

27.4.25 am

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Date: 27 April 2025

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. A warm welcome to the service this morning and it's especially good to see some visitors with us and you're especially welcome there's tea and coffee at the end of the service and if you are able to stay behind it would be good to get the chance to meet and enjoy fellowship together.

The notices have been on the screen and I'm going to highlight just a few of these, not all of them. First of all to say the evening service tonight will be usual time, 6 o'clock but it's the monthly Gaelic service and that service will be taken by the Reverend James McKeever.

Immediately after the Gaelic service there will be an English fellowship and it's not actually Carina McLean, McLeod from WEC will speak but there will be two people from WEC who are coming to speak about that ministry.

So be encouraged to come along and hear of what the Lord is doing in different parts of the world. So that's this evening, probably about quarter past seven by the time the Gaelic service is finished but just immediately after the Gaelic service.

Tomorrow, Monday, there will be the community lunch, the monthly community lunch so please go along to that if you're able to do so. The midweek prayer meeting this week is on Tuesday rather than Wednesday normally.

[1 : 22] We have the Wednesday prayer meeting. This week we're having it on Tuesday and joining with Scalpie and Leverborough here. If you remember back, I think it's probably two years since we had a healthy gospel church kind of meeting.

So there's going to be a meeting where Andrew Giffen and David Meredith will come and speak with us. There'll be a time of prayer and it will be a fairly informal meeting but that's half past seven and that's on Tuesday, not Wednesday.

Because of that, Road to Recovery will be on Wednesday, not Tuesday. So please take note of that. A couple more things. The men's Bible study, we had a men's breakfast yesterday which was excellent.

It was over 20 men who came. There wasn't a continental breakfast to be seen, sausages, bacon. It was very acceptable and of great encouragement. There's a men's Bible study starting this coming Thursday.

Scott will kind of give a lead with that and he'll be helped by various others. So that will be this coming Thursday and then every two Thursdays after that.

[2 : 36] So every second week. And Scott is going to be looking, beginning at Luke 19, 28 and essentially following Jesus as he enters into Jerusalem.

So all gents, all men, be encouraged to come along to that if you're able. Service is next Sunday. Morning service will be taken by the Reverend Derek Maxwell from Slavic Gospel.

They come along every two years and so this is the night for that one. Well, the morning for that one. Evening service will be taken by Scott. Two more things. First of all, Presbytery Camp for the young folks is taking place next weekend in Scalladale.

If anyone is able to provide some baking, that would be much appreciated. Sign up sheet at the door and if you're able to help, please put your name and indicate what you can give there.

We'll see the young folks with us next Sunday. Last thing, happy birthday, Angus Alec, 88 today. And I'll have to run fast to get away from that at the end of the service.

[3 : 48] Let's now worship God and let us sing to God's praise from Psalm 8. Psalm 8, and we'll sing the whole of this psalm. How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name.

How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name.

Who has thy glory far advanced above the starry frame.

From heaven's hand, from heaven's hand, from heaven's hand, thou didst strength or gain.
For I was caused that so thy might, the avenging glory strain.

[4 : 52] When I look up unto the heavens, which thy Lord fingers flamed.

And to the moon and to the stars, which were by thee ordained.

Then say I want this man that he remember his thy need.

For what the son of man that thou so kind to him shouldst be.

For thou a little lower hast, him than the angels made.

[5 : 52] With glory and with dignity, the crown it has dispelled.

All thy hands, thou mayest, Lord, all our thirst feet display.

All sheep and oxen, yea, and beasts that in the field do stray.

How tall the airfish of the sea, all that pass through the same.

How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name.

[6 : 52] Let's unite our hearts in prayer together.

Let's pray. Our heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, the Lord's day.

This day that has been set apart from all other days where we are able to come apart from all that we would normally do in the course of our week. We thank you for the command that you've given us to stop work and to take rest in your presence.

And we thank you for that promise that as we wait upon the Lord, our strength is renewed. And so we pray for that as we bow in your presence on this day.

That we may know the refreshing experience of Sabbath rest. We pray that we would know what it is to be still.

[8 : 09] And know that you are God. And that you are the God who is with us. And that you are the God who is for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us?

