

## Mark 6: 14-29

Please turn in your Bibles now to mark chapter six. We're continuing on in our Mark series. Now we're looking at Mark 6:14-29. Now if you if you remember from last week, we read into fourteen and I said, I'm just going to go ahead and steal from next week's sermon just to show the progression, because fourteen really does act kind of like a segue to what came before and what is coming after. You remember, Jesus had sent out his disciples. He had equipped them both in thought and in ministry, but also in the spirit, giving them authority not only to proclaim the gospel, but to have power over demons and angels and spiritual beings, something that kind of fulfilled what we talked about in that, that morning that that God reigns over all spiritual beings. There's not one being outside of his control. And if God reigns over all spiritual beings, then Jesus, second person of the Trinity reigns over all spiritual beings, and he bestows that authority upon his apostles. Now, we talked about the fact that here we had all these unknown apostles. We don't we don't get their names. We don't hear about their mighty deeds. Okay? We don't we don't get a list, you know, biographies of each one of them. And exactly what happened when they were sent out that time. And yet what we do learn is that in short order, people are repenting, diseases are being healed, demons are being cast out. Satan is bound. The world is held at bay. The flesh is being mortified. And then, remarkably, their message reaches even to the ears of the king in the region, King Herod. And so that's the background of this passage today. So please join me in reading Mark chapter six. We'll start at fourteen, and we're going to read all the way through to twenty nine.

***King Herod heard of it, for Jesus name had been had become known. Some said, John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. But others said he is. Elijah and others said he is a prophet like one of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard it, he said, John, whom I beheaded, has been raised. For it was Herod who had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted him put to death, but she could not. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. Isn't that interesting? It's just fascinating. We'll come back to that. Okay. But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you. And he vowed to her, whatever you ask of me, I will give you up to half of my kingdom. And she went out and said to her mother, for what should I ask? And she said, the head of John the Baptist. And she came in immediately 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. And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter and***

***gave it to the girl. And the girl said to her mother, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.***

This is the word of the Lord.

Well, this story is a fascinating one for a variety of reasons. One of them is it's just Mark showing his storytelling prowess. If you notice, it's actually a story within a story. Mark is telling us about the fruit of the work of the apostles and how it reached even the ears of Herod. And it caused Herod to ask this question, who is this man Jesus, who I'm now hearing about? And then Mark uses that as kind of a kind of, in a Shakespearean way, to kind of put a little episode within the larger episode. So we should remember this as we're reading about the death of John. This is Mark kind of bringing us up to speed on the events in the Kingdom at that time. It's also an interesting passage because there's not a clear teaching that comes out of it. This is just kind of a background story. It's inerrant. It's inspired by God. It's meant for our edification. And yet it's one of those stories where you really have to pause for a moment. You have to kind of ask, what are the points? What are the theological doctrines? What are the application points that Mark is implying when he tells us this story? And so we're going to try to do that tonight. We want to read between the lines because Mark doesn't tell us at the end. And therefore all must be, you know, concerned about losing their heads in the ministry of the gospel or something like that. He doesn't give us a clear practical application. He just tells the story and lets it sit there and argue that this is actually a part of Mark's incredible strength as a gospel writer. He rarely comes out and tells us exactly what we ought to think, but rather he displays for us the events that took place. He selects out the stories that are significant and that are salient, and then he lets the spirit do the work of drawing us to the proper conclusion. I would actually argue this is how all of the histories in the Bible work. Okay, we should never read a history and just think of it as just kind of brute history. It's never that. It's always leading us to a conclusion. Okay, We see that even in these stories that Mark has been telling us, and I've mentioned this multiple times, how he keeps putting these rhetorical questions in the text and then not answering the question. And he puts the question in there, who can forgive sins? But God alone says the Pharisees, after watching Jesus forgive sins. And Mark is saying, yeah, you think about that. And then he say, who is this that even the winds and the waves obey him after he calms the storms? And Mark goes, yeah, I'm just going to let that sit for a little bit. We also get this story as well. Mark has laid it out for us. And what he's doing is, is by story, he is drawing us to the proper conclusions.

