

Matthew 21-02-11a

Good evening, welcome to the Thursday night class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are going to move forward in our combined study of the Gospel of Matthew and its pertinence to the end times in which we find ourselves will be at Matthew chapter 14. Matthew chapter 14.

Starting a new section in the book, we reviewed the structure and the significance of the seven kingdom parables that we saw in Matthew 13 on Sunday morning. Hopefully you're up to speed and ready to launch into the story tonight of the arrest and execution of John the Baptist. Very fascinating and surprisingly pertinent to our times.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our study, and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful that your spirit and your word are a solid presence to guide us, to stabilize us, to give us hope and encouragement in the strange and twisty days in which we live. We thank you that we have confidence that we can observe and watch the rapidly developing pace of circumstance unfold before our eyes with the sure confidence that we are held in your hands, we are secure in your grace, and we're watching mindfully for the day when the Lord Jesus will return and take us to himself.

In the time that remains to us, we pray that this truth that we look at tonight will be meaningful and pertinent to each one of us, help us to see how we can live more faithfully and more obediently in its light. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Matthew chapter 14.

We are going to pick them up and lay them down tonight. We have a lot to cover, so let's read our passage. The preceding section, sometimes I mentioned that I think the chapter divisions are inelegant or not where I would have put them.

This one is great. This really is a new section. It's very clearly marked in the text, even without punctuation, but the preceding section is very helpfully concluded by this remark by the Lord Jesus.

A prophet is not without honor except. And this mention of a prophet is a marker of the conclusion of that preceding section where Jesus is not recognized as the messenger of God at a minimum, that he is in his own hometown, and an introduction to what follows about the last great Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist a subject that was broached at the very beginning of this gospel and is now brought back to the foreground in chapter 14. Chapter 14, at that time, this is at the time that Jesus has been preaching the gospel of the kingdom and has seen the reaction to it versus response.

The opposition is growing, questioning, summarized by the people in Nazareth who say, well, we've got good common sense reasons to dismiss this and to ignore it. This man isn't much who's bringing this message. And those who resist the truth of the word of

God, you will find as a hallmark and a marker and a characteristic that the second person personal pronoun will start getting used.

You are this, you are that. Where do you get this? You are doing despot to the spirit. You are twisting the word of God.

You are a big problem. You are making God a liar and so on. This is what they did to the Lord Jesus.

And he said, if they hated me, they will hate you. If they oppose me, they will oppose you. Just expect it.

Don't be surprised. There is no great harbinger of approaching doom that it has ever been the case. But at that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, this is John the Baptist.

He has risen from the dead. And therefore these powers are at work in him. These are a couple of the most astonishing verses in this entire gospel.

Do you see it? Herod himself is not an astonishment, but he thinks John the Baptist is risen from the dead. When has anybody ever heard anything about anyone getting raised from the dead in centuries? Not since the days of Elisha has someone been raised from the dead, six centuries. But the first thing that comes to Herod's mind when he hears about Jesus is John the Baptist is back.

Now, does he think that maybe, like those who think that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, he just went into a coma and the cool air of the cave revived him. Is there any chance John thinks maybe, or Herod thinks John didn't really die? Not unless there is head reattachment surgery available in that day and time. He saw the man's head on a platter, right? So it's not like, well, they goofed.

He wasn't quite dead. He's like the Monty Python sketch. You know, I'm feeling much better.

And he doesn't pass away. He's manifestly dead. But the first thought that Herod has when he hears about the mighty works and words of the Lord Jesus is that John is back.

What's doubly surprising about this is John did no miracles. No miracles associated with the ministry of John the Baptist, not a one. Didn't heal anyone, didn't raise anyone, didn't part any seas, didn't multiply any food.

He just preached. But the mighty works and the mighty words of the Lord Jesus call John the Baptist to Herod's mind. And he thinks he's back from the dead.

