

Matthew 21-02-21a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're going to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14. We're at the feeding of the 5,000 and the attempt afterward for the people to make Jesus their king.

And then events to follow revolving around the water. We'll jump right in. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, and we'll get started.

Father, we are grateful for another day, for Your sustaining grace in providing for our physical needs and in making provision for our souls and our spirits through Your Word and the presence of Your Holy Spirit. We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word together, that Your Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, help us to understand it and see the difference that it can make in our thinking and in our application as we seek to be good stewards of the time and resources that You have placed at our disposal, so that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified in our lives as we wait for His soon return. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

In Matthew chapter 14, as we have seen, there is the notation at the beginning about Herod. It has always seemed to me a little bit odd to make this note. It tells us a couple of things.

At that time—this is the beginning of Matthew 14—Herod the Tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He is risen from the dead.” It's just not the kind of thing that, in the normal course, people have not been raised from the dead.

There has not been miraculous ministry on the part of prophets in hundreds of years in Israel. It's just such a strange thing for the king to say, “This is John raised from the dead.” And we know that he thought this and told it to his servants because apparently there were sympathetic individuals in the palace.

We know in later times that there were those who were evidently believers in the Lord Jesus in the temple precincts. There were some that let John in the various palaces and places where Jesus is tried on the night before He was crucified. John is allowed in.

His family has connections in Jerusalem. You know that his father Zechariah was a priest, and evidently John is known to them and gets inside even while Peter is in the courtyard outside. John is inside. And in later times, we know that even in Rome, when Paul is in prison, there are those in the household and in the palace guard who are sympathetic.

So evidently someone, a disciple of John or perhaps a believer in Jesus Himself, is in the palace staff someplace and reports that this is what Herod said. “This is John the Baptist. He is risen from the dead.”

It's just such an odd conclusion to draw. Can you imagine anybody today saying, “Oh, this fresh wave of crime, Jimmy Hoffa is risen from the dead,” or “Don Corleone is risen from the dead,” or somebody that you would imagine to be a mastermind of something, or there's been a sudden burst of philanthropy, “Mother Teresa is risen from the dead”? Nobody draws that conclusion.

But Herod draws it, and in the rulership area, when you have a king of Israel, legitimate or illegitimate, northern kingdom or southern kingdom, the things that happen around them and the things that are recorded in Scripture that are attributed to them are significant as representative and almost metaphorical for the nation. And this thought on Herod's part represents the reaction of a lot of people, and it isn't an expression of faith in God. It doesn't look to God.

It looks to mysticism. There's something supernatural going on, but it isn't connected to the God of Scripture. And that's why he says, “He's risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.”

Not God's power is at work. You go to John chapter 3, and Nicodemus understands that no one could do what Jesus was doing except he were from God. Herod gets that there is supernatural power at work, but it's powers, lowercase p, and it's mystical.

So if you asked Herod, “Well, are you spiritual?” he would say, “Oh yes, I'm a very spiritual person. My whole family is spiritual. My father was spiritual. I'm spiritual. My brothers are spiritual. We believe in spirits.

“We believe in powers. We believe that things outside normal circumstance can happen.” Well, this note introduces this section of Matthew, and then as we go forward and you have the rehearsal of the execution of John the Baptist and Jesus retiring to process that information and the fate of John.

Because think about this. Jesus has come. There has been healing. There have been miracles. It has been casting out of demons, and a lot of people, I think, were kind of secretly glad to see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees begin to be pointed out and to see the genuine power of God at work. People who were those who listened to the Father and had learned from the Father recognized in Jesus and in Jesus' teaching that it was from heaven, it was from God, and that this was a great day and a great time.

But the ease with which we can go off the rails in suddenly coming to a realization that something new is afoot, something new is happening, is evident because there had not been a death associated with Jesus and His irruption, I-R-R-U-P-T-I-O-N, His intervention into the normal flow of human history. Suddenly there is this new thing, and there has been life. There has been healing.

