

- ***READ Matthew 11:1-15*** Here in **Matthew 11:1**, we read of Jesus and His Apostles being busy in their ministry, and their business was not a secret by any means. In fact, John the Baptist, though in prison, hears of the work being done by Jesus. In response to what he hears, he sends a delegation of his own disciples to Jesus to ask an all-important question, *"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"* (**Matthew 11:3**) This might not seem all that unusual of a question if we are unaware of the previous history between John and Jesus. Back in **Matthew 3**, we read of John's ministry in preparing the hearts of men so that Jesus could come in and establish His great Kingdom among men. Not only did he prepare the way for Jesus, but he even interacted with Jesus by baptizing Him in the Jordan.
- Therefore, we might be left scratching our heads as to how such a man of great faith might be confused or doubting as to whether or not Jesus is the chosen Messiah sent by God, but I want us to focus instead on the fact that Jesus does not offer a rebuke that is to be taken back to John. We know that Jesus had no problem rebuking those who were unbelieving or doubting...just look at many of His interactions with His own Apostles during their ministry together. How many times did Jesus rebuke them for their lack of faith?
- And yet, Jesus doesn't seem to rebuke John at all in this text. Instead, we read of Jesus simply telling these disciples to go back and tell John of the blind seeing, the lame walking, the lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and the poor being told of the good news. He wanted for John to hear what was truly taking place, and it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus would answer in such a way that would draw John's mind to the Messianic prophecy's that he would no doubt would be familiar with that are found in **Isaiah 35 & 61**. Jesus didn't want for John to be confused or to doubt. Instead, He wanted for John to know the truth, and He wanted him to have hope in what was taking place through Jesus and His Apostles.
- I believe that we can see that Jesus doesn't mean to ridicule John's question by any means because after sending away John's disciples, He turns to the crowds and begins to speak highly of John for the great role that he played in preparing the way and the hearts of the people for the coming of the Messiah. He speaks of John as a man of great conviction who was not willing to be persuaded by public opinion. (**11:7**) or bribed by those in positions of power. (**11:8**) Jesus confirms John as the fulfillment of Elijah who was to come, and even states him being among the greatest born of women. It seems so clear to me that Jesus has a deep appreciation for John not only for the work that he did, but also for the fact that John the Baptist was a man who was committed to knowing and speaking the truth. This text begins by John earnestly seeking to know the truth about what was taking place through Jesus, and it was this commitment to truth that even landed him in the position in which he finds himself in **Matthew 11:2**...in prison. Matthew 4:12
- It was for the sake of John telling the truth about the well-known marriage scandal (so well known that we've we can read about it in the writings of Josephus) regarding those ruling over Judea that led to him being thrown in prison, and we can read about that in the text of **Mark 6:14-29**. Within this portion of Mark's Gospel account, we read of another man, Herod Antipas, who has heard about the many wondrous works of Jesus of Nazareth and His apostles. However, instead of investigating to learn the truth about Jesus, we find Herod and his advisors only speculating who it is that Jesus was. Some said He was Elijah, and others claimed He was simply like one of the prophets from long ago.
- But Herod and others had another idea which was that Jesus was actually John the Baptist who had been raised from the dead. John's death was a result of Herod beheading him, but that isn't told within the running narrative of Matthew or Mark's Gospel accounts except for this insert which serves as a parenthetical flashback to help the reader come to know what had been John's fate after he had

been committed to prison, which is mentioned all the way back in **Mark 1:14**. This man who was devoted to knowing and speaking the truth, was willing to do so even to the point of being put to death for it, which is exactly what we find in this text. Let's quickly go through this text fleshing out the details, and then we will take a few moments to close with three lessons that we learn from it.

I. John's commitment to speaking the truth eventually leads to his death. (Mark 6:14-29)

A. John spoke out against the adulterous marriage of Herod to Herodias, his brother's wife. (6:17,18)

1. Similar to the way that Elijah (who has been mentioned in this text) goes to confront Ahab and Jezebel for their sin against Nabal in **I Kings 21**, John was very vocal towards Herod and Herodias for their adulterous marriage. He had an audience with Herod and it seems he repeatedly told the ruler, *"It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."*
2. This marriage was adulterous because of the fact that Herod Antipas had taken his brother Herod Philip's wife to be his own wife. Antipas convinced Herodias to leave her husband, and in order to clear the way for this marriage, Antipas had to divorce the woman to whom he had been married. This, of course, was contrary to God's divine law for marriage according to not only what we find in **Genesis 2:24**, but it was also against the Jewish laws of marriage in **Leviticus 18:16 & 20:21**. This would have been seen as being applicable to Herod Antipas because he had put effort into living as a Jew while he served as the Roman ruler of Judea

B. Herod respected John as a righteous and holy man, but Herodias demanded he be put in prison for his words against them. (6:19,20)

1. Herodias did not take too kindly to John speaking out against her marriage, and she demanded from Herod that he be killed. However, Herod was not willing to kill John because he believed him to be a righteous and holy man, and he also feared the Jews since he was regarded as a prophet. (**Matthew 14:5**)
2. Therefore, in order to suffice the two competing sides, Herod Antipas puts John in chains in prison. Yet, instead of putting John in prison for the purpose of killing him, he put him in prison and simply kept them there. In the meantime, it seems that Herod liked to converse with John because he was very perplexed by what he had to say.

