

Matthew 14:1-12 | David Baumgartner

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[0:00] All right. Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to be here, isn't it? Air conditioning. What more can you ask for? We're going to be continuing our verse-by-verse study in Matthew's Gospel account.

So if you have your Bibles or your cell phones, please turn with me to Matthew chapter 14. We're going to be looking at the first 13 verses there.

Well, I notice there's all this joy in the room. I know personally I'm just filled with joy. But today we're going to be looking at a rather sad account, and that's the execution of John the Baptist.

This is actually recorded in all three of the synoptic gospel accounts. Our outline this morning is going to be pretty simple. We're going to be introduced to a guy by the name of Herod Antipas and his family.

And we'll also be looking at the role that he and his family played in the death of John the Baptist. And then finally, we'll be looking at what it means for us.

[1:09] So, KJ, if you could put that verse up there. Let's go ahead and read with me. Chapter 14, beginning in verse 1. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the news about Jesus and said to his servants, This is John the Baptist.

He has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work with him. For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip.

For John had been saying to him, It's not lawful for you to have her. And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude because they regarded him as a prophet.

But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

And having been prompted by her mother, she said, Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist. And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests.

[2:35] And he sent and he had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

And his disciples came and took away the body and buried it. And they went and reported to Jesus. Now when Jesus heard it, he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place by himself.

Heavenly Father, as we think about these verses, this passage, we think about just what that meant to Jesus on that day.

We think about what it means to us, Lord, when we see evil seem to have the upper hand. Lord, we are grateful for this, your word, for this passage, and just for our time together that we can study it and to see what we can glean from this.

And Lord, we're thankful that the battle has been won. Sometimes sin does, evil does have an upper hand, but you have won the battle.

[3:47] And we're so thankful for that. And all of us said in Jesus' name, amen. I think, if truth be known, that I think most of us in this room are somewhat familiar with what went on here.

I looked on Google and I found at least six different Hollywood movies with this theme. And, you know, of course, they call it The Dance.

The Dance of the Seven Veils, or another title, was Salome's Last Dance. Even the season four of The Chosen has a version of this.

And so you wonder, you know, what's going on here? You know, has Hollywood, has The Chosen, has any of these really depicted what really went on that day?

Well, let's go ahead and look at our text, beginning in verse one. Notice that Matthew says, At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the news about Jesus.

[4:48] So we begin here with this man, Herod the Tetrarch. Now, we haven't come up with his name before. Who is he? Well, earlier in chapter two of Matthew, we were introduced to another Herod.

This guy was Herod the Great. Around 40 BC, the Romans needed a puppet to oversee the Jews. And this guy named Herod was politically aligned. And so that the Roman Senate gave him control over the entire area of Israel.

In fact, the Roman Senate called him the king of the Jews, even though Herod was a descendant of Esau. There's a few things about Herod the Great.

To his credit, he was actually a very great builder. He built fortresses. He built palaces. He built the Temple Mount, of course, where you see including the Western Wall.

[5:49] And, of course, he built the temple. He's best known for the guy who ordered the killing of the babies in Matthew chapter two, around when the time Jesus was born.

Historians say that Herod the Great had 15 children by 10 different women. And so we're talking here about a really big family.

Lots of half-brothers and half-sisters. And, in fact, if you look in Scripture in three different places, in Mark chapter three, chapter 12, and Matthew 22, there's this group that's mentioned called the Herodians.

What are they talking about? This is the extended family of Herod. Also, it included business associates and servants and friends of Herod's large influential circle.

The key thing is that when Herod died in 4 BC, control of all of Israel was parceled out to four different tetrarchs.

[6:55] Tetrarchs. That word tetrarch, what we see here in Scripture, it just means a ruler of a fourth part. So, well, who were they? Well, just briefly, in Luke chapter three, verse one, we see that it mentions a tetrarch by the name of Lysanias.

There's not much known about him. Perhaps he was a son-in-law of Herod the Great. He was assigned a small territory called Abilene that included a pass through the mountains of Lebanon. The remaining land of Israel went to three of Herod's sons. There was Herod Philip II, and he's also mentioned in Luke chapter three, verse one, as a tetrarch.

And he was placed over the northern part of the land called Ituria. He had another son called Archelaus, and he was placed over Judea and Samaria.

He's actually mentioned in Matthew chapter two. This was when Jesus and his family were leaving. And I'll read it for you. In Matthew chapter two, verse 22, it says that Joseph arose and took the child and his mother and came into the land of Israel.

