

Matthew 14:1-13

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/24/2011

What Does Deadly Unbelief Look Like – Part 2

Prayer

Would you bow with me? Father, we praise You and thank You for Your Son Jesus. What a privilege it is to come before You, to know that because of Him our requests are heard, to know that because of Him and by the power of Your Spirit, we can understand Your Word and we can do what You say. Father, we praise You for Your Word. We praise You because it reveals You; it reveals Your Son. We praise You that we have an opportunity to look into it today. And I pray that You would convict us, that You would use Your Word to break through the stony hearts, that You would break through the dullness from sin, that You would correct us. Train us, Lord God, that we who know You would be equipped for every good thing and those who do not know You that their hearts would be stirred and drawn unto You. Lord, thank You for Your Word. We pray that You will bless it as it goes out now. And we pray this in Your Son's precious name. Amen

Sermon

Well, I wanted to share – you are probably aware of this – that unbelief takes on many different forms and fashions. We have seen the unbelief of the Jews who would claim to know the Lord God. There are also those who would not claim to know the Lord God but seem to be very interested in the things of God, seem to want to hear those things, seem to believe what they hear; but yet, as we will see today, they are still in unbelief. There is an amazing passage in Ezekiel, chapter 33, and if you want to turn there for a minute. If you were with us when we went through the book of Ezekiel, it pointed out some amazing things that you would not think would be the way things are until you actually read it from God's Word. What we see here is that these people had been exiled to Babylon. The Jews have been exiled after a brutal siege and the expulsion from the land because of their sin. And Ezekiel, the prophet, has been sharing God's Word to them, calling upon them to turn and repent. And when they came to Babylon, it seemed as though these Babylonian exiles wanted to hear the Word of God; they were excited about what Ezekiel had to say. Ezekiel 33, verse 30:

³⁰“But as for you, son of man (that is speaking of Ezekiel), your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying ‘Come now, and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.’ (That sounds good to start with, right?) ³¹And they come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. ³²And behold, you (and that is speaking of Ezekiel, the one bringing the Word) are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not practice them. ³³So when it comes to pass – as surely it will – then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.” [Ezekiel 33:30-33]

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There are those who come and listen to the Word of God, who are intrigued by it, who actually like to hear it. It is enjoyable to them. But yet they do not do what God says. We are going to see today that Herod the Tetrarch enjoyed listening to John the Baptist, that he enjoyed what he had to say for a time.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles? We are going to see today in Matthew, chapter 14, what deadly unbelief looks like. Now again I will fill you in on the context of Matthew. I am going to abbreviate. Hopefully you have been with us and understand what is going on, that Matthew has introduced King Jesus. He is the King of the Jews, the rightful King of the Jews. He is the One who would save. "You shall call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) The LORD, the great I AM, God the Son, took on human flesh – the Lord is Salvation. We saw that He affirmed and confirmed all the prophecies concerning the fact that He is the King, that He is the Messiah who would save.

We saw the way prepared for Him as John the Baptist went out, "Prepare the way and make straight every road," and that he went out and preached, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2) That is where we prepare our hearts. Our hearts are prepared through the process of turning to God, recognizing our sin as He convicts us and calling out to Him to save us.

Very clearly the Lord Jesus came on the scene and began to minister. He was taken first by the Spirit of God out to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan; and He responded in His humanity, although being fully God, He responded, "It is written..." and Satan left Him alone for a more opportune time.

We then saw Him call unto Himself four fishermen. We saw the reality that He was preaching and teaching and healing at the end of chapter 4. And we saw the same statement at the end of chapter 9 that He was preaching and teaching and healing. And Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, shares His teaching and preaching in chapters 5 to 7 and then the affirming miracles in chapters 8 through 9. A gracious God who came among people who believed that they were His and laid forth His Word over their hearts that they would see truly where they stood with Him, a gracious God.

And then we came in chapter 20 where we saw the heart of the Savior as His heart was broken over those who are lost, and He exhorted His disciples to beseech the Lord of the harvest to send workers. We saw opposition forming against Him in chapters 11 and 12. We saw Jesus begin to confront those who had rejected His message, calling the current generation a bunch of spoiled, bratty children who are not getting their way. We saw Him condemn the unrepentant cities in the end of chapter 11, those cities which would incur a stricter judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah because they had rejected Christ who was in their midst. They did not repent. You see, you can think you have accepted Christ all the time. You could say, "Hey, I have accepted Christ. I think Christ is good." But if you have not repented of your sins, you have not accepted Christ. And they had not repented of their sins, and He pronounced their terrible judgment.

