

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW (Section 20 - Matt. 14:1-22)

FAITH IS THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO JESUS

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

HARDENED HEARTS CANNOT COMPREHEND JESUS (V. 1-2)

The news of Jesus' ministry had reached the ears of Herod Antipas (the son of Herod the Great). He ruled over one-third of Judea and was a petty dictator backed by Roman power. He was wicked, immoral, and arrogant, and John the Baptist had publically spoken out against his incestuous affair and marriage to his brother's wife.

Herod did not even consider the concept that Jesus was the Messiah, choosing rather to assume that Jesus was the reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom Herod had put to death. His eclectic set of religious beliefs blinded him to the truth that stood directly in front of him, i.e., that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, he believed that John the Baptist had returned from the grave more powerful than ever and was a power worthy of being feared.

HEROD HAD GOOD REASON TO BE AFRAID (V. 3-12)

In a sudden flash-back, Matthew details the interaction between John the Baptist and Herod. As a result of John's courage in condemning Herod for his sin, Herod had John arrested and put in prison. However, Herod was not blind, and he understood that there was ample evidence pointing to John being a prophet of God. For this reason, he did not order His execution.

Herod was a weak man, and in response to a perverse and lewd performance by his teen stepdaughter, he made a drunken promise to give her whatever she wished. At her mother's insistence, Herod's stepdaughter asked for John the Baptist's head. Overwhelmed by his

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weakness of character, Herod complied and killed the prophet. However, he believed John had returned, and this was bad news.

The contrast between Jesus and Herod could not be more stark. Herod embraced the very depths of debased morality by incestuous living, drunken feasting, and even sinking as far as to have his stepdaughter perform a distasteful and inappropriate dance before him and his guests. In contrast, Jesus gave up His time to attend to the needs of the people by healing, feeding, and teaching them. His personal time was spent in quiet fellowship with His Father on a desolate mountain top.

THE WORLD REJECTS CONVICTION (V. 3-12)

The reason that John had been arrested was that he had spoken out boldly against the flagrant immorality being lived out by Herod. John had not been shy about condemning this incestuous affair/marriage. After all, as a prophet, part of John's mission was to point out sin in the nation of Israel. Herod's response mirrors the response of the evil kings of Israel's history who imprisoned and killed God's prophets. Most notably, parallels can be seen between Herod and Herodious and Ahab and Jezebel.

HEROD CHOSE EVIL OVER HUMILITY (V. 9-11)

Despite the high cost of the foolishness of his promise to his step- daughter, Herod's extreme weakness was put on full display. At that moment, Herod had a perfect opportunity to set an example of humility and repentance in front of his entire court. However, he chose to save face and order the murder of John the Baptist. This truly grotesque scene, not uncommon in the culture of that day, clearly shows the level of depravity that Herod's court had sunk to.

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DIFFICULT CONNECTING LANGUAGE (V. 13)

The connecting language of "Now when Jesus heard this..." reaches back to verses 1 and 2, not to the beheading of John. At this time Jesus was ministering in the territory governed by Herod, so it would make logical sense that He would withdraw away from the region of Herod. Herod had killed John the Baptist, and if He believed Jesus to be John resurrected, Jesus was in peril.

Remember that the hour for Jesus' death had not yet come. There was more ministry to be done. Whenever Jesus was threatened before the appointed time for His death, He always withdrew from the scene and continued His ministry in a new place. This occasion was no exception. Jesus left the region of Herod to avoid any confrontation or arrest and moved on to minister elsewhere.

A SPECIAL MIRACLE (V. 14-21)

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle found in all four of the gospels. The whole scene opens with Jesus crossing the lake to seek some time alone. However, the crowds follow Him, walking, perhaps even running several miles around the lake and fording the Jordan river to reach Him. Remarkably, they arrive first on the other side.

COMPASSION ON DISPLAY! (V. 14)

Far from being annoyed with the people getting in the way of His plans for rest, Jesus immediately began to minister to them by healing them. Jesus' immense love and compassion for the crowds was on full display! This demonstration of continual personal sacrifice plainly revealed the true heart of the Messiah.

