

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 6: 14-29

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. It's time to read the bible again; today, we'll continue to read Mark chapter 6, verses 14 to 29.

Jesus sent His disciples to preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick, two by two, in a total of six pairs. These six pairs worked simultaneously in six different places, and Jesus gave them authority to represent Him, spreading the kingdom of God in various locations. This is the ordained pattern of God: not using one great spiritual person to establish a vast territory, but utilizing six pairs of ordinary individuals, perhaps from humble backgrounds, without noble lineage or notable achievements, without prestigious qualifications. Six pairs of ordinary people; and six is the number of men, indicating that every man is qualified in the team of Jesus Christ.

An ordinary person, after being trained by Jesus' discipleship, undergoes transformation, taking on the ministry of Jesus Christ and becoming a witness for Him. This is the model of Jesus' work: working in and through individuals, not seeking speed but depth. Jesus' ministry on earth for three and a half years resulted in only 11 disciples, but each one was completely won by Jesus and willing to martyr for the Gospel. This is also the disciples' model of work, like Jesus, not seeking speed but depth. Thus, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been passed down from generation to generation, going through difficult and challenging times but enduring various tests. The responsibility of this Gospel is now in our hands; may we stand firm and continue in this model of work that seeks depth, not speed: building up a church that's filled with life, ready to welcome the second coming of Jesus Christ. This was the first time Jesus sent out His 12 disciples to preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick, they achieved remarkable success, spreading Jesus' fame throughout the region of Galilee.

Verse 14: "Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, 'John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.'"

From the beginning, it mentions that King Herod heard of it. This King Herod is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who ordered the slaughter of all male infants under 2 years of age in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth. He had five different wives, and the relationships within his family were extremely complex. His sons and granddaughters had intermarriages, making the situation confusing and absurd. I don't want to spend time discussing these corrupt and chaotic relationships; I will explain a bit when we reach them in the scripture. Herod Antipas, mentioned here as King Herod, ruled over the region of Galilee. Therefore, the fame of Jesus reached his ears, and hearing about the disciples performing many miracles, he thought that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. He thought this way because he had guilt in his conscience for beheading John the Baptist. So, he assumed that John had come back to hold him accountable. However, his understanding was entirely wrong. John the Baptist had testified about Jesus, declaring Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John had even said that he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. Clearly, Herod Antipas did not have a deep understanding of John's testimony.

Verse 15: "Others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It's the Prophet, or like one of the prophets.'"

As Jesus' fame spread, people discussed Him, speculating on His background, the source of His abilities, and His identity. Those engaged in these discussions could never truly understand Jesus. Only those who have personally touched Jesus and experienced His saving grace can truly recognize Him as the Son of God. Those in discussion claimed that He might be Elijah because Jesus performed many miracles similar to those done by Elijah. Moreover, Malachi 4:5 states, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." They did not recognize that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah who would come

through the prophets. Others said He was one of the prophets, possibly due to hearing Jesus' wise words, which could be compared to the prophets. Such discussions lead to no conclusion and cannot help people. To truly understand Jesus, one must personally encounter Him.

Verse 16: "But when Herod heard, he said, 'This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!'"

Due to the disturbance in his conscience, Herod had a strong preconceived notion. Since he had executed John the Baptist, he strongly believed that John had come back to life. Following this, Mark briefly describes John the Baptist's fate. According to Mark's account, John was a brave and upright prophet who fearlessly proclaimed God's words, opposing the dark powers of Satan with his own strength. His fate is truly admirable.

Verses 17-18: "For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'"

Now, let's briefly introduce the chaotic marital relationships within the Herod family: In this chapter, the Herod mentioned is Herod Antipas, who is the son of Herod the Great, and both he and Philip are sons of Herod the Great. Herodias, on the other hand, is the daughter of another son of Herod the Great, named Aristobulus. In other words, Herodias is the granddaughter of Herod the Great. These three sons of Herod the Great were born to different mothers. Herodias initially married her uncle Philip, and they had a daughter named Salome, who is the woman mentioned later in the text who danced. Herod Antipas fell in love with Herodias and seduced her away from his brother Philip. Herodias, in turn, left her husband and took her daughter to marry Herod Antipas. At that time, Herod Antipas governed the region of Galilee, serving as the ruler of the Jewish people in that area.

John the Baptist courageously pointed out the error of Herod Antipas. According to Leviticus 20:21, "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless." John directly pointed out that Herod Antipas marrying Herodias was contrary to the Law of Moses. John himself was morally upright and influential among the Jewish people. Herod Antipas, fearing John's accusations might lead to a Jewish uprising, arrested John and imprisoned him.

Verses 19-20: "Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."

