

Why Did John Die?

Introduction. John the Baptist plays a very important role in the first century. It was he who prepared the people for the coming of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3-6; Luke 3:2-6). In fact, he was prophesied as coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:16-17; cp. Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:11-12). Jesus gave him an outstanding endorsement (Matthew 11:7-11). This was a man of character, consistency, and courage.

Yet, after a time of preparing people for the coming Messiah and His kingdom, he died at the request of a wicked woman (Mark 6:14-29). Why did John die? There are three striking reasons.

I. John Died Because He Would Not Change God’s Message

- A. His preparing the common people for the kingdom included teaching about repentance (Luke 3:7-14). In his preaching, he also spoke to those in political power and warned them about their sin. Specifically, he told Herod it was unlawful for him to be married to his brother’s wife (Matthew 14:3-4; Mark 6:18).
- B. Adultery must continue to be condemned, not comforted.
 1. A scriptural marriage is one where both man and wife are bound by God for the rest of their lives. The only exceptions are adultery and the death of the spouse (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). God will judge fornicators and adulterers (Hebrews 13:4).
 2. Comfort is being given to adulterers today by various false teachings.
 - a) The teaching of Jesus was really a part of Old Testament doctrine.
 - b) The alien sinner is not amenable to the law of Christ.
 - c) Adultery is redefined as covenant breaking.
 - d) Couples in adultery do not have to separate.
 - e) An unscriptural divorce is not a “real” or “lawful” divorce.
 - f) Divorce can rightfully occur for reasons other than fornication.
 - g) Remarriage is acceptable when the unbeliever departs.
- C. Evidence of compromise with sin.
 1. The reputation of the teacher, emotions, and charges of “judging” are changing how people feel about adultery (1 Corinthians 4:6).
 - a) Some feel that we should not preach on these subjects, while others feel that we should not discuss and mark false teachers, and sadly others accept into their fellowship those who have been unlawfully divorced and remarried.
 - b) But peace at the expense of truth causes fellowship with sin, the dishonoring of Christ, the encouragement of disobedience, and it lessens respect for the truth (Ephesians 5:11).
 2. The church has an important present need.
 - a) We continue to emphasize the truth on divorce and remarriage.
 - b) We continue to warn against adultery in all its forms.
 - c) We continue to encourage purity, obedience, and perseverance.
 - d) We continue to show John’s courage in exposure of sin.

- D. Since John would not change the message, Herod had him put in prison and later killed. John was not the first nor the last to suffer this treatment for standing strong in the faith (Acts 12:2; Hebrews 11:36-39; Revelation 2:13). Yet, he stands out as a great example of faith and courage. Thanks be to God that his godly example lives on to this day. Just as Abel, “he being dead, yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4).

II. John Died Because A Wicked Woman Saw No Other Way To Silence Him

- A. It was toward the close of the banquet, when all had gotten drunk, that Herodias made her daughter dance in their midst. Herodias stooped low to degrade her own daughter like a common harlot to carry out her intentions against John. A. T. Robertson stated, “Such dancing was an almost unprecedented thing for women of rank, or even respectability. It was mimetic and licentious, and performed by professionals.”
- B. Dancing excites ungodly lust.
1. Galatians 5:19 says that one of the works of the flesh is “lasciviousness.”
 - a) “Lasciviousness” is defined as “unbridled lust, shamelessness, wanton acts or manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females.”
 - b) It is variously translated as “sensuality,” “lewdness,” “promiscuity,” “debauchery,” “depravity,” “lustful pleasures,” “lustfulness,” “shameful deeds,” and “wrong use of the senses.”
 2. This is a perfect definition of dancing and specifically constitutes both the lust of flesh and the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16). And it is powerful! Remember, Herod did not dance, but he was still enticed to sin. This is like entering a burning house to watch it burn (Proverbs 6:27; 1 Peter 2:11-12).
 3. Parents should not close their eyes to the attraction it will have on their children. Exercise parental responsibility to instruct children in the dangers of dancing (Proverbs 22:6). In this case, parental permission precipitated passion! Herodias encouraged it (Mark 6:22-24). Prepare them for the pressures of rejection and isolation for doing what is right.
- C. The group lounging on the couches were thrilled or pleased by the licentious dance of the half-naked princess. The drunken tetrarch had been caught in the net of Herodias.

III. John Died Because A Wicked Man Made A Foolish Vow

- A. Herod was “sorry” for what he had vowed to Herodias’ daughter, but he was not sorry enough to try to offer something else. Therefore, John died that day because of a man’s unruly tongue (James 3:1-6). This is yet another example of the damage that is done when people speak before they think.
- B. Promises made before God are serious.
1. A rash tongue is indicative of a hasty heart (Ecclesiastes 5:2).
 - a) Think of Jephthah after his vow (Judges 11:30-31, 34-40). Abraham Lincoln said, “We must not promise what we ought not, lest we be called on to perform what we cannot.”

- b) Tongue control means a very careful reflection of everything we intend to do in the service of God (Proverbs 29:20).
- 2. Every vow that we make had better be kept (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). Thomas Fuller exclaimed, "Vows made in storms are forgotten in calm."
 - a) This includes our vows made to God in our conversion (Matthew 24:13).
 - b) This also includes our vows made when we marry (Romans 7:1-4).
- C. Rash speech damages others.
 - 1. Our speech is tamed so it is beneficial to others. The same mouth should not produce blessing and cursing (James 3:7-12).
 - 2. This includes speech between parents and children, husbands and wives, and brethren (Proverbs 10:32; cp. 15:1; Colossians 4:6).
- D. Sadly, there are people today who, like Herodias, blame the messenger when they do not like the message. It is evident that John's faithfulness to God and His message did not waver despite cruel treatment, so she silenced him the only way she could. This treatment did not silence the gospel message, but spread it farther (Acts 8:4). This is still the case today — never back down or apologize for telling people the truth (Acts 4:20).
- E. We don't know if John was told why he was executed. It was simply carried out "immediately" after the request was made. The account is stark and sad when it says, "And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb" (v. 29).

Conclusion. Worldly-minded and foolish people are around just like they were in John's day. Yet, instead of being depressed, be thankful for John and people like him who are faithful to God to the point of death (Revelation 2:10). John's bravery in teaching and his righteous life serves as a great example. His death was not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Timothy 5:24-25; Revelation 14:13). When persecution and hardship comes, John is both encouraging and inspiring!

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