

The Reward of John the Baptist

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Preacher: Chad Bennett

[0 : 00] Please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, and we're looking at the 14th chapter today.

So Matthew, chapter 14, verses 1 through 12. Matthew, chapter 14, we'll begin reading in verse 1.

At that time, Herod, the Tetrarch, heard about the fame of Jesus. And he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead.

That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

Because John had been saying to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people because they held him to be a prophet.

[1 : 08] But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod. So that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

Prompted by her mother, she said, give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter. And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guest, he commanded it to be given.

He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl. And she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it.

And they went and told Jesus. Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And as we come to this passage, it's hard to hear.

It's hard to visualize and consider. But Lord, it is your word. And we pray that by your spirit you would open your word and help us to understand it. And that you would encourage us from it.

[2 : 06] So speak to us now from your word, we ask in Christ's name. Amen. Well, we're looking today at the death of John the Baptist. We started this passage last week.

And I really only made it through the character of Herod. We talked about there would be a character study between the two. And today we're coming back and we're looking at the death of John the Baptist. Now, we talked last time about the place of this in the gospel.

Why is this here? And I want to just refresh your mind on why this is here. So we're moving as we progress along in the gospel of Matthew. We're moving into a time of greater rejection of Jesus.

Not only by the religious leaders like the Pharisees, but also by the crowds of the people. And so Matthew's illustrating this as we progress through that there's more and more rejection of Jesus. And so in this gospel about Jesus, he includes this story right here in the middle.

And I said last time that I think the reason for this we see in verse 13. Now, when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

[3 : 09] And so Jesus is about to move more into desert regions, away from the rain and the power of Herod. Well, why? Well, this story really forms for us a story of why Jesus is going where he's going.

And so it's a transitional story for us in the gospel of Matthew to understand what's going to come as we continue studying through the gospel of Matthew. Another point that I'd like to highlight is we've just finished the kingdom parables.

And Jesus has been describing the glory of the kingdom and how great it is and how we ought to desire the kingdom. And you may remember this has been expressed in different ways. We had the parable of the sower was one example.

But maybe one of the other more famous ones was he talked about the parable of the merchant and the pearl and the treasure hidden in the field. And so he talked about that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field.

And when a man finds it, what does he do? He goes and he says everything he has, he might have that treasure. And then he also, at a very similar one, he compares it to a merchant who's searching for this pearl of great value.

[4 : 15] And he finally finds this pearl of surpassing value to everything else he's ever found. And so he sells all his other pearls. He gives up his collection. He sells all he has that he may gain that pearl. And I really think that one reason this is included here is that Matthew is helping us to see an example of what does that look like?

And so today as we focus on the character of John the Baptist, we see an example of someone who has grasped the value of the kingdom of heaven. And they're willing to give all to have that kingdom.

And so we see that illustrated for us in this character of John the Baptist. So I want to look at a few aspects of John and his life and his death. First, to consider that John was a righteous man.

In the parallel account in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6, verse 20, it said that Herod feared John knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.

So here's this religious leader, excuse me, here's this political leader who knows of John, not just has heard of John, but he actually knows him to be a righteous and holy man.

[5 : 21] And so his character was such that even those who were unbelievers, the political leaders of the day, they knew him and they knew of his character. We even see in verse 2 why Herod had fears.

And he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. He feared that God had vindicated John's righteous life.

He knew that what he did was wrong, we saw this last week, that what Herod did to John the Baptist was wrong, and now when he hears these stories of Jesus, he fears that John the Baptist would come back to life.

Why? Because he thinks he's so holy, such a righteous man, that God would bring him back to life. And again, resurrections weren't a common day thing, but he thinks that if there's anyone whose life deserves to be vindicated, it's John the Baptist.

And this, again, is by an unbelieving political leader who's no follower of John the Baptist. We read in verse 5, it says that the people held him to be a prophet, which in fact, John was.

[6 : 27] He was the first prophet that had been for at least 400 years. There had been no word from God until John the Baptist comes onto the scene. And he was sent to prepare the way for Christ.

