

## Introduction

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, The Death of a Prophet and it is taken from Mark 6:14 – 29 and Matthew 9:35- chapter 10. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, The Death of a Prophet.

## SM025 – The Death of a Prophet

For days, for weeks, Herod's servants had been reporting to him about strange events happening in his realm.

"Master, the reports continue of large gatherings of people in the villages of Galilee. We don't believe it is an uprising against you. But just last week a Jewish rabbi was teaching the people and hundreds were listening to him and then ..." the servant's voice faltered as if he were afraid to give Herod the rest of his report.

"Go on," Herod said, "What else happened."

The servant said, "Master, I saw sick people carried on stretchers to the rabbi who was teaching. Then, he would lay his hands upon them, and they would rise up, completely well."

Another servant said, "Master, I was in Capernaum and I saw the same things. I actually saw a paralyzed man get up and walk."

Another said, "I have seen the blind given sight."

And another said, "I have seen the dead raised. Just the other day a synagogue official's daughter died and this rabbi raised her from the dead."

"Enough!" Herod bellowed. It was clear that fear was on his face. "I have had enough reports, but what I want to know is, 'who is this man doing these things?'" What do you say?

The servants looked at one another. Finally, one ventured an answer. "Some say that Elijah the prophet has come back to Israel. In the writings of their holy books, it is prophesied that Elijah will come again and will do a great work among the Jewish people."

Another servant said, "I don't know if he is Elijah but I know that only a prophet from God can do these things. He is like one of the prophets of old."

"And the people, what are the people saying?" Herod asked.

"The people are saying that ... it is John the Baptist."

"What? How can it be John. I had John beheaded."

"They are saying that John has risen from the dead and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him."

Herod turned white with fear. John risen from the dead? This would be his worst nightmare. Herod could fight an army. Herod could arrest normal men and execute them, but this was a power beyond him. How could he fight, how could he control a power like this? What would he say to Caesar if word got out about this?

"Leave me," Herod said. "All of you leave me," and the servants walked out of Herod's palace leaving him to his dark thoughts.

Herod got up from his throne and walked to the windows of his palace and looked out upon the land that he ruled. He controlled all of Galilee and Perea, the land east of the Jordan River that he had inherited from his father, Herod the Great. He had fortified the city of Sepphoris and added a strategic wall for the defense of Betharamptha in Perea. He had also built a great city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and named it after the emperor Tiberius, but Rome would not look kindly upon the disturbances in his kingdom.

But what could Herod do? He could not fight such power with the weapons that he had. "Yes, John whom I have beheaded has risen!" Herod thought. "John has risen from the dead and that is why such power is shown in him."

"Why did I behead him? Why did I do these things to him? Now what will I do when John comes to face me? I will not be able to look at him. I will not be able to sit on my throne before him. I will be at his mercy."

Herod thought back to the days when John was preaching. Herod had watched him. Herod would not be happy about the peasants gathering by the hundreds or thousands to listen to this man preach. If he preached rebellion against his rule he might organize the people into an army against him and Herod would have to put down an insurrection.

And John was preaching about another kingdom. John preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He did not preach about another kingdom of this world attacking but he preached about the

kingdom of God coming to earth and about some Jewish Messiah who would lead his people into the kingdom.

But as troubling as this message was, it was John's meddling in his personal affairs that caused the most trouble.

Many years before Herod Antipas had travelled to Rome and there he met the wife of his half brother Philip. Her name was Herodias and Herod Antipas fell in love with her. They spent much time together in Rome and the two agreed that they wanted to marry. And so Herodias and Philip divorced and Herod Antipas arranged for the divorce of his wife, the daughter of the King of Nabataea. Then, Herod and Herodias married and everything seemed wonderful and happy until John started preaching against him.

"It is unlawful for Herod to have his brother's wife, Herodias," John had preached. "Herod claims to follow the law of God but he is breaking the law of God by marrying Herodias. Your king, Herod is in sin and he must repent of his sin."

