

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 14:6-12 | The Senseless Death of John the Baptizer
Sunday June 30, 2024

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 14.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes are in the foyer, so take them home with you.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday, we began studying a new chapter in Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew chapter fourteen shifts from Jesus being the main character—to two characters who could not be more different.

To use the language of Psalm 1, we have “the wicked” man and “the righteous” man.

The wicked man is Herod Antipas—son of the infamous Herod the Great.

The righteous man is John the Baptizer—who was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb.

But, as in all great real-life dramas—there was also a third main character in last week's passage.

However, he is very clever and incredibly subtle.

His name is Mr. Fear, and we discussed how Herod feared everyone and everything but God and how John feared no one and nothing except God.

Then, we applied this passage to our own lives, discussing the root causes of our fears.

Specifically: Politics, Money, Better Health

INTRODUCTION:

Today's passage is part two of a flashback that Herod Antipas has about John's death.

Last week, we learned about *The Power of Fear*.

This week, we'll see how Fear controls a weak leader.

What a tragedy to be a slave to the emotion of fear.

Mr. Fear has such a snare on Antipas that Antipas can't think straight.

And one of the main points we'll learn today is that fear has consequences.

Fear impacts our thinking, our mood, and our future.

Fear affects our bodies physiologically.

Fear also influences those around us.

And we're going to see Mr. Fear overwhelm Herod Antipas today—to make one of the most tragic decisions not only in his lifetime—but in all of Christendom.

We'll also examine ~~how our personal fears can either draw us closer to God or move us away from Him.~~

what to do when life feels out of control & senseless.
And we're going to learn these things through the Senseless Death of John the Baptizer

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 14:6— When Herod's birthday celebration came, Herodias's daughter danced before them and pleased Herod.

Matthew 14:7— So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

Matthew 14:8— Prompted by her mother, she answered, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."

Matthew 14:9— Although the king regretted it, he commanded that it be granted because of his oaths and his guests.

Matthew 14:10— So he sent orders and had John beheaded in the prison.

Matthew 14:11— His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.

Matthew 14:12— Then his disciples came, removed the corpse, buried it, and went and reported to Jesus.

These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

*When I am afraid,
I will trust in you.*

*In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I will not be afraid.*

What can mere mortals do to me? (Psalm 56:3-4)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 14:6— When Herod's birthday celebration came, Herodias's daughter danced before them and pleased Herod.

Do you like birthday parties? Who doesn't?—The Jews!

In the ancient world, birthday parties were entirely Gentile and pagan.

These parties looked more like a perverted bachelor party.

So, the Jews considered them shameful, with good reason.

Generally, women didn't join men at these parties.

We see a hint of this separation in the book of Esther—when Queen Vashti gave a separate banquet for women. (Esther 1:9)

There are only two birthday parties mentioned in the Bible.

The first is Pharaoh's birthday in Genesis 40:20

Genesis 40:20— *On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he gave a feast for all his servants. He elevated the chief cupbearer and the chief baker among his servants.*

Genesis 40:21— *Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position as cupbearer, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.*

Genesis 40:22— *But Pharaoh hanged the chief baker,*

b-day party is
That's the first and the second in our Gospel passage today, where John dies.

Is it no wonder why the Jews didn't celebrate birthdays?

We're two for two with people dying at these celebrations.

Anyway, Herod has this birthday party, which is more like a crude bachelor party.

All the leading men of Galilee are gathered—the prestigious and powerful.

All the VIPs, from Herod's commander and chiefs to his executive staff.

Matthew 14:6— *When Herod's birthday celebration came, Herodias's daughter danced before them...*

With any party, there is usually some form of entertainment.

Now, we met Herodias last week.

We learned that she holds the title of being the second most wicked woman in all of Scripture.

Today, we meet her daughter.

Scripture doesn't give her name.

However, the Jewish historian Josephus does— Salome.

Now, Salome is not Herod's biological daughter; she is his brother, Philip's daughter.

