

The Church of the Servant King

Thursday Night Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Thurs_Matt14)

MATTHEW 14 – THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND, JESUS' WALK ON THE WATER, & MORE HEALING

JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED (MATTHEW 14:1-12)

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, 7 so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. 12 His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. (Matt 14:1-12)

This "Herod" is *Herod Antipas* (A.D. 6 – 39) who was the *son of Herod the Great* – the "Herod" who had ordered that the male babies two years old and younger of Bethlehem be killed. *Herod the Great* had at first included *Antipas* in his will to be king after *Archelaus* (4 B.C. – A.D. 6); however, he later altered his will to make *Antipas* only a tetrarch of Galilee (4:12) and Perea (19:1) which was only one-fourth the size of the original area – thus the title "tetrarch." His administration was characterized by cunning and crime and he was intensely selfish and utterly destitute of principle. *Herod Antipas* judged Jesus when He was on trial (Lk 23:7-12).

Mark sets this scene after the mission of the Twelve; and certainly the multiplication of Jesus' influence through his disciples would upset Herod, one of whose motives in imprisoning the Baptist had been to thwart any threat to political stability. Because John the Baptist's ministry had been exercised in Perea (Jn 1:28), he was under Herod's jurisdiction. Herod had been ruling more than thirty years, and at this time he lived primarily at Tiberias on the southwest shore of Galilee. Therefore, Jesus' ministry was taking place largely within Herod's jurisdiction.

Herod Antipas was first married to the daughter of an Arabian king of *Petraea* whose land adjoined *Perea* on the south. However, he later became interested in the wife of his half-brother *Philip I*, named *Herodias*, while staying in the house of his half-brother, *Philip I*.

Therefore, to divorce his first wife (the daughter of an Arabian king virtually on his border) in favor of *Herodias* was politically explosive. *Antipas* and *Herodias* eloped and married, even though both were already married. *Herodias* was the granddaughter of *Herod the Great* which meant that *Antipas* was her uncle.

John got into trouble with *Antipas* and *Herodias* by condemning the marriage (Matt 14:4; Mark 6:18; Luke 3:19-20). John's ministry came under *Antipas*' area of governance since John ministered in Perea (Jn 1:28).

The daughter of Herod Antipas and Herodias – The first two gospels mention “the daughter of Herodias,” but neither gives her name. Josephus says that her name was *Salome*. *Salome* was the granddaughter of Simeon, the high priest through her mother, Herodias. *Herodias*’ marriage to *Antipas* was especially aggravating to the Jews because she was a Jewess and belonged to the royal family. On top of that, *Antipas* had defied Jewish laws that prevented the taking of a brother’s wife (Lev 20:21).

21 'If there is a man who takes his brother's wife, it is abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They will be childless. (Lev 20:21)

The gathering in Matthew 14 is the birthday of *Antipas*. After *Salome*, the daughter, danced, *Antipas* promised her anything. *Herodias* saw the opportunity to use *Salome* to silence John. It is believed that John’s prison cell was beneath the banquet hall in which the nobility were entertained. The prison and the banquet hall were located near the northeastern extreme of the Dead Sea in a place now known as *Mkaur*. Here in the same mountains in which Israel sought for the grave of her first prophet (Moses), the last prophet (John) was entombed.

Antipas knew that John was popular among the Jews, so he didn’t want to kill him. However, his actions were largely motivated by politics. Like most weak men, *Antipas* feared to be perceived to be weak. His crime haunted his conscience so when he heard of the deeds done by Jesus, he suspected that John had arisen from the dead – a very interesting thing since it was the Pharisees who were known for their belief in the resurrection of the dead.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND (14:13-21)

13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" 17 They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, 20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. (Matt 14:13-21)

Late Nineteenth century liberalism tried to explain this miracle by teaching that what really happened was that the people started sharing their lunches. In reality, Jesus proved that He had authority to create as the Son of God (see Ephesians 3:9). About 5,000 men were fed, so the actual number of people fed when women and children are included could have been as many as 20,000. The miracle took place at Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). This is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels.

The twelve basketfuls may have significance in that there were twelve tribes and twelve apostles (cf. 19:28). The Messiah’s supply is so lavish that even the scraps of his provision are enough to supply the needs of Israel, represented by the Twelve.

Like the disciples, we are to be involved in feeding other people with spiritual food. The source of the feeding would be the Lord Himself. When their supply of spiritual nourishment ran

out, they would need to return to the Lord for more. Jesus would supply them, but the feeding would be done through them.

JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER (14:22-33)

22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matt 14:22-33)

Jesus sent the disciples away ahead of Him so that He could dismiss the crowd and be alone to pray. This was prompted by the crowd's desire to make Him king (John 6:15). The time was not right and Jesus knew it because the nation's spiritual leaders were deciding against Jesus (Matt 12:24). His acknowledgment of the nation's rejection as a whole was yet to come (Matt 23:37-39).

Personal observation: I have found that one of the best times to pray is immediately after having taught or learned a spiritual lesson. It reinforces the impact of the lesson or circumstance and helps me focus upon the true source of spiritual blessing.

Peter's request was actually in keeping with the authority that had been previously granted to the apostles by Jesus (10:1ff). Many times, we look at Peter in amusement and are sometimes critical of his lack of faith. However, Scripture only records two men who ever walked on the water. Only when he took his eyes off of the Lord and focused upon the adversity (wind) did he begin to sink.

Point: In the adversities of life, do we focus upon the adversity or do we focus upon the solution to adversity, i.e. Jesus? If we focus upon the adversity, we need to consider Jesus' rebuke of Peter to be Jesus' rebuke of us.

The disciples acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God; however, this does not mean that they yet understood that He would go to the Cross and die and be resurrected. They still had the Messianic ideas of Jesus as conqueror in their minds.

OTHER HEALINGS (14:34-36)

34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent word into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; 36 and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured. (Matt 14:34-36)

The people of Gennesaret, near Capernaum, were only interested in the healing ministry of Jesus. Most likely, they did not fully comprehend who Jesus really was. The stricter and legalistic types would have never rubbed shoulders in a crowd as Jesus did. One never knew what type of ceremonial uncleanness one might contract. However, Jesus could not become unclean. Instead, He made clean. This event set the stage for the confrontation over clean and unclean in 15:1-20.