

What Do You Want on your Tombstone? - Matthew 14:1-12

Introduction: In my research for this message, I come across some very interesting tombstone epitaphs. I'm sure none of these wanted them on their tombstone.

- In an Albany, New York cemetery: Here lies Harry Edsel Smith. He looked up the elevator shaft to see if the car was on the way down. It was.
- In a cemetery in Thurmont, Maryland: Here lies an Atheist. All dressed up and no place to go.
- In a cemetery in England: Here lies Anna Wallace: The children of Israel wanted bread, and the Lord sent them manna. Old clerk Wallace wanted a wife, and the Devil sent him Anna.
- In a cemetery in Uniontown, Pennsylvania: Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas instead of the brake.
- In a cemetery in Hartscombe, England: On the 22nd of June, Jonathan Fiddle went out of tune.
- And in another cemetery in England, someone meant to have this put on his tombstone: *“Under the son and under the trees, lies the body of Jonathan Peas. He’s not there, there’s only the pod. Peas shelled out, and went to God.”*

And again, someone wanted on their tombstone the following: *“Remember man, as you walk by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so shall you be. Remember this and follow me.”* But he didn't expect what someone wrote in response: *“To follow you I'll not consent until I know which way you went.”*

I hope this doesn't happen any time soon, but someday, if the Lord tarries His coming, some preacher is going to stand before a congregation of your loved ones to say a few words at your funeral. What would he say to describe you?

Everyone will be known for something. How will you be remembered? If I were to call out certain names, you could remember something about what they are known for: George Washington, Adolph Hitler, Hank Aaron, Barry Bonds, Billy Graham, Jimmy Swaggart. Some of these are remembered for good, while some are remembered for the bad they did.

Well, it's the same way in the Bible. There, we find descriptions of the lives of many people. Some are remembered for good, others for the bad they did. In the biographies found in the Old Testament books of

Kings and Chronicles, when some of the kings died, the people mourned for them. But there was one king, Jehoram, who ruled Judah for a while, when he died, here's what it says about him in 2 Chronicles 21:20: *"Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one's regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings."* Ouch! How would you like to be remembered like that?

In our text, the three main characters are remembered for what they did or for who they were. **READ Matt. 14:1-12.**

This passage contains the account of how the life of one of God's greatest prophets came to a tragic end. But I don't want to focus on the martyrdom of John the Baptist, as much as I want to look at how the main characters in this story are remembered. I want us to learn something of their make-up and see if we can learn something that will have an impact on our lives and motivate us to want to be remembered in a positive way rather than a negative way. The first character we'll look at is:

1. Herodias – She Held a Grudge

I need to give you a little background before I talk about Herodias. This will tell you how she got her name.

Herod the Great was the ruler of Judea when Jesus was born. He's the guy who ordered all the infant boys in Bethlehem to be killed in an attempt to kill baby Jesus. Herod had several children. One of this Herod's sons was Herod Antipas, or Herod the tetrarch, and he's the one mentioned in our passage today. Another son by a different wife was Herod Philip, who lived in Rome as a private citizen. He was not a ruler of any of Judea.

Now hang on here because it gets a little weird. Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. Thus, the reference to Herod in her name. She was first married to Herod Philip – her uncle. Then she left him to be with Herod Antipas, her other uncle, Antipas was Philip's half-brother. So Herodias not only committed adultery, she had also committed incest. Sound's like a soap opera, doesn't it?

Well, here's how John the Baptist got into trouble with Herodias. Antipas, for some reason invited John to the palace. Some think it was to have him perform some kind of miracle as Herod had later expected of Jesus (Luke 23:8). But rather than do a magic trick, John proceeded to publicly rebuke Herodias and Herod Antipas for their incestual relationship. And from what we read in vs. 4, John had done this on more than one occasion.

Well, of course, this didn't set too well with either Herodias or Herod. Herod wanted to put him to death, but because he feared an angry reaction from the people, he just had John thrown into prison. But Herodias let her anger sit and stew for awhile. Mark 6:19 that she "*nursed a grudge*" against John. Now the KJV says that she "*had a quarrel against him.*" But this was no little spat. No, she wanted him dead too!

The word "*quarrel*" is the Greek word "*enecho*" which means "*to keep a grudge as if being possessed by it.*" So, the translation of "*nursed a grudge*" in the NIV is a good one because we all know how grudges can grow bigger and stronger if they are held inside and if the anger and hatred is not dealt with properly. We can nurse them until they grow into giant grudges that are rooted in hatred, bitterness and vengeance. And these are like poison to the soul.

We've all known people who have held on to grudges and nursed them for years, and the sad part is that it has made them very harsh and very unforgiving and even vengeful. Now, were they done wrong? Probably so! Did it hurt them? Yes! There's no denying the hurt that can result from people doing you wrong. It's legitimate and real, and it is cause to be upset. **But as Christians, we should never allow our hurt to grow into nursing a grudge.** You see, there's a choice to be made when you've been done wrong or think you have. You can choose to keep on remembering it. You can choose to keep on bringing it up and keep on feeding the hurt, or you can choose not to. You can choose to be unforgiving or you can choose to forgive.