[8:14] But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed to regions of Galilee.

Well, those are three of them. The man in our passage this morning is Herod, also known as Herod Antipas. And he was placed over the middle section of Israel, known as Galilee.

And so in our text, we see Jesus has been traveling around Galilee. He's been healing people. He's been casting out demons. And in verse one in our passage says, at that time, Herod the tetrarch heard news about Jesus.

And it says in verse two, he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist. He's risen from the dead. And that's why miraculous powers are at work in him.

Now, the last time we heard about John the Baptist was actually in chapter 11, verse five. And at that time, he was in prison. Well, now we learn that John the Baptist is dead.

[9:29] And so now, how did that happen? What happened? Well, so in the following verses, Matthew's going to tell us. And so we begin in verse three.

Here's the account. For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and he put him in prison. Why did he do that?

On account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. So now we have some new names introduced here. Who are these people? There's a little background here about what's going on. At one time, Herod Antipas had a wife. Her name was Phasalus. And she was the daughter of an Arabian king. He was king over a small neighboring country of Judea.

Today, it's known as the area called Petra. Antipas also had another half-brother named Philip. Now, this is not Philip II. This is Philip I.

[10:31] And that's who he's referring to in verse three here. This Philip was not a tetrarch. He's just a private citizen. And this Philip also had a wife named Herodias.

And they had a daughter named Salome. It's interesting that Herodias was actually the daughter of another one of Herod's sons, Aristobulus.

And so, actually, she was married to her half-uncle at the time. Well, as the story goes, one day, Antipas was visiting his brother Philip in Rome.

And while there, he's checking out Herodias. He's interested in her. And he seduced her. And she went along with it.

Antipas leaves his wife. And Herodias leaves her husband. And so, the two of them join together. She joins with Antipas, who, by the way, is also her half-uncle.

[11:37] So, now you have a new couple. Herod and Herodias. Here they are. Obviously, this relationship has some problems. And all of this comes to John the Baptist's attention.

It says in verse four, For John had been saying to him, It's not lawful for you to have her. The tense of the Greek verb there actually indicates that John repeatedly said this to Herod Antipas.

Luke's account, and we'll be looking at some of these other synoptic gospel accounts here. Luke's account in chapter three, verse 19, tells us that Herod the Tetrarch was reproved by John the Baptist on account of Herodias, his brother's wife, and on account of all the wicked things Herod had done.

That word reproved. We should look at that word and be clear what it means. It means to express strong disapproval. That word is translated as rebuke in 1 Timothy chapter five and in other places. So here you have John the Baptist rebuking Herod for you can't have this woman. Well, how did Herod respond? Well, in verse five tells us, Although he wanted to put John the Baptist to death, it says he feared the multitude.

[13:10] We're reminded here that the people had a lot of respect for John the Baptist because it says they regarded him as a prophet. Well, the story's not over, friends.

That's because Herodias really hated John the Baptist. In Mark chapter six tells us that she held a grudge against John and wanted him put to death.

Well, Herodias saw an opportunity. Look in verse six. It says, When Herod's birthday came, this would have been an extravagant event attended by the Herodians and many other notable people. And it says in verse six, that the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. You realize, Salome would have only been a teenager by this time.

If you look down and notice in verse 11, she's called a girl. That's the same word that's used of the girl that Jesus healed. In Mark chapter five.

[14:20] And it tells us she was only 12 years old at the time. Well, Salome, it tells us she danced. Now, here's where we get to a lot of the movies that we see today.

Because in most of the movies, they depict her dance as being somewhat erotic. Maybe you've seen some of that before. Is that really the case?

Was it some kind of sensual dancing that she did? Friends, we really don't know. It's very possible that it was. For one thing, Josephus and other historians wrote about the Herodians and talked about how immoral they were.

And so, you know, they were known for their drunkenness and their drunken parties. But also, if you'll notice, it says that she danced before them. That word there actually implies that she made herself to be a spectacle in front of this crowd.

We really don't know. But in any case, it tells us Herod was pleased. And so, wanting to appear generous in front of all his guests, it says in verse 7, thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

[15:39] Boy, what a mistake. In Mark's account, it says that he actually promised up to half his kingdom. It's really unclear if Antipas could really do that.

Because he's really, in truth, under the thumb of Rome. But anyway, it sure sounds impressive, doesn't it? I'll give you half the kingdom. Well, Salome, in other words, I'm going to give you anything that you want.

