

Series in Mark: The Servant in Action
The Serious Cost of Pledging Loyalty to The Servant
Mark 6:14-29

Theme: Uncovering the Lesson Behind the Lesson

Introduction: Following Jesus is hard, how far am I willing to go with Him?

>We've all heard of those who have given their life for the Gospel. Those in the past, as church history tells us was the fate of the 11 original disciples. Then there's Polycarp, a second century Church bishop who would not renounce his faith, curse Christ, and say Caesar is Lord. The Romans called him, and others like him who swore allegiance to Christ as the only God, atheists. When he was arrested, the police kept watch on him, though it was late he prepared a meal and drink for them. Before heading to prison, he asked if he could have an hour to pray. He was 86 at the time. The chief of police, ironically whose name was Herod, said, "What harm is there in saying Lord Caesar, and saving yourself from death?" When he stood before the proconsul, he was urged to "take an oath and I'll let you go. Curse Christ." Polycarp responded, "Eighty-Six years I have served him, he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Again, "Swear by the divine power of Caesar!" And he said, "I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn the Christian message, arrange a meeting and give me a hearing." "I have wild animals," the proconsul said. Polycarp, "Call them in" for we are not allowed to change something better to something worse." "I'll have you burned alive, if you don't change your mind. Polycarp said, "You threaten with fire than burns for a short time and is soon quenched. You don't know about the fire of the coming judgment. But why are you waiting. Come, do what you will." It is said that Polycarp showed no sign of distress. The herald told the audience, "Polycarp has declared that he is a Christian." The mob gathered wood and piled it around him. They were going to nail him to a stake but Polycarp said, "Leave me the way I am, He who gives me power to endure the fire will help me to remain in the flames without moving, even without being secured by nails." His final prayer, *"For this and for everything I praise and glorify you through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Child. Through him and with him, may you be glorified with the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, Amen."* Then they lit the wood. Stories of the past. And stories of more recent history like Jim Elliott. Or as recent as the grandmother, Linda Brookes of BCH, told us about a few weeks who cared for orphans in Mogadishu, who's family members were just killed by the police. The stories are endless. Those who are willing to die for their faith. I highly recommend you read or watch *The Insanity of God* for more examples on the courage of modern day saints.

>We are amazed, and encouraged and even inspired by their commitment to Christ and we ask ourselves, **"How far I am willing to go for Christ?"**

>We are convicted, we are committed, we too make a pledge to follow Christ. Christ tells us plainly in Mk. 8 *"If anyone who come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross (or his own cross to bear) and follow me. (Or change the direction of your life. No longer live for yourself but your purpose in life is to live for me.)"*

>Paul urges us in Romans 12 to *"present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* (Idea: Get up on the alter and kill yourself; die to self, but instead of dying get up off the alter, totally transformed and living for Christ instead 1x act.)

>I am commanded, you are commanded, to surrender your life, your wife, your kids, your desires, your interests, your everything for Christ and His gospel. And that haunts me at times. I'll never forget raising each of my boys when they were babies to heaven and offering them to God. By his grace, they've been on loan to us for 40 years now.

KEITH GREEN: "I Pledge my Head to Heaven for the Gospel" sing the verses

Well, I pledge my head to heaven for the gospel, and I ask no man on earth to fill me needs. Like the sparrows up above, I am enveloped in His love, and I trust him like those little ones he feeds. Well, I pledge my wife to heaven for the gospel, though our love each passing day just seems to grow, as I told her when we wed I surely rather be found dead, then to love her more than the one who saved me soul. Well I pledge my son to heaven for the gospel, though he's kicked and beaten, ridiculed and scorned. I will teach him to rejoice and lift a thankful praising voice and to be like Him who bore the nails and crown of thorns. I'm your child, I want to be in your family forever, I'm your child, I'm going to follow you no matter whatever the cost, I'm going to count all things lose, well I pledge my head, I pledge my wife and I pledge my son to heaven for the Gospel.

>It is in God's sovereign care and it is no accident that Pastor Brad asked me to preach today and continue on in Mark's account of the Gospel. The story of John the Baptist's beheading is actually a "**parenthesis**" in his narrative.

