

# Gospel of Matthew

14:1-13

## On a Platter



Most of this story is told in retrospect. It is so famously infamous that the very common expression in English - “on a platter” or “head on a platter” has come from it. It has happened already within the timeline of Jesus’ ministry so it is a bit of a back into a gruesome and tragic event. Vs. 2 indicates that John is already dead. No one can know how the writer of Matthew got this information about Herod’s fears when he heard reports of the miracles of Jesus – perhaps a servant in the king’s court converted to Christianity later told it. Obviously, what He had done to the prophet John was terrorizing him in his thoughts. Now, Kings could do many terrible deeds with impunity because in most areas they were above the law. They could do anything they wanted – murder, rape, theft, torture, and no one could or would do a thing about it because the king commanded the army and all the authorities. He had the power. After his coronation, if the king turned out to be a bad man, even a very bad man, the only recourse was to somehow murder him – usually with poison. Death by poisoning happened fairly frequently, but probably not as frequently as it should have, because that kind of power in the hands of one person turned normal people into selfish, jaded, often perverted monsters that indulged their every whim, evil or good!





That is why it is hard for people to imagine that God is any different. We only have the example of human power – which has been abused since the beginning of time! But God has **ALL-POWER** - unimaginable power – unlimited by anything except His own character.

Therefore He must be the biggest tyrant of all! But the

Bible shows us a Creator/God that has not done us any wrong, but only good.

We've been judged and cursed, but that was the result of **OUR** doing! We did it to ourselves. But God does not abuse His power or take perverse pleasure in doing evil things to people for His own amusement. God has no reason to have a guilty conscience for He is perfect in all his judgments.

It was different for this king, king Herod, because He had done a lot of bad things as king. The whole ruling line of the Herod's were evil men! They did as they pleased, limited only by the greater authority of Rome. Rome generally didn't care what a king did in his spare time. They only cared that the king paid the annual tribute his country owed to Rome and that the King kept the peace in their country, squashing any revolutions! The king's behavior was only an issue if it was so bad, so tyrannical, that it fomented rebellion!

Herod was not a complete psychopath – someone without a conscience. He had actually had considered John a true prophet of God - and had not intended to actually have him killed. Herod was angry enough with John to have *fantasized* about killing him, but not angry enough to actually have him killed. He only wanted to silence him because John had been preaching that Herod had wrongly/unlawfully taken his brother's wife – and that even a King could not do that - according to the Law of Moses! Herod knew it was wrong, but he did not want John out there stirring up insurrection! So it says here that he was arrested, “bound” and imprisoned. It doesn't sound like it was pleasant. Herod was angry with John but not angry enough to have him killed. It says in vs. 5 that John had too big of a following in Judea for the king to just kill him. It could spark riots that would jeopardize his rule, and he knew that if there was a big enough wave of social unrest, Rome itself would step in, depose Him and put someone else on the throne. He also knew that John was a legitimate prophet of Yahweh, God, and He did not want trigger God to curse Him.



But when word of the great miracles of Jesus got to the king, he automatically thought it was John the Baptist that had been resurrected – even though John's ministry had not included miracles as far as we know. But he surmised that the power to perform miracles came from the fact that John was a resurrected! Certainly a chill went up the spine of the king! John would certainly come for him!



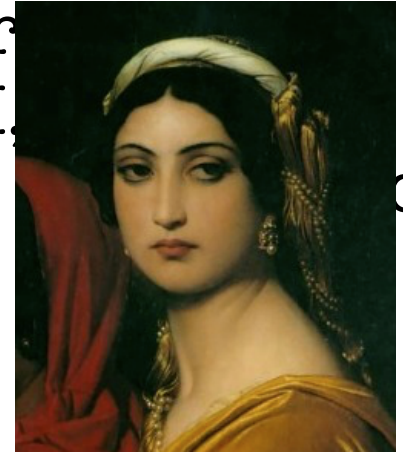
### Vs. 3 – “*Now Herod had arrested John...*”

Then the narrative goes back in time in verse 3 to give the reader some background – probably a few months. John had been preaching against the king's behavior in marrying his brother's wife, Herodias. Herodias had divorced Her first husband, Herod the 2<sup>nd</sup>, with whom she had one daughter, named Salome. This is almost certainly the daughter in the story. The king had heard about it and had John arrested to keep him from stirring up the people any more than they already were.

So then at Herod's birthday party, “*the daughter of Herodias*” danced before as the party's entertainment. The wording of this suggests that this girl was not the daughter of Herod himself. We can imagine that Herod was freely imbibing wine at his party and, typically, became inebriated and lost all discretion. He is so please with the dance that he promises her anything she wants within his ability to give it. I mean, how rash was that? But drunk people do rash things, right? \*That is why it is unlawful to even drive after drinking. A drunken driver cannot even execute a decent right turn, or stay in their own lane, much less possess the reflexes to respond to an emergency situation on the road, because their judgment is so impaired. So drunk Herod makes a rash promise. The girl consults her mother before saying anything to his promise, and then we learn that her mother was all for this illegal marriage, and more offended by John's condemnation of it than her husband was! Because,.. she sends her daughter back to the king with a gruesome request - “*I would like the head of the prophet John on a platter*”! She may have motioned to one of the nearby silver platters on the king's table. Just think of all the wonderful gifts that Herodias could have asked for, yet revenge on John was what she wanted most! Listen, women are called the gentler sex. It might be dangerous to state facts these days, but I will gamble that you all agree with me. In my experience, women *can be* just as vengeful, mean, spiteful as men, even more so! They are usually smarter/ craftier/ and more underhanded about it, but not always. Back in the day, when the west was being overrun by mostly Europeans, it was well-known that if you were captured by the natives, the worst part of your experience was going to be when the warriors turned you over to be tortured to death by the women of the tribe. They were ingeniously diabolical and could inflict unbelievable pain and suffering before killing their victims. The truth is that genders and race do not matter. If we are human we have the capacity to become unbelievably inhuman! LBGT, women, men, people of any skin color, we've all proven this!



