

PRAY FOR NEW MEMBERS (22 new members) – October 2nd

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning, Fathom Church!

Hey, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Matthew chapter 3.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to Matthew 3,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
 - under every single chair.
 - You'll find Matthew 3 on page **808**.

We're gonna start there and flip a bit through Matthew's gospel.

A big welcome to our friends and family joining us online!

- You can click that bible tab on your screen to find Matthew 3.

INTRODUCTION

Well, the section of text we are in today is an interesting one.

- We are at a turning point in Matthew's gospel
- where Jesus is moving from being very popular,
 - to being rejected,
- which will ultimately lead to what we just saw in Holy Week...
 - his betrayal, crucifixion, and death.

But last week's passage, and this week's passage, are what are known as rejection narratives.

- Last week one of our elders, Eric Shelly,
- brought the story of Jesus' rejection in his hometown...

- and listen,
- I think Eric did just a terrific job with that text last week.
 - Man, it is so kind of God
 - to give us other guys at Fathom
 - who can bring us God's Word faithfully! **GIFT**

But last week, Jesus was rejected at Nazareth...

- and this week is a strange little story about a beheading,
 - so...spoiler alert...
 - there's a beheading today.

So, I'm calling this sermon **SLIDE OFF WITH HIS HEAD**

DISCLAIMER

And I want to start today with something of a disclaimer...

- if you're looking for the feel-good sermon of the year...
- this isn't it.

Our text today features a beheading...

- but there's also incest...
- and adultery...
 - so, yeah, it's not so great.

And in order that today's passage just isn't a complete downer,

- I want to pad some of the more upsetting parts of this story
- with some pallet cleansers.

I heard another pastor do this, so I thought I'd give it a try.

- Think of these like bumpers in a bowling alley
- that will keep us from falling into the gutters.

So, let's try an example, ok?

"The Bible actually has some truly horrific stuff in it. Another beheading:

- *like when David defeated Goliath...*
 - which interestingly enough,
 - is a story we love to tell our Children AT BEDTIME!
- *But when the young boy David kills Goliath...*
- *he then draws out the giant's own sword,*
- *and cuts off his head...*
- *and then carries that head around with him for a while."*

That's pretty horrific!

SLIDE Here's a picture of a dog dressed up like a unicorn. [PAUSE]

- See?
- It's not as bad.

BLANK SLIDE

TRANSITION

Alright, so we'll be fine. Let's get after it.

We'll start in Matthew 3 and make our way to our text in Matthew 14.

- But let's start with a little recap
- about what we know about John the Baptist.

Matthew chapter 3. Starting in verse 1

MATTHEW 3:1-3

[1] In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness

of Judea, [2] “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [3] For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’”

EXPLAIN: JOHN

So, John the Baptist was a very important figure!

- Like Jesus,
 - he was prophesized about in the Old Testament...
- like Jesus,
 - his birth was foretold by angels...
 - the great significance of his life
 - was made known to his parents
 - before he was born.
- And like Jesus,
 - even his birth was miraculous
 - because his parents were old and barren!

And his role was clear:

- He was the forerunner to the Messiah.
- His job was to **prepare the way of the Lord.**
- He was to herald the coming of the kingdom and the king.
 - And he did it.
 - He did his job.

So, skip down to verse 13...where Jesus shows up on the scene.

MATTHEW 3:13–15

[13] Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. [14] John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” [15] But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.

EXPLAIN: JOHN KNOWS

So, John recognizes Jesus to be the one for whom he had been preparing the way! The Messiah!

In fact, in another gospel,

- upon seeing Jesus approaching,
- John says, *“Behold, the Lamb of God,*
- *who takes away the sins of the world!”*

So, John the Baptist knew Jesus was the Messiah.

But turn the page to Matthew chapter 4 verse 12. It says this:

MATTHEW 4:12

[12] Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

TRANSITION

So, John the Baptist is arrested. At this point we don’t know why.

- And as is the pattern for many of the followers of Jesus
 - in the New Testament:

- even John the Baptist,
 - who knows that Jesus is Messiah,
- gets confused when things do not go the way he expected.

Turn to Matthew chapter 11...look at verses 2 & 3.

MATTHEW 11:2-3

[2] Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples [3] and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

EXPLAIN: DOUBT

So, this is John the Baptist's moment of confusion and doubt.

In questioning Jesus, he's really asking, "*How did I end up here?*"

Because John had faithfully followed Jesus.

But Jesus hadn't lived up to what he thought the Messiah would be.

- Jesus hadn't overthrown the oppressors.
- Jesus didn't seem to be preparing a revolution at all.
- Rome continued to rule.
- Israel continued to suffer.
 - Where was the king?
 - Where was the kingdom John had preached about?

And now John's in prison.

And his faith has wavered.

