
Overview

Biblical Passage Mark 6:17-29

Supporting Passages Luke 3:1-20

Memory Verse Luke 14:27

Biblical Truth John the Baptist paid the ultimate price for living his life on mission.

Context Any study of the lives of the prophets makes one truth painfully clear—obedience is often costly. If we are going to be on mission with God, then we have to be willing to pay the price. Living Loud means that bearers of the gospel of Jesus Christ will discover that some people do not receive the gospel as good news. But even if our efforts are met with hostility and our very lives are threatened, God calls us to be faithful to His mission.

Learning Goals

- **Explore:** Your students will learn that there is often a cost for living on mission with God.
- **Transform:** Your students will identify ways in which living on mission for God might cost them and evaluate how committed they are to staying on mission.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.

- Pray that your students will understand that being on mission requires sacrifice.
- Pray that your students will elevate God's mission above their own desires.
- Pray that your students will live their lives on mission regardless of the cost.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her that God had chosen her to be the bearer of His Son, the angel also informed the young woman that her relative Elizabeth was six months pregnant. When Mary visited her relative shortly thereafter, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped at the sound of Mary's voice. The lives of their sons would be forever intertwined, as God used Elizabeth's son John to prepare the way for His Son, Jesus.

Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, **John the Baptist** preached in the Desert of Judea, calling people to repent of their sins and be baptized. John lived simply as he carried out God's mission, wearing clothing made of camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey. As people responded to his call to repent, John baptized them in the Jordan River. With great humility, the prophet pointed the people to the coming Messiah who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. And on the day that John and Jesus came face-to-face at the Jordan, God gave John the privilege of baptizing His only Son to fulfill His righteousness. Jesus later told His disciples that no one born of a woman was greater than John the Baptist.

John the Baptist clearly understood his role in God's mission to save the world. The prophet recognized that he was not greater than the Savior whose arrival he proclaimed. John was willing to be obedient to God's call no matter what the cost. Like the Old Testament prophets who had gone before him, John the Baptist spoke God's truth with courage, unconcerned about what other people thought about him. God's mission was paramount in John's heart and mind. Ultimately, John the Baptist's fidelity to God's mission cost the prophet his life.

Importance

This passage of Scripture is important because it reminds students that **Jesus is God and Savior**. As the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. John pointed people to the one who was coming after him who would be far more powerful—the Christ who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and judge those who failed to repent of their sins. John was very clear about his prophetic role—Jesus Christ was the Messiah, not him.

John's mission was to pave the way for Jesus. John the Baptist was willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, and ultimately his obedience to God's mission resulted in his death, a foreshadowing of the passion of the Christ. As they study this passage, students will be reminded that being on mission with God is not without cost. Jesus laid down His life for us, and we must be willing to lay down our lives for Him.

This passage also teaches the Essential Truth that **People are God's Treasure**.

Interpretation

Mark 6:17-18 Mark inserted this story about the demise of John the Baptist into his Gospel after noting that **Herod Antipas** had heard about Jesus' spreading fame. Herod's subjects were engaging in rampant speculation about Jesus' identity. Those who were familiar with the words of the prophet Malachi were well aware that a messenger was supposed to precede the Lord (Mal. 3:1), and since Malachi's oracle specifically mentioned that the prophet **Elijah** would be sent before the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), some people assumed that John the Baptist was Elijah reincarnated. Other people recognized that Jesus was a prophet, but they did not think that He was the great prophet whose coming was predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:15). Still others thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected, and they attributed His wondrous demonstrations of divine power to this hypothetical miraculous event.

As the tetrarch of **Galilee** and Perea, Herod Antipas was very sensitive to any perceived threat to his power, just as his father, Herod the Great, had been. After the Magi failed to bring back a report to Herod the Great about the newborn "King of the Jews," the king dispatched his forces to kill all the baby boys in the Bethlehem area who were two years old and younger in an effort to eliminate this potential usurper once and for all (Matt. 2:16). Likewise, Herod Antipas was jealous of this mysterious man named Jesus, who had attracted the attention of vast crowds of his citizens and spoken about the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15).

The specific issue that prompted Herod Antipas to issue an arrest warrant for John the Baptist was a family matter. Herod the Great fathered many children, including two sons named **Philip**. The son of Herod the Great's union with Mariamne, Herod Philip I married his niece, Herodias. At some point Herod Antipas wooed Herodias, convincing her to leave her husband Philip and marry him. Marrying your brother's wife while your brother was still living was a violation of the Mosaic Law, an egregious offense that did not escape John the Baptist's notice (Lev. 18:16). John's rebuke infuriated Herodias, so Herod ordered John's arrest and imprisoned him in the fortress city of Machaerus.

