

# No Input Allowed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we are starting what is essentially part four of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew himself split up his Gospel into four kind of parts,<sup>1</sup> and this is the beginning of the fourth part of Matthew.

And it's for the next few chapters, and it's all about the increasing hostility that Jesus begins to face from the people around him as he brings the news of the kingdom to the world and how people don't like that.

And that's what this section that we're starting now is about. But Matthew begins this section of his Gospel with these two stories, which seem quite unrelated, but he selects these two stories as what he's going to start this section with.

The first is about Jesus' reception back at his hometown, and the next is about the rather grisly account of John the Baptist's execution by the hand of Herod and his wife Herodias.

And this week, as I was preparing to teach this, I was thinking, you know, why these two stories? Of all the different things that happen, why does Matthew now select these two stories and put them here in his Gospel?

[ 1 : 16 ] What is the connection between them? What is the common thread between these two stories? Why are they together like this? Anyway, so I was thinking about this this week, and I think it was on Tuesday or Wednesday.

I went to ShopRite on the corner, needed to get a few things. So I walked to ShopRite, and often, you know, I'll go for a walk just to mull over the passage, and got my things, and then I was standing in the queue in ShopRite, and next to me, the checkout point-of-sale system was not working, and so there was no cashier there, and there wasn't a queue there, and while I was waiting in my queue, and this often seems to happen in ShopRite in Southfield, as you can relate, I can hear.

But I looked at the point-of-sale system to see, and the screen was facing me, and it said in big words on the screen, no input allowed. And it hit me, as I was standing there, that's it.

That's what these stories are about. They are about the different reasons people don't allow God's input into their lives.

Now, I know that's not what the ShopRite computer meant, but that is what's going on in these stories, and it's why it's so important for us to understand and hear them now, because maybe you've wondered in your life, well, if the Bible is true, why don't more people believe it?

[ 2 : 52 ] Well, the reason is because there's a number of reasons people don't allow God's input into their lives. There's a number of reasons people actually actively block God's input into their lives, and it's in these two stories that we discover the two main reasons people in this world block God's input.

But also, as we read them, we're going to see how we all actually have tendencies to block God's input into our lives. And I think these two stories are warning us of those tendencies.

So let's see what we learn. Let's see what those main reasons are that people don't allow God's input and the first reason we see is an unwillingness to change what we believe.

That's the first reason people tend to block God's input into their life, an unwillingness to change what we believe. Turns out it's much harder to change a belief that you already hold about something than to believe something new.

And we see a perfect example of this in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. So he's been ministering, he's been teaching, he's been doing miracles, he's been doing amazing things around the region of Galilee, but now he comes back to the town he grew up in.

[ 4 : 17 ] And he teaches them the same things as he's been teaching everyone else about the kingdom of God coming to earth and how he is the one who has been appointed to come and kick off God's kingdom.

That is what he's doing here. He is from heaven and he is the king that God has sent to kick off his kingdom. Now those are the things he's been teaching, but the people in his hometown find it particularly difficult to believe that, to believe what he's saying.

Why? Why them in particular? Well, because they already know Jesus. That's the problem. So picking it up from verse 54 of Matthew 13.

Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers, they asked.

Notice, by the way, it wasn't for lack of evidence that they struggled. They had all the evidence everyone else had. They could see what was going on. It was in front of their eyes, and that verse proves it.

[ 5 : 27 ] They didn't struggle to believe for lack of evidence. It was another reason. So let's read on from verse 55. Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary?

And aren't his brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? 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 home. Okay, so the reason that they were struggling so much to believe this teaching Jesus was bringing, that he is the king sent by God to bring God's kingdom on earth, the reason they were struggling to believe this, is because they already knew who he was.

Or they thought they did. He was the carpenter's son. They had grown up with him. He had been to their birthday parties. He had played in the park with them when they were growing up.

Him and his dad had done the roof extension on their house. They knew him. They were familiar with him. But that was the problem, you see. That was their stumbling block because they thought they knew him.

[ 6 : 42 ] The view they already formed of Jesus was blocking them from believing new revelation about him. That's what's going on here.

And the same happens today. The views people already hold about Jesus block them from seeing who he really is.

And pretty much everybody has a view of Jesus already, whether they're Christians or not. Most people have heard about Jesus. If you take ten random people and you interview them, and you ask them, who do you think Jesus was?

They'll pretty much all have an opinion. They'll all have some view already. Some will say, oh, he was a good teacher. Some will say he was an inspiring example of sacrifice for us.

Some will say, well, he's the leader of the Christian religion. Whatever it is, everybody will have a view on Jesus. You have a view on Jesus, even if you're not a Christian. You have a view of who he is.

[ 7 : 51 ] Well, let me ask you, what if the view you hold of Jesus is blocking you from seeing the truth about him? That he is so much more than these things.

You see, it's much harder to change what you already believe about something than to just accept, to receive new information, to receive truth.

It's much harder when you already hold a view on that thing. And everybody already holds a view on Jesus. Today, just as much as back then. But this idea that it's harder to change what we already believe about something is true for us as Christians, too.

