

**Human hostility to God is revealed by our willingness to believe all manner of superstitious nonsense.**

15. According to vv. 3-4, why did Herod put John in prison? What was it that John was telling him (see Exodus 20: 14 & Lev. 18:16)?

*John was telling Herod, on a regular basis, that it was unlawful for Herod to have sexual relations with his brother's wife, Herodias. It was unlawful because God said so. (Please note that John, who is Jewish, is telling Herod, who is a Roman and a Gentile, that the OT law that was given to Israel applies to Herod. He is offending God by doing what he is doing.) This made both Herod and Herodias mad and so he threw him into prison.*

16. Have you ever gotten mad at someone who told you that you were breaking one of God's laws?

17. According to v. 5, how mad was Herod? Why didn't he kill John, like he wanted to?

*Herod really wanted to kill John but he couldn't do it because he knew that many people believed John was a prophet of God. He knew that if he killed John, there very likely would be civil unrest, which could threaten his position as governor.*

18. Have you ever felt like hurting another person because of something they did to you? Have you ever not harmed the other person because you knew you would get in worse trouble if you did?

19. What does Herod do in vv. 6-7? Why does he do this?

*Herod throws a birthday party at which he has Herodias' daughter (probably a young teenager) dance for he and his guests. He is so aroused by her sexual dance and so eager to impress his guests that he promises to give her whatever she asks for. We discover he is a man given to lust and pride.*

20. Have you ever intentionally exposed yourself to situations that would cause you to lust? Have you ever rashly promised things in order to impress others?

21. How does the daughter of Herodias respond to this rash promise? What does this tell us about Herodias and her daughter?

*She confers with her mother and then requests that John be beheaded and his head given to her on a platter in front of all the dinner guests. Herodias hates John and most likely is contemptuous of Herod for not having the guts to kill John. She is very cunning and quickly seizes on the opportunity to put Herod in a place where he must do what she wants him to do. Her daughter is a willing accomplice in her mother's evil plot.*

22. Have you ever sought to manipulate another person to do something they didn't want to do but you wanted them to do?

23. How did Herod feel? What did he do? Why did he do it?

*Herod was very upset at the request of the daughter. Though he hated John, he knew that killing him would be a bad idea. However, he complied with the wishes of Herodias and her daughter and had John beheaded and his head delivered on a plate to the daughter. He did this because he feared the disdain and disrespect of his dinner guests more than he feared the disapproval of his Jewish subjects or God. My guess is that also he knew there would be "hell to pay" if he didn't do what Herodias was asking for.*

24. Have you ever done something you knew you shouldn't do because you were afraid of the disapproval of others or wanted the approval of others?

**Human hostility to God is revealed by our unwillingness to repent of our sins and obey God.**

*We know who you are Jesus. You're a nobody. You're a pretender. God's not speaking through you. We know you're not the Messiah because we know you're family. So get down off your high horse."*

*He does not treat them with the kind of respect and affirmation they deserve. If Jesus were the Messiah, they would expect some special treatment from him because they are his hometown. They would expect him to do what good politicians do, "bring home the bacon" to their home district. Jesus treats them like a bunch of sinners in need of a Savior and they cannot take it.*

**9.** Is it reasonable for them to be offended by Jesus? Why or why not?

*It is not reasonable for them to be offended. In fact, of all people, they ought to know who he is. Perfect humanity lived among them for over 30 years and they did not see. His teaching and his miracles prove that he is the Messiah and yet they are unwilling to believe in the face of overwhelming evidence because Jesus does not speak or behave according to their preconceived ideas of what the Messiah should be and speak.*

**10.** How does Jesus respond to their rejection of him?

*He tells them they are simply treating him the way every hometown treats prophets that return to their hometown. He doesn't do many miracles there because of their unbelief. Essentially he rejects them because they reject him. Their refusal to repent and embrace him as the Messiah keeps them from experiencing the benefits that he came to provide, salvation from sin and an eternal relationship with God.*

**11.** Have you or anyone you have known, ever been offended by Jesus because of what he has said or because he did not fit preconceived ideas about how God should act?

