

# Mark 6:12-29. the Death of John the Baptist.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

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*The sermon explores the tragic death of John the Baptist, Herod's guilt, and the comfort found in Jesus amidst sorrow and loss.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 147:3

**Topics:** "Repentance And Sin", "Comfort In Sorrow"

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## Description

Favell Lee Mortimer reflects on the story of Herod, who, despite hearing of Jesus' miracles, remained in his sin and guilt, haunted by his crimes and hardened heart. Herod's refusal to repent and his descent into deeper depravity serve as a cautionary tale of the consequences of clinging to sin. The martyrdom of John the Baptist, orchestrated by Herod and Herodias, highlights the faithful servant's acceptance of his fate and the disciples' grief at his violent death. Through this tragic event, Jesus demonstrates His power to comfort the mourning and heal the brokenhearted, offering solace and strength in times of sorrow.

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## Transcript

Very little is related concerning the events that happened while the apostles were absent from their Lord. This however we know--Jesus continued to preach, and to perform miracles. His fame was so great that it reached the ears of Herod, the governor. It may appear surprising that Herod had not heard before of his miracles; but the great are often ignorant of the things passing around them among the poor; and sometimes they do not even know the names of the most eminent of God's servants.

When Herod heard of the miracles of the Lord, he supposed that John the Baptist was risen from the dead; and though John in his lifetime had performed no miracles, he imagined that if risen from the dead, he could do mighty works. Amid all his splendor and his power the wicked monarch could not forget his faithful reprover. He had silenced the prophet long ago by committing him to prison; but he could not silence his own conscience, which upbraided him with the murder of the holy man. If before sin was perpetrated, it could be known what would be the state of mind afterwards, many would tremble to do the deed.

Herod was a miserable man; for he had a guilty conscience and an impenitent heart. His crimes were so flagrant, and so presumptuous, that they haunted him in his palace. But they were not followed by repentance. If Herod had really lamented his wickedness, he would have desired to acknowledge it to him, whom he supposed to be the murdered prophet. He would have found in him the only being who could take away his guilt, and give peace to his conscience. But when at last he did see Jesus, it was to insult

him, and to array him, just before his crucifixion, with a gorgeous robe, that ill-became his wounded, bleeding form.

And by what steps did Herod sink into this depth of depravity? Once he had heard John the Baptist gladly, and had attended to his words, and had reformed many parts of his conduct. But he had indulged one darling sin; he had refused to part with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and had imprisoned the man who rebuked his wickedness. This act hardened his heart, and prepared him for greater crimes. While the prophet languished in a gloomy prison, the unfeeling tyrant reveled in his palace. The elegant dancing of Salome enticed him to make an imprudent promise. He intended not to murder the prophet; perhaps he intended some day to release him from prison; at all events, he was reluctant to shed his blood. But having made an oath, he feared lest his guests should despise him if he broke it. He dreaded their scornful smile more than the angry frown of an offended God. But he soon experienced that it is a dreadful thing to provoke the Almighty. We learn from history, that Herod, with his idolized Herodias, was at length expelled his kingdom, and that he died in banishment and disgrace.

For a moment it seemed as if the devices of a malicious woman had prevailed against God's faithful servant. But was not early death a welcome boon to the holy Baptist? Was not the executioner an acceptable visitant in his prison? The messenger who fetched Joseph from his dungeon to the presence of Pharaoh, was not so welcome as the executioner who removed John from his prison to the presence of his God. He had done the work which was appointed for him to do; he had announced the coming Savior to rebellious men. The servants of God have various posts assigned to them. Each has some commission to perform, and when it is executed, he is recalled. It may appear that he has died in the midst of his work; but this cannot really be the case. God will raise up others to carry on his labors; even as He appointed the apostles to continue to preach that gospel, which John the Baptist had begun to proclaim.

The disciples of the martyred prophet were permitted to enjoy the melancholy satisfaction of burying his headless corpse; for Herod, who would gladly have spared his life, did not withhold his body from them. They must have viewed the early, sudden, and cruel death of their revered Master, as a mysterious event. To lose a friend by the hand of violence is far more bitter than to lose him through disease or accident; for it is more difficult to see God's hand in the loss when man's cruelty has had a share in it. With bursting hearts, these bereaved disciples went and told Jesus of their trouble, (Matthew 6:12.)

He could have explained the dark perplexing event. He knew that John was taken away from the evil to come, and was spared the sight of his own ignominious death. But we do not know what He said to comfort these mourners. None can sympathize with the sorrowful as the Son of God can. He came "to comfort all that mourn." His sympathy is not only tender; it is powerful. He is not only touched with the feeling of our infirmities, he can support us when tempted. He can pour consolation into the heart. No wound was ever really healed, except by His touch. He declares, "I wound and I heal." Though the death of John the Baptist was his appointment, yet He alone could comfort the bereaved disciples. Israel in her distress applied to a foreign king. But did she obtain relief? God said, "Yet could he not heal you, or cure you of your wounds." (Hos. 5:13.) But the saints can say, "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." (Psalm 147:3.)

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