

10 July 2022

Spiritual Choice – Matthew 14:1-21

1. The Kingdom of Herod

Degradation

⁶ But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

Question 1: How does sin act to degrade us?

Fear

- Fear of the people

⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.

- Fear of his guests

⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given.

- Fear of the consequences

¹ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, ² and 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."

Question 2: How are the fears described a result of unbelief?

Question 3: What is the Christian response to fear?

Death

⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." ¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, ¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

Question 4: Gruesome and unusual. What is the symbolism of this action?

2. The Kingdom of God

Dignity

¹² And John the Baptist's disciples came and took the body [of John] and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

Sorrow

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

Question 5: Why does Jesus need to be alone?

Compassion

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Question 6: If Jesus still has compassion, why is not every sick person who prays for healing healed today?

Thanksgiving

¹⁷ They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing.

Question 7: Relative to the need of the crowd, five loaves and two fish is almost nothing, what is its significance in spiritual terms?

Baskets of Blessing

¹⁹ Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Question 8: How much blessing from God is available to us, and what does it look like in our lives in practical terms?

3. A Prayer

Loving Lord,

Thank you for the life-giving message of this passage, in particular, its honest description of the Kingdom of Herod, stripped of its power and its early glamour and with its spiritual reality revealed for all to see, with its fear, degradation and death.

If I have never made the choice before, in the power of the Holy Spirit, reject this Kingdom and step into the Kingdom of God. Forgive my sins, through the sacrificial death of your Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Cleanse me from all unrighteousness, and receive me now, into the everlasting Kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ.

If I have the choice before, I mourn how the wrongful intrusion of Herod's kingdom into my life and the lives of those I know and love, and come to you again in heartfelt repentance and deeper commitment to following you.

I bring before you myself, and someone else for whom I have a spiritual concern, and in my heart name them before you now.

(pause)

All I pray for myself, I pray for them.

May the degradation of death be replaced by the dignity of life

May my sorrow lead to compassion,

May my thanksgiving lead to blessing.

In the power of your life-giving spirit, and for the sake of your Son my Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.