

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 14:1 - 14:12



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In his talk on Matthew 14:1-12, Steve Gregg discusses the story of John the Baptist's imprisonment and subsequent execution by Herod. He highlights the fact that John was not simply curious about Jesus' miracles, but was a sincere follower of Jesus. Gregg discusses Herod's adultery with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and emphasizes that this was a sin that led to John's execution. He concludes by urging listeners to repent of their sins and not ignore the truth like Herod did.

### Transcript

Today we'll be looking at Matthew chapter 14 and we have something of a break from the narrative of the life of Jesus, although it is related. We have a story of how John the Baptist came to his death. Now earlier in the narrative, John the Baptist was at liberty and he was preaching the gospel.

He was preaching the kingdom of God was at hand, calling people to repentance. And it was when John was arrested and put in prison that Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, sort of to fill the vacuum left by John's being arrested and taken out of commission, out of circulation. However, we've heard very little about John the Baptist since his arrest.

And even earlier when it mentioned that John was arrested, it did not necessarily tell us everything that was involved in the motivation and all that. We did find back a few chapters back that John sent messengers to Jesus to ask him a question and we heard that John was in prison at that time. So in the background of all this story of Jesus, we've been aware that John is in prison.

But the death of John in prison is related here in the beginning of Matthew 14. It's found in verses 1 through 12. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, this is John the Baptist.

He is risen from the dead and therefore these powers are at work in him. For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For 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 John as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before him and 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. And the king was sorry. Nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him at the table, he commanded it to be given her.

So he sent and had John beheaded in prison and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl and she brought it to her mother. Then John's disciples came and took away the body and buried it and went and told Jesus. Now this story is actually speaking of something that happened a bit earlier.

The death of John the Baptist doesn't really occur chronologically at this point in the narrative of Jesus. This kind of flashes back. The story is given here because as Jesus was going around performing miracles, Herod, who had already killed John before this point, heard about these miracles.

He had not previously known much about Jesus and apparently he didn't really become aware of Jesus until after John was dead. And Herod, hearing that this man was walking around doing miracles and tormented by a guilty conscience, concluded that this was John the Baptist risen from the dead. He must have assumed that God had vindicated John, raised him from the dead, and of course having miraculously come back from the dead was also endued with other miraculous powers, which would then explain why these miracles were being done through him.

Now at a later time, Herod lost this fear of Jesus and his miracles and we find that when Jesus was arrested, he was taken to Herod, the same Herod who killed John the Baptist, and Herod desired to see a miracle performed by Jesus. But Jesus didn't speak one word in his presence or perform any miracles for him, so Herod was disappointed and disgusted and sent Jesus back to Pilate, who then of course had Jesus executed. But this Herod, when he first heard about Jesus and his miracles, he was fearful.

His conscience smote him, whereas later on he got used to the idea this wasn't John the Baptist and just was curious, wanted to see Jesus do some miracles, which he was never humored by Jesus in this desire. But this tells us a great deal about Herod, because he knew that John was a man of God, because he assumed as soon as he heard about Jesus, God has raised John from the dead. Now even to have such a theory float through his head would suggest that Herod knew that God was on John's side, and that although there had been other people that God approved of who had died and had not been risen from the dead, yet it would not be inconceivable to Herod that God might raise John from the dead.

That is how much he really regarded John to be a prophet of God. And yet, if he regarded him such, it makes his guilt in killing John all the more, because he was not just killing an inconvenient citizen or a lawbreaker. He was killing someone that he knew very well to be a man of God, so much so that he even wondered whether God had vindicated John by raising him from the dead and giving him miraculous powers.

This caused Herod to be afraid, we read. After all, if a man rose from the dead after being beheaded and buried and was now performing miracles, and if this was John, would he be immortal? Would it be possible to kill him again or impossible? And what might he do to Herod if he had miraculous powers? What might he do to the man who unjustly executed him? These are the things that apparently were tormenting Herod's thoughts. And that's really what Matthew tells us occurred at this time in the story.

However, Matthew realizes that he has not previously told us about the death of John the Baptist. And since it was a reflection back on the death of John the Baptist that caused Herod to think this way at this time, Matthew takes time to parenthetically tell us what Herod had done and how it had come to pass. Now we're told that Herod had been tormented by John the Baptist because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had said to him, it's not lawful for you to have her.

Herod Philip was one of the three sons of Herod the Great. Herod the Great is the king who killed all the babies in Bethlehem in order to try to kill Jesus when he was a baby. This Herod in this story is Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod.

He had a brother named Philip, and he had another brother named Archelaus. When Herod the Great died, Archelaus took charge of the Judean area. And Antipas took charge of Galilee and Samaria.

And then of course, Herod Philip had another jurisdiction outside of the land of Palestine. Now, Philip had a wife named Herodias and Herod Antipas, his brother, was visiting him once and was smitten, as it were, with the man's wife, had adulterous longings for her. He violated the 10th commandment, which said you should not covet your neighbor's wife.

