



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from December 6 afternoon through December 13 morning

Matthew 14:1-12

“Herod the tetrarch” referenced in Matthew 14 is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who was responsible for the slaughter of male infants in Bethlehem, mentioned in Matthew 1. While Herod the Great was viewed more as a king, Herod Antipas was a ruler over a smaller region (about one fourth of Palestine) that included Galilee and Perea. Matthew chose to lead with Herod’s hypothesis that Jesus is actually John the Baptist “raised from the dead,” and then goes back to describe how John was executed.

Herod found himself at odds with John, because John denounced Herod’s sin of having a romantic relationship with Herodias, who was the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Herod decided imprison John instead of execute him, because he was afraid how the people of Israel would react to John’s execution. At Herod’s birthday celebration, his lover’s daughter came and danced before him, and Herod made an oath to give her anything she asked for. The girl’s mother had already told her what to ask, and so the girl asked for John’s head on a platter. Herod made the oath in front of his guests and believed he had to keep it, so he had John beheaded. John’s head was given to the daughter, who then took it to her mother. John’s disciples retrieved the fallen prophet’s body and gave it a proper burial, and then found Jesus to tell him the news of John’s death.

Matthew 14:13-21

Upon hearing what had happened to John, Jesus tried to spend some time alone. He went out onto the water in a boat, but the crowds followed him along the shore and eventually he came to shore and interacted with them. Even though Jesus had hoped to spend time alone, he still had compassion on these people who had followed him. In fact, he not only healed those who were sick, but he also used his power to feed them! His disciples asked him to send the people away, but Jesus challenged them, “... you give them something to eat,” (v. 16). When the disciples told Jesus they only had five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus blessed the food, broke the bread and sent the disciples out into the crowd to distribute the food. Miraculously, the food multiplied as the disciples distributed it, and thousands of people (likely as many as 15,000-20,000) were fed enough to fill their stomachs. Twelve baskets full of food were left over.

Matthew 14:22-36

After feeding so many people, Jesus told the disciples to travel by boat to the other side of the sea. He dismissed the crowds and then finally was able to take some time alone to pray. While he was on the mountain, a storm arrived on the sea and caused the waves to crash against the boat. Jesus decided to go to his disciples by walking on the water to them. When they saw him

they responded in fear, thinking that he was a ghost. Jesus called out to them, identified himself and reassured them. Peter responded by asking Jesus to command him to come to him on the water, and Jesus told him to do so. Peter got out onto the water and began to walk on it, but soon his focus shifted to the wind (and waves) and he became afraid. He started to sink and called out to Jesus to save him. Jesus grabbed Peter and held onto him, but also challenged him regarding his doubt and fear. When they both got back in the boat, the wind immediately stopped and the disciples worshiped Jesus as the Son of God.

They arrived on the northwest shore of the sea, and once again crowds formed as people began to recognize Jesus. They brought people who were sick, and those who touched the garment of Jesus were healed.

Discussion Questions

1. John was a faithful man of God, and yet his life ended at the hands of a wicked man. What does this show us about the idea that, if you are faithful to God, you will live a long and prosperous life?
2. When confronted with his sin, Herod chose to retaliate instead of repent. Why do you think he reacted this way? How should we react when we are confronted with our own sin?
3. Jesus wanted to be alone after learning of John's death, and instead he was followed by a large crowd. He responded with compassion. How would you respond in this situation, and why?
4. The disciples wanted Jesus to send the crowds away, and instead he told them, "you give them something to eat." What does this tell us about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?
5. How are you inspired by Peter's desire to walk on the water to Jesus, and his willingness to get out of the boat? If you were to follow his example, what step of faith would you take right now?
6. Jesus saved Peter from the waves, but also challenged him by saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" How does that statement speak to your heart today?