

Mark 6:14-29

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CHRIST'S IS OUR SHAME; OURS IS CHRIST'S GLORY.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist shamed everyone. He pointed out the elephant in the room. He pointed out the harsh reality that all are sinners, and that sin makes man unable to go to heaven. Yes, John shamed everyone by telling them that they needed to repent of their sins; otherwise, God would send them to hell.

Many couldn't get past the fact that John was brash enough to tell them to repent in the first place. They hated John for his preaching. Who was he to tell them how to live their lives? What did he know? Hadn't John ever heard the wise slogan of the 21st Century, "You do you"? But this is pride. And pride goes before destruction.

Yet, many who came to the wilderness heard John's cry for repentance, and they listened to him. This is humility. The opposite of pride. And, as they stuck around to listen, they also saw John's finger pointing to Jesus, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. Yes, John pointed sinners to Jesus, Who alone could give them forgiveness and salvation. And many followed this Jesus to Whom John pointed. Those who listened to John and followed Jesus were truly humble. The shame of their sin *was* exposed. But instead of hating John for pointing out their sin, they repented. They were apparently even *thankful* for John's boldness in preaching against their sin because it led them to life with Christ.

But notice here that *all* who heard John were shamed by his preaching. Yes, man's shame before God is real. But the difference between those who repented at John's preaching and those who hated John because of his preaching is manifested in how they responded to the shame. We are all by nature proud and objectively shameful sinners. But God shows us grace, makes us humble and repentant, and points us to the wisdom of the cross of Christ. It's as the Proverb says, "When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom." Our pride leads to shame. But, in His wisdom, Christ humbled Himself to pay for our pride and sin. On the cross, Christ took away our *shame*.

And this Gospel of Christ, which separates our sin and shame so far from us as the east is from the west—this very Gospel is what John the Baptist preached. He was the forerunner, the one who prepared the way for the Lord. He was the second Elijah, the man who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of Malachi and Isaiah. But the purpose of John's shaming everyone was that all would turn away from their sin and turn to where his finger pointed—to Christ, to Him Who bears their sin and shame.

But without Christ as the bearer of sin and shame, man must find another way to relieve his conscience. So, when his shame was exposed by John, Herod could not let go of his pride. When we read that Herod "was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard [John] gladly," it seems as though Herod had been humbled. But, no. Sure, Herod feared John and knew that he was righteous. But, still, he had to silence John from publicly teaching. Herod's pride and reputation depended on it. Herod had unlawfully taken his brother's wife and John called him out. So, Herod confined John to a prison cell, to where no one but he could hear John condemn his sin. Why did he do this? Pride. Pride makes people stubborn, cowardly, and weak.

Herod's defensiveness is predictable. Proverbs 31 warns men not to give their strength to women. But this is exactly what Herod, in his pride, did. He allowed his carnal desire for women to guide his decisions. Herod became weak and cowardly. He became effeminate and unmanly, because he gave his strength to women who were not lawful for him to have. Lust makes people, especially men, weak and foolish. It clouds

their judgment, strips them of all wisdom and discernment, and causes them to do absurdly irresponsible things. Consider how Herod was willing to give up half of his kingdom to fulfill his lustful desires! What a weak man! Let this be a warning to anyone who thinks he can continue living a life of lust and still avoid destruction— destruction both in this life and in eternity.

Yet half his kingdom was apparently fine for Herod to lose, but the demand for John's head made Herod sorry. Despite his sorrow, Herod had to follow through. He made his unfortunate promise in front of many guests. It was perhaps bad enough that his guests saw him behaving like a desperate, drooling, weakling in the first place. Bad enough that they saw Herod's complete lack of self-control. But add to this worldly shame: the shame of not keeping his promise to a sexually exploited little girl, the daughter of his unlawful wife? This shame was too much to bear. So Herod deemed the shame from the world more distasteful than the shame of his own sin before God. This is a stark warning to us.

What is more shameful for you? Knowingly acting contrary to God's will, or looking bad in front of other people for behaving and speaking like a Christian? Have you ever lost love and respect from fellow Christians for repenting and admitting that you were wrong to do or say something that was sinful? Of course not! On the other hand, who cares if the world makes fun of you for behaving like a Christian? Do you feel shame for praying before your meal in public? You shouldn't. Do you feel shame for telling your coach that you can't come to a practice or game on Sunday morning? You shouldn't. Do you feel shame for rebuking your children for living together outside of marriage? You shouldn't. Do you feel shame for associating with the lowly, the poor, the miserable sinners that are sitting in these pews around you? You shouldn't! You are a Christian. You belong to Christ. Your pride will lead to shame and destruction, but when God humbles you by showing you the shame of your sin, He does so to point you to Christ, the source of all wisdom, Who saves you from your pride and takes away your shame.

Then we have the example of Herodias. There is no doubt that John the Baptist shamed her. She was a wicked and brazen woman. She was all too proud. And, above all, she was shamelessly shameful, her conscience seared. She responded to John's call to repentance with a cold shoulder and a hot desire to murder him. The text says that she "held a grudge" against John the Baptist. She could not stop thinking about how much she hated John and what he said to her. She didn't fear God. If she did, maybe she would have repented of her sin.

