

Sunday 29-May-22

Taking Sin Seriously

Malachi 3:1-5

³ "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

⁵ "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

Matthew 14:1-13

John the Baptist Beheaded

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, ² and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³ Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴ for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much ⁷ that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." ⁹ The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰ and had John

beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹² John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

Sermon: Taking Sin Seriously

Please have your Bibles opened at Matthew chapter 14.

Let me ask **God give us His understanding before we look at this passage together**

Let's pray...

Context

- Just to **get the context**
- In the last few weeks, we have been looking at **Jesus** telling **parables** (*earthly stories with a heavenly meaning*) – **stories** that tell us a **truth** about the **Kingdom of Heaven** and about **God** and about His Son, **Jesus**

[Slide 1-Kingdom of Heaven]



- What we've learnt is that the **Kingdom of Heaven**
 - Is a kingdom **worth belonging to**
 - It's the most **treasured possession** we can have
 - It's **worth** selling and **giving up everything** to be part of it
 - It's like owning the **most valuable pearl**

- We've learnt that **Jesus is the King** of this Kingdom and **He invites all to come and be part of it**
- And for those who believe in Jesus - the most **glorious** place called **Heaven** awaits
- As we hit **chapter 14** - we come across a very different Kingdom
- A Kingdom run by the **Herod family**

[Slide 2-Herod Kingdom]



- Herod's Kingdom began with **King Herod the Great** – He was - the King Herod - who had all **the baby boys killed at the time of Jesus' birth** (Luke 1-2, Matthew 2)
- When Herod the Great died - His Kingdom was **divided** into **four parts** and given to **his family**:
 - One part - to his son called **Archelaus** – who ruled **Judea, Samaria and Idumea** (white)
 - One part - to his son called **Herod Antipas (aka Herod the Tetrarch)** – who ruled **Galilee and Perea** (grey)
 - One part - to his son called **Philip** – who ruled **Ituraea and Trac-hon-itis** (brown)
 - And one part - to his sister **Salome I** – who ruled cities of **Ashdod and Ashkelon** on the west coast – and the **region north of Jericho** – and also **Roman Syria** – north west of Galilee (not shown on the map)

- The Herod Kingdom is a **kingdom** full of **corruption, murder, intrigue** and **incestuous** and **promiscuous relationships** – *it's Home and Away on steroids*
- And in God's sovereignty various **members of Herod the Great's family** – sons, daughters, grandchildren – all **play significant roles** in the lives of Jesus, John the Baptist and some of Jesus disciples – including **Peter, Paul and James**
- In God's sovereignty – God even uses the “badness” and “corruption” of Herod's family to achieve His purposes!
- Now the Herod we are dealing with here in Matthew chapter 14 is **Herod Antipas** also known as Herod the Tetrarch [tetrarch means ruler of a fourth part) – this Herod is the ruler of Galilee and Perea (grey bit)

Conscience Disturbed (Matthew 14:1-2)

- As we pick up the story in Matthew chapter 14 verse 1 – we see Herod has heard reports about what Jesus was doing – **His miracles, His power and His teaching** – but Herod thinks that John the Baptist – who he has had killed – has somehow risen from the dead!
- We'll see how John the Baptist was killed in a minute
- But why would Herod think John has risen from the dead?
- Well – his conscience has been **disturbed** – because he **feels guilty** for having had John killed
- What is our conscience anyway?

[Slide 3-Conscience]

- The **Greek word used** in the **Bible** for conscience (*syneidēsis*) means – *the inner unseen part of us connected to our soul - which distinguishes between what is morally good and morally bad – and our conscience (if not suppressed or ignored)*

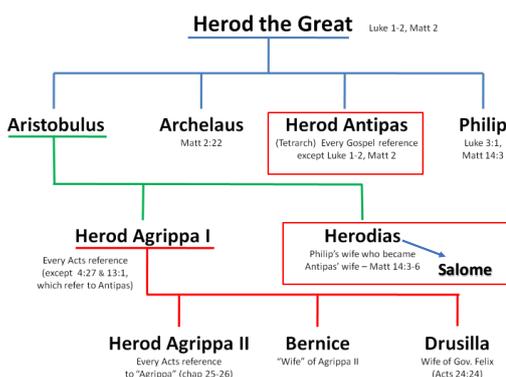
prompts us to do good and shun bad, and helps us to commend what is good, and condemn what is bad.