So let's just take a look first of all, at a couple of the things that we notice, I want to look at three things. Primarily, I want to look, first of all is what's going on between Herod and John and the whole thing dealing with Elijah. What do we do with Elijah and John? Okay, so I'm going to use this as an opportunity just to talk a little bit about some of the things going on around John's ministry. Then we're going to talk about the complicated Historicity of this passage because Mark is assuming he's giving us details, but he's also assuming he's also assuming that we understand a little bit of what's going on in the background. So we want to unpack that a little bit. And then finally, we're going to talk about, in light of this story, what are some of the gospel takeaways? What are some of the things that we're learning? Right? And I'll keep referring back to Rico, because he did such a good job when he was here for the missions

conference. What do we learn about Messiah? What do we learn about his message and what do we learn about what it means to be a follower of him? Okay. So that's where we're going to go this evening.

Let's start off, first of all, just with this, this interaction between Herod and John as he's thinking about or as this interaction going on in the background, as Herod is thinking about who Jesus is. And you notice here we get a couple of reports. Okay, the gospel writers will do this from time to time. They'll give us a little report of what people are saying. Okay. So notice here in this passage, we hear that some people are saying, who is this? This is John the Baptist raised from the dead. Okay, that's an interesting idea. It's possible that this is John the Baptist died. And, and kind of like we'll later see with Jesus, he's now raised from the dead and he's now in some kind of resurrected form doing this work of miracles and gospel proclamation. We know that there was there was continuity between Jesus ministry and John's ministry. They were both preaching, repent and believe. And so he might be hearing the gospel of these apostles. He knew that John had apostles. He's now hearing about this new person, Yeshua. Okay, okay. If John's. Uh, John's name was Johann. Okay. Like the Lord is gracious. He's now hearing about this new character, Yehoshua or Yeshua. The Lord saves and he's thinking, maybe this is John resurrected and continuing on in his ministry. But then others say this. Interestingly, they say he's Elijah and that should pique your interest. That should remind you of something. You might even remember how in the other Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of John, John tells us that people asked John the Baptist himself. So John the Apostle writes that John the Baptist was being asked, are you Elijah? And do you remember how he answered? He said, nope, I'm not him. We'll come back to that in a bit, a little bit later. But there's something going on there in this relationship between John and Elijah. And we might think, well, I go back and I read about Elijah, and he was like, John. He was a prophet of the Old Testament. John is our last prophet of the old Covenant before the coming of Jesus. Like John, he's a prophet. They didn't have a whole lot in common other than they were known to be ascetic. Okay. The two of them, they were known to speak to kings. In Elijah's day, it was Ahab. In John's day, he was known to speak to kings and leaders. As we even see here, Herod was not only apparently on somewhat of friendly terms with him, Herod being a somewhat complicated figure, as we see in this text. But. But John was also challenging Herod and was challenging him and convicting him of sin. And yet it's not obvious to see. Well, why would you say he's Elijah? Why not say he's Isaiah or say he's Jeremiah or Moses? Well, the reason why there's this suspicion that maybe John is Elijah is because there's this interesting passage in the Old Testament prophets. It's in the prophet Malachi, as he's anticipating what's going to happen when Israel is restored from exile to its full grand power. And Messiah King comes and they talk about all kinds of things that need to happen. The people need to repent. Okay, the end of days needs to come. You know this seventy years, and then it's multiplied in Daniel to seventy times seven. This end of time needs to come. And then at that point, Messiah will return. So there are these kind of triggers that have to take place in order for restoration to happen. And Malachi, interestingly, one of the only ones who does this says before Messiah comes, there's going to be a harbinger who comes before him declaring his coming. Now, if you know ancient Near Eastern Kings and how they tend to operate, you'd know that kings don't just show up unannounced, right? But when the king is on the way to coming, he sends