So he's not just any prophet, we understand that he's a unique prophet that had the special responsibility of preparing the way for the Christ. And so he is a very special prophet, but he is a man of God.

We see also that John the Baptist did not compromise on the issue of sin. I think, again, of our day and age, how common is it even to have religious leaders who are compromising on issues of sin?

We said just a couple of months ago, there's a very popular denomination in America that's splitting right now over the issue of female pastors and homosexual or transgender pastors.

And they're splitting over it. And so it's very common even in our day to see religious leaders who aren't taking a stand on issues of sin. But look at verse 5. I'm sorry, look at verse 4.

[7 : 35] Because John had been saying to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. So here's John, this religious leader, who's going to the political leader of his day and saying, your adultery, your incest, is sin before God and should not be done.

That takes some great boldness. We're going to talk some about his boldness. But it also takes a stance where you say, right is right and wrong is wrong. There's absolute truth.

I know that sounds crazy in our day of relativism. There's absolute truth. God has declared that what you're doing is wrong. You cannot do this. And so John stands for truth even when it's unpopular.

And so I think we could add to that that he does not conform to his culture. John was weird. In a good way, if you'll allow me to say. But he didn't fit in with the culture.

I think oftentimes we worry that if we take a stand for God, we're going to be weird in our culture. Well, you will be. Right? I don't want to argue that's okay.

[8 : 39] John was weird in a good way. Really, we could say John was weird in several ways. You may remember he went out to the desert. He lived out in the desert. He wore camel hair skin for clothing.

He ate locust and honey. I mean, just think, if there's a guy going around eating locust in our culture, he would stand out a little bit. Now, I've learned that in certain cultures in Africa, they still eat locusts and things.

So maybe it's more cultural, but he's out there eating big grasshoppers. Okay? And that would be strange for us. He's unique. But what we see about John is that he was not willing to compromise with the culture.

He, even going out into the desert, was in some ways getting away from the culture, calling people out to him. Romans 12, 1-2 says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. That's true of John. Right? He wasn't conformed to this world. Rather, he allowed his mind to be renewed and transformed by God's word.

[9 : 56] Now, I want to be careful. I'm not a proponent of asceticism. If you're familiar with asceticism, it's this whole idea that we get completely separated from the culture. Even to some extent, we punish our bodies, we torture ourselves.

I mean, John was wearing this rough garment and things like that. I'm not proposing that we become ascetics. Right? We need to be in the world but not of the world. But my thought is that most of us aren't struggling with being too far removed from the world.

Asceticism isn't the struggle for most of you in this room. I'm not having to fight you to say, look guys, I really think you ought not move out to that shed all by yourself in the woods and get one-on-one with God. I can't even go beyond that and say, in some ways, there's something wrong with that because God's made us to live in community.

He's made us to worship together and so living off in the ivory tower may sound great. There's no temptation out there, right? No, you take your own sinful heart out there so you're still tempted. It may sound great to some but my guess is that's not most of your struggles.

Maybe a few of you are struggling with this. But this isn't everyone's struggle in the room. Probably the struggle that we have the most is being too conformed to the culture. We're too immersed in the culture. It's become so common in America that we don't even notice it anymore.

[11 : 10] We don't realize how much we've given ourselves into the culture. So I think you can allow me the liberty just to encourage maybe a hint of asceticism in us if it means that we need to be careful not to conform to the culture.

We need to be mindful of ways that we've given in. Ways that we've started saying things are okay that the Bible says are not okay. John stood by God's word even when it wasn't popular.

We also see John's humility and his deference to the Lord. Now if you'll allow me just to flip through some other passages to illustrate this. Matthew chapter 3 verse 11 and verses 13 through 14.

This is Jesus' baptism. And John says I baptize you with water for repentance. Now this is before Jesus comes to the baptism. He's baptizing others. He says I baptize you with water for repentance but he who is coming after me is mightier than I whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. I'm not worthy to carry his shoes around. Now I've said before especially in our family shoes aren't a real popular thing nor is foot odor.

