

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 16, Disciple
Speaker: Neil Chotai
Passage: Mark 6.14-29
Big idea: There are 3 aspects to being a disciple.



My youngest son is in his toddler years and there are a few things that we are teaching him at home. Like numbers, the alphabet, reading. One of the things that I am teaching him is opposites. Such as up and down, right and left, and on and off.

Here we are looking at a biblical account where we see an opposite. On one side we have good and on the other we have evil. This true biblical account concentrates on John the Baptist and his last days. It is one of those passages that is quite sobering because of the evil at play here.

Evil has existed since the beginning of the original sin and continues today and shall continue, only to end on the very last day when the devil is sent to his final destination. We live in world where evil exists and wishes to take over. But we must endure and press on. In this passage of scripture we see a man of God, who is not just a follower of God, but a true disciple of God go through some horrendous situation, that leads to his death.

As we begin, there are a number of figures that we must look at within this biblical account and it might get a bit confusing. But, we will go through who is who after reading the passage.

¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ 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; yet he liked to listen to him.

²¹ 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. ²² 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." ²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried into the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Mark 6:14-29



Let's take this passage and put it into the context of what we have already looked at in the Gospel of Mark. Mark begins this book by talking about John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus. John then baptizes Jesus, Jesus is tested in the desert, then Jesus chooses and calls his disciples.

Right before this passage in Mark 6, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples to share the good news and after this passage we see the 12 disciples return to Jesus. So, our passage is sandwiched in between the sending out of the disciples and the report from the disciples.

Mark interrupts the account of the mission of the 12 disciples in order to tell the story and inform the reader of John's death. Mark tells the story of how Jesus' ministry is impacting people, then Mark flashes back to the account of how John was murdered.

Mark 6.14, "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.'"

Now because this part takes place after the death of John the Baptist some are believing that it could actually be John the Baptist, raised from the dead and performing these miracles.

Mark 6.15, "Others said, 'He is Elijah.' And still others claimed, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.'"

Others thought it was Elijah. In retrospect when we look at it now, John the Baptist reflects the coming of Elijah as stated in the book of Malachi.

Others believed it was another prophet and that God had finally broken the 400 years of silence.

Mark 6.16, "But when Herod heard this, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!'"

When Herod heard about this, he truly believed that it could be John the one that he beheaded and killed. It was probably because of his guilty conscience because he was directly responsible for John's death.

Herod's family was an odd mix of cruel and religious fanaticism. The family's background was Edomite from the descendants of Esau, and not the descendant of Jacob (Israel). Herod had converted to Judaism. While Herod is not really religious, he is quite superstitious, confirmed by his reaction to the news about Jesus possibly being John the Baptist.

As I mentioned earlier, there are many characters in this account, and it can be a bit confusing to read without understanding who is who. So, let's dive into some key people in this text.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah and the cousin to Jesus. His ministry was to proclaim the forgiveness of sin through repentance and baptism. He was a disciple to Jesus and was dedicated to serving God.

Now the next few individuals might be a little confusing, so I have provided some graphics to help.

Herod the Great

When Herod the Great was in power he had about 14 wives, and as a result, he had many, many children, and many, many sons. Lots of children is not what makes this confusing. What makes this confusing is that Herod named many of his sons Herod.

Herod the great- had a palace.
and in that palace, he had some sons.
With a Herod Herod here
And a Herod, Herod there
here a Herod
there a Herod
everywhere a Herod Herod.
*Sung to the tune of *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*.

When Herod the Great died, the area that he controlled was divided up and given to some of his sons.

Thus began the Herodians, which was really like a soap opera.

Herod Aristubulus, one of Herod the Great's sons, gets married, and they have a daughter, named Herodias.

Then one of Herod Aristubulus' half brothers, named Herod Philip, decides to marry Herodias. So, Herodias is now married to her uncle, her father's half brother. This is already disgusting, immoral, and incestuous.

Herod Philip and Herodias have a daughter, and while she is not named here in the text, scholars call her Salome.

Now Herod Philip gets visited by his other half brother, Herod Antipas. This is the Herod that we read about in this passage in Mark 6. Herod Antipas is currently in a peace treaty marriage to a princess of a neighbouring kingdom. Herod Antipas sees Herod Philip's wife, Herodias, and decides he wants her as his wife.

And you know where this is going... Herod Antipas gives his first wife the boot, Herodias divorces Herod Philip and so the two get together in so-called "marriage".

However, this causes a huge fallout, not just relationally, but politically.

Herod Antipas' now ex-wife was the daughter of a very powerful king who bordered their territory. This king was not happy about what happened to his daughter and goes to war against Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was about to lose the war but wins with the help of more Roman soldiers. Nobody is impressed with Herod's private life and how it has affected them, their army is now down in numbers.

This is a complete mess of Herod's own creation, and no one wants to interact with him or his family.

Now, that is when John the Baptist comes on the scene. Of all the people that are there, John is willing to come and share the truth with Herod. John has nothing to gain by engaging in this conflict whatsoever, but he has the courage to share the truth to him.