Not only was this marriage a religiously sensitive matter, it was also a politically sensitive issue. In order to marry Herodias, Herod Antipas had to divorce his first wife, who was the daughter of King Aretus IV, the ruler of the kingdom to the east of Perea. John's public rebuke of Herod was making a bad situation worse.

Mark 6:19-20 If it had been up to Herodias, John the Baptist would have already been dead. But Herod had an odd connection to the prophet who had condemned his actions. Herod knew that there was something different about this holy man, and he feared taking further action against John the Baptist because of the outrage that it would likely provoke among those who considered him to be a prophet (Matt. 14:5). Although Herod didn't understand John's teachings, he was still fascinated by him and subsequently sought to protect him from his wife's rage.

Mark 6:21-23 Banquets were a popular social custom in the ancient near east, and such events always included the drinking of wine, often to excess. Entertainment—such as music, singing, and dancing—was a standard feature of such a festive occasion. Herod's birthday feast featured what was likely a lewd dance by Salome, Herodias's daughter by Philip I. In yet another case of intermarriage in Herod the Great's family, Salome later married her granduncle, Philip II.

Entranced by Salome's dancing—and likely intoxicated as well—Herod made a rash promise. His offer of "up to half my kingdom" was likely proverbial but was indicative of his willingness to generously reward the young

woman for entertaining him and his guests.

Mark 6:24-25 As Salome huddled with her mother, Herodias seized the opportunity to exact her revenge on John the Baptist. Salome showed no sign of discomfort with her mother's murderous wish, and she delivered her decision to Herod quickly and forcefully.

Mark 6:26-28 Now Herod was in a bind. He had sworn an oath to this girl, yet he had been trying to protect the prophet from harm. To refuse Salome's request would have brought him dishonor among the high officials, military commanders, and leading men of Galilee who were gathered at his birthday banquet. The Greek word that Mark employs to depict Herod's frame of mind at this pivotal moment—which the NIV renders as “greatly distressed”—is the same word that the writer uses to describe Jesus' agony as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:34). With a heavy heart, Herod Antipas dispatched the executioner. Herodias had accomplished her goal at last—her nemesis John the Baptist was a dead man.

Mark 6:29 After getting word of their teacher's tragic death, John the Baptist's **disciples** arrived on the scene and gave the prophet a proper burial. John's followers are referenced elsewhere in the Gospels; While John was imprisoned, he sent his disciples to speak with Jesus to confirm that He was indeed the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-3).

John the Baptist's death foreshadowed the passion of Jesus Christ. Both men suffered violent deaths for speaking the truth, and their bodies were entombed. The difference is that Jesus would be resurrected. Jesus emerged from His tomb victorious, conquering the power of sin and death once and for all. John the Baptist had faithfully carried out His God-given mission, preparing the way for the Lord. His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins paved the way for the Savior of the world.

Implications

Jesus urged His followers to count the cost of being a disciple of His. His teachings were jarring: You have to hate your life, deny yourself, and take up your cross if you want to follow me. While many believers face hostility on account of their faith in Jesus Christ, relatively few ever have to put their lives on the line. But the reality remains: There is a cost involved in living on mission with God, and we have no guarantee that we will be spared from harm. Yet God calls us to rise above our fears and commit ourselves to His mission. Like the psalmist, we put our trust in God, for what can mortal man really do to us? (Ps. 56:4) We may suffer physical or emotional injury or even lose our lives, but our souls are forever secure. In times of trial, our confidence comes from the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). We count the cost of following Christ and recognize that the eternal benefits far outweigh any temporary, earthly discomfort. Have you suffered for the cause of Christ? What has it cost you personally to follow Him?

We do not want students to take the decision to follow Christ lightly. Our salvation was bought with a price, and just as Jesus gave up His life willingly for us, we should be willing to give up our lives for him (1 Cor. 6:20). John the Baptist set an example for us as a living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1) Challenge students to count the cost of being on mission with God. Ask them if they have already faced hostility for living faithfully. Are they committed to remaining on mission no matter what the cost?

Teaching Plan

Connect Activity

Review Questions: Elijah: On Mission in a Hostile World

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

Media Option: The Jesus Man

(3-5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)

Students will watch a video about what it looks like to be committed to Jesus regardless of the cost.

(3-5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)

If your church has purchased the Reverb Media Pass or the Reverb DVD, preview and arrange to show the “The Jesus Man” video. (If your church has not purchased the Reverb Media Pass, you can purchase this single video through the “Media” tab.)

