

The Sending and Suffering of God's Servants (Part 2)-Mark 6:14-29

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 6:14...

We often mistakenly assume that if something works for one person, we can copy and paste it and receive the same outcome. But that's not always the case. For example, I found my wife on social media for those who don't know. Long story short, I loved what I saw outwardly and inwardly, and I shot her a straightforward message on Facebook. I basically told her that I'd like to get to know her for marriage. Now, you may hear that and think, "Well, it worked for him; if I slide into the DM's of my crush, that'll end in marriage as well." I'm telling you now that may not be the case. You may end up blocked and reported to the authorities.

Or perhaps you've seen this trope in movies, particularly comic book movies. An ordinary citizen receives extraordinary powers by getting struck by lightning, and someone else covets this power is determined to be struck by lightning. Still, it doesn't end so well for him. Time and time again, we don't seem to grasp that the same work doesn't always equal a matching result.

This goes for ministry efforts as well. Ministry is not a copy-and-paste results-based matter. I've seen this in my own life. I've been in some settings where I share the gospel, and there seems to be abundant interest and even conversions. And then, in other contexts, not even the crickets are making a noise. This is why I think many "church growth strategies" that find their origins outside of what is prescribed in God's Word are just scams. They're a way to make money from small church pastors desperate for their church to grow. No one can guarantee you growth because that's not how it works. Again, disciple-making is not a copy-and-paste results-based matter.

We find evidence of that in this very passage. Last week, we considered the commissioning of the apostles. When we consider the words of Mark, it seems as if the apostles were engaged in fruitful ministry. Verse 13 states, "And they cast out many

demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” And then verse 30 says, “The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” This should be the Christian’s dream! Going out and engaging in fruitful ministry, witnessing the supernatural, and beholding God’s work in the hearts of people who repent and trust the good news. Excellent!

However, this isn’t always what follows churches or individual believers on mission. The other side of the coin is persecution (both social and physical), harassment, oppression, maltreatment, intimidation, terrorization, and, yes, even death. I think this is what the author is trying to get us to see. This is why Jesus tells his disciples not to root their joy in “ministerial success.”

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”
-Luke 10:17-20

“You better find your joy in the gospel and my finished work because ministry isn’t always going to look like this!” And boy, did his disciples discover this truth as all but one died a death of martyrdom. Last week, our main idea was that the Lord Jesus has commissioned New Testament churches to go and preach repentance to the nations. We considered the discontinuity and the continuity between Jesus’s direct commands to his apostles and churches today. The first point was “*The Commission: Proclamation* (vv. 7-13).” This morning, we’ll consider “*The Consequence: Persecution* (vv. 14-29).”

Herod was puzzled by the reports of miraculous powers at work. So much so he was under the impression that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had risen from the dead more powerful than ever! Well, what was the impetus behind John’s beheading? We find it in verse 18. John had been calling Herod to repent of his sin. John would have most likely been quoting Leviticus to expose the sins of Herod and Herodias.

¹⁶ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. -Lev 18:16

²¹ If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless. -Lev 20:21

So just as the apostles were commissioned to go out and preach repentance, as we see in verse 12, John the Baptist was commissioned to do the same. He called men to turn from their sin and turn to Christ.

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. -Mark 1:4

So here we find John explicitly calling Herod to repent, eventually leading to his demise. Allow me to touch on the unpopularity of “repentance.” We’ll consider:

1. What is it?
2. Why do people hate it?
3. Why must we preach it?

So, what is the message of repentance? Last week, we considered the wisdom of Puritan Thomas Watson and how he defined repentance. Here was his definition again: “Repentance is a grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.” I believe he’s right on the money. He also identifies six ingredients of true repentance.

1. The sight of sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred of sin
6. Turning from sin and returning to the Lord

And we can find all of this in one text. Consider the minor prophet of Joel with me.

¹² “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. -Joel 2:12-13

The Lord commands them to see their sin, possess sorrow over it, confess it, be ashamed, and return to the Lord. The New Testament word for repentance literally means a change of mind. It’s essentially a change of heart. Where you initially

cherished sin and devalued God, repentance means you no longer have the same heart posture towards evil, and you now view God and his Son as precious. The package of true repentance includes life transformation. Anyone who says they've repented while lacking a turning away from sin is either lying or deceived. John Piper stated, "This turning is the heart's redirection from prizing this world to prizing God." Listen to John the Baptist describe repentance:

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance... ¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." -Luke 3:7-8, 10-14

So, John the Baptist understands that what will follow genuine repentance is a transformed life or a turning from sinfulness.

2. Why do people hate it?

First, we'll look at the root reason. People hate the message of repentance because they love their sins more than they love God. It's that simple. This is why Herodias became so angry that she wanted John the Baptist dead. This is why Herod placed him in jail for daring to call him to repentance. We are naturally more enamored and impressed by sin than we are by a holy God. We prefer to bow at the altar of an artificial idol than to acknowledge and serve the God in the heavens, who is eternal. We prefer to give ourselves to sexual impurity than lay prostrate before the God of the Bible. We prefer money over the Messiah, Greed over God, sensuality over the Savior, drunkenness over the divine, and anger over the ancient of days. We don't want to let go of our sins. And anyone who tells us to do so is in the wrong.