>**The story of rejection continues.** (Last week we saw that Christ was rejected in his hometown and that His disciples were going to face rejection as He sent them out to preach the good news.) The story of rejection continues and, for us, this is the ultimate in rejection for the cause of Christ because John, for the sake of the Gospel, found himself imprisoned and executed. We pick up where Pastor Brad left off last week, as we look at Mk. 6:14-29 and visit Mark's retelling of the death of Jesus' cousin.

>**The fame of Jesus is growing.** (Think about the number of miracles He performed and the number of people that would have followed him as word about this Messiah spread. The crowds followed him everywhere (next week you'll hear how Jesus feed thousands of people). It should be noted that God's plan and the 3-year limitation on Christ's ministry is perfect. Any longer and the Roman government would have had to deal with millions of people coming from all over the known world to get just a glimpse of Jesus. Gal. tells us that at the fulness of time Christ came, and we can add and at the right time Christ died as well.

>Telling you about the story of John's imprisonment and execution itself is easy, the lesson behind the story is hard to swallow.

>What good does it do us today to recount the story and learn a few more insights into Herod's family issues and how John died. What good is the story if John's commitment to Christ doesn't impact our life?

>Honestly, the story is easy, but I'm not sure if I can wrap my mind around what it is I'm to provide for us today in way of application.

>What Jesus teaches his followers to do is radical life change. John the Baptist got what Jesus was preaching and lived a radically different life. I'm not quite sure, I get it or that we get it. Our comfort, while clearly a blessing from a gracious God, haunts me at times. What we have is the result of us living in an historic Judeo-Christian culture both nationally and in our own homes, but it still haunts me at times. The words of Jesus, challenge me, convict and at times leave me questioning my loyalty or level of loyalty to

my Master. And it is at those times I find myself clinging most tightly to the grace and mercy of Christ that is promised me. I trust his words haunt you at times as well. Maybe haunt is not the best word. Maybe baffled, convicted, troubled or it's that thing that is in the back of your mind that when you allow yourself to wrestle with it leaves you wondering, "am I truly following Christ?" All I can say is, if the words of Jesus don't bug you, then your heart is most likely hardened or you are the most Christlike of all the Christlike ones walking the earth today. But if that were the case, you'd be the most bothered by your short-comings. There is a lesson behind the lesson for us today.

But first, let's review the story and hopefully provide some new insights.

Let's read the entire passage: Mk. 6:14-29

>first define what Mark means by the word "it". King Herod heard of it or what?

>could refer to what the disciples just accomplished v. 30 *"returned to Jesus and told them all that they had done"*

>but the context points us to what Jesus was doing (healing 1:27ff and teaching 6:6

>Mark clarifies that the "it" is Jesus "for Jesus' name became known and that the fame of Jesus had finally reached royalty in Jerusalem. Remember, that he had done some teaching in Jerusalem, but his primary ministry has been on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. And while news travels quickly, it still traveled by foot or hoof or row boat.

I. Herod's Opinion about Jesus 6:14-16

A. **What others said about Jesus 14-15** (when word spreads theories, fantasies and folklore come about especially when the real truth behind the story is lacking. So naturally, while Jesus' fame grows so do the opinions of those who heard about it. Including even those who witnessed it with their own eyes and ears.

1. So some of the crowd say This guy is John the Baptist raised from the dead.

>must remember that J the B never performed any miracles. He just "prepared the way for the Anointed One." But now that he has resurrected from the dead, and that being the most powerful thing anyone can do, it only makes sense that He could do other miraculous things as well.

2. **Others say this guy is Elijah.** After all, that's what the last book of the Bible taught us. Mal. 3:1 *"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."* (John the Baptist claimed to be a fulfillment of Isa. 40 which states the same thing Mal. Did. Mal 4:5 The last verse in the writings of the prophets before the period of time known as the 400 years of silence (no prophets; no word from God) says "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." They were almost right, but the Elijah who came, according to Jesus, was really John the Baptist.