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It may only take us a moment to read, but the scene in these verses unfolds over a period spanning many hours. Having started around late morning or noon, Jesus' many healing miracles have taken time, and late afternoon is drawing to a close. With miles to walk to the nearest towns for food, the people will go hungry unless they leave now. There is a hidden question in the story. Leave the presence of Jesus and seek after human needs, or stay in His presence and trust Him to provide for the need. (v. 14-17)

JESUS CALLS HIS FOLLOWERS INTO MINISTRY (V. 16-19)

Faced with this dilemma, Jesus tasked His disciples with providing food for the crowd, a humanly impossible task. It is unclear if the disciples fully understood what Jesus was calling on them to do, but in many ways, their course of action showed a simple faith. It followed this formula: 1) The task is impossible; 2) The resources are inadequate; 3) We lack the power to change our resources; 4) Jesus has the power to change our resources; 5) Submit our resources to Jesus and obey.

GOD'S PROVISION IS EXTRAVAGANT (V. 19-21)

From a handful of servings of food, the disciples distributed food to a crowd of about 15,000 - 25,000 people. In addition, when all had eaten their fill, a generous amount of leftovers remained. God's provision had not only been miraculous in its nature, timing, and appropriateness; it had been more than adequate in its abundance. Jesus was teaching His disciples to trust in the miraculous provision of God to do the impossible.

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JESUS NEEDED ALONE TIME WITH THE FATHER (V. 22-23)

After the miracle, Jesus' ministry for that day was done. Regardless of what was going on around Him, Jesus made time to be alone with the Father. He ordered His disciples to leave in the boat and dismissed the crowd. Jesus' ability to master His flesh was remarkable. After a long day of ministry, He did not seek sleep but prayer! He rested and refreshed Himself by being in the Father's presence.

Jesus didn't simply pray for a short time. His prayer continued until the fourth watch of the morning, i.e., 3-6 AM. He had been praying since nightfall, and it was not until the early hours of the morning that He finally took notice of the perilous situation of His disciples as they rowed through the storm all night. God had been testing their faith through the storm and creating yet another opportunity for Jesus to display His power.

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS CHILDREN (V. 24-27)

The contrast is striking. Jesus, alone on the mountain, was fervently engaged in prayer and fellowship with His Father. Meanwhile, the disciples seem a world away, battling for their lives against the power and forces of nature. By this time, they were in the middle of the lake, some 2-3 miles from shore, and their physical strength was exhausted. In reality, their situation was lost and they were without hope. Jesus displayed the depths of His power in several ways. First, He came right to them in the middle of a horrific storm! Second, the power of nature had no effect on Him as He walked over the churning 8-10 foot high waves! Ultimately, He would rescue them by calming the storm and saving them from death by exercising His authority over the power of nature.

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With the miracle of the previous day still fresh in his mind, Peter displayed incredible faith in Jesus by asking to join Him by walking on the water. Peter's boldness was rewarded by Jesus' invitation to step out on the waves and join Him. As with the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus here invites His disciple to step out in faith into the realm of supernatural power. It is not that Peter had any power of his own rather, it is the power of Jesus flowing through the faith of Peter that enabled him to step out on the water. Like Peter, Jesus calls his followers to step into the realm of the impossible, through faith, in fulfilling the mission of the ministry of the gospel. (v. 28-29)

JESUS CALLED HIS FOLLOWERS TO ACT IN HIS POWER (V. 16-19)

In both miracles, Jesus called His disciples to take part in works that required their faith and action in His power. It would take the Divine power of being able to create food to feed the crowd. Likewise, walking on water required power that was completely beyond human capability. Jesus was teaching His disciples that through their relationship with Him and faith in His power, that power was accessible to them for the purpose of accomplishing their task of ministry. He was teaching them faith!