Herod had laid hold of John. And now we're, this is so typical of a biblical account. The ancient Near East is fraught with this sort of thing where you're in one place and time in

the story, and then you back up.

So he thinks John is back from the dead. Oh, let me explain why he would think that. I haven't told you that John at this point is dead.

So we back up and get that story. Herod had laid hold of John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had said to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude because they counted him as a prophet.

A prophet, we just saw that word in verse 57 of the preceding chapter. Herod's birthday was celebrated. Daughter of Herodias, Salome danced before them, pleased Herod.

Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother said, give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter. The king was sorry, nevertheless, because of oaths, because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her.

He sent and had John beheaded in prison. His head was brought on a platter, given to the girl, she brought it to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it and went and told Jesus.

We actually do not know what happened to the head of John the Baptist. I doubt that his followers were able to obtain it. Herodias evidently did something with it.

We know not what, but the body, the headless body was buried by the followers of John. Well, you know this story well. Let's analyze it a bit in the context of Matthew 13.

We just saw those seven kingdom parables in that chapter. And this is what the future kingdom is going to be like. This is what the future king is going to do.

Now we are brought to the present with the present kingdom and the present king and the people in that kingdom. So Herod the Tetrarch, quick review. We've covered this some years ago.

I don't know how much you remember. If it's as much as I remembered, then a review is in order because I had to go back and review. You remember Herod the Great.

This is the Herod of the birth story of Jesus. This would be 30 odd years in the past. From this particular point, he dies in 4 BC and he is then succeeded by his son.

Now, Herod had many, many sons. He had over two dozen sons by and with various women. And this Herod, Herod is like Pharaoh.

It's just a title. It was sort of a family name that became a title. You could say Pharaoh, you could say Caesar.

Caesar started out as a name and became a title. Same thing with Herod. This particular individual here is not the original Herod, Herod the Great.

This is his son Antipas, Herod Antipas. And if you have ever seen this word Tetrarch, tetra means four. And four sons of Herod were given four different pieces.

It kind of resembles what happened after Alexander the Great died and his empire generally got split into four big chunks. And so you've got the Egyptian part and so on. Same thing with Herod.

And so Antipas has the section that includes Judea. Well, another one of Herod's sons was Aristobulus. Another of his sons was Philip.

So when these boys were young, and this would have been in the 80s, well, actually it would have been, yeah, in the 80s BC, before Jesus was born, these sons were being born to Herod the Great. And Herod, of course, is down in Judea, but he doesn't want his sons to be provincial. So as soon as they're a few years old and weaned and able to take it, he sent them to Rome to be educated.

And so Aristobulus is quite a bit older than Antipas and Philip. Aristobulus was one of the earlier sons. When he went to Rome and got his education, he decided not to return home and he stayed in Rome.

Got married, had some children, one of whom is his daughter, Salome. Salome is Aristobulus's daughter. So what does that make her to Antipas and to Philip? Antipas, Philip, and Aristobulus are all brothers.

So if one of the brothers has a daughter, what is she to the other brothers? She's the niece, right? They are, she's got uncle Philip, she's got uncle Antipas, right? Well, over the course of time, as Philip gets sent back to Rome for his education, he meets Salome and they're children. And even though they are brothers to Aristobulus, he's so much older that both Philip and Antipas are pretty close to Salome's age. So let me back up a little bit.

I'm mixing up my Herod brothers. This gets so confusing. You have to have a chart.

Last time I taught this, I actually drew a chart and made it all out. But she is the niece to Philip and to Antipas. So when Philip goes back for his education, maybe I did say that right, he meets Salome and, no, I'm sorry, he meets Herodias.

That's what I'm trying to say. He meets Herodias. Herodias is Aristobulus's daughter.

I knew there was something squirrely in there. Aristobulus stays in Rome. He gets married.

He has a daughter, Herodias. So that makes her a sister-in-law to Antipas and Philip.

Herodias, well, now I'm still messed up.

