

# Faithful unto Death

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 October 2023

Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Engage together in time of prayer. Lord, we come before you this day and we humble ourselves down once more before you. We thank you for the gifts that we have, the gift of this time together, the good gift of fellowship one with another, the good gift of this time especially coming before you, a holy God who sees us and who knows us, who has set your love upon your people.

Help us this time to put our hearts and our minds. Help us to focus them on you. Again, we come to this place even this day. We come to this place and we are so aware that there are so many burdens, there are so many worries, there are so many issues and distractions and concerns which are taking our minds and our hearts away from you just now.

Help us, Lord, for this short time together, for this short time around your word. Help us to truly listen to your word. Help us to truly engage in it. Help us to enjoy it.

Help us to find real joy in hearing your word read and explained to us. Help us, Lord, this day to leave this place having not just grown in intellect or understanding, but having grown truly in our love for Jesus, in our concern and care for the lost, in our own perhaps concern for our own souls, as we see ourselves as of yet not having all that we need to know and have to be saved.

That knowledge of Jesus, that love for Jesus. We thank you once more for the boys and the girls. We thank you for them. We thank you for our Sunday school. We thank you, Lord, once more for the teachers who are sacrificial in their time in terms of serving you for them in the Sunday school.

[ 1 : 5 0 ] Lord, you bless them, we ask. You would encourage them as they do the essential grounding work of giving in the young years the true gospel to the boys and the girls.

Before they grow up, perhaps, and grow too old to listen, Lord, they are still keen to hear and still keen to listen. We thank you for them, Lord, for their inquiring minds.

We thank you for them, for their willingness to listen. We thank you for their engagement. We ask that all they would learn about you, Lord, would sink into their hearts.

And perhaps one day, if not soon, then in the future, one day they would think on these things properly for themselves. They would go through your word for themselves. And they would see their need for a saviour.

And with that, they would see a saviour's provision for them. Pray the same for everyone here this day. Lord, for our dear friends here who have gathered with us day after day and week after week, Lord's day after Lord's day, who have gathered in this place over many years and many decades and have a real interest in your things, a real interest in your words, but who as of yet cannot say truly that they know nor love Jesus.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] We ask that even today you would open their hearts and open their eyes to your word. They would be able to say that they are together with family in this place. We pray the same for our brothers and sisters next door.

We pray for them as they are built up today in your word, as they are built up through the preaching and singing of it. Lord, we do ask, Lord, for days of togetherness.

We ask weekly, Lord, but we keep asking. We know we cannot make it happen. We know it's not possible for us. But if it's your will, we leave it with you. If it's your will, Lord, we do ask for days of togetherness, denomination with denomination.

We can see perhaps no way forward with that just now, humanly speaking. But these things are not impossible to you. In the meantime, help us to serve you well in this place.

Help us as two denominations to serve you well in Tolstoy. To be salt and to be light. We confess we come just now to you, perhaps this week, having failed and having fallen short of our calling.

[ 4 : 06 ] Having fallen short of our duty to be salt and light, to be ambassadors, to be witnesses. In our efforts, in our words, in our actions, we have not declared the risen Saviour.

We ask us, Lord, we ask you, Lord, once more, to give us gospel opportunities this new week. Give us a chance once more to proclaim the risen Saviour. Give us a chance once more to talk about his beauty, his wonder, his glory, his holiness.

Talk about his provision of forgiveness for all who come to him. We come just now, Lord, understanding that we live in peaceful days for ourselves here.

We have such security and such safety in this village. We remember just now our persecuted friends and our persecuted brothers and sisters, those who we will spend eternity with, but who this very moment are facing real danger.

Who are being hounded out of their homes, out of their churches, out of their villages, for daring to proclaim the gospel. We pray once more for central and northern India, Lord, for the situation that is ongoing there with your people.

[ 5 : 16 ] Lord, you know the details and you know the names and the villages concerned, but we leave that situation with you. Those who have lost homes, who have lost family homes, who have lost their church buildings, who have lost their friends and family members, through the killing of those who are so opposed to the gospel, they're willing to kill even your precious people.

We give you praise, Lord, that even in death, that even in death and even in murder, that your people are a witness to you. That you can use that situation to bring even the murderers to your glory and to your side.