out a harbinger ahead of him. And Malachi says, our new king, the Son of David Messiah, God will come and he will have a harbinger or what people call in theology terms, in the title of this sermon, a forerunner, one who runs ahead before the king shouting out his regnal titles and what he is coming to do. Can we get a glimpse of this actually in Isaiah? Isaiah himself and Isaiah nine offers a little bit of that heraldry that announces the coming of Messiah whenever Messiah comes, he says, a child will be born to us, and then he gives his regnal names. Right? Regnal is just the adjective form of reign. His reigning names. And what are his reigning names? Son of God, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, wonderful counselor. Right? This is a heraldry that you would expect when a king comes. And Isaiah goes on to tell us, and the mantle of the government will be on his shoulders, and he will rule in the line of David. So he tells us, I'm talking about the announcement of the King who is to come. Well, well, Malachi adds to this and listen to what he says. Behold, he's talking about this forerunner who will come first. Behold, says the Lord in Malachi four five through six, behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. So what is he saying? He's saying before Messiah comes, there needs to be this grand universal repentance so that when Messiah comes, he's coming to a repentant people, not to a rebellious people. And he calls that harbinger, that forerunner, that herald who will come and get people ready for the king to arrive. He calls him Elijah. And so people living through that exilic period for hundreds and hundreds of years would be asking themselves, Has Elijah come back yet? You don't understand the intertestamental period fully. That time in between the old and the New Testament, without realizing that it's a time of anticipation. It's a time when Jewish mothers, Judean mothers, when they're raising up their sons, are bouncing their son on their knee and asking the question. Maybe mine will be Elijah. Maybe mine will be Messiah. If you're in the tribe of Judah because they're asking, when is this time going to happen? So there's a lot of anticipation that Elijah is coming. And so it's interesting that when in John one, he describes that the Pharisees go out to meet with him and they're interrogating John because he's got a lot of followers. Notice what John is doing. He's doing a baptism in the Jordan. But do you remember what the baptism is a baptism of? It's a baptism of repentance, right? Because what is he doing? He's doing what Malachi said needed to happen. The people need to repent. Interestingly, in the Gospels, it even tells us and all of Judea was going out to him. That's a very significant passage. That means that there is a large scale act of collective repentance going on in John the Baptist's day. So the Pharisees go out to meet him and they say, what then are you Elijah? And John tells us that the Baptist says, I am not. Are you the prophet just talking about some kind of prophetic forerunner? And he said, no. So what do we do with that? If you had asked Elijah of John the Baptist himself, are you Elijah? He would have said no. Now, it's especially complicated because later on in the Gospels, and I'm just drawing from the different witnesses that we have here.

Later on in the Gospels, Jesus will refer to John the Baptist as Elijah. Now listen to what he says. This is in Matthew eleven thirteen. He says, Elijah needs to come. And then he says this. Eleven thirteen to fourteen and if you are willing to accept it, he that's John the Baptist is Elijah who was to come. So listen to how Jesus says it, if you will accept it. John is Elijah. Later on in

Matthew, in Matthew chapter seventeen, the disciples ask him, then why do the scribes tell us that Elijah must come first? And Jesus answers, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come. And they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. You see what Jesus is saying? He's saying, Elijah the forerunner has already come. Look at verse thirteen of Matthew chapter seventeen, the disciples, it says, then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. All right. What do we do with this? What do we do with the fact that John the Baptist says, I'm not Elijah? And Jesus says, if you can handle it, he's Elijah. Well, I think we have to understand that John the Baptist and I'm not. We'll come back around to what John the Baptist knew about his ministry versus who he actually was. But when they're asking him, are you John the Baptist? I would argue this. He is answering their question in a literal way because they're assuming that John the Baptist is Elijah in some kind of reincarnated way. They're probably even sort of trafficking in the history that they know from the scriptures that Elijah didn't actually die. As far as we know, we never found his body. But what happened to him at the end of his life? He was born up on those chariots of fire. It makes him one of two prophets of the Old Testament who have mysterious circumstances surrounding their death. Okay, actually, I should say three characters, two clear, clear prophets. Enoch has mysterious circumstances surrounding his death, right? It says that he just was not. We don't know what that means. Moses, interestingly, dies, but no one knows where he's buried. And then you have Elijah, who mounts up on these chariots of fire. And we don't know where he went next. Okay. Now it doesn't mean he went directly to heaven. Okay. It might this might be the manner of his death. But in Second Temple Jewish thinking, they thought he must be in heaven, so he's going to come back reincarnated and bear witness to Messiah. And John is saying, I'm not him. They're asking a literal question. To put it this way. They're asking a literal question are you literally Elijah? And he says, I am not Elijah. And yet Jesus shows us, and in a way, he's instructing us in Matthew seventeen and in Matthew eleven, he's instructing us on how to read the Old Testament prophets. He's saying the prophets spoke in poetry. They spoke in imagery. They used symbols and allegory. They used metaphor in the way that they explained things. And more significantly, they used patterns or what we call types. They use patterns to describe the future in light of things that had happened in the past. So, for instance, almost all of the prophets, when they talk about the restoration from exile to the messianic kingdom. They talk about it like a new exodus. They say, actually, we're going to come out of the countries in which we were being held captive. We'll even plunder those countries will come out with riches, and it will be like the Exodus day, but it will be a new exodus. Now, they're not saying it's going to actually be a replay of the old exodus, but they're saying, you remember the old exodus. That's what the restoration is going to be like, but it's going to be greater and grander. No longer will we just be freed from Egypt, right? A human oppressor. We will be freed from Satan and from sin and from death. It's a greater exodus. Now, this is something that the Old Testament prophets did. Now, that doesn't mean that we're supposed to look for some time when we all, as as Christians go back into Egypt, are enslaved for a period of time, and then come out because of plagues, we're not expecting that. But what they're saying is, let's use this old pattern, this thing that had happened, this old story, to understand a future story. Now there's all kinds of these patterns or types that are

