

The Headless Prophet and the Heartless King

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Date: 07 November 2021

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from the book of Matthew chapter 14. Please follow along on the bulletin or in your own Bible.

Starting in verse 1 we read, At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead.

That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother's wife, because John had been saying to him, It is not lawful for you to have her.

And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people because they had held him out to be a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

Prompted by her mother, she said, Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter. And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given.

[1 : 28] He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it.

And they went and told Jesus, This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Angie. Good morning, Watermark family.

It's good to see everyone. If you are new, my name is Kevin. And it's wonderful to be with us again this morning and to look at this passage of Scripture.

Now, maybe before we do that, Just one kind of family update is, Hey, as a church family, we've had quite an unusual season.

If you don't know, Henrika, who is on staff, leads the university ministry. About a month ago, her mother passed away. She was sick for a long time, for many years in Holland.

[2 : 34] And Henrika went back to Holland and was able to see her mom, which was really good. And I think she's coming out of quarantine next week. And then 10 days ago, Ed, he's one of our elders, his father passed away after also a lengthy battle with cancer.

And Ed got to spend some good time with his dad. And then just this week, Bernard's dad passed away quite unexpectedly. And so we've had just a season as a church where we've kind of got front row seats into the fact that this world is broken and full of pain and grief.

And the hope of the gospel is that this world is not the final story. This is not the final chapter of our story. We long for a day in which every tear will be wiped away.

But we are in this season where many of us are feeling the reality of this. And so I wonder if we can just pray together as a family and just bring our church family before the Lord. Can we do that together? Let's pray. Father God, we are so grateful that your word describes you as the God of all comfort, the Father of all mercies.

And we come before you this morning, Lord, very aware of our need for your mercy and your grace and your comfort. God, thank you that your grace is not just for salvation.

[3 : 47] Your grace does not just cover our sins, though it does that. Your grace comes to us both as sinners but also as sufferers. Your grace comes to us in our moments of difficulty and pain.

God, in the longing of our hearts, you are there. And God, we really do come before you this morning asking for that. We stand as a family with our family members this morning.

And we ask you, God, come and be in our midst. Holy Spirit, won't you come and open our eyes to freshly experience your grace and to see you. God, there are probably many of us that are hurting and grieving and suffering in many ways, ways that we don't know about.

God, won't you come to us this morning? Won't you minister to us? Won't you pour out your Spirit into us? Won't you, as Romans 5 says, pour the love of God into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that we may know you, God.

Jesus, we thank you that you were a man that walked this broken world. And the Scripture says that you are able to empathize and sympathize with all of our sufferings because you've been there.

[4 : 51] We're so grateful for that, Lord. God, we trust you and we love you and we look forward to the day when you return and we are with you in glory. Until that day, we look to you and we trust in you.

Pray these things in your wonderful name. Amen. Amen. Well, by way of segue, the passage that we read this morning is full of brokenness and pain.

And it's an unusual passage because usually in the Gospels, the Gospels are kind of all about Jesus, right? Everything is front and central about the life, the message, the mission, the fame, the person of Jesus.

But in the passage that Angie read to us this morning, Jesus hardly appears at all. There's a brief reference to him in verse 1, a brief reference in the end of verse 12. But other than that, Jesus doesn't appear at all.

And really, the passage we're looking at today is this up close and personal look at these two guys, John the Baptizer and Herod the Tetrarch. And the big idea of our passage today is don't be like Herod, do be like John.

[6 : 00] Not really rocket science. You don't need a PhD to understand that. Don't be an egotistical, insecure, wicked, selfish guy like Herod. Don't be God-fearing, God-centered like John, okay?

But of course, there's much more to it than that. If that's all that we came to hear this morning, that would be the world's shortest sermon and possibly the world's worst sermon because the Bible doesn't just tell us to do do's and don'ts.

It gives us more than that. So let's dive in a little more and see what's going on under the surface here. And I've got four things that I think God wants to say to us this morning, okay, from this passage.