Then we came to chapter 12 where we saw the Pharisees trying to set up Jesus, trying to get Him to break their religious system so that they could say He was doing evil on the Sabbath. But what Jesus ended up doing was doing good on the Sabbath and healing and proving to them that they were the

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ones doing evil; they were the ones plotting to kill Him. Again the Lord Jesus addressed the Pharisees in their hypocrisy as they attributed to Jesus Satan rather than the Spirit of God when He cast out a demon and healed a blind, dumb man. And that sin Jesus said was unforgiveable. They were convicted by the Spirit of God (God was in their midst) and they attributed it to Satan – unforgiveable! And within that condemnation as they sought for a sign, Jesus condemned the generation. The evil, adulterous generation seeks and craves a sign.

We saw the condemnation of those who had heard His Word for almost a year and a half and now had begun to reject His Word. We saw very clearly in those chapters that they rejected it - in chapter 13 because their hearts had been hardened, their eyes had been shut to the Word. We saw the Lord Jesus turning away from the multitudes, no longer teaching out rightly, using parables because of their hard hearts. There is a point that if you reject the clear teaching of God, God will allow you to go your way; He will allow you to be hardened to your judgment. And it is a terrible, terrifying warning!

And then we saw through the parables that Jesus gave and His explanations to His disciples that we were “privy” to some wonderful kingdom truths: that although the reality is not many people respond to the Gospel and although the kingdom of God is the smallest thing you can find right now on earth, it will eventually encompass everything. And we saw very clearly that afterwards God removes wickedness. You see those who are truly trusting the Lord, walking with Him, those who are righteous because of Christ, are not many. There are few who find true salvation. But the world is full of those who do not know Christ and who have rejected Christ. But God is a gracious God. If He was to make the kingdom the biggest right now, He would have to judge everyone and pull them out. And He is a gracious God “Not wanting that any should perish.” He is giving time for people to repent. But that day will come where He does pull out those stumbling blocks, those unbelievers, those who have rejected Christ. And then the righteous will shine like the sun.

And we saw some other parables that helped us see the incredible value of the kingdom of God, the incredible value of a genuine relationship with the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is worth more than anything you could ever imagine: that those who are wise would gladly give up their wretched, sinful lives to receive true, eternal life in Christ; that what you give up does not compare to what you gain in Christ – the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. We saw we would be fools to hold onto our earthly lives for just a time and have our own pleasures for a time and then lose our own souls in judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ calls upon us to give up our lives, to repent of our sins and to turn to Him. And we gain everything because we gain a relationship with the living God.

We saw very clearly that His disciples understood. He asked them, “Do you understand these things?” And they said “Yes.” And then He gave them their responsibilities – good household stewards to bring forth the treasures, old and new, to be good stewards of these wonderful truths, wonderful truths.

And then last week we saw the living God come to His own hometown. And we saw the rejection of God in human flesh. We saw that unbelief is based on the rejection of the Word of God concerning Christ, that those who reject Christ use all sorts of diversionary things to pull away from the main point

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which is repentance and faith in Christ. And they do so because they do not want their sin exposed. We saw the result is that they were offended and they would stumble over Christ eternally because they did not believe in Him.

And from this point, I believe we see another picture of what unbelief looks like. It is not religious unbelief; it is unbelief that is interested in religion. Would you turn in your Bibles again to Matthew, chapter 14? We are going to be looking at what wicked unbelief looks like. I am going to read through the first 13 verses and then we will go through it together. Matthew 14:1,

¹ And at that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, ² 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 in him." ³ For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. ⁴ For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet. ⁶ But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷ Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ And having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹ And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. ¹⁰ And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl; and she brought it to her mother. ¹² And his disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. ¹³ Now when Jesus heard it, He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself... [Matthew 14:1-13]

And that is where we are going to stop today. I forgot to give the disclaimer today, but this message does have things that are probably not appropriate for young children so I am going to share things in code. I think you will understand that. Ummm.... just be aware of that, to answer your children's questions in a righteous, age-appropriate manner if they ask any questions afterwards.