used. Okay. For instance, temple is another one in the Old Testament, we have the temple. And then Ezekiel says, one day you'll have a perfect temple that will fill the earth. Okay. Well, how is that going to happen? How do you build a temple that will fill the earth? Well, it's not a literal temple, but it's it's it's a, it's fulfilling what the temple of the Old Testament was. It's Christ. And now his spirit within the people of God. Paul will say, don't you know the church is the temple? That's how it's going to fill the earth. Okay. So he's using a pattern, but it's not meant to be read literally. It's meant to be read typologically or metaphorically. Now, let me argue this. Malachi is doing the same thing he's saying in the Old Testament. There's this thing we see happen. We have prophetic pairs show up on the scene. Now you have to read closely to pay attention to it. But it's something that they would have recognized as going on. You often have one who comes and announces the coming of another. And the other person does the great thing that the first person talked about. Right. One example would be this. We have two nazirites in the book of judges, two Samuel, who come and it tells us that they are beginning and bringing the deliverance of Israel. Samson is the first and the prophecy that's offered to his mom, the the wife of Manoah is that he will begin the deliverance of Israel. But then we have a second Nazirite, who comes, Samuel, the greater Nazirite. And he has a prophecy that's given to his mother and to his mom. She's told he will bring the deliverance of Israel. Samson is the lesser, Samuel is the greater. We also see this happen. Arguably, you could say this is happening between Moses and Joshua. And I know we think of Moses as the greater leader, but who's the one who actually accomplishes the conquest of the Promised Land? It's Joshua. Moses talks about it. He lays the groundwork for it, but Joshua completes it. Right now, arguably, we have two more that we can think of, right? You have Elijah, followed by Elisha. Now, I know we tend to tell our children stories about Elijah Moore because they're such vivid stories. And yet if you put side by side their resumes in terms of the things that they accomplished, Elisha accomplished much more than Elijah ever accomplished. So I want to argue this. Matthew is saying we're going to get another pair. There's going to be a harbinger who comes, and he'll begin the work. He'll lay the groundwork, he'll get the repentance in place. He'll get the people getting reconciled, fathers to sons, mothers to daughters. He's going to get the groundwork laid. And then the greater prophet will come in a way of saying that is this you need to get Elijah first before you get the second prophet, who's the better prophet. And Jesus is telling us, no, he's not literally Elijah. Just like you are not literally the stones and the, the the, you know, the tapestries and the sacrificial ornaments and paraphernalia of the temple. And yet you are true temple. John the Baptist is not literally Elijah, but he is Elijah. I like that Jesus even tells us. I'm trying to help you interpret. He goes, if you can accept it, John's Elijah. So you notice we have John coming. People are wondering, is he Elijah?

Interestingly, Herod doesn't buy their argument. He actually thinks that John died as his own prophet, as in his own role as a prophet, and that now he's been resurrected as Jesus. One thing that's interesting about that here is it does tell us something about Herod's thinking on himself. He actually recognizes this is a true prophet. He has died and been resurrected. I'm the one who killed him. What is Herod telling us? Herod's telling us I'm guilty. And it shows us a little bit of Herod's double mindedness. We'll come back to that a little bit later about what it tells us about human corruption and human oppression. Notice Herod is not, though he is not a conniving villain, he's a double minded, foolish leader. Okay? He loves John. It says he's

exceedingly sorry when he has to have him beheaded, but he still gives in to the pressure of those standing around him and from his wife, Herodias.

