

The Fame of Jesus: A Life Fully Given to Jesus

Matthew 14:1-12

MPS Jesus is worthy of a Christ-follower's life fully given to spread His fame by faithfulness.

OBJ A life fully given to spread Jesus' fame is identified by faithfulness three qualities.

READ Matthew 14:1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, ²and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." ³For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. ⁶But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." ⁹And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. ¹⁰He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, ¹¹and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. ¹²And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus. Matthew 14:1-12

Here Matthew tells how John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed for his ministry. We also learn a little about Herod the Tetrarch, who had John the Baptist beheaded, and his life situation. And, how the fame of Jesus spread.

First, we read where Herod the tetrarch hears about the fame of Jesus. Jesus' public ministry is beginning to emerge, and word is spreading about all that He is teaching and the mighty works He is performing. When Herod hears of the miracles Jesus is doing, he attributes them to John the Baptist as being resurrected. According to the Gospel writers, Herod both respected and feared John, and he feared the people if he did anything to him because of his popularity. Most see Herod as displaying a strong insecurity and lingering guilt over what He had done to John. But that same insecurity caused him to bloat his confidence in front of his servants to mask his fear. He had enough understanding of Jewish teachings to know of the resurrection. So, he generates his theory of all that is happening by a mixture of what he knows of Jewish Pharasaic teaching and superstition.¹

Herod was not a good person. But we need to know something about him to understand what takes place in this passage. He was known as Herod Antipas who was given his rule by his father, Herod the Great, over the region of Galilee and Perea. He was immoral and incompetent but held a very high position of political power. He divorced his wife, whom he married in a political agreement, because he was having an affair with Herodias, the wife of his half-brother.² Herodias also divorced her husband so she could marry Herod. Their scandalous nature of their marriage is evidenced in both Biblical and non-Biblical sources.³ Herod's decision to divorce his wife would prove to be harmful for the country and his rule because it would later lead to war with his former father-in-law. But one who is ruled by insecurity cares little for other people, and only

¹D. A. Carson, "[Matthew](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 337. Carson states, "Herod's guilty conscience apparently combined with a superstitious view of miracles to generate this theory."

²D. A. Carson, "[Matthew](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 338. Carson writes, "Herodias was married to Herod Philip (not Philip the tetrarch, Luke 3:1), son of Herod the Great and Mariamne II (for this identification of Hoehner, Herod Antipas, pp. 131–36), and therefore half-brother to Herod Antipas." Carson continues, "John probably did not denounce Antipas for divorcing his former wife, an action probably judged allowable (cf. b Ketuboth 57b; Jeremiah Jerusalem, p. 371, n. 60), but for incestuously marrying his half-brother's wife (Lev 18:16; 20:21); and John probably kept on repeating his rebuke (imperfect elegen means "he used to say [repeatedly]"; so McNeile)."

³John Nolland, [The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 582. Nolland records, "Josephus reports Antipas's usurpation of the wife of his half-brother and implies the scandal of the marriage by noting the blood relationship between the two Herods." Nolland goes on to say, "John was critical of the new marriage as violating OT law. It was not just the fact of divorce, but that the specific provisions of Lv. 18:16; 20:21 were being violated. What Herod had done was considered to be a form of incest within the family. Josephus offers as the specific reason for Herod's decision to execute John the likelihood that John's great popularity would lead to sedition."



to bolster how other people perceive them. If a movie was made about Herod's life, it would be a "psychological fizzle", a complete mess of mental insanity. Herod was a man who always needed to look powerful and in control, because he really wasn't. As another author, Gene Edwards, states, "Outer power will always unveil the inner resources or the lack thereof."⁴ This is perfect commentary on Herod.

Understanding Herod's marriage to Herodias, though, provides important context.⁵ As part of his ministry, John the Baptist openly and regularly protested their marriage, which made Herod look bad in the eyes of people. Nothing triggers insecurity more than the threat against one's perception behind which they hide. This got John thrown in prison; Herod's attempt to shut him up. There was great animosity toward John the Baptist by Herod, and even more from Herodius.

TRANS Beginning in verse 3, Matthew provides a "flashback" to tell how John was put imprisoned and killed.

