

What to Do When You Are Rejected

Matthew 14:1-21

Nobody likes being rejected. Perhaps some people struggle with it more intensely and some people have experienced it more frequently, but nobody likes it. To the contrary, the temptation that many of us feel is the temptation to be liked, always. It is the desire to gain approval. The goal of being accepted. None of that is necessarily wrong, but those normal and natural insecurities often produce sinful behavior in the usually fruitless attempt to gain the approval of those who seem to withhold it.

Paul puts the danger this way,

Gal. 1:10 “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

So ultimately, it’s one or the other. In your own life, the goal is either one or the other, to seek the approval of men or to seek the approval of God. Ultimately, it can’t be both. You have to choose whom you will serve, whose approval you will seek. And if you choose God, that might well mean that you will be rejected by men. So the question is, “What should you do when you are rejected?”

I’ll answer that question this afternoon by describing what Jesus did, as our text is a description of Jesus’ response to the rejection he experienced. The parables we have studied in past weeks highlighted the separation between those who believed him and those who rejected his teaching, and Matthew chapter 13 ended with that emphasis upon rejection.

v.57 “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.” 58 Now He did not do many mighty works

there because of their unbelief.”

Chapter 14 continues with that theme, though now with the rejection of Herod the Tetrarch.

I. A SEVERE EXAMPLE OF REJECTION.

A very brief historical lesson, to set this in context. There were many Roman rulers that went by the name of “Herod,” and this one was the son of Herod the Great. That Herod had ordered the killing of all the young boys two years old and under, and when he died shortly thereafter, his kingdom was divided between his three sons. Here in Matthew 14, the reference is to one of his sons, often identified as Herod Antipas. He ruled the region of Galilee from AD 4 to 39, and he is the Herod to whom Pontius Pilate sent Jesus before sentencing him to death. And this Herod had a brother, called Philip, or more fully, Herod Philip. In book of Acts, Herod Agrippa would be in the next generation, a nephew of this Herod here in Matthew 14. So we read,

v.1-4

All that is to say that Herod represents a severe example of rejection of Jesus. And it was driven by an irrational fear—irrational for Herod because it was the fear of a resurrection, as if he really believed in the power of God to raise a man from the dead.

Herod Antipas had put John the Baptist to death, because Herod had married his brother Philip’s wife. Herod had John imprisoned, then at the request of his step-daughter, had him beheaded. And when he heard about the fame of Jesus,

v.2 “[he] said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.”

Again, for you and me, believing in the power of God to raise a man from the dead isn't irrational at all, but the very essence of our faith. For Herod, it represented the loss of his mind. He simply couldn't believe anything else. Without desiring to read anything into these words inappropriately, I think it is fair to say, as does one commentator, that when Herod heard about Jesus' power to perform miracles, "it shocked him to such an extent that in his restless, morbid, feverish imagination he saw in Jesus a 'John the Baptist restored to life'. He, the guilt-laden superstitious murderer, so informed his servants."

A guilt-laden superstitious murderer. That's who he was, and his guilt drove him crazy. His guilt made him irrational. And guilt will do that, guilt which is not removed by the power of God to forgive us our sins. Guilt that festers in the heart and soul, guilt from which he couldn't escape. And I want to focus upon that a bit this afternoon, for very often,

A. Irrational fear motivates the opposition to Jesus.

I want you to observe what guilt does to the human soul, and to see just how pathetic, and pitiful, is this man Herod. He couldn't deny the reality of Jesus' power, nor could he deny the fame which Jesus had gained. Thus he could have no better explanation than to believe that John the Baptist had come back from the dead.

Guilt is such a devastating experience. Just consider these words from,

Ps. 32:1 "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. 5 I

acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Or, Psalm 31:9 "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. 10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away."

I emphasize that because I think we should learn from Herod. We should be warned by his example, and by his irrational fears that came as the result of his guilt.

Ps. 95:6 "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. 10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." 11 Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

That warning should be a stimulation to each of you, to confess your sin. To turn away from your sin in repentance. And lest you think that is just an Old Testament example, turn to Hebrews 3, where the application is made to New Covenant believers.

Heb. 3:12 "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you

will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

The exhortation continues in the next chapter,

Heb. 4:6 “Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Beloved, that’s the application for us from Herod’s example of a guilty conscience. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” With this reminder, that “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Beloved, “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

So confess your sins, lest you be consumed by this same sort of despairing guilt as Herod.

Look a little further at this familiar story, to see the root of hatred. Hatred against John the Baptist, but as he was a forerunner of Jesus, it is no less a hatred of Jesus.

v.3-12

So it is that,

B. Personal hatred motivates the opposition to Jesus.

Personal, heart-felt hatred. A bitterness that defiles the soul. Thus the warning of Esau as we studied this morning,

Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”

Paul puts the exhortation this way,

Eph. 4:31 “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

So look at Herod, and resolve, by the grace of God, that you will put away any semblance of that sort of hatred and bitterness. And replace it with kindness, “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Let’s move on. What was,

II. JESUS’ RESPONSE TO REJECTION.

First, understandably, he withdrew.