[12 : 19] Right? I mean this isn't a glamorous thing to carry around someone else's shoes but John says I'm not even worthy to carry around shoes of Jesus. That's how much higher than me he is.

And then when Jesus came it says came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him John would have prevented him saying I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?

So there's a humility to John the Baptist and there's a deference to Jesus Christ. He's not one who's standing trying to take the place of Christ bring glory to himself. I may mention this later but well Matthew 11 11 Jesus said truly I say to you among those born of women there is arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

So if I want to continue with the character of John the Baptist there's no one greater than John the Baptist who's ever lived. that's what Jesus says. And then when it comes to John's relationship to Jesus Christ he says I'm not worthy to carry his shoes.

Do you realize how tempting it would be? Oftentimes think of the end of numbers. Moses says and Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth.

[13 : 32] He writes that inspired by the Holy Spirit and I think the second I ever wrote that I'd be like oh yeah man I'm great and then you wouldn't be humble anymore. The second you realize you're the most humble person on the planet wouldn't you cease to be humble.

And I think here's John the greatest man how easy would it be to be tempted to make much of yourself? But he doesn't. In fact later on we read in John 3 28-30 John says you yourselves bear witness that I said I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him.

the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase but I must decrease. And so here he is he's rejoicing in hearing the voice of Christ.

But that final statement I think is so powerful in terms of humility. I must decrease but he must increase. And so there's a desire in John to make much of Christ to increase Christ to bring him glory that's due his name.

[14 : 47] And so we get a sense there of his character his holiness his righteousness. Secondly I want you to see that he was a courageous man. He was a courageous man.

We've already touched a little bit on this and what we've seen in Matthew 14. But as I said earlier in the face of a political ruler one who proclaimed himself to be king John stood before him and boldly proclaimed his behavior to be sin.

Now this may come as a surprise but kings don't like to be confronted like this. Right? When you're the ruler you have all the power you don't like other people telling you that the things you're doing are wrong. Maybe if you're a really noble king but in general kings don't like to have their rule their decisions challenged.

And so there's inherent danger in speaking the truth. And I can say as well that there's safety and silence. So what do we oftentimes do when we're presented with that choice?

My thought is that oftentimes we do this cost analysis in our head. Right? We start doing what's it going to cost me if I speak up and what's going to happen if I keep my mouth closed?

[16 : 01] And we start running through the scenarios trying to decide is it worth it for me to speak in this instance? And so you can imagine if John the Baptist were thinking that way the cost analysis what does it cost him?

Just his head. Right? It's only going to cost him his life if he opens his mouth. But he does it anyway. And I think what are the things that sometimes make us keep our mouth closed?

Do we worry are they going to unfriend me if I reply to this post? Am I not going to get the raise at work? My friend's not going to talk to me?

Am I not going to be invited to the family get-togethers anymore? They're not going to want to talk to me? I think there are levels at which we draw the line that's far lower than where he draws the line.

Remember one of the things we said is that this is illustrating for us what does it mean for someone to find a treasure of great value and sell all they have to get it? Well one of the things you have is what?

[17 : 05] Your head. Right? That's something you have. Are you willing to give your head? I know that sounds almost crazy for us to ask. But you have to imagine that John understood the cost.

If he keeps his mouth closed he's safe. He doesn't have to deal with Herod. But what's going to happen if he goes to Herod and says what you're doing is sin. You've sinned against God.

You've sinned against your brother. This is wrong. You should not do this. And he doesn't. I think this kind of courage is really a mark of a godly man. Nehemiah sits 10 through 11.

You may remember the story from Ezra and Nehemiah that Nehemiah has returned. He's helping to rebuild Jerusalem and ultimately seeking to rebuild the temple. And he's challenged all along the way.

In Nehemiah 6 10 through 11 we read Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah who was confined to his home he said Let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

[18 : 07] Let us close the door of the temple for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said should such a man as I run away? I just think what boldness what courage.

