

WHEN KINGDOMS CLASH

Mark 6:14-29

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/when-kingdoms-clash/>

More than almost any other gospel story, this one brings into focus the clash between two kingdoms, the battle between good and evil. Let's meet the key players. This Herod is the son of Herod the Great, the one who killed innocent babies, trying to track down Jesus when our Lord was born. This Herod in Mark 6 was known as Herod Antipas. He was a "wanna be" king. Caesar Augustus had denied him the title "king," so he wasn't even technically a king. I get the feeling that Mark was using air quotes when speaking of "King" Herod.

Let's also be clear why John was in prison. He had confronted Herod about his sin in living with his brother's wife. John the Baptizer was bold in announcing that not even the royal house is exempt from the call to radical repentance. But notice the contrast. While John was courageous, bold and clear, Herod was cowardly, weak, swayed by fear, by the need to be popular and loved, by base sexual urges, by the moment and by his own shame and guilt.

Now, follow this contrast between the two, because it's not merely a contrast between two individuals. It's two a contrast between two different kingdoms. Mark's gospel is the subversive word from God, challenging Rome's power grab and abuses of lives. It's a counter-cultural word that says God is going to win, not Caesar, not a human empire. Mark's theme is that God's Kingdom is on the horizon and will soon overpower the Roman Empire. But in the meantime, it will be bloody and ugly. And John the Baptist is our hero and model. This is how you stand up to evil.

Look around and you'll see modern examples of this. At the recent gathering of the Baptist World Alliance, I heard of the testimony of believers in North Korea, who are forced to go into potato cellars to worship. They can only silently mouth the words to their hymns, for fear of being caught. They are constantly harassed by authorities, "Have you ever distributed that black book?" They are told to keep their heads down, lest they look up and worship their High God. Note the scripture we placed in your worship bulletins: "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against...the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil..."

But our temptations to cave to culture are more subtle. Let's be honest. We have some repenting to do as the Church. We were on the wrong side of slavery and racial justice. We were on the wrong side of subjugating women. Does it bother anyone else that the #MeToo movement started in Hollywood and not the Church? As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, the Church is too often a tail light, not a head light.

I've thought long and hard about John's moral courage. He didn't just wake up with it on the day he died for his faith. He had cultivated over time, with of small decisions filled with courage and integrity. And the same could be said for Herod's spinelessness. It didn't just happen that day but

was developed over his lifetime—a compromise here, a lie there, a selfish decision and then another.

Here is a Sunday morning game I'd like us to play. I going to show you two quotes and then I want you to see if you can guess who said them. Here's the first: "Remembering we are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart." That was the late Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple. Here's a second one. Who said this? "If you don't stick to your values when they're being tested, they are not values--they are hobbies." That was Jon Stewart, former host of "The Daily Show," on Comedy Central. Plenty to chew on and think about, for sure.

Elijah Brown, the General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, tells about a conversation he had with a follower of Christ from Syria. The man said to Elijah, "You in the West are in your comfort zone, yet live in fear; we live in danger and war and daily experience victory in Jesus Christ." We are often Sunday-fied but not surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ [I am indebted to E. Stanley Jones for the suggestion of this thought, *Abundant Living*, pp. 149-150]. Are there areas of your life not under the lordship of Christ? Whose kingdom rules in your heart?