



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark 6:14-29 The death of John the Baptist (11 July)

In Mark's gospel, we hear about the reactions of different people to Jesus. Here, Mark tells us about the reaction of Herod, who wonders if Jesus is John the Baptist come back to life. Then, as a sort of digression, Mark tells us the story of how John was killed.

For Jesus, John is Malachi's promised 'Elijah' – the one who would prepare Israel lest the nation come under God's judgement (see Mark 1:1-18; Mal 3:1). His execution does not bode well either for Israel or for Jesus, himself also a rejected prophet. Herod's puzzled interest in John is not unlike the crowd's interest in Jesus, though in neither case does curiosity alone save. The length of this account of John's death emphasises its importance: John was Jesus' forerunner in both his life and his death (see also Mark 9:11-13). Just as John was killed as a result of his uncompromising speaking out, so too will Jesus be.

1. What reason might Herod have had for thinking that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead?
2. How does the death of John cast an ominous shadow on Jesus' future?
3. What is Mark telling us by highlighting the similarity between Elijah and John? (See Mal 4:5-6.)
4. This passage is sandwiched between Jesus sending the twelve and them returning. Can you think of a reason why Mark might have chosen to put it here?
5. It seems that Herod feared and listened to John. Why then did he have him beheaded?
6. What Christ-like qualities can you see in John the Baptist?
7. How might Herod's ambivalent attitude to Jesus be repeated in the attitude of non-believers to believers today?