Here's someone trying to encourage him let's go hide in the temple because it's holy ground they're not supposed to kill you there. But to do so would be to shrink back from what God's called him to do in leading God's people and rebuilding the temple.

He says no am I such a man as I'm going to run away? Here's another example Acts 5 27 through 29 This is speaking of the apostles they set them before the council and the high priest questioned them saying we strictly charge you not to teach in his name yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us but Peter and the apostles answered we must obey God rather than men.

There's a great summary statement of a view of a courageous man when it gets down to it there's a decision to be made how do I make my decisions? I must obey God rather than men.

I believe that just reading the signs of where we are culturally and where things seem to be headed this is going to be the kind of thinking that's going to have to go through all our minds more and more in years to come. Are we going to obey man or are we going to obey God?

[19 : 31] Now we know Romans encourages us to obey the governing authorities in as much as don't contradict God but there's going to be more and more opportunities where we're commanded or encouraged to accept things that biblically are wrong maybe to teach things that are biblically wrong to uphold things that are biblically wrong and it's going to be so easy to shrink back in fear and to think that if I just keep my mouth closed then I don't have to deal with the consequences but I think here's another example here are the apostles Peter and some of the apostles they're commanded not to speak of Jesus you can kind of understand that in some ways this sounds easy doesn't it?

All you have to do is not do something not doing something is easier than doing something we understand this right? Just keep your mouth closed that's all you have to do to obey but they have they're compelled they feel a positive command that they must obey God God's command is we tell people about Christ and I think most of us aren't being commanded to keep our mouth closed about sharing the gospel and yet we're doing a mighty fine job of keeping our mouth closed aren't we?

Because we feel pressure elsewhere without even being commanded we feel it's going to affect relationships it's going to be hard to do this we've done the cost analysis and we're not willing to pay the price and I think what's being illustrated to us here in John the Baptist is exactly that parable he's one who's willing to pay the price even at the cost of his own life one more example from church history that probably you're familiar with one that I love is Luther at the Diet of Worms Luther said there fully understanding what the consequence would be that we know that there's a death sentence that's put on his head he's ushered out he's hidden he gets away but there's a death sentence and he didn't know that there would be any deliverance he said at the Diet of Worms unless I'm convinced by scripture and plain reason I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils for they have contradicted each other my conscience is captive to the word of God I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe here I stand

I can do nothing else God help me amen we need that kind of boldness and that's exactly what I see in John the Baptist speaking to Herod the kind of boldness that can stand and say I know what the consequences are but unless I'm convinced biblically unless I'm convinced of this my position is not going to change here I stand I cannot do anything for Luther there's no other choice is he going to deny the truth of God's word that's not even an option we obey God not men and so forget the popes and their councils we don't obey them we obey the word of God and that's what he stands by and so I want to encourage you that we need to share that boldness of John we need absolute moral convictions that are based upon the truth of God's word in an age of relativity moral relativity now

I know we had some discussion afterwards even some people we were discussing we were discussing Herod as a political leader and I made some comparisons to the political leaders of our day but I think here again we see a contrast we see that John is courageous by conviction he's courageous because he has a conviction that he must obey the word of God and this isn't a gray area here God has called adultery and incest sin and therefore he's got no other option by contrast you may remember that Herod decided what was expedient he did what he thought would be popular with the people his decisions were not based on conviction they're not based on absolute truth they're based on what's going to give me the most power what's going to make me popular with the people and so again without getting deep into the political realm let me just say what we need as a country even is leaders who will stand based on conviction and not based on what's popular or what's expedient we need leaders that are going to say this is the truth of God's word and so I stand by that truth even if it means they don't get elected may God raise up men who will stand for such truth and I pray that they will be elected and it would be a blessing to our country but here we see the example of a courageous man who's courageous because he's convicted by the word of God thirdly I want you to see John's reward