Yeah, so Philip marries her. Philip marries Herodias, who is his niece. Right? Herodias is the niece.

Philip, nobody's married Salome. Salome is not married. Herodias marries her uncle, Philip.

And he's kind of a half-uncle because Aristobulus and Philip are half-brothers, so they can kind of get away with this, but it keeps it all in the family. So if I haven't confused you already, three brothers. Aristobulus is way older than Antipas and Philip.

He has a daughter named Herodias. Philip goes back to Rome for his education, meets her. They're only a few years apart in age, and he marries his niece.

They then, Philip, Herodias, have a daughter, Salome. Salome is Philip and Herodias' daughter. Okay.

Well, for reasons unknown to history, Antipas, who has married another lady, decides he wants to be married to Herodias, his brother's wife. He wants to marry his sister-in-law. And Philip allows Herodias to divorce him.

He doesn't oppose it. He doesn't try to kill his brother. He lets it happen.

He lets his wife leave, wife and daughter, and they go, and Herodias marries Antipas. So now she leaves Rome and moves down to Judea with her daughter, Salome, to be with her new husband. Now, Antipas, and this is where it gets interesting, if I haven't already scrambled eggs too much, Antipas went to Rome in 26 AD.

We just got through talking about that year, right? 26 AD, that's the year Antipas went to Rome and met Herodias and decided he wanted to marry her. They get the divorce, they get the marriage, and Antipas, Herodias, and Herodias' daughter, Salome, return to Judea. This is all in the vicinity of 26.

So they are freshly back in that year, freshly back from Rome. As soon as they come back, this is a huge scandal. The law of Moses says a man shall not have his brother's wife, it's an abomination.

So the king of Judea has his brother's wife, and her previous husband, his brother, is not dead. So it creates a scandal. So are you with me now that this freshly returned party of the newly married Herod Antipas, Herodias, and Salome have just come back and John the Baptist is still preaching out there in the wilderness.

Jesus and his disciples are already operating. And people begin to hear that Jesus' disciples are baptizing more people than John's disciples are. And you have to wonder why did John's disciples not leave and go follow Jesus? But they didn't, John still has

disciples.

But as soon as they get back, and there is all of this shock and dismay. Now keep in mind, this is moral outrage at a political leader. Just grab onto that thought.

The people have moral outrage at their political leader. Are you with me? In case you missed that, moral outrage at a political leader. What is John's commission? What is he supposed to do? What did the birth narrative say? What was the song of Zachariah? What were the words of Gabriel in the holy place to his father, Zachariah? What's his purpose? What's his mission? What is his *raison d'être*? He is the forerunner for the Messiah.

That is his one and only job. He's apparently a Nazarite dedicated to that single purpose, right? Is it his job to call out the moral failings of political leadership? You say, well, certainly not his primary job. Could he rationalize it as being a part of his job? What if he thinks that Jesus ought to be the King and Herod shouldn't be the King? And by pointing out the moral turpitude of Herod, he's helping to pave the way for the Messiah.

Do you think that could be it? No, you don't. You know how we know that that was not John's thought? After John is locked up in prison by Herod and before he is executed, he sends messengers to Jesus asking, are you the coming one or do we look for another? John knows for sure that he is the suffering servant lamb of God. And he's not so sure if he's the King.

Maybe he thought he was both. And then when he got locked up because he thought, well, I'll help unseat Herod and help pave the way for the proper King of the kingdom. That's a possibility.

But in any case, it seems as though, and I say this with great trepidation and I may be on the diametrical opposite portion of the earth from whatever spot the new Jerusalem is as a result of saying this, but I personally think John messed up. I don't think he was supposed to get embroiled in politics and in voicing the moral concerns of people whose morality wasn't the issue. What think ye of Christ? This is the lamb of God who takes away sin, not I am the prophet who's gonna remove sin from the government or point out sin in the government.

And I think he messed up. Now you say, well, that's a pretty bold step. Turn with me to first Kings.

