

## **Keeping Our Heads About John the Baptist Losing His And So Also About Apparently Random Disasters In Our Own Lives**

**Mark 6:14-29** 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." But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of 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 to put him 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. 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'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." And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask 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 gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

A GENERAL QUESTION: *Why is this story included?*

A SIMPLE ANSWER: John the Baptist was a well-known person and the story of how he died is interesting. BUT all sorts of things are interesting ... and there isn't a lot of room in a "gospel" for every interesting detail! So then, WHY?

NOTICE THE CONTEXT: GENERALLY → **Mark 1:14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God... So this is "back-story."

IMMEDIATELY → The neighborhood where this story lives...

- i) **Mark 6:1-6** Jesus is rejected in his own hometown (*with where THAT would go!*)
- ii) **Mark 6:7-13** Jesus prepares his disciples to be rejected too (*with where THAT would go!*)

SO? Mark had two big things in mind, and included the details of John's death with them in mind.

- 1) The suffering and death of Christ
- 2) The suffering and death of Christ's followers.

HERE'S WHAT BOTH SETS OF SUFFERING AND DEATH HAVE IN COMMON:

- a) **Terrible!** → And therefore **disheartening**.
- b) **Seemingly random:** "Some bad luck!" → And therefore **disillusioning**.
- c) **Purposed by God in his justice as Judge and his faithfulness as Creator!** (Just about exactly the opposite of what it seems to be!) But this third "thing in common" we notice from comparing the story of the "bad luck death" of John with other big pieces of Scripture.

### **NOTES:**

To start with what should be obvious: what is plainly stated about the specifics of the death of Jesus...

- 1) **The immediate causes of the death of Jesus were only apparently random.**

**Acts 4:24-28** "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed' — for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place....**"

**2) The apparently random details of your life** (“good” and “bad”) **are also loaded up with the purposes of God.** General principles that guide our understanding of the potentially disheartening and disillusioning details of our lives: *Randomness is an illusion!*

**Proverbs 16:1** The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

**Proverbs 16:9** The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

**Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

**Matthew 10:29-31** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

*The point?*

**1 Peter 1:6-7** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, **if necessary**, you have been grieved by various trials, so that **the tested genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**So then we read these ideas back into the “apparently random” death of John:**

- a) Herod’s moral weakness
- b) Herodias’s grudge
- c) Her daughter’s sex appeal (?)

And we come to the conclusion that these details, and many other “randomnesses” along the way, were the means by which the story of John’s life and death played out as God in his justice as judge and his faithfulness as creator worked out his good plan.

**And now we can read these ideas forward into all the details**, especially the disheartening and disillusioning details, **of our lives!** But can we DO that? The death of Jesus was a very important death. John the Baptist was a very important person. Do the same principles about “non-randomness” apply to the not-so-important, ordinary people like you and me? Good question! Answer: Yes, which we can see by comparing ourselves to some very unimportant first-century Christians: slaves.

**1 Peter 2:18-20** Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For **this is a gracious thing**, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, **this is a gracious thing** in the sight of God.

**ACTION, with Two Specifics:** (regarding your life’s “crummy details”) → **Follow the example** of Jesus.

**1 Peter 2:21** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

“example” = [Greek]: “hupo-grammas” = ‘underwritings’

**Specific #1: Don’t speak of the details sinfully**

**1 Peter 2:22,23** He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten...

**Specific #2: Do keep entrusting yourself to God**

**1 Peter 2:23** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. *“just Judge”*

**1 Peter 4:12,17,19** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you... For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?... Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. *“faithful Creator”*

And here to help you in this are **TWO REALLY BIG IDEAS...**

**Romans 8** makes it plain, **everything** going on in your life, the nice and the grievous, **is intended** by your faithful Creator **to make you more like Jesus.**

**John 15** makes it plain, **everything** going on in your life, the nice and the grievous, **is intended** by your faithful Creator **to make you more fruitful for Jesus** (More about this next Sunday!)

But today, can you simply entrust yourself to Jesus, and believe with the apostles that he has your life, in every detail, under control, even if that seems exactly not true, and he is justly and faithfully working out his good plan in you and through you for you and for the good of many many people?

So go ahead and have a happy long weekend: be filled with joy and peace as you trust and obey God: and abound in hope. He is the God of hope!!!

**Romans 15:13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.