There has been positive teaching. There has been a stir. People have come out to be baptized. The disciples have gone forth and broadcast the news of the kingdom. But this is shocking that John the Baptist has been killed. And this is a political move.

It is motivated for political reasons. Herodias hates John because he has pointed out the impropriety of rulers who think that the normal morals don't apply to them, normal laws don't apply to them, normal moral laws. But she becomes furious.

But this is political intrigue, and political power puts John to death. That's clear. So when Jesus feeds the 5,000, and then He sees and senses that there is a notion building in that crowd, and so He sends the disciples preemptively and proactively into the boat and onto the sea.

This is the end of the day. The whole reason He fed them is that the day is long spent, and they need nourishment just to get home. They're probably going to get home after dark.

And so Jesus is going to send His disciples in the boat knowing that their journey is going to be in the darkness, and He needs to get them away from the crowd. So we saw this when we looked last time in John chapter 5, that the reason—and it tells us in Matthew as well—the people want to make Him king. And so this was in John chapter 6, actually, and looking at verse 14, the men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, the feeding of the 5,000, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Therefore, when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. Now if they are following Him to make Him king, notice that He goes into a place that people are not willing to follow. He climbs the mountain that people say, “Well, I'd like to make Him king, but I don't want to climb this mountain to get Him and bring Him down and make Him king.”

There are several significant times where Jesus retires to a mountain. He climbs, He goes up some rough terrain. He does this when He calls His disciples, and you get the roster of the disciples. He went up into a mountain. He's just been down with them in the lower elevations, and then He goes off to the mountain and then He sends for them and has them climb the mountain to be commissioned as disciples.

These people aren't willing to climb the mountain. His disciples will climb the mountain, and His disciples, if He sends them in the boat in the evening, even though the wind is against them, they're going to do what He asks. Why? They already had learned from the Father. They already love the Father and the things of the Father, and this is the explanation.

In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus gave the parable of the soils and the seed and the sower, and then He discusses some other things, and then later He gives the interpretation. In the same way, if you look at the Gospels as a whole, what's going on here in Matthew chapter 13 and Matthew chapter 14 and even Matthew chapter 15 is not obvious until you look later in the Gospels. John is really the explanation for what we have in these chapters of Matthew in the same way that Jesus in Matthew 13 gave the explanation for the parables later that might initially be difficult to interpret.

When you look at this sequence, Herod has executed John and now thinks that he has risen from the dead and that there are powers at work, mystical powers. Some unknown, unnamed power has in some way, shape, or form brought John back, but whatever that is, it doesn't turn Herod toward the God of Israel, toward the God of creation. He recognizes that wonderful and supernatural things are happening. He recognized that there was something special about John, and that's why he didn't want to kill him.

But recognizing that something is special and drawing the conclusion from those special attributes are two different things. You can be impressed, you can be dazzled, you can be drawn into an arena and into processing information, but we need to come to the right conclusion. Herod has heard about Jesus, Herod listened to John, and yet he doesn't arrive at the destination, and the reason is he's not truly seeking the Father.

He's not truly seeking God. He likes being dazzled, he likes being stimulated, he likes seeing and hearing that there are supernatural things happening. I'll give you a current example. I say current; it's been over the last decade or so. But this notion that people have died and gone to heaven and then they come back to tell us what it's like.

A couple of little kids came back and wanted to say all kinds of things about heaven, and people get dazzled by that, and especially people in the immediate periphery who describe themselves and others in the profitable books that were published about this afterward. There is a sense of excitement, of drama, of supernatural revelation. I'm hearing things that I didn't know. I'm finding out things I always wondered about. And it is a stimulation, but you know that there is something that matters because the destination doesn't end up being God, and the glory of God, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the written word and the purpose of the living Word and the purpose of the Holy Spirit from Genesis to Revelation is to bring us to the Father. You can't come to the Father without the ministry of the Spirit, without the presence and power of God's Word, both incarnate and written.