All right. So I want to start off with that. Why? Why this John the Baptist and Elijah confusion? And we get it at different points throughout the Gospels. Why are people asking this question? There's a good reason why they're asking it. It's not just the scribes, as the disciples say here in what we've just read, but it's also Malachi himself saying, Elijah needs to come first. He's the forerunner to announce the coming of Messiah. Now let's talk about the historical background of this troubled marriage, because if you're just reading this, it can seem quite confusing. It sort of sounds like, uh, you know, the short abstract describing an episode of, you know, *The Real Housewives of*, uh, of Judea or something like that. You know, it's kind of complicated. He's married to Herodias. She was married to his brother. The brother is still alive, and yet somehow they're married together and raising the daughter that she has from her previous marriage. Oh, not only was she previously married, the man she was married to is Herod's brother.

Okay, so just for some clarity, some of you are thinking, well, wasn't Herod King when Jesus was born? This is a different Herod. Okay, so you have Herod the Great. He's the one who was king when Jesus was born. And then you have his sons. You have the four Tetrarchs who were reigning after him. And so when Herod here is called a king, we have to first of all notice this. His name is actually Herod Antipas, and he's not king of everything. He's actually just king in the region under Roman authority. He's a tetrarch. That means because there's four of them. All right. So Herod Antipas is ruling, and he's married to an unnamed woman in the Gospels. But we know from history what her name is, but he's married to her, and he decides to. I don't know if they fell in love. I don't know if they thought this was a great political arrangement or whatever. But he decides to now marry his brother, who is alive. Okay. Who's referred to here by Mark as Philip, which is probably one of his regnal names. He's also known, possibly as Herod the Second. Philip over here is married to Herodias, and they decide we need to get out of our current marriages and marry one another. Now we know that Herod Antipas, that's the Herod of our story. I'm just trying to keep this straight, okay? Herod Antipas has already started to conspire with Herodias to marry. To marry each other and his wife. His first wife gets wind of it, runs off, tells her father, who's a Nabataean king. It leads to a battle that takes place between Judea and Nabatea, in which Nabatea loses. And it's kind of seen generally, even though he has generally the victory, it's seen as a judgment by the Judeans against Herod because of this terrible thing that he has done. But what happens? Okay. In a roundabout series of events, Herodias marries Herod. Now, just to make things even more complicated, Herodias is the granddaughter of Herod the Great under another son, so she has married one of her uncles, then left him and married one of her other uncles. Okay. Is it all clear as mud? Now everybody understand what's going on. All right, so this raises the question, what's John the Baptist beef? Is he just is he just keeping up with all of the with all of the rumor mills, he's watching whatever the old version of TMZ would be. And he's like, I can't believe they're doing this. This is crazy. No, that's not what's going on. John is recognizing that the Old Testament law that King Herod Antipas is supposed to be following because he presents himself as a righteous Judean, is being broken in this marriage. Okay. We have passages in the Old

Testament text. We have both Leviticus eighteen sixteen, which specifically says you should not marry your brother's wife. We also have Leviticus 20:20 one in which we're told, you shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife. It is your brother's nakedness. And he knows that by marrying Herodias, Herod is breaking the law and he calls him out for it. He says, not only is this unseemly. Not only is this not honoring marriage, but you're actually breaking the law that God has given us. Now, it's interesting. We do know that there's a leverette, right? There's this leverette thing that happens in the Bible, in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy twenty five, where you can marry your brother's wife if your brother dies. But that's why it's significant that Philip is still alive. Okay. Herod is not being a righteous Boaz type character and being a goel or a kinsman redeemer. Okay. He's rather stealing the wife of his brother. That's the opposite of what the Leverette commands are about. So he's married Herodias, and John the Baptist has spoken publicly against it. Now it says that Herodias had a grudge against John the Baptist and wanted him put to death, but Herod would not agree. And that's the interesting, just a fascinating passage that we have here. It says there in verse twenty, For Herod feared John. Interestingly, Josephus, the great historian of this period, says that this was the reason why Herod killed John because he feared him. However, Mark tells us, no. Herod feared John because he knew that he had a lot of people following him. Notice Jesus himself relies on this in one of his debates with the Pharisees when they ask Jesus about John and John, Jesus knows well, if I speak against John, then everyone will turn against me. And so he puts the question back on them. John the Baptist had a large following. It says Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man. So like Ahab with Elijah, we have an unbelieving king who. Nevertheless, I should be careful. We don't know the state of Herod's heart. It doesn't look good. Okay, but notice he has some discernment to recognize that this is a true prophet. It's interesting, in the Old Testament, this happens from time to time. Ahab seems to be double minded about Elijah, but he's got Jezebel whispering in his ear, telling him, no, you need to you need to get rid of this upstart, this prophet. It's interesting. We even see this in Jeremiah. There's a there's a passage in Jeremiah where Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern. And then we have this discussion that happens amongst the elders in the city of Jerusalem, where they say, well, he is saying a lot of stuff that agrees with the other prophets. Maybe he's a right prophet, maybe he's a good prophet. We see this, of course, as well with Pontius Pilate in Christ. Pilate seems to want to go with Jesus, but he gives in ultimately to the folly of the maddening crowd. So Herod, being pressured, listens to Herodias through the voice of Salome. Now, Salome is not named here, but she's named elsewhere in the Gospels. This is Herodias daughter with her previous husband, Philip. He listens to Salome's voice, knowing, knowing that it's Herodias behind it, and he has John put to death. It's an interesting story because Mark just leaves us there with this historical account. He doesn't tell us what we ought to do with it. He just tells us that after it happened, the disciples of John came and took John's body, and they buried it in a tomb. In other words, John was taken care of respectfully in death, even if not respectfully in life.