So let's dive in. The first one is this. Unlike Herod, let's be willing to repent at God's word, okay? Unlike Herod, let's be willing to repent at God's word.

Now, before we dive into that point, let me give the background to the story because you need to understand what's going on here. Do you remember Herod the Great? He died around 4 BC.

[7 : 03] He's the guy when the wise men travel from the east at the birth of Jesus. They come from the east. They come to Jerusalem and they say, we hear a new king is in town, Christ, the king of the Jews.

Herod says, go and find this baby and tell me where he is so that I too can worship him. But actually in his mind, he's thinking, let me kill the guy because Herod doesn't want a rival on the throne.

And so he then hears that he's been tricked by the wise men and he issues this decree. All baby boys under two years of age born in Bethlehem are to be murdered, killed.

Okay, that's Herod the Great. He had 10 wives, 14 children that we know of. Many of his wives and his children he had killed and murdered because he didn't like them or he was jealous.

So that's Herod the Great. Now, three of... Oh, okay, sorry. So Herod the Great, who's not great at all, he dies in the year 4 BC.

[7 : 59] And when he dies, he wasn't really king. He was called a client king. In other words, he was under Rome's authority. He dies and his empire, his territory, is split up into three sections and given to three of his sons.

Okay, and one of the sons that inherits a portion is called Antipas. And that's the Herod in our passage that we read about this morning. He's also known as Herod the Tetrarch.

Tetrarch means a quarter because he was given a quarter of his father's territory. Okay, so Herod Antipas, one of his 10 sons, Herod the Tetrarch, is Herod that we read about this morning.

Now, you need to know about two of his brothers, half-brothers, okay? One is a guy called Aristobulus, something like that, okay? And he's not that important, except that he had a daughter called Herodias, okay?

So we've got, can you see? I mean, you're struggling to see, okay? So we've got Herod the Tetrarch. He's got a half-brother, Aristobulus, who has a daughter called Herodias. These two have another half-brother called Philip, okay?

[9 : 02] Now, Herod in our story, Herod the Tetrarch, he marries this Arabian princess called Phyllis or something, okay? The daughter of an Arabian king. And they're happily married.

And Philip, their half-brother, marries Aristobulus' daughter, Herodias. So he marries his niece, okay? So you've got three brothers, one, two, three. There's a whole lot of other brothers, but don't worry about them.

One brother marries his other brother's daughter. One day, and Tetrarch marries this Arabian princess, and they're all happily married. But one day, Herod the Tetrarch goes to visit his brother Philip, and he sees his brother's wife, who remembers also his niece, right?

And he thinks, wow, I wonder what it would be like to be married to her. And she sees him and thinks, he's good-looking. I should be married to him.

And so they promptly both divorce their spouses. Tetrarch divorces his Arabian princess. Herodias divorces her uncle, who's also her husband, Philip, ditches him.

[10 : 08] And they get married. And they have a wonderful wedding ceremony in the palace garden. And you can imagine how awkward it must have been for Philip. Because on one hand, he's the ex-husband of the bride.

He's also the bride's uncle, okay, because she's his niece. But he's also the brother of the groom, right? And so, I mean, him being invited to the wedding banquet must have been very awkward. But anyway, so that's what's happened.

So the one brother has stolen his brother's wife, who's also his niece. And they've divorced their spouses, and they plan to live happily ever after. Okay, does that make sense at all? You're kind of tracking.

Okay, so the family tree genealogy. Now, there's a whole lot more. This makes Hollywood and Romeo and Juliet seem tame, okay? They're all marrying their daughters and their uncles and their aunts and nieces and stuff all over the place, okay?

So that's kind of the background. Now, coming back to Tetrarch in our passage. John the Baptist hears about all this, and he sends them a wedding present.

[11 : 12] Except rather than sending them a red packet with his congratulations, he sends them a note with one word on it. And the word is, repent.

He says, you have done wrong. You shouldn't do this. You divorced your wife. You divorced your husband. That's not what God wants for you. Remember, the Herodians, the Herod family, were Jews.