We are going to see the epitome of wickedness here, the epitome of sinfulness and selfishness and ungodliness. And in the midst of all this, we are going to see there is an interest in the things of Christ. That does not make sense, does it? So with this in mind, we are going to see Herod's reaction to the news concerning Jesus. Then we are going to have a flashback to why Herod reacts this way; and then we are going to see the Lord Jesus' response today.

Let's take a look and begin at Herod's reaction – the news about Jesus. Verse 1 of chapter 14: "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 ² and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'" Well, obviously, before we start we need to identify who is involved in this portion of Scripture. We need to understand who Herod the tetrarch is; we need to be reminded who John the Baptist is. And I believe in this

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background information, we are going to see and have some insight into the character of Herod and the character of John the Baptist.

Now this is not the Herod from Matthew, chapter 2: Herod the Great. It is not Herod the Great. It is not the Herod who murdered the Hebrew babies and attempted to kill the Lord Jesus as a child, as a babe. This is not that Herod. That Herod died; we see that back in chapter 2. This Herod is...notice our text says "Herod the tetrarch." The term *tetrarch* originally spoke of "one who controlled a quarter of a kingdom." Now Herod Antipas, who is this Herod (Herod the tetrarch), was one of the many sons of Herod the Great. And when Herod the Great split up his empire (or it was split up after he died), he split it up among his sons (or it was split up among his sons). And so we see of his sons - his sons Archelaus, Philip, and Herod, (and this Herod we speak of in our passage is Herod Antipas) – were given dominion over Judea and Samaria. Philip was given rule over the northernmost part; Archelaus over the south; and Herod Antipas got the middle section which is the Galilee region and the region of Perea which is east of Galilee.

We see very clearly this idea of a tetrarch; we see that he (Herod) was the tetrarch of Galilee in Luke 3:1. We see it very clearly. Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee. Now as we look at Herod and his relatives later, we are going to see that this Herod was an evil man. He was a wicked man; he was a sinful man. He was conniving man. And we are going to see how Jesus responds to him.

What about John the Baptist? Let's review a little about him. This is not the apostle John; this is not the apostle that Jesus loved; this is not the one who wrote the Gospel of John; 1, 2, and 3 John, or Revelation. This is John the Baptist. If you would turn to Luke, chapter 1, we have some good information concerning John the Baptist. Let's review that together. We see that John was special from the beginning; he was special from the very beginning. Luke 1:5,

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea (That is the different Herod, okay? That is his dad. That is Herod the Great, okay), there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. ⁸ Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his

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mother's womb. ¹⁶ "And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." [Luke 1:5-17]

Now you remember later on we see when Elizabeth was greeted by Mary, John the Baptist leaped in her womb. And remember what Zacharias prophesied down in verse 67 of Luke chapter 1, a little farther down.

⁶⁷ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, ⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant-- ⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- ⁷¹ Salvation from our enemies, And from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³ The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, ⁷⁴ To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. ⁷⁶ "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; ⁷⁷ To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, ⁷⁹ To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." ⁸⁰ And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel. [Luke 1:67-80]

Now I am almost sure that Zacharias would have told his son about the prophecies concerning him, the prophecy that he had, but also what we see in Scripture: Malachi 3:1. I will read this for you.

¹ "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts." [Malachi 3:1]

John the Baptist would prepare the way, and we saw that in chapter 3 of Matthew that he did come to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Now back to the book of Matthew. Let's look at chapter 3 for a second. If you will remember, we saw this portion in the beginning of chapter 3, starting in verse 1.

¹ Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'" [Matthew 3:1-3]

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He preached repentance because the King was coming! And when he baptized people, it was an acknowledgement that they had repented of their sins. But he was merely preparing the way for the King who would come, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we saw in John, chapter 1, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That is what John the Baptist said when he saw the Lord Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

And if you remember back in Matthew 4:12, the Lord Jesus had heard that John had been put in prison. And this was about a year and a half earlier from what we just read in Matthew 14:1-2. And do you remember while in prison back in chapter 11, John wanted to affirm the fact that Jesus Christ was the Messiah? And he sent messengers. He was in prison. We saw that in Matthew 11 very clearly. And I will read this to you. Matthew, chapter 11, verse 7. This is Jesus' response to the inquiry of John the Baptist, in prison, concerning whether Christ is the Messiah.