We could think of her as a stepdaughter, but remember that God doesn't consider Herod and Herodias married.

Salome would have been very young, most likely between 12 to 14 years old.

Salome dancing as the entertainment is highly unusual.

Because it was extremely improper for royal women to dance for men.

Usually, slave girls would come in and dance.

From the story of Esther we learn that Queen Vashti refused to be used for such purposes.

be exploited

Esther 1:11— He (the King) wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful.

Esther 1:12— But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command...

Herodias, however, was of a different disposition.

Not only does Herodias not qualify for “*Mom of the Year*,” but she’s also willing to use her own daughter for her own purposes.

QUESTION: Why is a 12-14 year old little girl dancing for this perverted adult birthday party?

Keep in mind that Salome is around the age of puberty.

She has no business being there.

Well, her mother is so vengeful toward John the Baptizer for reminding her that she is in an incestuous, adulterous relationship with Antipas.

So, Herodias has calculated and concocted a plan—and has no qualms about involving her daughter in this scheme.

Evidently, Herodias knows Herod well— and knows how to play him like a fiddle.

By the time the entertainment started, Herod and his guests were drinking heavily.

Now, the book of Proverbs has something very interesting to say about kings and alcohol.

Proverbs 31:4—...it is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire beer.

Proverbs 31:5— *Otherwise, he will drink, forget what is decreed, and pervert justice for all the oppressed.*

And that's exactly what is getting ready to happen.

Regardless of what God says, Herod is partying.

Matthew 14:6— *When Herod's birthday celebration came, Herodias's daughter danced before them and pleased Herod.*

Pleased—This is Matthew's very tame and discreet way of referring to Herod's lust.

By the way, if you saw the episode of The Chosen about this passage, you will also see that they tamed it down.

This dance, performed by a little girl, was thoroughly pagan and sexual.

The entire atmosphere of the party was one of debauchery.

Regardless, the dance pleased Herod because it did.
Matthew 14:7— *So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.*

Wow, Herodias' plan worked like a charm.

She knew that her husband would cave and be overwhelmed by his drunken stupor.

Somehow, Herodias knew that Herod would say something that he would regret.

In Mark's version, Herod uses words nearly identical to what King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther three times (Esther 5:3; 6, 7:2).

Mark 6:23—*Whatever you ask me I will give you, up to half my kingdom."*

Herod is drunk and clearly overstating.

Remember that Herod is not really a king.

He is a tetrarch; he rules one fourth of his father's territory.

He's more of a Roman Governor—so he doesn't have a kingdom to give away.

What territory he does rule—is given to him through the authority of Emperor Augustus. *of Rome*

Matthew 14:7— So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

(Christians)
As a general rule, we should not make promises, oaths, or vows.

However, marriage is a primary exception. (Matt 5:33-37, James 5:12).

Apart from marriage, we are to be men and women of our word and let our “yes” be yes and “no” be no.

Herod, however, makes a promise.

Matthew 14:8— Prompted by her mother, she answered, “Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter.”

Let that sink in: Music is pumping, drinks are flowing - Good time.

I bet that request sobered Herod up.

Can you imagine the silence?

I bet the silence was deafening.

Because for a moment in time, a teenage girl wields such wicked weight over the “king” (v. 9).

Mark's Gospel says this...

Mark 6:24—*She (Salome) went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?"*

Pause...why did Salome have to ask her mom?

Because she's a little girl.

Today, the state would claim her as a minor—so she asks permission.

But, she doesn't know what her wicked mother is up to.

Salome was probably hoping for a pony!

Regardless, Herod had made a foolish vow.

Matthew 14:8— *"Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."*

Our first thought should be, "What is wrong with people?"

Last week, we learned how wicked the immediate Herod family was, but if we peel the layers back a little more...

Herodias had an ancestor named Alexander Junius.

One day, he had a party and had eight hundred people crucified before his guests.

While the men were hanging on their crosses, their wives and children were murdered in front of their eyes.