That's the focus, and if it leads you anywhere else, if you say, "Well, there are wonderful things happening. I believe in resurrection from the dead, but there are powers at work," lowercase plural powers, Herod doesn't get there, just as his father didn't get there when the wise men came. And we're talking about supernatural revelation of the birth of a king in Israel. Well, what does Herod want to do? Find Him and kill Him.

He believes that the star means something, he believes the wise men know something, he believes the prophetic Scriptures that say He'll be born in Bethlehem, he believes all of that, but the conclusion that he draws and the way forward that he chooses are eminently wrong. Executing John is a heinous, murderous injustice perpetrated by a man who believes in the resurrection from the dead.

Well, this idea that you can perceive and be excited and not arrive where you should as a result is going to carry through. So with the feeding of the 5,000, people believe that Jesus can multiply bread now. They've seen Him do it, and they're ready to believe that it can happen anytime Jesus wants it to, so they want to make Him king to meet their physical needs.

He's the bread king. This solves poverty. The war on poverty just ended because this guy can probably walk by a granary and when you open it up, the silos are full.

Don't have to worry about threshing anymore, don't have to worry about grinding anymore. Just take a few existing loaves and suddenly everyone is fed. This is great.

We should get a hold of this guy and make him provide for us forever. Well, this is believing in something supernatural and something unique and special about Jesus, but not drawing the conclusion that these are signs of something larger and greater and in the spiritual realm, not the physical realm. And we learn this from John.

Matthew gives the account and moves forward, and the Matthew account is like the parables in Matthew. If we think about this long enough and we compare Scripture with Scripture, we will understand why the account is given this way and in this order. But as it used to say in your textbooks in school, here are the problems at the end of the chapter and the answers are at the back of the book.

Many times, sometimes they were only in the teacher's edition, but I took a number of courses where they gave you the problems and the answer was in the back of the book. And the reason it was given is, work the

problems, check and see, oh, I didn't get the right answer. I need to learn how to get the right answer because when I get to the test, the test is not in the book.

But here are the problems at the end of the chapter. See if you can work them. If you get stuck, the answers are in the back, and sometimes you can work backward.

Well, if you get stuck for an answer, trying to understand not just what is said—I understand that Jesus fed the 5,000. I understand that the disciples go on a boat and row against the wind for three quarters of the night. I understand that Jesus walked on the water—but why is this here? What should I bring from this by way of application? Well, the answer is in the back of the book, and the book is the Gospels and John is the back.

So, let's read the account, the end of the feeding of the 5,000 and beginning of the walking on the water here in Matthew chapter 14. And we're just going to take a shortcut and go to the back of the book and get the answer as to what this means. So those who had eaten, verse 21, Matthew 14, were about 5,000 men besides women and children.

The 5,000 number is chosen. Someone could have tallied up. They sat down in groups of 50.

They could have given us 11,000, 9,000, however many it was. But the 5,000 men are in all four Gospels, the number that is given, and the women and children are mentioned as being there but not counted. And this is going to be significant later on in the feeding of the 4,000.

Immediately, verse 22, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side while He sent the multitudes away. When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. He sent them away.

They're now able to make the journey. It's getting dark, and He says, "I'm not going the direction you're going. You're not going to talk Me into being king along the way.

I'm not headed for the hotel in the nearest town. I'm going up this mountain." And this incentivizes the people to go on home.

But He goes up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When you see Jesus seeking solitude, this is always the reason: communion with the Father. This is how Jesus kept His focus on spiritual priorities and spiritual truth in the midst of great physical pressures and physical circumstantial temptations.

And this is what we should do. This is what He did in verse 13, hearing of the death of John the Baptist and that Herod now thinks that He is John risen from the dead. He departed by boat to a deserted place by Himself. A deserted place by Himself.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to resist and flee the temptation to be constantly connected. Fine to keep track. Fine to be in touch. Fine social life and so on.

But in this day of technology, it is possible to never be alone. And that's a bad thing. The example of the Lord Jesus is there is a time to be connected and be in the multitude and hopefully be a blessing as well as be blessed in that fellowship.

But it is necessary. It is vital to have alone time. Find it.