We know that to be the case for we see that in Scripture. Even that apostle who once breathed out threats and murder against your church, you transformed and changed. You saved that man, that man of sin, that man of evil.

You changed his life and became a glowing witness for you. We ask the same would be said for those who persecute your church today, that they who try and put a stop to the gospel, would themselves be transformed and changed to that very same gospel.

We know where, Lord, we live in a world that is so sick of sin, where sin has permeated every part of this world. We see it in ourselves, in our own lives, but we see it today, especially internationally.

[ 6 : 39 ] We do pray, Lord, for the situation we find in Israel and in surrounding areas. Lord, you alone know that the complications and the specifics, but we see life and loss of life.

We see injury and pain. We see disaster. We hear and see the cries of those who have been injured for life, those who have lost loved ones and who are losing them at this very moment.

Lord, as the rockets fall, as attacks are taking place, at this very second, Lord, we take to you just now. We can do nothing here. We feel our uselessness. We feel our smallness.

We bring just now before you that conflict. Lord, we can do nothing. The nations of the earth themselves seemingly can do nothing. You are in full sovereign control.

I pray, Lord, for those just now who are crying out, those who are in pain, those who are in misery, those who are seeing the full evil of humanity, the mindless killing.

[ 7 : 44 ] As we bring before you the situation, Lord, in the Middle East, we also bring before you once more the situation in Ukraine. As we see more mindless killing day by day. As more rockets land there too.

As more homes and innocent people's lives are destroyed. Lord, we come to each now, we say, we have no words. We have no words and no way to understand the destruction and the greed and the evil of man.

You see all these things and you know all these things. These situations are not a surprise to you. Lord, we know that both in Gaza and in Israel, in Ukraine and in Russia, that you have your people there.

We do pray for your people across the borders, across the man-made lines of this world. We do pray for your people as they join together, perhaps even today, to raise their voices and worship to you from home and from church and from various places.

As they join together, different sides, perhaps off the war, but united together in their love for a saviour. Lord, we know that your church goes across all the man-made boundaries, all the cultures and languages and colours and creeds of this world.

[ 9 : 00 ] That you have your people. And they are yours and you keep them and you love them. Help us understand that. We join together today with an international church. A church which is made up of many, many people.

A church which at this moment is praising your name across the world just now. And we here feature as just a small part of that church. That church whom you love.

Whom you gave your only begotten son for. That church you call your own. That church you have purchased with the precious blood of our saviour. Help us therefore to love our brothers and sisters around the world.

Brothers and sisters, we will never meet this side of eternity. But help us to remember them, to love them, to pray for them. Help us today ourselves here. In this small corner.

In this small part of this island. Help us to be soaked and light this new week. Help us to be faithful witnesses of the cause of the gospel in this place and at this time.

[ 10 : 05 ] We thank you for the work that they do.

As a word behind the scenes. For your honour and for your glory and for your sake. Pray the same Lord for all that has gone on behind the scenes here. Pray Lord for those involved in WFM.

We thank you for their work. They're oftentimes quiet, unknown hard work. Raising funds for the great many causes that WFM supports. Lord for all the good work that is done there.

Pray Lord for all that is planned to be done in the future. For studies and meetings and gatherings and fellowships. Lord you know all the plans. We leave all these plans with you. If you're not in it.

There is no point. If you're not in it. Then it will not prosper. If you're not in it Lord. We don't want to do it. We leave these plans with you. Give us wisdom and give us guidance we ask.

[ 11 : 17 ] We come today confessing sin. Confessing that we have fallen short of your perfection. We have fallen short of your holiness. We have this week and this day. We have gone against a holy God in our thoughts and our words.

Our very actions. We come just now confessing that sin before you. And saying that we have nothing in and of ourselves. We find all our hope and all our help in Christ and him alone.

For his sake. In his name we ask all these things. Amen. Let's read together. We're still studying of course in Mark. But we can read in Matthew this morning.

First of all. The gospel. According to Matthew. Chapter 14.

That's on page 769. Matthew 14. Page 769. Matthew 14.

[ 12 : 22 ] Let's hear the word of God. At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus. And he said to his servants.

This is John the Baptist. He's been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. For Herod had seized John. And bound him. And put him in prison.

For the sake of Herodias. His brother Philip's wife. Because John had been saying to him. It is not lawful for you to have her. And though he wanted to put him to death.