It says in verse 8, having been prompted by her mother, that's Herodias, she said, give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist. And although Herod was grieved, the king commanded it to be given.

Two reasons are noted here. Because of his oaths, in other words, to uphold his reputation, his honor. But secondly, because of his dinner guests.

And that's because the guy, he doesn't want to be embarrassed in front of all these people. So verse 10, and he sent, and he had John beheaded in prison.

[16:49] John's prison must have been pretty near the palace where this party took place. It says in verse 11, that his head was brought on a platter, given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

And then we're told that John's disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and they went and reported it to Jesus. Thus ends the ministry of John the Baptist.

The voice of a man who in Matthew 11, Jesus called the greatest person who was ever born. John was silenced, quietly, privately.

And then in verse 13, now when Jesus heard it, he withdrew there in a boat to a lonely place by himself.

We'll end the text right there. That's the account. It's a rather sad account, isn't it? Sometimes in life, it seems like evil wins.

[17:56] And you and I may wonder, why did Matthew include this story? What can we learn from it? I think there's three things that I saw that I'd like to share.

The first thing is that we learned something about Herod Antipas and his family. If you noticed, he was tripped up by his pride with a little help from his wife, of course, who knew his weaknesses.

And he ends up ordering the execution of John. We're told that Herod Antipas was afraid of the people. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Mark 6, verse 20.

I'd like to point out a really interesting passage, which I think gives us some additional information about Herod's thinking, about how did Herod Antipas view life.

Mark 6, verse 20. Let me read it here. It says, For Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.

[19:10] And get this, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed, but he used to enjoy listening to him.

Wow. Apparently, while John the Baptist was in prison, a prison by the way that Herod Antipas put him in, Antipas would meet with John privately.

And it says, even though he was often perplexed, we're told that he enjoyed listening to John. What's going on here?

Well, remember, even though we're told that Herod Antipas saw John as holy and righteous, we see no evidence that he ever heeded any of John's warnings.

I think this suggests, to me at least, that Antipas found John amusing. Perhaps he found the prophet's warnings as entertaining.

[20:21] We're actually going to see this later in Matthew. During Jesus, when Jesus' trial takes place. I'll read in Luke's account.

It says that Herod was very glad this is when when Herod sent Jesus during his trial, sent him to Herod Antipas to be looked at.

It says, Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus for he wanted to see him for a long time because he had been hearing about him and he was hoping for some sign to be performed by him.

And he questioned, so what did Jesus do? It says that he questioned him at length, but Jesus answered him nothing. I think what this tells us about Antipas is that he was indifferent. That's really his problem, isn't it? He was indifferent. Regardless of whatever truth, whatever thing is presented to him, who cares?

[21:27] Who cares? I'm never going to be held accountable. Life will just go on. Don't you see that that's somewhat common today?

Indifference? There was this Nobel Laureate in 1928. He's a Holocaust survivor. His name is Eli Weisel. He says the opposite of love is not hate.

What is that? It's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness. It's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy.

It's indifference. The opposite of life is not death. It's indifference. So that's what we see in Herod Antipas.

What else do we see? Well, we learn the fate of John the Baptist, this important figure in Scripture. As we've studied this account from Matthew, we know that John was God's messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus.

[22:41] Jesus. John called people to repent so that they would see their need for a Savior. And along the way, he became aware of this issue involving the man who's in charge.

And notice John didn't back down. No, he said, you can't have her. That had to take some guts. You agree with that? I think it did.

He was put in prison. And then later, he was executed. John's work was done. And then he went home to glory. I have a question.

This is really for the Bethel Church family here. I thought you'd kind of love to dive into this. How should you and I respond to the Herods living around us?

those who are actively living a life of immorality? Suppose you have a new couple that moves in next door to you and their names are Herod and Herodias.

[23:56] And you're having them over for a barbecue to celebrate Labor Day and you find out that their lives don't align with Scripture. What should you do?

I'm going to give you three options. Don't worry, there's not going to be raising hands or anything like that. Here's one option. Follow John's example and rebuke them for their immoral life.

Are you comfortable with that? If the couple claims to be Christians, then I think that you could possibly challenge them on various passages in Scripture.

I'll give you an example of one I wrote down here. Paul told the saints in Ephesus in chapter 5, sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not be named among you as is proper among the saints.

Well, here's a problem, friends. Herod and Herodias were unbelievers and as such, they're outside the church.

[25:15] In fact, they don't even have the Holy Spirit in their lives to change anything. And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, he says, what do I have to do with judging outsiders?

