just the opposite is true. There is none who seeks after God, no not one. That's what Your Scriptures teach us. And so, that is what You saw when You looked through time, when You considered Your decree. It was not a people that were worthy, people that were grossly unworthy. And yet, that's where we see Your love for us, Father, and we rejoice in it because it was for an unworthy, unlovely people that You set Your love, and You sent Your son to purchase for Yourself. And we praise You and thank You for that, and pray that as we reflect upon that, we might be moved and motivated to serve You with the kind of conviction, kind of devotion, and kind of courage that we witness in John the Baptist in our text this morning. We pray that

You would teach us about how we should live our life. Move us to be men like him in a day that lacks men like that.

Give us a deep understanding of Your truth and the courage to proclaim it, the convictions to live according to it. We might be pleasing in Your sight, and in so doing be beneficial to those around us. Make us a people who truly do act as salt and light in the midst of this world. So, we ask Your blessing upon us this morning as we study the Scriptures, that You'd prepare us for the week to come, and we pray Your blessing upon us in a material way because there are many who are in great need of Your mercy. We pray for those who are sick. We think of Betty Devonport and her need at this time. Bob Messic. Many others whose names are listed on the calendar of concern and who have solicited our prayers. We pray for them. We bring them before You and ask Your grace upon them, Your mercy.

We think of those who are in need of employment at this time of the year. We pray that You'd move Your people to be generous and to care for them. We pray that You'd make provision and make provision with employment. We pray for ourselves materially. We pray for ourselves spiritually. We ask for wisdom that would be given to our elders. We ask for devotion, that it be given to our members, and we pray that we would live lives that are pleasing to You and be a good testimony, a good witness in this community. Bless this assembly to that end. Bless this nation, that our leaders would lead wisely. Bless the new administration that will take office shortly. We pray that You'd give wisdom. And pray Your blessings upon us in a material way. But most importantly, spiritually. May Your spirit move across this land and bring men and women to a knowledge of their lost condition, a conviction of their sin. Bring them to faith. May we, in this place, be used to that end. We pray, and pray that You would bless us now, as we sing our final hymn in preparation for a lesson that is given. And through that lesson, prepare our hearts for the time that is facing us in the week ahead, that we would be good servants of Yours. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] The proverbs say there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. That's a proverb for our day. We live in an age of expediency in which decisions are made for convenience and personal advantage. When people are willing to take shortcuts and violate their consciences in order to

spare themselves pain and shame. It may be breaking a contract in business or marriage that was ill-advisedly entered into. Maybe having an abortion to avoid the consequences of unrestrained passion. Decisions of that kind are never made with the long view. They only fix things short-term. And the Scriptures promise, promise that eventually, our sin will find us out. We're to use our modern expression: it will come back to haunt us, often through public disgrace, and always through annoying conscience.

We have a case in point from a first century man. King Herod, whose name is frequently given as Antipas. Herod Antipas. He was the son of the notorious Herod the Great, a man who made his name by building the temple in Jerusalem and killing the children in Bethlehem. A man who was a king, and Antipas was son, but he was hardly a king. Matthew and Luke, in fact, don't even identify him as a king; they identify him as tetrarch, which denoted the ruler of the fourth part of a region. And, Herod Antipas was that because he had inherited only a quarter of his father's kingdom, the region of Galilee and Perea, which he ruled under the supervision of Rome.

He was a careless man whose lust led him into a trap from which he tried to escape by means of expediency, by means of a sinful, short-sighted solution that came back to haunt him when he killed John the Baptist. And it's really John and his martyrdom for the faith that this passage is about. While it gives a penetrating lesson about folly and sin, it also gives instruction on the nature of the Christian witness, with John's uncompromising courage and the results that sometimes follow from such courage.

John is one in a long line of men and women who have represented our Lord well, who have given the good testimony, and paid with their lives. We think of Stephen, a man who spoke the truth with great boldness, and was stoned outside the city. Or John Chrysostom, the golden-tongued preacher who was driven by enemies from his church in Constantinople and hunted like an animal in the wilderness of Armenia until he finally succumbed to extreme hardships in 407 with the dying words, "Glory to God for all things. Amen." Or William Tyndale, whose only crime was to translate the Scriptures into his native tongue of English, and was forced into exile on the continent, eventually arrested, and after a cruel imprisonment, strangled and burned on October 6th, 1536. The list goes on of faithful men and women and

children who have died for their faith. They follow in the line of John the Baptist's faith and courage.