He feared the people. Because they held him to be a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came. The daughter of Herodias danced before the company. And pleased Herod.

So that he promised with an oath. To give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother. She said. Give me the head of John the Baptist.

[ 13 : 21 ] Here on a platter. And the king was sorry. But because of his oaths. And his guests. He commanded it be given. He sent. And had John beheaded.

In the prison. And his head was brought on a platter. And given to the girl. And she brought it to her mother. And the disciples came. And took the body.

And buried it. And they went and told Jesus. Now when Jesus heard this. He withdrew from there in a boat. To a desolate place. By himself. But when the crowds heard it.

They followed him on foot. From the towns. When he went ashore. He saw a great crowd. And he had compassion on them. And healed their sick. Now when it was evening. The disciples came.

And 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. But Jesus said.

[ 14 : 16 ] They need not go away. You give them something to eat. They said to him. We have only five loaves here. And two fish. And he said. Bring them here to me.

When he ordered the crowds. Sit down on the grass. And taking the five loaves. And the two fish. He looked up to heaven. And said a blessing. When he broke the loaves. And gave them to the disciples.

And the disciples gave them. To the crowds. And they all ate. And were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets. Full of broken pieces left over. And those who ate. Were about five thousand men.

Besides women and children. Immediately. He made the disciples. Get into the boat. And go before him. To the other side. While he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds.

He went up on the mountain. By himself to pray. When evening came. He was there alone. But the boat by this time. Was a long way. From the land. Beaten by the waves.

[ 15 : 15 ] For the wind was against them. And on the fourth watch of the night. He came to them. Walking on the sea. When the disciples. Saw him walking on the sea. They were terrified.

And said it's a ghost. And they cried out in fear. But immediately. Jesus spoke to them. Saying take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. And Peter answered him.

Lord. If it is you. Command me to come to you. On the water. He said come. So Peter got out of the boat. And walked on the water. And came to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind. He was afraid. And beginning to sink. He cried out. Lord save me. Jesus immediately reached out his hand. And took hold of him.

Saying to him. O you. Of little faith. Why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat. The wind ceased. And those in the boat. Worshipped him. Saying.

[ 16 : 09 ] Truly. You are the son. Of God. Amen. We give praise to God. For his holy. And his. Perfect. Word. Let's again sing.

This time again. From a Scottish psalter. From Psalm 113. A Scottish psalter. Psalm 113. Psalm 113.

Psalm 113. Psalm 113. Psalm 113. Psalm 113. Psalm 113. Psalm 113. Psalm 113.

Sing the whole psalm. Praise God. Ye servants of the Lord. O praise. The Lord's name praise. Yea. Blessed be the name of God. From this time forth always. From rising sun.

To where it sits. God's name is to be praised. Above all nations. God is high. Above heavens. His glory. Raised. Psalm 113. To God's praise.

[ 17 : 04 ] Christ. Here it is. Hail. Hear. Of the heavens. Who's for the heavens. ole your face. Dia \$■700. Lord. difference.

Chaum. So gold. O praise the Lord. quote. The Absolutely. In peace. The love of Him. In peace. Give us. He blessed be the name of all, the best time for all things.

From rising sun to where He says, God's kindness to be blessed.

advisor God is high, that best his holy grace.

But to the Lord have brought thy place, all thy good count on him.

[ 18 : 39 ] And so what I'm left to see, in heaven, not earth, without God.

The Lord have brought thy place, all thy good count on him.

And from the young hermeister man, O Christ will the Father be.

But if they hide in the mountains, I will have been set.

With those that thought there was the same, I will have found the amen to ■■■■teraiden.

[ 20 : 11 ] The fire, the moon, the fire, to thee, in the land, to thee, of sun, sun, the full of joy.

This will the Lord give me. Chapter 6, we reach to verse 14 of the chapter.

We're looking at the section of verse 14 down to verse 29. I guess for the sake of a text, we can take the words of verse 14.

Of course, last week we saw and we left Jesus sending out the disciples.

We saw the principles for evangelism that gave us. This is almost, we could say, an interlude in the account that Mark gives us.

[ 21 : 57 ] So the disciples have gone out. And whilst they're out, Mark takes this chance to remind the reader, or to tell the reader, what has happened since to John the Baptist.

