

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Fear that Forfeits Christ

Scripture: Matthew 14:1-13

Code: 2307

Let's turn together in our Bibles to Matthew 14. This passage is one of the most fascinating, while tragic, and yet triumphant texts in all of the Word of God. It tells the story of the murder of John the Baptist, but there is far more to the story than just that. As a story by itself, it has more intrigue than the most bizarre soap opera imaginable. It is an incredible story; true in every word. But beyond just the events, the plot, and the characters, there is an amazing picture of how a man, through fear, forfeited the Kingdom of God and forfeited the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that the fear of man brings a trap, or a snare. We see how true that is in this account. As we come to Matthew 14, the Messiah has been rejected, but, with His disciples, continues to preach the Kingdom. I think Scofield aptly calls this section of Matthew 'the Ministry of the Rejected King.' Jesus has arrived, presented Himself as King, announced His Kingdom. He is the long-awaited, long-promised Messiah, the King. He has been, however, rejected by His people. But among the people, there are some who will believe, so the Lord and His Twelve are moving among those people to present the Kingdom and its truth.

As we come to chapter 14, we have one of the eight incidents that are recorded from the end of chapter 13 through the beginning of chapter 16; eight instances that show us how people responded to the preaching of the Kingdom. You'll remember that the parables of chapter 13 describe the fact that some will believe and some will reject, and that will be the way it is in this age. Now we have illustrations of that.

As I told you in our last study, there are eight incidents. Two of the eight show people who believe; six of the eight show people who do not believe, paralleling the soils parable in the beginning of chapter 13. In our last look at chapter 13, we saw the city of Nazareth - the first illustration of an unbelieving, rejecting people. Now we see the story of Herod the tetrarch, as he is called in verse 1, who is also an illustration of stony ground, hard soil, unbelief, resistance, and rejection. This is a select incident, chosen by the Holy Spirit so that we may see that in this day, in this age, as well as the time of our Lord, there will be many who hardheartedly will reject the message of the Kingdom.

As you look at Matthew 14, keep in mind that Luke 9 and Mark 6 also feed in more information from parallel perspectives to make this story full, so we will be appealing to them periodically as we look at this story.

The last passage dealt with a town that rejected Christ; this one deals with a man who rejects Christ. The last passage dealt with common people who opposed the King; here, we see a king who opposes the True King. The last passage revealed the treatment of the Messiah; this one, the treatment of the forerunner, or the messenger, or the agent of the Messiah. The last passage showed rejection and resistance based primarily on jealousy; this one shows rejection and resistance based primarily on fear. But both of them have, at the bottom, selfish pride, and in all cases, that is usually what damns the soul - an unwillingness to give up what a person is to embrace Jesus Christ.

The story is told in a flashback. We look first of all at the reaction in verses 1-2, and then the story in flashback in verses 3 and following. Let's look at the reaction in verses 1-2. Remember that Christ is preaching, the Twelve are trained, and they're out two by two, preaching and proclaiming the Kingdom. The message is going out; signs, wonders, mighty deeds, miracles, healings, casting out of demons, raising the dead - all of this is going on, and the word finally reaches Herod the tetrarch, and we see his reaction.

"At that time," and that is an indefinite phrase; 'time' is kairos, not chronos. Chronos means 'a specific time,' kairos 'a general season.' At the general time of Christ's preaching and the disciples' preaching, at the general time when He was being rejected, at the general time when hostility was beginning to grow, "Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus." Now we meet this main character, the one who is the rejector in the passage, the one who is the stony ground.

He is called the tetrarch. Technically, that term is a mathematical word, it means 'a ruler of a fourth part.' Tetra has to do with a fourth of something. But it came to be a term used of any subordinate ruler in a section of a country, and there were many subordinate rulers in Israel at that time. He was one of them.

In verse 9, he is called 'king,' and it says, "The king was sorry." That is a very generous use of the term; he was not a king. In fact, he sought to be a king. On one occasion, he went to Rome to ask Caligula to make him a king, primarily because his wife wanted to be called 'queen,' and that wish was not granted to him. So he wasn't really a king, but a petty potentate, and it is a very generous use of the term 'king,' which was frequently used for people of lesser stature than we would imagine a king to have.