They were meant to know God's word. They were meant to know God's law. God's word and law is meant to be written on their heart. They were meant to be a light to the nations, a symbol of hope to the Gentiles.

As rulers, they were meant to establish righteousness and justice in Israel. And yet, all they've done is establish a scandal. All they've done is, rather than bringing righteousness and justice, they've brought a soap opera to Israel.

And John the Baptist knows this, and he says, this is not God's plan for you. This is not God's plan for our nation. You should turn from your wicked ways and repent from what you've done.

[12 : 16] John the Baptist sends this message. And so before things go from bad to worse, God sends his message, his word of grace, a word of redemption. It's a challenging word, but it's a word that's calling the Herodian family back from their wayward ways to come to return to him.

But Herod would have none of it. Look at verse 3. It says, Herod had seized John and bound him. Those are the same words that Matthew is going to use for the arrest of Jesus.

And he had him put in prison because of Herodias, his wife. Because John had been saying to him, it's not right that you get married to your brother's wife. So John tells this message, say, Herod, you've got to repent.

Now Matthew tells us that this is the message that John has been saying from the beginning. Matthew chapter 3. John the Baptist arrives in the scene and he says, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And just in case we think that John is some crusty old fire and brimstone preacher, Jesus in chapter 4 says the same thing. Jesus arrives, Matthew tells us, says, from that time Jesus began to preach and teach, saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[13 : 30] Now, as modern urban citizens, and many of us here are millennials, the temptation is to think, come on. I mean, we're being a bit harsh on Herod now.

I mean, I know he's a bit of a lunatic. He's a bit crazy. He's a bit insecure and does some crazy things. But should, I mean, isn't John being a little bit harsh on Herod? And especially given Herod's very crazy upbringing, his family background.

I mean, just consider his father, right? His father is Herod the Great, who was not very great at all. His father is the guy who, on hearing that Jesus was born, decreed that all those children under two years old get killed.

Herod the Great is the guy who killed a whole bunch of his wives and his sons because he was jealous that they would try and steal the throne from him. Herod the Great, on his deathbed in around 4 BC, he issues a summons to his one son and daughter saying, when I die, I am so fearful that nobody would mourn my death.

I want you to call all of the leading statesmen in Jerusalem to the palace and have them executed, killed, so that Jerusalem will be a mourning on my death.

[14 : 45] Okay, so they'll mourn for those people, but at least Jerusalem will be mourning when I die because he is so fearful that they would have a party when he died. But this is Herod the Great, right? They're also saying in Jerusalem at the time that it's better to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons.

You've got more chance of living out your days. And so given that background, I mean, shouldn't we be a little bit understanding and sympathetic to Herod Tetrarch, his son?

I mean, who can blame him for being a crazy lunatic and chopping off John the Baptist's head? I mean, maybe he just needed counseling. Maybe he needed a good therapist. And to be honest, counseling is important.

I'm not saying counseling isn't important, but maybe as 21st century millennials, we think if we had organized them a good, you know, Sigmund Freud would have a field day with him, understanding his background.

But no, friends, the Bible's assessment of the human heart is remarkably penetrating. Contra to Sigmund Freud, the problem with wicked Herod is not just his upbringing, it's not just his family background, it's the wickedness of his heart.

[15 : 51] It's his self-centeredness. It's the fact that there's a kingdom in his heart called the kingdom of self, that he's determined to exalt above all things. It's his obsession with his own kingdom.

And scripture's solution for the diseased heart is not just psychoanalysis. It's not as helpful as that can be. It's that agonizing little word that we don't like so much, the word repent.

The scripture's solution for the wickedness of the human heart is to find the kingdom of self and to turn from it and to come back to God. It's to come to Christ in faith and repentance.

It's to turn from the darkness into the light. And I know that at Watermark, we often are talking about repentance and faith, right? And if you're new to Watermark, you might feel like, oh my goodness, what's wrong with these guys?

They're just always beating us up, right? I mean, just give me a break. Maybe you think that this is a church where we like just cracking the whip and just telling you, repent, you sinner. But actually, the reason why we do that, the reason why scripture talks about it so much is because when the Bible talks about repentance, it's an invitation to come out of the darkness and to come into the light.