So what do we take away as followers of Jesus from this tragic and somewhat frustrating story? Because it's not. It seems to come out of folly and fears about what people think and foolish thinking and foolish counsel. You read this and you think John died for nothing. It seems like there wasn't some grand battle that ended in his death. He didn't like Martin Luther say, I shall

not, I cannot recant. And then they took his life. It had to do with him merely saying the truth about a foolish marriage. Well, I want to point out just a couple of things. First of all, this I want to notice what we see here and what we've seen in the Old Testament and what we see later on with Jesus and Pilate. I want to note the capricious nature of corrupt power. So often we think of corruption in leadership, whether it's in governments or in organizations. It's kind of a villainous thing. It's easier to be angry about it when you can paint it as deeply diabolical and conniving. It's easy to think about corruption as kind of somebody, you know, pond, you know, rolling their fingers together and saying, whoa. And having some master plan. And yet, notice most often in Scripture, the corruption of power doesn't emerge out of a conniving villain, but rather it's out of a double minded person who kind of sees the right way, but is also swayed to the wrong way. Like Ahab, Herod is not an arch villain, but rather he's more presented like a fool. Corrupt government can take the form of capriciousness, even haphazard evil. More often than not, I'd actually say that's how Satan is at work in our lives. And that how that's how sin is at work in our lives. It's not in some master plan to do evil in the world, but rather it's our occasional moment to moment bad judgments. I can think of some of the worst situations I've found myself getting into, and it's often because of just a bad judgment in a moment. So what can we do? One thing is this we can train ourselves in good practices, right? Surround ourselves with wise counselors. Not with foolish counselors, not with self-centered counselors, but for counselors who are informed by the teaching of Scripture, who has been, who have been conformed to the person of Christ. That's a great way of preventing this kind of corruption, this kind of folly. Have good voices speaking into your life. You also want to be conforming your own heart to the teaching of Scripture. You want to be going back to it regularly, daily in prayer, seeking the scriptures, returning to the Lord in repentance, doing the Lord's Day, Lord's Supper, as we're talking about here, so that you can be nourished and learn how to discern Christ in every situation. It's sad to say that so much corruption that takes place, even some of the greatest opposition to the gospel, is not because of some mastermind doing the evil behind it, but it's just folly. It's just stupidity. It's not thinking straight. It's not thinking beyond the moment. It's not hearing the word of the Lord.

So first I want to point that out. The capricious nature of corrupt power. If we recognize that, then it will help us in dealing with it down the road because so often, so often the evil that we see around us is not for some grand purpose, but rather it seems just haphazard, slapdash. It's just a bad decision at a bad moment. Secondly, I want to point this out. Jesus will tell the disciples later when he reflects on this event in Matthew chapter eleven. He'll tell us, this tells you something about the cost of discipleship. He says, John the Baptist is not a limited. It's not a specific or unique experience. This is how the world always responds to the teaching of the word. So in Matthew chapter eleven, verse eleven through fifteen that Jesus says this, truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Just ponder that for a moment. Truly, I say to you, there's no one who has arisen greater amongst all of humanity than John the Baptist. If you want to know what's a great picture of a human who's about as close to the ideal as you can get, Jesus is the ideal who's about as close to Jesus as you can get. You have John the Baptist, yet he says, and this is telling us the nature of grace in Christ's kingdom. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. You can be the greatest of all Christians. And yet in the kingdom of heaven, because all you

