

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

– SEPTEMBER 1. – MARK 6:14-29. –

Text: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." – Rev. 2:10.

TODAY'S STUDY includes the tragedy connected with John the Baptist's death. King Herod had put away his own wife, and was living unlawfully with the wife of his brother Philip – Herodias – a vain woman apparently and without conscience, who, for ambition's sake, had dared everything that she might occupy the place of a queen. John the Baptist, a fearless teacher, in his preaching had referred to the fact that King Herod was living in violation of the Divine Law, and that this was likely also to bring upon the people a war, for his wife whom he had put away was the daughter of King Aretas.

Herodias heard of John's teaching, and was both angry and fearful – angry that he should dare to speak so of her relationship to the King – fearful, lest the words of this eloquent man, which greatly moved the masses, might alienate her from the King, or that perhaps the King himself [R5069 : page 233] might come under the influence of John's searching words. Had Herod put her away, as would have been his duty, she would have been an ashamed and a disgraced woman in the eyes of the world, for the Herods and their affairs were well known in Rome and elsewhere. So a *denouement* would have left her a pitiable spectacle, and in her pride she was ready to do murder, or anything that would divert such a calamity.

Herod feared John and feared the people who believed John to be a Prophet, but Herodias feared neither God nor man. However, in deference to Herodias' wish, Herod had John arrested for his temerity. Even then Herod liked to hear John talk, though he still kept him a prisoner. All the more Herodias feared the influence of John. She brooded and she schemed. The King's birthday came, and she

encouraged him to make it a great day, a festival, and to ask to the banquet his principal friends. In the midst of the carousal she dressed her own daughter in the airy costume of the dancing girls of the East, and sent her in to dance before the King and his friends.

So great a condescension implied that the King should make some return. He asked the girl what he should give her, promising anything that she would ask, even to the half of his kingdom. This was exactly what the wicked mother had planned; and true to her agreement the child returned for instructions. Herodias had gotten Herod into her net. He had refused to kill John in spite of all her endeavors. Now, in the presence of his friends, on his own birthday, at his own suggestion, he had obligated himself to do anything that might be asked. If the daughter demurred to ask for the head of John the Baptist, the mother probably told her that if John lived both of them would probably sooner or later be outcasts; that his death was necessary.

BOUND BY AN UNHOLY OATH

When the maiden returned and made her request, the King was grieved, yet, not being a humble man, nor a God-fearing man, but merely a proud man with a man-fearing spirit, he felt himself bound to comply with his oath given in the presence of those great men. Was he not King? Was it not his birthday? Had he not freely promised, even though under the influence of intoxicating liquor, and should he now draw back and show the white feather, and simply that he had some confidence in this peculiar Prophet? No! The execution was accomplished; the head was delivered to Herodias; the King's honor (?) was maintained.

Alas, poor world! How many are its snares of pride in the wrong things, and in fear of the wrong person! How many are its attempts to preserve and increase its pleasures and honors!

In a previous study we heard Jesus' words, that no greater Prophet than John had ever arisen. We fully agree that he was a great man, a holy man; a Prophet of the Lord was he. We fully agree that he will have a great reward in the future – with all the holy Prophets, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he will come forth from the death-state perfect as a man, because he was found faithful, even unto death. He will be one of the class mentioned by the Lord through the Prophet David – "Instead of Thy fathers, shall be Thy children, whom Thou [Messiah] shalt make Princes in all the earth." (Psa. 45:16.) John will be one of those glorious Princes on the earthly plane, one of the representatives of Messiah and the Church, who will be on the Heavenly and invisible plane, like unto the angels, partakers of the divine nature.

Those who selected our lesson text evidently overlooked the fact that John the Baptist is not one of the Church class referred to in the Lord's words, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10.) John will indeed get life everlasting as a glorious portion, but he will not be a member of the Bride **[R5069 : page 234]** class, as we have shown. This honor belongs to us who have received Jesus and become His disciples and been begotten of the Holy Spirit, since Pentecost. We again quote St. Paul's words concerning the Ancient Worthies: "All these died in faith, not having received the things promised them," "that they, *without us*, should not be made perfect." (Heb. 11:13,38-40.) We, the Church, the Bride class, the Little Flock, called to be joint-heirs with Jesus in His Kingdom, must get our share of the blessing first. The Bride and the Bridegroom must be perfected in the First Resurrection before the Kingdom can be established; and it must be established before the blessing can go to any others – even to the Ancient Worthies.

WHEREIN IS THE DIFFERENCE?

If John the Baptist was faithful unto death, just as faithful as those will be who have lived since Pentecost, wherein is the

difference, and why should he receive an earthly reward and the Bride class receive the heavenly reward? There are several reasons for this. In the matter of justice God could not justly, not properly, show any preference to one person, or to one class; but in matters of grace, of favor, as the Scriptures declare, He may do what He will with His own. If A owed \$5 each to B and C, he could not justly give the entire \$10 to one of them and repudiate the debt to the other. But if he wished to make presents, gifts, he may give B \$1 and C \$9, or give the entire \$10 to B and nothing to C.

So far as the world was concerned, God was under no obligation whatever to do anything to help Adam and his race; hence the entire matter of redemption is of grace. But since Jehovah entered into covenant with His Son that the latter should pay the redemption price for the world, and then become its Restorer, Jesus, having laid down His life, the matter has passed from being purely of grace, and has connected with it a certain measure of justice between God and Christ.

So far as man is concerned there is a measure of obligation, because God has already stated what the results of the redemption work shall be – "all the families of the earth shall be blessed"; there shall be a "restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets." God is therefore bound to humanity by principles of justice, because He has made these promises. Yea, He has given His *oath* that all the families of the earth shall be blessed. St. Paul's argument on this subject is that God has thus bound Himself by two immutable or unchangeable things – His Word and His Oath.

But nothing in God's promise bound Him to give John the Baptist a place in the Bride class. The Apostle Peter declares that God foreknew this class, predestinated it as a *class*, but *not as individuals*, from before the foundation of the world; and He is now making a selection according to principles, to determine who may be of this

class. He gave no opportunity to John the Baptist to be of this class, but in His providence permitted him to die when he had accomplished the work specially intended for him. None could be of this Bride class who died prior to Pentecost, for there the Holy Spirit of adoption and begetting was first given, and without that none could occupy the plane of sons; those under Moses and of his House were servants.