But really, it goes beyond John. He is significant because of his connection with our Lord. The death of the Lord's forerunner was the foreshadowing of the death of the Lord Himself. That's probably the reason that Mark devotes only 3 verses to John's ministry in his gospel, and 14 verses to his death. Herod's treatment of John looked forward to Israel's treatment of Jesus. And so, we want to comment on these things in our lesson this morning. We want to look at Herod's folly, John's courage, and Christ, as He is anticipated in John's death.

The Lord has sent out His disciples on a mission in Galilee. He has invested them with His authority over sickness and over unclean spirits. The passage picks up with the word of the Lord's miracles and His power reaching Herod, perhaps due to the disciples' traveling down to Tiberius, Herod's capital on the southwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Only now, after quite some period of time, does Herod learn of our Lord's ministry, which, this might seem odd, but as AT Robertson writes, "A palace is late in hearing spiritual news." That may be the reason, or it may be that he was late in learning of the Lord because he had been staying at Machaerus, his fortress and palace far to the south, far away from the activities in Galilee, down on the eastern side of the Dead Sea where this story unfolds.

At any rate, when he learned that there was a man in Galilee who had the power to heal the sick and raise the dead, to calm the sea and cast out demons, he was gripped with fear. It wasn't just the reports of power that disturbed Herod, but also the popular opinions that were circulating about our Lord's identity. The people knew that He was a supernatural person. And so, many reasoned that He was someone raised from the dead. Some were saying that He was Elijah. Elijah has a very prominent place in Jewish thinking and in some of the Jewish legends that grew up at that time, and since then, and some concluded that no one could do this kind of work except Elijah. Others were saying that He was a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.

But Herod was convinced that He was John the Baptist. That's an odd thing to conclude. Could've concluded a number of things: Elijah, or the Messiah. But he was saying, Mark writes, this is John, whom I beheaded. He has risen. It was a conclusion that he reached not due so much to the miracles, as to the prodding guilt of

his conscience. He literally thought that John had come back to haunt him. With this, Mark gives us a flashback to earlier events that explained Herod's reaction. And so doing, introduces us to Herod's family. His wife Herodias and his daughter Salome. It was a marriage and a family built on passion and adultery. The stuff supermarket tabloids are made of. Mark doesn't develop it like a tabloid; he simply records in verse 17 that Herodias was the wife of Herod's brother Philip, who was also the father of Salome.

Josephus, however, gives us further details that sort of fill things in and give us the background of these events. A relationship between Herod Antipas and Herodias developed in Rome. Philip was living there in exile, having fallen out of favor with his father, Herod the Great, and that's not a bad place to live if you have fallen out of favor with Herod, because he was a man who could take some pretty severe measures with those he was not in favor of. He was known to have killed at least one son and one wife. So, Philip put some distance between himself and his angry father.

And while visiting Philip and staying in his home, Herod became infatuated with Philip's wife, Herodias. They had an affair and decided to marry. She left Philip and Herod divorced his wife, an Arabian princess, the daughter of Aretas, a king of Nabatea, which was right on Herod's border. Herodias became Herod's wife and queen, and soon moved into the palace.

So, this was the new royal family. In Galilee, not exactly the embodiment of family values. It was an adulterous marriage, and one in violation of the law, in violation of Leviticus 18 and verse 16, which prohibited marriage to one's brother's wife while that brother was still alive. So, the two were living in open scandal. And John had the boldness to strip this relationship of any pretense of legitimacy and expose it for what it was. We read in verse 18: For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

He didn't say that once. He said that on more than one occasion. It took a great deal of boldness. Perhaps we can compare that something like what might take place in an office. Find out your boss has been having an affair, and it's something of an open scandal in the office. As he walks through, you stand up and point to him as being a man living in sin. I'm not suggesting that that's the application we should make here, that you do that, but you might give some idea of the boldness that this man had to stand up and say before the powers that be in Galilee, that he was living in

sin. It took boldness. And Calvin observed, we behold in John an illustrious example of that moral courage which all pious teachers ought to possess, not to hesitate to implore the wrath of the great and powerful, as often as it may be found necessary. For he, with whom there is acceptance of persons, does not honestly serve God.

