

# Sermons on Matthew John's Head On A Platter

*Matthew 14:1-12*

*With Study Questions*

*Pastor Paul Viggiano  
Branch of Hope Church  
2370 W. Carson Street, #100  
Torrance, CA 90501  
(310) 212-6999  
pastorpaul@integrity.com  
[www.branchofhope.org](http://www.branchofhope.org)  
4/9/2006*

## John's Head On A Platter

*Matthew 14:1-12*

At that time \_\_Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus<sup>-2-</sup> and said to his servants, “\_This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.”<sup>-3-</sup> \_\_For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife.<sup>-4-</sup> Because John had said to him, “\_It is not lawful for you to have her.”<sup>-5-</sup> And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, \_\_because they counted him as a prophet.

<sup>-6-</sup> But when Herod’s birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod.<sup>-7-</sup> Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

<sup>-8-</sup> So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, “\_Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.”

<sup>-9-</sup> And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*.<sup>-10-</sup> So he sent and had John beheaded in prison.<sup>-11-</sup> And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother.<sup>-12-</sup> Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus. (Matthew 14:1-12)

At that time \_\_Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus. . .  
(Matthew 12:1)

## Herod the Tetrarch

Herod the Tetrarch was the son of Herod the Great who attempted to kill the baby Jesus and who did kill all the Bethlehem babies (Matthew 2:13, 16). The Herod in this chapter (Antipas), his son, ruled over a fourth of Palestine (a tetrarch denotes one of four rulers (*tetra*, four, *arche*\_, rule). He, unlike his father, would see the death of Jesus (Luke 23:11).

The Herods were either Idumean or of Edomite descent and had been forced to convert to Judaism in about 100 B.C., although there was little about the Herods that could be considered even remotely faithful. It would appear that the Roman governors recognized Herod’s quasi-connection with the Jews and placed them in this military / political position.

The fact that Herod the Great (born 73 B.C.) pushed through the gigantic line item of building Herod's Temple for Jewish worship did little to win the confidence of the Jews, since he also erected temples to pagan deities. He was a politician who needed to demonstrate some outward form of religion in order to appease the masses who didn't trust him... not unlike today's politician.

Herod had divorced his wife Aretas to marry the wife of his half-brother, Philip (Herodias). This was a violation of the law of God (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21); regarding this, John the Baptist had something to say.

**. . .and [Herod] said to his servants, " \_This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." -<sup>3-</sup> \_For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.**

**-<sup>4-</sup> Because John had said to him, " \_It is not lawful for you to have her." -<sup>5-</sup> And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, \_because they counted him as a prophet. (Matthew 12:2-5)**

### **Herod's guilty conscience**

Herod's lack of orthodoxy is revealed in his belief that John rose from the dead to become someone else—in this case Jesus. It is amazing where a guilty conscience can lead, being chased by ghosts.

### **The \_wicked flee when no one pursues. . . (Proverbs 28:1a)**

A few years ago, a movie came out entitled *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Who wouldn't be a little nervous if that was said to them? The Christian should ever pursue a clear conscience (2 Timothy 1:3) and when we fail we should ever repent and seek reconciliation. Jesus taught that we should be assertive and quickly seek peace with our adversaries (Matthew 5:24, 25).

### **No advocate for Herod**

Herod made no effort to right his wrong. And above that he had no way to dispose of his sin—no advocate.

**My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, \_\_we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)**

For every man (Christian or not) sin will always be a prominent figure in the equation. The accusations ever fly.

**. . .for the accuser of our brethren, \_who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. <sup>-11-</sup> And \_\_they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. . . (Revelation 12:10b, 11a)**

But with Christ, the accuser, and those who take rank with him, are a defeated foe. The blood of the Lamb, the cross of Christ, is man's only true depository for sin. Clearly Herod was no recipient of this grace. It wouldn't appear that he ever would be. Herod's only thrill when it came to Jesus was the fickle desire to see miracles done by Him (Luke 23:8).

## **John and the Law**

John the Baptist had a notable reaction to Herod's behavior.

Here we see John acknowledging the continuing responsibility to abide by the Law of God as it is revealed in the Old Testament. There may be difficulties understanding how the law of God given in an ancient agrarian society applies across the board throughout the course of history.

Certainly the form of government is different, and what purpose a sheep might have served versus an ox (*e.g.* restitution for a stolen sheep is four to one; for an ox, five to one (Exodus 22:1)) makes it difficult to understand the exact application of God's law.