We thank you, Lord, for the reminder that is given to us each Lord's day of the fact that Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior, he is risen.

We remember that on Easter day. But we remember that every week as we come together like this.

On the first day of the week, when they went to the tomb to see the body of the Lord Jesus, the tomb was empty because the body of the Lord Jesus had been resurrected.

And we thank you for that truth that has come through the ages, that has reverberated through history. The fact that Jesus died for our sin and rose from the dead, promising everlasting resurrection life to all who believe.

So give us faith, Lord, we pray, that we would be those who believe. That we would not simply hear the word today. That we would not simply gather in a building with people.

[9 : 25] But we ask that we would have that sense that we are also in the presence of God. And we pray that we would be given faith. That we may not only hear the promises of God, but that we may take hold of them.

And that we may be able to know that we are saved. That we are forgiven. That we have resurrection, eternal life through him if we believe.

Help us, Lord. We pray to believe and to take hold of the hope and the comfort of the gospel. We pray for that comfort once more. Week by week, we come together and we are conscious of those who are grieving.

And this week, once more, we remember those who are grieving. We think of the family of Kathy Campbell. We thank you, Lord, for her life and for her witness.

We thank you for all that we remembered in this week as we gather together. We thank you for the many ways that she pointed us to the Lord Jesus. And we thank you for the promise that we are comforted by in knowing that she is now with Jesus and like Jesus.

[10 : 35] So we pray for your comfort for our family and we pray for your comfort for all who grieve. Those who are present with us. Those who are absent from us.

Those who have lost loved ones in past weeks and months. Those who have lost loved ones years back. We ask, Lord, for your comfort and for your peace to be given to all who grieve.

We ask now, Lord, that as we seek to worship you, that we would be given a sense of your presence. That we would worship you in spirit and in truth.

And we pray, Lord, that you would bless us as we look to you. And we ask this together with the forgiveness of our sins which we confess. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Boys and girls. Would you like to come over? How are you all today?

[11 : 54] You can remember all to see Aunt Angus Alec happy birthday on the way out. Give him a fist pump. Where's Scott and Gordon? They're both here, aren't they?

There's Scott in the front row. And there's Gordon over there. What do you think they look like today? Do they look fresh and happy?

Or do you think they maybe look a wee bit tired? Maybe a wee bit older than they did this time last week? They look a bit like men who've been under a bit of pressure, don't they?

And do you know why? Because Scott and Gordon have been in exam season. Do you know what exams are? Well, just for those who might not know.

Exams are where, when the teachers test you. And they make sure that you've been listening. Do you always listen in class? And at Sclarian, nursery. Do you always listen to maths class in English and make sure?

[12 : 57] Well, you're supposed to listen to the teachers in class. And they teach you things. And you take them in. And then at the end of the term, they do a wee test.

And they make sure that you've learned everything that you need to know. And so, for Scott and for Gordon, both who are training to be ministers, they're getting asked questions about church history and all kinds of different things.

And so, they've been sitting exams and they've been writing essays. And now, are they all done? They're all done.

So, they're very tired. But they don't have to do any more for a wee while. But now, the thing is, they have to wait for the results. Because once you do the exam, the teachers go away and they take out their red pens.

And they start looking for things that are wrong. And then they'll give you a mark. How many percent out of a hundred, how much do you have to get to pass?

[14 : 10] Scott? Uh-huh. It's quite low, he says. Do you want to be more specific than that? So, you can be 60% wrong and still pass.

So, I think back in my day as well, it was 40% that you had to get to get a pass. But what are you aiming for? What do you want to get? You want to get 100%, don't you?

Do you think you're going to get 100%, Scott? Gordon, do you think you're looking for 100% in any of your essays or your exams? Well, maybe revisit this in a few weeks, will we?

Here's a question, boys and girls. Do you know that God has a pass mark for us?

If we want to get into heaven, what's the pass mark? Or put it another way.

[15 : 19] How many mistakes, how many sins can we take with us into heaven? What do you think? Do you think we can take sins with us into heaven?

Emily? No? So, I suppose God's pass mark is 100%. We have to be perfect if we're going to get to heaven.

So, do you think that you can get all the way through your life without doing any sins?

Do you think you can get all the way through your life without making any mistakes? Not a chance. Same as me.