Well, John never tried to find acceptance with persons. He was not a man-pleaser. He exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders; we see that early in his ministry when he's baptizing those who are coming to the Jordan. And then, one day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees approach, and he addresses them as a brood of vipers. He exposed the sin of the political leaders, as we see here. And he paid the price. Herod arrested him.

According to Josephus, he was imprisoned at Machaerus by the Dead Sea. It was his attempt to silence John, and it may have silenced John. But it didn't silence the voice of God. Men can never silence the voice of God. And even greater voice was raised against Herod and our Lord, who later called him "that fox," an association that was sometimes made to express the insignificance of a person, and the craftiness of a person.

Herod was that. Herod, as Leon Morris has pointed out, is the only person Jesus is recorded as having treated with contempt. He was not nearly as wicked and cruel as his father. In fact, he showed some interest in spiritual things. Verse 20 states that he used to enjoy listening to John, but he was a man who did deserve to be treated with contempt, because he was a weak man, a morally weak man. Immoral men are weak men, and his wife was able to exert a strong influence over him because of that. She was very ambitious. And John's preaching so enraged her that she wanted to kill him. Verse 19 states that she had a grudge against him. The sense of that is that it was an ongoing grudge. She nursed it. She plotted in light of it, because his preaching exposed her to shame publically, threatened her marriage, threatened her royal position. You might think, well, repentance is an option. But not for her. That would've cost her the palace. That would've cost her the prestige of the throne. She loved the world, like so many people, more than her own soul.

And so, she plotted his murder. She's like Jezebel with her hatred of Elijah. She wanted to kill him, Mark writes, but could not do so. As he explains in verse 20, Herod kept John in protective custody. He knew his wife's designs and was motivated to protect John out of fear, and out of the conviction that John was a

righteous and holy man. So, because of that, he feared to touch him. And so, he kept him safe in his dungeon.

Herod is an interesting study. He's a mass of contradictions. Someone has said he feared John as the bad fear the good. At the same time, he was fascinated with it. You can understand why. John was a fascinating person. Austere, a prophet of God who came out of the desert dressed in strange clothes, eating strange food, preaching the truth of God. A man of charisma whose influence was wider than that of Herod's. A man of deep conviction and knowledge and penetrating insight. He was a prophet of God and a compelling figure. And Herod used to enjoy listening to him, even though, Mark writes, it left him very perplexed. He didn't know which way to go as he listened to John preach. He didn't know whether to forsake his sin, or to continue in it.

Sin does that. Sin has a confusing effect upon people. It has a darkening effect upon the understanding. It frustrates good judgment. It weakens resolve. It did that to Herod. He listened to what John had to say. And yet, he was very perplexed because he continued in his sin, and because he continued in his sin, he continued to be hounded by his guilt-ridden conscience because he would not deal with that sin. A repressed conscience can drive a man mad. I think we see that in Herod, and I don't think we need to go to the psychology books to find that out. I'm sure we'd find it there. But all we need to do is look at the Scriptures, and they give us very insightful, some very insightful instruction on that very thing.

Think of David, and David's great sin, his willful sin with Bathsheba, his violent sin against her wife, Uriah, and it caused him terrible trouble. Physically as well as mentally. He writes of this, of the effect that his sin had upon him in Psalm 32. He writes, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away. Through my groaning all day long, for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me." When the hand of God is going to be upon all of His people who sin, in fact, it's going to be upon all people who sin. We do not sin with impunity, even if we're able to hide it from others. We cannot hide it from God, and God does not let it go unchecked. His hand is going to be felt heavy upon us. Particularly upon His people. David speaks of that. He writes, "My vitality was drained away, as with the fever heat of summer. Acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide. And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." As long as David kept it repressed within him as long as



he tried it and get away with it, he felt the hand of God heavy on him. He had no peace. He had an unsettled life. It was driving him mad. It was also ruining him physically.

But, David confessed his guilt. He repented of his sin, and was restored to peace. But Herod couldn't do that. And as a result, he would become increasingly hardened. That becomes very evident later in his life. When John was alive, Mark writes, he used to enjoy listening to him. But after John, after greater sin, when Herod at a later date got his desire to see Christ at our Lord's trial, our Lord stood before him silent, would not speak to Herod. And Herod could only mock Him. Mocked Him continually. So, Herod declined from a man with some interest in truth, to a man who mocked the truth.