At a large feast the rumors of Jesus' fame are mentioned. Herod shares his theory of both fact and conjecture to dismiss and impress those around him. But when Salome, his step-daughter, pleases him and the crowd with her dancing, he makes a boastful promise of up to half his kingdom in return for her wish. If anyone was more wicked and worldly-wise than Herod, it was Herodius, who told her daughter what to wish for. She requested John's head on a platter, the very thing Herod did not want to do. But with his promise and reputation on the line, his fear of John was secondary to his fear of weakness exposed, so he ordered it done. And what a way to climax a party, by delivering "proof-on-a-platter". Herod's pride and bloated oath would quickly turn to regret, grief, and severe guilt.⁶

John's disciples come and take the body to prepare it for burial. Matthew ends the passage abruptly and completes John's ministry role, by honoring him in his death through persecution as a model for all disciples.⁷

Gospel

In this passage Matthew irrevocably connects John the Baptist with Jesus in ministry and glory. This is very important for Christians. John the Baptist holds a unique role in redemptive history. He is the last in the tradition of Old Testament prophets.^{Matthew 11:9-15} He was the first to recognize Jesus even before his own birth by leaping in his mother's womb when Mary visited Elizabeth.^{Luke 1:41} John's whole life was ordained to introduce the Messiah of God, which also serves as the fulfillment of God's promise to send one who would prepare the way.^{Isaiah 40:3-5} Once John had confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah he was announcing^{Matthew 11:2-6}, he knew the completion of his ministry had come. And when his call was complete, he gave up his life to point people to the One for whom he lived, Jesus of Nazareth. Likely, John's death was a cue for Jesus to know His time for public introduction as Messiah was near. [John lived his whole life fully given to the fulfillment of his call from God. He serves as a premier model of one persecuted and martyred for Jesus. His life proclaims that Jesus is worthy of our life too!](#)

Jesus is worthy of a Christ-follower's life fully given to spread His fame by faithfulness.

⁴Gene Edwards, *A Tale of Three Kings*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), XVIII.

⁵Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 511–512. Wilkins comments, "Such a marriage would have been considered an incestuous affront to God's law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). Both Josephus and the Gospel writers agree that Herod Antipas had John arrested and executed because of his influence with the people. Beyond that, they give helpful different perspectives on the underlying motivation for arresting John. According to Matthew, "Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet." Josephus surmises that God judged Herod for his treatment of John."

⁶D. A. Carson, "[Matthew](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 338. Carson summarizes, "The total situation is psychologically convincing. Like Ahab, Antipas was wicked but weak; and Herodias, like Jezebel, wicked and ruthless. Herod's grief (not mere distress) in Matthew 14:9 shows his ambivalence. Moreover if he was "afraid of the people" because they held John to be a prophet (cf. 21:26, 46), then Matthew confirms Josephus's view that Herod's actions were largely motivated by politics."

⁷D. A. Carson, "[Matthew](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 339. Carson comments, "So John died, the last of the OT prophets (11:9, 13) who through persecution became models for Jesus' disciples (5:11–12)."



When Herod heard about the fame of Jesus, he immediately thought of John the Baptist. This causes us to ask, “**How do people hear about the fame of Jesus?**” Fame spreads via word of mouth, person to person sharing what they experienced. Herod knew about Jesus because John’s life was fully given to spread His fame.

TRANS Over the next three weeks I want to lead us through a mini-series of Matthew 14 and consider how the fame of Jesus spreads. Today we begin with “A Life Given Fully to Jesus”.

OBJ A life fully given to spread Jesus’ fame is identified by faithfulness in three qualities.

1. Faithful to source one’s whole identity in Christ.

John’s life was one of radical identification to Jesus, a life fully given to Jesus by sourcing his whole identity in God’s promise of Messiah. **How did John fully source his identity in Christ?** So often today we make identity into some emotional or psychological experience. While identity includes how we view ourselves and how others view us, it is far more external than we often admit. We have very few insights into John’s psyche or emotions, but we have great insight into the strength of his mental health. John lived undivided in radical obedience to what he understood God’s call to be on his life. John lived in faithful service to God’s commands. He didn’t concern himself with a life of relevance, tolerance, accommodation, nor alignment with the world. His life demonstrates that every decision for how he lived aligned with God’s commands and call on his life, not his preference. **John sought to seek first Jesus’ Kingdom, and lived a bold testimony to the world in both the way he lived and what he said.**

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33

John consumed his whole life with serving God. We’ve made this a rare exception for Christians today. Many still admire it but mostly from a distance, with too few wanting anything to do with it for their lives. Christianity is not simply a label we adopt to wear, but a new identity aligned with Jesus because of the redemption we have in Him. Every decision first considers God’s command, call, and counsel for our lives. Every conversation with our children is focused to train them in how to give their lives fully for Jesus. **Jesus sources our identity as we conform every aspect of life to Him by His Word.**