Not a chance. I can't even get through an hour without making mistakes and without sinning. They might not all be from our mouths or, you know, that people can see in our actions.

[16 : 29] But in our minds, in our hearts, what God sees, we're always sinning. So, none of us can live a perfect life, can we?

So, that's a bit of a problem. If to get to heaven, there's no sin, we have to be perfect. And if we can't be perfect because we're always sinning, there's a problem.

But God could see our problem and God loved us. And so, what did he do? What was God's plan to save us?

Who was God's plan to save us? Who did God send into this world to save us? Finley. Jesus.

That's right.

Did Jesus ever sin? Finley? Not even once. Not even once.

[17 : 31] Did Jesus live a perfect, absolutely perfect life? He did, didn't he? And Jesus promises in the gospel, the good news that we call it, Jesus promises that if we trust in him, do you know what he'll do?

He'll take all our sin away. And he'll fix it. That's what the cross was all about. And he'll take all his perfection, his righteousness is the word the Bible uses, and he'll give it to us.

And all we have to do is ask him. We just have to trust him. It's a bit like, it's a bit like, he takes away our exam paper, that's all full of mistakes, and in its place, he puts his perfect exam paper that has no mistakes, and everything is absolutely right.

All we have to do is trust him. So let's pray and ask Jesus to do that for us. Lord God, we thank you that you love us, and we know that we are sinners.

We know that we sin in our thoughts, and in the things that we say sometimes, and the things that we do. None of us live a perfect life.

[19 : 02] And we know that heaven is a place where there's no sin. And so what was left to us, we know that none of us could get into heaven. But we thank you, Father, that you sent your son Jesus into this world.

We thank you that he was, and is, the perfect man. We thank you that he lived the perfect life for us. And we thank you that he went to the cross to die.

To take all our sin, all our imperfection away. And we thank you that if we trust him, he promises he will do that for us, and open up the gates to heaven.

So we ask, Lord Jesus, that you would do that for us. Take away our sin as we confess it, as we tell you about it. And give to us your rightness, your perfection.

Give to us, we pray, that place in heaven, as we believe in you. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Boys and girls, we're going to sing now, and we're going to sing Mission Praise 296.

[20 : 19] 296 in Mission Praise. And it says, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me, a sinner, condemned unclean.

How marvelous, how wonderful, my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. We'll stand to sing just a moment. I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned unclean.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. For me it was in the garden, we prayed, not my will but thine.

He had no tears for his own grace, but sweat drops of blood for life. How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be.

[22 : 00] How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. In 50 angels beheld him, and came from the world of light.

To comfort him in the sorrows, he bore for my soul at night. How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. He took my sins, and my sorrows, he made them his very own.

He bore the burden to come with, and suffered and died alone. How marvelous, how wonderful, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. When with the ransomed in glory, His face I at last shall see.

[23 : 38] T'will be my joy through the ages, to sing of His love for me. How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour's love for me. Okay, boys and girls, if you head to Sunday school, remember to pray for them as they go.

Okay. If we could turn in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 14, please.

In fact, I think I'll read from Matthew 13, and at verse 53, it probably won't be on the screen, but that's fine, you can just listen.

So Matthew chapter 13, verse 53, through to Matthew chapter 14, verse 12. This is the continuation of our studies in Matthew's Gospel.

[25 : 21] This is God's Word. And when Jesus had finished these parables, He went away from there. And coming to His hometown, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

Is this not the carpenter's son? Is this not His mother called Mary? And are not His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all His sisters with us?

Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown and in his own household.

And he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus. 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. For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

[26 : 31] Because John had been saying to him, It is not lawful for you to have her. And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people because they held him to be a prophet.

But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod. So that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter. And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl.

And she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it. And they went and told Jesus.

[27 : 30] Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll sing again now to God's praise. We'll sing from Psalm 121.

The first two stanzas of the psalm. We'll sing in Gaelic. I'll read the verses in English. I to the hills will lift mine eyes. From whence doth come my need?

My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. Thy foot ye'll not let slide. Nor will he slumber that he keeps. Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not, nor sleeps.

These two verses of Psalm 121. We remain seated to sing in Gaelic. Thank you.