Herodias was a narrow-minded and malicious woman who resented John for pointing out her wrongs. She repeatedly wanted to kill John, but Herod Antipas prevented her. Now, let's refer to Herod Antipas as Herod for simplicity, but do not confuse him with Herod the Great. Herod, ruling over the Jewish people, had a certain understanding of their customs and traditions. He also enjoyed hearing people talk about the laws of Moses. After imprisoning John, they had numerous interactions. Herod recognized John as a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. Herod even acted according to some of John's teachings and was pleased to listen to him. Perhaps we can say that Herod still had a little goodness in his heart, sometimes willing to follow the promptings of his conscience and obey John's words. This situation is similar to many people who have contact with the church but cannot make a firm decision to fully embrace church life. Here, Herod's fate serves as a good reminder for such individuals. People are often weak, so standing in the middle can be dangerous. One may inadvertently fall into an irreversible trap. Let's see how Herod fell into his trap.

Verse 21: "Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee."

One day, coincidentally on Herod's birthday, he held a grand feast, inviting his nobles, Roman officers, and the chief men of Galilee. Since Herod ruled over the Galileans, he, like any politician, used such occasions to bridge relationships between the ruling class and those being governed. Herod's intention was to establish harmonious relations among these three groups and strengthen friendships between different classes. While his intentions were good, he inadvertently opened the door for the malicious Herodias.

Verse 22: "And when Herodias's daughter herself came in and danced and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, 'Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.'"

Herodias knew Herod well, understanding his impulsive nature, love for beauty, and desire for prestige. Herodias's daughter, Salome, at the age of blossoming youth, came in to dance. Usually, women who danced at such feasts were professional performers from brothels, specializing in music and dance. Their performances were nothing special to the audience. However, this time was different. The beautiful young girl's dance captivated everyone, and Herod thought it added much luster to the occasion. Perhaps, having consumed too much wine, he spoke without thinking and said to the dancing girl, Salome, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

Verse 23: "He also swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.'"

It appears that Herod, possibly influenced by excessive drinking, impulsively increased the stakes upon seeing Salome. He swore an extravagant oath, promising to grant her anything she desired, even up to half of his kingdom. This type of

grandiose promise is reminiscent of events that occurred around 400 years earlier during the reign of King Ahasuerus in Persia. In the Book of Esther, it is recorded that King Ahasuerus made a similar promise to Queen Esther before a feast, as recorded in Esther 5:6, "At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? and it shall be granted to you. What is your request, up to half of the kingdom? It shall be done.'" Seems the kings all like to boast; the difference lies in the fact that Ahasuerus was dealing with a virtuous queen, Esther, while Herod faced the malicious Herodias.

Verses 24, 25: "So she went out and said to her mother: What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Salome quickly went to her mother, Herodias, seeking guidance on what to request. Without hesitation, Herodias instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Salome promptly returned to Herod, expressing her wish for John's head on a platter. This illustrates that the entire plan was orchestrated by Herodias, who knew exactly what she wanted and had been waiting for this moment. In the midst of a joyous birthday celebration, the sudden request for John's head in such a gruesome manner was entirely inappropriate and disheartening.

Verse 26: "And the king was exceeding sorry, yet because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her."

When Salome made her request, Herod's initial reaction was one of sorrow. However, this sorrow couldn't overcome the oath he had made earlier, nor could it outweigh his concern for his public image. Therefore, despite feeling sorrow, he ultimately carried out the promise he made to Salome.

Dear brothers and sisters, before we were saved, our conscience, although present, is often weak. Faced with temptations and challenges, we knowingly succumb to actions we shouldn't take. However, after receiving salvation, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit strengthens our conscience and give us peace. The peace of God will guide our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus to resist temptation. King Herod's weak sense of conscience, could not sustain Satan's temptation, and he quickly surrendered to wrongful actions.

Verses 27-28: "And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother."

Here, Mark straightforwardly narrates the sequence of events. John the Baptist was still in prison when the king, in compliance with his oath, sent an executioner to behead him. The executioner carried out the command, placed John's head on a platter, and presented it to the young girl. She, in turn, gave the gruesome gift to her mother. Thus, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, concluded his ministry. While it may seem bleak from a human perspective, in the eyes of God, he was a martyr who sacrificed his life in defense of the truth.

Verse 29: "And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse and laid it in a tomb."

The disciples of John, upon learning of his death, retrieved his body and buried it in a tomb. This illustrates the common fate of all people, as everyone eventually faces death and is laid to rest in a grave. However, in Matthew 14:12, it is noted that John's disciples not only buried him but also informed Jesus of what had transpired. This emphasizes that while the worldly outcome may appear similar for everyone, what truly matters is how God perceives it. Jesus Himself acclaimed John's significance in Matthew 11:11, stating that among those born of women, none had arisen greater than John the Baptist. He held a unique position at the juncture of

the Old and New Testaments, being a prophet bestowed by God upon the people of Israel. John fulfilled his entrusted commission according to God's plan.

Let's pray: Lord, just as You fulfilled Your ministry on earth and sent Your disciples to proclaim the message, today, in Your Church, You are still seeking individuals whom You can send out. Help us in this last age to be a group willing to answer Your call, to shoulder Your commission, and to establish Your church on earth. Though we may be ordinary, You are willing to use us, making us messengers of the Gospel, bringing the good news to those around us, and leading people to the church. To be witnesses for You together on earth is such a glorious calling! Bless the church I am a part of, and we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.