Here's another reason why people hate the message of repentance, particularly in our culture. There was once a time when the church occupied the moral high ground in most people's minds. The idea was that society at large would be better if everyone attended church and lived according to the Bible's moral code. To be clear, that's not to say that most people were Christians, but the positive sentiment of Christianity was ubiquitous. However, now, many people believe the church and what it stands for are bad for society, and therefore, those who preach repentance are antiquated and intolerant. Recording artist Macklemore had this to say in his song entitled *Same Love*:

“The right-wing conservatives think it’s a decision, and you can be cured with some treatment and religion, Man-made, rewiring of a pre-disposition, playing God, aw nah, here we go, America the brave still fears what we don’t know, and “God loves all his children” is somehow forgotten, but we paraphrase a book written thirty-five hundred years ago...It’s human rights for everybody, there is no difference, live on and be yourself; when I was at church, they taught me something else, if you preach hate at the service, those words aren’t anointed; the holy water that you soak in has been poisoned.”

As you may have heard, preaching to turn from sin is now deemed hate and bigotry. And I’m sure one could argue that John the Baptist was being intolerant. Nevertheless, we are called to preach that humanity must repent of sin to be made right with God. Perhaps you’re here this morning, and that describes you. Maybe you aren’t extremely hostile to the gospel; otherwise, you wouldn’t be here. But perhaps you cringe at the idea of telling people how they should live. Well, dear friend, here’s something to ponder. You, too, preach a message of repentance. Perhaps you care about matters of justice, and therefore, you preach equality or equal treatment under the law. You are essentially telling those who are unjust, racist, or sexist to repent of their wrong. You rightfully think that the murderer should repent of his killing. But, friend, there is no standard of right and wrong apart from the God of the Bible, who has revealed himself. Think about it: whose standard of right and wrong wins? Apart from an authoritative word, how do we determine what message of repentance we should teach? The God of the Bible has made this clear in his word. Sin leads to death. Therefore, we preach to repent of sins so that people may receive eternal life. Please talk to someone after service if you’d like to discuss the gospel and repentance in more detail.

Now, believers, you must understand that in our day and age, repentance will isolate us and make us the villains. Particularly as we prophetically preach against the sins that our culture adores. This may include speaking the truth to those who possess political power. We have to be careful that we don’t become known more for our political conflicts than our gospel witness; however, we also mustn’t be scared to preach against the social norms of our day. We preach that life is precious in the womb because of God’s Word, despite what the world and political leaders tell us. We preach that our gender is assigned by God at birth, despite the laws that legislation passes. We preach that our sexuality is precious; therefore, we can’t do with it whatever we want. This won’t win us a popularity contest. It actually may lead to others metaphorically asking for our head; however, we must remain faithful to what God has commissioned his church to do. This brings us to our final subpoint regarding repentance.

3. Why must preach it?

There are several ways we could approach this. Ultimately, we preach it for the glory of God or to remain obedient. Both of those reasons are very true. But I'm going to give more time to this last reason. We preach repentance because it is necessary for salvation. To be a healthy church, we need a biblical understanding of conversion. There is a notion that repentance is unnecessary for salvation; all God requires is belief. This simply can't be true because there are several New Testament texts where repentance is clearly required. We considered one earlier where John the Baptist calls his audience to repent. Here are a few more:

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." -Acts 11:18

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. -Acts 2:38

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent...-Acts 17:30

¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me... ' ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance -Acts 26:18, 20

So, we preach repentance as we preach the gospel, that those in the world would turn from sin and follow the Lord Jesus. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Let's keep reading to verse 20.

There seems to be a dichotomy here with Herod. On the one hand, he imprisons John the Baptist for his offensive preaching. While on the other hand, he was perplexed and heard him gladly. I hate the Cowboys as a team. And I despise that some assume I'm a Cowboys fan because I'm from Texas. But I must admit, as a football fan, I was impressed by the beatdown that they gave the Giants. Although I hate the team, it was nice to watch them. I genuinely enjoyed seeing their talent. Often, this is the world's relationship with the Christians who live godly lives. Even though they hate our message, there are times when our godly behavior perplexes them, like what we see here with John and Herod.

Dylan Roof, the mass shooter who slaughtered nine church members at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, was filled with hate. He was literally engulfed in hatred; however, he told police that he "almost didn't go through with it because everyone was

so nice to him.” Their godliness perplexed him. I was watching CNN, and someone referred to Tim Scott, a known Christian, by saying, “I know the man. I’d do anything for him but vote for him.” Even though he profoundly disagreed with many of Scott’s political views, his genuine godliness perplexes this individual. This is what our good works do to the world. While I’ve noticed that some Christians, particularly on Twitter, seem to think they gain points by being jerks and then yell persecution because no one likes them.

