

A Clash of Kingdoms

Mark 6:14-29

The central theme of the preaching of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus was for people to repent, because the Kingdom of God was breaking out. One of the reasons people needed to repent and change their direction in life, is because God's Kingdom operates very differently than do the kingdoms of the world. In Luke 3:11-14, John the Baptist said that people in God's Kingdom are to be kind, honest, and content – which is the twin brother of grateful. But can these kind of people really compete against the proud and mighty of the world? Jesus' response was that God's Kingdom was going to be like a mustard seed, which starts very small, but then grows larger than all the other garden plants. Because Jesus understood this truth, He easily resisted Satan's temptation to give Him all the idolatrous nations of the world, if He would bow down and worship Satan [Matthew 4:8-9]. Jesus told Satan to get lost because He knew that Satan's kingdom of lies will be overcome by God's Kingdom of truth.

One of the places we are taught about the unstoppable increase of God's Kingdom is in the book of Daniel. About 600 years before the incarnation of Christ, Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, had a vision from God which foretold the future. In that vision, recorded in Daniel 2:31-43, there was a large, dazzling statue composed of four metals. The head was gold and represented the kingdom of Babylon, which was the world power at the time of that vision. Babylon however, was doomed to be conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire, which corresponded to the

statue's chest and arms of silver. The kingdom of Persia was eventually conquered by the Greek Empire, represented by the belly and thighs of bronze. And then the Greek Empire was to be conquered by the mighty Roman Empire, which corresponded to the legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay. The Roman Empire received the most attention in Nebuchadnezzar's vision because it was the world empire that existed when Christ was born at Bethlehem. And it was in the days of the Roman Empire that the truths of **Daniel 2:34-35 and 44**, would begin to unfold.

Listen to what Daniel says,

“While you [Nebuchadnezzar] were watching [the dazzling statue], a rock was cut out, but not by human hands [the rock represented Christ's humble incarnation – but notice what the rock does]. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time [because each kingdom had conquered and incorporated the previous kingdom into itself, when the mighty Roman Empire fell, all the kingdoms fell] and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth [here is the explanation] . . .⁴⁴ In the time of those kings [Roman Kings], the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”

One of the major differences between God's Kingdom and the kingdoms of the world, is that all the idolatrous world empires – represented by the dazzling statue, worshiped their earthly kings and gave them almost unlimited authority and power. The Kingdom Christ came to inaugurate on the earth is the antithesis of the world empires represented

by that statue. As Christ's Kingdom grows, the civil governments that should arise from a Christian worldview, are to have very limited powers. The major government emphasized in Christ's Kingdom is the self-government of the people who embrace the Lordship of Christ. Self-governed people need very little civil government. Any nation, whose people pay attention to the Word of God, will never give their civil leaders large amounts of power, because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Our Scripture passage for this morning should motivate us to seek Christ's Kingdom and not the kind of kingdom that we see operating in Mark 6:14-29. And to all the women here this morning, let me say – Happy Mother's Day and exhort you that the mother we read about in this passage, is not the kind of mother any of you should want to be. Let's back up and begin reading at Mark 6:12,

“They [Christ's disciples] went out and preached that people should repent [stop serving their idols and turn to the living God].¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.¹⁴ King Herod [Antipas] heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead [this is a shocking statement. Back in Mark 1:14 we discovered that John had been arrested, but not until now do we learn that John had died. And if indeed the spirit of John the Baptist had come to rest upon Jesus – that would be supernatural – which helps to explain what some people were saying in verse 14], and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him [Christ].’¹⁵ Others said, ‘He is Elijah’ [a prophet who was taken up to heaven **alive** and was expected by the Jews to return]. And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.’¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’ [Now we know how John died. What we discover next is

why Herod did this].¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had [committed adultery with and then] married.¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'"

We need to pause here and try to unravel some very twisted relationships. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great, who tried to kill the baby Jesus. Her father was Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great by his wife Mariamne I. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great by his wife Malthace. As we have just read, Herodias had been the wife of Philip, who was Herod the Great's son from his wife Mariamne II. Do you see any problems here?

John the Baptist was telling Herod Antipas that even though he was a ruler, it was a violation of God's Law for him to commit adultery with his brother's wife. Kings are not above God's Law. **Leviticus 20:21** declares, "If a man marries his brother's wife [while the brother is still alive], it is abhorrent; he has dishonored his brother." And because Herodias was also the daughter of Herod's half-brother, this violated **Leviticus 18:9**, "Do not have sexual relations with . . . either your father's daughter [from another marriage] or your mother's daughter [from another marriage" And yes, that command also covers not marrying your father's **granddaughter** from another marriage. Herod Antipas and Herodias were in a bad place.

I have heard Christians say that we cannot expect unbelievers to honor God's Law. After all they live in Satan's domain of darkness.

Nevertheless, the Bible says all people, saved and unsaved, have a conscience. And that conscience has been set and informed by God's Moral Law [Romans 2:14-15]. Unbelievers know by means of their God-given conscience that adultery and incest is wrong. God's Law says so and so does our conscience.

Please listen carefully. John the Baptist did not tell Herod that his relationship with Herodias was unlawful because he hated him. He said it because he genuinely cared about his soul and his eternal destiny.

Herodias however, did not see it that way. Let's look at verses 19-20,

“So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him [just as unrepentant lust will lead to sexual immorality, so unrepentant hate will lead to murder]. But she was not able to [kill John],²⁰ because Herod feared John [we do not read that John fear Herod – which is why John spoke truth to the king, even though he suspected the king wouldn't like it. Herod both feared John] and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man [Herod knew what righteous and holy looked like because of his conscience]. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.”

