

Matthew 14:1-14 What It Means to Follow Jesus

We are starting a new chapter this morning, Matthew chapter 14. Our focus will be on verses 1 through 14. This is all part of the third section of Matthew, Matthew Chapter 5-25, where Matthew presents five messages, and the in-between chapters are supporting chapters for those messages.

The First Message was in Matthew Chapters 5-7, The Principles of the Kingdom.

The Second Message was Matthew Chapter 10, The People of the Kingdom, His sermon on discipleship.

And then Matthew Chapter 13, that we finished last week, The Parables of the Kingdom, the Lord's presentation of eight parables in Matthew chapter 13.

Here in Matthew chapter 14 we have a supportive chapter, The Ministry of the Principles of the Parables. In other words, the principles of the parables lived out, especially that of The Parable of the Sower, where you have four kinds of responses to the Word. Here you have four different kinds of responses to God's Word beginning with Matthew chapter 14.

Now to start with, in this section in Matthew 14:1-12, The Paranoia of Herod. The Paranoia of Herod, the king.

In verses 1 to 2, we have The Circumstances Surrounding His Paranoia.

And verse 1 starts with what is called a *temporal clause*, that is a timestamp or time marker, where he says, **In that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame (or report) of Jesus.** *At, or in, that time.* We are now at approximately one year before Jesus goes to the cross. Two years into His ministry is marked by these incidents and circumstances in verses 1 through 12.

It tells us, **In that time Herod the tetrarch.** This is not Herod the Great that we saw back in Matthew chapter 2. Herod the Great is the one who sent out the decree to have all the babies two years and under killed in hopes of putting to death the Messiah. This is one of his sons, this is Herod Antipas, not Herod the Great.

Herod Antipas, the tetrarch. The word *tetrarch* means *ruler of one fourth*. Tetrarch: ruler of one fourth.

Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great. The other two sons were (1) Herod Archelaus [and (2) Herod Philip I.] Herod Archelaus received one half of Herod the Great's kingdom when he died. Herod Philip I received one quarter of the kingdom to rule. And then Herod Antipas received the other quarter, one-fourth, of the area to rule. That is why he is called Herod the Tetrarch, Ruler of One-Fourth. So, when Herod the Great died, he divided up his rulership between his three sons: half to Herod Archelaus, one-fourth to Herod Philip I, and one-fourth to Herod Antipas, that we have here in our text.

Verse 2 tells us, **And he says to his servants**, concerning the fame of Jesus. He heard the fame and report of Jesus, so Herod Antipas says to his servants, **This is John the baptizer**. English texts have *John the Baptist*, he was not a Baptist. The word literally means *baptizer*, it describes the kind of ministry he had. He went around baptizing Jews to prepare them for the coming of Messiah. And so, he said to his servants, **This Jesus is John the baptizer**. John the Baptist. **He himself was raised from the dead**. So, at this time that we are studying, John the Baptist has been put to death.

Remember, back in chapter 11, he was put into prison and he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" And the disciples of John took word back to him that this is indeed the Messiah, which is to come. Well, at our point here, John the Baptist has since died, and this text is telling us how he died, and the events surrounding his death. So, with John the Baptizer dead and Jesus going around performing miracles and preaching, Herod, in his paranoia, says, "This is John the Baptizer come back from the dead to haunt me." So, his conclusion is that Jesus Christ is John the Baptizer that has come back from the dead. **He himself was raised from the dead, and on account of this, the works of power are show forth, or, are operating in him**. So, he thinks this is John come back from the dead.

In verses 3 through 12, we have, The Commentary on John; what happened to him.

Verse 3, **For when Herod had laid hold, or, captured John, he bound him and put him in prison, on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother**. So, we get the participants now introduced to us. Herodias was Herod Philip I's wife. Herod Philip I is Herod Antipas' brother. Well, Herod Antipas and Herod Philip I took their wives and they went on a vacation trip, and Herod Antipas got involved with Herod Philip I's wife on the trip. And when they came back from the trip, they decided that they were going to divorce each other's marriage partners and that they were going to marry each other. So, John was captured, and he was put into prison because of Herodias. This would be Herod Philip's former wife, that is now the wife of Herod Antipas. And she is described here as the wife of Philip his brother, not the wife of Herod Antipas. The Scripture and, as well as, John the Baptist proclaimed it to be an unlawful marriage, which is what brought up all the problems. So, John was put into prison.

Verse 4 tells us the reason. **For John was saying** - notice the verb tense, continuous action in the past. *John was continually bringing the same message to Herod Antipas*. He said, **It is not lawful for you to have her**. So, you married your brother's wife, and is not lawful, and it is not permitted for you to have her. You can tell now why Herodias, who is now Herod Antipas' wife, why she got very upset with the message of John the Baptist.

