

MATTHEW

14:1-36

Matthew 14:1-36

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 16th March 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Ephesians 3:20-21

Introduction

This morning we will reach the half-way point of Matthew's gospel account, which means that we have the pleasure of reading and studying chapter 14 out of 28. And it's so good, and so important, that we do continue to study the whole Bible together, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. It means we have to consider the bits we find easy, as well as the bits we find difficult. It means we are reminded of all Jesus has done for us, but also all that we have done that required Him to die in our place. And this morning, like many weeks, there are some challenges ahead of us, that if we are truly listening, should cause us to sit up and think about our own lives, and our individual walk with the Lord, as to whether we are truly honouring the Lord in all we do.

Overview of chapter fourteen

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- **v1-12** — John the baptist beheaded
- **v13-21** — Jesus feeds the five thousand
- **v22-33** — Jesus walks on the water

Now, in the opening 12 verses we will read about the death of John the Baptist, and how that came about at the hands of King Herod. Then, in verses 13-21, we will see the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels — which is the feeding of the five thousand. So clearly, there will be things for us to note there. From verse 22 to 33, we will see another miracle, as Jesus walks on the water to meet His disciples in the middle of another storm. Then, finally, from verse 34 to the end, we will see that Jesus healed many more people that were sick.

Chapter fourteen

So, that's where we're headed this morning. So, let's jump in, starting at verse 1:

Matthew 14:1-2

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

So then, around the time that Jesus had returned to His hometown of Nazareth, having been based in Capernaum, we read that Herod heard a report about Jesus. And this particular Herod was *Herod Antipas*, the son of the Herod the Great, who earlier had tried to kill Jesus by murdering all the baby boys under 2 years old near Bethlehem, as we looked at in Matthew chapter 2.

As for the *contents* of this report, Matthew doesn't specify, but he *does* record Herod's reaction, that he believed Jesus had certain "powers at work in him". And I think it is reasonable to deduce from that, that this report had detailed how Jesus has been performing many miracles in the region of Capernaum, raising the dead, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, and furthermore He had been teaching multitudes about the kingdom of Heaven.

But Herod concludes that this must somehow be *John the Baptist* risen from the dead. Why? Well, clearly Herod was superstitious (as many are today, reading their horoscopes and such like), and in Luke's gospel account we read that *it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again.*

But, timing wise we will learn next that Herod had very recently had John beheaded, and so now had a guilty conscience. In fact, so recently had that taken place, that word hadn't reached Jesus yet.

And Matthew records the details surrounding John's death, noting in verse 3 on:

Matthew 14:3-5

For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

And so, we find the reason that Herod had imprisoned John was because John had called him out for his sin. For Herod had divorced his first wife, and now was in a relationship with his brother's wife, Herodias — which you can tell by her name, was also a relation, being their niece. And oh how nothing is new, for people will not like it today when we speak up that their relationship is out of the boundaries of what God has established as good and morally right.

But Herod, though he wanted to *kill* John, was also a politician, and wanted to be popular with the crowds, and so merely imprisoned him. And we'll see that his desire to gain the approval of others continued to direct his steps. And what a warning that is for us in *our* day and age, where we can all too easily make decisions based on how many likes, follows, shares, or subscribers we get on social media platforms. Or even how many comments we get in person.

Here, in verses 6 and 7, we see more of Herod's character revealed, as Matthew records more of the details leading to John the Baptist's death. We read:

Matthew 14:6-7

But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

And so, Herod celebrated his birthday, with Mark noting that he *gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee*. So, this was a party, and the drink was surely flowing. And as such it was a petri dish for sin to develop. And develop it did, for we read that Herodias' daughter performed a dance in front of Herod and his friends, and Herod — a man we already know had few boundaries — liked what he saw, and so he makes this grand gesture, in front of his friends, to give her whatever she wants. In fact, we read in Mark's gospel account that he *also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."*

This was a terrible, drink fuelled, lustfully motivated, ill-considered promise. And I hope you can recognise the foolishness of this gesture that Herod made. But before you or I think Herod is the only man (or woman) to have ever been so stupid, we should consider how many terrible errors continue to be made today, just like that.

