

# The Gospel Of Matthew

**Text:** Matthew 14:1-12

**Introduction:** It seems this passage is out of place. No mention of Jesus or parables, just a Herod, a preacher, and a wicked wife. But it has great implications. First, in the last chapter we see the unbelief of an entire town, cf. Matthew 13:57-58. But what we see now overall is a rejection of Christ by a single man, Herod. Although he didn't directly oppose Christ, he did so indirectly to John who was a messenger of Christ. Why did he oppose John? Because John was a truth teller, cf. vs. 4.

You may not think you oppose Christ, but you don't often like what is preached, taught or conversations that expose your sin. You get offended at the one who speaks the truth. You may leave a church, stop having conversations, and even make fun of those who hold such biblically narrow views. You may think you are just offended at the one who speaks, but in reality you are opposing the truth of God and God Himself. Again, a reminder of Galatians 4:16, **“So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”**

I do not want to keep repeating myself, but the truth is not subject to your feelings. The standard for today seems to be *“I feel therefore I am”*, but truth isn't based upon your feelings or what you think it should be. Because absolute truth reveals the nature of our own sinfulness, it often offends us. So, we just make the truth subjective. This is the reason we have such doctrinal confusion in the church, because the church is molding itself to the culture. The hatred of John was a result of not waving one iota on the truth, he didn't change the truth to fit Herod's sin. Neither should we.

## **Herod's Reaction (Vs. 1-2)**

The time line is somewhat hard to place, but Herod finally heard of Jesus and assumed it was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Herod certainly suffered from some sort of guilt for having beheaded John. He wanted to be crowned king, but was only a mere “governor” of a province. His father was Herod the Great, a wicked, vile, cold-blooded man. He had members of the Sanhedrin put to death for opposing him, he had at least one of his wives and two of his sons executed. And the most atrocious act was having all the babies slaughtered under two in an attempt to destroy the Messiah.

Luke records this as well, as Herod was terrified Jesus was John the Baptist risen and seeking revenge, **“Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead.”** In his mind, thought John was back to haunt him.

## **The Issue At Hand**

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John's message from the beginning as the forerunner of Christ was simple and didn't change, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). John would later scold the Pharisees for coming for baptism just to have another feather of works in their cap. Matthew 3:7-8, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance." John was not in the business of felt needs preaching. Nor was he concerned about what others thought about the truth. It was in Matthew 4:12 where we see John was put into prison.

Why was John hated? Why was he imprisoned? He confronted sin and called for holiness. He didn't dress or look or was educated as other religious men. Yet, Matthew 3:5, "Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan." The fact remains, that God will bring in those who want to know the truth and truly repent. In other words, don't change the message to get the crowd.

The main reason he was imprisoned is not because of his preaching in the wilderness, but because his preaching of the truth of the law landed in the lap of Herod. He also wanted to kill John, but feared an uprising from the Jews, cf. vs. 5.

Who was behind this? His wife Herodias seems to have the one bending his ear. According to historical data, Herod had taken her as his own wife, after seducing her away from his brother Philip. In order to marry her he had to divorce his current wife. His father in law sought to kill him for doing this, but the Roman army intervened. Herodias was not an angel either. Perhaps only second to Jezebel as wicked and perverse. It wasn't long before she was manipulating him, and because they were both married, they had to divorce, and that made doubly unlawful. Not only that, she was the daughter of the half brother of Herod, making her his niece.

It's not known when John confronted them about this sin, but it didn't set well. Mark records what John had been telling Herod, "For John had been saying to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:18). No one likes to be told about their sin, either from a friend or as you read the Scriptures, and God exposes to you who and what you are doing that violated His commands. It appears that John had rebuked the king and his wife on more than one occasion.

## The Reaction To Truth Boils Over

Both Herod and his wife were incensed by John's truth. As many of us are when we hear the truth. John was neither a diplomat or a compromiser. He did not fail to confront Herod and his wife, nor did he fail

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to confront the Pharisees. Every true follower of Christ, will at some point have to be bold about the truth, and confront and defend it. (Example of Esther being silent and then sharing who she was).

Peter and John became bold in the face of trials by speaking the truth. Paul stood boldly. Many stood on the truth no matter what may come. New Testament scholar A.T. Robertson wrote, *“It cost him his head; but it is better have a head like John the Baptist and lose it than to have an ordinary head and keep it.”* John was fearful of nothing except God.

John didn't care what Herod or the Pharisees thought. He wasn't moved by them being offended at the truth. This is becoming more applicable in today's culture as Christian truths about marriage, family, sexuality and life are challenged by those who think truth changes. Thus, we agree with the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1:10, *“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”*

## **Herod And His Wife's Response**

Herod was fearful of many things, including his wife. He feared the multitude of Jews as well. The king had developed a fondness for John, amazed and even fearful of him. Yet, his fear of his wife was greater. A little about her for context, she was evil, vindictive, immoral and cunning. She wanted this meddlesome prophet to be gone! She was plotting his demise, and then the opportunity came.

For context, birthday parties in the ancient world were Gentile and pagan, and the Jews abstained from them. It always meant, drunkenness, immoral behavior, sexual indulgence, erotic dancing and the like. In vs. 5 the word pleased is “aroused”, the king was so immoral he was attracted to his step daughter, so in a drunken state, he promised whatever she wished.

Herod's wife was at the heart of this evil. The chance to exercise her wicked plan and rid her life of this meddler. She influenced her daughter and used her to get what she wanted. And that was John the Baptist's head. The king lost all dignity by his weakness, drunkenness, and lustful stupor. So this raises the question of such a ridiculous request. Why didn't he just say no? He wasn't a man of respect. He wasn't a man of valor. But in the ancient near east, a promise made with an oath was considered sacred and inviolable.

Herod wasn't grieved over his sin, he was tricked and a coward. He knew this was an unjust request. The act was gruesome but not uncommon in the day. And Herod was played for a fool, and sealed his fate of damnation. He would become friends with Pilate, and work together against Christ. Dr. John

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MacArthur notes, *“Herod rejected Christ, and Christ rejected Herod. For fear of a woman, for fear of his reputation, for fear of his peers, for her of his throne, and for lack of fear of God, he damned his soul forever.”* The question today is where are you at? Will you give up your favorite sin, pride and fear the one who can kill both body and soul?

## **The Response Of Jesus**

The grief the disciples felt coming to get the body of John, a beloved and faithful man, to carry it away. Vs. 13 tells us what Jesus did, and affirms the humanity of the Son of God. The human emotion of a man whom He loved. He went to a secluded place. As some scholars say Jesus fled because He feared the same fate as John. I don't believe that. He knew He would die on the cross not long after this. John the Baptist was the first martyr to die for Christ, for preaching the truth.

**Application:** Do you like the truth you hear? Does it meddle in your life? Or are you at the point where you just don't want to hear it anymore. I'm not talking about beheading someone, I am talking about just plainly walking away from hearing the truth.