

# Matthew 14:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

## Analysis

'And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.' Herod's response reveals moral weakness: he was 'sorry' (λυπηθείς/lypētheis, grieved, distressed) yet proceeded with murder. His sorrow proves he knew John was righteous and the execution wrong. Yet he prioritized oath and reputation over righteousness. The phrase 'for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him' explains his tragic choice: breaking the oath publicly would shame him before witnesses—political and social elites whose opinion mattered. He chose temporary shame-avoidance over permanent guilt. Reformed theology recognizes this as moral cowardice: knowing right but doing wrong due to peer pressure, pride, fear of embarrassment. Herod's sorrow without repentance is empty—he grieved consequences while proceeding with sin. This contrasts with godly sorrow producing repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). The verse warns against foolish oaths, peer pressure, and prioritizing reputation over righteousness. Herod's choice haunted him (v.2—he thought Jesus was John risen).

## Historical Context

Herod's moral weakness appears throughout the account. Mark 6:20 notes Herod feared John, knew he was righteous, heard him gladly but was perplexed. He wanted to keep John imprisoned but alive—a compromise satisfying neither justice (release him) nor Herodias (kill him). When trapped by his oath, Herod prioritized face-saving over righteousness. Ancient honor-shame culture intensified this:

public shame was considered worse than private guilt. Breaking an oath before assembled nobility would devastate Herod's reputation, appearing weak and untrustworthy. Herod chose John's death over personal shame. Pilate showed similar moral cowardice: believing Jesus innocent, he delivered Him to crucifixion to avoid political embarrassment (John 19:12-16). Both rulers demonstrate how unregenerate conscience, though troubled by evil, doesn't produce repentance. Herod's subsequent fear that Jesus was John risen (v.2) suggests guilt haunted him. Josephus records Herod later suffered military defeat, which Jews interpreted as divine judgment for killing John.

## Related Passages

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. How does Herod's example warn against making foolish commitments under social pressure or impaired judgment?
2. What does his sorrow-without-repentance teach about the difference between regret over consequences versus genuine repentance?
3. In what situations do you face pressure to prioritize reputation, peer approval, or pride over doing what's right?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ ἐλυπηθη ὁ βασιλεὺς διὰ δὲ τοὺς  
And was sorry the king nevertheless for  
G2532 G3076 G3588 G935 G1223 G1161 G3588

ὅρκους καὶ τοὺς συνανακειμένους ἐκέλευσεν  
the oath's sake And them which sat with him at meat he commanded  
G3727 G2532 G3588 G4873 G2753

δοθῆναι

it to be given

G1325

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