Herod, it is going to explain to us why he put John into prison. It says in verse 5 that Herod Antipas **desiring to kill him, he feared the crowd, because were holding him as a prophet**. So, he wanted to kill John the Baptist, but he put him into prison as the next best thing for him to do because the people, the population and the crowds, were holding John the Baptizer as a prophet. So, he didn't want to put him to death and experience the rebellion and anger of the people. So, he put him into prison to get rid of him.

But while celebrating a birthday of Herod, the daughter of Herodias - that would be a daughter from the marriage with Herod Philip I, this would be Herod Antipas' niece - **the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst and she pleased Herod.** So, she did some kind of erotic dance. You have to understand that Herod's got all of his servants, he has got all of his important subjects from the kingdom inside this big ballroom. And Herodias comes out and one of the events of entertainment was that she was going to perform this dance for everyone. And it tells us, in verse 7, **From which he acknowledged with an oath to give to her whatever she should ask.** She pleased him and pleased the crowd, so, in order to show off in front of everybody, Herod Antipas says, "Whatever she desires, whatever she wants, give to her." In other words, his ego is showing that he's going to reward her with an oath. He even took an oath that she could have whatever she wants.

But verse 8 tells us about what was the plan ahead of time, **And having been instructed before by her mother.** So, Herodias told her daughter, "When you go out and dance, I know Herod, he is probably going to show off his ego, and he is probably going to offer you a reward for your dance in front of him, especially if it's a good dance. So, what I want you to do is say, 'I want the head of John the Baptizer on a platter.' I want him beheaded and I want his head brought here." You can tell that Herodias was really angry with John and his continuous message, while Herod was playing the political role, but now that's all coming together. **And having been instructed before by her mother, she says, "Give to me, here upon a platter the head of John the Baptizer."** So, she wasn't satisfied with John just being in prison, she wants him dead, she wants him gone. She doesn't want to hear anymore from this John the Baptizer.

Verse 9, **And the king was grieved, but on account of the oaths, and on account of the ones who were reclining with him** - (1) he had to keep his word, he couldn't go back on his word. He said she could have whatever she wanted. And (2) the people, because then he would be embarrassed in front of all the people if he went back on his word. So, **because of the oaths, and because of the people who were reclining with him at the table, he commanded it to be given,** that is, that her request would be given.

Verse 10, **And when he sent, he beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought upon a platter, or, plate, and it was given to the damsel, or, young girl, and she brought it to her mother.** That's kind of a gruesome exchange going on here, but I'm sure Herodias, even as gruesome as it was, it made her very happy that John was finally dead, and she had him put to death.

And when his disciples came, these would be the disciples of John. **When the disciples came,** verse 12, **they took up, or, removed the body and buried it; and when they came, they reported this to Jesus,** as to what happened. This is a historical event as to what happened with John the baptizer. It is also a historical marker that tells us that one year prior to the Lord going to the cross, this was a major historical event that took place that shifted His whole ministry; and this set in motion the fact that the Lord would move from out of this geographical area and that the Lord would move on closer to on His way to Jerusalem.

In Matthew 14:13-14, we have, The People Following Jesus. In 1-12 we saw, The Paranoia of Herod; now we are studying about The People Following Jesus.

In verse 13, The Compelling of the People. **When Jesus heard of it**, that is, John's death, **He withdrew from there in a boat, into a desert place apart, or, privately. And when the people or crowds heard of it, they followed Him by foot from the cities.** And as they were following Him by foot, verse 14 says, **that when Jesus came out, The Compassion of Jesus, When Jesus went out, He saw a large crowd and was moved with compassion over them. And He healed their sicknesses.**

Well, lest you think we are finished early, let me just say to you that I want to spend a few moments on a special word study that we haven't focused on before, but one that is very important. Back in verse 13 it says that people, they were compelled. They wanted to follow Jesus and they followed Him by foot from the cities. The word *followed* is the Greek word **ἀκολουθέω** (akoloutheo), and it is one of the most important words in the Christian vocabulary. We just have never focused on it before and studied how important it is. Jesus used it often.

There are many different words that Christians use to describe themselves, *Christian* is one of them. Another word that Christians use to describe themselves is the word *believer*, and that seems to be one of the more prominent expressions going around now.

"Are you a believer?"

And a person will say, "Yes," or, "No."

And if they say, "Yes, Are you a believer?"

"Yes, I am a believer."

So, we associate *Christian*, we associate the word *believer* as being someone who is saved.

Example, a while back, someone who is a believer was in a band, he joined a band. It was not a Christian band, but it was a band. And he says, "The interesting thing about it is there are a couple of guys in it that are believers." And I was perplexed over that because it is not a Christian band, and they travel, and do different venues, which are not Christian, they are not churches, they are not Christian groups. But, "It's okay if I participate with them in the band because they and I are believers." So, like I say, I was a little perplexed by it.