The name Herod is immediately familiar to us, because if we go back to Matthew 2:1, when Christ was born, we'll see that there was a king then by the name of Herod. That was a different Herod, Herod the Great. He was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau, and it was quite interesting that a descendant of Esau should rule over the sons of Jacob. He was an Arab, if you will. Herod the Great, to compound matters, was also married to a Samaritan, so you can imagine how a non-Jew, son of Esau, married to a Samaritan would be unpopular in the hearts of Jews. Yet he was their king,

appointed by Rome, over the whole area. It was he who was so fearful when he heard the word that a King had been born, and as a result, slaughtered, in a massacre, all of the babies, in order that he might eliminate anyone who would pose a threat to his throne.

Herod the Great has long been dead, however, by the time that this passage occurs, and this is one of his sons. History tells us that he was known as Herod Antipas. When Herod the Great died, his dominion, which was all of Palestine (to the north, east, and even south), was divided among three of his many sons. It is hard to keep track of his sons, because he had them by different women, so some of them were half-brothers. Some of them even had the same name, as we shall see; they had different mothers, but the same father.

He had three sons: Archelaus, Philip, and Herod Antipas. Archelaus was assigned the area of Judea and Samaria, over which he ruled. Philip was given Ituraea and Trachonitis, which was the northernmost part of the land of Palestine. So Archelaus was in the south, Philip was in the north, and Herod got the middle, which was Galilee, and to the east of Galilee, the area known as Perea.

This man had become sort of a petty potentate, a small-time king, a subordinate ruler of Rome, there to leave some kind of imprint of power and control on the society of Jews. There are two other Herods who appear later in the New Testament, and you need to understand that they come in the same line. The next Herod we meet is named Herod Agrippa, and if you want to know about that Herod, read Acts 12; he declared a 'Herod Day,' celebrated his power, and didn't give God the glory, so God smote him and he was eaten by worms, and died. There is, following him, a second Herod Agrippa, or Herod Agrippa II, and we find him in Acts 26. Paul preached to him. So basically we have these four: Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I, and Herod Agrippa II. Herod the Great has long been dead, and at this time, Herod Antipas is in his thirty-second year of rule.

He is the one who ruled Galilee and the area around it during the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Herod most familiar to the time and place in the text of Scripture. His area was from the Sea of Galilee to the northernmost tip of the Dead Sea; from the coast to east, beyond the Jordan. That was the area which he ruled.

He had lived in Tiberius, which is a city on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. I have been there, and it is a very lovely place. He had built a palace there. His father also had built a massive fortress at a place called Machaerus, and that was his summer home because it had natural mineral springs and so forth. So he spent much of his time in Machaerus and the rest of his time in Tiberius, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

What is interesting about this is that Jesus, in all of His ministry in the gospels, at no time is indicated to have ever visited Tiberius. By the way, you could walk from Capernaum to Tiberius, and Jesus did so much in Capernaum. Tiberius was within walking distance from Nazareth, or Cana, where He did

His first miracle. Yet Jesus is never indicated to have gone there. It is almost as if there was a very obvious effort to avoid a confrontation with Herod. He had already had a confrontation with Herod the Great as an infant, when Herod tried to massacre Him, and this man came out of the same basic style of rule, and there was no sense in putting Himself in a jeopardizing situation. So there is no indication that He ministered in Tiberius, which is where this man lived.

Therefore, Herod was not particularly aware of the ministry of Jesus at first. By the time he heard of the fame of Jesus, as verse 1 says, it has been two years since our Lord's baptism, or somewhere between one and a half or two and a half, depending on your chronology. So a couple of years have gone by and he hasn't heard. It may have been because the Lord never came there, or it may have been because he was at Machaerus much of the time. It may also have been because he lived in his ivory tower, and the Jewish people weren't about to make him privy to what was going on. It may have been that he was so consumed with his luxurious living and decadence that he never bothered with such petty matters. But finally, he heard of the fame of Jesus. This after the Lord is out ministering, He has trained the Twelve, and they are out ministering, so the word is spreading rapidly, and the hostility is growing. The conjunction of all of those things brings this to his attention.