Thank you.

[29 : 11] Thank you.

Please voy. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

[30 : 43] I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Let's pray as we come back to God's word. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We recognize that all scripture is God breathed. It's all useful for us. It's all necessary for us to meditate on and learn from.

Some passages we come to readily and we see clearly the message within them. Some passages we can see immediately the joy and the hope of the gospel.

[31 : 58] And there are some passages that we struggle with in terms of understanding, even in terms of the circumstances that are recorded.

It's difficult for us to read and to think through them all. And this is a passage a lot like that. And so we pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that inspired Matthew to record these grim events.

We pray, Holy Spirit, that you would be working in this place and in our hearts, in our lives, that you would help us to understand, that you would illuminate our minds, that you would touch our hearts. And as we sang that our eyes would be lifted from this world and all that preoccupies us for six days. We pray that our eyes would be lifted from ourselves.

We confess that we are so quick to focus on ourselves and enable us, we pray, to see what you would have us see in this passage. And that we would be directed to the one that John the Baptist pointed us to so consistently, to the Lord Jesus.

[33 : 06] So we pray that you would help us. We pray for the children in Sunday school. We thank you for them. And for those in Cresce and for those in the church here as well, we thank you for these little ones.

We thank you that the Lord Jesus called them to come to him. We thank you for the fact that these young ones give us an illustration of what it looks like to believe.

We pray that we would have that childlike faith, that we would hear the voice of Jesus, that we would come to the Lord Jesus, that we would seek the blessing that he gave to the children and gives to all who come to him.

So we pray for them in Sunday school. We ask that they would understand the message of the gospel, that they would trust the Lord in their early years, that they would walk with the Lord all the days of their lives.

So hear our prayers. Help us. We pray for other congregations around us here in Tarbert and in Scalpe and in South Harris and across Lewis.

[34 : 09] Whatever Christ crucified is preached. Whatever denomination, we ask, Lord, that you would be at work and that you would bless the word as it goes forth. We pray for the congregations that are connected with us this day as well, for those who visit us, for the fellowships that they belong to.

And we ask, Lord, that you would be at work in the places that their minds go back to. And that across the nation and across all nations, the name of Jesus would be lifted up and that we would be drawn to him.

So hear our prayers. Help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

suddenly becomes famous. The term that has been used over more recent years is going viral. It could be a music band. One day they're practicing in a garage in some backyard. It could be a singer-songwriter who's just noodling away on his guitar, absolutely unnoticed. Then they put a video on social media, and almost overnight, suddenly they're famous. And there's newspapers, and there's TVs, and there's photographers chasing them down the street. The example that I thought of was probably the only one I could think of immediately was the guys down the road, Pete and Diesel, who one day are playing in a bar, and the next day are all over media outlets like BBC Alaba.

[36 : 05] Their fame spread very quickly. But when someone or something goes viral, when someone or something suddenly becomes famous, usually we would think of that as a good thing.

Usually we would think of that as something that people aspire to, and it's celebrated. People become celebrities. And there's lots of people who want that. They want that fame. They want to become famous. But sudden fame brings risks and dangers. And we see that as we return to Matthew chapter 14.

What we see in this grim episode is that Jesus' fame is growing.

The name of Jesus is beginning to become known in circles of power. And although that fame drew big crowds, it brought with it danger.

Danger for Jesus, danger that he knew about. From before the foundation of the world, he knew of this danger. But this danger also was very much real for those who were associated with Jesus.

[37 : 34] And so the first point today is the fame of Jesus. Four points, if I manage to get through this in the time. We see the fame of Jesus, verse 1.

Then there's the fragrance of Jesus that comes to John the Baptist, verse 1 and 2. The third thing is we get this flashback to the death of John the Baptist.

And that's the majority of the rest of the passage that we read. And then if I have time at the end, we'll think about the four characters and what we can learn from these four characters in the story that's recounted for us.

So first of all, the fame of Jesus. Verse 1. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus.

So let's think just for a moment about the fame of Jesus. What did that look like at that time? Was that fame that was coming to Jesus, was that fame meant that everyone was loving Jesus?

[38 : 48] Was his name universally cherished as the fame of Jesus is growing? Was the red carpet being rolled out for Jesus wherever he went?

