

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 14:1-5 | The Power of Fear
Sunday June 23, 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:

We have spent nine weeks studying the Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13.

Last Sunday, Jesus left Capernaum and temporarily stopped teaching parables to visit His hometown of Nazareth.

We discussed how this was Jesus' second trip to his hometown, and it turns out neither trip was well received by his family and friends.

LW KEYPOINT:

Jesus' family and friends willfully choose not to believe.

Unbelief was the main focus of last week's passage.

Jesus' family and friends chose not to believe because they were too close to Jesus.

Jesus was too human—too ordinary.

Their version of God's Anointed One looked more like a Jewish Superman.

Even the miracles, signs, and wonders that Jesus performed to prove that He is indeed the Savior and Messiah couldn't change their minds.

They had previously made up their minds, and nothing would change that.

LW KEYPOINT:

Love your friends and family right where they are.

We are not responsible for the salvation of those we love.

We have to love them in their state of unbelief.

We are to pray for them but not argue with them.

We are to be bold in our faith—but not rude.

Lastly, we discussed areas in our own lives as Believers where we, too, will always have areas of unbelief.

I mentioned three last week: Politics, Money/Retirement, and health.

LW KEYPOINT:

Unbelief is a barrier to your relationship with God.

As we wrestle with those areas, God draws us in, loves us right where we are, and allows us to make mistake after mistake until we choose to believe ~~that God~~ always has better plans and better ways.

INTRODUCTION:

Today is a game changer for Jesus and the 12 Disciples.

Jesus has been preparing the 12 for this day for the past year and a half.

Here's why:

Jesus predicted opposition to His Gospel message and, ultimately, The Kingdom of God.

In the Sermon on The Mount, Jesus said,

Matthew 5:10—Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Matthew 5:11—“You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me.”

Matthew 5:12—Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The words of Jesus are contrary to what we know.

His Kingdom is 180 degrees from what we want to hear and believe.

Prosperity Gospel - Easy - Comfortable =

If you remember the Parable of the Sower, Jesus taught that only 25% of people will hear the Gospel and bear fruit.

That’s one out of four people you are personally witnessing, too—and that’s why it’s such a joy to witness because we don’t know who those people are.

In The Parable of the Weeds, Jesus taught that Believers and unbelievers grow up side by side.

We often don’t know who is who—just because someone says they are a Christian doesn’t mean they are.

Jesus also taught about a very real enemy of His Kingdom—Satan.

He taught that there would be violent opposition not only for the 12 but also for anyone who claimed to be His disciple.

2 Tim: 3:12 - *All who want to live a Godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted.*
This is precisely where we find ourselves now in Matthew’s Gospel.

Last Sunday, we saw how Jesus' family and friends were offended by him and rejected him.

And as we begin chapter 14, we'll see how rejection escalates and turns into violence.

For the next two weeks we'll study the passage where Herod Antipas murders John the Baptizer.

Believe it or not, this is a true story.

These are not actors on a stage.

It is so bizarre that it really is 'stranger than fiction.'

You can't make this stuff up!

It is a story of infidelity, divorce, remarriage, incest, political intrigue, jealousy, spite, revenge, debauchery, lust, cold-heartedness, cruelty, brutality, violence, ungodly remorse, and godly mourning.

There are ~~many~~ many ingredients that go into today's narrative.

Oh, I forgot fear—it's a story where fear is the lead character.

And how one man fears only God while the other fears everyone and everything but God.

+ **Proverbs 29:25**—The fear of man brings a snare/trap.

We're going to witness trap after trap after trap today.

That said, there is a lot to learn about fear today—and we'll also address our personal fears.

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

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 14:1—At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the report about Jesus.

Matthew 14:2—“This is John the Baptist,” he told his servants. “He has been raised from the dead, and that’s why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

Matthew 14:3—For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,

Matthew 14:4—since John had been telling him, “It’s not lawful for you to have her.”

Matthew 14:5—Though Herod wanted to kill John, he feared the crowd since they regarded John as a prophet.