And he seduced her and persuaded her to leave her husband and to come live with him as his wife. And so Herod and Herodias were now husband and wife, but not legitimately as far as God was concerned. They were married, and it was a legal ceremony.

But according to John the Baptist, it was a not a lawful ceremony. He said it's not lawful for you to have her. In other words, even though there was a legal marriage between Herod and Herodias, because it was an adulterous marriage, because the woman was really married in the sight of God to her husband, Philip, Herod was really living with another man's wife as far as God is concerned.

He had violated the laws of God. Now, before we go further, and before we think too harshly of Herod, I mean, we ought to think hard thoughts about Herod, because he was a very wicked man. But we should pause a moment to consider how many people listening to this program are married to persons of whom a prophet of God, if he were to meet you, would say it's not lawful for you to have that woman.

Now, I hope that's not true of many of you. Certainly, there was a time in the Christian church where it would never be true of anyone in the church. But in our day, divorce is so easy and free and frequent that it has even become common in the church.

Now, you tell me, what is the difference between Herod seducing another man's wife and marrying her, and you or anyone else who's a Christian today in the church taking another man's wife and marrying her? This has happened, unfortunately, thousands of times in the modern evangelical church. I know of many cases firsthand. Now, if that is true, there's no difference.

The person involved in such a thing is committing an unlawful act. Now, many people who do this, and they violate the laws of God in doing so, they satisfy themselves that, well, you know, we're now legally married, even if I repent of my sin of adultery, I can keep this marriage, because after all, it's now legal. But John said it wasn't legal.

Herod and Herodias had a legally binding marriage, but John the Baptist, the prophet of the Almighty, said, your marriage is not a legal marriage. It's not lawful for you to have this woman. And therefore, people who have stolen another man's wife, or women who have stolen another woman's husband, and are married to them today, may very well be in the same situation Herod and Herodias were in.

And it's necessary for some prophet of God to say to you, it's not lawful for you to do that. Now, the scriptural teaching about divorce and remarriage is not one that all Christians agree on every detail about. I, myself, believe that sometimes divorce and remarriage is legitimate, based upon Jesus' teaching that if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than fornication, that he causes her to commit adultery and remarrying, and whoever marries her also commits adultery.

And if he divorces his wife for any reason other than fornication and himself marries another, he is committing adultery and so is the woman he marries. This is what Jesus taught, but there is that exception clause, except for the cause of fornication. If you are in a second marriage, let me urge you to listen very carefully, because being right with God has a lot to do with whether your second marriage is something God approves or not.

If you are in a second marriage and your spouse, let's say was married before, but that spouse divorced because their first spouse committed adultery, then I believe Jesus taught that your spouse was free to remarry and free to remarry you if you have not

divorced another with less than perfect grounds. Let me put it this way. If you marry somebody and neither you nor your partner were ever married before, obviously that's a legitimate marriage.

If either you or your partner or both are divorced from previous partners, and in both cases you divorced because your first partner had committed adultery, then I believe you are also free to marry again, either one of you. Anybody who is divorced from a previous partner because of the adultery of that previous partner, I believe is as free to marry as if they had never married in the first place. But almost any other condition is ruled out for remarriage in the scriptures.

And even though the state of whatever state you live in may approve of a second marriage in circumstances where God does not, the message of John the Baptist to Herod is a very strong message to us today, because you may be living with the assumption that your second marriage is legitimate in a situation where it isn't. And that would mean, of course, that you are living in adultery in a case like that. Now, I'm not using words any stronger than those that Jesus used.

I don't really find John the Baptist using the word adultery, but it certainly is implied when he says that Herod is living with his brother's wife, that is adultery. But Jesus used the actual word adultery when he said, if a man divorces his wife for any reason other than fornication and marries another, he commits adultery. That second marriage is adultery.

It's not a marriage. It may be honored by the state, but it's not honored by God. And when you stand before God on the Day of Judgment, it's going to be more important to you what God thought of your behavior than what the state thought was authorizable.

If the state authorizes adultery, that doesn't make it less adultery. If the state authorizes marriage between two homosexuals, that doesn't make it marriage in the sight of God. You see, what Christians need to be concerned about is whether they are honoring God and doing something that's lawful in His sight when they are marrying somebody.

And if not, then the Bible makes it very clear. In such a case, the second marriage is adultery. And the Bible says, no adulterer shall inherit the kingdom of God.

In 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9-10, Paul lists many sins that if a person is committing them, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. And adultery is one of them. I don't say that to be hard on anyone.

I say that to be friendly. I say that to be helpful. I say that to save your soul.

If you are living in adultery because you've stolen another man's wife, what should you do now? Well, I believe there's different scenarios, but let me suggest this. If the man whose wife you stole is now married again or has had other women, then it seems to me

that that man has accepted the terms of the divorce. Even though the divorce was wrong, he has gone on with his life and he's made it impossible for the first marriage to be restored.

In a case like that, I think it's not much different than David with Bathsheba. She could not go back to her first husband. He was dead in that case.