- The **source of the Greek word**: literally means “*to see in one’s mind with one-self*” – so we could say it means “*to see or be aware of what is going on inside ourselves*”
- **Dictionary definition**: *a person's moral sense of right and wrong, viewed as acting as a guide to one's behaviour.*
- We all have a conscience (according to the Apostle Paul in Rom 2:15 – *the work of God’s law is written on our hearts*)
- However - we can suppress or ignore our conscience – and then make wrong choices that disobey God’s rules and commands – which is sin
- But sometimes we can’t suppress our conscience forever (*example of library book from Rev Dr Peter Marshall*)
- Having a conscience also explains why people confess to murder – 25 years later – when they can no longer live with the guilt anymore!

John takes sin seriously (Matthew 14:3-13)

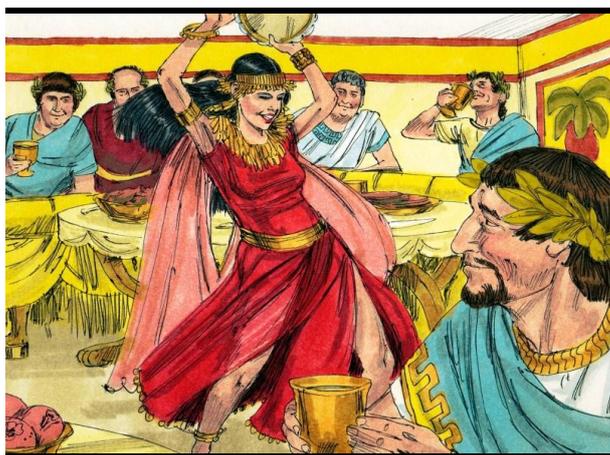
- Back to Herod then and **Matthew explains why Herod’s conscience is troubling him**

[Slide 4-Family Tree]



- **Herod** had **eloped** with Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip; divorcing his own wife and sending her back to her father, the King of Petra.
- Herodias was not only the wife of Herod's brother Philip but also daughter of Herod's half-brother, Aristobulus
- See v4 - **John had confronted Herod and Herodias about their unlawful union** (Exodus 20:12; Lev 18:16; 20:21) – saying to Herod “*it is not lawful for you to have her*” – in fact in the Greek – it means **John** was continually saying it to him – like a broken record
- So, **Herod wanted to kill John** (v5) - because John took Herod's sin seriously – and also because John's constant reminder of this sin had really got up Herodias' nose and **she had a grudge against John** –
- But Herod was also **mindful that John was popular with the people** – and feared that if he killed John, the people might rebel and cause him problems in His kingdom – so **Herod had John arrested** and **put in prison** instead of killing him

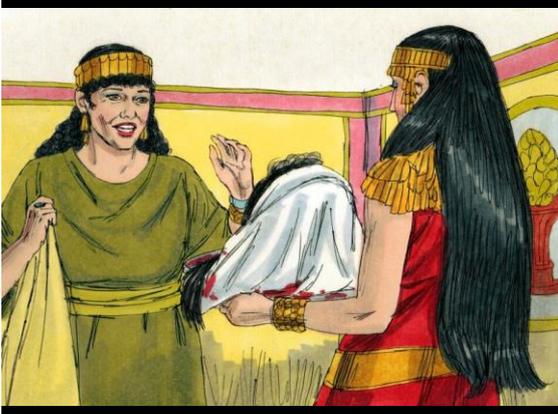
[Slide 5-Dancing]



- But **Herod underestimated Herodias' intense hatred of John** – and she seized her opportunity at Herod's birthday party – see v6
- V6-V7 - **Herodias arranged for her daughter Salome to dance a seductive dance in front of Herod and his guests** – knowing that Herod full of drink and sexually

aroused – would foolishly make an oath promising to give Salome **whatever she asked**

[Slide 6-Head]



- That played right into Herodias hands – v8 – and **she prompted Salome to ask for John's head on a platter**
- V9 – Herod is in a bind – he **doesn't want to lose face** in front of his mates – so he **agrees to Salome's request** and John is beheaded in prison (v10) – and **John's head is delivered on a platter to Salome** and then onto Herodias (v11)

Application

- What can we learn from this – this morning?