John confronts Herod about how he is living immorally. If Herod claims to be of the Jewish faith, and he does, he knows very well that this goes against Mosaic law found in Leviticus 18:16.

This courage that John has is very intriguing to Herod and Herod is curious by what he has to say.

However, as word gets out that Herod is being confronted by John, it raises the anger of Herodias....

Mark 6:17-18, "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.'"

Herodias was not just angry, she was furious. So much so, that because of Herodias, Herod gave the order to have John arrested. John was proclaiming the truth that "it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife". It is amazing how people react when truth is being shown right in front of them, often sin is what they love more.

Herodias loved her sin more than she loved the truth even though she would admit that she was part of the Jewish faith as all the Herod's did. You know we have people like that in our world. They claim to be of a certain faith, even in Christianity, yet their actions speak volumes, and their actions are in opposition to what their faith states. Herod and Herodias pay nothing but lip service to their commitment to the faith and not surprising, not much has changed in the past 2000 years.

Going to the next few verses we see what happens...

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

Herodias had nursed a grudge against John so strong that she would have killed him immediately, but she was not able to. She was infuriated with this man was in her own region of governance and she could do nothing about it. Her hate for John was so strong that the only way that she could be happy was to have him out of the picture.

But Herod, on the other hand, feared and protected John. He did not want anything to happen to John because he was very popular among the people. Remember this is the time where John's ministry was well known. Herod protected John, while it was motivated by fear of John's popularity, Herod did recognize that John was a righteous and holy individual. Herod was in awe of the purity of John's character.

Even as Herod is in his sin, paying lip service to his so-called faith, there was something within him that finds the truth interesting and because of the evil that he has allowed to enter his life he is puzzled.

All of this infuriated Herodias even more. She was constantly waiting for a chance, for a moment to have John killed. Evil is just waiting to pounce at the right time to get this godly man out of the picture.

Mark 6.21, "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."

Very humble of Herod, wasn't it? 'Hey guys I'm having a birthday party for myself, and you better come'. In that culture when the so-called king of the area had a huge banquet, you came and everybody that was the whose who of the region came. The officials, military commanders, leaders of the Galilean area. This party was not a nice get together. This would have been a sexual, drunken, immoral experience.

It's believed that Herodias had some influence on what was happening within this banquet, and it is believed that she was the one who brought her daughter into a scheme.

Mark 6.22, "When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests."

Herodias commands her daughter to perform in front of Herod and his guests. It is believed that this was a very sexually lewd performance that she gave among all the men that were in the banquet including Herod. There were low morals in Herod's court, if there were any at all.

Herod and his guests were pleased by this young girl's dance, and Herod wishes to reward her. Herod and the guests would have been so inebriated that Herod makes an incredible statement to reward this stepdaughter of his.

Mark 6:22-23, "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.'"

Herod wants to thank her for what she has done at his birthday party. So, he makes an oath, a promise, to give her whatever she wants, up to half his kingdom.

Herod, didn't really mean half of everything he owned, but he did mean to be very generous. He had to keep up his reputation in front of all his guests. Herod was known for being over the top and extravagant. During his reign there were large construction projects, including the enlargement of the temple in Jerusalem.

Mark 6.24, "She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?'"

It is believed that as soon as the daughter heard this, she ran to her mother, who was actually watching all of this take place. Herodias does not miss a beat:

Mark 6.24, "'The head of John the Baptist,' she answered."

Mark does not mention any surprise on the daughter's part when the mother made the request. In fact, some scholars believe at the daughter was even part of the plan because she quickly added two things.

Mark 6.25, “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.’”

This request sobers Herod. He may not have agreed with John the Baptist, but he liked him, and he actually protected him from his wife who wanted him dead. And now as he is deceived by her, he is stuck.

Mark 6.26, “The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.”

Mark states that the king was distressed about all of this. But Herod could not lose face before the high and mighty of Galilee.

Mark 6.27-28, “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.”

Herod chose to immediately order an executioner to be sent to the prison to behead the prophet. It was brought back on a platter and sent it to the girl and given to her mother.

Mark 6.29, “On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.”

Mark then ends this horrific story with John’s disciples coming for the body to give it a proper burial. This would have taken a lot of courage from John’s disciples, to go to Herod, the king to ask for the body.

In this biblical account we see the kingdom of God against the kingdom of the devil, we see light against darkness, we see good versus evil. We see a man of God who stands up for righteousness and then on the other the impact of the ugliness of sin and the machinery of evil creating a scene that is awful.

On one side we see a disciple of God, light, good; and on the other we see a disciple of the devil, darkness and evil. A person is either a disciple of good and God or by default, a disciple of evil and the devil.

The big idea for today is:

BIG IDEA

Three aspects of a **disciple**.



All of these aspects can be used for a disciple of God, which all Christ followers need to be, but be aware that these aspects can also be used for disciples of evil. As each of the three aspects are actually subject to our sinful nature.

It is the natural inclination to sin; given the choice to do God's will or our own, we will naturally choose to do our own thing. There is proof that of our sinful nature in children. No one has to teach a child to lie or be selfish; rather, we go to great lengths to teach children to tell the truth and put others first.