The secular company I work for (during the week) for a long time had a policy that no alcohol could be claimed on company expenses, precisely because two marriages were destroyed when two colleagues (whose spouses also worked for the company) got drunk on a business trip and ended up in bed together. And, to be honest, I think it was a good and wise policy, for indeed since the policy has been relaxed I've seen another marriage end this exact way. And I know these are not isolated cases. One pastor wrote:

Hardly a week goes by that I don't hear, "I was at this party," or "I was down at the bar," or "I was at the office get-together and I said something I shouldn't have said, and then I did something I shouldn't have done." These statements always come from broken, devastated people whose lives are permanently scarred because they were playing the game, trying to get ahead. Watch out for an environment wherein alcohol is flowing, and seductive music is playing. I don't care what society says. I don't care what the demands from your boss might be. Watch out. Herodias is dancing. You'll get sucked in, and you'll regret it later.

Those are wise words. Here, Herod, in the midst of this party, and in his lust, had made this open-ended cheque of a promise, because he let his eyes and heart wander. Oh, may we follow Job's example, who said *"I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?"* and may we follow David's example too, who wrote: *"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes;"*. May we do that before it costs us up to half our kingdom, or more.

Here, Mark records that Herodias' daughter, having been given this promise, *"went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist!'"*. And so, Matthew records:

Matthew 14:8

So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."

What a wicked arrangement this was. The request in itself was awful, but so was the means, for Herodias' daughter (who it is believed was called Salome) used the flaunting of her body to get what she wanted. But also Herodias herself, who we already know was in an adulterous relationship with her husband's brother (who was also her uncle), took advantage of his lust for her own daughter (and his foolishness in making such a promise) to demand the death of an innocent man.

There is so much wrong in this one episode that we could spend an entire conference looking at the dangers of repeating their sin. From using and flaunting of our own bodies to draw attention and to manipulate others, to holding grudges against those who correct our moral failings. But this morning there is yet more in this chapter that we should learn from. With Herod having heard this request from his step-daughter, we read:

Matthew 14:9-11

And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

How sorry was he? Well, the apostle John's gospel account records that Herod was **"exceedingly sorry"**. For, as John also records, Herod had reached the point where he had gladly listened to John speak. But, he was now reaping what he had sown. And indeed you and I would do well to remember that in our lives too, sin will take us further than we wanted to go, keep us longer than we wanted to stay, and cost us more than we wanted to pay. We need to be oh so careful...

Careful in our actions and decisions. But careful in our choice of friends too. For we read here that though Herod was sorry at hearing this request, he went through with it because he didn't want to look weak or unable to keep a promise in front of his friends. And we should take note of how important it is to surround *ourselves* with good and Godly friends that, when we are faced with the option to compromise, they will hold us back, give good counsel, warn us, exhort us, and even rebuke us if needed.

And likewise, we should avoid surrounding ourselves with such friends that will only encourage us toward sin. That is why it is so important to build your friendships here within your church family, and with other Christians too, that they might hold you back from sin, in sharp contrast to how your unbelieving school friends or colleagues will only encourage and even push you toward it.

Afraid of what his peers might think of him, Herod once again let the opinion of others determine his actions. And he ordered the execution of John the Baptist, following which we have this grotesque picture of his head being brought to his step-daughter as some sort of prize.

Matthew 14:12

Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

And as a side note, there is no panic amongst John's disciples that if his head and body are not buried in the same place together, that God won't somehow be able to raise Him from the dead one day. And that's one of many assurances we have that God doesn't need an intact body to raise any of our loved ones, or us, from the dead, when Jesus returns. It won't matter if you have been eaten by sharks, lost a limb in an accident, or have been cremated. For your body is not you. It's just the very temporary tent in which you live.

Now, we read in verse 13:

Matthew 14:13

When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

And so Jesus withdrew from any possible uprising or commotion that would have taken place after John the Baptist's death, and headed for a secluded spot outside the city of Bethsaida, as Luke tells us. But, hearing that is where Jesus was headed to, multitudes of people followed Him there.

