

## Kingdom Advancement: The Danger of Discipleship

Mark 6:14-30

In England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century it made all the difference in the world whether the King or Queen was protestant or Roman Catholic. It was only a few years after the Reformation and tensions were quite strong between the two sides. In 1553, after the death of a protestant King, Edward 6<sup>th</sup>, his older sister, Mary came to the throne. Mary was Catholic and her desire was to return England to the Roman church and to purge the land of the protestant reformers who had flourished under Edward.

During Mary's reign, 288 protestants, many of them key leaders, were burned at the stake for refusing to recant their faith. So she earned the nickname Bloody Mary for her extreme persecution of protestants. The very first man who was burned at the stake was a pastor named John Rogers. He pastored in Smithfield and had played a key role in the rise of the reformation in England. When Mary came to the throne he was arrested and the Catholic bishops tried to convince him to recant of his Protestantism. Of course, he refused, and I want to read you a brief description of the day of his death written by J.C. Ryle.

*"On the morning of his martyrdom he was roused hastily in his cell in Newgate, and hardly allowed time to dress himself. He was then led forth to Smithfield on foot, within sight of the Church of St. Sepulchre, where he had preached, and through the streets of the parish where he had done the work of a pastor. By the wayside stood his wife and ten children (one a baby) whom Bishop Bonner, in his diabolical cruelty, had flatly refused him leave to see in prison. He just saw them, but was hardly allowed to stop, and then walked on calmly to the stake, repeating the 51st Psalm. An immense crowd lined the street, and filled every avail-able spot in Smithfield. Up to that day men could not tell how English Reformers Would behave in the face of death, and could hardly believe that Prebendaries and Dignitaries Would actually give their bodies to be burned for their religion. But when they saw John Rogers, the first martyr, walking steadily and unflinchingly into a fiery grave, the enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. They rent the air with thunders of applause. Even Noailles, the French Ambassador, wrote home a description of the scene, and said that Rogers went to death "as if he was walking*

*to his wedding." By God's great mercy he died with comparative ease. And so the first Marian martyr passed away."*

This is one example, but the history of Christ's church is filled with those who have suffered and even died for their faith. We don't often think of it this way because we live in a free country with little fear of overt persecution, but discipleship can be a dangerous endeavor as we'll see this morning.

If you remember from two weeks ago we discussed Mark 6:7-13 where Jesus sends his disciples out on his behalf, to preach and perform miracles. This was a training mission for what they were to do after Jesus' death as disciples. Go ahead and open to Mark 6, which is where we will be this morning. If you look at verses 12-13 you see the disciples out on the mission accomplishing what they were supposed to, but we didn't hear about their return to Jesus. Now look down at verse 30. So, the mission of the disciples begins in 6:7-13 and ends in verse 30, but what happens in the middle?

Several times in the gospel of Mark we see stories like this called sandwich stories. Mark will fit one story in the middle of another and he does this on purpose because he wants us to interpret the two stories together with the center story drawing out the main point. So, what do we find in verses 14-29, in the middle? We find the tale of John the Baptist's death at the hands of Herod for his faithfulness to God's Word. Here's the outline:

The Disciples Mission (6:7-13)

The Fate of John the Baptist (6:14-29)

The Disciples Mission (6:30)

So, here's what I think we can learn from the pairing of these two stories; the disciples on mission and the death of John the Baptist. **Living as a disciple of Jesus on mission will cost you, but it is worth it.** Now, this morning I'm not going to divide this story of John the Baptist up into sections or points. I'm just going to tell you the story, because it's a crazy tale. And then we are going to draw out some applications for us after we finish.

Let's start in verse 14. Clearly the mission of the disciples made quite an impact. You can imagine that 6 groups of two people, all associated with Jesus, spread out

over Israel and preach and heal. This would make waves for sure. But the main issue is Jesus. The disciples represent Him and everyone knows this. So, what conclusion are people coming to regarding Jesus in light of all these events happening? Look at the rest of verse 14-15.

Several different opinions here, but none of them are negative at all. In fact, these are views that most people would believe are honoring and they acknowledge the significance of Jesus and his ministry. However, none of these are accurate and none are lofty enough. Jesus is more than a prophet, more than Elijah and more than John the Baptist. News of Jesus reaches Herod and he makes a call as to who Jesus is. Look at verse 16. Now, I'm not sure Herod actually believed John had been raised. He's probably saying something like, "here we go, it's John the Baptist all over again."

We haven't heard about John since chapter 1 and at that point we saw him preaching in the wilderness. Here we learn that he has been beheaded by Herod. What happened? Look at verse 17 and this is where things start go get crazy.

