

Jesus – Too Familiar and Too Foreign

Thomas Robinson, *Deeper with Jesus*, 4, February 23, 2014

Matthew 13:53-14:12

Jesus in his hometown Synagogue

⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴ 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**? ⁵⁵ Is not this the **carpenter’s son**? Is not his mother called **Mary**? And are not his brothers **James** and **Joseph** and **Simon** and **Judas**? ⁵⁶ And are not **all his sisters** with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, “**A prophet** is not without **honor** except in his **hometown** and in **his own household**.”

⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of **their unbelief**.

Herod Antipas deals with Jesus and John the Baptist

14:1 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**.

Matthew 12:46-50

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.

⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”

⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 17:10-13

¹⁰ And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?”

¹¹ He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Misunderstanding from Familiarity and Foreignness

“Ears to hear!” It was characteristic of Jesus’ teaching/parables that many “heard” but did not really hear or grasp what he was saying. Matthew has led us through many episodes, but wants us to engage the challenge, because it continued, then and now. Mt chooses this point to recount two episodes that are like little parables of misunderstanding and danger.

“Familiarity breeds contempt” – it’s a cliché. It also blinds people. We already “know” him. Jesus just taught people to be nice to each other. He was a great businessman, small group leader, revolutionary, popular philosopher, religious mystic, apocalyptic visionary, positive thinker.

Jesus was too long ago and far away. He’s too divisive and dangerous. He can’t speak to us.

We want a spirituality all can share without changing, not a Lord who calls to discipleship.

We’re in a different world with different issues. We can’t admit Jesus’ power in our world.

At Home among those who “knew” Him

We’ve never been there, but we can recognize the hometown scene. People who’ve known him since childhood, as a carpenter’s apprentice with his father, etc. We learn something of Jesus’ family: four brothers all with good biblical names, like Jesus/Joshua. At least three sisters. Mary is known, but Joseph seems gone. At least 8 children left. Our people.

When they hear Jesus now, they’re astonished, but don’t understand. They see Jesus not in terms of an in-breaking kingdom of God, not in terms of embodying God’s actions for his people.

How could they? He trying to be a Sage, a Wise man, a Wonder-worker. Where did he get this?

It’s not us, not from us. The real Sages of the Law oppose him; are after him. Etc.

Jesus is not surprised. He keeps a low profile. But note, this isn’t the end of the story. Jesus’ own brothers didn’t believe in him now [Jn 7:5], but his crucifixion and resurrection brought faith.

Notable Enough for the Powerful to Notice

For Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, it was as if Jesus just now appeared on the scene. He had recently executed John the Baptist, and he can imagine that Jesus is John resuscitated.

He just popped up on the radar. No history. Suddenly famous. What to make of him?

John is the best pigeonhole they have for Jesus. And it’s a dangerous analogy for Jesus. But Jesus must fit into some category. “Powers?” – sounds like a prophet. John is haunting me.

Herod Antipas and Herodias and the Death of John

The story of Herod imprisoning/killing John was well known, recounted in Mt, Mk, and Lk, and in the Jewish historian Josephus [Antiquities 18:116-119] with varying details that reflect the complex motivations and guesses at motivations. Herod Antipas had publically divorced a princess and married his niece, Herodias, who had divorced her husband. John condemned the marriage. Jesus noted John’s role as Elijah [Mal 4]. restorer of the people, forerunner of the Messiah. As Elijah was hated by Ahab and Jezebel [1Kg 17-19] so John had Antipas and Herodias.

But there was more. Josephus recounts how popular/powerful John was becoming and Herod’s fear that he might lead a rebellion, and thus imprisoned him in Macherus fortress. Herod’s mindless promise to his dancing step-daughter was just the irrational excuse to kill him.

In the meantime, the divorced princess’s father Aretas attacked Herod and destroyed his army. Josephus says that many thought this defeat was God’s punishment for killing John.

Then Herod learns about Jesus. He’s haunted by John. Is Jesus John revived? Matthew wants us to see the amoral irrationality and danger of such a ‘king.’ The opposite of God’s kingdom.

For Jesus, all the various oppositions simply showed the vast human brokenness and need for the very life, forgiveness, healing, and new Lordship, that God was bringing in through him.