[24:17] John's reward this wicked man Herod in order to keep his power takes the head of the godly man John John is finally executed as a result of a fleeting promise made by a drunken leader to a dancing girl I mean really what a sad end this is for a faithful prophet I know the way that people think often times and the conclusions go something along the lines of why would God allow this right we think that there should be a one to one correlation in this world this life between how someone lives and what they get in life but there's not and we see this with John godliness often goes unrewarded in this life I mean even my title John's reward is somewhat mocking because John's reward is he loses his head he dies for standing for truth and this really beds the question in what profit is it to serve

God is it worth it to serve God why would I want to do that I said this in my application or it's later in my notes but let me say here that this isn't the kind of way that we present the gospel usually is it when's the last time you shared the gospel with someone hey I thought maybe you were interested in losing your head today would you like to become a Christian right we don't just share the gospel like that right we don't see many tracts going around how to lose your head for Christ I mean that's not usually how we present the gospel in fact the popularity the popular religion in our day has really become the prosperity gospel if you believe in Jesus you're going to be rich happy and blessed in your life rich happy healthy right rich happy healthy that's what's going to happen if you believe in Jesus well again we see that's completely contradictory to the truth of God's word that's not what it says and if we present the gospel in that way we're telling a lie if someone comes to Christ because they're coming for their health or for their happiness in one sense or for their financial wealth they're not really coming to Christ at all are they they're coming to the God of money they're coming to the God of health they're coming to the God of hedonism whatever it is they're worshiping it's not ultimately

Christ and so we need to be careful in how we present the gospel but it begs the question what profit is it to serve God well I think we need to be encouraged that Christians must not expect our reward in this life our hope has to be in things to come the person who finds the value of the kingdom of heaven it's not the kingdom of this world right I think Jesus has already set this up that this is a spiritual reality that isn't immediately visible to the world it's not tangible it can't be touched in this life but when you see the value of the kingdom remember what we saw in the kingdom parables it's worth it so I said it's somewhat mocking to say John's reward but I want to argue that it's worth it John's reward is greater he gave up his head he gave up his life to gain a far greater treasure but the reality is for Christians it doesn't mean we're going to get in this life we shouldn't view Christianity it's just an add-on to the already great

American life life here is great even the poor in our country are living better than the rich in other countries it's really a great place to live right now and what makes it even better is to be religious too and be moral and spiritual and that's not how we ought to see Christianity or present the gospel so we must not expect our reward in this life but we must hope in the things to come but you have to imagine this had to be a disappointing end to the ministry of John the Baptist maybe the imprisonment may have been harder than the martyrdom just like Peter and the apostles said they have this compulsion to want to share about God and to be locked up in prison and to fill the confinement of that and yet we understand that God's plan is perfect and John had put his hope on those things to come not on the immediate J.C.

Ryle says let all true Christians remember that their best things are yet to come let us count it not strange if we have sufferings in this present time I think I've told you before there's this song and it says if you're living your best life now you're headed for hell and I think it nails exactly the problem with that kind of mentality God hasn't promised us our best life now our best life is in the life to come if you're living your best life now it means what's to come is worse and so you're headed for hell if you're living for now you're not living for eternity and so we're encouraged to set our sights on eternity and live for what's to come we have to understand as well that God is still sanctifying us he's still teaching us we're learning patience perseverance gentleness meekness which we can never learn if we had all our good things now if all we knew was good things now we wouldn't grow in these kind of ways we wouldn't be sanctified the way

[29 : 31] God is sanctifying us he's preparing us he's conforming us to the image of his son but we await a rest that's a heavenly rest that will be will make it all worth it our light affliction which is only for a moment is working for us in an exceeding weight of glory that far surpasses it all and that's the hope that we have to cling to as Christians and I believe that's what John lived for I mean to be a martyr requires you really to live for the eternal otherwise you denounce your faith and you turn away if life is more important than Christ then you're going to choose to deny Christ that you may have life imagine that there's many in this room who are facing various kinds of trials and afflictions today I just want to encourage you that our hope has to be eternal I think often times maybe we can catch this even how we pray that often times we pray that circumstances will change that this circumstance or that circumstance will be different

