

Does My Popularity Bring Me to God?

Mark 6:14-29

Popular King Herod was the governor of the region of Judea at the time of Jesus' ministry. Herod loved the status his fellow citizens gave to him and used it as a way to measure his political standing. For instance, he married the daughter of King Aretas, IV. This marriage brought peace and a good financial partnership along the border between Perea and the Nabatean kingdom. It brought popularity to the king in that region. Herod was perceived as a very talented politician and king of his people.



King Herod WAS popular because he was a man of the people. He liked to entertain the citizens of his region. Herod knew that John the Baptizer was a preacher and storyteller, and was followed by many. Therefore, Herod made John one of his friends (vs. 20b). Apparently, the preacher was regularly invited to Herod's social events and political meetings. Herod enjoyed his sermons and advice. Even though John disagreed publicly with Herod's divorce and re-marriage to Herodias, the governor was pleased to hear John's words.

Herod also increased his popularity by becoming a benefactor of the weak. This was the reason exposed in the gospel for John's imprisonment. Herod was protecting this great storyteller against his wife's grudge. Herod allowed John to continue his ministry from jail. In fact, John continued to tell his stories at Herod's events and meetings. Not only did Herod protect John while in jail, but also the king publicly praised the preacher with very eloquent expressions like "righteous man" and "Holy man." Residents of Judea agreed with the positive praise of their king.

With the people and with the leaders, Herod enjoyed high ratings in positive reception. He used to throw parties in honor of visitors, distinguished delegates from the Roman Empire, and his officials. The event referenced in this passage was a party in honor of his birthday (vs. 21). His goal was to make sure his popularity and acceptance remained undamaged by any circumstances, including John's opposition to his new marriage.

Everyone knew Herod's generosity and bigheartedness. His kindness was shown using the expression, "Ask me for anything you want. Whatever you ask, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." Kings would usually close this affirmation with an oath to emphasize the seriousness of their words. Obviously, King Herod and his guest were very pleased with Herodias' daughter performance because he made her such an offer.

However, the admired man didn't weigh his own limits as well as his wife's hold against the preacher. John became the object of a power struggle between Herod and Herodias. She used her beautiful dancing daughter to ignite his passion at the public event. She knew he would offer some generous gift at the end of her daughter's dance. After he saw her erotic dance, he offered her half of his kingdom to the ears of everybody in the ballroom. In other words, Herod offered for the dancer to be his queen. It didn't matter that the young dancer was his niece, because in the past it didn't matter that his lover was his sister-in-law! Now, with the king's proposal to the young dancer, the only way Herodias would win against John was advising her daughter to ask

John's head, which the young girl did. The pleasing-people ruler would not go back on his promise, so he beheaded John, the popular preacher and storyteller.

The text doesn't indicate if Herod's popularity was affected by the killing of John, the Storyteller. But that experience left Herod submerged in his own paranoia. Herod was tremendously puzzled by the stories people were telling about Jesus on the streets. The King had heard many explanations about the powers of the new preacher in his region. The supposed "resurrection" of the already-executed-by-him John the Baptizer" was the most popular explanation for Jesus' power. Herod had beheaded John the Baptizer, the last credible, ethical storyteller. Because Herod was so guilt-laden, he didn't give much attention to the other widespread story of Jesus being the prophet Elijah. The popular King Herod now feared any encounter with Jesus. Jesus, who fed five thousand and healed many, was growing in popular acceptance. And it was only Jesus, who could have a remedy for Herod's distressful condition.

Questions for Discussion:

Many people would measure their popularity based on the number of Facebook friends or Twitter followers. Others count the number of people they greet every day, or the number of loyal friends at church. Popularity has to do with the way one person is perceived by others in her own community. In other words, popularity has to do with being loved and accepted by others. *Do you think that popularity helps people be fully accepted in their own community? Explain your answer.*

Reflect upon this statement - *Popularity helps you to be a better person as Christian?*

Can you recall moments in your life when you have experienced a wonderful moment of popularity? How did that experience bring God's kingdom to others? What would you do different if you were to experience again that moment of being accepted?

John the Baptizer was killed because of a struggle for popularity and status quo. *Can you tell a story of a person who was "sacrificed" due to others' desires for popularity and power?*

How do you relate with those who crave to be accepted but are not? Can you think of opportunities where you or your women's ministry group could help someone to shine?

Jesus Christ is the healer of many, the one who accepts each of us as we are, and is the main character in Christianity. *What teachings of Jesus could we apply to our lives and what might be the results?*

If we are not famous people, how can we relate with Herod's story, his decisions, and the consequences for others?

Prayer:

Dear God, we want to be accepted, popular, and recognized. Give us the courage to assume the risks of exposing our frailties so others can see your power at work on us. When telling our stories, let only your name be glorified, because you are the main character not us. Amen.