POINT 1

And it's here I want to make my first point:

If you follow Jesus...

SLIDE YOU MIGHT NOT END UP WHERE YOU THOUGHT

Listen, Jesus will often

- confound,
- confuse,
- and sometimes even disturb...
- even those who believe in him.

You see, if I'm writing the story of John the Baptist,

- and I see his life as the forerunner,
- and then his humility to step out of the spotlight
 - when Jesus comes on the scene.

My mind says:

- Alright! Well done, John!
- Well done, good and faithful servant.
- Now, enter into the good life.

Like, John should get an early retirement.

- And John should meet a beautiful Israelite honey.
- And John should marry her and have wonderful children.
 - And have a nice house.
 - With a couple of camels.
 - And maybe a shop where he sells organic locust and honey bars...
 - you know, make a living off the hippy-dippy crowd.

- Maybe camel-hair clothing...
 - becomes the hot fashion trend of the season!

That's how I think John's story should end.

BUT IT'S NOT.

- While the very man he prepared the way for
- starts ministering to the crowds
- who once had followed him...
 - John ends up rotting in prison.

SLIDE Here's a picture of some cute and fluffy cows. [PAUSE]

BLANK SLIDE

TRANSITION

If you follow Jesus, YOU MIGHT NOT END UP WHERE YOU THOUGHT.

Now, we haven't even gotten to our text yet.

- But that's the last we've heard about John the Baptist
- in Matthew's gospel.
- Until today...

So, flip to Mathew 14...starting in verse 1.

- Now, an interesting fact is
 - this is the only story
 - in Matthew's gospel
 - where Jesus is not present.

MATTHEW 14:1-2

[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.”

EXPLAIN: DEAD?

So, if you’re reading this for the first time...

- this is something of a sucker punch.

Without any explanation,

- Matthew just brings up the fact
- that John the Baptist is now dead.

So, it’s like, well, what the heck happened? Look at verse 3:

MATTHEW 14:3–4

[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.”

EXPLAIN: THE HERODS

Ok, so this is a flashback all the way back to Matthew chapter 4, where John is arrested. Now we find out why he was arrested.

So, let’s do a little work on this guy, Herod the tetrarch. Ok?

This is Herod Antipas.

He is the son of Herod the Great.

- Herod the Great,
 - if you remember the Christmas story,

- was the one who,
 - after the wise men did not return
 - and report on finding Jesus,
- had all of the baby boys under 2-years-old...
- in Bethlehem slaughtered...
- because he was nervous about losing his throne.

On top of that,

- Herod the Great had his brother-in-law
- and mother-in-law executed.
 - And some of you are like,
 - “well, you haven’t met my mother-in-law.”
- But then he had his second wife executed.

This is a dysfunctional family!

But this is Herod the tetrarch...his son.

- Now, Herod the Great was the king of the region.
- But after his death, the region was split to be ruled by his sons.
 - And there were promises from Augustus Caesar
 - That one of the sons would be made king
 - if they ruled well...
 - but none of them ever did.

And John’s critique of Herod the tetrarch was because

- Herod had actually had an affair with,
 - and then married,
- his brother’s wife,
- Herodias.

This is a direct violation of the Torah, which reads, **"None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to have sexual relations. I am YAHWEH."**

Which seems simple enough!

- But Herod had divorced his first wife...
- had an affair with his sister-in-law...
- and then married her.

And this was such a big deal,

- that the father of Herod's first wife,
- went to war against him,
- and defeated him...
- but he was saved when the Romans intervened.

So, everyone knew about this stuff. It was in all the Israelite tabloids.

And John starts calling him out on this,

- which is John's M.O.
- He calls Israel to repentance.

And this isn't good for Herod the tetrarch,

- who wants to become Herod the king,
- because he needs to have good relationships with the Jews
 - in order for that to happen.

So, he had John put in prison to silence him.

Verse 5:

MATTHEW 14:5–6

[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,

EXPLAIN: BIRTHDAYS

Now, birthdays were pagan celebrations in the ancient world.

- Men would often hold a banquet
- where they would eat and drink.
- And they would hire a prostitute
- who would perform erotic dances...
 - or worse...
- to entertain the men.

But this story is particularly twisted,

- because the one dancing is actually Herod's stepdaughter,
 - who is also his niece,
- and scholars think she was likely 12 or 13 years old.

And the text says that she pleased Herod.

So, this is not good. It's very icky.

SLIDE Here's a chipmunk drinking from a teacup. [PAUSE]

BLANK SLIDE

And the story actually gets worse.

MATTHEW 14:6b-8

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.”

EXPLAIN

So,

- the 12-year-old stepdaughter/niece,
 - after her strip-tease,
- is offered a gift by her drunk stepfather/uncle.