Instead, she responded to John's pointing out her shame with violence. Surely she felt vindicated when she saw John's head on a platter. In her mind, might made right. And since she didn't believe in God, only might mattered. The governmental powers—embodied in a sexually manipulated Herod—executed the man who called her a sinner. With this execution, her pride soared sky high. Pride is, after all, powerful. But, as the proverb says, pride brings shame and destruction. Wicked Herodias, along with weak Herod, is now experiencing that shame and destruction in hell.

So, we shouldn't be surprised when we're hated for being Christians. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." John the Baptist was martyred for confessing that sexual immorality is shameful. John was not ashamed to confess this. Should we then be ashamed to confess what God really says on matters pertaining to the differences between men and women? Should we then be ashamed to confess that God created us male and female? Or ashamed to confess that marriage can only be between one man and one woman? No, we should not be ashamed to confess God's Law.

Because, dear Christians, we did not come up with God's Law ourselves. When the world hates you for saying what God's Law says—especially what the Ten Commandments say—it's because they hate God. The Law was given to us by God to help us. Don't be ashamed of what God teaches in His Law. The Law protects us from eternal destruction—and can even help us avoid hurting ourselves and hurting others on this side of glory. It shows us our sin and our need for a Savior. It gives content to the love in our Christian hearts

which are freed by the Gospel and desire to do good works in faith. But as we defend the Law as the perfect, eternal, immutable, will of God, we mustn't trust in the Law to save us. No, Christ alone is our salvation. We humbly confess this. All shameful sinners must set aside their pride and lay claim to Christ alone as their righteousness.

Confessing Christ alone as righteousness is what John did. John was surely a sinner. But Scripture doesn't talk about his sins, because that's not the point. The point is that John, in humility, pointed to Christ. John was full of wisdom and courage to preach what God sent him to preach. God endowed John with such strength. He is a man to admire. He feared God rather than men. He had no pride in himself. And he loved his fellow man so much that he humbly dedicated his entire life to preparing the way for the One who would die for the sins of the world. Yes, Jesus speaks more highly of John than of anyone else in all of Scripture. He says, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John."

But John is not the Christ. Many who heard John wanted him to say that he was the Christ. But he wouldn't say that, because it wasn't true. Instead, he confessed that he is not worthy to even stoop down to loose the sandal of Jesus. He himself confessed that he must decrease but that Jesus must increase. John was humble. And John was right. The One to whom John pointed sinners was the same One that he himself needed. Because John needed forgiveness for his sins, too.

The prideful world tried to shame humble John, even by beheading him. And God, in His wisdom, permitted this. Yet, as part of God's glorious plan, He rewarded John with a martyr's white robe in heaven, as our Revelation text tells us. God rewarded John because John died for the *faith*. God did not reward John for what he *gained* through good works, but for what he *lost* by preaching faith in Christ. John lost his life pointing sinners to the same Jesus he himself needed. Yes, John was humble.

And so we, too, are humble. But not because we want to be humble like John. No, John was humble for the same reason that we are humble. We are guided by the same Spirit of Wisdom and Truth. We are baptized children of God. New creations, created to be like God. As our text from Romans says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

So, dear Christians, confess your sin and pray that Jesus bear all your shame. He has indeed already borne all shame. What is the cause of your shame? Is it a divorce? Is it an addiction or an ungodly desire? Is it an abortion? Is it past or present unfaithfulness? Is it a lustful lack of self-control? Is it a grudge that you can't get over? Is it harshness with your wife? Is it unsubmitiveness to your husband? Or is it simply your heart-penetrating, shameful pride? Hear the words of John, dear Christian. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

As surely as you confess that you are ashamed of your sins, be bold to confess all the more that no shame of yours is too great for Christ to bear. Yes, He takes your sin and shame away. See in Him, the stricken, smitten, afflicted, and crucified Christ— see in Him your shame, because that's exactly what it is. Jesus Christ has borne your shame and death in Himself for your sake. Oh, how humble is our Savior for our salvation's sake! And this, because He loves you and wants you to share in the heavenly glory which only He can give. And this Christ who died with your shame, rose from the grave. Your shame is no more when you trust in Christ! Confess this beautiful Gospel! Yes, confess with St. John the Baptist, St. Paul, and all the martyrs who are waiting for us in heaven in their white robes—yes, confess with all the saints of all times who died before you and who are sitting in the pews with you today, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

Be not ashamed, dear Christians! John preached repentance so that sinners would come to see their need for Jesus and believe in Him! This is why repentance is preached to you, and why the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in you even now, constantly urges your conscience to flee from prideful sin, to repent, and to cling to

the only One Whose righteousness is acceptable before the Almighty Judge. Yes, follow the Lamb of God, the Humble One to whom John pointed. He leads you now and always. And with Him guiding you, you can be certain that when you enter into eternity, the glory of God awaits you, where there will be no shame.

In Jesus' name.

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