His reaction is very startling. Verse 2. "He said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.'" This was a great concern to him, because he had murdered John the Baptist. I suppose the fear of any murderer would be most realized in the possibility of the one he murdered coming back from the dead. I have heard of those who have done such things and been haunted in the nights for years after with the image of that person rising before their consciousness. The tremendous guilt that he had for murdering John the Baptist, that morbid kind of guilt, added to his amazing curiosity and brought him to the conviction that this was John the Baptist raised from the dead.

If you compare the other accounts, for example, in Luke, this was not his first reaction. In Luke 9:7, it says, "Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again." So at first, he got the same kind of report that the disciples gave Jesus when He asked them who He was in Matthew 16; "Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and some say one of the prophets," so all of this is coming in on him, and he doesn't know what it is. But as time goes on, and as he thinks it through, and as the word keeps coming, he sees the similarity between Jesus and John, and assumes it's John raised from the dead. That is what his morbid, fearful, guilty conscience would conjure up in his thinking.

Herod said in Luke 9:9, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" and he desired to see him. Although he was certainly afraid, there was that same morbid curiosity that wanted to see Jesus to verify whether his fear was legitimate. So Matthew shows us that he settles on the fact that it is John the Baptist. He makes that note at the end of verse 2, that the mighty works

that He does verify that.

That is a very important indication, because it tells us that John had done some mighty works. If he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, as it says in Luke 1, the spirit and power of Elijah was that of a miraculous power. Elijah was one of those men in God's Old Testament economy who was given the power to accomplish miracles. It is not without convincing argument that John the Baptist may well have been able to do some of the same. So when Herod hears that Jesus has this miraculous kind of power, which he knew to be demonstrated in John, he is assured in his mind by his guilty conscience that John the Baptist is back from the dead. His curiosity demands that he find out for sure.

Let's look at the reason for that reaction. Here comes the flashback; it is how the story is told. In verses 1-2, Herod is reacting to Jesus, and here is why he assigns to Him the similarity with John the Baptist. Verse 3. "For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'"

Matthew flashes back to the event that caused him to react the way he did to Jesus. This is how it happened. Folks, this is some kind of story. In order for us to understand it, I want to introduce you to the characters. First, John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, a great, holy, righteous man of God. Herod even said that of him; he knew that, it was obvious. Jesus said, "Of them that are born of women, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Matthew 11:11 indicates, therefore, that he was the greatest man who ever lived, the greatest prophet who ever prophesied. He was a marvelous, incredible man, the forerunner of the Messiah, the cousin, as it were, of the Lord, through the relationship of Mary and Elizabeth. This man's job in the world was to announce and introduce the Christ.

In Luke 1, it says that he would be great in the sight of the Lord, and drink neither wine or strong drink. He would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and turn many of the hearts of the people to the Lord their God. And he did. When he came, his message was very clear: repent. What does repentance presuppose? Sin. He was a confronter; he called people to confess their sin. Matthew 3:6 says that he was there, and coming and calling them, and they were coming to him confessing their sins, and he would then baptize them as a symbol of their desire for cleanliness of spirit. So he confronted sin, and called, with a strong message for holiness, to prepare a people for the arrival of the Messiah. He was very popular; the whole country was going out to see him, and multitudes responded to his message.

In contrast to this man of God, we meet Herod. We've already talked about the biographical data, so maybe I can say a word or two about his character. As I said, he was a descendant of Esau, ruling the sons of Jacob, which put him in a very difficult position. He was evil, debauched, shameless, hen-pecked, pushed around by an overbearing woman, given to all excesses, troubled in his

conscience but refusing to obey, and John the Baptist really disturbed him.

Here was a man with tremendous popularity, to whom the multitudes of people were moving, and Josephus, the historian of the time, tells us that Herod Antipas was really nervous about John. He writes, "When many others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause."

So Herod no doubt realized that the best thing to do with this guy was to kill him, just like his father had tried to do with the Messiah originally, when he slaughtered all the babies. He was like every other weak, fearful, impotent, suspicious, frightened tyrant who can only think of killing a rival; he had learned it well from his father.

So he put John in prison, according to verse 3, and behind this was his wife, Herodias, pushing the issue. Machaerus was a huge place - fortified by Herod the Great, incorporating a summer palace as well as a fortress. It was on a mountain higher than the city of Jerusalem, so you could see for miles around.