I think one reason for this is that we imagine that if the circumstance changes the problem will be removed and I think that's really a wrong mentality often times the circumstance can change and the problem still remains because the problem has a lot to do with us maybe we think we won't be as sad as disappointed as depressed as anxious if this would just work out and then maybe God in his grace even works it out and we find what happens a week down the road we just replace it with something else to worry about and we imagine if circumstances would change things would be better but the reality is that we're hoping in the circumstance itself instead of hoping in God and what we need to be encouraged is to place our hope in God place our hope in eternal things because what happens we can't really afford to lose all things until we can count them rubbish compared to knowing

Jesus Christ which again takes us back to the kingdom parables are we willing to sell all are we willing to give all to have Christ to know him now I want to make just a few points in application first I want you to see that this story reminds us of the kind of world that we live this world does not want to be told that it's sinful that's broken God's law right more and more we see this I think in our culture we're becoming more and more aware of that probably than we ever have been that people just don't like to be told that what they're doing is wrong and I said before not me personally but I think there's a clear argument in Romans that there are no atheists people want to deny that God exists why because they love sin and if God exists and he said that this is wrong then I've got a problem doing it so if I can imagine that God's not there

I can keep on in my sinful life and we see this more and more in the world we live in to stand for God means to stand against the world and to find the world opposed to you and maybe that's hard for you today maybe that's something that sounds quite frightening right do we really want the world the culture that we live in to be opposed to us to be against us maybe even to find ourselves vastly in the minority when everyone else is standing against us but we have to remember what Peter said it's better for us to obey God rather it's better if it ends in you getting killed it did for Peter and the apostles right they all died eventually from this so how is this better we have to believe that God is faithful to keep those promises and there awaits for us greater reward in eternity now

I've said before that about the tracts you never see tracts or gospel presentations that say if you just believe in Jesus you could get your head cut off but my question today is is God worth it for you what if we did present the gospel that way today is God worth it for you what if you knew that we lived in a country where professing faith in Jesus Christ would mean that you die maybe this week it's not going to be postponed they find out they're going to carry you out of your house they're going to put you to death is Christ worth it would you profess faith in Jesus Christ to me I know there are ways we can answer this question where we're not faced with it that maybe are illegitimate maybe it will look different when we're actually faced with that but I think this is partly an answer to how genuine is our faith the kingdom parables is Christ worth everything to us well if we say he's worth about 80% of my life but there's other things

[34 : 46] I don't want to give up I'm really attached to this head of mine I don't want to lose it if he's not worth it then have we really trusted in Christ at all so as I said John is an example of the parable of the treasure and the pearl he gave all to have that treasure I mean really he has given everything I think probably for all of us there's some things that we must surely be prepared to die for what are you prepared to die for what would you be willing to die for is it for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ that you would die thirdly I want to let me just state the fact that this is not just the tragic experience of John the Baptist maybe it would be great if we could imagine that this is one isolated incident that this isn't common this doesn't happen what we see is John the Baptist is a precursor for what's going to happen with Jesus Christ right

John in some ways is setting a pattern maybe we could say he's not setting a pattern because he's really following in the line of prophets that have all or many of whom have been put to death for their testimony but John points to Jesus and we see even in this story that Jesus reminds people of John the Baptist here thinks this is John the Baptist come back and so there's this pattern that's being communicated to us and maybe we could say it who calls us to take up our cross and follow him all the way to the place of the crucifixion what John experiences is exactly what Jesus is going to go through not too far from now he's going to stand for what is true he's going to stand for God he's going to cost him his life and then he says to his followers take up your cross and follow me cross means some level of sacrifice for

