

Mark 6, 17-29.

In the sermon of last Sunday I attempted to picture to you the early life of the great ^{messenger} prophet of G, John, the Baptist. We noted some of the peculiar characteristics of his life and work. John's place of abode was in the desert or wilderness East of the city of Jerusalem, toward the dead Sea. ^{his dress} his dress consisted of a rude garment made of course camel hair, which was thrown about his body and fastened about his waist with a leathern girdle. His diet consisted of locust meat and wild honey. We also compared John with the great OT Prophet, Elijah. It was on the banks of the river Jordan, on which John was preaching that the great prophet of the OT Elijah had been taken into heaven by means of a fiery chariot. In the same territory, then, in which Elijah warned the people against an evil and sinful life, at the same time pointing them to the Saviour from sin, JX, John the Baptist appears and proclaims his message of repentance at the same time proclaiming the coming of his Master. The ~~same~~ resemblance of the two men is very striking. We see that they had the same zeal and undaunted courage in telling the people of their sins and shortcomings. Repentance was the watchword of all their conversations and preachings - and X was the only one thru whom the guilt of these great sins could be removed. Even with regards their dress and food we find that they were alike. And we note from the words of the holy Evangelist Matth, that John had great success in his ministry. People of all walks of life, including lawyers, Sc, Ph, merchants, and soldiers came to hear him proclaim his message of repentance. And so a thorough and genuine revival swept the land. But brilliant and successful as it was, the ministry of John was very brief. It was not long before he was forced to exchange his life of preaching and teaching in the wilderness, to a life of seclusion and confinement in a lonely dark cell of the prison. In order to understand the reason for such change, it will be necessary to review briefly a few particulars.

Our Text makes mention of a character with whom we are all well acquainted namely, Herod. This is the same character to whom X was sent for trial. Like all the rest of the Herods who had gone before him, he was a man with a very low type of character. As we see from the first verses of our T, he had divorced his own lawful wife, and had taken Herodias, the wife of his brother ^{Philip} unto himself. On a journey and visit to Rome, Herod had seduced this Herodias, who, as he, was a person of ill-repute. Being an unprincipled woman, and thinking that the position of Herod was perhaps a bit higher than that of her rightful husband, she left Philip and became the wife of Herod. And since Herod was a man of renown and an official of the country, this news soon spread. John the Baptist also was informed about the matter. Being a true servant of the L, and feeling the duty of his divine mission - to preach repentance and warn the people against their infamous sins, John also rebuked Herod for his ill-legitimate act. Our T tells us outright that John told Herod; v18b.
 ~~shameful~~

John the Baptist had done his duty. He had warned Herod against the sin in which he was living. However, as we may well expect, Herod could not let himself be humbled to such extent that a man in the position ~~at~~ John had should so boldly and openly rebuke him for a sin. In order then, that John would not continue his admonitions, Herod bound John and placed him into prison. This act of Herod was especially pleasing to his ill-legitimate wife, Herodias. From the moment in which John had rebuked Herod for his sin, Herodias harbored thoughts of revenge and immortal hatred in her heart against John. Her pride was hurt, and what made things worse, her conscience was accusing her, because she knew she had deserved the rebuke from the messenger of G. There was only one thing which could appease her anger against John for his scathing rebuke, and that was his life. And her opportunity came. That, with its particulars and lessons shall be the topic for our sermon this morning.

THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

In our discussion this morning we shall follow the order of events as they are given us in our T by the inspired writer or penman of G,

T. 19. 20. In order that John would not continue to accuse Herod of the wrong which he had done and perhaps even rouse public opinion against him, John was cast into prison. However, from our T we see that Herodias, the ill-legal wife of Herod was not satisfied with this action. She was determined to kill John and no doubt encouraged Herod toward this end also. But Herod was between two

ires. One the one hand his wife was demanding the death of John, and on the other hand Herod knew that John was in very good standing with the people, and any act of further unkindness against him would arouse the ire of the public. And in the mean time Herod had often listened to John, and in many cases, obeyed his warnings. So we see that John was beginning to overpower the weak and immoral Herod and was convincing him of what was right and wrong.

T. 21-29. In accord with tradition and custom in the Herod family, a great celebration was planned for his birthday. Until now Herod had not yet become king, being only the tetrarch, however he soon hoped to acquire the office as king and supreme ruler to the people. Therefore he asked all the notables and men of any standing to this great birthday festival. It requires no stretch of imagination to picture to ourselves how this banquet was carried on. All the pomp and splendor, the frequent outbursts of song and laughter, the clattering of wine vessels, in short, every form of revelry which is carried on when reason yields entirely to pleasure.

Just at the time when the joy and song of the festive banquet was at its height, and the guests in their half-reclining and semi-drunken position, the door opened and the daughter of Herodias came into the banquet-hall. She was thinly clad and decorated with a great deal of jewelry. She began to dance for the assembly. The guests had just about reached that condition when such exhibition was especially appealing to them. Even Herod was very favorably impressed with her act. Immediately he made an extravagant promise to the girl, telling her that she could choose anything as a gift, and if it amounted to half of his kingdom. Already from such promise we can see that he must have been at least in a semi-intoxicated mood. While the girl, in astonishment over the offer made to her, was thinking of what she should request, Herod strengthened his promise by an oath. Our T says v23. So Herod added one great sin upon another. However, Salome, the dancer was undecided as to what she should ask as a gift, and therefore asked for sufficient time to speak with her mother about the matter. And now the time for Herodias had come in which she should be able to seek revenge upon John the Baptist for having rebuked her and Herod for the sin which they had committed. She insists upon it that her daughter Salome ask for only one thing, namely the head of John the Baptist. In obedience to the wish of her mother, the dancer returns to the banquet hall and hurrying to Herod, said 20b. What dreadful reward to ask for such act.

