

## The Cost of Service Mark 6:14 - 29

**Proposition:** The passage highlights the cost of service and points out the danger that may be involved when speaking truth to power.

**Application:** Ask the Lord to give you His grace and courage to boldly and lovingly speak the truth and to patiently suffer for the sake of truth.

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### Introduction

Patrick Hamilton was 24 years old when he died in 1528, at St. Andrew's College, the center of Catholicism in Scotland. This is also the place where Prince William and Kate Middleton first met. Hamilton exposed the evil he witnessed in the Catholic Church. He boldly declared the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. He angered the clerics when he stated that "*it is a devilish doctrine to teach that remission of sins can be obtained by means of the sacraments.*" As a result, the church council was irate, accused him of heresy and he was burnt at the stake. When asked why he would not recant, Patrick responded: "*As to my confession, I will not deny it for awe of your fire, for my confession and belief is in Christ Jesus. Therefore, I will not deny it; and I will rather be content that my body burn in this fire for confession of my faith in Christ than my soul should burn in the fire of hell for denying the same.*"<sup>1</sup> Patrick Hamilton possessed a high degree of courage which is very much in need today.

Jesus, said of John, "...among those born of women, there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." This passage is not so much about Jesus but about His forerunner John the Baptist. John was the forerunner in Jesus' ministry. He was also the forerunner in His death.

The passage describes the courage of John the Baptist; it highlights the cost of service and points out the danger that may be involved when speaking truth to power.

### I. A Faithful Herald (6:14 – 20)

*His Fame* (6:14, 15): Jesus' fame had spread far and wide. All of Galilee was buzzing with talk about His mighty works and powerful words. The news finally reached Herod's palace. Herod was late in hearing the news. He was out of touch with what was going on in Galilee. The message and miracles of the Messiah was bringing forth faith among the crowds but for Herod and his family, Jesus' word and works did not bring about faith. A poll was done to find out what people thought about Jesus. Some were so confused about Jesus they believed He was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Others believed He was Elijah the great prophet who was raptured

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Lorimer, *Patrick Hamilton, The First Preacher and Martyr of the Scottish Reformation* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1857), 143

into heaven in a chariot of fire. Scripture declares that Elijah will pave the way for the coming of the Messiah (Mal 4:5). Still others believed Jesus was like one of the ancient prophets of Israel. People knew there was something supernatural about Jesus but in the minds of many, He could not be the Messiah. Even today people come up with all kinds of explanations about who Jesus is. Some believe He was a great man; others believe He was a great teacher; still others believe He was a prophet. Even Muslims view Jesus as a great prophet but not as great as Muhammed. It is not enough to have a high regard for Jesus, we must believe that He is the Messiah, that He is Saviour and that He is Lord.

Herod's hedonistic family was characterized by adultery, divorce, drunkenness, revelry, and murder. This sinful posture of Herod required the man of God speak.

*Herod's Feelings of Guilt (6:16):* Herod did not like what John had to say so he had John the Baptist killed. Yet he could not forget the sight of John's bloody head on a platter. None of the popular speculations about Jesus could quiet his angry conscience. Instead, he chose to believe a crazy theory that John was risen from the dead. Whenever the topic of Jesus came up, Herod would say "*He is John the Baptist risen from the dead.*" That was his story, and he was sticking to it. To appease his guilty conscience, he had to believe a lie. Do we not do the same? We deceive ourselves and others to excuse our actions and quiet our troubled conscience. A guilty conscience makes cowards of us all. So how do we deal with a guilty conscience? We must not deal with it by lying to ourselves. Rather we deal with a guilty conscience by admitting our sin; rather than conceal sin we confess it. We are to believe that Jesus shed His blood to cleanse our guilty conscience and then we call on Him and find His grace and His mercy to cleanse us from sin (1 John 1:8, 9; Ps 32:5; Prov 28:13).

Herodias wanted to be the wife of a ruler, so much that she divorced Philip and married his brother Herod.

*Hateful Feelings of Herodias (6:17 – 20):* This marriage was the reason for John's rebuke. Herod was like a second Ahab. Herodias like a second Jezebel. And John was like a second Elijah. He had no fear of the powerful, the wealthy, the influential. He possessed a high degree of godly courage which is so much needed today. John was *righteous* in the sense that he was blameless in relation to his fellow man. He was *holy* in the sense he was blameless in his relationship to God. John rebuked Herod more than once. His rebuke of Herod's marriage was based on Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21.