That's what sin does. The longer one stays in it, the harder it becomes to leave it. The longer one refuses to repent, the harder it becomes to repent. That's why the author of Hebrews writes: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Herod hardened his heart. He was caught between fear and fascination, between guilt and conviction, and so he compromised. He kept a righteous man in prison, which is an obvious contradiction. But it silenced John's criticism of him, and he could justify it, he could rationalize it as a protective measure against the violent whims of his wife. It was an act of expediency, and it would come back to haunt him one night in an unguarded moment.

That night came with the celebration of his birthday. It was the opportunity that Herodias had been waiting for. Mark calls it a strategic day, a day well-suited for her purpose. She knew Herod's weakness, knew to appeal to his prurient interests, and a party provided the right occasion for that. Herod invited all of the important people of his realm, the noblemen of the realm, his military and political leaders. Invited them to join him for the celebration at his palace at Machaerus.

Toward the end of the banquet, everyone was full of wine and in a generous spirit, Herodias sent her daughter in to entertain the guests with a dance. The girl was about 16 years of age, and her dance was undoubtedly erotic and designed to entice the men who watched the dance. Dancing was considered indecent in Roman circles, and was usually done by professionals, which underlines the wickedness of this woman, Herodias. The overall impression of the passage is that this was her scheme to achieve her ends. And to do that, she was willing to sacrifice her daughter's

respectability. Nothing was more important to her than obtaining her ends. So, she used her daughter for that purpose.

The fact of the matter is: parents can do that today, can be guilty of the same kind of things. This, no doubt, is an example in the extreme. But I think that nevertheless, mothers and fathers can use their children for selfish ends. Perhaps it's in a situation of divorce in which one plays off the other by means of the child. Or perhaps, it's simply parents trying to live their lives through their children. At any rate, it can be essentially the same kind of thing, of using a child to one's own advantage.

And Herodias had no qualms about doing that. She sent her daughter in to dance before these men, and Herod responded just as his wife knew he would. Mark says he and his guests were pleased. Now, that was an understatement. They were thrilled, as they lounged on their couches with goblets of wine in their hands, staring at this half-naked princess. Then Herod sprung the trap on himself when he said, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." It was a statement made on impulse, a statement made without thinking, caught up in the moment. Then he sealed it with an oath, you'll read in verse 23. And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom."

Now, that last phrase, up to half of my kingdom, should probably not be taken literally, since Herod, his so-called kingdom was under Roman authority. He really didn't have the power to give it away. So, the phrase is probably to be understood proverbially, as expressing great generosity. Something like, "Ask for whatever you want. Money's no obstacle." An expression of his great excitement of what he'd seen.

The girl then left the hall, seeking her mother's advice, who was dining separate from the men in another room. She came to her and she asked, "What shall I ask for?" Well, Herodias didn't need to think about that at all. This was the moment she'd been waiting for. And she quickly replied: "The head of John the Baptist."

Now, if her daughter was surprised, Mark doesn't mention it. In fact, from Mark's vivid description, she was equally delighted. And in fact, adds a flourish of black humor of her own, because we read in verse 25, "Immediately." She doesn't wait. She came in haste before the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me right away the head of John the Baptist on a platter." You can imagine how the room was stunned with silence. The request suddenly sobered up Herod. And Mark writes

in verse 26, "He was very sorry." He was sorry, but he was caught by his own lust. The apostle John writes in 1 John chapter 2 of the lust of the eyes. He also writes of the lust of the flesh. That's what Herod suffered from. It got him into an adulterous marriage, and now it got him into this trap. I wonder: how many men have shipwrecked their lives because of the lust of the eyes? Because they couldn't avoid looking at certain magazines, which led to certain kinds of entertainment, which led on to other things.

The fact is: Herod's weakness is a weakness of men, of males, generally. I don't know that Herodias had any special insight into Herod. It may have been a particular problem with him. I think it was. But, she knew men. She knew that this was a weakness that men have. And that's why we are bombarded today by appeals to the eye, appeals to the flesh on the newsstands, in the newspaper ads that we see every day when we open them up. It comes in the mail, in slick magazines. And men must learn to control their eyes. The best time to begin is when you're young. That's when you need to set those kinds of habits, and most of us aren't too young anymore, but we can instill that in our children. We can instill the need to avoid certain kinds of literature and certain kinds of entertainment into our sons. And we can teach our daughters to dress appropriately. And we can set the right example around the house by not having certain kinds of entertainment and certain kinds of literature there.

