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The Final Days of John the Baptist; Matt 14:1-12
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Introduction – This is the 3rd time Matthew has written of John the Baptist. In Matt 3 we learned about the ministry of John and his role in announcing the arrival of the Messiah. In Matt 11 we find John in prison and experiencing a season of weak faith. Here in Matt 14 we discover why John is in prison and we are told of the events that led to his death.

The story reveals John's death was untimely and unjust, wrongful and wicked, but that's just the headlines. That's just the storyline. What we often find in the narratives of Scripture is the fleshing out of the truths of Scripture. There is a storyline beneath the storyline. There are fundamental principles at work underneath the actions of all the characters we meet in this tragic narrative.

- I. Truth Remains Truth
 - a. No one would dare confront Herod Antipas, the King. Herod was a wicked and cruel king. No one dared oppose him and no one expected him to exemplify a moral high ground. So whether it be fear for one's life or simple apathy towards evil, everyone knew you didn't confront Herod.
 - b. Then enters John the Baptist. Announcer of the Messiah. Preacher of repentance. It was his very calling to call out sin, to call for people to recognize their sin, repent of their sin, and look to the Savior. Repentance is essential to salvation. If you do not recognize your sin, you will not know you need a Savior. John confronted Herod on more than one occasion. The Bible says John was saying to Herod. I imagine when Herod saw John coming he would drop his head and think, "Oh no, here he comes again. Mr Holy. Coming to brow beat me again with his religious morality." Eventually his blood boiled and he had John seized, bound, and thrown in prison.
 - c. John exposed Herod's adultery, exposed his sin and wickedness, exposed his immorality. He brought truth to bear in Herod's life. And rather than repent and find forgiveness and new life, Herod clung to his sinful life. He refused to be set free by the truth and decided to suppress it.

- d. And yet truth remains truth even when you try to silence it, make it go away, and cover it up. Out of sight – out of mind does not work with truth. It remains truth no matter how you treat it. Herod's adultery didn't go away just because he sent John away.
- e. And that becomes particularly evident especially for Herodias. She would never be satisfied as long as John was alive. She could not tolerate the one who called out her sin was living. He must die. But even then, truth remains. Just because you kill the messenger doesn't mean you stop the message.
- f. Tragically some react to the truth of their sin in the same way today. Rather than repent, rather than yield to truth and find new life, a cover up begins. We seek to rationalize our sin rather than repent of it. We try to justify our behavior rather than turn from it. We attack the messenger in an attempt to do away with the message. We dismiss the Bible. We try to tweak its message. But if the message is truth, it remains. If our course of action and way of life is sin, it remains sin no matter how we treat it or regard it.
- g. When confronted with the truth, we only have two options. We can embrace it and align ourselves with it, or we can reject it and plot our lives on a course that only leads us to further sin. Truth will lead us to Christ. Sin will lead us to more sin. That was the horrible trajectory that Herod and Herodias chose.

II. Truth Prevails Even When It Seems It Fails

- a. On the surface one might think that sin wins the day. Herod with his power and thirst for sin overcame John. By the end of the story, John has been executed and Herod continues on his merry, sin-filled way. I guess truth lost this battle.
- b. But that's hardly the case is it? Truth prevailed even after John's murder, after the messenger was silenced. Truth prevailed in a messenger that you can't silence no matter how hard you try. It's called the conscience. And every single person has one because sinner or saint, we are all created in the image of God. We know when our actions have crossed a line that should not have been crossed. The conscience is a preacher of righteousness when there is no other preacher around.

- c. We see this to be the case when Herod concludes that Jesus must be John raised from the dead. Down deep inside the heart of this wicked man, he could not refuse the truth of John's message. He knew he was in sin. He knew John was right. He knew he was guilty. He thought he could not get away from John, but it was the truth he could not escape.
- d. No matter how immoral we become. No matter how far we go to try and cover up our sin or dismiss our sin or justify our sin, there's a little voice deep in our hearts that keeps whispering, "You are not right with God. What you are doing is wrong." This line of morality buried deep within all of us C.S. Lewis argued was one of the greatest evidences for the existence of God. Where else could that line come from? We didn't put it there, but it shows up when we live in out right rebellion against our Creator.
- e. And oh what great lengths we go at times to try to silence it. We blame others for the guilt we feel. Just like Herodias, we rage against anyone who would dare question our choice of morality. We demand that everyone agree and comply and celebrate our autonomy. And yet that little voice remains because truth prevails even when it seems that it fails.

III. Known Sin Has Deeper Roots

- a. Sin is never solo. Just as faith is always accompanied by its true companion of good works, so sin is always accompanied by its true companion of more sin. Just as faith is progressive and leads to further righteousness, so sin is progressive and leads to further sin.
- b. One progression in our text is that once we embrace our sin, it will cause us to strike our conscience and do what we don't want to do. Sin leaves us no choice but to keep sinning. As one lie will only lead to another, so Herod's imprisonment of John led to his execution of John.
- c. Sexual immorality is the breeding ground for sensual pleasure to take hold of your life and then take from your life. Sexual sin is a chain of gratification that only tightens its grip on your soul. Herod the adulterer becomes Herod the murderer.
- d. This dance of Herodias' daughter must have been very sensual in nature. It was pleasing to Herod's fleshly appetites and caused him to

make the rash promise to repay her with whatever she could think to ask.

- e. And rather than be shamed and take back his oath, Herod allows his thirst for sin to trap him in a deceptive scheme. Herodias' deceptive scheme provided Herod the perfect out. You've heard the saying, "God will make a way when there seems to be no way." The opposite is also true. Sin will make a way for more sin when there seems to be no way for more sin!
- f. Sin will eventually progress to a horrible, evil, unthinkable end. V11. Sin's initiation is pleasure. Sin's end is disgusting evil.

IV. The End of the Story is Not the End

- a. As I said earlier, on the surface it seems that John is the one who suffers loss in this story. Herod is still king and John is dead. But we know that the end is not the end.
- b. At the end of v12, John is in heaven and Herod is in sin. Truth remains truth even when it seems that truth has failed. But the truth of the gospel is that even death can't take away your life. Death only escorts you to paradise. As Herod continues on a fast track on the downslope of sin, John has simply left this world for the glory of everlasting life. John's not the one who suffers loss in this story. He suffered, but not for loss. He suffered momentarily for a glory that will never end. If you live for God in this life, you will suffer, but not for loss, rather for glory!
- c. 2 Cor 4:17 – For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.
- d. And that my friends is the truth.

Conclusion – If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for. – Charles Spurgeon