C. Herodias takes advantage of a poorly judged situation, and this results in John being beheaded. (6:21-29)

1. Sadly, there came a point in time on Herod's birthday when a grand banquet was taking place. Many nobles, military men, and leading men of Galilee were present at this gathering. During the festivities, we are told that Herodias's daughter (history tells us her name was Salome) dances for Herod and his many important guests. The text tells us that Herod was pleased by the dancing that she did. We might make some assumptions as to what type of dancing this was, but know for certain that whatever she was doing filled Herod with such pleasure that he rashly says to her, *"Ask me whatever you want, and I'll give it to you...Whatever you ask me I will give you, up to half my kingdom."* (**6:22,23**)
2. This was exactly the opportunity that Herodias was looking for, and it fell in her lap. The text tells us, *"She (Salome) went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' 'John the Baptist's head'"* was Herodias's answer. Salome returns to Herod and tells him that she desired for John's head to be brought to her on a platter at that very moment. Immediately, Herod seems to know that he had messed up, but he couldn't show himself to be anything less than a man of his word before all of these important people. Therefore, he sent for the executioner to behead John and for his head to be brought to him as Salome (Herodias) had requested.

3. John's disciples come to hear about what has happened, and they came to remove the body of John to be placed in a tomb. Surely we all feel that this great man of faith and truth deserved so much better than to be killed in such a begrudging manner. And yet, there are some very important lessons that we can learn when it comes to others, ourselves, and truth.

II. What can we learn from this sad account of John's death?

A. Some people cannot handle hearing the truth.

1. We can look many other places throughout the Scriptures besides what we see in this text concerning Herodias's reaction to the truth spoken to her by John concerning her marriage to Herod Antipas and come to understand that people often don't react well when truth that contradicts their beliefs or actions is presented to them. Even here within this same chapter of **Mark 6**, we find the people of Jesus's own hometown Nazareth not appreciating His truthful teachings. (**Mark 6:1-6**) Peter rejected the truth that was being spoken by Jesus when He foretold of His rejection, arrest, and murder at the hands of the Jewish leaders. (**Mark 8:31-33**) Lastly as an example (thought many more could be given), the rich young ruler did not appreciate Jesus's truthful commands that he should go sell all of his possession, give them to the poor, and follow Him. (**Mark 10:17-22**)
2. It is natural for us to become defensive when we feel as if we are being attack in some way, but we must learn to examine whatever it is that is presented to us. If we find it to be truthful then we ought to respect such things as truth and act accordingly. I would suggest that the Berean treatment (**Acts 17:11**) of all things spoken to us will be extremely beneficial in many different facets of life beyond just Biblical considerations. We need to be willing to examine what is presented to us and come to determine whether or not there is truth behind it. Regardless of the context of that truth being shared, we must learn to respect & respond in an appropriate fashion.

B. We must base our decisions and actions upon truth and not emotions alone.

1. It is important that we learn to respect and respond well to truth because failing to do so can get us into some pretty nasty situations. Consider that what happened to John was a direct result of Herodias failing to properly respond to truth and instead lash out in hatred with a strong grudge. Even Herod was guilty of this when he allowed for Salome's dancing to stir up his emotions and feelings to the point where he makes the rash promise that is found within this text. Instead of thinking with solid judgment, Herod allowed for temporary emotions to cloud his thinking.
2. This is something that I'm sure many of us not only see all around us, but we also experience from time to time. This is especially true when it comes to discussions of a spiritual nature. I feel confident in saying that we have all experienced times where is truth rejected simply because there is a strong negative response of uncomfortable feelings given towards it. Instead of allow reason, logic, and evidence to guide, those involved rely upon emotions to be the guide to decisions and actions. This type of reasoning can easily lead us to a place where we find ourselves regretting our emotion-based actions or decisions. Before we know it, we find ourselves in the exact same place that Herod found himself...deeply distressed because of our poor decision making. We must allow our love for the truth to guide us in everything that we do.

C. We must be willing to stand for the truth regardless of the response.

1. John was most certainly aware of the feelings that Herodias had towards him because of the truth that he spoke to her regarding her illegitimate marriage. And yet, we don't see John backing down from continuing to speak the truth regarding the situation or the circumstances that came as a result. He knew the truth that needed to be spoken, and he was courageous to speak it regardless of the negative consequences that might come...even his life being taken.

2. Friends, as disciples of our Lord Jesus who is the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life (**John 14:6**), we too must be a people who are defined by the truth that we are willing to not just hold on to, but that we must also be willing to speak in whatever circumstance that is demanded. It is interesting to me that this story is shared between the recording of Jesus sending His disciples out and their returning. Might it be that Mark is trying to get the point across that following Jesus in the ways of truth might come at a cost? I think that is certainly a possibility.
3. Therefore, we must take note of the courage of John and the many other great examples of faithful servants of God throughout the Scriptures and be committed to standing rock solid upon the truth that they themselves sometimes even gave their lives to proclaim. May God grant us such courage in every circumstance.

The flashback account of John the Baptist's death shows us the lengths to which some will go because of their hatred for what is true because it is against their own wishes or feelings. Each of us are just as susceptible to this temptation as those involved in this story, so may God strengthen our love for truth to the extent that we are always willing to put aside our personal feelings in order to embrace and respond to truth accordingly. May the our Lord Jesus Christ, the Truth, be glorified in our daily pursuit of the truth that will set each of us free. May each of us try daily to be men and women who are committed to truth.