She doesn't know what to ask for,

- so she goes to her mother, Herodias,
 - who has been publicly humiliated by John.
- And she asks for his head. OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

But remember, Herod wants John alive...

- because he wants the favor of the Jews...
- so he can become king.

So, what's he going to do? Verse 9:

MATTHEW 14:9–12

[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.

EXPLAIN: JOHN'S DEATH

So, John the Baptist...

- the cousin of Jesus Christ.
- Prophesized about in the Old Testament.
- The miracle child.
- The one who baptized Jesus
- The one who prepared the way...

Hears the noises of a party filled with drunkenness and debauchery from the dungeons.

- And Herod is there,
- and his mistress is there,
- and a scantily clad teenage girl.

And there's no earthquake that miraculously opens the prison doors.

Like with the Apostle Paul...

And there's no angel who shows up to walk John out of prison...

Like with the Apostle Peter...

No...into the dungeon walks the executioner...

- and John's head is pushed down onto a chopping block...
- and he takes out his sword...
- and cuts off the head of John the Baptist...
- puts it on a plate...
- and brings it to a 12-year-old girl...
- all to the cheers of the drunken party-goers.

And thus ends the life of the one Jesus called, the greatest among those born of women.

So, once more, just to make you feel better:

SLIDE here's a picture of my daughter as a newborn. [PAUSE]

POINT 2

But it's here I want to make my second point.

If you follow Jesus **SLIDE YOU WILL BE REJECTED**

- YOU MIGHT NOT END UP WHERE YOU THOUGHT...
- And YOU WILL BE REJECTED.

Scholars point out that

- John's death is a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus, himself.
- But it also provides a theological framework
 - for what all of God's people can expect
 - if they faithfully follow Jesus.

Jesus doesn't get John out of prison...

- Instead, John dies there...
- because of a drunken and incestuous lap dance.
- And his disciples have to care for his decapitated body.

This is a disgraceful story!

But one question is, why did Matthew include this story in the middle of his gospel?

- Is it just to wrap up John's story?
- No. I don't think so.

Most scholars don't believe that Matthew would waste words like that.

- Every point has a point.
- And the point is this:

- passive pushback to Jesus...
- is now becoming hostile rejection.

And if this is what happens to...

- the one who prepares the way for the long-awaited messiah...

Then what will happen to the messiah himself?

- And furthermore,
 - what will happen to those
 - who claim allegiance to...
 - and follow the messiah?

YOU WILL BE REJECTED.

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APPLICATION

And I think you and I have been anesthetized to this reality...

- mostly because of the western American culture
- we have been born into.

Though, I do think we are starting to see this more and more.

No, it is unlikely that you will be imprisoned or even killed for your allegiance to Jesus.

- But the kingdom message of Jesus
- is at odds with the ways of our world
- just as much as it has ever been!

There is still a price to pay for following Jesus in our cultural moment.

- A Christian commitment to racial equality
 - is seen by some as liberal wokeness,
 - rather than a Biblical reality of the kingdom.
- A Christian commitment to being pro-life
 - from conception to the grave
 - is now considered by many as an affront to women
 - and their civil rights.
- A Christian commitment to care for the poor and marginalized
 - is seen by some as Marxist or communism.
- And a Christian commitment to a Biblical sexual ethic,
 - which used to be weird and old-school to some,
 - is now considered a barrier to progress
 - and even hateful.

And maybe most apparent of all, the exclusivity as Jesus being...

- the only way...
- the only truth...
- and the only life.
- That no one comes to God, except by him!?!)

That is an affront to modern sensibilities.

That could get you killed.

TRANSITION

Listen, being a faithful follower of Jesus

- is not a means to popularity and status...
- YOU WILL eventually BE REJECTED.

POINT 3

So, those are the first 2 points: if you follow Jesus...

- YOU MIGHT NOT END UP WHERE YOU THOUGHT
- And YOU WILL BE REJECTED

But my last point is this:

If you follow Jesus...

SLIDE YOU WILL BE TEMPTED TO SOFTEN THE BLOW

Just like I kept putting up those cute pictures, this is the temptation for us as Christians.

- In light of the disturbing,
 - and difficult,
 - and even confusing parts of following Christ...
- we can be tempted to superficially sprinkle some sugar on top.

But I want to caution us against this.

- Trite Christian answers...
- mundane platitudes...
- and niceties are not where our hope is found.

EXPLAIN: TRAGEDY

The question to ask of this story is this: who is the tragic figure in our text?

- Is it John the Baptist?
- Or is it Herod
 - and Herodias
 - and her daughter
 - and the drunken hoards at the party?

I'm telling you, church,

- our temptation to think of John
- as the one getting the short end of the stick
- is so telling of our view on life and death.

