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By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
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“Pain & Loss in the Kingdom”

The 49th Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 14:1-12

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, ² and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” ³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, ⁴ because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” ⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. ⁶ But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” ⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. ¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, ¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. ¹² And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand this difficult passage. Cause our hearts to be tender before Your Word, and build our faith. And we ask that You would give us spiritual eyes and

ears so that we wouldn't just be hearers of Your Word but doers of it. So help us to consider what it means to follow You and not ourselves. By Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: “Every Group Has Its Own Bullies”¹

In light of the recent allegations of ‘bullying’ between two NFL behemoths that have the sports media all worked up, I thought I would weigh in on the issue. While I believe with all my heart that we should protect those who cannot protect themselves, I also believe our culture continues to promote a ‘victim mentality’ whereby nearly any situation is obsessively being considered ‘bullying;’ whether it’s a high school football team that scores too many points against its opponent, or two fully grown, 300-pound men who play professionally in an aggressively competitive and combative sport for a living.

Have you ever thought how much better the world would be if we could get rid of bullying? ... Don’t hold your breath; that’s not going to happen. Bullies aren’t going away. They never have, and they never will. Bullies are a fact of life and have been since the beginning of time. The sooner we learn to deal with them by assuming at least **some** responsibility for what happens to us in life ... the sooner we stop bullies from doing their damage.

I have some experience with bullying ... growing up I played sports, all of them, all the time. And I was always the smallest, shortest, littlest kid on the team ... **always**. And I got teased, and mocked, and every opposing team would try to go after the little kid ... especially in basketball ... not a sport known for short people. I remember one game (I was a freshman in High School), when the other team started laughing when I walked out onto the court. They said my dad must have been the coach (he wasn’t). In the second quarter, the guy I was guarding reached out, knocked off my glasses, and told me to get off the court. **Lacking maturity**, I responded **emotionally** and ... well ... I **may** have broken his nose. The first and only technical foul of my short basketball career. It was also my highest scoring game ... **ever**.

Warning to those of you who pick on the little guys. We have a chip on our shoulder. And remember, Napoleon was my height. And he wrecked about 17 countries. Sometimes bullying has consequences. This past October was Anti Bullying Awareness Month and I think that it’s a good thing. Too often, bullied children feel isolated and alone. They feel like they have no one to talk to or confide in. I applaud those who are calling attention to the problem and offering support and encouragement to those on the receiving end. In fact, my sister is a guidance counselor in Jacksonville, Florida and she has authored an anti-bullying curriculum that’s now being used throughout North Florida. Good for her!

However, no amount of awareness or attention will put an end to bullying. Bullies come in all sizes, ages, shapes, colors and nationalities, but they have one thing in common. They lift themselves up by stepping on others.

Think of men like Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden ... or for that matter ... Goliath. What were they if not bullies **with great power**? **Think** of violent gang members.

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the articles, “Can We Put An End to Bullying” 10/17/12, by James Spence (no relation), and “The Original Giant Bully” 11/8/13, by Rick Johnson, all found on the blog [A Few Grown Men](#), www.patheos.com. A good resource to help your sons learn how to respond to bullies is Rick Johnson’s book, [A Man in the Making: Strategies to Help Your Son Succeed in Life](#),

What are they, if not bullies **with guns**? **Think** of people who file malicious lawsuits. What are they, if not bullies **with lawyers**? **Think** of “road rage” and aggressive drivers. What are they, if not bullies **with cars**? I could go on, but you get the point.

Bullies are everywhere, and most of us will run into them at one point or other in our lives. The bullies most of us will encounter are everyday people who need to put others down in order to exalt themselves. There will always be people like that. You might not like it — I certainly don't — but that's life. To stop bullying entirely you'd have to change human nature, and I don't believe that's possible. Bullying is pervasive within the human race and human history.

Does that mean we don't try to change things? No, it doesn't. What it does mean is that we must approach the problem of bullying with the understanding that it is **fundamentally a heart problem**. Ultimately, bullying isn't a result of a bad parenting or a poor environment, although those things can certainly help create a bully. The Old Testament book of Jeremiah best summarizes the problem, **Jeremiah 17:9**, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” We live in a **fallen** world, full of **fallen, broken** people. We'll never stop bullying entirely, because the problem is common to humanity.

Today's passage is about one such bully. His name is Herod Antipas.

Herod, in our story from Matthew 14, is one of several with the same name in the New Testament. Herod the Great was King of Judea when Christ was born, and known for ordering the baby boys around Bethlehem slaughtered lest there be a rival to his throne from the newborn King. Later he ordered two of his own sons killed because he thought they might overthrow his rule. Definitely a bully.

Herod Philip, called Philip in Luke 3, Herod Agrippa I who died after giving a self-glorifying speech in Acts 12, and Herod Agrippa II mentioned in Acts 25 before whom Paul appeared are all named in Scripture. All bullies. Now we have Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee after Herod the Great's death.

Herod Antipas, according to some accounts, was the ablest of Herod the Great's sons, and yet Jesus called him, “*that fox,*” in Luke 13 to point to his weakness through lack of dignity and true power. His half-brother, Herod Philip, had married his niece, Herodias. Though married to the daughter of the king of Petras, Herod Antipas fell for Herodias while visiting with his brother. He cast care to the wind, and pursued Herodias' hand in marriage, and as a wedding gift, he would cast out his wife, the daughter of the king of Petras, even though this eventually resulted in a costly war with Petras, which he was losing until the Romans stepped in and stopped it. Since Philip's kingdom was the least desirable of the three Herodian rulers, Herodias, being “a woman of towering ambition,” consented to the proposal of Herod Antipas. She essentially divorces her uncle in order to marry her other uncle. And so this truly dysfunctional family returned to his kingdom, and thought that all would be well.

But the preaching of John the Baptist became a thorn in their side. Some New Testament scholars suggest that Herod had invited John to his palace with a view to gaining popularity with the masses around Galilee. While there, John cut Herod no slack! He rebuked him for his breach of the divine law. In fact, the laws of Leviticus and the Ten Commandments and the commandments that speak against adultery **all condemned Herod** for what he was doing. John had simply preached that to Herod. And Herod, we are told in this passage, **hated** John for having brought that, not only to his attention, but to everyone's attention.

And so we begin by seeing ...

v. 1–5: PAIN AND LOSS FOR KING HEROD ²

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Matthew 14. You'll remember over the last few months we've looked at Matthew 11, 12 and 13. Highlighting the majesty of Christ in Matthew 11, highlighting the character of Christ in contrast to His opponents in Matthew 12, and highlighting the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. We also saw at the end of Matthew 13, as Tom taught last week, that a major shift in Christ's teaching ministry occurs. Beginning in Matthew 13, we see more and more throughout the Gospel a **rejection** of Jesus' public ministry, not only by the Pharisees, but even by the crowds following Him. Matthew 14 continues along that line. In this passage, we open with the account of the death of John the Baptist. In the wake of the crowds' disappointment with Jesus, since He wasn't the kind of Messiah they were looking for, and in the wake of His rejection in Nazareth by His own townspeople, we come to Matthew 14.

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, ² and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” ³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, ⁴ because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” ⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.”

First of all, starting in verse 1, we see how Herod came to hear of Jesus' ministry and what his response to that ministry was. And we learn that Herod's conscience is nagging him. But it's not nagging him in a saving way. He's guilty of things and he's inwardly bothered by those things even if he doesn't admit them openly, but he's not bothered **enough to seek a Savior**.

There are several things at work here, all which demonstrate the pain and loss in Herod's life. He has a seared conscience, he's wracked with guilt, and he's controlled by fear — fear of extended family, fear of public opinion, fear of those ... like Jesus and John the Baptist ... who appear to have more power than he does.

And so Herod responds to this news of Jesus' ministry with fear. He was superstitious, and so he feared that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead to continue to hound him and he was worried. He announces to those around him that this is John the Baptist, he's risen from the dead, and that's why miraculous powers are at work. He's now able to do signs and wonders. It's John come back from the dead to torment me.

Herod knew he was wrong when it came to the murder of John the Baptist. He knew he was wrong in the foolish vow that he'd made during his own birthday party and that still continued to nag at his conscience, and so when he hears word of Jesus' ministry that superstitious response of Herod is to think that John has come back to bother him again. Herod **hated John before**, and he surely **hates** him even more **now**. And that's often the response of people who are in the grip of sin. When someone speaks to them about their sin, having only their best interest at heart, the response is to **hate** them. And that's exactly what Herod did.

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 2* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 1–12; *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. James Montgomery Boice, pages 254–262; **And the Sermons, “*When God Sits on His Hands*” by Dr. Michael Andrus, First Evangelical Free Church, Wichita, KS, 12/2/07, www.firstfreewichita.org; “*Herod and the Murder of John the Baptist*” by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 7/12/98, www.fpcjackson.org; and “*Courage, Fear, and Folly*” by Dr. Phil Newton, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 12/28/03, www.southwoodsbc.org.**

In fact, we're told in this passage that what Herod wanted to do was kill John immediately. But you see what a weak man Herod was. We're told that the reason Herod didn't kill John right away was because he was afraid of what the people would think. Herod did what he did, not because he thought it was **right**, but because he thought that it was **expedient**. And there you see a key to the heart of Herod. He was not moved by doing that which was **right**. He was moved by doing that which was **expedient** ... that which would give him favor with the people. He **feared** there might be some sort of rebellion because John was still popular amongst the masses and if he killed John there would be some sort of uprising so he throws him in prison.

And yet, John's words come back to haunt Herod, don't they? Long after God's witnesses are gone, their witness remains. Long after God's messengers are gone, their message still speaks. And so when Herod hears of Jesus' ministry, he immediately remembers John. He remembers what John had said and he remembers what he had done to John. And his conscience is bothering him. His guilt begins to consume him. And so Herod, when he hears of Jesus' ministry, reacts with the same kind of fear and anxiety that he had with John's ministry.

Herod wants power and respect and he's losing it to these no-name preachers and prophets like Jesus and John. And that infuriates him, he acts rashly, guilt overwhelms him, emotional pain describes him, and his heart gets harder and harder and harder. That's one type of pain and loss.

Another type of pain and loss is presented to us in the life and death of John the Baptist. His is more obvious. He speaks the truth ... and he's killed for it.

v. 6–11: PAIN AND LOSS FOR JOHN THE BAPTIST

Starting with verse 6, we have the account of John's death, *“But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod,⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.”⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given.¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison,¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.”*

Sweet girl. So we learn, first of all, that Christians must not expect our reward **in this life** but we must put our hope in things to come. Matthew now recounts for us how Herod came to murder John the Baptist. And it all began with a birthday party. Now, there's nothing wrong with birthday parties, but this was an out of control affair. It was an affair in which women were not normally invited. It's instructive then that a young girl was brought in to dance. And again, it shows you the kind of the household Herod's was and with Herod drunk and his lips ready to speak things that he would have been wiser not to, his guard is down. And so this party becomes an occasion for **great evil and sin**.

The party itself was not the problem. The attitude of those who were involved was the problem. The things that went on there were inappropriate and so Herodias' daughter comes out and dances for the party even though women weren't supposed to be present. And she extracts from Herod an oath promising her the head of John the Baptist. And so John is finally executed as a result of a fleeting promise made by a drunken monarch to a dancing girl. What a **dishonorable** end for a **faithful** prophet of God. We're stunned when we get to the end of this passage. When we get to verse 11, we can't believe that God would have let John's life end this way. Your faithful servant of the Lord, imprisoned for months, beheaded at the request of a dancing girl? Lord, surely this isn't what You intended. Surely, this is a mistake. But as the

great commentator, Bishop J.C. Ryle reminds us, “God's children must not look for their reward in this world.”

If ever there was a case of godliness unrewarded in this life, it's John's. Here's a man who deserved, **if anyone deserved**, the reward of a faithful servant, and yet his life ends in such a terrible way. But even in this, we learn that our hope must be placed on the city which has foundations. That's where John's hope was. And though surely this must have been the most disappointing of ways to end his ministry, I can imagine, not so much the martyrdom, but the **imprisonment** in the last months of his life. It must have been terribly frustrating for him.

He would have wanted to be preaching repentance, preparing the way for Christ, and here he is confined and finally executed. And yet God's plan is perfect. And John had put his hope on those things to come. Bishop Ryle again says, “Let all true Christians remember that their best things **are yet to come**. Let us count it not strange if we have sufferings in this present time.”

It is a season of trials and testing. We're still at school. We're learning patience, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, none of which we would learn if we had ‘Our Best Life Now.’ But there is an eternal holiday yet to begin. For this, let us wait quietly. It will make amends for **all** pain. It will bring rewards for **all** suffering. It will amply replace **all** our losses. As the Apostle Paul says, **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**, “*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us **an eternal weight of glory** beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*”

Getting your head chopped off and served on a **platter** may not sound to you like a “**light momentary affliction**,” ... but it surely did to John, who woke up to the dazzling glory of God in the heavenly realms. Many of you are facing testing, trials, or afflictions this morning. You probably don't want to hear them described as “*light and momentary*.” However, the sound of “**an eternal weight of glory**” does have the ring of Good News. And that's because the message of this passage is that in the midst of pain and loss, our hope must be on those eternal things.

What a motley crew of characters we have in this story. They provide a sad glimpse into the high life of antiquity, as well as what people are like today. There is Herod with his guilty conscience. There's Herodias, a wicked, vengeful woman. There's her daughter, already corrupted at a young age by her evil mother. There are the sensuous friends of Herod. And against them all is John the Baptist, whom everyone knew to be an upright, outspoken, and courageous man. There is, however, one character we haven't talked about. He doesn't enter into the specific action of this story, though He is the most important person of all. He is Jesus Himself, mentioned in the first verse and in the last verse, where we see the ...

v. 1, 12: PAIN AND LOSS FOR KING JESUS

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus ... ¹² And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.”

As I told my class the other day, any passage that both starts and ends with Jesus **probably** has something to teach us about Jesus. Several commentators have pointed out that every time someone is “**scandalized**” or “**offended**” by a person in the Gospels, that person is always Jesus. In fact, we just saw that in **Matthew 13:57** where it says, “**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.*”

We have a good example of it here. Neither the citizens of Nazareth, nor Herodias, nor her daughter, nor the drunken guests of Herod were offended by King Herod, because they're all like him to one degree or another. Nor were they offended by one another, for the same reason. Sinners like other sinners because they feel at home with them, and if their consciences bother them for some past evil acts, they can always point to some other sinner who's a lot worse. It's comforting to have someone as evil as King Herod around.

True. But you don't get help from other sinners. Other sinners don't enable you to live an upright life, nor do they provide salvation from your sins. Only Jesus does that. Only Jesus can.

All of this means that in the final analysis the real contrast in this story is not between Herod and John the Baptist, as interesting as that is, but between **King Herod** and **King Jesus**. What happened to Herod? Herod killed John. But a few years later, when Herod's brother Agrippa (the Herod of Acts 12) had been appointed king over the former territory of Philip, Herodias, who was always ambitious, pestered her husband until he went to Rome to see if he could be appointed a king too. Unfortunately, Agrippa wrote to Emperor Caligula accusing Herod of treasonable dealings with the Parthians, and instead of being made a king, Herod was deposed and banished to Gaul, where he died.

Think of the contrast. Herod did what those in power do. He used his power to preserve his power, but in the end he lost it and died a pauper's death. Jesus laid His power aside to die for his people, but today He rules in glory and will reign forever. Herod was a petty king, but he looked kingly. Jesus was the King of kings, but He looked like a humble Galilean peasant. Deceiving, if you look only at the outward appearance! Yet if you look beyond the appearance to who **Jesus really was** and listen attentively to what **Jesus really said**, you will find yourself agreeing with John's testimony about Him, **John 1:29, 34**, "*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" and then "And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."* John trusted in Christ and stood for righteousness. He died for it. But now John is with Jesus and will rule with Him one day along with all who willingly confess Christ as Lord and Savior.

But we still have a problem here, don't we. And the problem is this ...

CONCLUSION: *The Story Reeks With Injustice!* ³

I mean, let's face it. John dies because Herod lusts. The good man is murdered while the bad man parties on. A man of God is killed while a man of passion is winking at his niece. Is this how God rewards His anointed? Is this how He honors the faithful? Is this how God crowns His chosen? With a dark dungeon and a shiny blade? The injustice was more than John could take. Even before Herod reached his verdict, he's asking questions. His concerns were outnumbered only by the number of times he paced back and forth in his cell. When he had a chance to get a message to Jesus, his inquiry was one of despair, **Matthew 11:2-3**, "*Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples. ³ Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*

Note what motivated John's question. It wasn't just the dungeon or even death. It was the problem of unmet expectations — the fact that John was in deep trouble and Jesus was conducting business as usual. Is this what messiahs do when trouble comes? Is this what God

³ The Conclusion is adapted from *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado, pages 162–182.

does when His followers are in a jam? And Jesus' silence was enough to chisel a leak into the dam of John's belief, "Are you the one? Or have I been following the wrong God?"

Had the Bible been written by a public relations agency, they would have eliminated that verse. It's not good PR to admit that one of the cabinet members has doubts about the president. You don't let stories like that get out if you're trying to present a unified front. But the Scriptures weren't written by agents; they were inspired by an eternal God who knew that every disciple from then on would spend time in the dungeon of doubt. And though the circumstances have changed, the questions haven't.

And what was Jesus' answer to John's agonizing question from the dungeon of doubt, "*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*"

Look carefully at what Jesus says, **Matthew 11:4-5**, "*Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*"

But before you study what Jesus said, note a couple of things He didn't say.

First, He didn't get angry. He didn't throw up his hands in disgust. He didn't scream, "What in the world do I have to do for John? I've already become flesh! I've already been sinless for three decades. I let him baptize me. What else does he want? Go and tell that ungrateful locust eater I'm shocked at his disbelief." ... He could have done that (I would have done that).

But Jesus didn't. Underline that fact: God has never turned away the questions of a sincere searcher. Not Job's, not Abraham's, not Moses', not John's, not Thomas', not Dave's, not yours. But note also that Jesus didn't save John. The One who had walked on water could have easily walked on Herod, **but He didn't**. The One who cast out the demons had the power to cast the king out of the castle, **but He didn't**. No battle plan. No SWAT teams. No flashing swords. Just a message — a kingdom message — "Tell John that everything's going as planned. The kingdom is coming." Jesus' words are much more than quotes from the Prophet Isaiah. They're the description of a heavenly kingdom. A unique kingdom. An invisible kingdom. A kingdom with three distinct traits.

First of all, it's a kingdom where **the rejected are received**, "*the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear...*"

No one was more shunned by their culture and more picked on by the bullies than the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf. They had no place. No name. No value. Canker sores on the culture. Excess baggage on the side of the road. But those whom the people called trash, Jesus called treasures. Jesus told John that a new kingdom was coming — a kingdom where people have value not because of **what they do**, but because of **whose they are**.

The second distinct trait of the kingdom is as potent as the first, "*and the dead are raised up.*" The grave has no power. Jesus looked into the eyes of John's followers and gave them this message. "*Report to John ... the dead are raised up.*" Jesus wasn't oblivious to John's imprisonment. He wasn't blind to John's captivity. But He was dealing with a greater dungeon than Herod's; He was dealing with the dungeon of **death**.

But Jesus wasn't through. He passed on one other message to clear the cloud of doubt out of John's heart. **The third distinct trait** of the kingdom is simply this, "*and the poor have good news preached to them.*"

Even though by the "book" I'm guilty, by God's **grace** I get another chance. Even though by the law I'm indicted, by God's **mercy** I'm given a fresh start. We read in **Hebrews**

4:16, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of **grace**, that we may receive **mercy** and find **grace** to help in time of need.”

No other religion offers such a message. All others demand the **right** performance, the **right** sacrifice, the **right** chant, the **right** ritual, the **right** experience. Theirs is a kingdom of trade-offs and barterdom. You do this, and God will give you that. The result? Either arrogance or fear. Arrogance if you think you’ve achieved it, fear if you think you haven’t. And remember, Herod lived with overwhelming fear.

Christ’s kingdom is just the opposite, **Ephesians 2:8-9**, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Christ’s kingdom is a kingdom for the poor. Christ’s kingdom is a kingdom where membership is **granted**, not purchased. You are **placed** into Christ’s kingdom. You are “**adopted**.” And this occurs not when you do enough, but when you admit you **can’t** do enough. You don’t earn it; you simply **accept** it. As a result, you serve, not out of arrogance or fear, but out of **gratitude**. That’s the unique characteristic of Christ’s kingdom. Its subjects don’t work in order to go to heaven; they work because they **already are** going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy. That’s the kingdom Jesus proclaimed: a kingdom of complete acceptance, eternal life, and total forgiveness.

We don’t know how John received Jesus’ message, but we can imagine. I like to think of a slight smile coming over his face as he heard what his Master said, “So that’s it. That’s what the kingdom will be. That’s what the King will do.” And now, he understood. It wasn’t that Jesus was silent; it was that John had been listening for the wrong answer. John had been listening for an answer to his earthly problems, while Jesus was busy solving his heavenly ones. The fact is, John wasn’t asking too much; he was asking too little. He was asking the Father to resolve the temporary, while Jesus was busy resolving the eternal. John was asking for immediate favor, while Jesus was orchestrating grace for eternity.

That’s worth remembering the next time you hear the silence of God. If you’ve asked for a mate, but you’re still sleeping alone ... if you’ve asked for a child, but your womb stays empty ... if you’ve asked for healing, but you’re still hurting ... don’t think God isn’t listening. He is. And He’s answering requests you’re not even making.

Does that mean that Jesus has no regard for **injustice**? No. He cares about persecution. He cares about hunger and prejudice. And He knows what it’s like to be punished for something He didn’t do. He knows the meaning of the phrase, “It’s just not right.” It wasn’t right that people spit into His eyes. It wasn’t right that soldiers ripped chunks of flesh out of His back. It wasn’t right that spikes pierced His hands. It wasn’t right that the Son of God was forced to hear the silence of God. It wasn’t right, but it happened.

While Jesus was on the cross, God sat on His hands. He turned His back. He ignored innocent screams. He sat in silence while the sins of the world were placed upon His Son. In a world of injustice, God once and for all tipped the scales in the favor of grace and mercy, hope and love. And He did it so that we could know the King and His Kingdom.

John the Baptist sat in a dungeon of doubt as a captive of a King. He took his doubts to Jesus, and Jesus answered him, “Tell John that everything’s going as planned. **The kingdom is coming.**” And so John the Baptist died in a dungeon of death ... but died in faith, as a captive of a King.

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. We thank You for the truth of Your Word. And we thank You for this passage as dark and difficult as it is, for there is no work of Yours which will not ultimately make sense in the light of glory. Help us then to trust You until that day. Help us to live as captives of the true King. And as always, help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

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John 11:25-27

*“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. **Do you believe this?**” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*