

Matthew 14:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

Analysis

'But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.' The tragic sequence leading to John's martyrdom begins: during Herod's birthday celebration, Herodias's daughter (named Salome, according to Josephus) danced, pleasing the king. The phrase 'birthday was kept' (γενεσίους ἀγομένοις/genesiois agomenois) indicates elaborate celebration—likely feast with political officials, military commanders, and Galilee's elite (Mark 6:21). The dance by Herodias's daughter was probably sensual/seductive, inappropriate for such public setting and particularly for young girl of noble family. That it 'pleased' (ἤρεσεν/ēresen) Herod suggests more than entertainment—likely aroused his lust. Reformed theology sees this account revealing sin's progression: adultery (Herod and Herodias's marriage), pride (lavish birthday feast), lust (arousal by stepdaughter's dance), and ultimately murder (John's execution). Each sin leads to worse. The setting also demonstrates worldly celebration's often corrupt nature: drunkenness, sensuality, rash vows, violence. Believers must be wary of environments where compromise and sin are normalized and celebrated.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture celebrated birthdays of royalty and nobility with elaborate feasts, entertainment, drinking, and often debauchery. Jewish tradition generally avoided birthday celebrations (viewing them as pagan), but Herodian dynasty had embraced Greco-Roman customs. Mark 6:21 specifies the guests: 'lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee'—political, military, and social elite. Such

gatherings involved heavy drinking and entertainment. Dancing by young noble girls in such contexts was considered shameful—respectable women didn't perform publicly for men's entertainment. That Herodias's daughter did so suggests either desperate manipulation (Herodias orchestrating scenario) or family's moral degradation. Herod's response—rash vow offering up to half his kingdom (v.7)—shows his drunken, lustful state. Similar rash vows appear in Scripture (Judges 11:30-40, Esther 5:3), often with tragic consequences. Josephus places John's execution at Machaerus fortress where the birthday celebration likely occurred. The account reveals moral corruption at Herod's court—appropriate background for John's martyrdom.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this account warn believers about participating in worldly celebrations where sin is normalized and celebrated?
2. What does the progression from adultery to dancing to murder teach about how sin escalates when unchecked?
3. How should Christians maintain faithful witness in morally corrupt environments without participating in or endorsing sin?

Interlinear Text

γενεσίῳ δὲ ἀγομένῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδῃ ὠρχήσατο ἡ
birthday **But** **was kept** G3588 **Herod** **danced** G3588
G1077 G1161 G71 G2264 G3738

θυγάτηρ τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος ἐν τῷ μέσῳ καὶ ἤρεσεν
the daughter G3588 **of Herodias** **before them** G3588 G3319 **and** **pleased**
G2364 G2266 G1722 G2532 G700

τῷ Ἡρώδῃ
G3588 **Herod**
G2264

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 40:20 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.