

Mark 6:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Analysis

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. This verse reveals Herod's conflicted response—simultaneously respecting and imprisoning John. 'Herod feared John' (ὁ γὰρ Ἡρώδης ἐφοβεῖτο τὸν Ἰωάννην, ho gar Hērōdēs ephobeito ton Iōannēn) indicates reverent fear or awe, not terror. 'Knowing that he was a just man and holy' (εἰδὼς αὐτὸν ἄνδρα δίκαιον καὶ ἅγιον, eidōs auton andra dikaion kai hagion) shows Herod recognized John's moral integrity and divine calling. 'Observed him' (συνετήρει αὐτόν, synetērei auton) can mean 'kept him safe' or 'watched him carefully'—likely both: protecting John from Herodias while monitoring him as potential threat.

'When he heard him, he did many things' (ἠπόρει καὶ ἠδέως αὐτοῦ ἤκουεν, ēporei kai hēdeōs autou ēkouen)—some manuscripts read 'was perplexed' (ēporei) showing John's words disturbed him. 'Heard him gladly' (ἠδέως ἤκουεν, hēdeōs ēkouen) reveals attraction to John's teaching despite its challenging nature. This tragic portrait shows someone intellectually convinced yet volitionally uncommitted—Herod knew the right but wouldn't do it. He enjoyed John's preaching like entertainment but refused life transformation. This exemplifies those who hear God's word regularly, recognize its truth, yet never submit to its authority—finding religion interesting but not compelling enough to sacrifice sin.

Historical Context

Herod's ambivalence toward John reflects the complex relationship between political rulers and religious figures in first-century Palestine. Rulers needed religious legitimacy but resisted prophetic correction. Herod's protection of John while imprisoning him mirrors his father Herod the Great's relationship with rabbis—alternately honoring and persecuting them. The detail that Herod 'heard him gladly' suggests private audiences where John taught, perhaps in prison. Ancient rulers often kept prisoners for conversation—intellectual stimulation or spiritual curiosity. Herod's doing 'many things' might indicate limited reforms: perhaps releasing some prisoners, showing mercy in certain cases, or minor policy changes. Yet he wouldn't address the fundamental issue: his unlawful marriage. This selective obedience characterizes much nominal religion—conforming in areas that cost little while refusing areas requiring genuine sacrifice. Josephus indicates Herod was superstitious, consulting astrologers and fearing supernatural powers. His reverence for John likely mixed genuine respect with superstitious fear. Early church fathers (Chrysostom, Augustine) used Herod as warning against 'almost persuaded' Christianity—intellectual assent without volitional commitment results in damnation, not salvation.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Herod's pattern of hearing God's word gladly while refusing to obey it describe many modern churchgoers who enjoy preaching without submitting to Christ's lordship?

2. What does Herod's selective obedience ('did many things' but not the one thing required—abandoning Herodias) teach about incomplete repentance?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	γὰρ	Ἡρώδης	έφοβεῖτο	τὸν	Ἰωάννην	εἰδὼς	αὐτοῦ
G3588	For	Herod	feared	G3588	John	knowing	him
	G1063	G2264	G5399		G2491	G1492	G846
ἄνδρα	δίκαιον	καὶ	ἅγιον	καὶ	συνετήρει	αὐτοῦ	καὶ
man	was a just	and	an holy	and	observed	him	and
G435	G1342	G2532	G40	G2532	G4933	G846	G2532
ἤκουεν	αὐτοῦ	πολλὰ	έποίει,	καὶ	ήδέως	αὐτοῦ	ἤκουεν
heard	him	many things	he did	and	gladly	him	heard
G191	G846	G4183	G4160	G2532	G2234	G846	G191

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 21:26 (References John): But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

Matthew 14:5 (Parallel theme): And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

John 5:35 (Parallel theme): He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.