And it can become a stumbling block even for those of us who know and believe who Jesus is. Particularly when it comes to doctrines that we believe about the Bible. Particular areas of faith that we've always believed.

But then the Bible comes and challenges those areas. That happens a lot. If the Bible is being preached faithfully. That you'll often actually come across things you hear from the Bible that are different to what you grew up believing or what you thought.

[ 9 : 06 ] And what happens then is it's hard to take on those new doctrines. Those new beliefs. Because you've already got beliefs in those areas.

In church, in my preaching career, I've often come across this. That people get upset with things that are said from the pulpit. Now sometimes they get upset because the things were said insensitively or just plain wrong.

But sometimes people get upset for things said in the pulpit. Not because it's not in the Bible. But because it clashes with the view they already hold.

In fact, that's most of the time when people have come to me and become upset with something that I've said when I've been preaching. It's because they already hold a view in that area.

And this doesn't work with that. It rubs up against it. You see, it's hard to take on new information when you already have a strong view in the matter.

[ 10 : 12 ] I remember once we bought a new toy for my dog, Finnan. Because his old toy was getting rotten and smelly.

He loved it to bits, but it had been passed its old by date and needed replacement. So we got him a new toy and we brought it home for him. And we kind of encouraged him to smell it.

But he had his old toy in his mouth. And he was interested. Sure, he was interested in getting this new toy. And you could see he kind of wanted to check it out.

But he was not going to let go of this old toy that he had in his mouth. He was gripping it. And that was actually stopping him from enjoying the new toy. Now, of course, we waited until he was asleep and then got it and hid it away and replaced it with the new one.

But I think what he was doing, we're all a bit like that when it comes to beliefs we hold. Right? We hesitate to let go of things we already believe.

[ 11 : 19 ] Things, views we already hold in order to take on new information when the Bible reveals it to us. But we've got to learn to do it. If we're ever going to grow, we've got to learn to drop old beliefs in order to take on biblical beliefs.

I've got to learn to do it too. Every week I've got to do that. In order to preach faithfully, every week I've got to open the Bible and let it, be willing to let it change what I think I know.

I've got to let the passage in front of me challenge and change my views and my beliefs. We all do. And if you are ever going to allow God's input into your life, if you're going to allow God's word to do its work in your life, you also need to be willing every Sunday to let it change what you think you know.

And I promise you I'm going to be willing to do that when I'm sitting in my study preparing sermons. I'm going to be willing to let this Bible change and challenge what I believe.

But I want you to promise that you're willing to let it do the same on Sunday. Just like the people in Jesus' town should have let hearing what they were hearing change what they thought they knew.

[ 12 : 49 ] Because as we read on, look what happens if we don't let it do that. Verse 58. And he, Jesus, did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

You see, because the people in Jesus' town were unwilling to take on new truth, Jesus knew that even miracles that he did would not convince them.

And so what they did by being unwilling to change what they thought they knew, they essentially cut themselves off from experiencing God's power in their village and in their lives.

And in the same way, if you are unwilling to let this Bible change your mind about things, you are also going to rob yourself of experiencing God's power in your life.

You know, if you're only coming to church on a Sunday to hear the pastor confirm what you already know, you're never going to change.

[ 14 : 00 ] You change when you let God's Word change your mind. That's when you experience His power. That's when His Word starts to work in your life and put off old things and put on new things and transform you.

But it's a difficult process. Jesus called it pruning. Pruning. Pruning. Cutting things away. It's a difficult process. To let God's Word do its spiritual surgery on us.

But we've got to. We've got to. If you go to the doctor and he says, we've got to do surgery to cut out this cancer or whatever. And you say, sure, that's fine.

I'm willing to do that. But you're just not allowed to change anything in my body. The doctor will be like, I don't think you understand what I'm saying here, okay? If you're going to be saved, we need to cut.

We need to get in there. And we've got to let God's Word do the same thing. We've got to be willing to let it change us. But there's another reason that people cut off God's input in their lives and don't experience God's power to change them.

[ 15 : 13 ] And this is the second reason we see, which is an unwillingness to change how we live. So the first is an unwillingness to change what we believe. The second is an unwillingness to change how we live.

And we see that in the next story, in how King Herod dealt with God's prophet John. So picking it up from chapter 14, verse 3. Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

For John had been saying to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. Okay, so Herod had married contrary to God's law.

And John the Baptist was not afraid to tell him, no matter how unpopular that was. Now, at this point, I should say something.

Now, it may come as a shock to modern ears, but God, as our Creator, has a right to say who we have sex with and who we're allowed to marry and who we're not and anything else He wants to.

[ 16 : 27 ] I know that doesn't sound right, does it? Especially in today's world, but it is true. God, as our Creator, has a right to tell us how to live and to tell us what to do and what to do with our bodies and everything else we have.

But because He has that right, what that means is whenever He speaks to us through His Word, that will demand changes in our life when our life is not in line with what His Word says, which is most of the time, if we have to be honest with ourselves.

So, you see what that means? It means there's a risk to opening God's Word. There's a risk to coming to church on a Sunday and listening because this is God's Word and God is the one who has a right to tell us how to live.