Jesus Christ please understand that cross by definition means ultimate sacrifice it means death our day and age maybe the example would be if Jesus said take up your electric chair and follow me the conclusion we would say is electric chairs can be kind of heavy you know it's a burden that someone has to carry you know he just means do hard things for him no be prepared to die right there's a one to one correlation between electric chair and death like people don't just keep electric chairs in their home because they're cute right I know we wear crosses around our necks and we have a cross up there we have crosses everywhere and maybe we're just used to that but understand what he's saying is take up your instrument of death and carry that for my sake so just carry around with you carry your electric chair around with you so that when the time comes for them to put you to death you're prepared you're ready here it is I got it for you I'm just going to sit down I mean you're ready and I think this is what Jesus is saying he's setting for us really a paradigm this is what ministry is going to look like this is what serving

Jesus looks like this is a norm in many ways what we've experienced long time but don't we see it waning I think we need to be realigned with the expectation that following Christ means death that that day may come for any of us in this room there really is no other way to serve Jesus faithfully than to walk in his steps by bearing our cross and enduring the cost the servant is not greater than the master they hated Jesus they'll hate us also I were saying what's true they hated Jesus look you're a sinner I can understand why people would hate you sorry don't be mad at me but I can understand why people would hate any of you in this room Jesus is sinless he was holy he was righteous and he was still hated and put to death and you're not better than he is it should not surprise us that servant gets the same treatment as the master and so this is a sober reminder about the general costliness of ministry in

Jesus name and in hostile world not just for John but for Christ and therefore everyone who follows in his footsteps in ministry but fourthly now this is fifthly I want to encourage you of the glories of martyrdom this is probably something you don't hear a lot of sermons about but I really want to focus on this how glorious martyrdom is this is weird I want to be careful but my desire would be that we would raise up martyrs in our church not because people being put to death is great in and of itself but how glorious that God would raise up a man such people who are willing to lay in their life for the sake of Jesus Christ and so again I want to be careful but let me say my take is that martyrdom is perhaps the highest calling of a Christian to follow in the footsteps of their Savior to be put to death as Christ was for following God now let me base this on something other than just my opinion consider where

[40 : 16] John is now Revelation 6 9 through 11 11 heard should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

I could spend a great deal of time just exposing this. Let me just start at the end and say, God has a set number of martyrs. God has established there will be this many people who will die for their faith in Jesus Christ.

And so then we have this picture, and where are the martyrs? Now, I'm always struck by, they seem to have some preferential treatment there in heaven. They're under the throne. There's a group of martyrs, they're there together, they're under the throne, crying out to the Lord, judge those who have slain us.

Judge the world. And God's answer is, I am, but not yet. Because there's more yet to come. The glories of those who have died for my sake are not yet complete.

There are others who will bear witness to me in this way. You may have heard before that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. The church is grown in many ways by those who have laid down their life for the sake of the church.

[41 : 48] Now, I said, where's John now? So there's our answer. We're actually told, here's where John is now. He's under the throne, crying out to God. He's given a white robe and told to wait a little longer. That's a great place to be.

Right? Would you not? Think of the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field. What would you give to have? I mean, have you guys gone to concerts lately? We looked at concert tickets recently. And the price to get seats up near the front, under the stage.

I mean, there are tickets that are like \$1,200 now. I'm like, I have the CD. I can just listen to it. I can just pretend, right? Why do I have to sit that close to them singing? It's the spit zone. Right?

Why do I have to be that close? What would you pay to be under the throne of the creator of the universe, the holy God? Just your life. So we've established, where's John now?

Where's Herod now? I mean, do you get the contrast that's made between these two characters? Here's Herod. He will not listen to John. He will not repent. Why? The answer is given to us.

[42 : 54] Because he feared the people. He didn't want to upset them. And so, he behaves the way, I mean, because of the hardness of his own heart, because of his sin.

But he wants to keep his position of power, and that dictates everything he does. And in the end, what happens? He dies. And he loses it all. All the power. All the sinful pleasure that he lived for.

He was not willing to give up the adultery. We talked about just the party that he threw, and what it must have been like. He's unwilling to give those things up, and so the reward for all that is, he loses it all.

But he who, for my sake, gives his life, gains his life. And here's John. I should make clear. Herod, I mean, even to the day of Jesus, we see there's no repentance.