**Human hostility to God is revealed by our unwillingness to see the glory of God in Christ.**

**12.** In 14:1-2, what are the things that Herod believes about spiritual reality?

*First of all, he is no atheist. He believes that miracles are being done. Supernatural power is being exercised through Jesus. He knows there is a spiritual reality that is outside and above the physical reality we live in. Second, he believes that people don't simply cease to exist when they die but that they continue to exist, though in a different form. Third, he believes in the resurrection from the dead, that dead people come back to life in their original bodies. Fourth, he believes that John the Baptist was a significant person in God's estimation. When he hears about Jesus' power he assumes that God would be pleased to raise John from the dead and enable him to do such things. I think we can also assume, based upon the story that follows, that Herod has a guilty conscience. He knows he should not have killed John and so he wants to believe that somehow God has stepped in to reverse the evil that he did.*

**13.** Does he believe the truth about Jesus? What is it that causes him to adopt such a weird explanation to the person and power of Jesus? See Romans 1: 18-23 & Isaiah 44: 7-20.

*Like the majority of people in the world, Herod knows there is a spiritual reality beyond the physical reality of this world. In fact, the evidence of Gods' existence and human responsibility to God is blazing in front of every human face. But also, like most people in the world, his understanding of that reality is based upon human explanations, not divine revelation. He feels guilty about what he did. He knows that John was a "man of God". He also believes in supernatural visitations from the place of the dead. So he constructs, in his own imagination an explanation of the reports of Jesus' power. This explanation requires not repentance on his part and no faith in Christ. It simply serves in some way to assuage his conscience and give him an answer to the basic questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Have you or anyone you have known believed things about God, human beings, creation, etc. that is not in line with God's revelation in his word?*

**14.** How should we respond to the fact that sin makes us stupid (Romans 1:21-23)?

*We should study God's word and humbly ask him to keep us from error.*

4. In light of these themes in vv. 1-52, how do these three stories function? What point is Matthew trying to make? Hint: What do all three of these stories share in common?

*Each of these stories shows a different way that humans reject Christ and his kingdom. They stand as three pieces of evidence showing the wickedness of humanity. They prove the sinfulness of human beings and that salvation is therefore a work of grace.*

5. When we read these stories who should we identify with, Jesus and the disciples or the people of Nazareth; Herod, Herodias and her daughter or John the Baptist?

*We should not read these stories and shake our head at the wickedness of the “bad” guys. Rather, we should see how similar we are to the bad guys. We should allow this word from God to “pierce” our hearts (Heb. 4:12) so that we see how desperate is our own condition.*

#### Studying the text:

6. How do the towns of “world champion” sports teams treat the teams after they win? (For example, Green Bay after they won the Super Bowl, or Chicago after the Bulls won the NBA championship or Phoenix, AZ after the Diamondbacks won the World Series.)

*People throw a party and the team is given the “key” to the city and a parade to welcome them home.*

7. In v. 57 we are told that rather than welcoming him, they are offended by him. What does it mean to be offended by someone? (Clue: The Greek word used here is the word we get “scandalized” or “scandal” from.)

*The people of Nazareth are deeply offended by Jesus. They cannot believe someone would act like he does and say what he says. They feel about him like most Americans felt about Bill Clinton when they found out about Monica Lewinski. They universally condemn him as an evil and bad man.*

8. Why do the people of Nazareth not welcome Jesus in this fashion? Why, after they hear him teach, are they offended by him? What kinds of things did Jesus teach? Why would this be offensive?