Was he being given the best seats at every restaurant that he attended? Were there TV chat show hosts asking him to come on and give an interview?

Were there the influencers of that day begging him to come on to their podcasts? Well, none of that was happening. Because as Jesus was becoming increasingly famous, storm clouds were gathering.

We read at the end of chapter 13. And the section that we read at the end of chapter 13 in the ESV has that title, Jesus Rejected at Nazareth.

So as the fame of Jesus is spreading, his own people, they don't celebrate him.

[39 : 58] They criticize him. They say, who is this? We know him. We know his brothers. We know his father. We know his mother. We know his sisters. We know where he worked.

Where is he getting all this stuff from? And they're not willing to receive him. But they are more than ready to resist him.

And reject him. And this, at the end of Matthew 13, is just the beginning of a trajectory of rejection that would take Jesus to the cross.

And Jesus knew all this. He knew that this is the way it was going to go. He knew about the rejection. He knew about the hate.

He knew about the resistance. He knew about all that he would suffer in the eye of this storm. Before he ever came into the world, and yet still he came.

[41 : 06] Think about that for a moment. Jesus left heaven. Where his fame, where his glory, was never met with resistance.

Ever. Jesus left a place where he was continually worshipped. Where he was always recognized as the one who was worthy of all praise and all glory.

He left that place. Didn't have to. But he chose to. And he came to this world. To a small village. Called Nazareth. Which was about the size of Tarbert. Four to six hundred people, they say, lived there. It was a kind of... It was a place that was not celebrated in that day and age.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? That's what they said about Nazareth. That's where Jesus chose to come. And he came to an ordinary family. And he worked in an ordinary job.

[42 : 21] And Isaiah tells us he didn't have striking good looks. He laid aside his majesty. And for thirty years, Jesus was almost unnoticed.

The one who's at the center of heaven. The one all eyes are on. Continual glory being directed to the one who's worthy of all praise.

And he comes to this world and no one notices him. There's not a word of praise. And then at the age of thirty, Jesus puts down his carpenter's tools.

And he begins to minister. And he begins to be noticed. But as the name and as the fame of Jesus began to grow, his name was not honored.

His name was actually increasingly hated. And why did Jesus do all this? Why did he come to this place?

[43 : 43] Why did he put himself into this situation? Why does he allow himself to be at the center of all this infamy, resistance, rejection? Suffering?

Well, it was for us. Because he loved us. Because he was on a mission to save us.

As we often sing in the hymn, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

And so he came from heaven to this world so that the gate of heaven could be unlocked for those who trust him. The fame of Jesus. Second point, the fragrance of Jesus.

Verse 1, as we continue on at that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus and he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist. He's been raised from the dead.

[44 : 47] That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. So Matthew, at this point, he draws our attention in verse 1 to Herod.

So who was Herod? Well, Herod is part of a wider family and they were known for their resistance, for their rejection, for their hatred of Jesus.

Whenever you see the name Herod in the Bible, whatever generation, whichever Herod it is, there's always rejection of Jesus. So this Herod was a kind of low-level Herod.

He was a sort of king, but not really a king. He was a tetrarch, which means he ruled a quarter of the kingdom.

And when Herod heard about the fame of Jesus, he immediately mistook the identity of Jesus as being that of John the Baptist. Why?

[45 : 48] Well, because John was a lot like Jesus. John was so much like Jesus that when Herod heard of Jesus, he immediately connects him with John.

So something of the fragrance, we're on the second point now, Donald, something of the fragrance of Jesus was about John. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2 and verse 15 says, we are the aroma of Christ.

Speaking to Christians, he says, we are the aroma of Christ. And John brought the aroma, the fragrance of Jesus to all who came into contact with him. John's life was not about John.

John's life was all about Jesus. Think about how John was as we track his life through the Bible.

Think about John in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 3. What is he doing there? He's preparing the way for Jesus. And then when Jesus begins to minister, what does John do?

[47 : 08] He gets out of the way of Jesus. John, who you could say was almost like the pastor of a megachurch in the wilderness.

Everybody's coming to John. They're hearing about this strange man who eats locusts and wild honey and he dresses in an unorthodox way and he preaches with such power.