[17 : 07] It's an invitation to come out of slavery and to walk into freedom. It's an invitation to leave a life of death and to walk into life. Repentance always feels like death in the moment because you've got to humble yourself, but it always, always leads to life and freedom and joy.

We sang about it earlier. We sang about you have broken every chain. There's salvation in your name. And that's what the gospel proclaims. But the way to get to that freedom is through humbling ourselves and saying, I am not God, you are God.

I mean, look at these two characters here. Who do you think is more free? Right? I mean, sure, John the Baptist is in prison. He's got chains around his hand, chains around his neck. Herod's throwing this party.

He's got porters and wine flowing everywhere. He's got beautiful ladies dancing for him. But who's more free? Herod looks like he's free, but he's a slave.

He's a slave to his desires. He sees his stepdaughter, stroked niece, dancing in front of him, and he can't help himself. He gives this ridiculous promise. He says, what do you want?

[18 : 19] I have to half my kingdom. I'll give it to you. Anything you name, it's yours. Herod sees his brother's wife. He has the hots for her, and he can't help himself. He divorces his princess, and he says, I must marry you.

I must sleep with you. And look at how he's a slave to people's opinions. He issues this ridiculous decree, saying, I'll give you whatever you want. His stepdaughter, Salome, takes him at his word, and says, I want John the Baptist's head on a platter.

And now he's in an awkward position, because he said this in front of all the guests. He's a slave to people's approval. He can't back down. He says, okay, fine. And he ends up murdering an innocent man, all because he's a slave to people's approvals.

And John the Baptist, what about him? Sure, he's in chains. He's in prison. He's enslaved. He's got a chain around his neck. But I tell you, he's more free than Herod.

He's not a slave to anyone's approval. He speaks truth with clarity. He looks the king in the eye and says, what you've done is wrong. You need to repent. Friends, who's more free here?

[19 : 21] And so, the scripture's description is that when Jesus calls us to faith and repentance, the message of the gospel to turn from our sins and to turn to Jesus is not a word of condemnation.

It's a word of freedom. It's an invitation to be whole. It's an invitation to find life. You have broken every chain. There is freedom in your name.

Listen, Jesus Christ, our living hope. Friends, unlike Herod, let's be willing to listen to God's word of repentance and turn and run to him.

Okay, that's the first one. That's the longest one. The next three are a little shorter. Secondly, so firstly, unlike Herod, let's be willing to listen to God's word and turn to repentance.

Secondly, like John, let's be willing to suffer for the glory of God's kingdom. Okay? Now, this passage, John 14, is roughly halfway through Matthew's gospel.

[20 : 21] Matthew's gospel is 28 chapters. We're kind of in the middle. And the first half of Matthew's gospel, Matthew's constantly presenting Jesus. Remember, he says, this is Jesus. How are you going to respond?

Jesus, the great and better David. Jesus, the great and better Moses. Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. How are you going to respond? From chapter 14 onwards, there's a twist, a turn, a pivot, because Matthew is now preparing us for Jesus' death on the cross.

Twice in chapter 16 and 17, Jesus is going to tell his disciples, the Son of Man is going to die on the cross and rise again. But here in chapter 14, there's the kind of foreboding, the dark clouds are starting to come in, anticipation of the cross.

And in many ways, what Matthew wants us to see is that the story of John the Baptist here is going to become the story of Jesus. And the story of Jesus is going to become the story of all those who trust in Jesus and follow him.

Douglas O'Donnell says it like this, John's cross, as it were, points to Jesus' cross, and Jesus' cross points to the cross of those who will follow him.

[21 : 36] Remember, Jesus said it like this, he said, if anyone wants to become my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever's willing to lose his life for my sake will find it.

Imagine how easy it would have been for John to keep quiet. I mean, it's not like Herod summons him to his palace and said, John, tell me, what do you think about me marrying my niece-stroke-sister-in-law-stroke-brother's wife?