Archaeologists have dug that area up and found there was a great dungeon there, plunging deep into the earth, and in that dungeon made out of masonry, there were holes in the masonry where wood and iron were attached, in order that a prisoner might be chained to the very dungeon wall. They believe that was the place that was the prison of John the Baptist. So he was put in prison to be kept there for about a year.

We also meet Herodias in verse 3. It introduces Herodias as 'his brother Philip's wife.' Herodias is one of the worst people in the Bible; she is really wretched, as you will see. She is not designated as his wife, though she was married to him. But the Bible says she was his brother Philip's wife. So the Holy Spirit refuses to recognize her marriage to Herod. The Holy Spirit refuses to call her the wife of Herod, because in verse 4, it says, "John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" So God wouldn't recognize the marriage. The facts are mind boggling, so hang on to your seat. Here is where the plot thickens.

Herod Antipas was married to the daughter of king Aretas. There was an area south of where we're speaking of, southeast of the Dead Sea, called Nabatean Arabia. It's where Paul went during those years when he was silent and God was preparing his heart before he came back to minister. Nabatean Arabia had a king named Aretas. Aretas had a daughter, and Herod married her. She was his wife. Herod also had a brother named Philip. Not Philip the tetrarch, that was another brother named Philip. This is a different Philip, by a different woman, but the same father, Herod the Great.

Well, Herod went to Rome to visit his brother Philip, because Philip was a private citizen who lived in Rome. He didn't get any place to rule, and some historians believe it was because of some treachery on the part of his mother. He had a wife named Herodias. While Herod was there, he seduced Philip's wife. Apparently, she responded positively to the seduction, so he said to her, "Why don't you divorce Philip and come be my wife? I'll divorce the daughter of Aretas, and when we get our decks cleared of our present mates, we'll consummate a marriage." That is exactly what happened.

It's somewhat complicated at this point. Herodias was the daughter of another brother of Herod, so he's one son of Herod the Great; Philip is another son of Herod the Great; there was another son of Herod the Great who had a daughter who was Herodias. So he's marrying his brother's daughter. There is so much in this that can confuse you, so just try to hang on to that.

Philip and Herod Antipas were one generation from the loins of Herod the Great, Herodias was two generations, so she married her uncle. That is incest. By the way, she had another brother named Herod Agrippa, who was the one eaten by worms in Acts 12. I just thought I'd throw that in. This is a really fouled up family. There is all kinds of incest, and that is the simple version!

They decided to go through with their divorces and come together in marriage. John the Baptist confronted the situation. Some believe that it may have been that Herod Antipas called him because he wanted his stamp of approval. Josephus says that the Jews were up in arms, irate over this illegitimate marriage, because this man had married by causing a divorce. He had divorced his own wife, and Aretas was really upset. He was so upset he came in and destroyed Herod's entire army, and Herod would have been killed except that the Romans saved him. The Jews could see the evil of the whole thing, and they really felt that what was happening when Aretas came and devastated the army was punishment for the terrible thing that Herod had done.

So Herod and Herodias are married by the time we come to this scene, and another Philip, the brother of Herod, dies. This Philip is the one who ruled the northern areas. Immediately, Herodias wanted that area; she wanted to be the queen, and have more territory. However, Caligula, who was the Roman Emperor, gave it to Agrippa. She was so upset that she said to Herod, "Go to Rome, and even though you didn't get the other territory, you make him make you a king; I want to be a queen." So Herod hemmed and hawed and tried to talk her out of it, but he couldn't handle her at all. With his tail between his legs, he makes a trip to Rome to ask if he can be a king and she can be a queen.

However, Agrippa doesn't like him at all, and so Agrippa sends a faster messenger to Caligula and tells him that Herod is planning a rebellion and all of this is a ruse. So when Antipas comes in to ask to be made a king, Caligula already believes he has a rebellion and a revolution on his mind, so he takes away his throne and puts him in exile until his death. The worst of it is, he exiled Herodias with him. That's tough, but that happened a little in the future.