Play the video for your students. When the video is over, ask students what they thought about the video. Explain to your students that today’s lesson is all about the costs of living life on mission for God. Say:

What are some of the costs that Reverend Brown has paid for sharing the gospel? Have the costs convinced him that it is not worth it? As we look at today’s lesson, keep this question in mind: Considering the great personal costs, what is it about God and His mission that would keep a man like John Brown committed for 35 years

Drama: The Cost

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will watch a drama about someone who has to pay a high cost to get where she wants to go.

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the drama script. Prior to the session, enlist two students to enact the drama. Give copies of the script to cast members ahead of time so that they will be ready to perform it.

Prompt students to perform the drama. Afterward, say: **Everything in life has a cost, and not every**

cost is paid in money. Some costs are paid with our lives. Today we'll look at the life of John the Baptist. He paid a very high price for being a servant of God and living out what was right before God.

Explore Activity

Master Teacher Key Study: John the Baptist: On Mission Regardless of the Cost

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Mark 6:17-29 to understand the cost that John the Baptist paid for being on mission for Christ.

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the Master Teacher Key Study. Print one copy for your own use. Also download the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Print a copy for each learner. Also provide pens.

Learning Goal: Your students will learn that there is often a cost for living on mission with God.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Mark 6:17-29.

Transform Activity

Deeper Discussion

(5-7 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss what they might have to give up in order to be on mission for God.

(5-7 minutes, easy set-up)

Learning Goal: Your students will identify ways in which living on mission for God might cost them and evaluate how committed they are to staying on mission.

Use the following questions to begin a discussion about the cost of being on mission.

- What things have already given up in order to follow God?
- What things in your life do you think you will have to give up or sacrifice in order to remain obedient to God's mission?
- How would you express to a friend that you do not believe that his or her life is pleasing to God? What consequences might you pay for being so honest?

- What sacrifices are involved in walking obediently in God's mission or plan in terms of the friends you hang out with? your behavior and activities? your entertainment choices?
- What do you believe could be the ultimate cost that you might pay for being on mission with God?

Creative Prayer

(5-7 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will prayer for courage to stand up for what's right while being on mission for Christ.

(5-7 minutes, easy set-up)

Provide paper and pens.

- **Learning Goal:** Your students will identify ways in which living on mission for God might cost them and evaluate how committed they are to staying on mission.

Ask students to find a place in the room where they can be alone. Explain that this may be done simply by turning a chair toward a wall. Distribute paper and pens. Invite students to enter into a time of prayer as you share the information below.

Remind students about John the Baptist. Note that John continually stood up for what was right and had been saying to Herod that his relationship with Herodias was inappropriate. Explain that it was because of this that John ended up being hated by Herodias and eventually beheaded.

Say: **Calling people to consider what is right before God, calling them to repentance, and pointing the way to Christ can be costly.** Say: **Think about your life as it is right now. Think about your family, your friends, your school, and any extracurricular activities in which you participate.** Ask: **Is there a certain situation you are facing or that you know about which you know you need to speak up and stand up for what's right?**

Once students have had time to write down their responses, encourage them to spend some time in prayer over their situation. Remind students:

- **Pray for the people involved in the situation.**
- **Pray for wisdom to know when and what to say.**
- **Pray that you will be courageous in standing up for what's right and point the way to Jesus Christ.**

Once students have had time to pray, take a moment to lead all of the students in prayer. Pray specifically for the students to be courageous in their mission for Christ.

Reverb Student Book Option: On One Hand, On the Other

(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)

Students will complete an activity about the benefits of living in relationship with God versus the cost that comes from following Him.

(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)

If your church has purchased the *Reverb* student book, preview the activity on page 256. If possible, provide a copy of the book to reference as you mention the activity to students.

- **Learning Goal:** Your students will identify ways in which living on mission for God might cost them and evaluate how committed they are to staying on mission.

As students work through pages 252-257 in the *Reverb* student book this week, challenge them to take about 10-15 minutes and read through the “On One Hand, But on the Other” activity on page 256. Ask: **We might count the cost of “things” in our lives, but how many times have we actually taken stock of the benefits of living in relationship with God versus the cost that we pay to follow Him?** Say: **Here’s your opportunity. Start counting.**

Living Loud 3, "John the Baptist: On Mission Regardless of the Cost"
Review Questions

1. The Lord spoke to Elijah through a _____.
 - a. wind
 - b. fire
 - c. earthquake
 - d. whisper

2. Elijah felt alone because _____.
 - a. he was in a cave by himself
 - b. he experienced the wind, fire, and earthquake
 - c. the angel came to visit him
 - d. everyone appeared to be worshipping other gods