But, Jesus commands us to forgive those who have hurt us. Now, the person may not deserve your forgiveness, but neither do we. We don't deserve God's forgiveness. Not after the way we've rebelled and rejected and sinned against Him. Not after the way we've done Him wrong. But the fact is, God is willing to forgive us in spite of our hurting Him. I know Jesus forgave me in spite of my hurting Him with my sin. How about you? Well, the Bible says that I'm to forgive others just as God forgave me.

But Herodias nursed her grudge, and she let it lead her to plot the death of John the Baptist. It led her to murder.

Do you want to be remembered like this? A person who holds grudges? Someone who allows themselves to be ruled by bitterness and hate? I hope not. Next, we see:

2. Herod – He was a Wimp.

Let me give you a bit more background here: This marriage to Herodias was not his first. He had been married for 15 years to the daughter of another king, but left her for Herodias. Years later, that king defeated Antipas' troops, partly to get some revenge for throwing aside his daughter. This is the same Herod who would later judge Jesus at one of His trials before His crucifixion.

According to the passage here, Herodias' daughter did a dance in order to get ole Herod and his birthday guests sexually aroused. Can you imagine that? It's sickening really. Well, her dance did its job, so much so that Herod made a stupid promise. He offered up to half of his kingdom to His wife's daughter.

"Here's the keys to the BMW sweetheart!" "Here's the checkbook dear." "Take the summer home and go have yourself a good time sweetie." Wasn't that crazy! I mean this girl couldn't have been any more than 18 years old. Some commentators say that she was only 12-14 years old.

But look what happened. Instead of asking for that kind of wealth and power, in her vengeful state of mind, Herodias convinces her daughter to ask for the death of John the Baptist. And he wimps out. He agrees to have John beheaded and then have his head brought to his step-daughter on a silver platter.

Now why did he do this? Because He was a wimp. He was a weakling who didn't have the backbone to say no. He didn't have the courage to stand up to his wife and say, *"No, this is wrong."* He was weak minded and had weak morals. He did what a lot of people do when they party and get drunk – he said some stupid things, and he had to pay for it.

He was also a wimp because he was afraid. Mark tells us that he was afraid of John because of his righteousness. When he looked at himself - a terrible father who was evil, shameless, henpecked, and lustful compared to John the Baptist who was in every way righteous, he was afraid of him. Why? Because he didn't understand that kind of man. And what he didn't understand, he wanted to do away with. He wanted to kill him.

Herod was also afraid of what others would think. He was afraid of the people of Judea, because they considered John to be a prophet. He was their ruler but he didn't have much real power. If the Roman government didn't think a local ruler was doing his job keeping the people under control, they would come in

and remove that person and install someone else. Herod didn't want that, so he had to keep the people calmed down.

He was also afraid of his guest's opinion of him. Mark tells us that he had his military commanders, high officials, and the leading men of Galilee with him at this party. He couldn't afford to look like someone who breaks a promise. I guess he could afford to look henpecked, but not like someone big enough to realize he'd made a stupid promise.

And he was afraid of his wife. Obviously Herodias was a woman who wasn't going to be messed with. She really wore the crown in that family. She'd have worn the pants too if they'd have worn them back then.

So how will you be remembered? Will it be like Herod, who let his fears define his life? I hope not. Finally, let's look at the third main character, and that is:

3. John the Baptist – He Pointed People to Christ.

John was a unique man in history. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets who walks onto the pages of the New Testament. He has a high and unique calling of God, and he fulfilled it right down to the end of his life. His calling was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

And old John did just that. He lived and died for the kingdom. His one and only message was "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" And that message prepared the way for the Messiah, who brought the kingdom. Well, guess what his message was for Herod? It was "*Repent.*" And it got him killed. You see, all the way to the end, he never wavered from the message.

John always pointed people to Jesus instead of himself. That right there sets him apart from a lot of people. Most people think it's all about them. They think the world revolves around them. They're so stuck on themselves they couldn't reach out and touch someone if they tried.

But not John - His job was to point to Jesus, and when Jesus came, he said to his followers: "*You go with Him. He's the one you need to be around. He's bringing the kingdom. Don't worry about me – I need to decrease so that He can increase.*" Does that sound like a guy who was stuck on himself? Nope.

Conclusion: So how will you be remembered? When they go to write your obituary, what will they say about you? What will be on your tombstone? Will you be remembered for holding a grudge and letting

bitterness and unforgiveness run your life? Or will you be remembered for being someone who cared more about what other people thought of you than doing what was right? Or will you be remembered living like it was all about Christ and His kingdom? Which one would you choose to be most like?