CONFLICTED HEARTS (V. 30-32)

Despite the great miracle of the day before and the shock of seeing Jesus walk on the water, the disciples were still gripped with fear. Their hearts were growing in faith by degrees, but the fears and cares of this world still weighed heavily on them. Even Peter, despite standing on the water, a miracle of epic proportions, was gripped by faith-crushing fear and began to sink. The disciples ultimately worshiped Jesus for His greatness but still had yet to fully understand the implications of His Deity.

KEY VERSES

TWISTED RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Matthew 14:2 - Under the heavy influence of pagan religions from his close ties to the Roman government and a heart that was given over wholly to arrogance and the lust of the flesh, Herod held to a strange and twisted concept of religion. His bizarre belief that Jesus was a resurrected form of John the Baptist, reappearing with greater power, is evidence of his spiritual ignorance.

Matthew 14:8 - Gruesome scenes such as a decapitated head on a platter at a royal banquet were not uncommon among pagan kings. This was not the first scene of its kind. Other instances recorded tell of hundreds of crucifixions being done as entertainment for royal guests at a banquet, as well as other atrocities. Such base treatment of the sanctity of human life should never have occurred in Israel, but Herod and his court were wicked and immoral.

MINISTRY TRAINING

Matthew 14:16 - Jesus knew that He would not always be with His disciples. He was preparing them now to do ministry after His ascension. His blunt statement, instructing the disciples to feed the crowd, functioned as a call to faith for them. They had been with Jesus day in and day out, watching Him do miracles. They had been given power by Jesus to do miracles themselves. Now they were being trained by Him to have a default position of faith, faith in His power, and faith in His work. He was training them to see opportunities for His power rather than obstacles that were beyond their ability.

Matthew 14:18 - Jesus' simple instruction to the disciples is rich with truth. The disciples showed Him the extent of their earthly resources, which were totally inadequate for fulfilling the task He had given them. Once again, the focus was on Jesus. It was only through His power that the disciples could accomplish their task. Jesus was the key to their ministry success.

(KEY VERSES - CONT.)

DIVINE POWER

Matthew 14:25 - In the context of the day in which Jesus lived, the water represented overwhelming power over which no man could exercise authority. Controlling water, especially bodies of water like a lake or the ocean, fell within God's authority alone. Jesus not only had calmed the storm, but now He demonstrated that He had the power to modify it at the elemental level by walking on it. Such power could only be Divine.

GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE DOES NOT DEPEND ON MAN

Matthew 14:31 - Jesus' love of Peter was not dependent on Peter's faith. Likewise, God's love for His children is not dependent on their faith. All believers should be thankful for this since man's faith is weak. God alone sustains His people, and Jesus rescued Peter from sinking despite his doubt and fear. God holds His children's salvation by His own power and secures their eternity in heaven through His power alone.

KEY CROSS REFERENCES

LEVITICUS 18:6 (V. 4)

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness."

LEVITICUS 20:21 (V. 4)

"If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless."

(KEY CROSS REFERENCES - CONT.)

2 Kings 4:42-44 (v. 16)

"A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" So he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD."

DEUTERONOMY 31:6 (V. 27)

"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

ISAIAH 41:13 (V. 27)

"For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."

ISAIAH 43:1-2 (V. 27)

"But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

(KEY CROSS REFERENCES - CONT.)

James 1:6-7 (v. 31)

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

KEY WORDS

MADE (ANAGKAZŌ) MATTHEW 14:22

To force or compel. Jesus ordered His disciples into the boat, commanding them to row to the other side. This was not a suggestion or an option. Jesus wanted them to leave Him there and cross to the other side. In His Deity, He knew what was going to happen to them. He intended this test to grow their faith by teaching them to rely on His power, even when He wasn't physically with them.

DOUBT (DISTAZŌ) MATTHEW 14:31

To stand at a split in the path. To waiver over a decision. To be unsure of which way to follow. Peter had the faith to step out of the boat, so why did he ultimately fail in his faith? He failed when he considered the option of fear and lost confidence in the certainty of his decision to step out of the boat. He allowed other influences, the wind and the waves, to impact the steadfastness of his decision to place his faith in Christ's power.