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

PRAY:

*Even when I go through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)*

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 14:1—At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus.

At that time—This is when Jesus began to experience increasing hostility and rejection.

He had been ministering for about a year—maybe 18 months—teaching, preaching, and performing many signs and wonders—healing every disease, raising the dead, and casting out demons.

John's Gospel says that there are not enough books to record everything Jesus did. (Jn:21:25)

Matthew places this narrative right before Jesus' popularity explodes with the feeding of the 5,000, which we'll study ~~next week~~ *in a few weeks.*

Matthew 14:1—At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus.

So, let's talk about Herod.

When discussing Herod, it's like watching the Jerry Springer show.

The full name of this Herod is Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.

This Herod in verse one is a son of Herod the Great, who is obviously a very subtle and humble man.

With a name like that, humility oozes from his being.

Herod the Great was anything but great.

They should have called him Herod the Fearful or Herod the Envious Egotistical Tyrant.

Herod the Great founded the 'Herod Dynasty' and ruled from 37 b.c. to 4 b.c.

He was not a ~~true~~ Jew by birth—which poses many problems for him and his sons.

Herod the Great was quite the lady's man—he had nine wives (some say ten)—depending on who you ask.

Personally, “Herod was a heathen in practice, and a monster in character.” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary).

Character Examples - Herod.

He had all the members of the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court) put to death for daring to challenge his authority. 23/71

He had at least one of his wives, and two of his sons executed.

This is also the same Herod who slaughtered all the male babies of Bethlehem when he was trying to find Jesus.

The Herod family considered themselves above the law. They were rich, proud, and violent.

Herod Antipas, the Herod in this verse, was only 17 years old when his father died.

And this Herod was not an actual king—he was a tetrarch

Tetrarch is from the Greek term *tetra*, meaning “four.”

Which meant that he ruled only 1/4th of what his daddy ruled.

Herod Antipas was not a great ruler.

He is sometimes referred to as a ‘king’ in Scripture, but he was not an actual king—he was a petty or puppet king for Rome.

Antipas was nothing more than a glorified governor employed by the Romans—but don’t tell him that.

Matthew 14:1—At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus.

Since Herod was not a Jew, he was not interested in religion, which meant that he was not interested in Jesus.

However, it was inevitable that Herod would hear about the person and works of Jesus.

So, as Herod is listening to the reports of Jesus—

- The famous Sermon on the Mount.
- The healing of lepers—which no one can do.
- The healing of his own Roman soldier's servants.
- The exorcisms (Not only a teacher and healer but an exorcist).
- He heard the story of how four people ripped open a hole in the roof to get their paralyzed man in front of Jesus--and not only did he heal him, but he forgave his sins!
- The conversion of Matthew as a tax collector.
- Along with the countless healings of the blind, deaf, and sick.

Matthew 14:2—“This is John the Baptist,” he told his servants. “He has been raised from the dead, and that’s why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

Herod’s statement reveals a lot about him.

First, it reveals his **bad theology**—Herod’s religion is full of superstition and paganism.

Second, he confesses his **guilty conscience of murdering John the Baptizer in cold blood.**

Bad theology and a guilty conscience led Herod to his conclusion, which was this:

John had come back from the dead to seek revenge.

Now, verses 3, 4, and 5 are a flashback. *Matthew's Commentary.*

Matthew 14:3—For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

Matthew 14:4—since John had been telling him, "It's not lawful for you to have her."

Matthew 14:5—Though Herod wanted to kill John, he feared the crowd since they regarded John as a prophet.

Matthew 14:3—For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

Mark's Gospel says that Herod "feared" John.

Mark 6:18—John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Mark 6:19—So Herodias (more on her in a moment) held a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not,

Mark 6:20—because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard him he would be very perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

In other words, Herod admired John the Baptizer.

Herod knew that John was a prophet.

So it's like he listened to John with both pleasure and panic.

Herod was both fearful and fascinated.

John intrigued Herod, yet it left him confused.