Exploit it. And start it with prayer. And Jesus the Son of God needed time alone to process who He was, why He was there, what the Word of God had to say about His current circumstance, planning His future, knowing what He should and shouldn't do.

There is a time to not make bread and there is a time to make bread. We saw that last time. So verse 13, circle it.

Departed to a deserted place by Himself. Verse 23, sent the multitudes away. Send your phone with its apps away.

Send Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest. Send it away by Himself to pray. And when the evening came, He was alone there.

I submit, I suggest, I believe in my heart of hearts that if Jesus had not spent time by Himself alone to pray, He would have not walked on the water, which is one of the most signature miracles and signature events in the Bible. It has entered into secular knowledge. People say, "Well, He's walking on water." This isn't something mythological.

This is the Lord Jesus, and it's one of the signature events in His ministry and it wouldn't have happened. He knew to do this because He was by Himself communing with the Father in prayer, reflection, meditating on the Word of God in His humanity. Because He was not omniscient in His humanity.

We know this from other miracles. "Who touched Me?" He tells us that in His humanity, He did not know the time of His return. Only the Father knows.

So, He is alone there. Verse 24, the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night, the Jews had divided the night into three watches. But the fact that this is fourth watch, by the time of the Lord Jesus, the Roman system of timekeeping had prevailed.

This is kind of like going metric or something in this country. And so, the Romans had four watches of the night, and this was six in the evening to nine p.m., nine p.m. to midnight, midnight to three, three a.m. to six a.m. is the fourth watch. So, in the fourth watch of the night, now you remember, they get into the boat and start across the sea before dark.

So, how long have they been struggling and rowing and trying to get across this lake in accordance with Jesus' command? How long? Over nine hours. Over nine hours.

If you figured the sun went down at seven p.m. and this is in the fourth watch, not at the beginning of the fourth watch, it's been nine hours. Nine hours of these guys trying to move this boat across the lake against the wind. The wind was contrary.

Now, Jesus sent them in. He is pretty good at knowing the weather. And this is not unintentional. This is not an accident.

This work is good for them. Why didn't Jesus give them a favorable wind and they blow right on across? There are a couple of reasons, and this is speculation on my part, why Jesus has them spend all night on the lake. And I'll mention them here in a moment.

So, evening came. Jesus is alone. Verse 24, the boat is in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves. The wind is contrary.

In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost." Think back to my long and labored introduction about Herod.

What does Herod think when he hears about Jesus? "It's John back from the dead." Not necessarily John's ghost, but something akin from the supernatural.

Here, the disciples, now in broad daylight, if they were working against a storm, they might draw a different conclusion. But they are tired. Have you ever been tired enough to hallucinate? Have you ever been tired enough to not really be able to process and think well? Most of us have.

I've told you before there were times when I was trying to get back where I was supposed to be and driving in the middle of the night and just dog tired, and suddenly I would see an overturned semi right in front of me on the highway. I mean detail, paint, scuff marks, brand name on the side, wheels turning, jackknife semi on its side in the middle of the highway. Slammed on my brakes, and there was nothing there.

It was a waking dream. Get out of the car, sprint a quarter mile back up the shoulder, quarter mile back, half-mile run. It would give me another 15 to 30 minutes of conscious ability to get down the road, and then when I started feeling that drowsy, I would pull over, do a sprint, and get myself back.

That's the dumb stuff you do when you're young. But fatigue plays a role in conclusions that you draw under duress. They're already under pressure.

They are troubled, and when they see this form on the sea, they say, "Well, it's a ghost, it's a spirit. It can't be a physical person because physical people don't walk on water," and they don't know that it's Jesus and they don't suspect that it's Jesus. They don't expect Jesus.

They left Him back on the shore, and this is unprecedented. And so when they see a form approaching them in the boat, it's got to be a spirit. We do know that there was demonic activity that they were familiar with by this time.

They themselves have cast out demons. They've seen Jesus cast out demons, and so there is great fear. Well, immediately when they cry out, Jesus spoke to them, verse 27, "Be of good cheer, it's Me. Don't be alarmed, it's Me."