As hard as it is to hear today, it was not uncommon in the first century to bring the head of someone who had been murdered to the person who ordered it.

It's said that when the head of Cicero was brought to Fulvia, the wife of Antony, she spat on it, pulled its tongue out, and drove her hairpin through it.

*What is wrong w/ people? We know the answer.
Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,*

Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned

—Willaim Congreve, *The Mourning Bride*, Act 3.

There are many lessons that we can learn right here from Herod Antipas.

+ **Proverbs 13:16**—Every sensible person acts knowledgeably, but a fool displays his stupidity.

+ **Proverbs 14:16**—A wise person is cautious and turns from evil, but a fool is easily angered and is careless.

+ **Proverbs 14:24**—... the foolishness of fools produces foolishness.

The entire book of Proverbs compares wisdom to foolishness.

Make no doubt that Herod is a fool.

+ **Matthew 14:9**— Although the king regretted it,

Note to self—don't ever do something you know you will regret!

Isn't that the very definition of foolishness?

Isn't life hard enough w/o making it intentionally harder?

Even drunk, Herod knew he had been tricked—by the one he loved.

- ESV— exceeding sorry
- NASB/ LSB—very sorry
- NRSV— deeply grieved
- NIV— greatly distressed
- NCV/GNB—very sad

So what? Who cares if Herod is sorry? ~~Regret~~ *Regret, Grieved, Distressed*

What's he sorry about?

- Throwing John in prison?
- Not listening to John?
- Being drunk and not able to think clearly
- Being filled with lust.
- Making a promise that he had no business making?
- Allowing Herodias and Salome to have power over him?
- The fact that he is turning into a cold-blooded murderer?

Herod is sorry—big deal.

Judas Iscariot was sorry after he betrayed the Son of God.

Herod felt the kind of sorrow that Judas did.

Both Herod and Judas were filled with remorse but not repentance.

There is a world of difference between the two.

Remorse is guilt—it's Herod's conscience eating away at him.

Repentance is how he takes care of that.

Repentance is when someone turns from his sin and turns to God in faith.

KEYPOINT:

Regret and remorse are not repentance.

Repentance is when you confess sin & sin, Turn in faith to God & stop doing what you've done.

He is in no position to make a ruling of any kind.

He thinks he has no choice in the matter.

Herod thinks that he must keep his promise.

He should never have made it, and having made it, he should never have kept it.

There is no doubt Herod has broken promises before.

He is a politician, after all; why stop now?

Herod was weak, and like most weak men, Herod didn't want people to think he was weak.

A similar thing happened to Pilate—Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but still crucified Him. (Luke 23:4, 14–16, 20, 22–25; cf. John 19:12)

Matthew 14:9— Although the king regretted it,

Matthew's use of "king" is sarcastic.

Matthew calls Antipas "king" precisely at the moment in which he acts least kingly.

Matthew 14:9— he commanded that it be granted because of his oaths and his guests.

So Herod sent the order to execute John.

Herod murders John because he is too weak to admit his mistake—and too scared of his wife.

He wanted to save face in front of all his guests.

And what's his reward— He has the dubious honor of being the man who killed the greatest prophet ever.

Matthew 14:9— Although the king regretted it, he commanded that it be granted because of his oaths and his guests.

In other words, Herod commanded the murder of John because of his pride.

Proverbs 16:18—Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.

And we'll see Herod? Herodias? Salome lose everything.

Instead of admitting his terrible drunken sin—Herod allowed himself to be used to commit an enormous crime—all to save a reputation he thought he had.

Think about how simple it is to get out of this whole thing.

All Herod had to say was, “Salome, I promised to give you a gift, I did not promise to commit a *crime*.”

Or even this, “I promised you, Salome, a gift— not your mother.”

However, the best response would have been, “I see now that I sinned. Therefore I recant oath.” (King David did this when he vowed to kill a man named Nabal in 1 Sam 25).

But Herod lacked the courage and humility—even when sober.