Right, I mean, Herod, he didn't have to lie about it. John could have just kept quiet. And in doing so, he would have kept his head. But John knows that his calling is to be a man that speaks God's word even if it's uncomfortable, even if it's going to cost him dearly.

John knew that living for the obedience and the authority of God and the praise of God sometimes means living with the rejection of man. Do you remember how the Apostle Paul, he writes to Timothy.

Timothy's leading, he's a young pastor and leads his church in Ephesus. It's a bit of an unruly church. And the Apostle Paul could have said, listen, Timothy, things are tough. Just keep your head low.

[22 : 43] Don't cause too many ripples. Just see it through and everything will be fine in the end. He said, no, no, no. He cuts straight to the chase and he says, Timothy, anyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will face persecution.

Friends, that's a scripture worth memorizing. The Apostle Peter says the same thing. He says, to be with the Lord means becoming like your Lord. He says, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trials when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's suffering. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5. He says, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad. That's how they treated the prophets and your reward is great in heaven. Friends, this is the Christian life. This is what it means to follow Jesus, that we pattern our lives after Jesus.

And Jesus showed us that the road to glory passes through Calvary. And that's true for Jesus, but it's true for his followers. So like John, let's be those who are willing to suffer for God's kingdom.

[23 : 54] Okay? Unlike Herod, be willing to repent to teach him God's word. Like John, let's be willing to suffer for God's kingdom. Third thing, like John, let's be clear on what success is.

Okay? When you read Matthew 14, you are straight away impacted by the contrast between Herod, Herod on the one hand, and John the Baptist, right?

Herod has got everything going for him. John's got nothing going for him. Okay? Just consider this. Herod is a ruler. He's not really king. He likes to be called king. He's kind of more like a governor or a prince, but he thinks he's a king.

Okay? He's got some authority. John the Baptist is in prison. Not much authority. Okay? John's under authority. Herod has a crown on his head, so to speak.

John's got also metal on his head, except it's chains. Okay? He's got a collar around his neck. No crown for John. Herod is feasting at the banquet. More wine, 10 course meal, everything you could want.

[24 : 58] John, remember John, the description of John? He was in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey. That was his meal. And now, where is John? He's in prison. Okay? Not quite the four seasons in prison.

I don't even know what they fed them. If they fed them anything, John's in prison. Herod is surrounded by the who's who of Jerusalem. All the people that you could imagine are there. He's got porters.

He's got slaves. He's got servants. He's got wine. He's got everyone there. John is in prison surrounded by jailers and prisoners and rats.

Okay? That's his company. And Herod, of course, carries a sword. John's head is firmly underneath the sword. And so, if you are a first century citizen in Jerusalem, who do you want to be?

Whose life do you want? Right? You pick a name out of the hat. Who's the jackpot? Who's the dud? Herod's the jackpot. John's the dud. Right? But friends, don't believe it for a second.

[25 : 59] John's outer life. I mean, Herod's outer life looks like it's all together, but his inner life is wasting away. And though we don't see it in our passage, at the end of the story, the scales are going to be tipped.

Because by the time that Matthew's gospel is written and distributed, everyone in Israel knows the sorry end to Herod's story.

First, remember how Herod divorced his princess, Arabian princess wife, to marry his stepsister stroke niece? Well, this princess, her dad, was a little bit upset by that decision.

And so he, the king of Arabia, musters this army together and annihilates Herod's army. He runs in, attacks them, destroys them. He's about to kill Herod himself.

And Herod sends some help to the emperor in Rome. The emperor sends some forces and saves Herod's skin. Okay? So Herod gets out alive, but only just. A few years later, his wife Herodias, she hears that another family member has been given the title king by Rome.

[27 : 08] And she wants to be a queen. So she convinces her weak husband, Herod Tetrock, to go to Rome and say, hey, I also want the name king. And so Herod marches off to Rome and says, what about it?

Why don't you give me the title king? Rome is already pretty irritated with Herod because he's such a weak leader. And this presumptuous request makes it even worse. And so they relegate him into exile in the backwaters of the Roman Empire for the rest of his life.