have to rely on is the righteousness of Jesus Christ and not your own righteousness in the kingdom of heaven were all the same. When you get to heaven, when you're worshipping in heaven, there's a sense in which you will be sitting next to believers who did much, much greater things for the sake of the gospel than you. And you will all be there, not because of the righteous works that you did, but because of the alien righteousness of Christ that was put on you. And let me tell you, that's a much better ticket than going with your own righteousness. Jesus goes on to say, from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and the violent take it by force for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. You see how John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. They prophesied until John, verse fourteen. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah to come. That's the one we just quoted. He who has ears, let him hear. So think Jesus is saying a lot. He's the greatest in the kingdom, and yet the least in the kingdom is greater than him, because we're all trusting in Christ's righteousness, not in our own. Secondly, if you are doing the work of the kingdom, do not be surprised when the powers of this world respond with violence. As a matter of fact, if they're not responding with violence, ask yourself, okay, it's not because you're a sucker for punishment. But ask yourself, am I working for the kingdom? If I'm not being opposed by the world, am I truly doing the work of the kingdom? And then lastly, he says, and this is the way it's always been. This is the way it's always been. If you have ears to hear, you can know John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. He is the Elijah who was to come. So violent opposition is common to the work of the gospel. And then lastly, I want to leave us with this though John is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, according to the passage above. And though he is martyred, okay, we should lift him up. He's been martyred. We see in revelation when John the Apostle is looking at the vision of revelation, he notes that the martyrs have this place in heaven. They have a function for what they do. Again, they're not greater than the others in heaven, but they have a job, and their job is to long for the new heavens and new earth. John the Baptist is there. He's in the heavenlies, and part of his job is to long for the new heavens and new earth, so that his body will be restored to him, because it's not right and it's not great. Okay? It's not our final form for us just to be spiritual beings in heaven with all of those other angelic beings, we have bodies and we're supposed to get those bodies back. So he's been martyred. He's in heaven. He's now longing for his body, says the John the Apostle in revelation. And yet do you notice that John himself, in his life never seemed to fully understand what his function was within the kingdom of God? I don't say this merely because when they ask him if he's Elijah, he says no, though I do wonder if that sheds some light a little bit. On how much he understood about what his job was. Did he see himself as a forerunner? In the same way that Malachi talks about Elijah who was to come? We know that he was a forerunner for something because he preached. There is one who is coming who is greater than me, and I can't even tie the sandal strap on his foot. So we know that he was anticipating something. Did he know what he was anticipating in full? And here's the other reason I ask, because we have this fascinating passage in Luke. It's Luke chapter seven, where John the Baptist is meeting with his disciples And he starts to wonder, Is Jesus the one? Is he the one who was to come? This is John seven, verse eighteen. The disciples of John reported all these things to him, the things that Jesus was doing. And John, calling two of the disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, are you the one who was to come, or shall we look for another? And when the

men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, are you the one to come, or shall we look for another? And in that hour Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind received their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up. The poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended. Who is not offended by me? It's that last line. I think he's suggesting to John. Stay strong. Don't be offended by me. I may not look the way you thought I would look. I'm coming in. Loneliness, gentle and lowly. A man esteemed not amongst us a man of sorrows. Don't be offended by me, because have no fear. I am the one who was to come.

It's interesting to me because I think about our own lives as we do whatever it is the Lord has called us to do. We all have a sense of where the Lord has placed us the friendships, the relationships, the ministries he's called us to. And yet, we can also take hope, knowing we may not fully ever understand in this life all that the Lord is doing through us. We may have doubts. We may wonder if it's really worth it. We may struggle in not seeing the goals that we set out to do accomplished in every way we imagine them being accomplished. And yet, as we see here, even though John is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, even though he was martyred for his faith, he still may not have fully understood all it was that God was doing through him. Again, our hope is in Christ alone. It's not in our understanding of the calling God has put in our lives. It's not in our understanding of what we think our lives are going to become, but rather our hope is in his righteousness. And as we come to this table now, we should remember that we are coming to this table to feed on Christ. He is present with us in spirit. And so as we come to the table, he has said, come to this table. And when you do, you're not just remembering me. We're not just going through the motions. You are proclaiming me in my death until I come again. Let's pray.