Because we see that when the disciples come back in verse 30, they come back to Jesus. At this point, Jesus has been told, as we read in Matthew, of the death of John the Baptist.

And that's important to the next section. So Mark takes this time, as did Matthew also, to just give us a summary of what's happened to John.

What's happened to John? We saw him at the baptism of Christ. We saw that point. But now we see him here in prison. So a small summary then, Mark gives us these few verses from verse 14 down to verse 29.

As a summary of what's happened to John the Baptist. In summary, perhaps for our title, we could say this section tells us about the death of a righteous man.

[ 23 : 07 ] There is, friends, much evil in this account today. There are parts of this story. And perhaps we're so used to hearing it. We're so used to reading about it.

This is a story, this is an account which contains so much evil. So much sin. And we'll dig down into that in a second. Perhaps we don't realise just how bad it is.

Not just because we're familiar, but because you have to go slowly and see where the sin is. There is sin here at every single level of this account. Against all the sin and all the evil, we see John, this righteous man.

This faithful man. Faithful to the very end of his life. And that's our hope this day. As we see the faithfulness of John the Baptist. We see it contrasted against the darkness and the pain and the evil going on around him.

And just to encourage us. We live in a dark day. We live in a hard day. Again, since yesterday, we see new warfare breaking out.

[ 24 : 15 ] New evil taking part. And even the last few days, there has been some real evil in this world. Some real vicious, evil, sinful things taking place in this world.

Nothing's changed. How do we as Christians interact with that? How do we understand that? And how do we keep serving the Lord even in the midst of that?

We have a short time we have just looking at the four, I say characters. They are real people. But for the sake of our time, the four characters, the four people we see in the account.

First of all, we see a good and faithful man. Which is, of course, John the Baptist. A good and faithful man. Then we see a weak and evil man.

Then we see a weak and evil man. Herod. Then we see a ruthless woman. Herodias. And finally, we see a helpless girl. Herodias' daughter, Salome.

[ 25 : 16 ] And we'll cover that later on. First of all, a good and faithful man. John the Baptist. We know his story.

We've preached before and you've heard preached before me, I'm sure, plenty of times before in John the Baptist. We won't give too much of a summary. But just to remind ourselves, his was a life of constant service.

We know that even before he was born, as he jumps for joy, as he moves around in his mother's womb. We see John born to serve.

We see John born to be what he was. He was born to lead and proclaim the way before the coming Messiah.

He was born to be there as a witness for the one to come after him. He was there to prepare the people, to tell them they had to repent. For all their holiness and all their so-called perfection they found in their religion, it meant nothing if they didn't come to Jesus.

[ 26 : 25 ] John was there as a servant. He was there to serve the coming Savior. Even before that Savior became public, we could say, in his ministry, John is there serving him.

He's there preparing the way for him. It's also a life of waiting for Jesus. Now, of course, John knew and, of course, John's related, humanly speaking, to Jesus.

But he's waiting. He's 30 years waiting, preparing the way. He's a righteous man. He's a patient man. I don't know about yourselves, but I would struggle to spend 30 years of one job.

30 years of one purpose. 30 years of waiting. Knowing what was coming. He knew his job. He knew his purpose. But he had to wait these 30-odd years before Jesus became public in his ministry.

He's a faithful man. He's a patient man. And we see, well, of course, we see is there at the baptism of Christ. So the question then is, what did John do afterwards?

[ 27 : 31 ] If John says, well, I must decrease and he must increase, what did John's life look like after he baptized Jesus until now? Well, the summary we have is John kept serving.

John kept preaching. John kept being faithful to God. And that faithfulness is what has landed him up now in this dungeon, in this prison cell below Herod's palace.

He is there because of his unwavering willingness to serve Jesus, no matter what the cost for him looked like. He was an honest man, a righteous man, a faithful man.

And he called out sin in a world where he saw it. He was honest about the world he lived in. He was honest about what God required of those who live in this world.

And because of that faithfulness, that honesty, because of that integrity, he is now in prison. He is now awaiting his end.

[ 28 : 36 ] We see that, of course, verses 17 and verse 18 of the section. John's in prison, we know, for a very simple reason.

For a very simple reason that is based on one of the most complicated family situations you'll ever hear about. We'll cover that more in a second. We have to cover it. It's the most complicated family situation.