Cheer up, allay your fear. Be happy, don't be afraid, it is I. Well, this is the second time within the space of a chapter that we've seen a supernatural event or the perception of supernatural things going on.

Herod hears about it, the disciples see it with their own eyes, and the immediate conclusion they jump to is spirits are at work, powers are at work. And in both cases Herod is wrong. It's not John come back from the dead. The disciples are wrong.

It's not spirits, malevolent, benevolent, or otherwise that are at work. In both cases it is the Lord Jesus, but it is not immediately evident to the observer that it's Him, and wrong conclusions are drawn. Many times there are forces at work in our lives and we think, "Well, this isn't just circumstances. I'm under oppression here. There's something bigger going on," and we can draw wrong conclusions.

And often times it is God that is at work to will and to do for His good purpose in our lives. And as believers schooled in the Scriptures, knowledgeable about the way God works, if we spend time alone in reflection and in prayer, we are going to be much better equipped to parse circumstances correctly, to understand world events and national events and local events, whether they are political, whether they are in the religious world or the spiritual world, to perceive correctly, to cut through the fog, to cut through the confusion, cut through the deceptions and the falsehoods and the fakeness of things.

To cut through all of that, we don't need better online sources, we don't need a new Drudge Report or a better Tucker Carlson report. We need the Word of the Lord, and we need fellowship with the Lord alone in the privacy of our closet, the King James called it, time alone in reflection and in prayer. Do this.

That's the way to be the tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season. Figure out a way to make it happen. Jesus Himself over and over again disconnects from the crowd, even disconnects from His own disciples, goes off by Himself alone to pray and commune with the Father.

Now if Jesus the Son of God needed to do this, how much more so do we? Having done this, He is able to understand His own circumstances and to know when and where to be and to do, and this of course is our goal.

So the conclusion, the observation, interpretation, and application at this point this morning is, look at the example of the Lord Jesus. You've got a boat full of disciples who are struggling to understand, struggling to make their way through circumstances, and you've got the Lord Jesus who has successfully fended off yet another temptation to give Him a crown without the cross, who understands the wrongness of the arguments that are being made by the crowd, who understands the wrongness of arguments that are being made by the religious establishment, who understands the needs of His own disciples and understands when and where the power of God can be invoked in a supernatural way in His own life, in His own ministry.

The reasons for which He doesn't just wait for them to get to the other side, the reason that they're in the boat struggling for nine-something hours, is what we'll look at when we come back from the break. But there is an emphasis here on the example of the Lord Jesus in seeking solitude to commune with the Father in reflection and prayer, and we don't want to miss it amidst the supernatural multiplication of loaves and fishes, the supernatural walking on the water and the stilling of the storm.

It's easy to miss, but watch the Lord Jesus. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. He is our example. He is our great high priest, and if He in His humanity needed to do this, how much more so do we?

And if we look at the pattern, think about the last several days, how many times did we stop and just sit down, maybe open the Bible, grab a recent set of notes, and just reflect for 10 or 15 minutes? The Lord Jesus did this for hours.

When's the last time on a non-Bible class night or morning we just sat down for 15 or 20 minutes and reviewed and renewed and refreshed our souls with the supernatural power of God's Word, the supernatural presence of God's Spirit and the opportunity to enter into the throne room of God Himself by that new and living way through the veil that the Lord Jesus has provided? It's critically important. It is a life skill for every believer to make time to do this.

Some of us have it kind of built in. Every day as I'm thinking ahead to our next Bible class, I get the chance to do this vocationally, and it's a lot easier for me. But I encourage you, you do not realize the value and the power if you have not been doing this on a regular basis.

If you've been doing it on a regular basis, you already know what I'm talking about, and there's a smile on your face and you're nodding your head because you know that the power of God comes into the life of the believer through the Spirit of God and the Word of God, not through a phone screen. We'll pause here and take our break. When we return after our wonderful special music, we're going to see and try to answer the question from the Gospel of John, why? Why is this here and how should we then live? But let's pause here and take our break.