Everyone comes to hear John. And then Jesus begins to minister. And the crowds all leave John. And what does John do? John doesn't say, what about me? What about my congregation? What about my parish? What about my name? No, John simply gets out of the way of Jesus.

John, in John chapter 1, he says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[48 : 09] John says to everyone who listens, don't look at me. Look at Jesus. And then as the crowds grew even more for Jesus and shrank for John, the disciples of John come to him and they say, what's going on here?

Everybody's going to him. They're looking for John to say, I know, it's terrible. What can we do? We need to build the congregation back up. But what John says to his disciples as they complain is he, Jesus, must increase.

I must decrease. And John lived saying that. And John died saying that.

Even in John's death, he's pointing us to Jesus. One commentator, Ross, says, just as John served as the forerunner to Jesus in his ministry, so he now serves as the forerunner to Jesus in his death. The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth and the hostility of Herod indicate to us that the shadow of the cross is falling darkly across the path of Jesus.

[49 : 34] Jesus. the fragrance of Jesus is all over John.

And if you and I want an example of how to live well, if we want an example of how not to waste our lives, then we have it in John.

Because everything in John's life had the aroma, had the fragrance of Jesus about it. And if we are Christians, that's our calling.

We're to be about Jesus. We're to be like Jesus. We're to point people to Jesus. And in this particular culture that we're in, there's something hugely compelling about someone who says, it's not all about me.

Because we're continually being asked the question, how do you feel about this? And how do you feel about that? And what do you think about this? And what do you think about that? Everything is designed in our culture to make us think about me. But our calling is not to be affected by that culture.

[51 : 02] It's to be counter-cultural. Our calling is to say, it's not about me. It's not about my ambitions.

It's not about my business. It's not about how much money I've got in the bank. It's not about how many likes I have on social media. It's about Jesus. we point people to Jesus.

This week as we met for the funeral and for the wake for Kathy Campbell, we remembered her and we gave thanks to God for our life.

But the thing that was so striking about Kathy was just she was like Jesus. the contentedness that was on her face even that spoke to us about Jesus.

The gentleness, the kindness in the way that she spoke and in the way that she gave of herself and her things. It was like Jesus.

[52 : 17] She was like Jesus. she and her life pointed us to Jesus. Something of the fragrance of Jesus was about her. Something of the fragrance of Jesus was all over John.

And something of the fragrance of Jesus should be about us if we are Christians. And how can that happen? How can the fragrance of Christ be about us?

Well, it's by being with Jesus. I was thinking back to when I was a wee boy and I remember one day sitting beside my mother and to my horror she, without any announcement, put on some perfume.

And so she put perfume on herself but I was almost sitting on her lap and for the rest of the day I was absolutely paranoid because maybe I had this fragrance about me. Because I was sitting close to her.

And that's how fragrance works, isn't it? If we want to have the fragrance of Jesus about us, we need to be with Jesus, close to him, in the word, in prayer, in the house of God, at the prayer meeting, in these places where we have the promise that he will be there with us.

[53 : 45] The fragrance of Jesus, the fame of Jesus, the third point is the flashback that we have here to the death of John the Baptist. And what we often learn in the Bible is that techniques that the modern-day filmmakers use, they actually get from the biblical narratives.

Matthew uses what we would call the flashback technique. We are familiar with this in films. You know, very often in films, the director will be telling the story.

And sometimes as they tell the story and work through the plot, there's a break. And then all of a sudden we're taken back in time to ten years earlier.

We're given an insight into this character and why this character is the way he or she is. And that's the technique that Matthew uses here. He's telling us about Herod. And what we know from Herod is that he is very interested in the fame of Jesus.

He connects it immediately with John the Baptist and that troubles him. Herod's conscience is troubling him. He's disturbed. And now Matthew tells us why.

[54 : 56] He tells us this grim story. Verse 3, But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod.

Maybe I'll take a wee break just for a moment. Matthew, when he writes this, when he's writing this, he's thinking first of all about the audience that would first read this, and that was a Jewish audience.

And the Jews, interestingly, especially the Jewish kings, they never ever celebrated their birthday. There was no recollection, there was no note of the birthday.