⁷ And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes (this is afterwards) about John (and He gives some descriptions about John now), "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. ⁹ "But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' ¹¹ "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [Matthew 11:7-11]

And we went through this passage – I am not going to re-preach it today - but we saw that John the Baptist was the greatest person ever born up to this point except Christ; but Christ was eternal. He just took on human flesh. John the Baptist was the greatest created being - human being - because he had the privilege of introducing Christ personally. What a privilege! And yet, we now in the church have a much greater privilege: we have Christ within us, the hope of glory. We have even such a greater privilege. John the Baptist was the greatest who had ever lived because of his privilege.

So we have Herod, this man who is reigning in Galilee and Perea. He is a little king with a little "k" thinking he is a big king! And we have the John the Baptist who we will see is a courageous, faithful, godly man who was walking in righteousness proclaiming the truth.

With that in mind, let's go back to our passage now in chapter 14. And the Scripture says, "At that time, Herod the tetrarch, heard the news about Jesus." "At that time." What time is he speaking of? He is speaking of that time which we just saw in chapter 13, the time in which the Lord Jesus had turned away from the multitudes. He has pronounced their condemnation and He had turned to His disciples explaining those hidden truths of the Kingdom. "At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus." That word *news* just speaks of what you hear; it is the same word they use to speak of hearing. It speaks of a report or message. He heard the message; he heard the report about Jesus. Evidently

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Herod was stuck up in his little castle area where he was pretty much kept at - where he kept himself – and the news finally got to him concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what was this news about? What did Herod hear about Jesus? What was it that he heard about Him? Look down at the end of verse 2, it says, "...that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Obviously, part of the news that Herod had heard about Jesus was this miraculous stuff going on. And we see that very clearly. We see very clearly that the news of miraculous things was being declared forth. We saw in Matthew 4:24 and 9:26 and 31 that the news concerning Christ was not necessarily about His Messiahship; it was about the healings and the miraculous stuff. That was what was going forth. And Herod heard the news about Jesus. He heard the news and notice what he says to the servants in verse 2. "...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 in him.'" Evidently Herod, at this point, began to believe that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. This is going to key off the next portion: a flashback to when Herod killed John the Baptist.

Take a look at the parallel account in Luke, chapter 9; let's take a look there. Luke 9:6. There is also a parallel account in Mark 6. We are going to be going between Luke 9 and Mark 6 and Matthew 14 so you may want to spread some of your bulletin in different spots so we can hold onto those places. Luke 9:6. Now this is speaking of the disciples after they had been sent out by Jesus to share the Word of God. It says in verse 6:

⁶ And departing, they began going about among the villages, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere. (These were the disciples. They were doing the same thing Jesus was doing.) **⁷ 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,⁸ and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others, that one of the prophets of old had risen again.⁹ And Herod said, "I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see Him. [Luke 9:6-9]**

So Herod originally does not believe he is risen from the dead, but he starts to hear this and he wants to go see him. But evidently he came to the point, as we see in Matthew, that he believed that he (speaking of John) was risen from the dead.

Go to Mark 6:13, and we see another parallel account. Again it comes on the heels of Jesus having sent out His disciples. They were doing what He had asked them to do. They were teaching and preaching; and they were affirming that with the miraculous. They were an extension of what Christ was doing. Mark 6:13:

¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.¹⁴ And King Herod heard of it, for His name (that is speaking of Christ now.) **had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him."** (So people are saying John the Baptist rose from the dead. That is why there are all these

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miracles. You know, that is a sad statement in and of itself because they are not hearing the message, by the way. And he says here)¹⁵ **But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."**¹⁶ **But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" [Mark 6:13-16]**

"John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" So Herod is now convinced that Jesus is John who has risen from the dead. And the reason why he is convinced is because he is trying to figure out why this Jesus person is doing these miraculous things. And so he is attributing that now to John, rising from the dead; he is listening to the rumors of people and he is believing them. But even in the midst of this, he was interested in seeing Him.

Now at this point, we come to a portion of Scripture where we have a flashback where we see what happened when John was actually murdered. So we look in verse 3. It starts out with a *For*. "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 is not lawful for you to have her.'" We begin a flashback here; we begin a flashback of about a year and a half, back to when Herod had arrested John the Baptist. Remember that back in Matthew 4:12. We saw that Jesus heard that he was arrested. It was right in the beginning of Jesus' ministry – that John was arrested and thrown into prison. And folks, prisons were not like the prisons we have today. It is not "three hot meals and a cot," plus TV and exercise time. These were dungeons. They were dungeons. Historians believe that he was probably at a very horrible dungeon in the middle of the desert called Machaerus.

