

Title: THE GREATEST PROPHET, MARK 6:14 – 29
(Chatham, NJ; 07/15/12, AM) [Pc – Narrative Analysis]

Theme: The life of John the Baptist is the story of the struggle to establish the rule of God in the midst of the Kingdom of darkness and evil.

Purpose: To relate John's story and to demonstrate the trials that the church must face today.

Introduction:

1. Mark uses a flashback to tell of the death of John: Herod seems to think that Jesus is John resurrected from the dead, 6:16.
2. Jesus has called him the greatest of all the prophets and has identified him with the Elijah that was predicted to come (Malachi 4:5; Luke 1:17; Mt. 11:14).
3. Like Elijah he called people to repent, and he confronted the rulers of this world.
4. What can the church learn from his life?

I. First, a Story Summary without the Names

A. The summary

1. A man of integrity and righteousness
2. He creates a grassroots movement among the common people
3. It gets the attention of the religious and government officials
4. He runs afoul of those officials by confronting their sins (whistleblower?)
5. He and his movement suffer misunderstanding, lies, and injustice
6. Eventually he is marginalized, rejected, imprisoned, and/or killed

B. The same story played out many times in many places

1. The prophets Elijah and Elisha
2. Confucius was born during the lifetime of the prophet Daniel: the ruler his state, who had gained his power through usurpation, asked him for advice on how to rule, "Confucius replied tartly that he had better learn to govern himself before trying to govern others." The ruler ignored the advice and marginalized his influence (gave him a government post with no authority)
3. Gandhi would be a contemporary figure by whose influence British rule came to an end peacefully but was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist
4. Dr. M. L. King should certainly be on the same list with such men and with a similar story

II. Second, the Story of John with Names Included

A. The narrative of John

1. Even more than a man of integrity: a man chosen by God (Luke 1:17)
2. His preaching turns many away from sin and prepares them for Jesus
3. Religious leaders hear of his work, Mt. 3:7-10
4. They didn't accept his authority (Mk. 11:30-33), hence he was marginalized
5. He confronts Herod over the matter of his marriage to Herodias (Mk. 6:18); she held a grudge
6. Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that Herod's affair with her began on a visit to his brother's house; she had the reputation of being power-hungry
7. She has nursed a grudge against John and finds the opportunity at a lavish party by means of her own daughter
8. In the eyes of the world, John was a troublemaker and therefore expendable

B. What drives the drama

1. The injustice of it all: John beheaded for no crime at the whim of a ruler's wife

2. John's concern for God's law of marriage (Brad Pitt's mother criticized Obama's stance on homosexual marriage and has received death threats because of it)
3. His rejection by religious and government authorities
4. Herod's lavish party vs. John's austere lifestyle
5. Herodias' vengeance
6. Her daughter's compliance (she receives John's head, gruesome)
7. Herod's duplicity: he receives John's message but is more concerned about public opinion
8. His disciples bury him; Jesus goes away, Mt. 14:13, to mourn (?)

III. Third, What We Take Away

- A. Was John's life wasted?
 1. His influence is still with us
 2. Herodias could only take his life, not his words
 3. "Whoever does the will of God abides forever," 1 John 2:17
- B. What compels/inspires us?
 1. John sacrificed his life on behalf of the Kingdom of God
 2. He was more than happy to let Jesus have the glory
 3. Are we ready to face such oppression and injustice for the sake of God?
- C. How should our lives conform to John's?
 1. Repentance and righteousness
 2. Live among the people and let our lives be a witness: engage them and seek to bring them into the Kingdom
 3. Deny the pleasures of the world in order to serve God (Moses, Heb. 11:24-27)
 4. Trust God no matter how much evil people threaten (1 Peter 2:12 & 23)
 5. Fulfill your Christian calling: Jesus considers those in the Kingdom of God to be even greater than John, Mt. 11:11

Conclusion:

1. The story of John has been repeated in church history often.
2. Sometimes we have to endure things on behalf of the Kingdom of God.
3. John's life, even in his death, assures us that our struggle is worth continuing.
4. We stand on his shoulders and see Jesus, the author of our faith.
5. Let us continue to gaze at him and be faithful, Heb. 12:2.