It was bad enough that John was spoiling his marriage to Herodias, but he was also inciting the crowds against him. Herod had to do something. He could not allow John to continue to preach this way and so one day Herod sent his troops to find John, arrested him, and had him taken to the stronghold of Machaerus.

Herod thought back to his first sight of John. He looked like a prophet! He was dressed in the skins of animals and his hair was shaggy and his skin deeply tanned from many months of preaching in the open. How easy it would be to say the word and be done with John. Just one word and he could have John's head and be done with it all, but then, what would the people say?

The people were angry with Herod for arresting this man they believed to be a prophet. If he executed him on the spot there might be an uprising. No, it was better to wait. Let things quiet down a bit. Let people go back to their homes and families and work and then he would deal with this John. Besides, it might be fun to listen to him talk.

And so John the prophet was locked up in the stronghold of Machaerus and from time to time Herod would have John brought to him and the two of them would talk. Herod thought it would be fun, but the things John said frightened Herod. John talked about the kingdom of God. He talked about a Messiah who lead his people to the kingdom. He talked about mountains being leveled and valleys being raised up. John spoke about an act of God that would bring the kingdoms of the world to an end, including his own kingdom and the kingdom of Rome, and Herod feared.

Weeks passed and John remained in prison. Herodias, the wife of Herod said to him, "Why don't you kill that man. You are the king. He is nothing but a smelly prophet from these hideous Jews. He hates you Herod. He hates me. He hates our marriage. You know what he preached. You know how he turned the people against us."

But even though Herodias begged her husband to execute John, Herod was unwilling because he knew John was a righteous and holy man. He knew the multitudes backed John and Herod feared their

reaction. And so Herodias plotted and schemed and knew that she would have to use cunning and deception to get rid of this man that she so hated and despised. And one day an opportunity arose for her to carry out her evil wishes against John.

It was Herod's birthday, and Herodias and Herod and all the palace servants arranged for a great celebration on this special day. Many invitations had been sent to important lords and nobles for this great day to celebrate the birth of King Herod. No expense had been spared. The food was abundant. The wine flowed. The entertainment was endless and Herod was honored by his guests with endless compliments as they saw his wealth and splendor laid out before them. Herod was full of joy and mirth and wine and himself and then Herodias quieted the party and announced the next entertainment that would be before them all. Her own daughter would dance for the guests.

The music played a low, soft, sensual melody and the young woman appeared, the daughter of Herodias. Never had such beauty been seen in the palace of Herod. Her face and her form moved before Herod and the guests as they hungrily and greedily looked upon her, but none as hungry and greedy as Herod himself as he filled his eyes and his heart with every movement of her body. His desire awakened within him and began to surge through him. He was captivated, intoxicated with her and he wanted to give her anything that she wanted.

Herodias, despised her husband for this. She felt nothing but disgust as she watched her husband lust over the body of her own daughter. But her hatred of John was so great that she was willing to do anything to get rid of him, and now her trap was almost ready to spring shut upon her husband and upon John.

Suddenly the music stopped and Herod and the men rose in honor before the beautiful daughter of Herodias. She approached Herod, and he, with arrogance and stupidity said to her, "Anything. Ask me for anything and I will give it to you, up to half my kingdom!"

She said, "Do you promise? Do you swear to me before these guests that you will give me anything up to half your kingdom?"

And Herod said, "I swear it to you before my guests."

The young daughter of Herodias went to her mother and said, "You have heard it yourself. Your husband will give me anything I ask for, up to half his kingdom. What shall I ask for?"

And without hesitation Herodias said, "Tell him, 'I want the head of John on a platter before me, right now.'"

The young daughter smiled and returned to Herod. He and his guests were laughing and talking, not knowing the trap that was about to spring shut on them. In the presence of all and with a clear voice she said, "Here is what I want. I want the head of John the prophet, on a platter, right now."

Herod's mouth dropped open. He could not believe the request. She had not asked for wealth. She had not asked for authority. She had not asked for part of his kingdom, but she asked for the head of the

prophet that Herod feared and respected. He knew he had been set up. He looked at the end of the room and there was his wife with a stern look on her face. Her eyes focused like a wild animal ready to seize its prey. A slight smile on the corner of her mouth as one who had triumphed.