Now why was John arrested? We have this in the flashback. Why was John the Baptist arrested by Herod? In verse 3: "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 is not lawful for you to have her.'" So John had had contact with Herod because the tense of this verb that says "it is not lawful for you to have her." He had been saying this over and over and over again to Herod. And I think we are going to see that John had had contact with Herod and within that contact, he had been continually confronting Herod with the relationship he was in with Herodias. He was continually, habitually saying that it was unlawful, what Herod had done.

Now I am not sure, but quite possibly Herod wanted John to perform miracles for him. Maybe that is why he had brought him before him. It seems like that is Herod's "MO," or *modus operandi*. Herod wants to see some miraculous stuff. Take a look up at Luke 23:8. We see that Herod wanted Jesus to perform stuff. It seems like that was what Herod was interested in. He was interested in the miraculous stuff. Luke 23:8,

⁸ **Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus** (Some people are very glad they come to church sometimes. But for some, it is for the wrong reasons.); **for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. [Luke 23:8]**

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Herod wanted to see some miraculous stuff and he was excited. And evidently, he was the same way with John. But when he saw John, John was righteously rebuking Herod concerning his sin as we will see. You know, one element of unbelief (on a side note) is wanting to see signs. Remember what Jesus said, "An evil and adulterous generation craves signs." (Matthew 12:39) We see even farther on very clearly that they enjoyed and wanted to see signs, but yet they did not repent. The multitudes did not repent. This is what I shared in Ezekiel as we started; that there are those who want to hear the Word of God; they want to hear stuff that is enjoyable to them and yet they do not do what they hear. It is like a sweet, sensual song to come to a biblical church. But yet they do not do what God says. We are going to see that Herod was intrigued by Jesus; he was intrigued by John. He wanted to what he had to say; he wanted to see the signs. But he did not want to repent as we will see. And that cost John his life!

So Herod is craving signs and miraculous. He enjoyed listening to John. He enjoyed listening to John. And we see very clearly –and that is back in Mark, chapter 6, verse 20 – it says,

***^{20b} And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.
[Mark 6:20b]***

That is speaking of Herod, listening to John the Baptist. He used to enjoy listening to him. Herod used to get John and he would listen to him; he enjoyed it. He enjoyed it! We will see in a moment there was something he did not enjoy. He did not enjoy having his sin exposed! Back in our passage, verse 3: "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 is not lawful for you to have her.'" John had confronted Herod, as we will see in a moment, concerning his sin.

And this takes a little bit of explaining, and this is where I will be brief. I think you will understand what I am saying. But history reveals that Herod had gone to Rome; he had divorced his wife, and he had seduced Herodias, the wife of his half brother Philip. Now not only was this marriage wrong, Herodias was also the daughter of Aristobulus, another brother (half brother) of Herod which made this woman he was with which he called his wife (which Scripture does not call his wife, by the way; it still calls her the wife of Philip), this made Herodias his niece also. So Herod had stolen his brother's wife, which is his niece, and John had reproved him concerning that because this incestuous relationship was wrong. "For John had been saying to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" It is not for you to have her. We also see in Scripture that he, John, had reproved Herod. He had reproved Herod. And we see very clearly that John the Baptist was arrested because of what John had said to Herod. It was because on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.

So we have a picture of unbelief, of someone who really delights the Word of God, delights in hearing John. John was not just telling stories: John was giving the Word of God. He was preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. And Herod delighted in that. The Word says in chapter 6 of Mark, verse 20, that he enjoyed listening to him. And folks, we see this all the time; people come and they enjoy listening to the Word of God. But the minute it addresses their personal sin, there is a 180-degree turn and there is

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that hatred manifested in the lives of those who do not know Christ. And we see that Herod had John arrested because he had exposed his sin. That is what this unbelief looks like, this interest yet not a willingness to repent and believe.

We see the core of unbelief. We saw it back in John, chapter 3, last week and I am going to read it to you again. We see very clearly why people do not turn to Jesus, why they do not repent of their sin. John, chapter 3, verse 17:

¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. (First coming is salvation; second coming is judgment. First coming, salvation.) ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." [John 3:17-21]

Herod's deeds were exposed and John was arrested because of his righteous boldness before Herod.