But John's in prison because, in short, he refuses to compromise. He refuses to not give the truth.

Verse 17. There was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. Verse 18. For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

We might miss part of Scripture. John had been saying. John had been saying. And the grammar there is continuous.

[ 29 : 38 ] John is on and on again and again at the sin of the king, the sin of the ruler. He is saying to Herod, or he's proclaiming against Herod again and again, The thing you are doing, Herod, it is not good.

It is not right. Because John wouldn't shut his mouth. Because John wouldn't compromise. We now meet John, of course, in prison. He refuses to compromise on the simple God-given truth, even at the cost of his freedom and even, of course, at the cost of his life.

John was a simple, gospel-based, honest man. We perhaps forget, at least I tend to forget, these biblical people, they were also still real people.

No, John lived a life as John. He served the Lord well and he was out dressed in camel hair. We know that. But he was still John. He's still interactive people.

He still was a real, normal human. Always faults and failings. Always personality quirks and traits. We are sure of it. John lived a normal life in his context.

[ 30 : 53 ] Of course, he had extraordinary calling and he fulfilled that calling. But he was still just John doing it. John's a gospel-based, honest man.

He's a man, of course, known for his honesty. He's a man known for his holiness. We see that in verse 20, for his righteousness. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man.

They read in Matthew that Herod hated John. Here we see that Herod at times wanted to keep him safe. Why? Well, it seems that Herod was almost fascinated with John.

He was fascinated with this man who was so willing to go against the king. So willing to speak up and call out his sin. Herod seems to have a real fascination for him.

Almost a begrudging interest, a begrudging liking of him. He hates him, but he keeps him safe. That's not a contradiction in Scripture. That's a contradiction in Herod.

[ 31 : 55 ] Some days he hates him. Some days he wants to listen to him. John, I'm sure, is a fascinating man. John, I'm sure, was a fascinating man to have in your company and to listen to.

Until he starts reminding you of your sin once more. He's a man of holiness. But also, look at verse 20. John was an approachable man, it seems.

For Herod feared John. A righteous man, a holy man, he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed. And yet he heard him gladly.

John is honest, clearly. John seems to be quite blunt, clearly. But John is not unpleasant to be around. Herod heard him gladly.

Even when John is telling Herod he's in grave sin and must repent. John is doing it in such a way where even King Herod doesn't just kill him straight away.

[ 32 : 55 ] We know there's other reasons, but he could have, he wanted to. John is conducting himself in such a way where he is honest and speaking as a word, proof to power. But doing so with integrity and doing so with some spirit of gentleness, obviously.

Brothers and sisters, we can be honest. We can live life seeking to be holy. We can live life seeking to glorify and call the world around us to repentance. Yes, but if we are not affable people, we're not serving the Lord well.

Perhaps, and perhaps this was what was more prominent perhaps in years gone by, at least the church was seen as being this hard-nosed, just solemn, but not in a biblical sense, solemn in a worldly sense to our shame, just unapproachable, unreachable group of people.

And we see that. Brothers and sisters, I still feel that within their own context here, within their own village here. When I go out and talk to people, I'm in my shorts, I'm in my hoodie, I'm in my jeans.

People look at me as if I'm going to catechise them on the spot. That's not what we want to have, is it? That's not how we want to approach our village, how we want to approach our people. We want them to know that we love them.

[ 34 : 16 ] We care for them. John the Baptist spoke truth to power. He called to repentance the king himself, and still the king hears him gladly.

It kills him eventually. Up to that point, he hears him gladly. John was not unlikable. He was honest. He was eternally honest.

He was honest to his very death, it seems. But he was still approachable. Brothers and sisters, there's lots for us to learn there. The life of this great man of God, this holy man, this righteous man.

Two Greek words sum up his life. At the end of it, he was beheaded. In Greek, two words. There's no pomp, there's no ceremony.

His life ends like that. In some dingy, rat-infested, do you imagine it? Prison, hole, really, dungeon below the foundations, really, of Herod's palace.

[ 35 : 23 ] No family affair. No great occasion. On his own. Him the executioner. And John is killed in a second. His head is chopped off.

That is the end of this great man of God. Brothers and sisters, we see that John would lead the way for many more after him.

Thousands more after him. Who would live faithful lives. God-glorifying lives. To meet a quiet, horrifying end.