Herod admired John's boldness and moral clarity, but it required Herod to change his life—and like most people, Herod wasn't going to do that.

In other words, Herod enjoyed listening to the man ^{that} he wanted to put to death!

But John was much more than a prophet.

Jesus said...

Matthew 11:11—*Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared*

There is nobody like John the Baptizer...

John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

Before John was born, an angel visited his father and said:

Luke 1:13—*Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.*

Luke 1:14—*There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth.*

Luke 1:15—*For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb.*

Luke 1:16—*He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.*

Luke 1:17—*And he will go before (The Lord) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."*

From birth, John the Baptizer had been set apart by God to announce the Christ/Messiah /God housed in flesh and bone to all the World!

Jesus' point was that, as far as people are concerned, John the Baptizer is the greatest man who ever lived.

Doesn't that sound a bit strange?

Jesus is saying that John was greater...

- ...than Abraham (the biological father of Israel),
- ...than Moses (the man who talked with God as a friend),
- ...than David (the greatest king Israel ever had),

What made John so special was the privilege of physically pointing people to the Christ—the Messiah, the Son of God, God in the flesh!

Obviously, none of the other prophets did that.

John 1:35—*The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples.*

John 1:36—*When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"*

And because John fulfilled his divine calling, Jesus says he is the greatest man who has ever lived.

And it's also this man—who has been sitting in a dark dungeon chained to a wall for the past year or so.

Matthew 14:3—For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias.

Who is Herodias?

The first clue is her name—Herodias = Herod / Herod = Herodias.

The short version of Herodias is that she is one of the most wicked and perverse women mentioned in Scripture, perhaps second only to Jezebel.

Background: Herodias was the daughter [of Aristobulus, yet another son] of Herod the Great. Corinne's daughter

Her character:

- Herodias first married Philip, a son of King Herod the Great, making Phil her half-uncle.
- She later left Philip and became the mistress of Herod Antipas, another uncle.
- Meanwhile, Phil, her first husband, is still alive.
- Furthermore, Antipas married her while his former wife was still living.
- So altogether, Herodias is guilty of triple adultery and two counts of incest.

But wait, there's more! It takes two tango, so let's talk about Antipas.

Herod Antipas was first married to an Arabian princess, Phasaelis, the daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea.

This was a political marriage to keep the peace.

It turns out Herod Antipas fell out of love with his wife and fell in love with his brother's wife—and she fell in love with him.

↳ Herodias

I'm guessing that makes it a little awkward for the holiday get-togethers.

Regardless, one day, while Herod Antipas was visiting his brother, Phillip, he proposed to his brother's wife.

So get this—He, Herod, a married man, proposed to her, Herodias, a married woman.

She accepted. They both divorced their previous spouses—and lived happily ever after!

I mean, how could it not be happy?

So far, we have adultery, divorce, deceit, politics, and incest.

Matthew 14:3—For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

Note—Scripture does not call Herodias Herod's wife, but his brother Philip's wife.

Scripture is crystal clear about the sanctity of marriage and refuses to recognize Herod and Herodias' relationship as a marriage.

At this point, I have two questions:

- Family Dynamics of Herod
1. So what does all this mess have to do with John the Baptizer?
 2. And why did Herod throw him in a dungeon, leaving him to rot?

Matthew 14:4—since John had been telling (Herod), "It's not lawful for you to have her."

So John the Baptizer rebukes and reprimands both Herod Antipas and Herodias.

There was good reason for John's rebuke—their relationship was both adulterous (Rom. 7:2-3) and incestuous (Lev. 18:16; 20:21).

Heir relationship

It is clearly against God's law.

But why is John getting into Herod's personal business?

Answer:

Because Israel is God's covenant nation—and Herod Antipas is one of its rulers.

It's never good for a ruler of a nation, especially God's nation, to live in such defiant sin.

John the Baptizer was trying to save Israel from God's chastening or even wrath.

Believe it or not, confronting Herod was part of John's job as a prophet.