We can learn a lot about John, greatest man up to that time. He was not a compromiser. He spoke clearly over and over again about Herod's sin. He did not fear man, but he feared God. And what about you, brother and sister? When the Lord has prompted you to confront sin, when the Lord (not just "Mr. Sin-Finder"), but when the Lord has brought it before you and you are prompted to confront it, do you shrink back? Or in the power of the Spirit, do you boldly address it for their good for God's glory? John, as we will see, suffered the ultimate, physical consequence for obeying the Lord and being bold and righteous.

There is a lot of shrinking back in the church these days. There are a lot of people who will not say a peep about something concerning sin because they are more interested in maintaining their status quo or their relationships or whatever it is than obeying God and allowing the consequences to go where they may go. Herod had not died yet. I am sure John recognized the possibility that he could actually come to faith if he repented. And he did not shrink back from sharing that was profitable. He did not shrink back from sharing this sin. One pastor (John MacArthur) writes:

Such godly, boldness which does not consider the consequences is the hallmark of prophetic greatness. The faithful man of God confronts sin wherever it is and by whomever it is committed, regardless of the power they might have over him, including the power over his life. That holy boldness was a mark of Stephen, Paul, Peter and the innumerable other saints throughout the nineteen centuries that the church has been in existence. And many have forfeited their lives rather than their message.

John the Baptist righteously shared Herod's sin and Herod had him arrested.

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Now let's take a look at what happens here. We are going to see that John is courageous, but Herod is a coward. John is courageous. Herod is a coward. For fear of the multitudes, Herod initially keeps John alive. Let's read this again. Verse 4: "For John had been saying to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" And verse 5: "And although he wanted to put him to death (Herod wanted to kill John. Make no mistake about that.), he feared the multitude (That is the people.) because they regarded him as a prophet." Herod did not regard him as a prophet. It said it is because they did. You see, the multitudes were what Herod reigned over; and if he had trouble with these Jewish multitudes, that might put his little kingdom in jeopardy with Rome. And he feared the multitudes. So he did not put him to death. Herod was a coward, as we will see. And by the way, the fear of man is an identifying mark of someone who does not know the Lord. That is the way you continually, habitually live. Paul said if he was to please man, he would not be a bondservant of Christ—that is the way he used to live. We see the fear of man, in Proverbs, brings a snare; it brings a hook.

An identifying mark of a true believer is the fear of God; it is the fear of God: a righteous devotion to God, fearing Him more than the consequences of doing what is right. Non-believers are characterized by no fear of God. Romans, chapter 3, 18: "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*"

They live their lives without fear of God at all. They do not reverence, they do not honor, they do not fear Him at all. John feared the Lord; Herod feared the people. He feared he might lose his little kingdom.

Let me ask you this: what do you fear continually? What things do you fear? When you are afraid, what are you afraid about? Now, we as believers, it does not mean we do not become afraid at times, but we turn to Christ immediately. Like Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20. They were afraid but they turned to seek the Lord. What do you fear continually, habitually? Do you fear your circumstances? Do you fear your financial situation? Do you fear people? Are you ashamed of the Gospel? Are you ashamed of what people might say in response? Do you fear the Lord? Do you have conscious, holy respect for Him? John the Baptist, a wonderful example. He did not just say it once. He was continually confronting Herod concerning his sin. Herod enjoyed hearing him, but he did not enjoy this part.

Now notice, although you are tempted to think Herod's fear of man was good because it postponed the beheading of John, it is not good. It is not good because this wicked fear, based on man, would eventually cause him also to kill John. Let's take a look back at our passage again. We see in verse 5:

⁵And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet. ⁶But when Herod's birthday came (it is a wicked, evil birthday, by the way), the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸And having been prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.' ⁹And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. ¹⁰And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl; and she brought it to her mother." What a wicked scene! The depravity of man! The wickedness manifest in action because there was no

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fear of consequence earthly-wise! Herod could kill whomever he wanted; there was no earthly consequence in his mind for that. But he did not fear God at all; he did not fear God at all.