At this point, however, we meet this wretched woman. Oh, what a bitter thing when he seduced Herodias. That is the basic cast of characters, and there is one more to meet in a moment. All of this wretchedness was brought to John's attention, and he comes before Herod. He says, "It is not lawful for you to have her." He didn't just say that once, but the Greek text indicates he kept on saying it. He probably said it all over every place. "It is not lawful; that is an ungodly, sinful union."

That is what I see as confronting the issue head-on. He didn't say, "Oh, great king, we want to minister to you, so I don't want to say too much." No, he just said what was true in the spirit and power of Elijah. He just plain said it. It did not make Herod happy to hear that, and it made Herodias livid. She was furious that he said it, and they were angry, and as a result, they threw him in prison.

This is the mark of greatness, the mark of prophetic greatness, the mark of the man of God: fearlessly confronting the sins of men even though they be the highest leaders in the nation or the world. You don't piddle around with leaders of the world; when there is sin to be confronted, you confront it. They hold your life in their hands, but that's OK. You're God's man. Christ, Stephen, Paul, Peter, and John the Baptist confronted it, and it's the only right thing to do.

A.T. Robertson said, "It cost him his head, but it is better to have a head like John the Baptist and lose it than to have an ordinary head and keep it." It's dangerous to rebuke an Eastern despot; you can imagine what would happen if you did that today to some Arabian king. It's the same culture. So John signed his death warrant, but he was in the hands of God.

Verse 5. "And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." This guy lives by fear; he fears his wife, he fears the loss of his throne to John the Baptist, but he is afraid to kill him because he is afraid of the people. He is paralyzed, afraid of everything, so he just keeps John in prison to try to buy time. But something very interesting happens.

As he has John the Baptist in prison, Herod becomes fascinated with him. He is afraid of John, but because he's incarcerated and can't do him any harm, Herod's fear turns to fascination, and he becomes enamored with John. John was dynamic; there was never a man in the history of the world like him, according to Jesus. He must have been a marvelous, incredible kind of person, and Herod was so drawn to him that he began to have regular conversations.

It says in Mark 6:20 that Herod feared John; he was in awe of John. He knew he was a righteous, holy man, and he protected him. When he heard John, he heard him gladly. Herod was hearing John, listening to John, fascinated by him, so his fear was turning to fascination, although the fear would have immediately emerged had John escaped, I'm quite sure. But Herodias was seething; she was a woman of immorality, infidelity, vice; she was vindictive, and nursed her wrath to a boiling

point. She wanted revenge, and she wanted John condemned, dead. She became a parent so incensed with anger and fury that she would stain her child with guilt beyond description.

That introduces us to the last character. Verse 6. "But when Herod's birthday was celebrated," and by the way, only pagans celebrated birthdays, Jews never did. The Jews used to look on the pagan birthday celebrations as a terrible act of shame.

In fact, there was a phrase, *herodas dies*, which in Latin means 'Herod's birthday.' It came to be a proverb for excessive, orgiastic festivals. In those days, the Romans held stag birthday parties; all the birthday parties were stag parties, where only men came. They were gluttonous, drunken brawls, and climaxed by women who came in and danced immoral, lewd, seductive dances and then it became an orgy. That was Herod's birthday.

So the daughter of Herodias, whom Josephus tells us is Salome, danced before them and pleased Herod. Herodias had this all planned; she wants John dead, and she knows that by the end of this party, Herod will be drunk, gluttonous, stuffed to the gills, and primed to be vulnerable. So when it is time for the dancing girls, the immoral, suggestive, shameless women to come in with their lewd dances, she brings in this young 16- or 17-year old daughter of hers, to do this dance and really accomplish her goal. When it says, at the end of verse 6, "It pleased Herod," in our vernacular, it means that it turned him on. He fell to the lust and the lewdness; he became a leering, lecherous, vile, drunken sot.

Verse 7. "Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask." He was really suckered into this, and in his drunken, gluttonous stupor, this state of sexual seduction, he lost all dignity, all sensibility, all desire to do what was right and sane. He wanted to be the magnanimous, magnificent benefactor, and made a stupid promise and then an oath to sign himself to it that she can have anything she wants. Mark adds in chapter 6, "Up to half of his whole kingdom." That will tell you how far gone he was. The plot hatched at that moment.