>Luke 1:17 Jesus, referring to J the B, says *"he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah....to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*

>Then in Mk. 9:11-13 Jesus, referencing J the B says *that Elijah did come to restore all things, and to proclaim that the Lord must suffer many things*, then He says, 13 *“but I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”*

3. **Others weren't ready to say Jesus was Elijah** but they were willing to admit **He's (just) a prophet**, like the ones of old. This guy is just another prophet like the ones we heard about in the past. But they felt he had no real significance to them.

Matthew Henry: *“Where there is an idle faith there is commonly a working fancy. Those who most willingly disbelieve truth are more credulous of errors and fancies. Those who fight against God find themselves baffled.”* 19th century: But so true today, isn't it.

Ask: Who do you say Jesus is? (Peter's 2 responses must be our responses)

>John 6: “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy one of God.

>Look over at Mk. 8:27-29 Read “You are the Christ”

B. But What did Herod say about the fame of Jesus? 16

1. **John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.** (John was a man of God now raised from the dead and if he can be resurrected he can surely do the other miracles.)
2. **But Why did Herod say this?** It wasn't so much that he said it because he heard about Jesus as much as it was the conviction of a guilty conscience. Most likely Herod had not even heard about Jesus until now. In his statement, he declares that he is guilty of killing J the B. And the conviction and burden of his sin was haunting him.

M. Henry: *“a guilty conscience needs no accuser or tormentor but itself. There may be the terrors of strong conviction where there is no truth of saving conversion.”* The fame of Jesus just reminded Herod of the horrible deed he committed.

>So Mark, at this point, decides to recount the actual story and why Herod was haunted. It centers around his pride, lust and making a promise he should have never made. The OT tells us about a similar case in which a Judge by the name of Jephthah made a promise to God to sacrifice whatever came out of his house first if God would give him the victory over the Ammonites. He ended up killing his own daughter to keep a promise he should never have made. King Saul tried to do the same thing when Jonathan ate the honey during a battle.

>Gary Candlish, one of my heroes and mentors, taught me “Never make a promise I can't keep”. Be careful what you promise! Let your yeah be yeah and your nah be nah. KJV

II. Herod's Obsession with John 6:17-20 No doubt, Herod has an interest in John. The text says he feared him, knew he was a godly man, kept him safe, heard him gladly.

A. Herod is perplexed by John's godly character. KJV says, Herod heard him and “did many things”. Implies many other evil things besides behead John. But a better translation is here in the ESV. “he was greatly perplexed”. We know from history the Herod's family had an evil track record but the idea here is that Herod was torn about what to do with John, He respected John but wasn't willing to make the changes John demanded. Like the old love song that says, so close but yet so far away.

ILL: Willy Bell Liberty, Soccer Camp England: Elton John: "I need to do that someday but not right now" M. Henry "*Many who are not good themselves can see it and respect it in others*"

1. **John was a righteous and holy man.** (Both are required to be a good man.)

a. **He surrendered to His calling**

>heard God speak to him to be the fulfillment of OT prophecy: (Isa. 40. Mal. 3 and 4 and even as far back at Dt.18 All four gospels declare John, surrendered to God's calling, and was clearly the promised forerunner to prepare the way for Jesus

b. **He believed Christ was God.** John 1: "*I am not the Christ, make straight the way for the Lord*" Mk. 1: "**after me comes one mightier than I**" Jn. Adds "*who ranks before me because he was before me*"

c. **He preached the Word of God.** Jn. 1 "*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.*" "He preached repentance and Lk 3 says "*and with many other exhortations he preached the good news to the people*" Balance: Bad/Good News

d. **He selflessly lived for Christ.** Lk 3 "*I am not worthy to untie his sandals.*" Jn 3: "*I must decrease and He, Jesus must increase*"

2. **John wasn't afraid to call sin, sin.**

a. **He called "a spade a spade".** We must be careful to only identify sin as what the Bible clearly calls sin and not equate our preferences and opinions as sin. Luke 3 says John reproved Herod, not just for Herodias, but "*for all the evil things he had done*" John wasn't afraid to call sin, sin. The key here is that he called Herod's marriage to Herodias sin. "*It's not lawful to have your brother's wife*". Why was John calling them on this?

>**Background:** Herod (Antipas) married the daughter of an Arabian King named Aretus because of a peace treaty with their country.