A holy man. A good man. A godly man. A faithful man. What about the weak man?



The weak and evil man, King Herod. Now, humanly speaking, King Herod, or Herod of the Tetrach, he was a good king. Politically, economically, he was a great king.

- [ 36 : 24 ] He did wonders for the region. Real incredible political mover. Real incredible strategist. He built buildings and aqueducts and did a whole range of city-wide and area-wide renovations.

The people loved him. He was a good king. But he's weak. Good, perhaps, in his outworking of his kingly duties.

But a weak man. An evil man. First of all, we see he is weak in his lust. Verse 17 and verse 22. In verse 17, we see the family dynamic.

For the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. Now, friends, brothers and sisters, here's where it gets complicated. And forgive me for reading.

I obviously try not to read my notes too much. But this is complicated. We have, of course, Herod and Herodias. We'll see.

- [ 37 : 32 ] That's not actually her name. That was a name given to all the female leaders. The female wives. The queens of the day. But anyway. Herod and Herodias.

Herod the tetrach. We have here his wife Herodias. Philip, his brother, was married first to Herodias.

Herodias and this Herod here have an affair, whilst Philip is away on battle. Now, we know this from secular sources. This is real history. We know this from multiple accounts of the time.

It was a scandal at the time. Josephus records this, as do other historians of the day. He has an affair with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

Philip is away battling. Philip is away doing his job. But it seems that this was a long-term thing. Because Philip, in history, puts up no fight, it seems.

- [ 38 : 34 ] He lets his brother have his wife. Herodias leaves Philip. Marries this Herod we have here.

Now, it gets a lot worse, though. It gets an awful lot worse. Herodias is the great-granddaughter of the granddaughter to Herod the Great.

Who is the father of this Herod. In essence, both Philip and this Herod here, they've both married their niece.

Herodias is Herod's niece. Herodias is Philip's niece. No half-relations, full-blooded niece. His lust is here.

He has happily stolen his brother's wife. At the same time, by doing so, he's married his own niece. The levels of sin are growing, aren't they? The levels of just, ugh, are growing.

- [ 39 : 39 ] Now, there's details that we can go into here that aren't suitable, perhaps, for a pulpit. But the history is so much more grim and complicated than this. But that's enough for us today. Safe to say this man is a lust-filled man.

A man who is weak in lust. We see that again, this time in verse 22. We see Herodias' daughter, who is Philip's daughter, his brother's daughter, is sent in to dance, to please Herod.

We'll see this more in a second. When Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. So much so, the king says to her, whatever you want, I'll give it to you, up to half my kingdom.

Without being too explicit, and again, we have this from historical sources, but it's implied in the text too, if you read it carefully. But I'll ask a question rather than give the answer, because the question answers the question.

Friends, brothers and sisters, what kind of dance do we think she was doing for the king? You know, it wasn't. We know from history the kind of dance these young girls were doing for royalty.

[ 40 : 52 ] How old is this daughter? How old is this girl? We know from history between 12 and 15 of the very oldest. She's 15 of the very oldest. Likely she was 14. The historians weren't quite sure at the time how old she was, but she's a young girl.

A young girl doing a certain type of dance for this room of rulers and rich, lustful, evil men. You see the image?

It's grim. It's very grim. This is the reality John is speaking into. These rich, powerful, lust-filled, evil men.

And John is saying to them, and he's saying to Herod, the thing you are doing is not good. He's also weak, as it were, in his place.

He's weak in himself. We see that in verse 26. Weak in his lust, but also weak in his standing. He can't but kill John.

[ 41 : 54 ] He doesn't want to kill John, but he has to kill him. Why? Because of the oath. Because of the oath of his guests. Because of the oath his guests heard him making.

He's a great king, a powerful king, a successful king, who's conquered nations and conquered areas, vast areas. But he's too embarrassed to go back on his word.

And because of the social embarrassment he might face, he's happy to kill John. He's happy to kill a man to avoid the embarrassment. He's happy to kill a man so his wife would be happy with him.

He's a weak man. Weak in his lusts. Weak in his place. An evil man. Who's finding pleasure and joy in the dancing of a young, a very young girl.

And this weak, evil man is, of course, accompanied by a ruthless woman. This woman, Herodias. As we said, this was not her name.