[Slide 7 – Application]

- **Herod pleased himself and pleased Herodias** – **rather than pleasing God and keeping God's rules.** What about us? – Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount – *anyone who lusts after someone has committed adultery in their heart* (Matt 5:28) – Jesus also says - that *if our eye or hand causes us to sin – pluck it out* (Matt 5:29-30) – in other words we are to do all we can to avoid falling into sin – either by removing the temptation – or by staying away from the temptation
- **We are to please God ahead of pleasing ourselves and others**

- Also - Herod feared the people – and feared Herodias – and feared being embarrassed in front of his mates - rather than fearing God and doing what God commands. What about us? Do we have a reverent fear of God – always wanting to obey Him – not wanting to displease Him?
- Herod also made a foolish oath – we can never promise someone that we will do anything they ask or give them anything they ask – what if they ask for something that is against God’s will and against God’s rules. Or what happens if we make a promise and then have to break it due to some unforeseen circumstances or because we never really meant to keep the promise in the first place. What happens to our credibility and our reputation?
- Try breaking a promise to a child – they won’t forget it in a hurry! Again, **Jesus warns in the Sermon on the Mount – *to not swear an oath – but to simply say Yes or No*** (Matt 5:33-37)
- What foolish oaths or promises are we making?
- One more thing we can learn here – Herod and Herodias killed the person pointing out their sin (namely John). If we ignore or avoid the person who is pointing out our sin – it’s not going to take away our guilty conscience or fix our sin is it? – neither will ignoring our sin and burying our head in the sand - only repenting and saying a heartfelt sorry to God – and believing Jesus forgives our sins - can fix our sin!

God takes sin seriously (Malachi 3:1-5)

- John took sin seriously – and it cost him his life – but John wanted to please God and not Herod and Herodias – John was very courageous to do that – standing up against someone in power – is not easy – and often doesn’t end well – but John – as God’s prophet - took his obedience to God very seriously

- And that's because **God takes sin seriously**

[Slide 7 – Good takes sin seriously]

- In fact - **God cannot tolerate sin**
 - King David in Psalm 5:4-5 says this about God: *For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong;*
 - Isaiah 6:3 says: *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”*
 - Isaiah 59:2 says: *“our iniquities (sins) have separated us from God; and caused Him to hide His face from us”*
 - And Habakkuk 1:13 says: *“God’s eyes are too pure to look on evil; God cannot tolerate wrongdoing”*
 - And the Apostle Paul says: *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23) and that the *“the wages of sin is death...”* (Romans 6:23)
- From all of that it's clear that **God is holy and perfect** – and **we are not holy** and **we are sinful**.
- God took sin so seriously that in our OT passage from Malachi 3 [if please turn there now] – In Malachi 3 - **God promised to send 2 messengers** (He made this promise 400 years before John and Jesus were even born)

[Slide 9-Two Messengers]

- The **first messenger** referred to in **Malachi 3:1** is **John the Baptist** – he was to **prepare the way for the second messenger** and call people to repent of their sins
- Malachi 3:1 also says it is the **Lord Himself who will come as the second messenger** and **He will be a messenger of a new covenant** (a new way that God will deal with

sin – instead of endless sacrifices – This second messenger will bring a once and for all sacrifice). **That second messenger is of course Jesus.**