And rather than being king and queen, Herod and Herodias spend the rest of their lives and die in the backwaters of the Roman Empire where nobody hears from them again. Okay? And so, rather than Herod being lifted up, actually, John is lifted up and where do, what do you speak about Herod now?

For the rest of history, his name is relegated to the history books as this weak, insecure failure. Friends, one of the things that God wants us to see in this passage is that though Herod takes John's head off and is there any more literal way to silence your critics, he could not silence the message of John's gospel.

Because though John's head has been taken off, his gospel message goes forth until the ends of the earth and so even today, 2,000 years later, it is still bearing fruit.

[28 : 34] Soren Kierkegaard, that Danish or Swedish philosopher said this, the tyrant dies and his rule ends, the martyr dies and his rule begins.

Is that not profound? Is that not exactly what we see here? Herod's on the throne. He dies and his rule ends. John is in prison and he's beheaded but his message goes forth forever.

And so what this means, friends, is that the good life and the successful life and the life that God is calling us to is probably not the life that the magazines and the MTR and the billboards of Hong Kong are going to scream at us.

The billboards are going to tell us the good life looks like this, pomp and ceremony and lights and glitz and many servants and a big house and all the razz patazz.

And the scripture tells us that the good life might not involve that at all. In fact, it might even mean walking away from all that. The good life is the life that is centered on Christ Jesus, trusts him, hopes him, obeys him, gives our life to him.

[29 : 41] Friends, maybe to live the life that God's calling you to, you're going to need to downscale your life. You're going to need to walk away from some of those things. But that's the life that Christ has called us to. That's the successful life. 700 years before John comes on the scene, Isaiah the prophet says, there will be a voice calling in the wilderness saying, prepare the way of the Lord.

And Isaiah says, God, what is this voice going to say? What's his message going to be? Jesus later says, this is John the Baptist and God responds, his message will be like this, all flesh is like grass, the beauty is like the flower of the field, the grass withers, the flower dies, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Friends, just like the grass withers and the flowers fade, so too do the kingdoms of this world. You know, a few years ago, a couple of decades ago, archaeologists found in the city of Ephesus some graffiti engraved into a stone saying, Rome, your power will never end.

Sorry to tell you, it did. Friends, the kingdoms of this world are going to come to an end, but there is a kingdom that will last forever and ever. And though, like Daniel chapter 2 tells us, it is a small stone and it looks unimpressive, though it is buried in a field of ordinariness, though it is small like a mustard seed, though it is hidden like yeast in a batch of flour, it is growing, it is growing, it is growing, and one day God's kingdom will fill the earth like the waters cover the sea.

Friends, like flowers in a vase, they look good for a few days, but eventually they end up on the trash heap. Let's be clear on what the good life is. Let's be clear on the life that Christ has called us to.

[31 : 24] It may not be sexy, it may not be popular, you may not win friends and influence people. Friends, maybe Jesus will call you to make some radical decisions, but that's okay, you give yourself to loving, trusting, and obeying Jesus.

It'll be worth it. Let's be clear on what the life that God has called us to. Fourthly and finally, unlike Herod, let's be clear on who Jesus is.

Now, look at verse 1 and 2 with me. Now, this is a bit confusing because verses 1 and 2 actually happen way after verses 3 to 11. Kind of the main part of our story we looked at, verses 1 and 2 actually happens afterwards, but look at what happens here.

Verse 1 and 2 says this, At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, This is John the Baptist. He's been raised from the dead.

That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. Okay, so later on, Herod's killed John, and he hears there's this preacher on the scene that has got the same message as John the Baptist, saying repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[32 : 34] And he's doing miracles, and people are following him, and people are going out to the wilderness to find him, and he says, Hang on, this sounds like John the Baptist. I thought I killed him.

He must be back from the dead coming to get his revenge on me. Josephus, the first century historian, actually tells us that's what Herod believed, that John had come to get revenge on him for taking off his head.

Okay, so Herod's paranoia is getting the better of him. Later on, Jesus is arrested, and he stands on trial, and he stands before Herod, the same Herod, the Tetrarch, before Herod and Pontius Pilate.