How much less while intoxicated?

Matthew 14:10— So he sent orders and had John beheaded in the prison.

This is one of the saddest and most senseless passages in all Scripture.

+ **Matthew 14:11**— *His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.*

Review:
Salome's seductive dance leads to Herod's foolish promise. *lost*

Herod's foolish promise leads to Herodias' appalling request.

And then, tragically, John is dead.

His head is served on a platter. Everyone gasps.

But then the music starts again, the drinks flow, and Herod's birthday party continues.

+ **Matthew 14:12**— *Then his disciples came, removed the corpse, buried it, and went and reported to Jesus.*

John the Baptist was the first martyr to die for Christ.

The death of John foreshadows the death of Jesus.

John's death is purposeless. Jesus' death is purposeful.

We know how it ends for both John and Jesus—

But what about Herod Antipas, Herodias and Salome?

Herodias told Antipas to go to Rome and ask the Emperor to make him king and to give him more territory to rule.

Instead, the Emperor fired Antipas and banished him and Herodias to what is modern-day France. *He lost everything - but Herodias,*

Salome married twice, and then Salome died from a horrific disease. Just a reminder of how no one can outrun the justice of a Holy God.

PREACH:

There is no doubt that this story doesn't make any sense.

It seems like it has no purpose.

The 12 Disciples thought the same thing about Jesus' death—Until the third day!

You have all experienced things in your own life that made little sense—many of you are going through another season of ~~that~~ right now.

Senselessness

And it's at these moments that the tragedies and senselessness of it all— either draw us closer to God— or we choose to walk away from Him and try to figure it out on our own.

Many times, we ask, "Where was God when...?"

The answer is that God was on His throne, ruling, reigning, loving, forgiving, and offering grace—where He always is.

But

And when we are in the middle of the senselessness—it's really hard to hear that.

But time brings comfort and clarity.

The world says that *time heals all wounds*—and that's untrue.

What happens to a wound if you don't treat it?

The senseless events of our lives are healed only through our relationship with Jesus. *↳ the fellowship of the local church. — that's the cross*

There is no other way.

During the times of confusion and hopelessness, we must look at what Christ has already done.

We got to be reminded over & over — because we forget

His blood has been shed—and the grave is empty!

God has already proven His love for you—The Heavenly Father has sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now The Holy Spirit of God leads and guides us during these senseless times.

May I encourage you to run to Jesus when life makes no sense.

May I encourage you to pray like you've never prayed before—and to cry like you never cried before.

May I also encourage you to believe—like you've never believed before.

Remember when Jesus was teaching and people started walking away because they were so offended?

Peter says, *“Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* (John 6:68).

Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth and the life.”* (John 14:6)

The apostle Paul provides encouragement in our senseless seasons of life...

Romans 8:28—We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

It's easy for us to take that verse out of context and start naming and claiming it.

Telling God what to do.
The problem that we have is that we don't know what's good—compared to God's definition of good.

We view our trials and hardships as unloving.

time **Hebrews 12:11**—No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

John the Baptizer was tested—there is a lot that happened to him that we don't know.

What we do know is that although he was falsely accused, mistreated, humiliated, and murdered—he may have doubts and fears—

But he did finish life well.

The same goes for you—There are senseless things in your life that you will never know the answer to—until you're with the Lord.

And it's only then, will it make sense—as He explains it to you, *face to face*.

Until then—God is building spiritual muscle through these trials.

Hebrews 11:1—Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

KEYPOINT: 2

We may not understand God, but we can still trust Him.

How do we do that?

1. Pray
2. Read Scripture on the thing that we're struggling with.
3. THEN, we talk to someone. (Godly friend, trusted pastor, Christian counselor.)

Many times we get the order backwards.

We may not understand God, but we can still trust Him.

PRAYER

LORD'S SUPPER

BENEDICTION

*May the Lord bless you and protect you;
may the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
may the Lord look with favor on you
and give you peace.” ’ (Numbers 6:25-26)*

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