Herod liked to listen to John except when John's words poked at his idol of lust. Herod was like the stony soil Christ referred to in Mark 4:16-17. Jesus said this kind of soil would hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But because the soil was shallow, the seed could not put down roots and bear fruit. Let's keep reading at Mark 6:21,

“Finally the opportune time came [for the hate of Herodias to give birth to murder]. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.²² When the daughter of Herodias [Salome – whose father was Philip] came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests [Herod was pleased not because of her

artistic skill, but because her dancing pleased his lust, and lust was his master]. The king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.’²³ And he promised her with an oath, ‘Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.’ [This is exactly how Herodias thought her lustful husband would respond].²⁴ She [Salome] went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ ‘The head of John the Baptist,’ she answered.²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: ‘I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison,²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.²⁹ On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.”

There were four individuals who did wrong in this passage: (1) Herod, for putting a righteous man to death; (2) Herodias, for hating and then plotting the death of a righteous man, (3) Salome, for doing what her mother asked, even though it violated God’s Law, and (4) the guard who carried out that wicked command. And besides these individuals, there was also a whole group of people in leadership positions who did not protest the murder of an innocent man.

There is much we can learn from this incident. (1) Herod knew that John was a just man, and yet he put him to death on a whim – with no just cause. Kings should never be given that kind of authority. Do we all agree? Last Sunday pastor Jeff noted that Jesus was astonished at the unbelief of the people from His hometown. I want you to know that I am astonished when I see people applauding civil leaders who boastfully promise they will take money away from those they claim have more

wealth than they deserve, and redistribute it to those who don't have as much. The Biblical word for doing that is – stealing. If we think civil leaders have the authority to violate the 8th Commandment, then we are on the side of Herodias, who thought that she and her kingly husband could do as they pleased because of their rulership status. There are millions of Americans today who agree with her.

(2) Another lesson we can learn from this incident is how much Herod's idol of lust had mastered him. When Herod had to choose between wrongfully putting John to death – or to keep a hasty vow he made because his lust was aroused – he chose to put John to death.

(3) We learn from this incident that John the Baptist was willing to call wrong – wrong, even if it cost him his life. This tells us that John truly believed what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:28**, “Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

(4) Another important lesson is to realize that Herod cared more about what his friends thought, than what God thought. And we have many people today who are in the same boat. A prime example are people who do not want to say out loud that men having sex with men – or women having sex with women is wrong. Actually it is worse than that. There are people who think it is terribly wrong for a person to believe that homosexual acts are wrong. In their minds that thinking should be a punishable crime. John the Baptist, on the other hand, would say homosexual behavior is in the same category as adultery and incest.

(5) Another important truth is that even though Herod respected John, he would not repent of his sin. And friends, whatever sin a person holds onto, without repentance – is the sin that separates that person from Christ, which in turn sends him to hell. Any unrepentant sin – is an idol.

(6) There is one final important lesson that history teaches us about this incident. It would be easy to think that John the Baptist lost when he became pitted against the powers of Rome and the growing unbelief of Israel. But actually, it was the truths that John spoke, which prevailed over both groups. Remember, John was the Elijah foretold in **Malachi 4:5-6**,

“See, I will send you [the nation of Israel] the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes [a day of the Lord is a time of judgment].⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

John did turn many people in Israel back to the Lord and back to strong families that loved each other. However, John’s death was a sign that the nation of Israel as a whole, had hardened themselves against truth, which would also cause them to lash out at Christ. Why were the religious leaders of Israel so opposed to John and Christ? Because what John and Christ taught was apposed to what the religious leaders treasured – and to what kept them in power. Think with me about this. When John told people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, he was pointing people away from the temple at Jerusalem, which had been the only place where sins could be atoned for. And when Christ died on the cross, the stone temple, and animal sacrifices offered by Levitical priests were made

obsolete. Did the Jewish people stop sacrificing at their temple after Christ died and rose again? No. This is why that temple had to be Divinely swept away by a day of the Lord. And John the Baptist warned the unbelieving Jews of his day that a great judgment from God was on the horizon in

Matthew 3:5-12,

“People went out to him [John] from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [John was not speaking about a far off end of the world judgment. Both John and Christ ministered to the last generation of Old Covenant Jews – Hebrews 8:7-13] . . . ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire [and who will carry this judgment out?] . . . after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit [referring to those who repented and embraced Christ as Savior and King] and with fire [referring to judgment upon those who rejected Christ and persecuted His followers]. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’”

A few years after John gave that warning, Jesus foretold that before that generation passed away, not one stone of the temple at Jerusalem would be left upon another. Because of that judgment, Jewish people today cannot carry out animal sacrifices, which was a central requirement in the Old Covenant. The only way Jewish people can be in a saving covenant with God today is by entering into the New Covenant through faith in Christ.

And friends, where is the mighty Roman Empire of the New Testament? It is on the trash heap of idolatrous empires that have come

and gone. And how is Christ's new temple, the Church – doing today?
The Church and Christ's Kingdom continue to spread into all the nations,
just as Daniel 2:35 foretold. When salty Christianity is on the move, it
means that the worship of earthly, mortal rulers will be on the ropes. Let's
pray.

Heavenly Father, the truths we have examined this morning are soul
changing, society altering, culture cleansing truths. They are Kingdom of
God truths. May Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is
in heaven. Amen