Matthew 14:14

And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

So, despite having received the news of the John the Baptist's death (and, remember, he was an earthly relation of Jesus too), and having headed for a quiet place, Jesus was still willing to love and serve others — we read here that He was moved with compassion for them.

And honestly that makes me wonder at what cost to our own plans, and our own time, are we willing to be compassionate toward others? I love what Jon is doing with the upcoming CEO sleep-out to raise awareness of homelessness. I love how Mike serves at the food-bank in town. These are good examples. But even more, how moved with compassion are *any* of us to see people saved? Are we moved enough to not only attend our outreach BBQs, but to invite people, to talk to people — to share Jesus with them? Are we so compassionate that we are willing to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger — here or anywhere — that we might talk to them about Jesus?

We tend to this of evangelism as a gift — and indeed there *is* a spiritual gift of evangelism. But we should all evangelise! Let me put it like this; would any of you, if faced with a starving child, think for a moment "well, I don't have the gift of feeding starving children"?! No! We would be moved with compassion, for we would see the need. And it wouldn't matter that we're not a full time food aid worker, would it!? Let us have compassion for practical needs as Christians really ought to, but oh let us have even more compassion, that we would be moved to share the gospel with this dying world, that so desperately needs it.

Now...

Matthew 14:15

When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

And so the disciples recognised the practical need of the people to eat. And we read here "*when it was evening*" — which to us sounds like it was, *the evening*, right?! But it's helpful to know that the Jews had *two* evenings. One at 3pm, which was the time of the evening sacrifice. And one at 6pm, which was nearest to sunset. I mention this, because in verse 23 we will read "*Now when evening came*" — which is at that point referring to 6pm on the *same* day.

But here, at 3 in the afternoon, the people it seems had not had anything to eat for lunch. And the disciples think the solution is to send everyone into the neighbouring villages to buy food.

Matthew 14:16-17

But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

Now, if you've read ahead, then you know we're just about to read of this famous event where Jesus fed the five thousand. But with something so familiar, we need to be careful not to skip over it, or switch off while we look at it — for it was important enough for the Holy Spirit to prompt all four gospel writers to make note of it. In fact, it's the *only* miracle of Jesus that Matthew, Mark, Luke *and* John record in their accounts. And so what is there for us to learn here?

Well, first, we see the disciples learn an important lesson here, that they were not to rely on their own strength, knowledge, wisdom, or even what was in their hand. But to rely on God, knowing that where God guides, God provides. And oh that we might learn that too. This should remind us of what we read in Proverbs chapter 3, which says:

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

But second, we should be willing to give all we have, for we read next:

Matthew 14:18

He said, "Bring them here to Me."

And oh what Jesus will do with the little that *we* have. But we must be prepared to surrender it to Him. Here, the disciples actually had *nothing* to give, but rather (we read in John's gospel account) these five rolls and two small fish we actually from a young boy that was present in the crowd, and it seems that he was willing to give up *all* that he had. What lesson for us, to be willing to give *all* we have — no matter whether it seems a lot or a little — and let the Lord use it for His glory.

And we should also note, that the boy here had no idea what Jesus was going to do with what he gave, and he placed no demands on how it was used, not knowing if he would even benefit from it himself! And therein is example for us, that when we give our tithes or offerings, we are to place no stipulation on how they must be used, but rather we would pray that God use them as *He* desires, and in the way *He* directs those *He* has called to use them.

Here, the little the boy gave all he had. And we now find out what Jesus did with that. We read:

Matthew 14:19

Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.

So, Jesus sets a pattern that we should give thanks to God for our food. And then starts giving these loaves to His disciples. But, these pieces that-they-were-broken-into didn't run out. We read:

Matthew 14:20

So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.

