

Review

Jesus has been making the news. Back in chapter 4, we read that He...

Matt. 4:23-24 ...was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria...

In chapter nine, Jesus raised a 12-year-old girl from the dead. He...

Matt. 9:25-26 ...took her by the hand, and the girl got up. This news spread throughout all that land.

Later in that chapter, He healed two blind men.

Matt. 9:30-31 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows about this!" But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land.

And so, it comes as no surprise when we read...

14:1-2 Herod Heard The News

One of the confusing things about Roman history is that when you read about Caesar or Herod, it is not immediately obvious that there was more than one of them. In this case, the Caesar ruling the Roman Empire is Tiberius Caesar, and Herod is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great left his rule to three of his sons, and the territory was divided between them. Herod Antipas was made the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1) and Peraea.

When Herod heard the miraculous things Jesus was doing, he became convinced that it was really John the Baptist, risen from the dead. Dead? John the Baptist dead? When did he die? Last we heard was that he was in prison (Matt. 4:12; 11:2). Now we're hearing that he is dead? Matthew goes on to explain...

14:3-5 The Reason For John's Arrest

John the Baptist was arrested because John had been preaching to Herod about his brother's wife. You see, Herod was married to

the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia Petres. But Herod had gone to visit his brother Philip, and he and Philip's wife Herodias entered into an adulterous affair. Herod ended up divorcing his wife and marrying Herodias.

This was common knowledge among the people, and John the Baptist preached against it. Clearly, it was sinful for Herod to divorce his wife without cause, and even worse to marry his brother's wife, which was specifically forbidden in the Jews' law:

Lev. 20:21 If there is a man who takes his brother's wife, it is abhorrent...

Herod was understandably upset to hear John preaching against his marriage. He wanted to put John to death, but politically he knew that this would be disastrous. John was popular among all the people, and was regarded as a prophet of God.

We also read in the gospel of Mark that...

Mark 6:20 ...Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

14:6-11 John Is Beheaded

The day came when Herod was having a birthday party. Herodias' daughter began to dance, and "pleased" Herod. This Greek word ("ar-ES-ko") means, "To elevate and excite the emotions." And so this must have been a very seductive dance.

In his elevated emotional state, Herod made a foolish promise:

Mark 6:22-23 ..."Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom."

This reminds me of the warning we receive in Proverbs:

Prov. 6:24-26 To keep you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot

one is reduced to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life.

Herod was captured in her eyelids, and was reduced to a loaf of bread.

She went and asked her mother what she should ask for (Mark 6:24). Well, Herodias hated John the Baptist. Mark tells us,

Mark 6:19 Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death...

And so this seemed to be the perfect opportunity for Herodias to get her wish. She instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This woman was so engulfed in bitterness, that this was her first thought.

Mark 6:26 And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her.

Herod felt obligated because of his pride, and had John beheaded.

14:12-13 John Is Buried, Jesus Withdraws By Himself

When John's disciples heard about this, they buried John's body and then told Jesus what had happened.

At this point in Jesus' ministry, we know,

Mark 6:31 ...there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

In spite of how busy things were, Jesus withdrew from the crowds to have some time by Himself.

Understand that this was the death of a cousin, of a partner in ministry, of the man who baptized Him, and of yet another prophet whom He has sent.

There are times when ministers have need of ministry. When they just need to get alone with themselves and the Lord. They need to regroup, recharge, and be reinvigorated again. Remember, it is those who wait upon the Lord who shall renew their strength, who run and don't get weary (Isa. 40:31).

But although Jesus really needed this time, the people wouldn't hear of it. They had needs, and determined that their needs were more

important than His. They pursued Him, and actually arrived on the other shore before He did.

14:14 Jesus' Compassion For The Crowd

Jesus was in emotional pain and personal need. I must admit that if I were in His place, my instinct very well might be a bit different than His. As I was pulling the boat into shore and took a look at this huge crowd waiting to demand even more from me, I might have completely lost it. "Don't you understand that I need ministry too? Are you so selfish that you can't see that I came here to be alone?" But Jesus sets the example for all of us. In spite of His personal pain, He ministered to the crowd because He felt compassion for them.

Col. 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience