

Matthew 14A

- With the Kingdom parables behind us, we're ready to move into new things
 - And as we do, we're moving into a new section of Matthew's Gospel
 - The section we just finished covered Jesus' rejection and the transition of the Kingdom proposal into the Kingdom Program
 - And it ended with a series of eight parables that explained various aspects of that program
 - Including why it was necessary and important for the disciples to understand the program and teach it to others
 - Now the section we move into tonight runs from the end of Chapter 13 until the beginning of Chapter 19
 - It bridges us into the final two sections of Matthew that cover Jesus' last days of earthly ministry and His crucifixion and resurrection
 - And therefore, this is an important section of Matthew's book because it explains how Jesus went from hero to zero among the people
 - And it's easy to understand that transition when you remember how Jesus' ministry changed following His rejection
 - He went from teaching openly to teaching circumspectly
 - Rather than healing everyone, He only healed those few who professed faith in Him
 - He no longer declared the Kingdom was at hand but instead spoke of coming persecution, judgment, and His own death
 - Given those changes, it didn't take long for the crowds to turn against Jesus, and of course, the leaders were always against Him
- So let's start that journey with the first of those negative receptions involving Jesus' earthly family and friends in Nazareth

[Matt. 13:53](#) When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.

[Matt. 13:54](#) He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"

[Matt. 13:55](#) "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"

[Matt. 13:56](#) "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

[Matt. 13:57](#) And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

[Matt. 13:58](#) And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

- We learned in earlier chapters that when Jesus began His three-year earthly ministry, He moved His family from His hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum
 - Capernaum was located on the Sea of Galilee and along several major roads, which made it ideal for conducting an itinerant ministry
 - The Scriptures say Jesus prompted His family's move
 - Since Jesus was the first born son of the family, that detail suggests Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, had died by that time
 - Therefore, Jesus decided the family should relocate
 - But prior to that point, Jesus spent nearly three decades living in Nazareth, which was a very small town in the hills
 - Nazareth was small even by ancient standards, so it was the kind of town where everyone knew everyone
 - People knew each other's families, and the children grew up knowing every other child in the town
 - So Jesus and His family would have been very well known among everyone who lived there
- Now a year or two after Jesus had taken His family away, Matthew tells us that Jesus goes home for a visit
 - And on the Sabbath He enters the local synagogue for service
 - Matthew says in v.54 that Jesus was teaching that day
 - The custom in Jewish synagogues of the day was to invite visiting men to teach during the service

- Every Jewish man was expected to know the Scriptures and to be able to teach when called upon
 - And certainly a favored son, like Jesus, would have been invited to speak upon the occasion of his return
 - Moreover, the citizens of Nazareth have certainly been following with great interest all Jesus had been doing in the Galilee
- So Jesus accepts the invitation to teach, but this will be the last time Jesus agrees to do so in any synagogue
 - This is the final time in Matthew's Gospel that we see Jesus teaching openly to a crowd
 - And it's the final time Matthew reports Jesus entering a synagogue
 - This is in keeping with the change in ministry that followed Jesus' rejection
 - From now on Jesus will teach only His disciples, and as a result He increasingly shuns the normal circles of orthodox Jewish life
- So Jesus takes His seat in the service, and teaches, but Matthew doesn't record what Jesus taught on this day
 - Probably because it really didn't matter...because whatever Jesus taught, it was rejected out of hand
 - And the reason the crowd dismissed Jesus' teaching might surprise you
 - Notice in v.54 the crowd was astonished at Jesus' teaching
 - The meaning of that Greek word is amazement and even panic...the room was in pandemonium as Jesus spoke
 - Jesus was teaching new and even revolutionary ways of understanding Scripture
 - He was turning conventional thinking on its head, because conventional wisdom was wrong
 - The Pharisees had long distorted the Scriptures for their own gain

- So when Jesus taught them properly, it was shocking to Jewish society
- Then when Jesus performed miracles in their midst it only served to amplify their amazement
- So the crowd asks, where did Jesus get such wisdom and power?
 - That expression may sound complimentary when we read it, but that's not how you should hear it
 - Read it as an expression of doubt, because they were saying it was inconceivable Jesus could be so wise
 - And His power to heal only served to make them more suspicious, as if His power was from an evil source
- Why did they doubt what they heard? Notice in v.57 Matthew says the people in Nazareth took offense at Him
 - In Greek that phrase should be literally translated "they stumbled at Him" or "they sinned because of Him"
 - It wasn't the message they rejected...it was Him, the messenger...they stumbled over Jesus
- In v.55, the people look at one another and ask, isn't this the carpenter's son?
 - Isn't this the son of Joseph who worked among us?
 - Wasn't His mother Mary, who we saw collecting water at the well every day?
 - Isn't this Jesus the brother of James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, who were just ordinary lads in our town?
 - Mark records that they also asked "Are not His sisters with us?", meaning Jesus' sisters had married and remained in the town
 - And as an aside here, it's remarkable to consider that Jesus had no less than four brothers and at least two married sisters by the time He entered ministry
 - Which by the way denies the Catholic false teaching
 - Catholics maintain that Mary remained a virgin her whole life...a completely unbiblical and altogether unnecessary invention

- But in noting these things, the people are saying, “Isn’t Jesus just like us?”
 - That is, Jesus is just an average guy, way too normal to be viewed as an authority figure in their lives
 - Nazareth had known Jesus His whole life and what they knew about Jesus couldn’t be reconciled with what He was saying and doing now
 - They couldn’t reconcile the familiar with the extraordinary, so they judged the two to be incompatible
 - In other words, the Jesus they knew back then invalidated the Jesus they saw before them now
- Jesus responds to their unbelief in an interesting way, by explaining that their response is the result of a natural bias present in the heart of every unbeliever
 - Jesus says that a prophet receives no honor in his own hometown and in his own household
 - By prophet Jesus means generally anyone empowered by the Lord to speak or do remarkable spiritual things
 - And by hometown or household Jesus means generally those people who know us best, those who might see themselves in us
 - *E.g.* Your unsaved family & friends, that next-door neighbor, your elementary teacher, your high school coach
 - Those unsaved hearts that know you so well that they look upon you with suspicion should you come to them one day preaching spiritual truth
 - Some of you may have experienced this bias in your own life
 - Like when you try to explain to your mother how to go to Heaven
 - But she reminds you that she helped you find your shoes before school
 - When you share with your childhood friends about the Jesus Who has given you a new view of eternity

- But they can only remember the silly things you did and said when you ran together in junior high school
- Like Jesus in Nazareth, unbelievers who know us well judge the message by the messenger and that leads to a bias against us
 - And the driving force behind this bias is the oldest sin in the world: pride
 - A prophet is not received among those in his or her own hometown because pride gets in their way
- The better we know a person, the more closely we will identify with that person
 - And when we identify with someone – seeing them as someone like us – then we will be offended if they try to assume a position of authority over us
 - A prophet or teacher who comes speaking spiritual truth naturally assumes a position of authority over someone
 - And that will challenge the unbelieving heart when it comes from someone they believe to be no different from themselves
- Accepting spiritual truth from another person always requires humility, even if the messenger is a complete stranger
 - So how much harder is it to demonstrate humility in response to a message brought by someone we know well?
 - They ask themselves, “Who does he think he is?”
- That was the case for Jesus...the citizens of Nazareth all knew His story well
 - Jesus was the child who played in the dirt streets
 - He was the young man who studied Torah and learned carpentry under His father
 - He was the modest and unremarkable young man who lived a quite life at home
- Moreover, they knew Jesus *didn't* come from a family of great spiritual learning and privilege

- He didn't attend a rabbinical school nor was He trained by prominent rabbis
- Jesus wasn't even especially bold or outgoing in His personality
- He was by every definition...ordinary!
- Which, by the way, reminds us that living sinlessly doesn't turn a person into a freak or living robot, or even draw attention to Himself
 - We know Jesus was sinless as a child and as a teenager and as a young man...He was always sinless
 - Yet somehow during all that time, no one noticed
 - No one realized that Jesus never sins, which would have certainly been big news to Jews
 - And it also tells us that Jesus never tried to draw attention to Himself either
 - Jesus was accepted as an ordinary kid so much so that when He began teaching with power and authority, it was unexpected
- This bias is present in all unbelievers, so the Lord works to mitigate against this bias in the way He brings the Gospel
 - Since people are prone to rejecting spiritual truth brought by a familiar messenger, He often sends strangers instead
 - We see this pattern throughout the Bible
- In the Old Testament, the Lord often called prophets to go to unfamiliar people and places
 - He would send a prophet from one region of Israel to another
 - Prophets from the north went to the south and prophets from the south went to the north
- Or He sends the recipient to the prophet from a long distance like He sent the Queen of Sheba to Solomon
 - Or He sends the prophet to the recipient over a long distance, as when He sent Jonah to Nineveh
 - And even when the prophet comes to his own people, the Lord will find creative ways to create a sense of unfamiliarity

- The Lord took Moses away from the Jewish people for 40 years before sending him back to free them from Pharaoh
 - And He put John the Baptist in the wilderness for many years before bringing him back to the people of Judea
 - And the Lord separated Saul for several years from the church before bringing him back as Paul to minister in a fresh way
- These are merely examples, but they demonstrate the love and grace of God in overcoming our biases against Him
 - And He will do the same with our witness too...bringing us to strangers where we will have opportunity to share the truth
 - In fact, this principle explains why we usually send missionaries to other places
 - And it should heighten our readiness and willingness to preach to strangers knowing that this is an approved method of God
 - And at the same we shouldn't be surprised when our unsaved family and friends reject us out of hand
 - And one more thought...we need to be careful not to allow this bias to creep back into our thinking as believers
 - Because pride never goes away
 - And even though we have Christ and the Spirit, we can still harden our hearts to truth when it comes by someone we know well
 - So we need to guard against that bias and not let familiarity with the messenger give us reason to ignore the message
 - Nor should we require the messenger be sinless before we're willing to consider the truth of their message
- As we finish this moment, notice at the end of v.58 Matthew says that as a result of the crowd's rejection, Jesus did not do many miracles there
 - This is the first time we've seen this statement in Matthew's Gospel, and it's a reminder of Jesus' shift into the Kingdom Program
 - As a result of being rejected, Jesus now performs miracles only for the benefit of those who believe

- And since there were few in Nazareth who received Him there, He performed only a few miracles there
- Matthew records this moment in His Gospel to show us how those who knew Jesus best, rejected Him too
 - Which tells us that if Nazareth wouldn't receive Jesus, it's no surprise that the nation as a whole didn't either
 - We're learning that Jesus' opposition occupied every strata of Jewish society, including His family
- And to emphasize this point further, Matthew now jumps to the other end of the spectrum

[Matt. 14:1](#) At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, [Matt. 14:2](#) and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

- Herod the Tetrarch refers to one of the sons of Herod the Great
 - Remember, Herod the Great was the one who tried to have Jesus killed by slaughtering all the young children around Bethlehem
 - He died in 4 BC and his sons received pieces of his kingdom
 - His son, Herod Antipas, received the northern region of the Galilee, and that's the Herod in view here
 - Herod Antipas lived primarily in Tiberias along the western shore of the Galilee
 - So naturally Herod heard the news of what Jesus was doing in the region, and he too reacts in the wrong way
 - While those who knew Jesus best in Nazareth underestimated Jesus' spiritual credentials, Herod made the opposite mistake in a way
 - Herod, who didn't know Jesus at all, exaggerated Jesus' spiritual identity
 - Herod believed Jesus to be a resurrected John the Baptist
 - And that detail is Matthew's subtle way of introducing the news that John had been killed by this point in Jesus' ministry

- Matthew then explains how John died

[Matt. 14:3](#) For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.

[Matt. 14:4](#) For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

[Matt. 14:5](#) Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet.

[Matt. 14:6](#) But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod,

[Matt. 14:7](#) so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

[Matt. 14:8](#) Having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."

[Matt. 14:9](#) Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests.

[Matt. 14:10](#) He sent and had John beheaded in the prison.

[Matt. 14:11](#) And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

[Matt. 14:12](#) His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

- The exploits of Herod's family was a soap opera so sordid it could cause HBO to blush
 - In v.3 Matthew mentions Herod Antipas and Herod's wife, Herodias
 - Herod Antipas, like his father Herod the Great, was a nominal Jew (in name only)
 - His father had multiple wives and therefore he had children by different mothers
 - So in addition to Antipas, Herod the Great also had a son named Philip and another son named Aristobulus
 - Aristobulus had a daughter called Herodius, which is the women mentioned by Matthew
 - So Herod the Great's son, Antipas, married Herod the Great's granddaughter by another wife, Herodius (his great niece)
 - But before marrying Herod Antipas, Herodius had married Antipas' brother, Philip

- And in between those marriages, she had been a mistress to a step-uncle
- So she was guilty of multiple adulteries and incestuous relationships
- Our world today is accustomed to the misadventures of the rich and powerful, so we might shrug our shoulders at such behavior
 - But in Jesus' day, these things were truly scandalous, and John the Baptist fearlessly said so
 - In v.4 Matthew says John was condemning the tetrarch for having taken this woman as a wife
- Since John had gained a reputation as a prophet, his word mattered among the people
 - And so it threatened an insecure king who was worried about holding on to power
 - So Herod arrested John intending to kill him, but fearing the crowds might revolt, he simply held John for a time
- And in the meantime, Herod came to like hearing John as Mark tells us

[Mark 6:20](#) for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

- Herod made a sport of listening to John the Baptist
 - What do you supposed John was telling Herod each time they met?
 - I can only imagine that John told Herod much the same thing he told those who gathered at the riverside
 - He probably told Herod his sins would condemn him apart from repentance and faith in the Messiah
 - But Herod wasn't moved by what he heard
- But there was another enemy of John who was determined to see him killed, and that enemy was working behind the scenes to bring it about
 - I'm talking about THE enemy...Satan

- Satan was at work to bring John the Baptist to death, and since Herod wouldn't act, he begins to move among the women
- Matthew says that on a fateful evening Herod had a feast at his palace with guests in attendance
 - And on the occasion of Herod's birthday, Herodias' daughter danced for the king, probably in a lewd fashion
 - Since this young girl is not Herod's daughter, he probably lusts for her
 - And to impress her, the king promises her anything
- Mark says he promised her up to half his kingdom, which makes me think Herod was either very drunk or demonically influenced or both
 - You might think that she would have asked for half the kingdom, but she doesn't
 - Under the influence of Satan, Herodias instructs her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist
- Since Herod gave his word, he must agree since to say no would mean breaking his oath in public, which was a great humiliation
 - So despite his fear of the people, he agrees to kill John and this is the end of John's ministry
 - Then John's disciples came and informed Jesus
- Why is this story in Matthew? Because it shows the other end of the spectrum from the events in Nazareth
 - Jesus' family was against Him, and the Roman authorities were against Him or any who stood with Jesus like John
 - And it foreshadows how Satan will ultimately bring Jesus down too
 - He will use the evil hearts of those in the Roman and Jewish governments to conspire and act against Jesus
 - So Matthew includes this story immediately after Jesus' rejection to make clear where this story is going
 - In other words, what happens to John will happen to Jesus

- Now what do we take from this account? It reminds us that the Kingdom Program itself will have two sources of opposition
 - On the one hand we have our friends, and on the other hand, we have our enemy and both will oppose us at times
- Our unbelieving friends and family may oppose us because they can't accept that God is working through us
 - They may question your calling, doubt your sincerity and ultimately reject your spiritual insight
 - They know you too well, so they judge you according to our old nature
 - And therefore, they underestimate how much spiritual change has taken place in your life
- How do we respond to that challenge? With grace...remembering we were once in their shoes
 - Follow Jesus' example...Jesus just moved on and waited for another time
 - And in that next opportunity, Jesus won some converts
- How do I know that? Well, this was not the first time Jesus returned to Nazareth to teach in the city
 - Luke tells us of at least one earlier occasion, at the very start of Jesus' earthly ministry, when He visited Nazareth
 - In that earlier account, Jesus taught and was rejected also
 - And in fact the people got so angry they tried to kill Him by throwing Him off a cliff
 - There is no record that even a single person followed Him in faith in that earlier visit
 - So Jesus just left them without a fight or argument

Luke 4:28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things;

Luke 4:29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.

Luke 4:30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

- But now we see Jesus has returned...He gave them another opportunity despite the fact that they tried to kill Him before
 - And again He taught them just as He did before
 - But look what happened in His second visit? This time some believed and were saved
- How do I know that? Because Matthew said that Jesus did not do many miracles (which means Jesus at least did some)
 - And we know Jesus was only doing miracles for those who believed at this point
 - Which means at least some believed and were blessed with healing in that second visit
- That's your encouragement in the face of friendly opposition to try again
 - Your message may not be received today, but it may be received tomorrow
 - Don't engage in argument or conflict, just graciously step aside and wait for the next opportunity
- And what about our enemies who act against us under Satan's control...what should we do about them?
 - Do what John the Baptist did...when his enemy took him captive, he used that opportunity to preach the Gospel to him every day
 - That became his ministry until such time as the Lord allowed John to go free or to lose his earthly life for Christ
 - Sometimes the answer will be one and sometimes the other
 - But hey, we're all going to die one day, and better to die in service to Christ if you ask me
 - As Paul said...

Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- The same opponents Jesus encountered when He taught the Kingdom Program will oppose us as we continue that program

- That program isn't just a work of winning hearts...it's also program of enduring opposition and even persecution
- Serving Christ is a sacrifice...but a small one compared to the one He made for us