So, Herod is a ruler of Galilee and other areas near Galilee. He's under the authority of the Roman Empire. Now, as I read about his family it would make the family drama of the Kardashians look like an argument between pre-schoolers. Essentially, Herod got tired of his wife, dropped her because he wanted to marry his half-brothers wife. She left Philip and married Herod. This was clearly immoral, according to Leviticus 20:21. John knew his OT and so look what he did in verse 18. Now, this probably wasn't directly to Herod's face but was probably something John proclaimed publicly. John was a respected religious figure in Israel so this would have been quite damaging to Herod and his new wife. And Herodias is having none of it. Look at verse 19-20.

She wants him dead but Herod knows John is a good man and he is fascinated by him. This entire situation anticipates what will happen to Jesus. A weak ruler, Pilate, will know Jesus is not worthy of death and will be fascinated by him, but ultimately will fail to do what is right and will give into the crowd. Of course, Jesus is closely tied to John the Baptist. Listen to Mark 1:7-8. And let me just remind you that disciples of Jesus are tied to Jesus in the same way. We can expect that the way our Lord was treated will be how we will be treated.

Let's see how this all comes to pass. Look at verse 21. Herod was no doubt throwing a very Roman party here for his birthday and he invites the wealthy and powerful. But the birthday celebration takes an unfortunate turn in verse 22-23. This girl would have been Herod's stepdaughter. We don't know exactly what happened here but Herod and his guests are thrilled and Herod promises her a lavish gift. Now, according to Roman law he couldn't actually give her half his kingdom but this is hyperbole meant to show how generous he is feeling.

Look at verses 24-26. Herodias obviously was holding a grudge because this answer came quickly and easily. And Herod is caught and since he is certainly not a man of moral character he caves into the crowd and his foolish oath. Verse 27-29.

What was John's crime here? The text makes it clear in verse 20 that John was an upright man. He had committed no crime. He had gotten on the wrong side of an immoral and angry ruler and his family by speaking the truth of God's Word to them. It's no accident that this comes right in the middle of the disciples mission and it's not surprising that Jesus told them people would reject them in 6:11. This isn't the last time he says this in Mark. Listen to Mark 13:9-13 as Jesus talks about the end times. When we live as disciples on mission we can expect opposition. Listen to how one author summarized this passage in Mark 6.

*"The fact that Mark inserts the execution of the Baptizer in the context of the sending and return of the Twelve on their first mission journey forces readers to consider what John's death means for discipleship and mission with Jesus."* – James Edwards

So, I think we need to ponder for a few moments what this means for you and I in our lives as disciples. First of all, I don't think any of us are in danger of losing our heads this week because we follow Jesus. But, here's my question for us this morning. Has your Christianity ever put you in a place of discomfort? Now, I'm not talking about purposefully being weird, unsociable, and bizarre just to show that you are "distinct" from the world around you.

If the answer is no or "rarely", perhaps it's because you aren't intentionally engaging in the mission we are called too. Discipleship involves danger or discomfort when disciples are actively engaged in the mission Christ has called them to.

I have a burden folks. For myself and for you. It's really easy to come to church on Sundays and greet one another warmly and it should be. It's wonderful to have a fellowship of friends and family. But, if we aren't intentionally going out to meet unbelievers, get to know them, have them in our homes, and share the gospel with them, we aren't engaging the mission as disciples. We aren't doing what Jesus has us here to do. We are surrounded by people who are lost and without hope. I was talking to a friend this week who told me about a pastor he knows who lives in South Carolina and told his elders, we are within 5 miles of 15 other Southern Baptist churches. We don't have a reason to exist.

That's not true of us. There are some churches around, but we can be a strong gospel witness in our community. But in order to be a gospel witness we must deal with discomfort at times. We must stretch ourselves socially and spiritually. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said of his own ministry in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

What we see in the Bible is disciples suffering opposition and affliction for the cause of Christ. This is normal Christianity. This is normal discipleship on mission for Him. Our job is to conform the walk of our lives to the Bible and this means engaging the mission and encountering opposition when it arises.

We aren't that far from a new year, 2018. I would love for us to seize the opportunity that a fresh start provides and work together to actively engage the mission that we have. What is our mission? Here's how we summarize it hear and we believe this is based on the Great Commission. **Woodhaven Bible Church exists to make followers of Christ who worship God, connect with one another, and serve the church and the world.** What is our ultimate goal? It's to make disciples for the glory of God. That's what the Apostles were doing and that's still the mission.

I want each person in here to begin actively thinking and praying about what involvement in that mission looks like in 2018. And, as we move forward we will face opposition. Things will get uncomfortable and that's ok. That's to be expected. But I'm not content to sit still and watch our city continue on its merry way to destruction. We are here and we've been given an assignment by God to make disciples. Let's stand up straight, understand that difficulty will come and make that mission a reality in the new year.