And therefore, David was not required to break up that second marriage. If you are in a situation where you stole someone else's wife, but that man from whom you stole the wife has now gone on and married again, or he's connected with some other woman in the same way as he was before, then I do not believe that you necessarily have to break up your present marriage. Even though it is adultery, I think what you need to do is repent before God and ask God to cause you and your wife to enter into a sanctified union now that you've repented of the adultery.

On the other hand, if you stole a man's wife and he's still waiting for her to come home, then you have stolen property in your home. What the world calls your wife, what the courts of the land call your wife, the Bible calls her your partner in adultery. And if she has her faithful husband still waiting for her to come back, then the second marriage is not legitimate at all and it is adultery and she needs to go back and fulfill the vows she made.

We have another example of this in the Bible. Michael was taken from David, stolen from him, she was his wife, against his will. And he did not renounce that marriage.

He considered himself still married to her, even though she went and married another man named Paltiel. It was all legal in the court system. King Saul himself made the arrangements.

His daughter married Paltiel, but she was not free to marry him. She was David's wife. David had never renounced the marriage vows and therefore when David came to power again, he took Michael back to be his wife and Paltiel had to just accept the fact that he lost the woman that he had thought of as his wife because she wasn't his wife.

She was never his wife in the sight of God. I'll tell you what, when a society violates the commands of God, it sure messes things up. And I wouldn't be surprised if many listening to my voice today have really messed things up.

Now there's grace, but grace always comes through repentance and faith. And repentance can come when you say, I did the wrong thing, I need to make it right. I need to get right with God.

And if a person is committed adultery and is even married to the adulteress at this present time, then you need to repent and you need to get right with God. As far as what you must do to get right with God, that depends on various things in the circumstances

that I just described. And there are others.

I don't mean to oversimplify this. But while I am not saying that every second marriage is a case of adultery, and I'll just tell you if you don't already know, I'm not in my first marriage. My first wife divorced me and she committed adultery.

I did not. I remarried legitimately. And so I do believe in legitimate second marriages.

But I also believe there's illegitimate second marriages and they are not marriages. In God's sight, they are not lawful, even though they're lawful in the sight of the state. There may not be many pastors willing to tell you this because you certainly don't want to hear it.

I don't think Herod wanted to hear what John the Baptist had to say either. But John the Baptist was doing him a great favor in telling him because Herod needed to know how to get right with God. Herod was in a position to do that.

When John said, being married to Herodias, it's not lawful before God, Herod could have repented. Herod could have been, as he no doubt was, smitten in his conscience. He could have said, oh, you're so right.

This is my brother's wife. I'm living in adultery with my brother's wife. And he could have sent her home to her husband, Philip.

But he didn't. Instead, he wanted to silence the messenger. I wouldn't be surprised if there's some people who hear that message today and would like to silence the messenger.

It's a shame. Really, we have two choices. When we hear the truth of God from the Word of God, we can either repent and comply with what God says, or else we can ignore and silence the messenger.

If we do the second, we will have something to regret big time, probably in this life, but also certainly at the Day of Judgment. The Word of the Lord to us in our sinful condition is never flattering, and therefore it's not pleasant to hear. There are people, however, who when they are told the truth, they repent and get right with God.

And God forgives. He's a gracious God. But there are those like Herod, who when they hear the truth, they want to take the messenger out of circulation and ignore his words.

That's what Herod did. He arrested John. He bound him.

And he kept him in prison. He actually wanted to put him to death, it says in verse 5, but he was afraid of the people. John was too popular.

And so he just left him in prison for a while, until Herod had a birthday, and his

illegitimate daughter-in-law danced for him, pleased him. He was probably drunk with his friends. And he said, you know, whatever you want, ask for it.

And she consulted with her mother, and her mother said, good. Ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. It's quite clear that Herodias, the wife, was very, very hateful toward John the Baptist.

She didn't like him exposing her sin either. So much so that when her daughter could have asked for millions of dollars in gold, instead she said, no, get the head of John the Baptist. And so she got it.

And that was the end of John in this life. His disciples came and took the body and buried it, and the news of it came to Jesus. And we will read next time what Jesus did when he heard the news.

We can see the foolishness of choosing a life of sin. Where is Herod today? He seemed to get away with it in his day. He killed the prophet of God, and he lived on himself and went ahead and ruled and stayed in his adulterous relationship until the day he died.

But that's just the point. He did die. Where is he today? For the past 2,000 years, Herod has been regretting his decision.

And he will do so for all eternity. How about you? When you hear the word of God, and the word of God points out that you are not right with God, that you're living in sin. Do you satisfy yourself that maybe your pastor doesn't agree with what the word of God says? Or maybe you can just ignore it? Maybe society approves of what you do? Well, you may seem to get away with it.

But there's something else to reckon with, and that is eternity. Let me urge you to get right with God, no matter how much it costs, because we don't have all that much time left. We do have a great deal of time after we die to live with the regrets and the consequences of our actions if we choose wrongly.

In Jesus' name, let me urge you to repent if you are in a sinful state today.