So, not only did each person get to eat *something*, but they were *filled*. That is, there was not a rumbling stomach left among them. And this was even more remarkable when we take note of the following verse:

Matthew 14:21

Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

That is, there were significantly more people fed here than is often thought. For even assuming just one woman and one child per man, then there are at least fifteen thousand that Jesus fed here on this day! Imagine how astounded that young boy must have been to see all that Jesus did with his packed lunch! Let us never forget all that our all-mighty God is able to do, noting what Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, that we read earlier:

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

God is able to do far beyond what could ever do on our own. So why do we try and do things on our own? We must remember what else Jesus said, as the apostle John records in his gospel:

John 15:5-8

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Let us abide in Him. Let us boldly bring our requests to Him. Let us give Him all we have. Let us not be half-hearted in any of this.

Now, following this, we read in verse 22 on:

Matthew 14:22-23

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

There is tremendous need and tremendous value in our corporate times of prayer — here on Sunday mornings, at our Thursday evening prayer meetings, and our Sunday morning prayer meetings. Please, don't let that latter one be the worst attended meeting in this church. Likewise, don't neglect to pray as a family, nor as a couple, nor even as friends. But, let us also follow Christ's example here and make time to pray on our own. For if Jesus thought there was need to do it, then we certainly need to do it! Why? Because prayer isn't only a one way conversation — it is not only us bringing our requests to God, but us listening to God's leading for us as individuals.

So I urge you; don't make any major decision, or commit to any major course, without making it a major focus of prayer — whether praying about who you date or marry, whether praying about which job to apply for or where to live. Or how to serve God in ministry. Make time to pray on your own, without distraction, without your phone, without the TV on in the background, without music playing, without anything that could crowd out the Lord talking to you, and you talking to Him.

But also, note what else was going on here, for we read in John's gospel account, that following His feeding of the five thousand, *"Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king,"* and so *"He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone."* In other words, Jesus time was still not yet. But also, He was already King by right and title — and will not need to become King by popular vote, mob rule, or any democratic process.

Now, Jesus was praying alone here on the mountain, but His disciples were having an altogether different evening, for Matthew notes:

Matthew 14:24

But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

That is, the boat was all over the place, and the wind was against them. And once again, even the experienced fishermen on that boat could do nothing about it. And it had no doubt been a long night, for we read:

Matthew 14:25

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

And so they had got as far as the fourth watch of the night, which for the Romans would have been from 3am to 6am. They were no doubt exhausted from trying to stay afloat, and then all of a sudden they see Jesus — but at first they don't recognise it is Him. We read:

Matthew 14:26

And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

Perhaps they didn't expect Jesus to show up in the midst of their difficulties, even though Jesus was the One who had instructed them to set sail. Which is odd, because we'd *never* do that, right?!

And we read that they were troubled, which is to put it mildly. Frankly, they were scared to death.

Matthew 14:27

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

And likewise, God does not want us to be consumed with worry — remember He had taught regarding this in His sermon on the mount, saying:

Matthew 6:25-27

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

Let us not forget the value God puts on us, nor the love that He has shown toward us. He does not want you to worry. Neither about your life, or things going on *in* your life. And, here, at least one disciple was reassured by what He had said, for we read:

Matthew 14:28

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

I love this — for Peter doesn't jump in the water, he doesn't move an inch, without being sure that it is indeed the Lord speaking to Him. What great example to us, that we wouldn't just jump into things without talking to the Lord, and seeking *His* voice in the situation. Here, Peter had sought the Lord...

Matthew 14:29

So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

And so, having sought the Lord, and then followed His leading, Peter becomes only the second person in history to have walked on the water (the other being Jesus, of course!). An impossible thing to do in His own strength or ability, but possible because God was with Him, and He perfectly following God's will for Him. Yet more than that, notice how Peter asked in faith — for of all people, he knew the dangers of the sea, and the impossibility of walking on it, for he was a fisherman by trade. But rather than rely on His own understanding, He trusted Jesus implicitly. And there could not be a more fitting scripture to read alongside this than what we read in James chapter 1:

James 1:2-8

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Peter asked in faith, with no doubt that Jesus was able to empower and sustain him in what was a humanly impossible task. But note too, that His request was something that would only lead him *closer* to Jesus — for Jesus would have not enabled him to do something that would lead him away. May our requests not only be made in faith, but may our requests also be for that which will lead us, and others, closer to Jesus.