None the less the law of God as it is revealed in the Old Testament (which is the fuller expression of the law—John 1:17), should always be the standard. I believe the Westminster Confession teaches correctly when it explains,

**To them (Israel) also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that**

**people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.<sup>1</sup>**

Equity means fairness. Seeking to place Old Testament Israel in the middle of twenty-first century Christian America would simply be impossible; for example, there were laws given regarding the make-up of the twelve tribes. But it does not follow that we should not view God's law, in terms of what He has determined to be just, to no longer apply to our view of ethics.

### **John and confrontation**

John used the law of God to confront public sin. It was no secret what Herod had done. He had public disregard for the law of God. Had this been private and personal there would have been a different and more appropriate response (Matthew 18:15-20). Sin that is not confronted lingers like a cancer. Therefore Paul writes,

**And have \_\_no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather \_expose *them*. (Ephesians 5:11)**

John confronted the behavior of a person in power. Herod could have helped advance the ministry had his sin been overlooked by John—after all, his father did build the temple; funds could have been appropriated for the advancement of Christianity. John apparently wasn't very strategic.

Corrupt people with money and power can easily be looked at as the "one ring to rule them all." They may be evil but their power can be used for good. This is man thinking he has the power and wisdom of God. We are called to resist the devil (1 Peter 5:8), not utilize him.

**But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod.<sup>-7-</sup> Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.**

**<sup>-8-</sup> So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "\_Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter.\_"**

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Westminster confession of faith*. 1996 (Chapter XIX, 4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>-9-</sup> And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. <sup>-10-</sup> So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. <sup>-11-</sup> And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. <sup>-12-</sup> Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus. (Matthew 14:6-12)

## Herod's Birthday

Birthdays, proms, Christmas, Easter, "spring break" so easily become events where we are prone to justify ungodly behavior. This was no exception with Herod. It was his birthday and I needn't labor the nature of what "pleased" him when his step-daughter danced. The Proverbs aren't lacking when it comes to this folly.

**My son, if sinners entice you, \_do not consent. (Proverbs 1:10)**

**He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Proverbs 13:20)**

Herod was enticed while in the companion of fools. He makes a rash vow to grant whatever she desired up to half his kingdom. This type of vow should never be made, nor if one recognizes their vow to be ungodly, should they keep it.

That Matthew records that "**because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him**" should clue us in to the fact that Herod wasn't being a man of his word when he kept his vow. His reputation was at stake and he capitulated to the request.

It was not politically expeditious to execute John the Baptist (Matthew 12:5), but now it would not be politically expeditious to publicly dishonor his own vow.

## Herodias

Apparently Herodias didn't care about the politically advantageous this all was. She had been publicly ridiculed and wouldn't have it.

**Better to dwell \_\_in the wilderness, Than with a contentious and angry woman (Proverbs 21:19).**

Women should never underestimate the true power they have.

**The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands (Proverbs 14:1).**

Workers, pastors, governors, presidents, kings and kingdoms have been either cursed or blessed by the Herodias's and the Abigails (1 Samuel 25:3) of this world.

### **John is buried**

This section ends with a record of the disciples burying body of John and telling Jesus what happened. It would appear that in the same way John prepared the way for Jesus in his earthly ministry, he would serve as a preamble for the death of Christ as well.

This event will play a prominent role later in Matthew when Jesus begins to teach in parables again. In the Parable of the Landowner (Matthew 21:33) the prophets are killed before the son is killed. In the Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14) the servants are killed. We will see later the eschatological implications of this event (an eschatology quite different that what is popular today).

Suffice it to say for now that two thousand years have come and gone since Herodias' daughter danced for Herod. For a fleeting moment Herod had the illusion of power over John. But for an eternity Herod will have no power and no advocate, while John will ever enjoy the presence of the peace of Christ.

May God grant us all the vision to see through illusion of the mundane distractions and may He grant us the conviction to walk in the true power of His grace through Christ.

### Questions for Study

1. Who was Herod the Tetrarch (Page 2)?
2. What did Herod do (page 3)?
3. How did John the Baptist respond to Herod's behavior (page 4)?
4. Discuss the law of God and today's Christian (pages 4, 5).
5. What happened on Herod's birthday (page 6)?
6. What kind of power do women have according the Proverbs on page 7?
7. Compare John and Herod (pages 7, 8).