>Herodias was married to Herod's brother Phillip. She was also the daughter of Herod's other brother Aristobulus. So Herodias was not only Herod's sister in law, she was also his niece.

>So at some point Herod fell for Herodias and took her away from his brother Phillip. She goes willingly. And in order to marry Herodias, Herod has to get rid of his wife, the daughter of the Arabian King. Which according to Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, says is what happened. Josephus said this issue became a real political mess for Herod and his rulership.

>It was a sin, not only because Herod was allowing his flesh to rule his life, but more important because it clearly violated the teachings of the Law. The Torah does not allow a man to marry his sister-in-law if his brother is still alive. Lev. 18:16, 28:21. To top it off, Herodias, through Roman courts, filed for divorce from Phillip her husband. But Jewish woman, according to the Torah, were not permitted to file for divorce. They, instead, had to plead their case before the Elders, who then granted a woman a divorce if approved. But divorce, even when legal, didn't permit remarriage if the spouse was still alive. According to John, they were both guilty of sin. And he repeatedly reminded them of it. What did Jesus say about it. Ironically, a few chapters later, he comments on divorce and remarriage

>**Mk. 10:** in a debate about Moses and divorce Jesus says the same thing, "*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*" Matthew gives an "an exception clause, but that's another lesson. This is not a message on the sanctity of marriage, but we must admit marriage is serious business to God. We must work hard at the marriage we are now and seek to honor

and obey Scripture. We thank God for his grace as it applies to the bonds of marriage. Regardless of your view on marriage, John called their situation sin.

- b. **He disregarded the consequences.** “Herod seized him and bound him in prison” for the sake of Herodias” Herod and Herodias had enough and needed to stop it.

B. Herod is infatuated and controlled by a godless wife.

- 1. **Herodias hated John and wanted him killed.** And if momma ain’t happy...

Proverbs, *He who finds a (good) wife, finds good.* “A contentious (quarrelsome) woman and a steady dripping of rain are alike; It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman” Herodias is up there with the likes of Jezebel. Ahab too had his hands full. Ha. Herod was between a rock and a hard place. He had a wife who has a serious grudge against a man he was perplexed by.

- 2. Herod imprisoned John to keep him safe and, I believe, to keep peace in the house.
- 3. Herod gladly heard John but rejected his message. Remember this, Herod loved his conversations with John, he respected him as something he was not, but he refused to surrender His life to John’s message of repentance and Christ. John was a problem for Herod, but he was not a danger to Him. Herodias was dangerous to both of them.

Alan Cole: *“Devotion to a wife can lead a man astray”*

We need to see **God’s Sovereignty** in all this: John’s imprisonment and eventual execution removes the potential for his followers to continuing to follow John in spite of his urging to follow Christ. John’s life would have caused his followers to resist allegiance to Christ. God in his plan to redeem man uses J’s death to turn the world to Christ and Christ alone. (It’s what J wanted Jn. 3:29-30) *“The friend of the bridegroom who stands with him, rejoices in the bridegroom. “Therefore this joy of mine is complete. He must increase I must get out of the way” (sign of a true leader)*

III. Herod’s Opportunity to Remove John 6:21-29 (I’m taking a different approach to this than the tradition one which says Herod was simply the victim of a cruel trick by his wife and was caught in a trap he couldn’t get out of, so he had no choice, even though it was against his will, to kill J.

>I want to suggest today that Herod may have been in on the scheme from the start.

>We know the story: Remember she wanted J dead. But no opportunity yet to do so. Is it possible some premeditation had taken place behind the scenes? M. Henry: The only safe way for their marriage to continue was to remove John. He had to be killed.

“Many love good preaching if it doesn’t address their sin”. I think Herod has enough.

A. **Plan a Birthday Party** and all the high officials in the region were invited.

B. **Create a Predicament:** No daughter of a Queen would have been made to dance a lewd, sensual dance before an intoxicated male crowd; she would have been thought to be a harlot. The dance aroused Herod and his cronies. It’s an insult to royalty.