But, we certainly need to learn to control where our eyes wander, and where they linger. That's a constant battle. It's a habit we must form, but it's a constant battle. I know I'm guilty of stating the obvious in saying all this, but it's so easy to become a victim of the lust of the eyes. If left unchecked, it leads to sorrow. Herod's a case in point. He was a victim of his eyes. He was a victim of the flesh because he didn't control it. Because of his pursuit of pleasure over purity, he was now trapped by his own folly. He had given his word before all of his distinguished guests, and was now caught in a dilemma between his conscience and his reputation.

He knew the right thing to do. The right thing is rather obvious. But to do it, was to go back on a promise that he had made, and a promise that he'd sealed with an oath. He'd evidently made something of a spectacle of himself there. Making this great promise and then giving oath after oath, that I'll give you whatever you want. And now, having made that, made this promise that he had no business making in the first place, he knew that if he were to go back upon that, he would lose face before his

friends. And that might've been the price that he would've had to have paid. But far better to admit an error than make a greater one.

Herod suddenly, unexpectedly found himself at a crossroads where he had the opportunity to confess his folly, to admit that he had spoken impulsively without thinking, and in doing so had gone too far. Or, he could continue to go too far.

We are never in a position where sin is our only option. Never. The option that we have, due to foolish decisions that we've made or foolish activity that we've engaged in may be painful. It may involve humiliation, publically. But that is always far better than sin. Breaking a bad promise would've been the right thing to do. It would've been the manly thing to do. But Herod couldn't see that. John also speaks of the pride of life, and Herod was blinded by his pride. As Mark writes, "The king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her." Couldn't refuse this young girl because of his pride.

It was a decision of expediency. He came to a crossroads in his life. And because he feared men more than he feared God, he chose the wrong road. He chose the wrong way, the one of self-interest, and the one of sin. With that decision, Herod, I think, killed his conscience, to the degree that a man or woman can kill their conscience. Spiritual truth would never have the effect upon him that it had had to that point in his life.

So, we read in verses 27 and 28: "And immediately." So, if he was sorry about this, he wasn't sorry for very long. "Immediately, the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother." The account ends with John's disciples retrieving the body of their teacher and giving it a proper burial. No doubt, Herod thought that that was the end of the matter.

Then, some months later, startling news arrived that there was a man in Galilee doing works far greater than John did, a man with teaching more piercing than John's, and a presence more powerful than John's. And memories are revived, and his conscience was awakened, and it began to afflict him all over again. Decisions of expediency, attempts to serve self at the expense of principle are shortcuts to disaster. And Herod reminds us of that.

But Herod is not the main point of this passage. It's John and his death. And John's death is important because as he was the forerunner of our Lord in his life, he foreshadowed our Lord in his death. The parallel between John's passion and our Lord's is very striking. The hatred and plotting of Herodias against John corresponds to the schemes and the hatred of the Jewish leaders toward our Lord. Herod's failure to release John, his fear of men and their opinions anticipated Herod's failure to release our Lord in spite of the fact that he knew from his conscience that he should, and he knew from the advice that his wife gave that he should. Nevertheless, he listened instead to the crowd. He was intimidated by their taunt, that he was no friend of Caesar. He too made a decision of expediency. And he came to a crossroads in his life, and he chose the wrong way.

And the burial of John finds its counterpart in the request for the Lord's body by His secret disciples and the respectful burial that they gave it. Our Lord's death was followed by His exoneration and his exaltation with His resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. John, too, was exonerated. He died a cruel and a dishonorable death, but he died a martyr's death. And he is held in honor throughout all of the earth, and he has been held in honor down through the ages. And the day is coming, a future day, when he too will be resurrected from the dead, because of the faith, the saving faith that he put in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what about Herod? Well, there is an epilogue to the story. Later, Aretas, the king of the Nabatean Arabs, the father of the wife whom Herod divorced, made war on Herod and destroyed his entire army. According to Josephus, who also records that many of the Jews took that as the hand of God, took it as punishment upon Herod for his treatment of John. And Herodias, too, who was driven by passion and driven by ambition, in the end, she lost everything. When Caesar discovered the intrigues of Herod's court, he deposed him and he exiled both Herod and his wife, Herodias, to Gaul in the year 39.