Herod was sick. He had not wanted it to end this way. He looked at his dinner guests but they stared back at him to see if he would keep his word to them. John was nothing to them. Why should they care. All they wanted to know is if Herod would keep his word. Herod continued to look around, his wife, her daughter, the dinner guests. Herod was alone and his word was at stake. If he did not keep his word to the girl he would lose face and word would spread that Herod did not keep his promises. They would mean disaster for his authority and might bring war.

Herod had no choice. He called for the executioner. “Bring me the head of John.” The executioner went immediately. No one moved. No music played. The daughter stayed before his throne. His wife continued to watch in the distance ensuring that this deed would be done.

A few minutes later, the executioner returned. He placed the platter before the king. The king gave the platter to the girl and the girl gave the platter to her mother whose face glowed with triumph. John, the prophet of God, the baptizer of the Messiah, the proclaimer of the kingdom was dead.

Herod came to himself. How many times had he relived those moments? And now, many weeks later, Herod, who thought he was finished with John had to deal with all these reports. Herod feared that John had risen from the dead and would soon confront him for all his sin and evil and crimes.

### **Interlude**

Hello everyone. This is Jonathan Williams, the creator and storyteller for Stories of the Master. Not every story from the Gospels ends with healing and praise. Sometimes, the stories are sad, like this one where the prophet John was martyred for speaking the truth of God. But even these sad stories can have a happy ending and we will see what happened in a just a few moments.

I hope you have been enjoying these weekly broadcasts and it is always so encouraging to hear from different listeners. Our desire is to take the stories of Jesus all over the world. Wouldn't you agree that the world needs to hear about Jesus, the stories he told, and the life he lived?

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak where we teach the truth of God's word to a world that desperately needs to hear truth. We show people how to develop a biblical worldview, how to obey God's word, and how to connect their personal story to the Story of God's love for them. If you would like to help us in this ministry, write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in San Antonio TX 78209. That's Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in San Antonio TX 78209.

We've been telling the story of the death of John at the hands of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Weeks had passed since the death of John but it seems that John's work has not stopped. Now there were reports of miracles and Herod, in his fear, thought John had risen from the dead. But had John risen from the dead? Let's get back to our story and find out where the miracles were coming from.

## Part 2

For months, while John was in prison at Machaerus and after he had been executed by Herod, Jesus had been healing in Galilee. Many times he had told people not to tell a soul, but they were so excited about Jesus' compassion and power that they could not remain quiet. And in this way the news about Jesus' power reached the halls of the palace of Herod Antipas.

But even though Jesus knew that word was spreading about him, and who could stop it, especially when thousands would flock to hear him preach, he never stopped teaching and healing the multitudes. He loved them too much.

Matthew, the tax collector, tells us that Jesus would go through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. <sup>36</sup> Seeing the people, He would feel compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

The work was so great. There were so many needs and Jesus knew that his time on earth was limited. He knew that he had to multiply his work through his disciples.

One day he said to His disciples, "A great and plentiful harvest of souls awaits us, but the workers are few. I want you to pray to my Father and ask him with great earnestness in your heart that he, the Lord of the harvest, would send out workers into His harvest."

And the disciples would pray that with him.

One day Jesus called twelve of them to himself. He had spent the entire night in prayer and he asked twelve of them to step forward as his special apostles to whom he would give authority.

The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

Jesus told them that it was now time for them to go out and preach. They had been with him for months and had learned many lessons. They had seen him heal. They had seen him eat with sinners. They had seen him cast out demons. It was time for them to put into practice what they had learned.

And so Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. He told them to proclaim the kingdom of God and he gave them many words of warning and many words of instruction that they would need.

First, they would need to be focused. There was a whole world in front of them, but their first mission would be to their own people only and so Jesus said, "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; <sup>6</sup> but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' <sup>8</sup> Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.