>the plan unfolds: We need to see more and if you do, I’ll give you anything; up to half of my kingdom. But there’s a **problem**

1. Makes an extravagant promise but Herod didn’t own the kingdom, Rome did. In Rome’s eyes he wasn’t a king at all. Legally, he’s the tetrarch or Rome’s appt. governor of the 4 regions around Jerusalem. The other gospel writers don’t even call him King. They call him the tetrarch.

Calling the local authority king was common in first century culture. Mark uses it here to solidify the story.

2. He would have never given a girl that much power nor would his co-horts approved of it. One commentator says, "If she would have asked for a ¼ of the kingdom He would have found a way to get out of it." A rash oath, with counsel and agreement of others, could have been dismissed.

3. Not sure Herod would have approved of it unless he knew in advance. His oath made it look like he was trapped and had no other option.

4. Herodias, who wasn't even in the room (*daughter went out*), immediately knew what to tell her daughter to ask for.

5. The daughter, Salome according to Josephus, doesn't bat an eye as such a request and adds to her mother's wish (to have it done immediately and to present it on a platter)

6. Is the head of one man worth more than half a kingdom? Herod, just maybe, appears surprised but for the sake of saving face carries out the request.

C. **Remove the Threat:** John is out of the way. Ironically, Herod went to Rome, advised by Herodias, to appeal his case to be called king, Rome removed him from his position and made Phillip his brother "the king". There's all kinds of lessons in that but let's finish:

IV. John's Example Challenges our Loyalty to Christ

>John knew the Word, loved the Word and boldly proclaimed the Word.

>John was consumed with living for and was obviously willing to die for Christ.

Point: While John has a special calling on his life, we too have a special calling on our life. In the same sense, Christ calls us to be non-negotiated followers. John's example challenges our loyalty.

>But it shouldn't surprise us. The gospels are loaded with the concept of his followers having unyielding, unwavering, willing to risk it all, self-denying, self-sacrificing loyalty to Christ. Listen

A. Jesus challenges our Loyalty (Here's just a few of Christ's words)

1. It's not comfortable Mk 8:34-38

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

2. It's not safe Luke 12:4-5

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.^[a] Yes, I tell you, fear him!"

3. It's not convenient Mk 10:42-45;

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,^[a] ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave^[b] of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not

to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” “Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:25-33

4. It’s not cheap Luke 9:57-62

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus^[a] said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

David Platt: Radical sums it up for us, “Plainly put, a relationship with Jesus requires total, superior and exclusive devotion.” I guess that’s my point. But what if Jesus’ words aren’t really intended for those of us living in the church age or the age of grace? I know some who would justify their neglect of Jesus’ teaching sighting that his words are not intended for this dispensation. Suppose they’re right. We’re off the hook, right? Wrong! The NT writers simply build their imperatives and indicatives on what they were taught through the inspiration of the Spirit and via their conversations with Jesus.

B. The NT Writers challenge our Loyalty

1. It demands selflessness 2 Cor. 5:15

¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

2. It requires sacrifice Rom. 12: 1; Heb. 10:32-33

I appeal to you therefore, brothers,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.^[b]

“How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

3. It assumes devotion Phil. 3:8

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ"

J. I. Packer: Knowing God *"When Paul says he counts the things lost rubbish or dung, he means not merely that he does not think of them as having any value, but also that he does not live with them constantly on his mind: What normal person spends his time nostalgically dreaming of manure? Yet this, in effect, is what many of us do."*

4. It includes suffering 1 Pet. 2:21; Phil 1:29

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake"

Make it Personal: That's it, make it personal. How are you doing with this? Thank God for His grace and unconditional love but...

Who are you teaching? Who are you influencing?

Who are you challenging with truth?

Who are you helping? Who are you counseling?

Who are you supporting?

What ministries are you investing in? You may not be called to risk your life but you may be called to sacrificially support those who do!

What intentional sacrifices are you making for the cause of Christ and His Gospel?

Is there anything you are doing in obedience to Christ that makes your life, in anyway, uncomfortable, inconvenient or at risk?

Loyalty to Christ is a lifestyle. It's a challenge, that we will never fully achieve, this side of heaven and it is only by his grace that we are where we are at this time. Like John, have you pledged your head to heaven for the gospel?

I surrender all.