The poet William Congreve once wrote: "*Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.*" Because John called out this marriage Herodias sought revenge. John's rebuke may have been a nuisance to her conscience a cancer to her character, and so she nursed a lasting grudge against him. She was not content with John sitting in a jail cell, Herodias craved his death. Hatred in the heart

leads to murder. Herod also wanted to kill John. But he was restrained because he feared the crowd (Matt 14:5).

As a candle attracts a moth, John's message grabbed Herod's attention. John's message appealed to Herod's better nature, but sadly he could not conquer his evil nature. You may have heard the term *cognitive dissonance*. This term describes the distress one goes through when two thoughts conflict with each other. For instance, we know smoking is harmful to our health, yet we smoke anyway. We excuse this action, by pointing to our high stress levels. John's message caused cognitive dissonance in Herod. He knew the right action to take but preferred to carry on with his evil pursuits. He was torn between a guilty conscience and the desire to indulge his sin nature. He was *fascinated* with John. He was *fearful* of John, and he was *furious* at John. He could not rise above his sinful pleasures, so he acted as the fool.

## II. A Foolish Herod (6:21 – 29)

*Hedonism in Excess* (6:21 – 23): Herodias' desire for John's death was thwarted because her husband kept John safe in his jail cell. But she was patient. She was willing to wait for the right moment to fulfill her craving for John's death. Herod's birthday party served as the opportune time for Herodias. Parties are risky affairs. Drinks flow. Passions are fuelled. Morals plummet. Restraints removed. This is an all too familiar story of lust, pride, power, and revenge. Not only was the room filled with the movers and shakers of Herod's little kingdom, it was also filled with drunkenness and revelry. This reminds me of the yearly Davos meetings hosted by the WEF where over 3000 global elites gather to discuss their global plans. Every year as soon as world leaders touch down in Davos without their spouses the demand for prostitution and adult entertainment skyrockets.

Herod welcomed three groups of people to his party. He first welcomed the *lords* – these people held high office. They could be compared to the deputy prime minister, the finance minister, the minister of health, etc. *Military commanders* is self explanatory. Lastly, Herod welcomed *leading men of Galilee* – these would be the social leaders of the region – like key journalists, business leaders etc. The climax of the banquet was the solo dance of Herodias' daughter, whose name was Salome.<sup>2</sup> Herodias likely sent her daughter into the banquet hall to entice the lustful passions of drunken men. Did Herodias exploit her daughter out of sheer hatred for John? Was she willing to stop at nothing to get her way even if it meant using her daughter who was likely in her mid-teens? The drunken guests cheered and clapped at her sensual and seductive act. Her dance could be compared to a strip tease dance in a night club. Given the low morals of the hedonistic Herodian clan we should not be surprised at this action.

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<sup>2</sup> Josephus names her in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*.

Seeking to impress his guests with his generosity Herod urged Salome to request whatever she wanted. She may have wavered to accept his request. So, he promised again this time with an oath making it binding. This silly promise had tragic results.

*Hate Acts with Haste (6:24, 25):* The mother's absence shows the banquet was for men only. Salome was unclear in her mind what to ask for, so she runs to mom. She could have had anything she wanted. But this is what she chose. Without delay she returned to the banquet hall. Herodias asked for the *head of John* and the daughter may have added *on a platter*.

*Haughtiness Takes Herod Down (6:26 – 29):* Just as pride took Satan down so haughtiness took Herod down. Even though Herod was consumed with grief he was a moral coward. He was sorry that his drunken tongue led him into this horrific situation. His sorrow was not enough to lead to a change of mind. He still preferred to murder a godly man than repent of his choice. He was more worried about what his drunken guests might think than what God thinks. He had more regard for the opinions of intoxicated guests than of a holy man of God. He feared man more than he feared God (Prov 29:25). One who fears God has moral courage. One who fears man is a moral coward. Folks, I am a moral coward. Pray for me!!! Although Herod and his wife may have received John's head on a platter, the Lord received his soul in heaven. John lost his head, but Herod and his wife lost their souls. Herod's legacy is that he murdered the greatest man born of a woman. John's legacy is that we name our sons after him.

### **Conclusion**

Life is often unfair. Godly people do suffer. But God sees. God knows. John the Baptist was a man of flesh and blood like you and me. And he possessed a high degree of godly courage which is sorely lacking today. Will you be that godly man or woman who has the courage to speak truth even if you must pay a price (Ps 56:3, 4)? Let us ask God to give us His grace to give us the courage so that we might boldly and lovingly speak the truth and if need be to patiently suffer for the sake of truth.