3. God told Elijah that there were _____ others in Israel who worshipped Him.
 - a. 7,000
 - b. 1,000
 - c. 3,000
 - d. 70,000

4. Elijah first found shelter in a _____ and then in a _____.
 - a. broom tree, cave
 - b. cave, broom tree
 - c. house, church
 - d. church, house

5. God is with us _____.
 - a. in the good times
 - b. in the bad times
 - c. only when we are healthy, wealthy, and happy
 - d. always—in good times and bad times

Living Loud 3, "John the Baptist: On Mission Regardless of the Cost"
Answers

1. The Lord spoke to Elijah through a _____. (*Lesson 2*)
 - a. wind
 - b. fire
 - c. earthquake
 - d. whisper**

2. Elijah felt alone because _____. (*Lesson 2*)
 - a. he was in a cave by himself
 - b. he experienced the wind, fire, and earthquake
 - c. the angel came to visit him
 - d. everyone appeared to be worshipping other gods**

3. God told Elijah that there were _____ others in Israel who worshipped Him. (*Lesson 2*)
 - a. 7,000**
 - b. 1,000
 - c. 3,000
 - d. 70,000

4. Elijah first found shelter in a _____ and then in a _____. (*Lesson 2*)
 - a. broom tree, cave**
 - b. cave, broom tree
 - c. house, church
 - d. church, house

5. God is with us _____. (*Lesson 2*)
 - a. in the good times
 - b. in the bad times
 - c. only when we are healthy, wealthy, and happy
 - d. always—in good times and bad times**

*Living Loud 3: "John the Baptist: On Mission
Regardless of the Cost"*
Drama

The Cost

Characters:

TRAVELER
COLLECTOR

Props: chair, magazine, backpack

Costumes: Both the Traveler and the Collector can be dressed in typical street clothes.

Creative Note: Be as creative as you want in staging this sketch. Consider constructing a whole checkpoint/weigh-station on stage.

(A girl, TRAVELER, walks across the stage and approaches a guy, the toll COLLECTOR, who's leaning against a chair while reading a magazine. Just as she's about to pass him, he steps in front of her to block her path.)

TRAVELER: Excuse me.

(She tries to go around him, but he blocks her again.)

COLLECTOR: You're excused.

TRAVELER: What do you want?

COLLECTOR: Depends on what you got.

TRAVELER: Really?

COLLECTOR: Yep. Where are you heading?

TRAVELER: Home, if you must know.

COLLECTOR: Is that right?

TRAVELER: Yes. That's right. Now, if you don't mind . . .

COLLECTOR: Actually, I do mind.

TRAVELER: Well, I mind too. Please get out of my way and let me go home.

COLLECTOR: I'd like to. I really would. But I just can't do that.

TRAVELER: Why not?

COLLECTOR: Well, you see, in order for you to go home, it's gonna cost you.

TRAVELER: Cost me?

COLLECTOR: Yep.

TRAVELER: Why?

COLLECTOR: That's just the way it is.

TRAVELER: Fine. How much?

COLLECTOR: How much you got?

TRAVELER: Oh, no. I'm not playing that game. Just tell me how much it's going to cost.

COLLECTOR: I can't do that.

TRAVELER: You can't?

COLLECTOR: Nope.

TRAVELER: Why not?

COLLECTOR: 'Cause it's different for every person.

TRAVELER: Different?

COLLECTOR: Yep. For some it costs a little. For others it costs a lot. For a few it costs absolutely everything.

TRAVELER: Everything?

COLLECTOR: Yep.

TRAVELER: Well, what's it going to cost me?

COLLECTOR: That's the wrong question.

TRAVELER: The wrong question?

COLLECTOR: That's right. You see, the question you need to be asking is: Are you willing to pay it?

TRAVELER: Am I willing to pay it?

COLLECTOR: Yep. Whatever it costs.

TRAVELER: To get home?

COLLECTOR: That's right.

(TRAVELER thinks for a moment.)

TRAVELER: Yes. Yes, I am.

(COLLECTOR steps out of her way.)

COLLECTOR: Well . . . I guess we'll see, won't we?

(TRAVELER exits.)

(The End)

Master Teacher Key Study

JOHN THE BAPTIST: ON MISSION REGARDLESS OF THE COST

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Intro: What does staying on task with God's mission mean, and what will it cost me?

Description: For John the Baptist, staying on task with God's mission meant remaining faithful to the cause of boldly calling people to repentance and ushering in the Kingdom of God—to the point of death.