First of all, let's take a look at this wicked party. ⁶“But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.” Now the Jews did not celebrate birthdays. One of the reasons they did not celebrate birthdays was how wicked birthday celebrations were in the Roman culture. They recognized that the Roman birthday celebrations were terribly immoral; they were shameful, pagan celebrations. And these celebrations, I cannot get into it, but they were basically where only men would come. They would have a gluttonous, drunkenness time climaxed by having the women come and dance for them, and then you know what the rest is. They were wicked, wicked times. And it is interesting that this term (there is a Latin term *Herodias Dias*), which literally means Herod's birthday, it came to speak of a proverb concerning what one commentator writes: “These terrible, wicked festivals.” Need I say much more about the wickedness of this party?

Now we see the daughter of Herod was probably a teenager at this time. And here we have this wicked, incestuous situation going on at this party. You have the point where the women come in and this happens to be Herodias' daughter. Herodias, the wife Philip that Herod had stolen which was his niece. Now this is the daughter of her. And it says here in verse 6: ⁶“But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.” Whatever she asked. If you look at Mark, chapter 6, verses 20 and 21, we kind of see a different picture of this also. And it is all wicked; it is wickedness. It is the vileness of the wicked heart. And folks, before Christ, we all have wicked, vile hearts. And we can be tempted to have wicked, vile thoughts. We need to be careful that we do not place ourselves above this wickedness. We are wicked, and God redeems us from that wickedness. Mark, chapter 6, verse 21:

²¹ ***And a strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet*** (now there is a little more information) ***for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee*** (this is this awful, wicked pagan birthday celebration for men); ²² ***and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.” [Mark 6:21]***

And we see later on also he makes it clear that, in Mark 6:23:

²³ ***And he swore to her, “Whatever you ask of me, I will give it too you; up to half of my kingdom.” [Mark 6:23]***

Herod was willing to give away half his kingdom, his little *k* kingdom, half his kingdom to this girl after drunken, wicked party. And so we see very clearly that Mark gives us more information. Verse 24:

²⁴ ***And she went out and asked her mother*** (her mother is Herodias), ***“What shall I ask for?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.”*** ²⁵ ***And immediately she came in haste before the king*** (she agreed fully, she just ran right back in there) ***and asked,***

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saying, "I want you to give me right away the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

[Mark 6:24-25]

Very clearly, Herodias also did not like her sin exposed, did she? She had it out for John the Baptist. And notice this wicked, wicked, wicked oath fulfilled. ⁹ And although he was grieved (this is Herod, verse 9), the king commanded it be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. ¹⁰ And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl; and she brought it to her mother."

Now folks, if you think Herod was grieved because he did not want to kill John, I think you are actually wrong because back in verse 5, he said that he wanted to kill him. I think he was grieved because he thought there might be some political ramifications; there might be some dissent or uprising with the Jews. I do not think he was grieved at all about actually having him killed. He clearly wanted to kill him, verse 5.

But notice there are 2 reasons now that Herod does have him killed. Before he kept him alive because he feared the multitudes. Now there are 2 reasons why he has him killed. One, middle of 9: "...because of his oaths," and second, "... and because of his dinner guests." His dinner guests. We have pride again and the fear of man - picture of unbelief. Herod could not rescind because of his pride, his evil oath; and Herod feared man and he could not rescind it. And folks, let me sidetrack for just a quick second. Some of you believers have made evil oaths. You have said, "I am going to do this," and it was wrong. And you say, "I have got to keep my word." No, you do not keep your word if it is an evil oath. You repent of that oath, and you do not do it. You do not do it.

So what is the culmination of this wicked gathering? We see it again from the book of Mark. Mark 6:26:

²⁶ And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother." [Mark 6:26-28]

Again, what wickedness! This is the same guy who enjoyed to the Bible stuff from John. He is the same guy. He enjoyed it. He actually enjoyed listening to John. Yet he hated to have his sin revealed. So then, thinking about our initial context, verses 1 and 2, that is where it started. Herod had heard about Jesus, and he thought, "Is this John risen from the dead?" There is this flashback concerning his wicked guilt.