So what a wonderful example Peter is. But he is also a very real, very human example, for we read next in verse 30:

Matthew 14:30

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Having sought Jesus' will in faith, and having stepped out of the boat in faith, even walking on the water as Jesus was, Peter now looks at the wind and waves around him — that is, he looks at the situation rather than his Saviour — and he starts to sink. And don't we do the same? We trust the Lord to lead us into a certain job, or to live in a certain town, or take on a particular ministry, or into a relationship or marriage — but then we take our eyes off Him, and start looking at the wind, the waves, the storm around us, and at very least, our hearts start to sink.

What is the remedy when we are in such a place? We need to do the same as Peter and cry out to the One who alone can save us. The One who alone can make sense of the situation, and bring us out of it closer to Him. Peter exclaimed "Lord, save me!" (the shortest prayer in the Bible):

Matthew 14:31

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter cried out. And what did Jesus do? He stretched out His hand and caught him. When did He do it? Immediately. Now, I'm not saying that the storm will disappear immediately, for we'll read here that it didn't calm until they got back in the boat. But immediately Peter felt Jesus' touch, as Jesus took a hold of him in the midst of the storm.

And we see Jesus ask why Peter doubted — but this was a rhetorical question, for Jesus knew the answer. And so do we — Peter doubted when he took his eyes off Jesus, and focussed instead on the situation. Let us learn from this! And let us note that Jesus didn't merely speak comforting words to Peter — rather He was fully able to save him, and actually did save him from drowning. By all reports, Peter was not a small man — he was a strong and seasoned fisherman. And with one hand, Jesus stopped him from drowning. Our God is able to help us in *whatever* situation we are in. Again He is the all-mighty God. Not a *bit*-mighty God!

Now, we read next:

Matthew 14:32

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

So Jesus performs yet another miracle, calming this storm as He had calmed the storm in chapter 8, that His disciples had faced soon after His *Sermon on The Mount*.

Matthew 14:33

Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

His disciples, then, had come to the right conclusion of who He was. That He wasn't merely a good man, or a great moral teacher. But that He was, and is, the Son of God. And because this conclusion of theirs was correct, Jesus neither corrected them, nor refused their worship as *angels* of God in such situations would certainly have done.

Now, as an aside, let us consider that God, that Jesus, knew this storm was going to happen. Yet He still sent His disciples off into it. Why? Well, it wasn't to correct them, but to perfect them. And likewise God will allow us to face trials and difficulties that He might refine us, and that we too might know He is the Son of God, and our Saviour whom we can trust. How we ought to look for what He is teaching us in every trouble that we face.

Let's read on:

Matthew 14:34

When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret.

So then, they completed the journey they had set out to do, landing on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Matthew 14:35-36

And when the men of that place recognised Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

So in contrast to Nazareth, where we *read* (at the end of chapter 13) that Jesus "*did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief*" we read here that these people approached Jesus believing that He was able to heal them. They approached Him in faith, and many were healed, that it would be even clearer still that Jesus was their Messiah.

But what do we make of them touching the hem of His garment? Well, as mentioned back in our study of chapter 9, where the woman with the issue of blood did the same, the hem of the garment was considered a symbol of authority, such as we see in the book of Ruth, where she seeks to put herself under the authority of Boaz. And as we see with David and Saul, where David symbolically cut off the hem of Saul's clothing to signify the removing of Saul's authority as king.

And so, these people, as with the woman with the issue of blood, were, in effect, appealing to Jesus authority, that He might help them. Not out of superstition, but in faith.


And that brings us to this halfway point in this gospel account.

Application questions


So that we might apply what we have read this morning to our lives, let us consider the following:

- Are our decisions being influenced by what others think, or what God thinks?
 - Are we relying on what we can bring, or what God can do?
 - Is our focus on Jesus, or the situation around us?
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