The gospel is offensive enough; we don’t need to try to make it more offensive with our rude behavior. We see the opposite commanded in Scripture.

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. -1 Peter 2:12

So, there’s even an evangelistic element in our ethic of love and good works. Our persecutors may come to faith. There’s an old story of a growing church in Nepal. A pastor in the States tells the story: “A pastor invited me to speak at his church. Then, two years ago, six Christians’ houses were burned completely [by persecutors]. When I went back to the church, there were 85 Christians in the church. The first time when I went, there were only 24 Christians.

“I asked, ‘How did the church grow?’ The new members said, ‘These wonderful Christians forgave us after their houses were burned down, and we believe in Christ now because of them.’

“One of the reasons the church is growing in Nepal is because of the Christians’ patience toward the persecutors.”

So, while we preach repentance to nonbelievers, our lives should be marked by forgiveness, grace, and love. How have you treated your political or ideological opponent? The world and the various news stations will spur on your flesh to remove the image of God from these individuals to the point where you only see them in terms of an adversarial avatar. That’s how you know you’ve been too influenced by something or someone other than the Bible. Our mission is not to stick to the other side with rude comments on social media or any other type of interaction. Preach the gospel, and live in a way that convicts the individual who persecutes you if that be God’s will. Let’s reread verses 21-29.

Again, there’s a direct juxtaposition between the apostles’ fate as they preach and John the Baptist here, which reveals that God has a plan that apparently isn’t equal. Comparison is the thief of joy, as they say. While you may experience rejection and trials, you may glance over and see another believer engaged in the same mission, which seems carefree. At times, it’s seasonal; as we know, the apostles are all treated horribly, most of them killed. Remember when Peter asks Jesus about John?

18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” 20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” 22 Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”-John 21:18-22

Jesus doesn't want Peter to spend his time concerned with his plans for John, as they're different. John happened to be the only apostle who wasn't martyred. The point is this: God is sovereign, meaning he controls everything. He's the ruler, and his providential plans cannot be thwarted. These plans won't look the same for all people at all times; therefore, we're not to look over at one another in envy. We should instead expect persecution if we're obedient to God's Word.

It's crucial we understand that trials are a part of God's sovereign plan; otherwise, when those trials come, particularly in the form of persecution, we'll end up questioning our Lord. This is what happens with John the Baptist.

And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” 20 And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ -Luke 7:19-20

John the Baptist is questioning whether or not Jesus was the Messiah because he's sitting in a jail cell while the kingdom of God is supposedly here. If we don't expect persecution and have a biblical category for it, we, too, will question God's sovereign reign. Now, notice Jesus' response to John.

22 And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. -Luke 7:22

Last week, we considered that these authenticating signs were meant to prove to the people of Israel that the kingdom was being inaugurated. Hence, Jesus wants John the Baptist to be informed of these signs. John the Baptist needed an “already but not yet” understanding of the kingdom. Consider what Jesus says about John the Baptist during his doubt.

24 When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25

What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." -Luke 7:24-28

Consider the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus! He could've taken this time to berate and scold John, but instead, he speaks highly of him. What a gracious God we serve. Perhaps you've doubted God in times of hardship and wondered if God views you differently. Be encouraged by this text. He's gracious towards his people because he's taken their place, which leads us to our last point.

This story does more than teach us that persecution shall come with living as faithful Christians. It's anticipatory in its nature. Only two passages in Mark aren't about Jesus; they're both about John—this text, along with 1:2-8. But they are really about Jesus because they foreshadow much about Jesus. When examining 1:2-8, we considered how John's ministry pointed to Jesus insofar as he was the forerunner of Jesus' message and ministry. In this passage, John is also the forerunner of his death. Mark is preparing us for Jesus' death with this story. This story encapsulates the miscarriage of justice that will be fully displayed during the passion narratives. Both John and Jesus were killed by men who vacillated back and forth, but in the end, put them to death because of the fear of man. Both deaths were the result of political manipulation. And both men were innocent victims. However, there's one crucial detail that separates the two. Jesus was not only innocent of the crime charged against him but also of all sin. Here's the first time in human history that a good man is dying.

And this would have been extremely relevant to the church that Mark was writing this gospel to in Rome. They were experiencing suffering at the hands of an evil tyrant. And yet, we find a motif of suffering and success in Mark's gospel. No servant is greater than his master. Since they hated Christ, they will hate us. And some of us will even be beheaded. But now that Christ has risen and succeeded by defeating death, we no longer need to fear persecution! The Christian hip-hop artist KB said, "What they goin' do? Murder us? What murder does, is send a surge of us, to go put churches up." So expect hardship and persecution in this life, saint, if you faithfully preach repentance. But also remember we have a forerunner in Jesus who succeeded past death, and so will we.

Let's pray.