


# The Gospel of Mark

Part 21

## The Tragic Death of John the Baptist

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled "Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time", are perfect for private reflection.

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Pastor Doug drew lessons from each of the main characters in today's passage (see the [Sermon Summary](#)). Take a moment to review what we can learn from John the Baptist, Herod, Herodias and Salome.

- **From John the Baptist we learn** that even those who do not submit to God will be judged by him. How should we respond when someone, upon hearing the gospel, protests: "*But I don't believe in God*"?

What reason or evidence can you marshal for making your point? Do you think it will "work"?

What can we do to begin caring more about others' spiritual destiny than we do their opinion of us?

- **From Herod we learn** that a high opinion of Jesus or his teachings is *not* the same as saving faith. Before you believed savingly on Jesus, what opinion did you have of him? Tell us about it.

What analogy do you think you could use to illustrate what saving faith is, and is not?

- **From Herod's wife, Herodias, we learn** the destructive power of a vengeful spirit. Read Romans 12:17–21, making a list of every command, positive and negative.

How might things have turned out for each of these four characters had these commands been heeded?

- **From Herodias' daughter, Salome, we learn** to be very careful from whom we seek counsel. What's some bad advice you've received—or *given!*—in the past? Was it taken? What happened?

Pastor Doug proposed three tests for counsel: (1) Is this action loving? (2) Is it biblically wise? (3) Will it glorify God and advance his purposes in the world? Evaluate that advice by these standards.

Reformulate the advice that was given in that situation so that it conforms to those three standards.

When was the last time you gave advice which conformed to those standards? Tell us about it.

## Sermon Summary Key Text: Mark 6:14-29

When Herod Antipas was nearly thirty years into his forty-three-year reign, he began to hear rumors of a man named Jesus who could work great miracles. In his mind, there was only one explanation as to how this man came by His powers: “John the Baptist—whom I beheaded—has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him” (v. 14 & 16). Up until this point in His public ministry, Jesus’ fame had been overshadowed by the ministry of John the Baptist. John was so famous that Herod Antipas had become well acquainted with him. But Herod had been more than a casual admirer of John; their relationship had become very complicated, as I will explain in a moment.

Herod was haunted by a guilty conscience. He feared that John had returned to life. Herod feared that if John had indeed been raised from the dead, he must be bringing God’s judgment on his enemies, and he knew that he himself would be “Enemy Number One”—because he was responsible for John’s death. It is said that “power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Although only God has absolute power, on the human level, the more power someone has, the more evil they can commit. In Herod’s realm his evil impulses were unrestrained—but John the Baptist was brave enough to try! John confronted Herod about a sin in his life that shook the moral sensibilities of the Jewish people (v. 17-20). John’s main function was to call the people of Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of their Messiah King. John’s call for repentance even extended to the royal house as he publicly denounced Herod Antipas for his adulterous relationship with a woman named Herodias, who just happened to be the wife of his half-brother Phillip.

Herodias, it seems, was more irked about John’s denunciations of Herod than Herod was, for it was Herodias that incited Herod to arrest John. Herod had a deep respect for John. He knew him to be a righteous and holy man. You see, Herod, like all of us, had a conscience. He ignored it a lot, but he had one! That is why he wanted to protect John. While the human conscience helps restrain evil in the world, it is certainly not infallible (Romans 2:14–15). That is because when we repeatedly violate our conscience, it becomes callous, and we learn how to silence its voice. Our consciences can become distorted and twisted. But no matter how much we may seek to stifle our consciences, we still occasionally feel pangs of guilt. We still have a sense that there are certain things we ought to do and certain things we ought not do. I think that, to some degree, explains Herod’s fascination with John the Baptist. On the one hand, Herod didn’t like being called out for his adulterous relationship, but on the other hand he knew John was right.

To pacify his wife he agreed to put John in jail, but he wanted no harm to come to him. But Herodias was determined to exact revenge on John. She wanted him dead. A strategic day came when Herod threw a party in his own honor, and the guest list was a Who’s Who of Galilean society—in attendance were leaders, noblemen, bureaucrats, tradesmen, and so on. The entertainment was provided by his stepdaughter: a sensuous, erotic dance! Salome’s dancing was well-received, and in his desire to appear magnanimous and generous in front of his guests, Herod offered her virtually anything she wanted (v. 22-23). Salome sought her mother’s advice, and finally Herodias had her chance: she ordered her daughter to ask the king to execute John (v. 24). Rather than lose face in front of his guests, Herod sadly complied (v. 25-26). He cared more about the approval of men, than the approval of God.