When John the Baptizer criticized Herod for immorality, he stood in an ancient prophet tradition.

Moses did the same thing by telling the Pharaoh, "Let My people go" (Ex. 5:1).

Then came Elijah, who confronted King Ahab. Remember the big showdown between Elijah and 450 false prophets of Baal? (1 Kings 18:18).

Isaiah was God's mouthpiece when he brought the bad news to King Hezekiah.

Hezekiah sinned by showing off all of Israel's treasures to people from Babylon (2 Kings 20:12–18).

Daniel stood before King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and warned him of his pride and arrogance. (Daniel 4).

Amos cried out against the sins of King Jeroboam II (Amos 7:10–11).

So yes, John the Baptizer stands in good company with other prophets.

We must commend John for his courage in confronting Herod and Herodias.

Verse four suggests that this was not a one-time confrontation—John kept telling them to repent.

So, John was an outspoken man.

It is one thing to be righteous— it is another thing to be outspoken about it.

John was both.

A mentor once told me, “Be careful when writing a check with your mouth that you can’t cash.”

We see the consequences of being righteous and outspoken...

Matthew 14:5—*Though Herod wanted to kill John,*

Question: Why is Herod so sensitive about what a Jewish prophet has to say?

I mean, really? Does Herod have such thin skin that he wants to kill John for embarrassing him?

Is that what this is about? Embarrassment, pride, and ego?

Yes and no. It’s a bit more complicated than that.

You’ve heard me say that ‘*sin makes you stupid.*’

And that’s true,

KEYPOINT 1:

Sexual sin makes you really stupid.

One of the fastest ways to ruin your life is to watch pornography, commit adultery, or have relations outside the covenant of marriage.

And one of the many reasons why sexual sin makes us really stupid is that it involves other people.

Our selfishness and lust always impact other people.

How many people did this Jerry Springer episode impact between Herod and Herodias?

Answer: How about three entire nations of people?

It just so happens that King Aretas didn't like Herod divorcing his daughter and sending her back home.

This sexual sin between Herod and Herodias actually led to a war between Israel and the arab nation of Nabatea.

Can you imagine being a soldier in that war? Having to risk your life so that two fools can remain in an adulterous and incestuous relationship?

Regardless, Nabatea goes to war against Israel...and guess what? Herod lost the battle.

Herod lived through it only because the Romans came to save him from total disaster.

Is that crazy? Three nations go to war because of this demonic soap opera.

So yes, sin makes us stupid.

Back to John the Baptizer...

So, think about it: any criticism of Herod's second marriage would have been like throwing gasoline on a raging fire.

But John doesn't care about politics.

John was neither a compromiser nor a diplomat.

John is a prophet who was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.

He doesn't fear Herod—He only feared the Lord.

John didn't fear the Pharisees and Sadducees either—“a brood of vipers” (Matt. 3:7).

And he doesn't hesitate in calling Herod and Herodias to repent of their blatant sexual sin.

Matthew 14:5—*Though Herod wanted to kill John, he feared the crowd since they regarded John as a prophet.*

We know that Herod feared John, but Herod also feared the crowds.

Herod fears the people in which he governs.

Herod fears that if he were to kill John, there would be a revolt—which Rome would hear about.

So, Herod also fears his employer (Rome)—and how the Emperor might replace him.

Next week, we'll see how Herod also feared his crazy wife Herodias.

He also fears his oaths and his birthday guests.

Herod is a fearful man—and at the end of the day, fearful men are small and weak.

Scripture reveals four primary types of fear:

1. Fear of the Lord.
2. Fear of man.

3. Fear of the future.
4. Fear of death.

If I were a betting man, I would say that Herod also fears death.


So, what's the only thing that Herod doesn't fear? The Lord.

If Herod had feared the Lord, he would have repented and never went through John in prison.

put
through

**PREACH:**

Last Sunday, we discussed how there are three areas in life where, as Christians, we struggle with unbelief:

- 
1. Politics
 2. Finances/Retirement
 3. Health.