[ 42 : 58 ] Even in history, her name wasn't truly known. All the female accompaniments. And I say that carefully. They weren't queens because these kings had concubines and other various attachments.

They had whole harems, unfortunately. But this was the queen of sorts. And she was called Herodias. That was her title. Her real name is lost to history.

But she was called Herodias. That's how they called her. Dear friends, she was smart. She's no fool. Again, and we have to be careful here.

This is not in scripture. But in history, it's seen that her dealings moving from Philip to this Herod, it tells us something. That she's doing some kind of political dealing for herself.

She doesn't seem to be the victim here. She seems to be moving behind the scenes quite subtly, quite cleverly. We see that she is no fool. She's very smart in her dealings.

[ 43 : 57 ] She had the affair with this Herod, who was the smarter, the richer, the more successful of the two brothers. We see that also she demands, does she not?

She demands the king the death of John. Again, and again, and again. She wants to put him to death.

We see that again in the grammar. Verse 19. Herodias had a grudge against John and wanted to put him to death, but she could not. The grammar tells us, again, this is continuous. She demands and demands and demands that John be killed.

Just get rid of him. You can imagine Herod saying, maybe we aren't right. Maybe I shouldn't have taken you as my wife. Maybe you should have stayed with Philip. Maybe John's got a point.

Herodias says again and again, just kill him. Just kill him. Silence this man who is ruining our lives. Just get rid of him.

[ 45 : 00 ] But she could not get rid of him. This is a woman who is ruthless. Ruthless in our relationships. But also ruthless towards her own blood.

Do you think that Salome, that her daughter, that Herodias' daughter, went in to dance just because she fancied giving a dance to these old, rich, seedy men?

No. She's sent in, is she not? She came in and danced. There's not a second thought about her daughter dancing in the way she was dancing in front of these evil men.

She was doing something. She was doing some political wranglings behind the scenes. She knows what she's doing. And the second, the second her daughter comes back and says that the king has offered you whatever you want, there is not a second's pause, is there?

Not a second's pause. We see that. What should I ask for? Verse 24.

[ 46 : 36 ] Herod, this evil, weak man. His new wife, Herodias, this ruthless woman. It ends with the last character we could say here.

This helpless girl. Again, we aren't giving her name, but we know from history she was called Salome.

Again, this is recorded by Josephus, a well-regarded and well-accounted historian. His work is used to this day across all corners of historical work.

Josephus recorded things faithfully. He recorded things well. And he says that she was called Salome. Now, some commentators are quite harsh on Salome.

Quite harsh on this young girl. But when you read the text, when you think to yourself, she's 15 at the oldest, much likely more 14 or 13. But it's a young girl who we see as nothing more here than a pawn, a political pawn being used by those around her, the evil ones around her.

[ 47 : 47 ] She's dragged, first of all, into this new family. She's Philip's daughter, but she's dragged along to this new family with Herod and her mother. A new place, a new land, a new people.

She's dragged away from her home. Dragged away from her own family. When she is, she's dragged in front of men. Again, this is something we know that the daughters of the queens were trained to do at this time.

This was culturally happening. This is not just a one-off event. The queens' daughters were all trained. Of all the Herods, their wives' daughters were trained how to dance in a way that would please these evil men.

This is bad. This is dark. This is grim. But it's here in front of us. We have to address it. She's dragged in front of men. And then she is made to ask for the most horrendous thing.

A man's head freshly cut off on a platter. Grim. Really grim. Really dark stuff.

[ 49 : 00 ] Again, Scripture's honest. We solve this and we'll see it again this evening in the book of Judges. Scripture is honest. God paints a picture of us just as we are. Our own lusts drive us so far.

Our own ambitions drive us so far. Our own evilness and sin. It makes us do things we never thought we would do or think or say. And it gets worse actually.

For us, Salome's story ends here. But we know from history she was actually married off twice not long after this. She was married off very, very young in life to her half.

Well, to an uncle. He was an uncle of sorts to her. He was that level of relation to her. She was married off essentially to her uncle for a while.

And then after that she was married off to at least one other man. And as we think her life ended with him. That he killed her. That's not in Scripture.

[ 50 : 03 ] We have to be careful here. But it's in history. We know. Elise married off twice. Very young. And she died a very young woman. Her life. Used and abused.