And what was the reaction of Herod upon this request? Our T says, 20a. Herod had begun to look favorably upon John, and he also knew, that by executing John without cause and under the present conditions, he would surely invoke the hatred of the people against himself. For that reason he at first held back in granting this untimely request. But on second thought he remembered that he had sealed his promise with an oath, and that all of these notables present at the banquet had heard his oath on the matter. And so we again see the weakness of Herod's character come to the foreground, and he ordered that the request be fulfilled. At once an executioner was sent to the dismal prison cell to carry out the command. We shrink at the dreadful picture which rises before us. We hear the order given to bring the head of this messenger of G, John the Baptist. We picture to ourselves the descent ~~into~~ the long and dark passages leading to the prison. We hear the creaking of the rusty door which leads to the dungeon. John is suddenly awakened from his peaceful slumbers, he sees the glimmering light of the torch, sees the axe of the executioner flash in the dim light, and hears the verdict of Herod spoken on him. With a prayer to his God, John's head is placed upon the block and separated from his body. O what gruesome sight. Thus the wish and hope of the ungodly Herodias is finally fulfilled, and John's head is brought ~~upon~~ upon a large platter to the banquet hall. And Josephus a noted historian tells us that Herodias continued to show her contempt and hatred for John who had rebuked her because of her adultery, by running needles thru his tongue.

There are several important lessons which we may draw from our text. We cannot pass the incident of our T by without a remark, ^{about amusements} which is very much in season. We must all have amusements of some sort from time to time. The call for them lies in the social nature of every one. However, we should be very careful in choosing our amusements. We may classify amusements into three classes:

Some are innocent and lawful in whatever light they may be viewed. They may be used by every one with good results and for the enjoyment of all. Other amusements are sinful and unlawful in whatever light they are viewed. Such, of course should be avoided by every decent person, especially by a Xtian. There is, however a third class, which in themselves are innocent however, they become unlawful and inadvisable for a Xtian, because of the circumstances which go with them, and the dangers and sins into which they so frequently lead one. Into this dangerous class we must class the public dance. With regard to the amusement which led to the martyrdom of John the baptist, we must say that it is being practised very commonly throught our nation, and especially also in our own city. In spite of all the arguments which may be advanced in its favor, we must keep in mind that it is an amusement of and for the world. And, in speaking on this matter, I am speaking as a Xtian to a Xtian. Let us look at this amusement and consider it frankly. The act of dancing is not sinful in itself. Nor do I wish to give the impression that every one who attends a public dance can be accused of having fallen into "gross sins which so often follow the dance. But whether you are guilty or not, you will nevertheless be classed as a member of that group who practise those sins, because you have been seen with them. An illustration will perhaps show this most clearly. A pastor was speaking with a young lady of his congregation about the dangers of the public dance. She could not see why he should object to this general amusement. Finally the pastor arose, went to the stove and picked up a piece of charred wood. He offered it to the young lady. ~~with the words, it will not burn you, take it.~~ ^{and said, "It will not burn you, take it."} But, she answered, I will get black if I take it. And so it is with the public dance. You may not become burned or singed or become guilty of gross sins, however, you will receive a black name. And remember, if you have once lost your good name among people, it will take you a long time to regain it. But with a Xtian, the question arises, can I keep my good name in the eyes of G? Or am I subjecting myself to dangers of sin when I could be avoiding them, and yet have just as good, clean, amusement. Can a Xtian, who has pledged his allegiance to his G and wants to serve Him only, willfully walk into the snare of Satan. When you plan to attend places of questionable sort, such as the public dance, ask yourself the question "Can I take my LJ with me to this place? Let that be the judge of your actions remembering that all eyes of the world are focused upon you a XTIAN.

Another lesson which we should learn from our T is this. John saw the sins of Herod and Herodias and boldly told them about it. He realized it as his Xtia duty. Do we always realize this and in a spirit of brotherly love warn our erring brother? John had to suffer death for it, but the L knew that he had performed his duty, and even before the revengeful murderers had the chance to see the head of the martyred John, his soul had been crowned with a crown of blessedness from the righteous judge, JX. With regards the murderers, the words of our L, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the L" were slowly but positively fulfilled. The father of Herod's divorced wife waged battle against him and defeated Herod in a complete defeat. To add to this misfortune, a short time later the Roman Emperor removed Herod from his throne, and cast him, dishonored and banished into Gaul, where Herod and his evil companion died in exile and poverty and disgrace. As to the girl who danced before them at this festival, Salome, it is reported that she perished miserably on the ice while attempting to cross a frozen river in Spain. So justice, tho it seems to have a foot of velvet and a hand of steel, will win out. Be not deceived, G is not mocked. For what a man soweth, that shall he also reap."