And Luke tells us that Herod was glad to see him, for he had heard about his miracles, and that he was hoping to see some miraculous sign done.

But Jesus just stays quiet. Jesus had an opportunity to defend himself. Jesus could have done some miracle to prove who he was.

[33 : 35] Jesus could have got off, but Jesus stays silent. Do you know why? Because Jesus didn't just come with a message. Jesus didn't just come to do some miracles to entertain the crowds.

Jesus didn't just come to tell people that he is God and that they should follow him. Jesus came to die on the cross. Jesus came to give up his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus came to take upon himself the sins of those who would recognize him and humble themselves and turn from their self-righteousness and follow him. And before Herod stands Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Before Herod stands the Sovereign Lord, the one that Colossians tells us, by whom, through whom, and for whom the whole world was made. Before Herod stands the one that Hebrews chapter 1 tells us, he upholds the whole universe by the word of his power.

The one who is the very image and the radiance of the glorious God. The one who, with his word, spoke galaxies and solar systems and universes into being.

[34 : 47] Before Herod stands this sovereign, glorious God. and all Herod can see is a magician, an entertainer. Someone who's maybe come to make life a little bit more convenient.

Friends, to be a Christian, you don't need to know a lot of things. You don't even need to know everything in the Bible. You don't need to know Greek and Hebrew and have a degree in theology.

theology, you can even still have some questions but there are some things you do need to know. You need to know who Jesus is. You need to know that he is the son of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

You need to know that he's the lamb of God who was slain for our sins so that we can be given his righteousness instead. Friends, you need to be clear that Jesus didn't come to tell you just how to improve your life, how to make your life more comfortable.

He came to call you from death to life. You need to know that he is the king of glory, the hope of glory. You need to know that he's the one who looks you in the eye and says, come and follow me.

[35 : 58] And yes, that may mean picking up your cross, that may mean dying to yourself, that may mean suffering but Jesus looks you in the eye and he says, I love you. I love you enough to go to the cross for you.

I love you enough to die and give up my life for you. Come and follow me. Friends, you need to know that Jesus Christ is the one who describes himself as the friend of sinners. The one who didn't come to condemn you but to pour out his love in you.

Friends, you need to know that he is the one who will not crush a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. He will come and surround you with his arms and draw you into his kingdom.

Friends, many people know a great many things about great many things in life. You have a PhD in this. You may know how the economy works, how to run a business, how to grow an enterprise.

You may know some amazing scientific discovery. That's wonderful. Praise God for that. But do you know who Jesus is? Are you clear on who Christ is? Are you clear on why he came?

[37 : 01] What he came to do? That he died on the cross for you to take your sins upon himself so that he could give you his righteousness instead? Friends, these are the most important things.

Christ came to us in flesh and blood to show us what God is like so we don't need to guess. So we wouldn't need to be unclear so that we could have absolute certainty on who he is.

Friends, this is the message of Matthew 14. Don't be like Herod. Let's be willing to repent and follow Jesus. Let's be like John the Baptist who's willing to suffer and embrace the cross.

Let's be like John who knows what the life that God has called us to and unlike Herod, let's be clear on who Jesus is. Let's love him, trust him, obey him and follow him.

Let's pray. Oh Lord Jesus Christ, amazing God how your word written 2,000 years ago which shows us these two men actually reveals so much about you.

[38 : 02] Christ, thank you that your word doesn't just give us it gives us so much more than just do's and don'ts. your word actually invites us into a life of life and light and joy and freedom.

Jesus, you look us in the eye and you unashamedly call us to turn, to forsake our false idols and to turn to you in faith and repentance. But Jesus, you call us to life.

You call us to freedom. God, help us to respond. Help us to respond. God, even now with the things in our life where it's so tempting to hold on and to not trust you.

Oh God, we want to trust you. We want to turn from the idols in our lives that promise us hope but only enslave us.

Come and help us, we pray. Come and glorify your name. In your wonderful name we pray. Amen.