*The point of all their questions revolves around the fact that Jesus is a very ordinary person. He exhibited no special characteristics that they noticed while growing up. He was the son of the carpenter and they all knew his mom, brothers and sisters. He had no special training. He was just a common laborer from a common peasant family. But why would his common origin and his familiarity with them cause them to be offended?*

*Two things would cause them to be offended. First, these people, just like us, presume that when God is present and is working you can't miss it. God makes his presence known in dramatic ways. This expectation would be very heightened among these Jewish people who expected that the coming of the Messiah would be marked by large and miraculous events. That they could have lived with the Messiah or with a person who possessed such miraculous powers for so many years and not to have known it is beyond their comprehension. The way that Jesus conducted himself was so contrary to what they would expect. The Messiah would never have lived in such obscurity, in their way of understanding. So Jesus was offensive because he didn't fit their preconceived ideas of how God works in his world.*

*The second and probably greater reason they were offended by him is summed up in the cliché, “Just who do you think you are?” We know from reading the gospel of Matthew that when it says he was teaching in their synagogue, he wasn't simply telling nice little “feel good” stories. He was saying things like this to them: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (5:17) “You have heard it was said to the people long ago, do not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” (5:21) “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” (12: 34) Jesus talked as if he were speaking for God, as if he were God and yet they knew his family and had lived with him for all those years. “Who does he think he is, talking to us like that? Who does he think he is acting like he's some prophet or the Messiah?*

# THE RULE OF GOD IS OFTEN RESISTED

## Matthew 13:53 – 14: 13 (Sermon 12/9)

*Review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

“Every man is a good man in a bad world, as he himself knows.”  
William Saroyan.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Does this describe how you usually think about yourself? (Helpful hint: Consider how you responded the last time you were in a conflict with another person. Whose fault was it? Another helpful hint: When you feel mad or sad or depressed or whatever, do you ever say, “I’m mad because of .....something that was done to you or circumstances that happened to you?”)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn spent over 10 years in Siberian prison camps for no reason. He became a leading dissident within the former Soviet Union. He is Russia’s most famous modern author. In his book, “The Gulag Archipelago”, which is an account of the conditions in the Soviet prison camps he writes, “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” One of the major themes of the Bible is to persuade us that this is true. The Bible is intent on convincing us that salvation is not, indeed cannot be, dependent upon anything that human beings do because the only thing that human beings can do is sin. The Bible is out to convince us that what unites humans is not a common love for God but rather hatred for God. That is the theme of these three stories that Matthew records.

### STUDY

Establishing the context:

1. What is the main point of the parable of the weeds (vv. 24-30 & 36-43) and the parable of the net full of fish (vv. 47-50)?

*This world belongs to God. At the present time both the righteous and the wicked are living in this world together, both enjoying all the benefits of God’s grace upon this world. However, there is a day coming when God’s angels will gather up both the wicked and the righteous. The wicked will be condemned to an eternal hell and the righteous will shine with the glory of God in his presence forever.*

2. According to the parable of the Sower and the seed, the parables of the treasure in the field and the precious pearl and the parable of the homeowner who brings out treasures, what are the characteristics of the righteous and the wicked?

*The righteous are those who “understand” the message of the kingdom and so bear the fruit of righteousness. They understand that Jesus and his salvation is a treasure chest of holy joy. They abandon all attachments to this life and all hope of gaining happiness through the pleasures of sin and pursue and love Christ above all things. They display their joy in God by living generous lives. They delight to give themselves away in love to others. The wicked are those who do not “understand” the greatness of Christ and his salvation. They are unwilling to suffer any loss to have Christ or because of belonging to Christ. They are taken up with avoiding suffering here and finding happiness in this world and so cannot find Christ to be a treasure. They bear no fruit to God. They only are motivated by their own narrow self-interest, not the glory of God in Christ.*

3. According to vv. 10-17, what is the bottom line reason that anyone “understands” the greatness of Christ and his salvation?

*Understanding is a gift of God’s grace. All humans, though given overwhelming evidence of the greatness of Christ and of the necessity of repentance and faith towards him persist in unbelief. But God, in his mercy, grants to some eyes that see, ears that hear and hearts that trust and love.*