Who is John the Baptist the latter day echo of? Jesus said, he is Elijah, if you are willing to accept it, right? So let's look at Elijah back in first Kings chapter 18. You remember he shows up for the first time in chapter 17. There's a drought.

He gives a message to Ahab. You have the, there will be no rain. So there is the Mount Carmel episode, prophets of Baal versus Elijah.

You remember that whole scene, right? Don't have time to review it in detail, but prophets of Baal dance around all day, cry aloud, cut themselves. This is 1828. Blood is gushing out on them.

Midday passes. They prophesy until the time of the evening offering, no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention. So it's the time of the evening sacrifice.

It is the time of the evening sacrifice. First Kings 18 29. When Elijah says in the next verse, come near to me.

All the people came near. He repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down, took 12 stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come saying, Israel shall be your name. He builds an altar with those stones in the name of the Lord, made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two sals of seed, put wood in order, cut the bull in pieces.

They fill four water pots with water, poured on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. They did it a second time and they did it a third time in verse 34, by verse 35, there's water running all around the altar. He also filled the trench with water.

Came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. No accident here. Remember the Lord Jesus is going to be the ultimate perfect sacrifice at the time of the evening sacrifice at Passover.

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and I am your servant and that I have done all these things at your word. What has he done that is according to the word of the Lord? Built the altar, cut up the sacrifice, put the firewood in order, doused it with water once, twice, and thrice. All of this was done at the word of the Lord, right? Sacrifice according to the will and the word of God.

Hear me, oh Lord. Hear me that this people may know that you are the Lord God and that you have turned their hearts back again. The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust.

And it licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and they said, the Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God.

Everything is great up to this point, right? Everything has been done according to the word of the Lord. But the next verse, verse 40, is not according to the word of the Lord. Elijah said to them, seize the prophets of Baal, do not let one of them escape.

They seized them and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slew them, executed them there. If we step back and think about this for a moment, has the mission according to the word of the Lord been accomplished? Has Elijah demonstrated to the people that the Lord, he is God? Have they seen that demonstration and accepted it?

Yes, they have. God said nothing about slaying the prophets.

This is Elijah's addition. Now there is a time for people to be slain at the word of the Lord in Old Testament Israel. Do you remember another time when there was a prophet of God that did some slaying? You remember Samuel? When Saul is given explicit orders at the word of the Lord to kill everyone.

But Agag and a lot of the other stuff that is taken as spoils winds up getting spared. And when Samuel shows up and Agag says, well, surely the bitterness of death has passed and Samuel grabs the nearest sword and hacks Agag into giblets because that was the word of the Lord. Leave nothing alive.

The King didn't do it. So Samuel the prophet does it, but that's the word of the Lord. This in verse 40 is not the word of the Lord.

You know what this is? Think about the modern day. The followers of the previous power that has just been defeated should be hunted down and slain. How do you feel about that in the modern day? We're going to find and penalize anybody that we think should not have been following who they were following.

It doesn't matter which side of the political spectrum you are on or which presidential candidates you voted for, which one you love, which one you hate, which one you can tolerate, which one you can't. When there is a clear or as clear as it can get victory and the process has moved forward to go back and wreak havoc and retribution on the followers of the defeated, you only do that if you have a direct word from the Lord. And God was very specific in Israel that there is a time to leave no one alive.

And there are times when once you've defeated them, you subjugate them and they pay tribute. And maybe you take servants from them. You have slaves, you have those who will serve and will work the fields and so on.

But Elijah has no warrant for slaying these guys. And because he does what the other side would have done had they won, he has basically sunk to their level and he's playing by their rules. And that's why in chapter 19, verse one, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.

This is what gets Jezebel's ire up. And she says, I'm going to do to you what you did to them. When he saw that in verse three, he arose and ran for his life.