We discussed our need to repent of our unbelief in those areas of life.

And I showed you several Scripture passages that I pray brought you peace.

So last week, we discussed *The Power of Unbelief*, and today, we've learned about *The Power of Fear* through this narrative of Herod Antipas.

As we think about both unbelief and fear, we notice how they are interrelated.

Unbelief and fear are two sides of the same coin.

So, let's use the same examples from last week and view them through the lens of fear.

**1. Politics**

What are you afraid of when it comes to politics?

- The wrong person in office?
- The future of this country?
- The future of your kids and grandkids?

Are you really fearful of those things? Or are those only superficial reasons?

Can you name the specific fear?

2. The second area of concern deals our Finances/Retirement.

What, specifically, are you afraid of?

- Not having enough food?
- Losing your home? Job?
- Not able to provide for yourself and family?

Are you really fearful of those things? Or are those only superficial concerns?

Can you name the fear—that you fear?

3. Our health is the third area in which we struggle.

What specifically are you afraid of? Can you name it?

Or are these fears simply a fog—to where you don't know where you're going and your terrified to admit it?

- Physical Pain?
- Loss of specific abilities?
- Loss of certain privileges as we get older?
- Death?

Whatever your fears, consider them an invitation to grow closer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's how:

Whenever you have a fearful thought—pause and take that thought to the authority of Scripture and make it obey Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5— we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

What does that mean?

It means you sanctify that thought.

You purify it—to see if it’s a legitimate thought—or a lie.

If we renew our minds (Rom 12:2), that thought will run amuck.

And here’s the scary thing—it will also control our emotions and behaviors.

Example:

Politics—“*I’m fearful (angry/upset/concerned) that so and so is ruining this country?*”

What does the Word of God say about your thought?

Romans 13:1 NLT—*For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.*

Is *so and so* ruining this country, OR, has He been placed there by God to fulfill God’s divine purposes?

Finances/Retirement—“*I’m concerned/fearful/upset/angry that*”

Does your thought agree with Scripture?

Philippians 4:19—*And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

It’s an interesting transition to go from full-time work to retirement.

And I get the sense that your concerns/fears deal with not being able to physically provide for yourself as you age.

My prayer for you is that you will enjoy the transition—and realize that even in your best health—it was the Lord providing for you all along.

Health—“*I’m concerned/fearful/upset/angry that*”

Are you afraid to die?

Do you let your mind run wild as to what could happen—compared to the truth that will happen?



1 Corinthians 15:54—*Death has been swallowed up in victory.,*

Where, death, is your victory?

Where, death, is your sting?,

It’s been said that many Christians function as functional atheists.

Meaning, when it comes right down to it—many of us acknowledge the sovereignty of God—but don’t really believe that God can be that powerful.

- Can God really put people in office?
- Can God really provide for my retirement when I know I didn’t save enough?
- Am I really going to Heaven? Is Jesus really enough?

We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling? (Phil. 2:12).

Is Jesus Christ truly your Lord and Savior? Or do you call on Him only when I need Him— like some cosmic bellhop?

I want to encourage you to take your unbelief from last week and your fears from this week and submit them to the foot of Jesus’ cross, ask for forgiveness and repent.

Meaning—we learn how to pause and make our thoughts obey Christ.

It's then—when we experience the peace that surpasses our understanding. (Philip. 4:7).

PRAYER

Deacon & Deaconess Commissioning:

How church is governed

- A Deacon/ness is someone who is the hands and feet of the church.
- They allow the Pastor and Elders to lead the church through teaching and preaching—equipping the Saints for the work of the ministry.
- So, they protect and prioritize the most critical ministry within the church—the preaching and teaching ministries.
- As members of the Leadership Team, they help preserve and promote the church's unity.

They have committed to serve you for the next three years.

- ##
- Andy Andrews
 - Michael Mathews
 - Carolyn Butler
 - Lonnie Shields

BENEDICTION

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. (Not fear) (Col 3:15)

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