- Malachi 3:1 also says – this second messenger Jesus – will come to His temple. And of course, Jesus comes to His temple in several ways: Jesus is presented at the temple as a **baby**; also, when **aged 12** he talks to the teachers of the law in the temple; and also, when He **clears out the temple** from all the people trading. In fact, Jesus says **His body - IS the temple of God.**
- Malachi 3:2-5 describes the second messenger – Jesus - as a launderer, refiner and purifier. All methods of cleaning away the “dirt of sin” – which Jesus did by taking our sin upon Himself on a cruel cross
- But also, v5 says - **Jesus will also come again - to put people on trial – to judge people of their sin – and condemn them if they haven’t repented of it.**
- This passage from Malachi 3:1-5 relates closely to what we’ve seen Matthew 14:1-13 in the following ways:
 - Both messengers from Malachi are on view in Matthew 14 – John and Jesus
 - Both messengers fulfil their roles described in Malachi; John prepares the way for Jesus by calling people to repent (e.g., Herod and Herodias); and Jesus will be the one to take away the sin of all who believe in Him
 - God takes sin seriously in Malachi – that’s why He sent John to prepare people to meet Jesus by calling them to repent – John took his job seriously – and he stood up to the sin of Herod and Herodias – and it even cost him his life!
 - God takes sin seriously in Malachi – that’s why He sent Jesus on a cleansing mission to clean sin – Jesus took that mission seriously – and He stood up to the sin of the Pharisees and others – and got killed for it

- Also - **Herod's family were heavily involved in the death of John and Jesus** – and they might think they can get away with it – **but they can't** – and besides it was all part of God's plan to fix the punishment for sin – **that's God's amazing sovereignty over all things!**

Application

[Slide 10-Application]

- What can we **learn** from this?
- There are **consequences** for sin
- Herod and Herodias might have thought they have got away with it by killing John – but **there are always consequences** – Herod's family is totally dysfunctional
- A few years later in 39AD - Herod's nephew Agrippa I – brought several accusations to the Roman Emperor Caligula – **saying that Herod was plotting against the previous emperor Tiberius and now plotting against the current Emperor Caligula** – and **so Herod was exiled to Saul (France)**. Emperor Caligula offered for Herodias to retain her property – **but she chose to go into exile with Herod**
- Sin always has consequences
 - **if we lie** – we keep having to lie to cover up the first one and we need a good memory to keep the lies covered up
 - **if we cheat on our partner** – there are **consequences** for us – for them – for our children – our extended family – and those consequences keep going throughout our lives
 - **if we steal from the company we work for** – we lose our job – we may go to jail – we may not can't get another job – we may lose our marriage – no one will trust us again – and so on...

- Not only are there consequences for our sins in this life – ultimately – as Malachi points out - all of us have to face judgment one day. John 5:27 says - *God the Father has given His Son Jesus – the authority to judge everyone* (John 5:27)
- Jesus will return to judge all people – there’s no escape
 - Jesus says in John 5:24: *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life*
 - On the other hand - Jesus also says those who don’t believe – are condemned (John 3:18) – just like the weeds and the bad fish in Jesus’ parables – those who don’t believe will be thrown in the fire of Hell

Our Response

- What will our response be to this – this morning?

[Slide 11-Response]

- 1st - are we taking sin seriously – and obeying God’s word - like John and Jesus did?
- 2nd - we must search our hearts – examine our conscience – can we join King David from Psalm 139:24 and ask God to *see if there is any offensive way in us and lead us, in the way everlasting?*
- And will we - repent of our sin – as both Jesus and John called people to do
 - Matthew 3:2 (John says) - Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.
 - Matthew 4:17 (Jesus says) - Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.
 - The way we repent is described in 1 John 1:9-10: *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all*

unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

- 3rd - **listen to the Holy Spirit** – as John 14:26 says “*the Holy Spirit will teach us all things and remind us of everything Jesus has said*” and as Paul says in Romans 8:16 – *God’s Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*
- 4th - **can we be bold like John and stand against sin** – in our families? With our friends? In our church? With our government? Remember we can call out sin in two ways – either by **telling people what their sin is** (gently and kindly) – or by living our life as example and showing people a better way to live – God’s way!
- 5th - **have we thanked God that He sent Jesus to do what we can’t do** – and by removing our punishment for our sins on the cross?

Let’s pray...

Father God,

Help us to take our sin seriously and follow your Word and your commands.

Help us to constantly examine our hearts and conscience – repenting and confessing our sins to you – asking for your forgiveness.

Help us to listen to the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit, as our guide and life-coach.

Help us to be bold and courageous in standing against sin.

And thank you for your love for us – that in your grace and mercy, you sent Jesus – to save us for Heaven.

In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.