Verse 8. "So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter.'" Herodias didn't want to wait until Herod sobered up; she wanted it now. The fool was too proud to break his stupid oath because he wanted to come off as a magnificent, magnanimous benefactor. He wanted everyone to think his word was pure gold, that he knew what he was doing, and hadn't made a foolish statement, and he feared losing his reputation and the respect that you can be sure he never had, because all of those kinds of people despise each other.

Out of the fear of losing face with the captains, chiefs, and famous men at the party, instead of saying how enormously stupid such an oath was, or saying, "There is no reason to commit an enormous crime; that's not what I had intended by the promise," the morally impotent, witless, weak fool, in fear of his wife, of John the Baptist, and in fear of the people there, he filled his cup with iniquity. As with

the saying, "There is no fury like a woman scorned," she got her way.

Verse 9. "And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her." He was trapped, and he knew it, but his pride wouldn't let him do what was right; he was just like Pilate. Pilate was trying to hold on until they said to him, "If you don't kill Jesus, you're no friend of Caesar." And afraid of losing his name and reputation and throne, he killed the Son of God. So does this man kill the messenger of God for fear of losing his face.

"So he sent and had John beheaded in prison." Silently, privately, in the depth of that dungeon, John the Baptist was murdered. This happened in these days, you know. Herodias had an ancestor by the name of Alexander Junius, and historians tell us that one time, Alexander Junius was holding a big feast, and brought in 800 rebels to make a display. He crucified all 800 of them in front of all the revelers at the feast, and then, while they were hanging on the crosses, still alive, he murdered their wives and children in front of them. It was a debauched world. I think that today, we still see some remnants of this kind of approach to human life in that part of the world.

Matthew Brotus writes, "When the dish was brought in with the bleeding head on it, no doubt she took it daintily in her hands lest a drop of it should stain her. She tripped away to her mother as if bearing her some choice dish of food from the king's table. It was not uncommon to bring the head of one who had been slain to the person who ordered it as a sure proof that the command had been obeyed."

When the head of Cicero was brought to Fulvia, the wife of Antony, she spat on it, pulled its tongue out, and drove her hair pin through it. Jerome says that is what Herodias did with the head of John; we can't verify that, but we know that Herod's family seemed to want to mimic all of the worst atrocities of the Roman nobility. It must have been a point of derision and mocking - that dear, godly, faithful man, his head severed from his body. That is the extent of rejection that comes under the pressure of the fear of man. He was afraid to lose his throne, afraid of John, afraid of his wife, afraid of the people around him. Under the intimidation of that, he damned his soul to Hell forever.

After a year of imprisonment, John the Baptist is dead. His work is done; he has gone to his reward a faithful, uncompromising man. That is the true prophet of God - no compromise.

Someone handed me a letter this morning that said, "Pray for a Pakistani Christian suffering for his faith in Christ and willing to die for the Lord because he won't compromise. We'll call him Mr. Q; he is the peanut butter man. He finds another placard tacked to his house each night, this one declares that a victory front of zealous Muslim men has been formed to harass him by spying on his house 24 hours a day.

"They forbid any Muslim friend to visit him, any shopkeeper to sell food or supplies to his family. They plot to kill him by a certain date if he doesn't recant and return to Islam. After living in his village for more than 20 years as a vibrant, witnessing Christian, making his living by making and selling peanut butter, this is the most protracted and dangerous persecution he and his family have undergone since they left Islam.

"It was seemingly provoked by the marriage of his Christian daughter to a fine young Christian. By tradition, she should have been given to some Muslim cousin. Mr. Q, beloved by all the Christians in Northern Pakistan, is a blessing wherever he travels in the course of his business. Our churches have been stimulated to fast and pray for his family in this crisis. At least one young Muslim man, seeing his faith under stress, has accepted Christ. They have offered \$10,000 to him if he rejects Christ; he said, '\$10,000 is the price of Hell,' and affirms that he is ready to die for his Savior, should he be deemed worthy of that privilege" That comes to us from one of the TEAM missionaries.