### **But how would their needs be met? They would have to eat and drink? Where would they sleep?**

Jesus said, <sup>9</sup>“Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, <sup>10</sup>or a bag for *your* journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. <sup>11</sup>And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave *that city*. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, give it your greeting. <sup>13</sup>If the house is worthy, give it your *blessing of peace*. But if it is not worthy, take back your *blessing of peace*. <sup>14</sup>Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. <sup>15</sup>Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Those were hard words! How could anything be worse than what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? And yet Jesus knew that if Israel did not repent, terrible calamities awaited the people. Yet, he would give them many chances and one of these chances would be in the preaching of the twelve to the people of Israel.

This would be a hard road before them. Jesus told them:

<sup>16</sup>“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup>But beware of men, for they will hand you over to *the* courts and scourge you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup>and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. <sup>20</sup>For it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

<sup>21</sup>“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>22</sup>You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

<sup>23</sup>“But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish *going through* the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

<sup>24</sup>“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. <sup>25</sup>It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more *will they malign* the members of his household!

<sup>26</sup>“Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup>What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in *your* ear, proclaim upon the housetops. <sup>28</sup>Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup>So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

With many other words Jesus prepared his disciples. Then he sent them out. They preached through many cities of Galilee to the Jewish people. They healed the sick, they cast out demons, they preached

the good news of the kingdom of God and the reports of all their activities and Jesus' activities reached the palace of Herod Antipas who feared that John had risen from the dead.

The disciples said to Jesus, "Jesus, your name is powerful. In your name the demons flee. In your name the sick are healed. In your name sinners are forgiven."

Just at that moment, while the disciples were rejoicing, some of the disciples of John came to Jesus and said, "Jesus, teacher, we have some bad news. We have been looking all over to find you to tell you this. John is dead. He was beheaded by Herod."

The news brought great sadness to Jesus. John, his cousin and the prophet who had baptized him had been martyred by Herod. The disciples stopped talking about all their preaching and healing and casting out demons. The mood turned somber.

Jesus spoke a few words with John's followers and they went away. Then he called his twelve aside and told them they must get away for a few days and rest. Jesus looked in the direction of Machaerus, many miles away where John had died and his heart grieved. Jesus thought on all the prophets who had lost their lives to tell the truth about God. Jesus thought about his own life and the end that would come to him. But one day, all of this suffering would end. One day, the kingdom of God would prevail.

High on a hill in the fortress of Machaerus a king sat on his throne. He was surrounded by servants, wealth, power, and pleasure. But in his heart he wondered what might happen to him. He looked toward Galilee where the reports were coming about the miracles. The kingdom of God was drawing near to him and he feared.

## **Ending**

Yes, Herod feared. He feared the multitudes. He feared John when he was alive. He feared the reports of the miracles. He was afraid that John had come back from the dead. He feared the coming of the kingdom of God, and rightly so.

The ancient stories tell us that one day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah. The ancient stories tell us that one day injustice and greed and suffering will be a thing of the past, and the kingdom that Jesus has started in Israel that has been spreading through the whole earth will be the only kingdom on a renewed earth with Jesus on the throne.

That is the day we look for and long for but until then, our task is to tell others about the king who has come that men might repent, acknowledge his sovereignty, receive his forgiveness, and find new life in his kingdom that will prevail.

Have you done this? Have you bowed your knee to King Jesus? If not, why not do so right now and let him reign in your life. Tell others about him, and live your life for him.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God Speak where we teach the truth of God's word for life change, a biblical worldview and to connect your story with the story of Christ's love for you. Our

desire to is help people all over the world connect their personal stories to the story of Christ's love for them. Please pray for us and help us with your financial gifts to take these stories to a world that needs to hear about the Savior of mankind. You can reach us at PO Box 90047 – SA TX 78209.

Please check out our website – [storiesofthemaster.com](http://storiesofthemaster.com) and you can listen to today's story again, download it or purchase a CD to share with a friend. You will also find books and studies that will help you grow in your discovery of Jesus and your relationship with him. And when you go to the website, don't forget to Recommend us on the FB icon.

My name is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have been blessed today and I look forward to you joining us next week for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master himself richly bless you.