Even though, I want you to listen to what I'm saying, even though everyone who is saved is a believer, not all believers are saved. Every saved person, everyone born of the Spirit of God is a believer, but not all people who are believers are saved.

A *believer* is just a general term that represents someone's religious beliefs and convictions. For instance, I have found lately, and you know me, when I hear certain phrases I ask people, "What do you mean by that?" I have found that a *believer* is *someone who believes the truth about what the Bible is saying about Jesus*. "I believe the Jesus that's in the Bible, and so I am a believer."

Did you know this shocking fact from scripture? Did you know that Satan is a believer? That's what it says. In James 2:19, James even told the believing Jews, James 2:19, **"You say that you believe in the one and true God; well, you do well: but even the demons are**

believing and are trembling." Both present tense verbs. Satan knows and believes the truth about what the Bible says about Jesus. He believes it.

There were times when Jesus would walk into the sanctuary of the temple and people who were demon possessed, the demons would call out in confession for who He is, "We know who You are, the Holy One of God, the Son of God." They made confession. They know who He is. They believe who He is. There's a big difference though. They don't follow Him. That's our word.

In our text in verse 13, the verb that designates the people followed Jesus by foot, it shows the action of the verb and what it means. They literally followed Him, an action of doing. They didn't follow Him in the newspaper, they didn't follow Him over the radio, or over television, none of those things existed. They literally followed Jesus, which is interesting. So, you say that you are believer, but the real question is, are you a follower? Not a follower of church, not even a follower of Bible, all those things are included in there, but are you a follower of the person of Jesus Christ Himself? Do you follow behind Jesus?

In Matthew 16:24, this is what Jesus said to people and He said it constantly; when people came to Him, and He says, "If anybody desires to come after Me." The word *after* is the word **ὀπίσω** (opiso) in Greek, and it means *behind*. "If any of you desires to come behind Me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me." Jesus always called, not just believers, but followers. He didn't ask people to believe in general, but to be actively following Him. So, Jesus presents the proper position in relationship to Christ. "Follow behind Me," He says. Now it wasn't a desire to become a church member, or even to become a Christian, "Everybody who desires to come behind Me, and follow after Me, this is what you have to do." You have to deny yourself, and you have to take up your cross, and actively follow. Personally, actively, follow the Lord.

So, He presents the two principles, how we are to walk in this position of following after Him:

He says (1), "You must deny yourself." That's obvious. I cannot follow Jesus and follow what I want at the same time. It is impossible. To *deny* in the Greek text means *to reject*. I still function, my ego still functions, my fleshly desires, my human desires still function, but the Lord calls upon me to reject those so that I can follow Him. I can't follow Him and myself at the same time. I can believe in Him and follow what I want to do, but I cannot follow Him and follow myself and my own desires at the same time. It is impossible. So, He says, "Deny yourself."

(2) And the second thing He said, by way of principle, He says, "And take up your cross." Many people think that means *hardships* and *difficulties*. No, it literally means *the death that Jesus died on the cross for me*. He died my death; therefore, I have died. He didn't die so that I wouldn't have to, when He died my death I died. In Colossians 3:3 Paul says, "For you died and your life has been hidden in Christ in God." You died. Your human faculties and desires still function, but you've died to those. That person is dead, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

Now I get asked questions by people, who... just this week somebody talked to me and talked about following Jesus. Because he presented himself as a believer, and some friends that he knows as a believer, and I said, "Well, are you a follower? That's the question. Not just a believer, but are you a follower of Christ? Follow Him personally?" And we talked about open doors. "Well, I follow the Lord, but is it right to look for open doors? God to open the door for me to go through?" And I let him know, first of all, Satan can also open doors, opportunities, because Satan has access to the whole world. So, if it has something to do with the physical world, or physical circumstances, I'm skeptical right off the bat. Why would God open the door for me to go out into the world and take up the things of the world? I'm not saying He wouldn't, I'm just saying I'm skeptical right away with that. But I did tell him, "If the Lord does open a door, it's not for you to go through. It's for Him to go through." God doesn't open doors and sit there and hold the door open for me, while I go through in my own human strength, my own human ability, and go out and try to do what God wants me to do. That's not following, especially when He is still back there holding the door open. Obviously, my position is wrong, I'm not following behind Him. When Jesus opens a door, He opens a door for Him to go through and I follow Him.