A. A personal withdrawal.

v.13a

There are lots of reasons for such a withdrawal, but chief among them is fellowship with God

Mark 1:35 “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.”

So Jesus departed privately, though presumably that means with his disciples. When confronted with the reality of rejection, even with the murderous reputation of Herod Antipas and the memory of John’s death, he retreats to a desolate place in the full recognition that the time to lay down his life had not yet come.

The priority for Jesus, living on earth in his humanity, was fellowship with his father in heaven. And that needs to be your priority as well, and mine. There is an appropriate time for a personal withdrawal, even daily for most of us. A time to pray. A time to read the Word of God. A time to enjoy the fellowship of God without the normal, ordinary distractions of life. But look at the whole of,

v.13

So what else did Jesus do? Get mad that the crowds ruined his quiet time? Did he get annoyed that the people wouldn’t leave him alone? Hardly. He had compassion on them. So even as he withdrew in the context of the rejection he received from Herod the Tetrarch, he still exercised,

B. Compassionate ministry.

v.14

It wasn’t just a job. It wasn’t just a duty, or a responsibility. And it wasn’t merely obedience, simply for obedience sake. “He

was moved with compassion for them.” That is a word of tenderness, a word of deep emotion, of personal interest.

So when he was rejected by some, rather than retaliate, rather than feel the insecurities of trying to win the approval of men, he exercised his compassion! For Jesus, it wasn’t about him and his glory. It wasn’t about his reputation and his honor among men. Instead, it was all about the compassion that he would give to people who needed his care.

We saw the same thing in,

Mat. 9:35 “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

It was, of course, his disciples who were annoyed!

v.15

And Jesus’ words to them seem to be something a rebuke to their faithless reaction to the situation. They were in the presence of Jesus, who had the power to raise a man from the dead, and here they were worrying about feeding a crowd. So Jesus corrects them, with a gentle rebuke,

v.16

Now, of course, Jesus knew they were powerless to do anything, and I believe he was calling to admit their weakness and insufficiency. But in that, they should call upon Jesus to help! That’s the point of holding them responsible, “You give them something to eat.” The immediate response should have been, “Jesus, we are completely unable to do so, but you are able!” They should have looked to Jesus for help and hope, as should

you and I whenever the situation seems desperate and impossible.

But, of course, they didn't look to Jesus. They looked to themselves. And realized only the impossibility of the situation. Rather than respond in faith, they were in near despair.

v.17

So what does Jesus do? You all know the story, I expect. This is one of the most familiar of Jesus' miracles, and the backdrop is the unwillingness of his disciples to look to him for help in time of need. The backdrop is the complete and total rejection he received by the murderous opposition of Herod the Roman Tetrarch. The backdrop is the danger he is in, given the attraction of the crowds which he is gathering. So what does he do? How does Jesus respond to rejection? He gives to us a demonstration of him...

C. Miraculous power.

His disciples have only five loaves and two fish. So what does Jesus do?

v.18-21

First, let me state the obvious. This is an actual historical event, not a myth or a fable. This actually happened. Jesus multiplied the food, the five loaves and two fish, so that 5000 men ate, as well as women and children. Some estimate maybe 15 to 20,000 people, as if that would have been any harder than 5,000. The number could just as well be 5 million, because the point is the power of God.

So I believe this actually happened, just as the words describe it. I believe God's word to be true. And I believe God's power to be absolute. I believe those 15 to 20 thousand people all went

home fully fed and fully satisfied. And there was an abundance of food left over.

What a foolish thing it is to take these miracles of Jesus and gloss them over, or outright deny them. No, this is a full display of the glory of the power of God. So what do you take from that for yourself this afternoon? First,

Heb. 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

In other words, the same Jesus who performed this miracle "always lives to make intercession for [his people.]" He still stands ready to exercise his compassion, and his power. And beloved, he is infinitely perfect with both. His compassion and his power.

One without the other is useless, compassion without power or power without compassion. Useless, dangerous. But put them together, and you have Jesus. And he, Jesus, is the one who is able to provide what you need as well!

Perhaps the Psalmist says it best,

Ps. 18:1 "I will love You, O LORD, my strength. 2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. 4 The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. 5 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears."

Or maybe these verses from Romans are the best

encouragements to us today,

Rom. 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 delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing will be able to separate you from the compassion AND the power of Jesus. Nothing in this world, no struggle, no trial, no deprivation, nothing. And that confidence comes from looking at this simple miracle. If Jesus can take five loaves of bread and 2 fish and feed 5,000 men, plus women and children, with plenty of food left over, then Jesus can provide whatever you need as well.

So don't look to yourself or your own strength. Look to Jesus, and whatever the circumstances of your life, trust him.

Mat. 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."