Dragged around. This is a story where we see sin portrayed so clearly to us. All the levels. All the areas.

A sinful king. His ruthless wife. The poor daughter who is facing abuse. And who knows what at their hands.

This is the image of the world, isn't it? Turn on the news. And you see it. Brothers and sisters. It doesn't take kings and queens. This kind of abuse.

And this kind of sin and evil. It's happening on our own island. It's happening perhaps in our own village. We don't know. We live in a world that is so infected. And so caught up in sin. And the only glorious part of this story.

[ 51 : 01 ] Is the beauty of John the Baptist. And look how this account ends. All the sin. All the evil. All the darkness. And verse 29. This is John the Baptist's disciples.

When his disciples heard of it. They came. And took his body. And laid it in. A tomb. All the evil.

All the darkness. All the horror. And sin. It ends with John the Baptist. This faithful. Righteous. Godly. Man. Being taken away.

And laid. At least bodily laid. To rest. Friends. We live in a world that is sick with sin. And we know ourselves. And I'm sure some here know more than others.

The evil hasn't changed. How far we go. To display and carry out our evil desires. And thoughts. Hasn't changed. And our calling is.

[ 52 : 01 ] We must as a word be a John. In the face of such evil. We must be willing to live lives. That go in the face of sin. That go in the face of evil. And be willing to proclaim Jesus.

Gently. Carefully. In love. Yes. But still be willing to do so. Faithfully. And strongly. Whatever the cost. For John. That cost was his life.

We see John seems to go to that place. Quite happy. We see no word of resistance. Or struggle. In one sense. He is serving his Lord. Right to the end. And we pray that would be our story.

Because we live in a world. We're fortunate. We live in a society. We're fortunate. We aren't having the worries of death. And of beheadings. Of course. The brothers and sisters. Who do have these worries. And that's a different story altogether.

But we're still called to be faithful. We're still called to serve our Lord. No matter what the cost. Personally. Might be for us. And that's what we see. And learn. Of John.

[ 53 : 02 ] Contrasted against the darkness. And evil of this world. John shines. As a glorious example. Of a faithful witness. Of his faithful. Savior.

Let's put our heads in that. A word of prayer. Lord we come before you once more. We thank you once more. For your word. For the gift of it. For the wonder of it. We come confessing Lord. That we find ourselves.

We read these accounts once more. The level of evil in this world. The level of sin. And the level of pain and suffering. Lord help us to read this account. And to be reminded that even there.

In the depths of that palace. Where such evil going on. Where there was such darkness taking place. You had John there. Proclaiming your light.

Proclaiming your goodness. Proclaiming your truth. Give us Lord. We ask the strength. To be faithful witnesses. At home. At work. In places of study. Whatever it is you call us to be.

[ 53 : 58 ] To serve you. And to be yours. To be your disciples. Give us. We ask even. A sum of the strength of John. To faithfully proclaim the good news. No matter what the cost may be for us.

We ask these things. Thank you once more Lord. For the ones who. Who lead the praise week after week. Giving you praise for that. We can sing your praises back to you. Knowing the words we sing are yours.

And therefore. They are perfect. We ask these things. In and through Christ. And his perfect name's sake. Amen. Amen. Let's bring our time to a conclusion.

This morning we can sing. From Psalm 33. Scottish Psalter. Psalm 33. Psalm 33. Psalm 33.

On page 245. We'll sing just verses 1. Down to verse 5. Of the psalm. Psalm 33. Verses 1.

[ 54 : 59 ] Down to verse 5. These four stanzas. Ye righteous. In the Lord rejoice. It calmly is unright. That upright men. With thankful voice. Should praise the Lord of might.

Praise God with harp. And unto him. Sing with the psalter. Upon a tenstained instrument. Make ye sweet melody. Psalm 33. Verses 1 to 5.

To God's praise. selon her word. Amen.owing you a word. So yes. Listen, in the Lord rejoice.

In God■ gets unrighted. that the bright men with handful of eyes should praise the Lord Almighty.

With God with heart come down to Him, sing with us all to Him.

[ 56 : 12 ] Upon a fancy dissonant, make this great melody a new song to us sing as King Almighty at the Lord Almighty with the light still submit to His■ To Christ as cover all His To be continued...

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, both of you now and forevermore. Amen.