So, the question comes up though, "How do I know?" I always plead ignorance with the Lord. I always tell the Lord that spiritually I am incapable of knowing. I have no way of knowing. I am lost, don't know my way. And He is very faithful to not only go before me, but to take me with Him. To the point that it's been so many times that I know when it's Him and know when it is not Him. It's a learning lesson of, first of all, the first step is to seek Him, pray, "Lord, show me what you want me to do." But it's not Him telling me what to do. That's the second point. Not only does He open doors, is that God doesn't tell people what to do. He does it. And people tell me very often, "Well, I think the Lord is showing me that He wants me to..." He doesn't want *me* to do anything, He wants to do it through me. He's going ahead of me and He wants to do it through me. He's not trying to show me what He wants me to do in my own human effort and my own human ability. It is all the Lord, and He knows in order for me to follow and I am a fallen creature and spiritually I have no sensitivity, I have no way of knowing because we're dealing with the spirit realm, He is faithful that as I plead my ignorance, and I plead my helplessness and my weakness, He is there to take me. To the point that people say, "How do you know it is what the Lord wants you to do?"

"I can't stop. He just takes me. And He is going before me, and I just see what He's doing."

I gave a message, you remember, one Sunday night over at Grace Baptist Church. I gave a message. It's very simple, a Christian is either a motorboat or a sailboat. We either start up the engine and we go make our own way. We see the storm coming, we see the waters churning, so we want to find a better circumstance. So, we start up the motor and we head away from the storm and we head into calmer waters or nicer weather. But, in reality, the Lord calls us to be sailboats. My desire for Him is to cast my sail and let the wind of His Spirit take me. I have no control over where it takes me. That's His Spirit and the faithfulness of His Spirit leading me in the direction that He would have me to go.

Just as Jesus did 2000 years ago He is still doing today. He is calling people to believe, but He is also calling them to follow. They go hand-in-hand. Following the Lord is an active lifestyle, it is not religious practice. It is not looking into the Bible and finding out what are the three steps God wants me to take for me to do. It is an active lifestyle, following: ἀκολουθέω (akoloutheo), following is active. The position is to follow behind Him and the only way that I can follow behind Him is to deny myself, and what I want, and to take up my cross... and I think I began to tell you about the cross. Jesus died on the cross, He died my death, therefore I have died. So, every day I am carrying my cross, my death, the death that Jesus died for me. Again Colossians 3:3 where he says, "You have died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God." So, you still exist, but you must reject it. Seek Him, to follow Him, not to show us what to do, but to have Him actually do it. To go before us and even to take over and to live and minister and move through us. Jesus is still calling for followers today. Back then, in public He would call people, "If you desire to follow Me, to follow behind Me." He didn't say, "If you desire to believe," but, "If you desire to follow after Me, here's what you must do: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me. Behind Me. Follow with Me."

It is interesting, in Matthew chapter 16, the same chapter that Matthew 16:24 came from. Earlier, you remember that Peter had come to Jesus and Jesus had told the disciples that He must go into Jerusalem and to die and to rise up on the third day. And so, Peter took Him aside privately and he said, "God have mercy on You for saying this." He actually rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing, much like many people do today. "If you dare speak against the flesh, against the hardships and difficulties of the flesh, God have mercy on you. A God of love would never allow your flesh to suffer."

Well, Jesus said, "Yes, I've got to go in and suffer and die and rise the third day."

Peter comes over and says, "God have mercy on you."

And Jesus turned to him and said, "Get behind me Satan. You are an offense to Me. You are a stumbling block. You're in front of me. You are preventing me from getting where I have to go." The proper position for even Satan is to get behind Jesus, for Peter is to get behind Jesus; not to get along side of Him like He is our buddy, or to go ahead of Him and keep looking back and trying to get directions of which way to go. But to get behind. Satan was out of position and he caused Peter to be out of position, because Peter took charge of Jesus. Had it backwards. He went on to tell him, "You do not think the things of God, you think the things of man. Your frame of mind is there to defend the flesh and to defend yourself. You're minding the things of man. Your frame of mind is according to human, not according to spiritual."

So, they followed Jesus. Very important word in the Christian vocabulary. They followed Jesus and Jesus called people to follow Him. He still calls for people to follow Him today. Going to church isn't following Him, it can be part of it. Even studying the Bible is not following Him, it can be part of it. Church is church, and the Bible is the Bible, Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ. He is the One we follow. God takes His Word and causes us to grow in Him and to come to know Him and to understand Him and become familiar with Him, so that when He does move in our life we recognize Him. But, we even have people today who have made church their idol, given themselves totally over to a church system. They are not following Christ, but they think, "Yes, I am following Christ by giving myself over to a church."

We saw that back in the Protestant Reformation, where man took over man in a religious setting in the church. And the great reformers came up and protested, which is why were called Protestants; protested man's rule over man. Only God rules over man, not man. But, of course, because of our fallen human nature, we still practice the same things today. We still join a system. Some people I've known that know the Bible very well, but they don't know Jesus hardly at all, and they made the Bible their idol. All of these things: our fellowship together, our organic relationship together in fellowship, and God's Spirit through His word bringing us to Jesus Christ, it's all for the purpose of Christ. Jesus said, "In the volume of the book, it talks about Me." It's about Jesus.

Let's close in prayer.