**Wikipedia** - Herod the Great (the first Herod) executed his sons, Alexander and Aristobulus IV, in 7 BC, and engaged Herodias to Herod II - her brother. Her marriage was opposed by Antipater II, Herod the Great's eldest son. Herod demoted Herod II to second line to the throne. Antipater's execution in 4 BC for plotting to poison his father, left Herod II as first in line. But his mother's knowledge of the poison plot, and failure to stop it, led to his being dropped from this position in Herod's the Great's will, just days before he died. Herodias certainly divorced Herod II because of his fall from grace and exclusion from the throne. She was obviously an ambitious woman who realized, by hook or by crook, her dreams to be queen. No wonder she hated the prophet John! After all she had endured to get where she was – no one, not even God Himself could tell her it must be undone!



The king is immediately stricken with remorse over his rash promise. It really sobers him up. But there is no way out. He promised. So, probably immediately, he sent an axman to the dungeons to take John's head and bring it to the girl, on a platter as she had requested. She then picks up the platter and carries it to her triumphant mother! Any teenage girl that could get anywhere near such a macabre and ghastly object had to have been a real piece of work in the first place – as Solomon described a beautiful woman with no character – a gold ring in a pig's snout! I am sure this greatly soured the king's mood and ruined the party for the remainder of the evening and for some time to come. If the king wasn't happy, no one was happy! Plus, from then on this deed likely began to plague the dreams of Herod who knew he had just condemned his own soul by such an unjust and murderous act against a man of God!



Jesus certainly had known all of this – starting with John's arrest and incarceration, as did everyone in the country. But He had done nothing about it, and does not even seem to have spoken of it to his audiences. He was not a revolutionary and was not political as He has so inaccurately been portrayed in the last 100 years or so in many areas of the world where revolution conveniently serves the opposition party to the ruling government! Certainly, Jesus was opposed to what had happened to John, but He was not here to right all the wrongs of the world – not politically anyway. He wasn't fixing kings or countries – not yet anyway!

Jesus wasn't here to rule the world. No political speeches railing against King Herod or Rome! No protest marches, no riots, no plotting, no revolutions, no wars! But what He WAS doing was nation building, one person at a time. He was winning hearts and allegiances. When a person gave Him their oath, their allegiance they were given citizenship in the Kingdom of God! That is the way it worked, and that was the business that Jesus was in. He was focused on seeking and saving those that had been lost to God. [Ph'p. 3:20]



John had fulfilled his main purpose in life - to point out that Jesus was the Messiah, the Promised One, finally arrived! He started the big ball rolling! His task was the most important task of any of the prophets! It had all come down to his declaration – “***Behold***, (See him! Take a good look!) ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***”!! It was not that John was unimportant to God, but most of the time God does not interfere in the affairs of humanity. I do not believe as some Christians do that God was responsible for what happened to John. I believe that Herodias, her unnamed daughter, and Herod were responsible. Their hearts were seared by the cruelties that ran in their family – cruelties done to them and cruelties they had done! I mean, what kind of people can do something even resembling that, and sleep at night?! These were people who were so ruined, sick, and monstrous - whose scars run so deep that they were irredeemable! God's consolation to us is that they didn't get away with it. In fact, no one gets away with anything! There will be a reckoning and God will see to it!

But as to why God allowed this to happen to John we cannot possibly know! But terrible things happen here on earth between humans of all nations perpetually – unjust things where the innocent are punished and the guilty go free – where the good die young and the bad live to a ripe old age, where the strong devour the weak! This is what happens when God gives to us what we thought we wanted – independence! But then we all have to deal with the sinister consequences of His absence!



Afterward, John's disciples heard about it. The unthinkable had happened! Herod had actually done it! So they went to the prison and were able to collect John's headless body and bury it. We do not know what may have happened to John's shaggy head. But we can assume that Herodias wasn't about to give it back. She could have had half the kingdom but she chose a rotting human head! It had to be pretty valuable to her, I would think!



So then John's disciples went on to find Jesus and tell Him about it. He receives the news and immediately seeks a place of solitude in a boat. But someone keeps a sharp eye on the boat and about the time Jesus and his disciples land, maybe 2 or 3 miles away, a crowd is already. They don't even give Him time to grieve! The gospels say that Jesus was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief! But He didn't even get time to grieve, before He was again inundated by desperate, grasping hordes of people! It really *is* sad.