Sin is part of our being. The Bible speaks of "sinful flesh" in Romans 8:3. It's our "earthly nature" that produces the list of sins in Colossians 3:5. And, Romans 6:6 speaks of "the body ruled by sin." The flesh-and-blood existence we lead on this earth is shaped by our sinful, corrupt nature.

All of us have a sinful nature, and it affects every part of us, we call this total depravity. All of us have gone astray, Isaiah 53:6. We can be, a slave to sin, Romans 7:14.

It is this sinful nature that affects us. However, when we have a relationship with God, when we are 'born again', through Christ, by his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection, we inherit a new nature. "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" 2 Corinthians 5:17. Now we don't lose our sinful nature, but we have help in the battle, divine help from God through the Holy Spirit.

It is this sinful nature, that we are all born with, that affects the characteristics of a disciple, either one of God or not.

The first aspect of a disciple is:



What is conscience?

One definition says it is an inner feeling viewed as acting as a guide to what is right or wrong. Conscience can be good or bad, based on a certain set of values. And there are only 2 sets of values: godly and ungodly.

The godly conscience is to:

Submit to God

Let's look at John the Baptist. Yes, he was set apart by God from before birth, but so are we. A disciple of God has a conscience that is according to the will of God, based on Word of God. John's conscience was towards God.

Conversely, when we look at Herod and his family, their conscious was totally opposed to the will of God. They claimed to be following the Hebrew faith, but their actions which spoke louder than words were diametrically opposed to biblical teaching. Their set of values were totally affected by the sinful nature, and they were consumed with their own selfishness, their own set of values.

The single greatest restraint on evil that God has placed in this world is conscience. The most wicked people, sociopaths, and psychopaths are sometimes described as being without conscience; nevertheless, they have not been able to annihilate altogether that voice of right and wrong that God has implanted in every human creature. Paul speaks of the law written on the heart, so that one's conscience bears witness to God's standards and one's thoughts therefore accuse or excuse (Rom. 2:12-16). - R.C. Sproul

A disciple of God will not follow their own will or selfishness, but they will follow the will of God over everything else. It comes from a relationship with God through prayer and knowing God through his Word.

The second aspect to being a disciple is:

Choice

Now the word choice can be good or bad. Sometimes it is easy to make a choice and sometimes it is very difficult. Last Sunday the Chinese ministry was celebrating the Chinese New Year. And what did they have they have? A buffet! Let me tell you it was very hard for me to make the right choice of what I wanted to eat because everything looked so good. I could take a little bit of everything, but then I would have 20 plates, and that would not be good.

Choices are either good or bad and based on the value system.

For the Christ follower the choice is based on the Bible and following the word of God. The choice that we have is based on the Gospel and the example it is to us. The story of redemption was not based on obligation, that God had to do something. Rather, redemption was based on:

Love for others

A disciple of God must love others, as God loves humanity.

Going back to John, we see that he was called to tell people about the forgiveness of sins to have a right relationship with God. That message was based out of love. And it was out of love that John the Baptist had enough courage to go to Herod and tell him, in love, that what he was doing was wrong according to scripture. The passage states that Herod was intrigued about what John had to say. John the Baptist could have been like the other religious leaders and just condemned Herod. But John the Baptist chose to speak the truth in love and not in hate.

Conversely, on the other side, we have Herod and by extension Herodias, not choosing to love, but to hate. Their choice based on their conscience, their set of values which is based on the sinful nature was not love but pure hatred. It was pure evil and pure hate.

As disciples of Christ, it is easy in our sinful nature to choose to hate over love, and it is not easy taking the high road. As disciples of God, we already know that people will not receive us with love with the message of the Gospel. Jesus himself told us that we will be hated by everyone because of Him (Matthew 10:22).

The final aspect is:

Consequence

Consequence in this context is a result of action and can be good or bad. When you do the right things the consequence is good, and when you do the wrong things, the consequence is bad.

What do you think the consequence was for John the Baptist? He chose to love, to follow God and his plan. Even though John was brutally murdered because, the consequence was:

Peace from God

There is peace in trusting that we will be with God in eternity. John knew from the very beginning that the consequence of following Jesus was great; it was life forever with God. John lived a life that was worthy of being called a disciple. In fact, Jesus said this of John "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" Matthew 11:11.

This is a good result; this is a good consequence.

The consequences for Herod and his entire household were not good. History records that during the later part of his reign Herod was exiled for conspiracy and he and Herodias were sent to the western part of the Empire.

Initially when reading this passage, one would think that the tragedy is the death of John the Baptist, but the real tragedy in this story is Herod and his entire family. Because they heard the story of redemption and instead of acting on it, they rejected it.

There are many in our world, perhaps those that you know, who have heard the message of the Gospel, and have not responded. We do not know what tomorrow holds, we don't know what will happen next. But what I can say right now is that God loves you and wants a relationship with you.

Will you answer that call to be in a relationship with God? To have a relationship with God, ask him to forgive you of your sins, which separate you from God, believe that Jesus is the only God, and commit your life to Christ.