Where is the courageous Elijah that was on the mountain? Let me just say this. If God had wanted those prophets dead, the fire that came down and consumed the sacrifice, the wood and the stones and the dust and the water would have consumed the prophets. God would have done it.

Vengeance is mine, I will repay. But Elijah goes above and beyond his call. The latter day

Elijah, in my opinion, goes above and beyond his call.

Elijah in chapter 19 is going to get in trouble. He's going to end up being tired and discouraged and out of sorts. God is going to have to come and give him correction.

You see that in chapter 19. We don't have time to review it. In the same way, I think John is imprisoned, can no longer engage in his work of preparation.

A third example, which we don't have time to cover tonight, but those of you that remember our study in the book of Acts, you remember when Paul the apostle is called on the Damascus road to be the apostle to the Gentiles. God has got 11 other apostles to go to the Jews, but Paul just can't help himself. And he decides that when he cannot win them with rhetoric and with argument and with Old Testament scriptural allusion and with appeal to the fulfillment of prophetic scriptures, he takes up a big money collection and he's going to take it down to the church at Jerusalem and win them over.

He's going to win not only the Jews that have not yet come to faith, but he's going to convince the Jerusalem church under James that his ministry is legitimate and that Gentiles are good to go and so on. And when he goes back to Jerusalem after repeated warnings by the Holy Spirit, several different times, people come to him and say, bondage and chains await you in Jerusalem. He goes anyway.

He just can't believe that he can't be all things to all people and that by all means he can save some and he gets himself in trouble and he ends up getting arrested and that ends up in his trip to Rome and that ends up in his execution. Lord only knows what might've happened had he avoided that path. God works all things together for good.

We can learn from it just as we learn from Elijah and we can learn from John the Baptist. But Paul got, in my view, got tangled up in the politics of the Jerusalem church and decided to use a human means. Let me show what the Gentiles can do by way of offering and by way of help.

And what I can't obtain by your response to the word of God and the spirit of God, I'll get by this big gift that I bring. And the gift is ignored. Paul gets in trouble.

He submits himself to James and to others in that group, winds up doing things he shouldn't do, taking a vow he shouldn't take, paying for sacrifices that he shouldn't pay for and it is all to no avail. It doesn't work in any case. All it does is get him arrested and sent to Rome.

My guess is it's possible that in the resurrection when Paul and all the rest of the apostles come back, some of the truth that we have in the book of James might've been authored by Paul in another epistle that he never got the chance to write, talking about faith versus works and so on. And God, by way of a somewhat tongue in cheek rebuke, has James complete the picture of faith and works because Paul took himself out of the

running by getting himself arrested and executed. Of course, God knows all of these things and it worked out for good.

But you have examples, both Old Testament and New, where if you go beyond your mandate, Moses strikes the rock the second time instead of speaking to it. God brings the water anyway, but there's a lesson in it. There's a message in it.

John gets himself locked up, not because of how many people he baptized, not because he introduces the Lord Jesus, not because he encourages his followers to go to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He gets arrested and executed because he focused on politics. He focused on preaching about morality and using the King as an example.

And it was not his commission, not his mandate. I would submit by way of observation, interpretation and application, we should be extremely cautious. There is a way to be salt and light that doesn't cause us to depart from our primary mission.

There are many ways to go wrong. There's only one way to go right. And to not lose sight of the fact that we have our own morality to tend to.

We have our own priorities and goals and values. We have our own calling. We have our own spiritual gift.

We have our own commission, whether it is as a husband or wife, as a child, as a parent, as a grandparent, as an employee, as an employer, wherever we find ourselves, we have opportunities from God. And that has to be the priority, to begin looking at larger things and trying to be a shaker and a mover and an influencer and a trend maker and so on. Elijah got in trouble for it and knocked out his own spiritual life.

John the Baptist got in trouble for it and ended up getting beheaded. Paul got in trouble for it and ended up getting sent to Rome and his ministry ending before his life would have in other ways. So it's a word to the wise.

Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll move forward in Matthew 14.