

Summary

This sermon, preached from Mark 6:14-29, explores the story of John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution at the hands of Herod Antipas and Herodias. The pastor opens with a sobering account of 300 churches in India being burned to the ground because of militant opposition to Christianity, setting the stage for a deeper look at why the world opposes the Christian faith. John the Baptist is presented as a courageous preacher of God's Word who confronted Herod's sinful and unlawful marriage, ultimately paying for that faithfulness with His life. The contrast between John's integrity and Herod's cowardice serves as a powerful reminder that standing on God's Word carries real cost. The sermon draws four key applications from this passage. First, God's Word can be offensive because it confronts sin and unbelief. Second, when God's Word offends us personally, the right response is repentance. Third, when God's Word offends others, believers are called to stand firm with grace and truth rather than anger or compromise. Finally, Christians in free nations are urged to pray earnestly for the estimated 388 million believers worldwide who face persecution, discrimination, and even death simply because they love Jesus. The example of Finnish Parliament member Paivi Rasanen, who stood firm under police interrogation and multiple court trials for publishing biblical truth, is offered as a modern-day illustration of courageous, grace-filled faithfulness.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You grateful for the freedom to gather and study Your Word together. As we open this discussion, we ask that You soften our hearts and quiet our minds. Help us to set aside our own agendas and preferences, and give us a genuine hunger to hear what You want to say to us today. Where Your Word challenges us, give us the humility to receive it. Where it comforts us, let it draw us closer to You. May this time together not simply be an exchange of ideas, but a moment where You move among us and shape us more into the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing you remember being taught as a child that turned out to be really important to how you live today?

Key Verses

- Mark 6:14-16
- Mark 6:17-20
- Mark 6:21-29
- Leviticus 20:21
- Leviticus 18:16
- Hebrews 4:12-13
- Mark 4:24-25
- Hebrews 11:4

Questions

- The pastor opened with the story of 300 churches in India being burned to the ground because of Christian faith. How did that account affect you, and what emotions did it stir up?
- Herod is described as someone who enjoyed listening to John the Baptist but never obeyed what he heard. In what ways can we fall into the same pattern of enjoying sermons or Bible study without letting God's Word actually change how we live?
- John the Baptist preached God's Word boldly even when it directly confronted those in power. What do you think gave him the courage to do that, and what can we learn from his example?
- The pastor said that when God's Word offends us, the chances are 100 percent that God is right and we are wrong. How do you personally respond when Scripture challenges something you believe or a choice you have made?
- Repentance is described as turning away from sin and turning toward the Lord. What does genuine repentance look like in everyday life, and how is it different from simply feeling sorry or guilty?
- The pastor encouraged believers to stand firm on God's Word with grace and truth rather than anger or harshness. What does that balance look like practically in your relationships, your workplace, or your community?
- Paivi Rasanen described 30 hours of police interrogation over her biblical beliefs as '30 hours of Bible study with the police.' What does her attitude reveal about what it means to hold convictions with joy rather than fear?
- The sermon highlighted that 388 million Christians around the world are currently persecuted for their faith. How does that reality change the way you think about your own faith, your freedom to worship, and your responsibility to pray for the global church?

Life Application

This week, identify one area of your life where God's Word has been challenging or convicting you, and take a concrete step of obedience in response. This might mean having an honest conversation, changing a habit, or simply spending time in prayer and confession. Additionally, commit to praying each day this week for persecuted Christians around the world. You can use a resource like Open Doors (opendoorsusa.org) to find specific prayer requests for believers who are suffering for their faith. Let your gratitude for religious freedom fuel both your personal obedience and your intercession for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Key Takeaways

- God's Word is powerful and penetrating. It confronts sin, corrects unbelief, and calls every person to account, which is why it can feel offensive to those who are unwilling to submit to it.
- When God's Word convicts us personally, the right and only healthy response is repentance. Listening without obeying, as Herod demonstrated, leads to spiritual hardness and ultimately to loss.
- Believers are called to stand firm on the truth of Scripture when the world pushes back, but that firmness must always be wrapped in grace, love, and genuine respect for others as people made in God's image.
- John the Baptist's life and death remind us that faithfulness to God's Word may come at great personal cost, yet those who stand firm are remembered and honored while those who oppose God's truth ultimately lose everything that matters.
- Christians in free nations carry a responsibility to pray actively and consistently for the 388 million believers worldwide who face persecution, discrimination, and death simply because they love Jesus and will not renounce their faith.

Ending Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the time we have shared together in Your Word today. We are grateful that You are patient with us, that You speak to us through Scripture, and that You never stop working in our hearts. Where You have convicted us today, give us the courage to repent and follow You more closely. Where You have called us to stand firm, give us the grace to do so with love and truth, reflecting Your character rather than our own pride or fear. We lift up our persecuted brothers and sisters around the

world, the 388 million who suffer for loving You. Comfort them, protect them, and strengthen them. Remind us not to take our freedom for granted, but to use it faithfully for Your glory. May we leave this place today more committed to obeying Your Word, more grateful for Your grace, and more willing to stand firm no matter the cost. In the strong and saving name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.