I feel confident, unless something happened later in Herod's life, that he's in hell now. He's lost all that joy, all that pleasure. And here's John. The guy who wore camel skin, lived in the desert, was eating locusts and honey.

[44 : 03] Not living his best life now, is he? But now he is, isn't he? Because he's in the presence of his Lord, seated under his throne, crying out to him, singing praises through his name, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

A white robe. Herod, who was ruled by sinful pleasures and the desire to keep power, has lost both. John, who humbly served the Lord, is now in Jesus' presence, experiencing fullness of joy.

And I would even go further to say, what's told to us of Christians is that Christ is reigning on his throne, and that we, in some sense, are reigning over the world as vice regents still, as under shepherds, under Jesus.

So, Herod wouldn't give up the authority of this small region around Jerusalem, and he's lost it all. John, submitting himself to be put to death for the sake of Jesus Christ, is now reigning over the entire world.

What a contrast that is. And I think this even beds the question, who are the great men of our age? Who are the great men of our age? I think about history and who's going to be remembered.

[45 : 14] We can talk about presidents and political leaders. But those really aren't the great men of our age, are they? Hebrews 11, I think, helps us understand the great men of our age.

In verses 36 through 38, we read, others suffered, and he's already given a long list in Hebrews 11, if you're familiar with the passage. But let me just skip to the end.

He says, others suffered mockings and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sewn in two.

Just mentally picture that for a second. They were killed with a sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats.

Does it make you think of John the Baptist? Destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

[46 : 13] Wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. So we have, to my knowledge, one place in the Bible that proclaims, who are the men of whom the world's not worthy?

Men like John the Baptist. It's going to be just the ordinary Christians. Ones that we know nothing of. They're names. That stood for Christ and died for Christ. Killed by the sword.

Sawn in two. Stoned to death. Destitute. Afflicted. And the world isn't worthy of such people. We have to get that kind of mindset in our mind.

Or we'll never be able to face this kind of persecution. To face death. We have to understand that these are the men who the world's not worthy of. It's not the wealthiest men of our day.

It's not the most politically powerful men of our day. It's not even the great inventors. It's not Nobel Prize winners. So does it stand for Jesus Christ.

[47 : 17] That the world's not worthy of. What's great about martyrdom? Let me expand just a little bit further. Well, what I see as great about it is this.

The extent of the sacrifice and the willingness to suffer demonstrates the extent to which they treasure God above all things. There's no greater sacrifice that can be paid than by your life.

And so it's one thing to go to your neighbor and say, I love Jesus Christ. I want to tell you about the gospel. It's another thing to say, And I'm laying down my life for Christ. You basically, you bat what you said.

I know I've said I really loved him. I'm going to show it to you. Greater love have no one than this, so he lay down his life for his friend. And so the extent displays the value, the treasure we have of Jesus Christ.

So suffering displays to the world the supremacy of Jesus' worth above all other treasures in our life. He's worth more. I'd rather have Jesus than anything else. And so John is an example of the man who finds the treasure and gives it all to have.

[48 : 31] Gives all to have it. My prayer is that the same would be true for all of us who are here today. There may be opportunity in your life to display it. There may not be. But there are ways in which that we live that out each and every day.

Is Christ our treasure above everything else in life? Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for Christ.

We want to thank you that this Christian life is worth it. Lord, we know it may not be worth it in this day in terms of what we live and what we face. And in fact, to follow you actually means that we're going to face similar tribulation and suffering.

But Lord, we count the cost and say it's worth it. Lord, help us to treasure you and your son above all else in this world.

That we would lay down our possessions, even our head, if we're called to, to follow Christ. And Lord, we pray for our congregation that you would raise up among us men and women who would be willing to go to the very ends of the earth to take that gospel to people who have never heard before.

[49 : 48] Lord, we think of even people like the Moravians who would pack their luggage in their casket knowing that they were going to die. We pray that you'd raise up people who valued Christ that much among us.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.