And so here we have Herod, and it's his big day, it's his birthday, and he throws this big party. And so the Jews would be saying, first of all, that's no way for a king to behave. And in terms of his relationship with his brother Philip's wife, that too was no way for a king to behave.

That was something that was morally wrong. It was also incestuous. And so we have this illegal relationship with this totally unacceptable king, and it comes to his birthday and he throws a party, which he should never have done in the eyes and in the mind of those who were listening to this.

[56 : 44] And then it gets worse. When Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias, which would have been his niece, I think, danced.

Now again, the Jews, when they danced in any kind of celebration, it was a kind of communal dancing, a bit like an Achille dancing, all together. There was never a dance when one girl danced. So what's going on here is sinister, it's lurid. There's an erotic dance that is happening here and we're told in verse 6 that this pleased, there's a lot in that word pleased, Herod.

So he promised, verse 7, with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.

the king was sorry because of his oaths and the guests he commanded it to be given.

[58 : 01] Why was he sorry by the way? When you think about that, why was he sorry? Did he not want John dead? He did want John dead. But the people thought John was a prophet, so there would be a revolt.

So he was sorry because this was going to cause political uprisings. So it was still all about him.

The king was sorry but because of his oaths and guests he commanded it to be given, he sent and had John be headed in the prison.

And the head was brought on a platter and given to the girl. The girl was somewhere between the age of 12 and 14. Her name was Salome, the historians tell us.

And so we have this awful image of this traumatized girl walking through past all these men in a party with the head of John the Baptist.

You know, it's an awful, dark, grim scene. She brings it to her mother. And the disciples of John, verse 12, came and took the body, which was a brave thing to do, and buried it.

[59 : 21] And they went and told Jesus. So it's a grim story. It's not a story we like to read.

But it's in the gospel here, because this is what happened. happened. This is what happened in history. And we need to be aware of the fact, as much as we don't like to read of it, this still happens.

the Sunday school, don't go into details like this, but they work through something called the Open Doors World Watch List.

Open Doors is an organization that I think about persecuted Christians, and they give updates on how Christians are suffering around the world. So every week, the children, they hear a kind of sanitized version of what's going on in different countries where people are suffering for Jesus'

sake.

And it's happening. People are still being arrested for Jesus' sake. People are still being imprisoned for speaking God's word.

[60 : 35] People are still dying because they are faithful to Jesus. But in verse 12, we're told that Jesus heard of the death of John.

that's an important detail to take in. The death of John did not go unnoticed.

That's why it's recorded in Matthew, and it's actually recorded more fully in Mark's Gospel. And still today, although the 6 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 9 o'clock, whatever news will not tell you, about the deaths of Christians.

There are Christians who are dying in Nigeria and Pakistan and Southeast Asia and Myanmar, and the list goes on.

and we never hear about them. But Jesus knows about them. He knows every name that suffers and dies for his sake.

[61 : 53] J.C. Ryle says, we have in this passage a page out of God's book of martyrs, the history of the death of John the Baptist. And then the quote from Psalm 116, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

So this story ends in this section with Jesus being told about the death of John.

And there's a sense of anticipation here. There's a question that isn't actually written, but which comes to our minds. The question is, what will Jesus do?

He's just heard about the death of John the Baptist. what will he do? And if we were to read on, which we will do in time, we can see exactly what Jesus did about death.

Jesus went to a cross to wage war with death. Jesus went to a cross so that death would not be the end of the story for John the Baptist, just as death was not the end of the story for Jesus.

[63 : 09] Yes, Jesus died to take away the sin of the world, but he rose from the dead, just as he promised.

He said in John 11, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

John believed. So John is not dead. John, as we speak, is alive with Jesus in heaven.

And that's true of all who have believed in Jesus. There's so many who have sat with us here, even in this building, in some of the seats that are empty.

I can see faces. I can hear voices. We can think of those who sat with us in the church, who walked with us in life, who have died.

[64 : 22] But if they are trusting in Jesus, today they are not dead. they are with Jesus in heaven. And so the question for us is, do we believe?

Will we, when the time comes for us to face death, will we go through death into life that's everlasting?

Will we have a place in heaven? Because that's what Jesus promises to all who believe in him.