He says, do you not judge those who are within the church? But he says, but those who are outside, God judges. So that's the first option.

Here's the second option. Herod and Herodias, you're living an immoral life? you find that out, you say nothing.

Say nothing. By the way, that's the preferred choice of many churches today. Say nothing. Quiet. Maybe attaboy.

Go for it. The problem is, didn't Jesus tell us earlier when we studied the Sermon on the Mount that you are the salt of the earth?

[26:21] Here's a quote. This is from an unknown author. It's disputed who said this. The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

Don't say anything. And I think about that option and I think about all the times that I have complained about the deteriorating morality in our country and I say nothing.

Can you relate to that? It's the second option. I'm kind of putting these together. Here are my thoughts and we have to remember that we are now, we have God's word. So this is my opinion here. I think in a general sense, publicly, I believe that you and I should take a stand for righteousness.

righteousness. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5, he says, do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.

[27:30] When he says expose them, he's referring to the deeds of darkness. He's not talking about individual people. He's talking about the deeds of darkness and we're to expose them.

And I think that dealing in a public sense. Secondly, though, I believe that when dealing with individual people who do not believe in Christ, I don't think we should rebuke them directly. Here's a helpful verse, and I know that we've looked at this before. It's found in 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 15. Sanctify Christ in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that's in you, yet with gentleness and reverence. When he says everyone, it's very interesting there that the Greek in that word, it's actually masculine singular. He's saying, in other words, every person who asks for you to give an account. And so we may wonder, what does that look like? I'll give you a great example. In Acts chapter 24, we're told that Paul reasoned with Felix, a Roman governor, about self-control and the coming judgment.

[28:54] You don't have to turn there, but it's in Acts 24. It says that Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

And here's what it says. As Paul was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, go away and present.

Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you. So, here we have some discussions. Here we have invitations to participate in reasoned exchange here.

Another thing, of course, we can share our testimony. We see Paul doing that. I've been doing that a lot lately, sharing my testimony. You know why? Because nobody can argue with it.

And if someone has trouble with it, I'm not directly offending someone. We can remember to pray for people. And it's a great reminder when we pray that we don't save anybody.

[30:06] All of us need God's grace. Here's the third reason, and if I could invite the musicians to come up. Here's a third reason why Matthew included this account.

It fits with the theme of Jesus' rejection. You realize Matthew wrote this account some 15 to 20 years after Jesus ascended back into heaven.

And we're in this section in Matthew where he's giving his readers examples of Israel's unbelief and rejection of God's plan of salvation.

If you notice the context right before this passage in chapter 13 verse 54, Jesus returned to his hometown Nazareth. The crowds are amazed at his teaching, but as we saw, they refused to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

In fact, verses 57 and 58 says that they were offended by him. And Jesus were told they did no miracles there because of their unbelief.

[31:20] In Matthew's gospel, there's a close connection between Jesus and John the Baptist. Christ. In fact, in John chapter 3, John himself refers to himself as the friend of the bridegroom.

Listen to what he said in John chapter 3 verse 28. He's speaking about himself. He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.

And so this joy of mine has been made full. John went home with his joy being full.

Yes, sometimes evil does seem to win out, but evil does not have the final word. Christ himself will be put to death, but he will die as a sin offering, paying the price of all those who hear him, hear his voice, and place their faith in him.

And he will defeat death by rising again. Here we have this, what a contrast between Herod Antipas and John the Baptist.

[32:45] Herod Antipas had everything. And where is he today? a Christless life. John the Baptist had nothing.

We're told that he dressed in camel outfits. He ate locusts, wild honey. Who has the joy now? I think it just tells us, friends, that you and I can have hope, and you and I can be salt of the earth.

We don't have to be ashamed. We can share God's word with others as we have opportunity.

Here's my last verse that I'll end with. It's in Luke chapter six.

Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man.

Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven, for the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

[33:53] Heavenly Father, once again we look to you and we thank you, Lord. We thank you that we know that the story is not finished, that you will have your day, and that Lord, all of us who have been adopted into your family have a glorious future.

Until then, Lord, may our words, may our actions and deeds be seasoned with salt. Help us with the Herods and Herodias' today.

Lord, let them see in us shining examples of those who have been transformed by the very power of your Spirit in us.

Thank you, Lord, for this. May we leave here as people that have been refreshed, and even though it's a difficult and sad account, we know that you have the ultimate victory.

We ask for this in the name of Jesus. God's people said, Amen.