

Text: Mt 14.1-12, Mk 6.14-29, Lk 9.7-9

As I mentioned during our Bible reading on Sunday, we will be looking at just one story for tonight's study. I am always thinking about the verse count when deciding how much to cover. Sometimes the verse count for one story isn't enough material for the pace we are trying to keep up. Tonight we have just enough in the three record of the story of:

John the Baptist, Martyr

Now, to remind you of our immediate context in the chronology of Christ, last week we saw the passages where Jesus gave instructions to the twelve and gave them authority to perform miracles themselves. Then he sent them out by twos, ministering in various towns and villages of Galilee.

At the same time, Jesus himself continued ministering and working miracles on his own.

With that context in mind, I think we are ready to read our texts. Let's start with Luke 9.7-9.

I. Herod perplexed (Lk 9.7-9, cf. Mt 14.1-2, Mk 6.14-16)

A. Herod the tetrarch

1. One of the many sons of Herod the Great
2. Given control of Galilee and Perea as tetrarch (not King)
3. An able administrator, builder of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee
4. Notorious for divorcing his wife and marrying Herodias, the wife of one of his half-brothers, Herod Philip
 - a. Just to confuse things, there are actually two men called Herod Philip, this one is also called Herod Boethus
 - b. And to further confuse things, Herodias is the half-niece of both of these half-brothers, the daughter of Herod Aristobulus
 - c. And to confuse things yet more, Salome, the daughter of Herodias (and Philip 1) ended up marrying the other Herod Philip, another half-brother of these two

5. Final bit of confusion: Herod Antipas ultimately deposed
 - a. Herodias urged him to seek kingship rather than tetrarchy and...
 - b. Her full brother, Herod Agrippa denounced him to the emperor
 - c. Result: banishment

Nice family. You can't read about them without a certain sense of horror.

- B. The news of the miracles reached the ears of power
 1. The activity of all these men can't escape notice
 2. Jesus in particular is at the center, and at the center of speculation
 - a. Some say he is John, risen from the dead
 - b. Some say he is Elijah, who is prophesied to return
 - c. Others suggest another of the prophets
 3. Herod himself appears to vacillate
 - a. Who can it be? (Lk)
 - b. It must be John (Mt, Mk)

Despite the viciousness of these Herods, God granted many opportunities to approach the truth. The most dramatic is Herod Agrippa 2 (nephew of Herodias) who is "almost persuaded" by Paul in Acts.

God grants grace to all sinners, an encouragement to us to preach to whoever will hear.

II. Flashback: John beheaded (Mt 14.3-11, Mk 6.17-28)

- A. The account of John's beheading is of something that already occurred
 1. It is probably fairly recent, as it seems Jesus learns of it while the disciples are out on their mission
 2. But it is already past, causing Herod some confusion
- B. The issue: John's forthright preaching (Mt 14.3-5, Mk 6.17-20)
 1. John publicly rebuked Herod for marrying Herodias
 2. Herodias in particular was very antagonistic to John

3. Herod wanted to have him put to death, but feared the crowd (political motivation) and he also had a twisted delight/fear relationship: knew him to be a holy man, liked hearing him preach

One wonders at the spiritual perversion of the man, a man full of contradictions. He plagued his own soul with his doubts and wavering.

Be sure of the gospel truth and be committed to following it with your whole heart!

C. The outcome: Herodias gets the upper hand (Mt 14.6-11, Mk 6.21-28)

1. Herod gave a great banquet on his birthday, Salome provided some of the entertainment
2. No doubt there was a great deal of drunkenness; no doubt the dance was sensually appealing
3. Herod rashly promised the girl a gift for her performance, she is coached by her mother
4. In spite of his reservations about executing John, Herod is unwilling to go back on his public vow, so John is executed

The word used in Mark suggests deep sorrow: Herod was in a moral quandary, but went against his conscience in ordering the execution.

III. Jesus informed (Mt 14.12, Mk 6.29)

A. John's disciples honor him in his death, grant a proper burial

1. The commentaries note this account as a parallel to Jesus' death
2. Mark 9.13 gives a veiled reference to this, and ties both John and Jesus into the prophecies

B. After the burial, the disciples come to Jesus and inform him of John's death

1. It is quite likely that the Lord, as the son of God, knows already
2. But the gospels are marking human motions and events — this news is on Jesus' mind as his disciples return from their successful journey

Conclusion:

The significance of the event:

- Fulfilment of prophecy
- Marking the widespread interest in Jesus in every region of society
- Offering an example for us of courage in ministry