So, in a matter of eight years after this event, it was all over for them. And that's something of a commentary on a life of expediency, a life of decisions of self-interest, and shortcuts. Whatever Herod gained in the short-term, he lost in the long-term. And, in the end, his whole life turned to ashes in his mouth. And worst of all, at least from all that we can gain from what we know of Herod, he lost his soul.

John, on the other hand, was a man who took the long view, who made the hard decisions, who walked the narrow path. His faith was in his Savior, who he called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and he spent his life pointing men to Him. He believed in our Lord. He trusted in Him. He feared God, rather than men. Like many of the prophets before him and many of the saints afterwards, he paid with his life.

Ours is not a day in which there are a lot of John the Baptists. There are many more Herods, men of expediency, rather than principle. That's true not only in the world. We expect Herods in the world. He was a man of the world. He's a typical man of the world. But that's really true in the church as well. It's not always easy to stand for the truth, at risk of sacrifice. And even Christians can fall into that, and even Christians within the church can begin to make compromises. We need in our day, men who know the truth, who represent it with clarity in word and deed and stand for it regardless of the cost that they will pay. We need men of uncompromising courage. We need men like John the Baptist. And in the end, while it may cost us something, really, it costs us nothing. What we lose in time, we more than gain in eternity. While others who are time-servers lose everything in time and for eternity.

The Lord asks one of the most significant questions of all when He asked His disciples a few chapters later, in chapter 8: what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Nobody gains the whole world. No one has ever gained the whole world. Men have made attempts, and men have gained much. But our Lord's saying that if a man could gain the whole world, what would he really gain, if having done that, he loses his soul? Well, if Herod and Herodias could stand before us today and they could answer that question, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? They would say, I think they would say, at least, nothing. Nothing at all.

What are you pursuing? Are you pursuing the world, the things of the world, or are you pursuing the Lord and the things of the Lord? And how are you going after it? According to God's principles? Are you living by faith, are you trusting in Him, or are you going after it according to expediency, according to self-interest? If you're pursuing the things of the world and living according to its standards, living for self, living for the short-term, then you're headed for disappointment. You're heading for the experience of Herod, which is that of being very sorry.

Even Christians, as I mentioned, can fall into that trap of living for self, living for pleasure, becoming time-servers. The exhortation to you, the exhortation to me, the exhortation to all of us, because that's always a problem. That's always a threat. The world is always pressing it upon us and always calling us to itself. But the exhortation to all of us is to take up our cross, to live like John, to live for the Lord. That's what we're to do. That, I think, is the lesson of John's life to us: to live courageous lives, lives of uncompromising courage.

But for you who don't know Christ, if there be any such people in our audience this morning, I ask you: who are you living for, and how are you living? Are you living like Herod? If so, you are at a crossroads. You are faced with the decision to turn from self and to turn to Christ. There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death. And the longer that you delay turning to the right way, the harder it becomes, as the Scriptures say. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. May God help you to turn from self, and to turn to Christ, to do what is expedient in the best sense, what is to your best advantage, which is to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. May God help you to do that. May God help all of us to live lives of sacrificial service to Him, lives that are uncompromising, lives that are clear in their testimony to Christ, not be enamored by the world and the things of the world, but to be enamored by the cross of Christ, and to serve Him, and to carry that cross in this world. May God help us to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we are reminded of many things as we look at this passage, a passage that is rich in instruction. We're reminded of the folly of sin, and we're reminded of the alluring temptation of sin of the flesh, of the lust of the eyes. How easy it is to be gradually drawn in to all of that, but what terrible consequences it has, and the sorrow that it brings. Protect us from that, Father, and give us dispositions that delight to turn away from it. We're reminded of the boldness of the Christian witness, that which is to be exhibited in each of us. And I pray, Father, that You would make us a people that do that, that live that way, that make the good, that are willing to suffer for Christ's sake. Whatever we suffer, whatever is taken away from us in this world, Father, we know is more than made up for eternally. And whatever we can gain in this world, we can't keep for long anyway.

Press us with that fact, Father. Move us to be men and women who serve You faithfully. And we're reminded, also, of our Lord's death and are reminded of the price that He paid, how He was so unjustly, so cruelly sacrificed on a cross. He, who knew no sin, dying in the place of sinners. We thank You for that and pray that You'd bring upon us a deep conviction of what He did on our behalf that we might serve Him well and serve Him faithfully. Thank You for the gift of Christ. Thank You for the life that we have in Him, through His death. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.