We do not live naturally in line with God's Word. So, whenever we hear God's Word, it's going to demand change in our lives. And when we hear it, deep down, because of our God-given conscience, we know we must listen to it.

We can't just ignore this. that's why Herod couldn't just ignore God's prophet, but he threw him in prison.

[ 17 : 48 ] You see, he actively shut down God's Word in his life so that he could continue living how he wanted. no input allowed in Herod's life.

But in many people's lives, it's the same. People don't just ignore God's Word, but they actively try to shut it down so they don't have to hear it. Have you noticed that in society?

For example, take the Bible's teaching on sex and sexuality and homosexuality and gender and marriage. People don't just ignore that when they hear it, but they label it hate speech.

And they actively seek to throw Christians in prison who are saying it. It's nothing new. You know, we think, we look today and we think, oh no, it's terrible now that Christians are being thrown in prison for saying what the Bible says.

It was happening here. It's been happening for thousands of years. It's nothing new. People always shut down God's Word when it confronts how we want to live. But you know, even Christians can do this.

[ 19 : 00 ] Even we can do this without realizing. When we read the Bible selectively, you know what I mean? We pick and choose the verses that make us feel good and make us feel comfortable and encourage us, but we skip those verses that talk about sin and judgment and repentance.

When Christians go to churches that preach only what they want to hear, and there are many of those. There are many churches that preach only what people want to hear. Those are the churches that are packed with people.

The Bible says they'll be drawn to what their itching ears want to hear. And there are a lot of churches that don't preach the uncomfortable things. But you see, if we do that, if we go to those kind of churches, if we read our Bibles selectively, and we skip the uncomfortable bits, if you are unwilling to hear about your own sin, well then you rob yourself of the very power that can save you from it.

as we heard earlier in 1 John 1 from verse 8, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.

We're not deceiving anyone else. The people around you know that you're a sinner. Right? But we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Verse 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[ 20 : 33 ] Note there, we hear this verse often, but note there, the purification that God wants to give us, the power to change us, only comes when we are willing to face the truth of our sins.

You know, I often, a big part of my job is counseling people, and people will come for counseling about a problem in their life or a problem in their marriage or whatever it is.

And people are very willing to hear verses that are encouraging, that give them hope, that make them feel secure, but when it comes to verses that expose their sin, that's when often people will stop listening.

Especially when, actually my primary job as a biblical counselor is to show people where their own failure to obey God's word is causing this problem.

And that's when people will ignore. When it's their own sin. You see this in marriage counseling as well. No, it's my spouse's sin that's causing the problem, isn't it?

[ 21 : 46 ] And I'm like, well, but look at this. Look at how you're not obeying this. And then, no, but they're always looking at someone else as the problem. And they ignore when it's their own sin and they never change.

People never change unless they're willing. This is what 1 John is saying. Unless they're willing to own, to take ownership of their own sin and their own failure to obey God's word in a particular area, things will never get better.

Things will never change. And so, if you want to experience God's power in your life, just as much as you need to be willing to let God's word change the beliefs you hold, you also need to let it change the life you live.

But many, many people in the world are just not prepared to do that. and that's why they won't allow God's input into their lives. And so, don't be surprised that as a Christian, when you bring God's word to other people, don't be surprised when it offends them.

And when it does, especially in today's world where everybody gets offended, when it offends people, when you bring them God's word, you're going to be tempted to soften it.

[ 23 : 07 ] To make it easier, more palatable, less demanding. It would have been very easy for John the Baptist to do that in Herod's court.

When it came to this marriage that he had with Herodias that was unbiblical, John could have said, well, you know, Herod, if it's true love, well, then it must be right. He could have made up something.

He could have said, well, you know, yes, the Bible does say that, but scholars differ on the interpretation. of that particular verse, so Herod, I think you're fine. He could have said the things that Herod wanted to hear, but he didn't.

He told him straight what God's word says. And I think today not enough Christians are willing to talk straight about what the Bible says for risk that they're going to offend people.

But here's the truth. If you're only going to share God's word in a way that never offends people, you're also going to rob it of all its saving power.

[ 24 : 15 ] So think of your friends, your non-Christian friends, your non-Christian work colleagues. when you make God's word more palatable so that it doesn't offend them, you're actually withholding God's salvation from them.

What right do you have to do that? Because nobody is ever going to experience the power of God's word unless we allow it to change us.

Unless we let it challenge us. And we allow it to change how we think and how we live. The people in Nazareth weren't willing to do that.

Herod wasn't willing to do that. The question is, are you willing to do that? Let's pray. O Lord, we thank you for inspiring Matthew to record these particular stories at this particular place in his gospel so that we could be warned of our tendency to shut down your input into our lives and the reasons why we do that.

We do confess, Lord, the ways that we do that and we pray that you will help us. Help us, Lord, to be willing to let your word constantly challenge us and change us, even if that's uncomfortable.

[ 25 : 56 ] Help us, Lord, to let your word change what we think we know and to let your word change how we live day to day. And through that, Lord, would you do your work in us for your glory in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.