

PLEDGE YOUR HEAD TO HEAVEN Matthew 14:1-11

introduction

- famous story about a man who has his head displayed to the guests at a dinner party on a platter
- he wouldn't stop speaking truth to power about right and wrong and the kingdom of God
 - specifically sexual & marital morality
- what am I willing to lose for the sake of the Lord and Savior I have gained?
 - really relevant to us today because our world simply keeps getting weirder and weirder
- what are you/this church is this church willing to lose as a consequence of continuing to tell the truth of God to the power of man?
 - particularly appropriate that we talk about this story and this challenge on this holiday: Fathers' Day
 - will talk about how in a few minutes

where it fits

- bridge to new section (chs 14-20), expectations of messiah, Jesus working w/ disciples, Kingdom and church
 - story told as an "aside" or parenthesis
 - Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, brother of Philip, husband of Herodias, Philip's ex-wife
 - hearing about the miracles, preaching, communities spring up all over Galilee because of Jesus and his apostles
 - at this point Matthew is just talking about how Herod is concerned about Jesus, especially after he'd already put John to death, wondering if Jesus is John, back from the dead
 - a short flashback to tell us about the execution itself

S&R

Matthew 14 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." ³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴ because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. 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. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." ⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. 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. ¹² And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

pray for what you want

- me: gentle, careful, wise, compassionate, bold, clear, unapologetic
- them: gentle, careful, wise, compassionate, bold, clear, unapologetic
- Fb: listen carefully and consider where real Christians are really coming from when we say unpopular things

what they need to listen for

- 4 ways we need to exercise our imagination today

the first point

Imagine what happened

- so easy to think it's just a fairy tale... so extreme, so surreal

John is sitting there in the dungeon, wondering when and how the kingdom is going to come. The door opens. Three men step into the cell, one with an executioner's axe. John doesn't know what's going on. The guy with the axe says, "Come over here and kneel down. Let's get this over with."

John says, "What? What's going on?" The executioner says, "The king's step-daughter danced a sexy dance at the party. The king must have really liked it, because he told her she could have whatever she asked for. She asked for your head. We're to get it. Don't make this harder than it has to be. Just get on your knees."

the second point

Imagine what John thought

- what do you think John was thinking as he waited for the axe to fall?
 - "I thought the Kingdom was really coming"
 - "I thought Jesus really was the messiah"
 - "I'm so glad I get to die for standing up for what Jesus said; in fact I really can't imagine a better reason to die today"
 - "I wonder what Jesus will say when he hears about today"
 - Jesus: "no greater man has ever lived"
- do you believe that John's death was a defeat?
 - think about a death we've experienced in the church family over the last few years **[[]]** was it a defeat or a victory?

1 John 5 ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 Corinthians 15 ⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Romans 8 ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be[□] against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.[□] ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

the third point

Imagine what you'll do

- ISIS beheadings on Libyan coast [Ppt](#)
- Jack Phillips and Masterpiece Cake Shop [Ppt](#)
- probably haven't had to deal with that kind of persecution...
 - loss
- if you haven't faced the loss of something or someone precious recently, just wait
 - illus** Joyce's head being cut on as I was laying out some basic parts of this sermon
- a lost and broken world, with death, sickness, suffering, grief, and loss constant realities
 - do you really believe what the Bible says?
 - just read extensively... those of you who know your Bibles... scores of promises
- the details of this story are important because Jesus has already taken his stand FOR natural marriage and AGAINST divorce and other damages and distortions to God's creative intent for man and woman and marital love back in the Sermon on the Mount (ch 5)
 - he will revisit the issue of marriage with even more clarity and conviction in what we now know as ch 19 of Matthew
 - almost like Jesus was doubling down on his moral teaching after John's execution for telling the unpopular truth to the most powerful people in Galilee
 - faithful followers of Jesus will stand by his teaching on marriage and morality even if it costs us our heads... or jobs... or friends... or tax-exempt status

the fourth point

Imagine why love tells people things that hurt them and anger them

- even more important to us than our tax-exempt status, or jobs, or friends, or family, or heads,
 - our conscience, our integrity, our obedience to Jesus' command to love
 - hard to imagine how John or Jesus or we could be loving when we say that people are sinning when they sleep with the people they love
- read what Jesus says about sex and marriage and divorce and desire in the Bible, esp Matthew 5, 19

- his teachings were what John spoke to Herod
- his teachings are strong and stark, and based firmly in the creation story itself in Genesis
- his teachings were hard for even his own disciples to wrap their heads around (Mat 19)
- his teachings were considered radical and subversive by other rabbis, as well
 - but his teachings were not harsh or abusive or cruel or hate-filled
- Jesus believed that what he was saying about sex and marriage and divorce and desire were good for people, and would tend in the direction of health and wholeness and holiness and love
 - both for individual people and for whole communities and cultures
 - and his disciples believed the same thing about what he taught

1 John 5 ¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

1 Corinthians 13 ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

- why does love tell people the truth they don't want to hear? because it's love
- **illus** why love asks us to ask people to wear a mask and keep their distance... why love asks John to pay a guy to cut a hole in his wife's skull and take out part of her brain

conclusion

- Liberty grads: ignorant homophobic racists
- Liberty Baptist College... Keith Green

Well, I pledge my head to heaven for the gospel,
And I ask no man on earth to fill my needs.
Like the sparrow up above, I am enveloped in his love,
And I trust him like those little ones, he feeds.

Well I pledge my wife to heaven, for the gospel,
Though our love each passing day just seems to grow.
As I told her when we wed, I'd surely rather be found dead,
Than to love her more than the one who saved my soul.

Well I pledge my son to heaven for the gospel.
Though he's kicked and beaten, ridiculed and scorned.
I will teach him to rejoice, and life a thankful praising voice,
And to be like him who bore the nails and crown of thorns.

Well I pledge my son, I pledge my wife, I pledge my head to heaven,
I pledge my son, I pledge my wife, I pledge my head to heaven, for the gospel.

- particularly appropriate that we talk about this story and this challenge on this holiday: Fathers' Day
 - dads: if the father in the family is not willing to stand up and tell the truth, where will the rest of the family go?
 - dads: what are you willing to stand for? What are you willing to take a fall for? Even if what is falling is your head?
 - family: when Dad takes a stand that's biblical and right, will you stand with him?
- what does it take to truly take your stand with Jesus?

- turn from your sin and yourself to God and his glory
 - trusting in Christ's sacrifice for your sins to make you right with God
- shelter yourself in the shadow of his cross
- bathe yourself in the blood that he shed there for you
- robe yourself in his righteousness
- hide yourself in his holiness
- rest yourself on his redemption
- renew yourself in his resurrection
- lose yourself in his lordship
- find yourself in his friendship

He will become for you wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and salvation.