Final point, very briefly, you can do the thinking yourselves when you get home, I'll just give you the headings.

Four characters, four characters to learn from. And you can just take this away with you, as we think about these four characters.

characters. The first character is Herod. And what did Herod do? Well, Herod heard the word of God, but he didn't do the word of God.

[65 : 40] He sat in the chairs, he listened to the sermons. He liked the preacher. Matthew tells us in verse four that he heard the word of God through John.

Mark tells us in Mark chapter six that Herod actually liked to listen to John. He heard him gladly. He didn't have to get dragged to church.

He was glad to hear John the Baptist, but he wasn't willing to do anything about what he heard. God and if we were to fast forward to the trial of Jesus, Herod meets Jesus.

The same Jesus that John the Baptist preached to Herod about actually sits before Herod. And we're told in Luke 23 that when Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad.

Just as he was very glad to hear John, he's very glad to see Jesus for he had long desired to see him because he'd heard about him. And he was hoping to see some sign done by him, so he questioned him at some length.

[66 : 58] But Jesus made no answer. Because the opportunity for Herod was gone.

And it's a warning that perhaps some of us, even in this room, need to hear. This is a warning of what can happen if we hear the word of God, even hear it gladly.

But don't do what it says. Don't respond. Psalm 95, I quote it so often, because this is the text I was converted to myself.

Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. do something, believe. Herod, he heard the word of God, but he didn't do it.

Herodias, second character, she hated the word of God. Herodias is the wife that Herod should not have had.

[68 : 06] The relationship was wrong. John said it was wrong time and time again. Herodias hated John because he spoke God's word to her and it offended her.

And so she hardened her heart and she nursed a bitter grudge and it poisoned her from the inside out.

that's what sin does. If we allow sin, whatever sin, to be harbored in our hearts, it will poison us for time and for eternity.

Herod, Herodias, third character is the daughter of Herodias, Salome. she was hurt by those who turned away from the word of God.

It's such a tragic story. This little girl, 13 years old probably, and she's used to get at John and we can't imagine how much she suffered as she's made to do this dance.

[69 : 26] she's all these eyes on her. We can't imagine how much she suffered as she hears her mother saying, I want the head of John. She goes back and she tells the story.

We can't imagine how traumatized she must have been as she walks through this party carrying this severed head. She's hurt.

And it's a clear warning here. When we turn away from God and from his word, we tend to say in our own minds and in our own hearts, well, I'm only hurting myself.

When we turn away from God and his word, we tend to say, well, you know, my sin is only affecting me. But it's never the case.

When we turn from God, God, when we turn from his word, when we sin, others are always affected. The damage, the hurt, is never contained within our own lives.

[70 : 43] The daughter of Herodias is a tragic illustration of that. The final character is John the Baptist. And he heralded the word of God.

Even though that word was not popular, just as it isn't today, even though to do so was very costly, John remained faithful.

he heralded the word of God and he pointed people to God, the word, to the Lord Jesus.

So let's learn. Four characters to learn from. Let's learn from Herod and Herodias, the dangers of hearing and not doing anything about what we hear, the dangers of hardening our hearts and the hurt that that brings, not just to us, but to others.

And let's listen to John and look to Jesus and come to Jesus, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

[72 : 02] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this passage, as hard as it is for us to think about, as disturbing as it is to see worked out in the lives of those who are shown to us in it.

We pray that you would take this passage and that you would apply it to us, that the Holy Spirit may be working even in our lives today, that we may see where we are in relation to all this, that we may understand our own hearts and see what you are calling us to do.

Help us, we pray, to do what John the Baptist called everybody to do, and that was to come to Jesus. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We sing to conclude a response really to this call. 275 in Mission Praise, I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest.

[73 : 36] Great and the weary one later, my head upon my rest.

I live to Jesus as I was, weary and warm and sad.

I found him in a resting place and he has made me land.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, behold, I free begin.

! The living water thirsty one stood down and drink and live.

[74 : 37] I came to Jesus and I drank of that time giving stream.

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, I am this dark world's light.
Look unto me, thy Lord shall rise, and all thy day be bright.
I look to Jesus stand like love in him my star my sun.
[75 : 38] And in that light of life I walk till drowning days I turn.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more. Amen.