I can’t even begin to imagine that macabre scene. I don’t want to! Now, you may be thinking: “Those people were barbarians back then. How could people do such a thing? Didn’t they have any sense of right and wrong? How could they have such a low view of the value of human life? Where was their moral outrage?” But before you do that, remember that we slaughter a million and a half innocent, vulnerable children in the womb every year—63 million in our lifetime—and think nothing about it. In fact, as a country we heartily approve of the practice. We defend it. We celebrate it as a woman’s moral right to “health care”. But just because abortion is legal doesn’t make it moral. It is not. As a nation, we should be deeply convicted and ashamed for allowing such a thing to happen. By comparison, Herod’s beheading of John seems almost trivial. Please hear me: “If you have been party to an abortion, forgiveness is available in Christ—but in order to be forgiven, we must call abortion ‘sin’.” Well, that is all I’m going to say about that!

Mark gives us the sad postscript to this narrative; John’s disciples came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb (v. 29). At times like this we wonder why God allows such things to happen. He could have stopped it, but he didn’t. In times like these it’s normal to ask the question, “why?”—but what we must not do is demand that God answer. Someday God will judge all sin; that’s why we all need a Savior. Truth is, all of us are guilty of evil. If God were to set a deadline of tonight at midnight, would you stand? Herod will one day receive his just punishment; it doesn’t always happen in this life. You may be wondering, “Whatever happened to Herod Antipas?” In A.D 39 his nephew denounced him to the Roman emperor, and as a result, Antipas was sent into exile. In the end, the public’s opinion that he treasured so much, turned against him. All he was left with was a guilty conscience! **But what we can learn from the main characters in our text today?**

**[1] From John the Baptist we learn** that while not all people submit to God’s moral law, everyone will be judged by it. That is why John confronted Herod. It is not enough to know that all of humanity will be judged by God’s moral standards. We have to have the courage to point people to a God who has provided a remedy for their sin. Like John, we must care more about others people’s spiritual destiny than we do our temporal wellbeing. It took a lot of courage for John to call out a king, but he did it. John cared more about the state of Herod’s soul than he did his own personal safety.

**[2] From Herod we learn** that a high opinion of Jesus is not the same as saving faith. You can’t silence a guilty conscience by condemning the moral message of the moral messenger. Choosing to please people over God leads to foolish and destructive choices.

**[3] From Herod’s wife, Herodias, we learn** the destructive power of a vengeful spirit. We must refuse to nurse a vengeful spirit. Vengeance belongs to God alone.

**[4] From Herodias’ daughter, Salome, we learn** to be very careful from whom you seek counsel. Closeness of relationship does not always translate into sound advice! Always evaluate the advice you receive against biblical principles: Is this action loving? Is it wise? Will it glorify God and advance his purposes in the world? If not—it’s bad advice. And my advice is to ignore it!

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

**"Five Question Bible Study"** (see below) *is useful for studying any topic. Let's use it to explore biblical teaching on how to have a clear conscience...*

**Monday**—Study 1 Timothy 1:5 & 2 Corinthians 1:12.

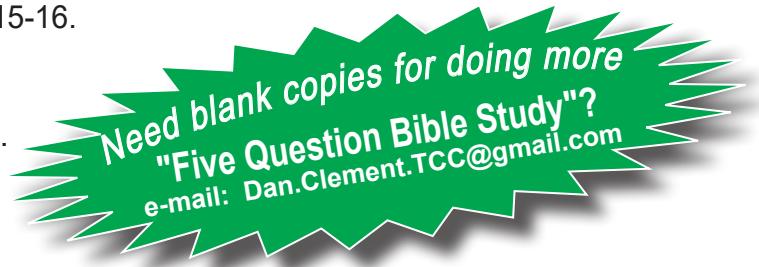
**Tuesday**—Study 1 Timothy 1:18-20 & Titus 1:15-16.

**Wednesday**—Study Romans 13:1-5.

**Thursday**—Study 1 Peter 2:18-20 & 3:13-17.

**Friday**—Study Hebrews 10:19-25.

**Saturday**—Study Acts 24:15b-16.



### Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]