

JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED.

I. QUAR., LESSON I., JAN. 6, MARK 6:17-29.

Golden Text – "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."

– Matt. 10:28. –

JOHN the baptist was the last of the prophets, and the greatest, in that the special favor was granted to him of being the forerunner and introducer of the Messiah. Aside from his privilege in this respect and his faithfulness in the position to which he was called, we see in the man a most worthy and beautiful character. He was self-sacrificing and devoted to God – willing to fare on locusts and wild honey, to be clothed in coarse clothing and to make his abode in the desert, because the special service to which he was called required such conditions.

Then when the multitudes, drawn by the power of God manifested in him, came to him from every quarter, and he became very popular, never did he seem lifted up with pride and vanity. Even when the Son of God came to be baptized of him, instead of becoming vain under such an honor, he shrank from the task, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" No thought of envy or self-exaltation seems to have entered his mind. He was willing that his glory should be totally eclipsed by the presence of the one greater than he – his cousin according to the flesh – yet whose shoe's latchet he declared himself unworthy to loose. "He must increase," said he, "but I must decrease;" and while the fame of Jesus was being noised abroad, the worthy prophet soon found himself within the confines of a prison dungeon where he was cruelly beheaded, as the world's reward for his faithfulness to his mission.

And his disciples, who had become the disciples of Jesus, hearing of it, came and took his body and buried it, and went and told Jesus. No doubt, the Lord sympathized with the sadness of the occasion, and groaned in spirit as he did at the grave of Lazarus, – because the time for the powers of darkness to work had not yet come to an end, and until it does those that live godly shall suffer persecution; and often, as also in his own case subsequently, even unto death. Evidently John's course was finished. He had fulfilled his mission and proved his worthiness of a distinguished place in the earthly phase of the Kingdom of God. Consequently there was no effort on the Lord's part to interfere with, or to influence, the powers of darkness that for a year restrained John's liberty and finally took his life.

While the Lord never in any way interfered with the course of this world, either to instruct, reprove or overpower, but confined his ministry in all these respects to Israel, the course of John in boldly and openly reproving the king, who was not an Israelite, but a Gentile and a godless and wicked tyrant, was in marked contrast. We are at a loss to account for this contrast, and for the seeming lack of wisdom on John's part in this matter, until we call to mind the typical character of John to which attention has already been called. (See M. DAWN, VOL. II., Chap. VIII.) In this view of the matter we see King Herod as the representative of the world power of the present time, Herodias, his unlawful wife, as the representative or type of the ecclesiastical powers of Christendom now seeking and longing for union with, and the co-operation of, the civil powers. Such is to be the result of the present movements in both civil and ecclesiastical circles for closer bonds of sympathy and co-operation. John, as we have shown, was a striking type of the true Church in the "harvest" or end of this age. We, like John, must stand aloof from all those whose cry is, "A confederacy, a confederacy!" (Isa. 8:11-13); and by our teaching and example declare *unlawful* the proposed and sure to come union between church and civil government.

The type is a striking one, and the fulfilment thus far is none the less so; but carried to its end it gives to the faithful overcoming Church a premonition of the approaching final test of faithfulness. As the course of John incurred the wrath of the infamous woman who ruled the king and thereby accomplished John's beheading, so the course of the John class – the true Church – will incur the wrath of the antitype. And the culmination of that wrath will doubtless bring about the dark night foretold by the Lord and the prophet, and typified by John's imprisonment (John 9:4; Isa. 21:12), wherein no man can labor in the great "harvest" work. And as John never emerged from that prison, save to enter the deeper dungeon of the grave from whence God will in due time bring him forth to power and glory, so when the coming night imprisons and fetters the faithful elect, the only deliverance they can hope for will be through the depths of the valley of the shadow of death into the glorious Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose they are and whom they serve.

For an explanation of the golden text see our issue of Feb. 1893 – "What saith the Scriptures about Hell."
