

Mark 6:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

Analysis

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. The plot's mastermind reveals herself as Salome consults her mother. 'She went forth' (ἐξελθοῦσα, exelthousa) indicates Salome left the banquet hall to consult Herodias privately—suggesting she didn't initially know what to request. This demonstrates Herodias's manipulation: using her daughter as instrument without informing her beforehand. 'What shall I ask?' (Τί αἰτήσωμαι, Ti aitēsōmai) shows Salome's uncertainty—having successfully pleased Herod, she sought guidance on capitalizing on his promise.

'The head of John the Baptist' (Τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ, Tēn kephalēn Iōannou tou baptistou) reveals Herodias's immediate, unhesitating response—she'd been waiting for precisely this opportunity. Her specificity (not just 'John's death' but 'his head') shows the depth of her hatred and desire for visible proof of his execution. This request exemplifies hardened wickedness: no wavering, no second thoughts, just cold determination to silence God's prophet. The contrast is stark: John proclaimed repentance; Herodias demanded his head. The passage warns that those who persistently resist conviction eventually seek to destroy the source of their conviction rather than repent.

Historical Context

Herodias's immediate response suggests she'd long contemplated this scenario, waiting for opportunity. Her demand for John's head specifically may reflect

several motivations: ensuring he was truly dead (not imprisoned again), humiliating the prophet even in death, or following ancient Near Eastern practice where beheading enemies demonstrated complete victory. Requesting the head on a platter (v. 25) added macabre detail—treating the prophet's remains as banquet dish. This violated Jewish burial customs requiring respectful treatment of corpses. Ancient sources record various instances of heads displayed as trophies—Pompey's head presented to Caesar, John the Baptist's stored by Herodias (according to some traditions). The swift consultation and return suggests Herodias was nearby, waiting—confirming this was premeditated plot, not spontaneous request. Salome's willingness to request such ghastly prize indicates either her youth and manipulation by her mother or her own moral corruption. Early church tradition held that Salome later died tragically, falling through ice and being decapitated—whether historical or legendary, this tradition reflected belief in divine justice.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Herodias's instant, unhesitating demand for John's head illustrate the depth of wickedness that results from persistent rejection of prophetic truth?
2. What does this mother-daughter collaboration in murder teach about how sin and hardness toward God can be passed generationally?

Interlinear Text

ἡ δὲ ἐξελθοῦσα εἶπεν τῇ μητρὶ αὐτῆς Τί¹
G3588 And she went forth and said G3588 G846 What
G1161 G1831 G2036 G3384 G5101

αἰτήσομαι ἡ δὲ εἶπεν Τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου τοῦ
shall I ask G3588 And and said G3588 The head of John G3588
G154 G1161 G2036 G2776 G2491

βαπτίστου

the Baptist

G910

Additional Cross-References

Job 31:31 (Parallel theme): If the men of my tabernacle said not, Oh that we had of his flesh! we cannot be satisfied.

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