

What Kind of King is Jesus?

Devotional #11, Mark 6:1-29

He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name 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." ¹⁵ But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ 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.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² For when Herodias's 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." ²³ And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." ²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Today's Gospel reading could be called "A Tale of Two Kings." We see both King Jesus and King Herod exercising their royal authority among their closest followers. The contrast could not be clearer:

King Jesus speaks the truth and demonstrates His power as king so clearly that people are left stunned and puzzled. They ask, "*Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?*" (v. 2) He then gives authority to His twelve closest followers, whom He sends out to preach the Gospel and cast out demons. His reign thus brings wisdom, power, deliverance from oppression, and salvation from sin.

King Herod is precisely the opposite kind of king. He throws a big party for himself on his birthday, full of self-indulgence. He also gives authority to one of his subjects, his step-daughter. Only instead of giving her authority to proclaim forgiveness and deliver people from demons, Herod gives her authority to kill an innocent man and have his head presented on a platter.

We can judge rulers by what they do and by what they empower their followers to do. President Ulysses S. Grant was generally considered an honorable man himself, but he allowed many in his administration to abuse their authority, and so he is remembered as an effective general but a poor president.

Sadly, we have to acknowledge that much evil has been committed in the name of Jesus by those who claim to be His followers, but the true followers of Jesus have been the greatest force for good the world has ever seen. The followers of Jesus have created the world's first hospitals, universities, public schools, and orphanages and created just war theory and the concept of universal human rights. They have also led the way for the elimination of foot binding in China, widow burning in India, slavery in the UK and the US and a whole host of other evils around the world. In all, the kingdom of Jesus has been the source of more good in the world than anything else in the history of the world, by far.