Let's look at Jesus' reaction as we finish up here. Verse 12, Matthew 14: ¹² And his disciples took away his body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. ¹³ Now when Jesus heard it, He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself." We have John's disciples coming, getting his body, burying it, and then giving the report to Jesus. And then Jesus goes to a lonely place. The term *lonely* speaks of solitary or desolate. Do not forget, although Jesus is fully God, He took on human flesh. And

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no doubt, He was grieved as we would be grieved over the death of someone we love. Now there some commentators that would say that Jesus feared Herod, that is why He withdrew, and that is absolutely wicked. That is not true. Just turn to Luke, chapter 13, verse 31, for a second. Let's take a look there. This is a little bit farther down the line. We are getting close to the point where Jesus is getting close to going to the cross. Luke 13: 31:

³¹ Just at that time some Pharisees came up, saying to Him (they are speaking to Jesus), "Go away and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." (Herod has it out for Jesus – get out of here!) ³² And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.' ³³ "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem." [Luke 13:31-33]

He is pointing to the fact of His soon to come death for sins. He was not scared of Herod at all. "Go tell that fox I am going to do what I am going to do." He was not scared at all. And folks, even though Herod's heart was murderous towards Jesus as it was towards John, take a look at the last dealings with him. We looked at it already and let's finish up with this. Luke 23. And let's turn there together. This is during the trial of our Lord Jesus Christ, where Herod is a part of this. This is the day Herod and Pilate became friends over the crucifixion of Christ, by the way. And you will see that Herod had not changed at all. He still wanted signs and wonders. Luke 23, verse 1:

¹ Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate (that is Jesus being brought before Pilate). ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." ³ And Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." ⁴ And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man." ⁵ But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place." ⁶ But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean (Hmmm... Galilee). ⁷ And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, (well, we saw earlier he wanted to kill him. It is that duality of hatred for your sin exposed and being enticed by these spiritual things) **because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. ⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He (that is speaking of Jesus) answered him nothing. ¹⁰ And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹² Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been at enmity with each other. [Luke 23:1-12]**

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We have this wicked, final scene with Herod now with Jesus. And Jesus does not do anything that Herod requests; He does not even answer him.

What does wicked, unbelief look like? Well, in Herod's case, there is an enjoyment – an infatuation – with the miraculous concerning God. There is an enjoyment with the miracles and stuff. There is an infatuation. There is even an enjoyment in listening to the Word of God at times. But yet, when sin is revealed, Herod's murderous heart became evident, his hatred; and he wanted to kill Jesus and he did kill John the Baptist.

Some of you are infatuated with miraculous stuff; you are infatuated with the preaching. But when your sin is revealed, you get angry. It is an evidence you are like Herod. We all were like Herod before we came to Christ. We all have fallen short. And God is a gracious God, even in the midst of your terrible, wickedness and my wickedness. He was willing to save me, and He is willing to save you. Jesus Christ, in the midst of these requests for miracles, was on the way to the cross. And He went to the cross and He died for your sins and He rose from the dead. And if you cry out to Him, turn to Him from sins – "Lord, Jesus save me" – He will save you, the very same Savior that you have hated because your sin has been exposed.

Believers, what can we learn from this? Those who do not know Christ are going to hate you when you speak the truth. We see that in John 15; you can read that on your own. They hated Christ; they are going to hate us -how much more the servant if the Master is persecuted! But do not fear men; fear God. Do what is right by His power and strength. Say the right thing or be quiet at the right time. Are you a coward? Or are you courageous?

Last passage, let's turn together to Revelation 21. This summarizes the 2 possibilities. This is the end. This is the end. This is where everyone ends up. If you trust in Christ and believe in Him, you are going to end up in this first category. But if you are an unbelieving coward, we will see what happens. Revelation 21:1:

¹ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them (there we will be with God, true believers, with Him), ⁴ and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes (and we see in 1 John, it is through faith in Christ we overcome) shall inherit these

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things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (That is the destiny for true believers. What is the destiny for the coward?) ⁸ **"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers** (that is just people who hate) **and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."** [Revelation 21:1-8]

Are you courageous because of Christ or are you a coward because of your unbelief?

Prayer

Lord God, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for this example although it is horrifying to look at. It is horrifying to see the wickedness of Herod and Herodias and Herodias' daughter, and the wickedness of all involved except for John and Jesus and the disciples. Lord, it is awful to see. But Lord, you know if we were honest with you, all of us have gone astray; all of us have had wicked thoughts whether we have acted upon them or not. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory, Your glory. Father, I thank you that You sent Your Son Jesus to die for our sins and that He went to the cross and did so. I pray for anyone here that You are convicting of their wickedness, that they would turn to Christ and believe and be saved. And Father, for those of us who are saved, may we no shrink back in those situations that You have ordained for us; and may we not speak when You do not want us to speak. May we trust You completely for the words and the timing. May we be courageous, not in ourselves, but in You. Thank You for Your Word now. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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