

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DEATH

Matthew 14:12; 14:3-5; Mark 1:14; 6:16-20; Luke 3:19-20

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: King Herod, Herodias, and Herodias' daughter

Key-location: King Herod's palace in Galilee

Key-repetitions:

- Herodias' persistence to kill John the Baptist: Herodias held a grudge against John the Baptist and wanted to kill him (Mk 6:19); an opportune time came for Herodias to kill John the Baptist (Mk 6:21); Herodias asked her daughter to ask King Herod for the head of John the Baptist (Mk 6:24).
- King Herod's birthday celebration: King Herod had a great celebration (Mk 6:21); gave a banquet (Mk 6:21); important people were at the banquet (Mk 6:21); men were delighted with Herodias' daughter's dancing; King Herod was delighted with her dancing (Mk 6:22).
- Guard's actions: went to prison, beheaded John the Baptist, brought his head on a platter; presented John's head to the girl (Mk 6:27-28).

Key-attitudes:

- Herodias' hatred for John the Baptist.
- King Herod's fear of John the Baptist.
- Celebration of King Herod's birthday.
- Men's delight at Herodias' daughter's dancing.
- King Herod's weakness before family and peer pressure.
- Herodias and her daughter's cruelty.
- King Herod's regret of promise to Herodias' daughter.

Initial-situation:

Jesus began the first year of his ministry being unknown outside of the town of Nazareth. John the Baptist was popular with the crowds.

John the Baptist accused King Herod of living in adultery with Herodias, his sister-in-law. King Herod had John the Baptist imprisoned.

Jesus began his second year of public ministry about the time when John the Baptist was arrested and put into prison. The multitudes, who had formerly sought out John the Baptist, now sought out Jesus because they heard about the things he was doing. However, religious leaders became furious with Jesus because he did not respect their traditions, especially those regarding the Sabbath day.

John the Baptist remained in prison for about a year. Herodias held a grudge against John the Baptist and wanted him killed; however, King Herod protected John the Baptist.

Initial-problem:

An opportune time came for Herodias to kill John the Baptist when King Herod celebrated his birthday.

Final-situation:

John the Baptist's disciples took his body and buried it.

BIBLE STORY

John the Baptist told King Herod, "It's not right for you to take Herodias, your brother Philip's wife." King Herod arrested John the Baptist in order to please Herodias. Herodias held a grudge against John the Baptist and wanted to kill him.

An opportune time finally came for Herodias to kill John the Baptist. King Herod had a great celebration for his birthday. King Herod gave a banquet for his high officials, military commanders, and the most important men of Galilee. Herodias' daughter entered the banquet hall and danced. King Herod and his guests were delighted with Herodias' daughter.

King Herod was so pleased that he told the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." Carried away, King Herod swore an oath, "I swear, whatever you ask I'll give you, up to half my kingdom."

The girl went out and asked her mother, "What should I ask for?"

Herodias answered, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist."

The girl ran back to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

King Herod deeply regretted his promise, but felt he could not break the promise he'd made in front of his guests. King Herod immediately sent a guard with orders to bring John the Baptist's head. The guard went to the prison, beheaded John the Baptist, and brought back his head on a platter. The guard presented John the Baptist's head to the girl, and the girl gave John the Baptist's head to her mother.

John the Baptist's disciples heard about this. They came for his body, took it, and buried it in a tomb (Mk 6:20-29).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was John the Baptist imprisoned and murdered?

2. What kind of man was Herod?
3. How was King Herod manipulated to kill John the Baptist?
4. What lessons can we learn from the events involving John the Baptist, King Herod, and Herodias?
5. What kind of pressures try to manipulate us to do wrong?
6. Is it ever right to go back on a vow or refuse to keep a promise? Why?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The person who hears but refuses to obey the word of God may turn against God's word and attack the messenger of the word.** King Herod heard John the Baptist's message but did not repent. King Herod ordered John the Baptist's arrest to silence his criticism and Herodias tried to kill John the Baptist (Mk 6:20).
2. **A weak and indecisive person is a potentially wicked person.** King Herod was not a deliberately wicked man. King Herod desired to listen to John the Baptist and to protect him. But King Herod was weak and allowed himself to be swept into wickedness. One condition of doing right is a resolute and steadfast will. King Herod was torn between conflicting impulses. John the Baptist and his own conscience were on the one side, and wicked Herodias and fear of what his peers would think were on the other. King Herod procrastinated until the day came when Herodias trapped him with the crime which he had steadfastly refused to commit. King Herod became a wicked man because he lacked strength of will to stand up to Herodias, her daughter, and the peer pressure of important men in Galilee. King Herod lacked the strength to do what was right.
3. **A punishment of sin is the havoc it works in character—the loss of sensitivity, the seared and hardened conscience.** King Herod began by neglecting to repent when John the Baptist's word made him miserable with guilt. King Herod ended by mocking Christ. The person who is sensitive to God's word and is made miserable with guilt, should not procrastinate. There is the danger of a seared and hardened conscience. About a year after beheading John the Baptist, Jesus was being judged and was sent before King Herod. King Herod and his soldiers ridiculed Jesus and made fun of him (Lk 23:11). Contrast these two facts: King Herod began by fearing John the Baptist and being sensitive to God's word; King Herod became so wicked that he and his soldiers ridiculed Jesus and made fun of him (Lk 23:11). In the contrast, you see the calamitous result of a weak person who allowed himself to be swept into sin.
4. **A woman who uses her sensual body to manipulate men is a curse to others.** Herodias' daughter used her body to manipulate King Herod to kill John the Baptist. (Mk 6:14-29). In the Old Testament there is the example of Deliah (Jd 16:1-20).
5. **The man who gives attention to a malicious, sensual woman can be manipulated to do cruel things.** King Herod became infatuated with Herodias, his

sister-in-law. King Herod betrayed his own brother. King Herod was impressed with the dancing of Herodias' daughter, and he was manipulated to kill John the Baptist (Mk 6:14-29).

6. **What a person does under peer pressure can reveal his character.** King Herod arrested John the Baptist under pressure from his wife. King Herod respected John the Baptist's integrity and knew he was a man of God. However, fear of losing face before his peers resulted in King Herod having John the Baptist killed. Driven by the stronger will of his cruel wife and false pride before peer pressure, King Herod did the very thing he loathed.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Series of Two Tableaux:

The storyteller narrates the Bible story from the beginning until the end. Then drama participants plan a series of frozen images that, together, tell the story with a beginning, and ending. Designate three drama participants. Each is designated to represent a person from the story:

- King Herod.
- Herodias' daughter.
- Important man at King Herod's birthday banquet.

The storyteller starts retelling the Bible story. Drama participants stand around the performance area. The storyteller will pause after narrating the following events and allow drama participants to interpret each event with a frozen image:

- Herodias' daughter danced; King Herod and his guests were delighted with Herodias' daughter.
- Herodias' daughter ran back to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."