

John the Baptist Confronts Herod Antipas

Note: your group may not have time to discuss all of these items. You may need to choose one or more from among them to talk about. Follow your Bible study leader's instructions for your discussion and report.

Mark 6:14-29 explains how John the Baptist, the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah, lost his life. He boldly confronted a ruler regarding his sinful actions and was sent to prison and eventually was beheaded for doing so. Yet Jesus commended John. In Matthew 11:2-6, we learn that while in prison, John had heard about Jesus' ministry and sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He was the "Coming One [the Messiah], or do we look for another?" (v. 3). Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him about the miracles He was performing in His ministry and that "the poor have the gospel preached to them" (v. 5). Then He added, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (v. 6).

After this exchange, Jesus publicly praised John. Read Mark's record of what happened to John in Mark 6:14-29. Then read Jesus' statements about him in Matthew 11:7-15. Note that Jesus knew why John had been arrested. Although Jesus didn't mention the details of John's arrest, He still expressed words of praise and affirmation for the one who had prepared the way for His coming — and who had confronted Herod.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How might the answer Jesus gave to John's disciples to take back to John have reassured him?
2. How did Jesus affirm John in his statements in Matthew 11:7-15?
3. What did John do that got him into trouble? Why do you think he did it anyway?
4. Apart from the often-stated principle that pietists hold that God's spokesmen should not address political issues because they're political, not spiritual, what points might someone emphasize in making the case that John should *not* have confronted Herod? How valid are these?
5. Why might God have wanted John to confront Herod about His sin, despite the risk and the cost John eventually would pay for doing so?
6. Who is in a better position to confront political leaders about their sins, and the sins of the nation, than God's spokesmen — preachers and pastors? When they are silent and sin is taking captive multitudes of people, what do you think God thinks?
7. Respond to the following observations. What conclusions might we draw from them?
 - a. Jesus could have chided John for confronting Herod and for being involved in politics, but He did not.
 - b. Jesus could have chided John for offending Herod and for not being "winsome," but He did not.
 - c. Instead of criticizing John, Jesus praised him.
 - d. Significantly, even though John's confrontation of Herod appealed to God's moral law and Jesus had come to usher in an "age of grace," apparently Jesus was OK with John's emphasis on God's moral law in the age of grace. Obviously, Christians aren't to avoid talking with sinners about how to be saved, but this incident tends to indicate there are appropriate times and places to simply confront people about their sins. What would be some appropriate times and places to confront people along these lines today?