

Series: John the Baptist #1699

Title: John 1; Mark 6

John the Baptist Gets Beheaded!

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Welcome back. We have one more, what I am calling, element in the character of John the Baptist to cover and we will be coming to that today. Before we get there, let me remind you John is a man of deep character and the Bible says he serves as a witness and testimony to Jesus Christ. And in this we learned something about who God is: God intentionally and purposefully sends His witnesses out into the world to testify about His Son Jesus. God sends just the right witness to testify at just the right time. God is purposeful. He sets in motion the life of John and He builds into this life certain elements of character necessary for John the Baptist to fulfill his mission.

And the Baptist is indeed a credible witness. In the court of law the only good witness is a credible witness, and this John is such a man. And that's important to know as we prepare to talk about his testimony next time.

Let me say to Christians listening that we are witnesses who give testimony to Christ. And in order to be credible witnesses, then we must also be a people of sound character. So what does your life say to others about who Jesus is? Something I have found very convicting in studying the life of John the Baptist is his commitment in word and deed to exalting Christ by humbling himself. This is a practice that we too can follow. John models this for us, and we really must learn from him and do likewise.

Too often when we discuss how to witness for Christ we jump to the methods. But when reading Jesus one becomes immediately impressed with how much He thought about who we are as people on the inside – the content of our living, as it were. The Apostles, such as John, Paul, and Peter pick right up on this in their writings to the early churches. And what they teach is that who we are on the inside is what most impacts our testimony on the outside. So as Christ followers we want to pray for and press for the Holy Spirit to refine our character.

Let me give you an example: humility. Humility is first a character trait. That is, a person develops humility on the inside before it shows on the outside. So we can pray a very specific prayer to God and ask Him to make us humble. Now *that's* a scary prayer, isn't it? Few are the people who pray it. You're nervous that if you say this God's going to be quick – *really speedy* – in answering that! It may take Him forever to give you a spouse or a new, satisfying job, but you ask for humility and KABOOM you'll be flattened!

Well, humility does require a flattening! And it's essential to the character of someone who is a witness and testimony for Jesus. As Jesus Himself was humble, so too we must be humble. Then, as you find the Holy Spirit humbling you, you'll be humble in practice. Isn't humility a way where Christ can be more exalted by you? Your life is not about *you*. Your life is about Christ.

For example, let me speak to the working man and woman as well as to the student. Do you work in a team? Do you have assignments that are to be completed with input from others? How about this: humble yourself by sharing credit for success with others more readily, freely, and easily. And should the group you work or study with fail, take the blame and put it on yourself! Shoulder responsibility even if you do not necessarily "have to." This attitude – practiced by the Christian – will speak loudly to the people around you of your humility. Rather than being quick to take credit in success or tardy to accept responsibility in failure, be quick to give others credit in success and fast to take ownership when there is failure. This is only one example. Do not get wed to the example!

And remember: I am not asking you to just go out and be immediately humble. Ask God to make you this way, otherwise what I have suggested here will be too unnatural and the people in your team will pick up on the lack of *genuine* humility. John the Baptist exalted Jesus by humbling himself and that made him a credible witness. Let us do the same.

Give this thought and prayer. I have already been doing the same in my life. With that in mind, let's get to the eighth element of strong, godly character in John the Baptist's life and it is this: the eighth element of John the Baptist's character is that Herod beheads him! And you might say, "Well that is an outward action by Herod, not an inward character trait in John." Oh no? You can always tell a lot about a person's character from the way he or she dies. Same with John. His bold, no holds barred, prophetic preaching ministry of repentance had him beheaded! He died a gruesome martyr's death for Christ. That says monumental truth about the man John.

Let me just read you the story from Mark's Gospel. This is the true story of how John the Baptist died. Mark 6, verses 17-29, **"For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' ¹⁹ Herodias had a grudge against [John] and wanted to put him to death and could not *do so*; ²⁰ for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard [John], he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.**

²¹ A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; ²² and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.' ²³ And he swore to her, 'Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom.' ²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.'

²⁵ Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' ²⁶ And although the king was very sorry, *yet* because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded *him* to bring *back* his head. And he went and had [John the Baptist] beheaded in the prison, ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When [John's] disciples heard *about this*, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb." Mark chapter 6, verses 17-29.

That is how John the Baptist died. Those who tell the truth about Jesus, especially when it is unpopular to do so – those who speak the truth of the Gospel to power – will often be killed! John was God's man. He was "sent from God," but that in no way meant that he could not or would not have his head taken off! The martyr's death, so common in the Bible and in places in the world *today* that we Americans cannot understand, because we are far too comfortable and cozy in our own little worlds. Insulated, many of us do not boldly proclaim Christ by calling for repentance from sin in our churches and then outside the church in the world, in the communities where God has placed us.

But John the Baptist was a fearless defender of the truth. He is a hero of mine, and I am sure many of you. I have read over his life and I have found at least eight essential elements to his character. There are more. Perhaps you have some? Well, how can we summarize the eight elements of John the Baptist's character? Let's add to our statement and conclude it this way:

John the Baptist is a God sent prophet! Once the greatest man who ever lived until Jesus, John exalted Jesus by humbling himself. He tells the truth about Jesus and other people. Therefore, he is not popular with the Jewish leaders and Herod beheads him, killing John the Baptist.

If you just took those four sentences and went over them in your mind until you memorized them, then for the rest of your life you can summarize the most essential elements in the character of John the Baptist. And you can find this a couple of ways. Visit our social media pages on Facebook and Instagram. The handle is God Is Podcast, that's God Is Podcast on Facebook and Instagram. Or, when you visit our website look for today's podcast and click the link marked "Read Along."

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Why have we spent these days on John's character? First, we need to know the man before we can get to know his message. This is John the Baptist: the man and his message. And let me give you his message now since we have a little more time. I am reading John's Gospel chapter 1 and verse 29. John 1.29 says, **"The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"**

Wow! What a message this is. According to the prophet John, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is certainly a message worth listening to and understanding. And we will explore this next time as we continue to discover who God Is.

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