One commentator said this: *"Those who murdered John are far more pitiable than is John himself. In this instance, to be 'dead' is more blessed than to be 'alive'; for the one murdered truly lives, while those who murdered him are in reality the dead."*

EXPLAIN: ESCHATOLOGY

Now, there's a nice big theological term for this.

- We call it an "over-realized eschatology"

Eschatology is the study of final or ultimate things.

It's the study of what happens at the end of all things.

- So, an over-realized eschatology
 - is when someone expects
 - that the end hope of Christianity
 - is already here and now.

That this world IS where our ultimate hope is found!

And how many of us FUNCTIONALLY live like this life is all there really is?!?

Cause if that's the case...then the death of John IS the tragedy.

But it's not!

- This world is not the end.
- The Christian hope is not in this life...
 - but in the life to come!

Now, we can overcorrect, and form an under-realized eschatology...

- which is when we don't appreciate our lives here on this earth...
- and everything in this life is relegated as unimportant...

And that's just as problematic!

But, we don't need to soften the blow!

- Even in when life doesn't go the way we thought it would...
- or we are rejected because of our faith...
- the Christian's ultimate hope is not in this life!

BLANK SLIDE

ILLUSTRATION: BLINDSPOT

There's an illustration I have used for this before, but it's been like 4 years since I've told it, so I'm using it again.

I have a thing for binge watching intense crime action shows.

- Now, there are some good ones, like 24.
- And then there are some not-so-good-ones,
 - like just about everything else.

And one of the not-so-good-ones was a show called Blindspot.

It's out of date now, but has anyone seen this thing? *It's pretty bad!*

Here's the premise:

- a mysterious tattooed woman is found by the FBI,
- with no recollection of her own past or her own identity.

But, they discover that her tattoos contain clues

- to crimes they will have to solve...
- And then...they just kill a whole bunch of people.

That's pretty much it. Right?!? It's actually every action show.

But the main FBI agent is a guy named Kurt Weller.

- Strong name...one-syllable, two-syllable name.
- That's the code, ok?
 - Jack Bauer...
 - Kurt Weller...
 - Chris Martin!

So, I'm watching season 2 on Netflix,

- because season 3 was playing live on TV...

And in the finale of season 2:

- a terrorist gets some nuclear material...
 - and is looking to destroy the entire Eastern seaboard.
- And the only way to stop this from happening...
 - is to take out a beacon that's controlling the nuke.
- And the beacon is on a plane headed right for the White House,
 - So, the FBI is trying to take that plane down.

Script-writing gold!

So, Kurt Weller is like,

- *"How much time do you need to take the plane down?"*

And the FBI guy is like,

- *"I need 15 minutes!"*

And Weller's like,

- *"We don't have 15 minutes!*
- *In 15-minutes we'll all be dead!*
- *I'm going in on my own."*

And so, he goes in...on his own...

- And he's fighting the terrorist in hand-to-hand combat,
- but come to find out,
- the beacon is actually inside the body of the terrorist.
- And if Weller kills her, it'll go off.

Is this a safe place for me to confess that I like this kind of stuff?

And so, I'm watching...and my heart's pumping...and I'm thinking,

- there's no way out...
- the whole east coast is going to be destroyed,
- but more importantly, Kurt Weller is going to die!
 - And I've got sweaty palms,
 - and my heart rate is up...
 - in my living room...
 - eating a bag of chips...
 - with my stretchy pants on...

When all of a sudden...I stop!

and I think...

- Wait!
- This is season 2...
 - and everyone's watching season 3 live right now...
- and I saw the preview!
 - with Kurt in it...
- Kurt wins!

And I just calmly watched the rest of the scene.

Now, just so you know:

- Weller uses a defibrillator on the terrorist,
- torching the beacon inside her,
- crisis is averted.

BLANK SLIDE WITH PADS

ENDING

But this is what you've gotta know about following Jesus...

- We're only in season 2...
- But season 3 is coming!

So, this is a disturbing story. And I don't want to bait-and-switch you here:

It teaches us that if you faithfully follow Jesus...

- YOU MIGHT NOT END UP WHERE YOU THOUGHT
- YOU WILL BE REJECTED
- And YOU WILL BE TEMPTED TO SOFTEN THE BLOW.

But our hope is not in this world!

- It's not in sugar coating our experiences!

Jesus calls his followers to come and die.

And woe to us if we try to paint the faith in any other way!

BUT THERE IS HOPE!

And it's so much better than anything this life has to offer!

So, let me quote Jesus to close our time today:

SLIDE MATTHEW 10:26–28

[26] “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. [27] What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. [28] And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

God help us to believe this!

Let’s pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Carson, D.A. Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary.
- Osborne, Grant R. Matthew: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.
- Porter, Josh. *Severed Heads and Phony Kings*.
- Strauch, Alex. *The King Begins to Withdraw*.