Paul teaches that how a Christian lives is because of who we understand to be the source of our life.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
2 Corinthians 5:14-15

What consumes you, in both inner and outer life, determines where you source your identity from. Identity is rooted in the heart and the mind but revealed through the actions of life. You are surely more than the sum total of the outward actions of your life, for no single action fully defines you. But you are not less than your actions. Identity is shaped by that which you adhere to both internally and externally, by affections and convictions, allegiances, participation in and obedience to, and traditions and celebrations of life. The source of our identity determines the direction of our energies; what we love, what we invest in, and how we spend our time. Identity prioritizes decisions and guides everything in the home from relationships to rhythms and patterns of living. Every part of John’s life was defined and directed, fully given by faithfulness to Jesus, fulfilling His call, obeying His Word, and serving His mission. If you are to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, your identity must be sourced completely in Him. **John’s life testifies that Jesus is worthy of your life fully given to Him.**

APPL Have you considered your life and asked, “how much of my identity is consumed by Jesus, or being defined by some other influence?”

2. Faithful to stand on God’s Truth.

John the Baptist was characterized by his life of faithfulness. And the most evident demonstration of his faithfulness was the consistency of and faithfulness to His message of repentance. He called people to repent of their sin. And, he identified sin



according to what God's Word said sin was, not what people felt it was. His faithfulness to God's truth was both radical and unrelenting, unchanging regardless of his audience. John was hated by people who, specifically Herod and Herodius, were offended and irritated because of his faithful to God's truth. [John was killed because he took a stand for Jesus.](#)

Christ-followers need not be offensive in tone, demeanor, nor spirit for others to take offense. People who take offense at Jesus^{Matthew13:57} will inevitably take offense at His followers too. But what Christ-followers must do is understand so to be prepared for this. People will take offense when you dare to stand on the truth of God's Word. They will seek to discredit you and deny God's Word and will resort to any means necessary to do it. When offended and threatened, there is no limit to the depth of darkness and deception the collective human wisdom will dive to discredit the truth of God's Word. But truth remains the two-edged sword that cuts through confusion and deception, especially in the heart and mind. And truth is still the living water and bread of life that satisfies the thirsty, hungry soul.

ILLUS [Debate over WWJD](#) WWJD is a popular cliché that arose years ago. Its intent was to remind us to consider Jesus. But some negatives also arose from its emphasis, namely, situational ethics that left some confused. We need not ask "WWJD", but rather "WHGS", "What Has God Said?". Jesus only said and did what the Father told him to say or do.^{John5:19}

APPL God's Word is sufficient for Christians today too, for every decisions, circumstance, challenge and difficulty. When we stand on God's Word, we can be confident that it will always accomplish His purposes in our life. That may or may not align with our wishes, but it will always bring about His transformation into Christlikeness. God will prove faithful when we stand faithful to His Word. [Is there any area of life, a relationship, decision or otherwise where you are wavering over whether to trust God? Jesus is worthy of your life fully given to faithfully stand on the truth of His Word.](#)

3. Faithful to persevere to the end.

John the Baptist is one of the ultimate models for faithfulness in perseverance for Christians. He refused the pressure of daily demands and opposition. And he rejected the pressure to recant by prison and the threat of losing his life. He knew he was going to die. He knew his time and ministry were limited. And he knew his ministry would conclude when the Messiah was identified. This is why he sent word to confirm that Jesus was that Messiah.^{Matthew11:3} He was faithful to the very end. And when the end came, he was submitted his life fully, even in death.

When a Christian endures to the end, Jesus promises that we will gain our life from Him.^{Luke21:17-19} Most of us will not have to persevere to death for our faith in Jesus. But we still must be ready to persevere against the pressure we face daily, mocking and ridicule, loss of friendships and relationships, loss of job and career opportunity, and many others. Jesus sees our faithfulness and honors us by His blessing. There is no stronger promise for the Christ-follower than what we have from Jesus about what appears to us as the end of life. And with such a strong, hopeful promise in the face of a terminal threat, to see one who has gone before us gives us strength to endure. Persevering to the end is determined by one thing along, daily faithfulness, every day. [Jesus proves He is worthy of your life fully given to Him in daily faithfulness. And he will prove faithful when you persevere to the end.](#)

TRANS [Why did John the Baptist give live so radically for the mission of proclaiming the message of the coming Messiah?](#) He knew Jesus was worth his whole life.

[Jesus is worthy of a Christ-follower's life fully given to spread His fame by faithfulness.](#)

CLOSE [What is your life saying to the world? Christ-follower, do more people know the fame of Jesus because of you?](#)