Illustration: In the 1960's a show called *Mission Impossible* ran, followed by a series of movies with the same title that starred Tom Cruise in the 1990s and 2000s. One of the common features in each episode or movie is the line "Your mission, should you choose to accept it" followed by "This message will self-destruct in five seconds." So, when it comes to being on mission for God, "Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to" follow the leadership of God who is on mission to redeem a lost world. This mission has been costly for Him and for all those who have chosen to follow Him, and it will be for you as well. Oh, and this message will self-destruct in five seconds.

1. The mission always means taking a **bold** stance for **truth** (Mark 6:17–18).

Description: John the Baptist was known to be blatantly honest. His mission had been to call people to repentance from their sins. That can't be done without confronting people with truth in honesty and love. John confronted King Herod about taking his brother's wife to be his own. It was wrong, and Herod needed to repent.

Illustration: In the 2001 movie *Shrek*, the character Donkey, played by Eddie Murphy, is blatantly honest about everything. If he thinks it, it's going to be said. At first, that's what Shrek hates about Donkey. But later in the story, that's what Shrek comes to love about Donkey. He knows in the end that there is not a truer, more loyal friend to be had anywhere.

Application: It's not always pretty, but there are times when the mission we're in with God calls on us to stand boldly, oppose sin, and confront people with the truth of their sin in order to call them to repentance.

2. The mission always runs **against** the ways of the **world** (Mark 6:19–24).

Description: Herodias, Herod's new bride, could not deal with the truth presented by John the Baptist, so her only recourse was to silence the messenger—permanently. On the other hand, Herod, though he had John the Baptist imprisoned, recognized that this was a man of truth and righteousness. But he was caught up enough in the ways of the world that rather than turn from his sin, he caved in to Herodias' wishes.

Illustration: People generally run from truth. Mayor Larry Langford of Birmingham, Ala., was convicted of conspiracy, bribery, and money laundering charges in 2009. The evidence was so compelling that the jury took only a couple of hours to convict him. Still, after his conviction was announced, Langford asserted to the media that he had been up.

Application: The mission that we're on is based upon truth—the truth of God. The world loves a lie, but it opposes the truth. Our mission is to reveal and live out the truth.

3. The mission always comes with a cost (Mark 6:25–29).

Description: Although Herod had not wanted to harm John the Baptist, Herodias found a window of opportunity to trap him into committing to murder John. She persuaded her daughter to publicly request John's head. Herod was not in a position to refuse her request. John would realize the ultimate cost for remaining faithful to God's mission—a cost from which even God's own Son would not be spared.

Illustration: Very few things in this life come for free. There is a Greek myth about King Midas, who asked the god Dionysus to give him a special touch—that everything he touched would become gold. Midas soon learned that there was a high price to be paid for that special touch. Everything he needed to sustain him in life turned to gold, including his food. But the thing that broke his heart was when he touched his young daughter and she too turned to gold.

Application: We don't need to take on God's mission by never counting the cost and thinking that it's going to be a piece of cake. We can see throughout Scripture that God has never promised us that the mission would come with ease. Instead, we take on the mission in faith and trust that the cost we pay is worth it in the end.

Conclusion: Our mission in the world is costly because the sin that is so prevalent in the world is costly.

Description: John the Baptist is a great example of the ultimate cost that has to be paid for carrying out God's mission. He did not shy away from what He was called to do. His cost would precede the greatest cost of all—that which was paid on a cross.

Application: God does not call us to live in fear when He calls us to live our lives on mission with Him. We can't predict the costs that we will pay for living in His will, but instead we have to trust that He knows the future, that His ways are best, and that there is a much bigger picture beyond the costs we pay in this life. Eternity is ahead of us—a great reward.

REVERB::LIVING LOUD::lesson three

JOHN THE BAPTIST: ON MISSION REGARDLESS OF THE COST

biblical passage: Mark 6:17-29

memory verse: Luke 14:27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

JOHN THE BAPTIST: ON MISSION REGARDLESS OF THE COST

1. The mission always means taking a _____ stance for _____ (Mark 6:17–18).
2. The mission always runs _____ the ways of the _____ (Mark 6:19–24).
3. The mission always _____ with a _____ (Mark 6:25–29).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What things have already given up in order to follow God?
- What things in your life do you think you will have to give up or sacrifice in order to remain obedient to God's mission?
- How would you express to a friend that you do not believe that his or her life is pleasing to God? What consequences might you pay for being so honest?
- What sacrifices are involved in walking obediently in God's mission or plan in terms of the friends you hang out with? your behavior and activities? your entertainment choices?
- What do you believe could be the ultimate cost that you might pay for being on mission with God?