

A CHARACTER STUDY OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST

Lesson 7

WHAT KIND OF MAN WAS JOHN
THE BAPTIST?

Mark 6:1-29

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Adult Sunday school Class

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For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Mark 6:20

John the Baptist was a remarkable man in many ways. It has been said that He was a mentor to the young Lord Jesus before He began His ministry. Jesus came from Nazareth to Galilee to be baptized. By doing so He was recognized as a prophet by John. (Mark 1:9) When Jesus' authority was questioned by the chief priests, and scribes and elders, He referenced John's baptism to underscore His authority to work the work of God in Jerusalem. (Mark 11:27; John 1:29,36) The ministry of John the Baptist is recounted in detail in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John the Apostle gives an interesting perspective in chapter of one of his Gospel. Mark also sheds light on

the work and character of John and gives his own interesting perspective. In chapter six of Mark's Gospel, we see how the ministries of Jesus and John were related.

In chapter six Jesus has returned to His home town of Nazareth. He had hoped to do mighty works for those He grew up with and for His family. The people of Nazareth were amazed at his wisdom and insight into the Scriptures. *"And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?"* (Mark 6:2) In the Gospel of Luke the story is related of how he went into the Synagogue in Nazareth to read the Scripture. While there He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. That passage describes the work of the Messiah. When he closed the book he said, *"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."* (Luke 4:21) In doing so, He was claiming to be the Messiah. The people were shocked and offended. They became incensed and were filled with wrath. They tried to throw him from a cliff. Mark

tells us that they were *“offended at Him.”* (Mark 6:3) It is amazing to a New Testament believer how anyone could be offended by the Lord Jesus. They could not see how this Man who had grown among them could be so brash as to blaspheme in this manner. *“But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”* (Mark 6:4) They rejected the blessed Lord Jesus as their Messiah. How this must have burdened the heart of the Lord. Maybe that is why, when He heard of the trial of then faith of John the Baptist who was in Prison, he said, *“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”* (Matt. 11:6) The sting of the rejection of Nazareth must have still been in His heart.

In Mark six the story of John’s death is placed in the middle of the story of His rejection in Nazareth, and the ministry He sent His disciples to accomplish. It has been speculated as to why Mark placed John’s story in the middle of this narrative. It serves to link by foreshadowing Jesus’ death at the hands of public officials with John’s death. The story of Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth is

part of this foreshadowing. In the story of Herod's beheading of John insight is given into the character of John the Baptist.

Jesus was working mighty deeds in the land and news of His deeds had reached the ears of the king, Herod. His conscience was causing Herod to wonder about these deeds. *“And king Herod heard of him; [Jesus] (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.”* (Mark 6:14) In Herod's mind John was such a righteous man that it would not be unheard of for him to return from the dead and do miracles. He had such a powerful testimony that he was considered to be a supernatural person. John the Baptist had constantly preached about the sin of Herod in his taking as his wife his brother, Phillip's wife. This constant rebuking of the monarch over this sin infuriated Herodias. She insisted that Herod place John in prison. Herod did so, but regretted doing it. Herod thought John to be a “just man and an holy,” and he, Herod observed him, that is he protected John.

“When he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.” (Mark 6:20)

Herod knew John to be a Holy man. He knew that John lived a life of dedication to God. He was a just man, that is, he preached against Herod’s sin because it was the right thing to do. He listened to John’s teaching willingly, but he never let John’s exhortation to righteousness move him to change his way of living. All these characteristics of John stand as powerful examples of the kind of man that John was. When Herodias’ daughter demanded the execution of John the Baptist, Herod was very sorry but he had to keep his word. *“And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.”* (Mark 6:26)

John the Baptist was a man chosen of God to prepare the way before the Lord Jesus. “It is an important fact that John was beheaded for righteousness’ sake. In so doing he precedes the King who died because of His righteous character. Plummer notes, ‘John preceded the Messiah in birth and in mission; and now he precedes him in a violent death.’” (Toussaint. P. 189.) John

was the kind of man who preached righteousness even though it caused him the loss of his freedom and the loss of his life.

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