The courage of the one who speaks for God. Look at verse 12 and we'll see a beautiful ending to an ugly scene. "Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus." So John's disciples buried his body. I love that they went and told Jesus. You can imagine how it was to pick up the headless body of the man whom they loved, who was the voice of God to them, the greatest man they had ever known, who made such a profound impression, preached repentance, and under whose preaching they had confessed their sins, repented, and been baptized in preparation for the Messiah. They took his body and buried it. It may speak something of the thoughtfulness of Herod in his sobriety as he would permit that.

Then that lovely note at the end of the verse, that they told Jesus. He would have wanted to know that, for John was so beloved to Him. Verse 13. "When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself." Luke tells us that His disciples were with Him, and they were alone. Someone has suggested that He got out of town because He was afraid of Herod; hardly. But then, it wasn't in the plan to confront Herod. This was not the time to see Herod and be thrown in prison, or the gospels wouldn't be the gospels.

The timetable did not involve Herod, so Jesus doesn't go to Tiberius or confront the man. But it would have been a very important time to be alone with the Twelve to talk about what it is going to cost them to preach the Kingdom. Here was the first preacher and he was killed. Christ, the second, would be killed. The majority of the Twelve would be martyred for their faith as well, so this was a very important time to be together to talk about the price, the cost, and a time of instruction.

This is the final note, the climax of the whole thing. Herod wanted to see Jesus. He thought He was John the Baptist risen from the dead, and really wanted to see Him. He wanted to resolve the anxiety in his mind, and he wanted to see the power of Jesus. Luke 9:9 says he desired to see Him. There

was that morbid fascination, that curiosity with the miraculous and the supernatural, and that incredible guilt and anxiety over who it might be that made him want to see Jesus.

You know something? Jesus never saw him. In the intervening period of time, He ministered, but he never saw Herod. Once, He sent a message to him. In Luke 13:32-33, He sent a message to Herod and said, "You fox. You want to see Me? You will not be able to kill Me like you did John the Baptist until My work is done." He called him a fox, and He never saw him, and moved, with quiet dignity, beyond the grasp of Herod. He left Herod to his guilt, his unresolved fear, his vile, wretched sin, and to the woman who was his doom, until one fateful day.

Look at Luke 23:6. This is the only time He ever went into the presence of Herod. This is the trial of Jesus. "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time." Pilate didn't know what to do with Jesus, who was on trial, or mock trial. So he knows that He is from Galilee, and he says that He belongs in Herod's jurisdiction, so he ships Jesus to Herod. Verse 8. "Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him." Here was this strange fascination again, and now, finally, the two meet.

"Then he questioned Him with many words," and we don't know what he asked, but what an opportunity! The Lord can give him all the answers right now. Herod desires, longs to see Jesus, and has for a long time. The Lord could do some miracles, give him all the answers he wants, and it says, "But He answered him nothing." Jesus never said one word. "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other."

They used to hate each other, but here, they became friends. You know how? Common mockery of the Son of God; they are two very tragic men. Listen, Herod rejected Christ, and Christ rejected Herod. It was hard, stony ground; for fear of a woman, for fear of a reputation, for fear of his peers, and for fear of his throne, he damned his soul forever. John the Baptist lost his head but lives forever in the presence of God. Christ wants to reveal Himself to you, but if you are proudly holding onto your reputation, for fear of what others may think, for fear of the attitude and actions of those who may reject you, for fear of the loss of face or reputation, for intimidation by evil people, you have forfeited Christ and damn your soul. The day will come when you ask the questions and get no answers. Let's pray.

Father, we are struck by that incredible verse, "Pilate and Herod were made friends." The only basis they had was a common rejection of Christ. So it is in the world; they have their own, and they are friends with those who choose to live without the blessed Son of God, who choose to live for the lust

of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Oh, God, what a tragic statement. They couldn't agree on anything except that they both had contempt for Jesus. May we know that such friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Father, we come again this morning with thankful hearts because of all that You have done for us, and because of Your great grace to us. Thank You for the beloved Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we live, by whom we are forgiven, and have grace. We pray, Father, that there might be no one who leaves this place who has not known Christ, but that they will come to know Him. We pray that You will fill that prayer and counseling room with those who come with eagerness of heart to embrace the King and find forgiveness and cleansing. Bring us together again tonight with anticipation that You will meet us here, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).