APPLICATION

THOSE WHO PURSUE THE WORLD REJECT JESUS

Herod was given over to pursuing the world and the sin that it brings. Every facet of his life was filled with compromise, immorality, and lewd behavior. He had betrayed his nation, his family, and his people. He was only interested in increasing his own power and position, and he was willing to do anything to eliminate opposition. Everyone who pursues the world will be completely opposed to the things of God.

THOSE WHO PURSUE GOD ARE SAVED

In contrast to Herod, the disciples were engaged in relationship with Jesus. Slowly their faith was growing as they followed Jesus into ministry and learned from His teaching. Even though they struggled with weak faith, they were humble, and Jesus met them in their weakness, patiently teaching, guiding, chastising, and rescuing them despite their lack of faith.

FEAR AND DOUBT ARE THE ENEMIES OF FAITH

In both miracle accounts, fear and doubt stop the disciples from moving forward. First, the disciples allow "common sense" to draw their attention away from Jesus' power, and then they allow fear of nature to do the same thing. The power of God transcends all of man's "wisdom" and overpowers any force in creation. As the creator, God can remake, alter, change, or subvert the laws and power of nature to His own sovereign will. As His children, we can rely on His power to enable us to complete our mission.

THROUGH GOD'S POWER, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Peter walked on the water because he had faith in the power of God to allow him to do so. This was only a foreshadowing of what Peter was going to do, much like Moses, who performed a

(APPLICATION - CONT.)

few miracles before the burning bush at God's command. Soon Peter and the disciples would do MUCH more! They would continue the powerful ministry of Jesus, including His miraculous works through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.

BELIEVERS WHO PURSUE MINISTRY WILL BE EMPOWERED

The power of God is not available for casual use. It is not for performing cheap tricks designed to draw attention. The whole purpose of the power of God working in the believer is to advance the Kingdom of God in the world. Those who pursue the mission of the Kingdom will be filled with the power of God for the purpose of ministry. Believers must be careful not to set limits on what is possible. God is powerful enough to do anything He wills.

FAITH IS GAINED BY WALKING WITH JESUS

Sanctification is the journey of the believer through this life from the point of their conversion to the end of their life when they are called home to be with Jesus. As shown by the life of the disciples, faith is not attained in a moment. Instead, it is something that is learned/gained by degrees. Faith is gained by spending time with Jesus through the Word and prayer.

Furthermore, it is strengthened by testing and trials, which God allows in the life of the believer. Just like Jesus commanded the disciples into the boat, knowing they would face the storm, so God allows trials and testing in the life of His children to grow their faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Herod was confronted with truth from God's Word by a prophet of God, John the Baptist. He responded by imprisoning and eventually beheading John for his boldness in pointing out Herod's sin.

-Are there sins in your life that you have been convicted about by God's Word or by faithful teaching from godly people?

-Have you been receptive to this conviction?

-If not, have you tried to silence this conviction in your life?

-As a follower of Christ, how should you respond to conviction in your life?

POWER FOR MINISTRY

God has given His children access to His power to aid them in accomplishing the work of ministry that He has called them to.

Take a moment to consider these questions in light of your own life and calling to spread the message of the gospel.

-Do you truly believe that the power of God is capable of working through you?

-Do you doubt the power of God in any way?

-Have you ever asked God to work through you in power?

-Do you pursue ministry with an attitude of confidence, knowing that God will give you the power you need to be effective for Him?

(DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - CONT.)

WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF...

...you were fully convinced that God's power was at work in you?

...you boldly entered every situation expecting God to work in power?

...you actively put aside fear and doubt in your life to trust God?

...you intentionally attempted ministry work that was only possible through the power of God.?

THE RESULT OF WALKING WITH JESUS IS FAITH AND POWER

"Now when they (the pharisees) saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." - Acts 4:13