

Matthew 21-02-21b

I thank Dan and Anne-Lynn and Lori for our special music this morning. The subject of storm and the water is certainly in our sights here as we continue our study. As a quick reminder, the task of studying a gospel is to understand when you confine yourself to just the narrative that is presented by that particular book, that particular author, and when to feel free to raid the commissary and find everything that is in the other gospels.

And our goal here is sort of to do both. So as I suggested in the first session this morning, Matthew is presenting this account and this section of his gospel, much like Jesus presents the parables in general. The import and the meaning and the application is available to those who are equipped to receive it and to understand it.

And from Jesus' day until this, just thinking, these things weren't written down in the days that they were happening, of course, but people would hear the account and hear the sequence and hear cause and effect and reflect and try to understand what God means by these things. What are we to draw by way of a conclusion? How should we then live? And so I want to be careful to respect the narrative in Matthew. And as we do that, you think back, you remember our rule of thumb on the gospels, each of them has an emphasis.

It's not an all-consuming, restrictive theme. But in general, the gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the coming king. It is Jewish and Israel focused in its presentation.

This occurred to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, is a repeated refrain in Matthew. And its thrust and its message are toward Israel in character and in composition. So the coming king.

The gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant. He is moved with compassion. He is sacrificial.

He is moving quickly because a good servant moves with alacrity and gets things done in a timely manner. And euthus all the way through the gospel of Mark. And remembering that this is Peter's eyewitness account and the humility that Peter learns over time through his experience with the Lord Jesus and power and strength through humility becomes emblematic in Peter.

And so the gospel of Mark, as Peter's recollections, presents Jesus as the servant. And in many cases, the suffering servant. So coming king, suffering servant.

Luke presents Jesus, really emphasizes his humanity and that that transcends the mere Jewishness or Gentileness of someone. So you have the son of man. Jesus is the son of man and his connection to humanity through his incarnation.

And then John, of course, presents Jesus as the son of God. In the beginning was the

word. The word was with God.

The word was God. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. We beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

So respecting the emphasis and the composition of these four gospels, like the four faces of the cherubim, it takes this multifaceted presentation that overlaps in many ways. But the information from our two eyes overlaps almost entirely. And yet the combination of the two is what gives us depth perception and allows us to greatly appreciate and enhances our understanding of the world around us.

In the same way, the overlap, as well as the distinctions of these gospels, they're slightly different points of view, give us not just stereo vision, but. Quad vision, which enters us into the spiritual realm, so as we look at the gospel of Matthew, we want to see this account in its context and the significance of the feeding of the five thousand at this point is not explained, is it? The significance of Jesus staying behind and sending the disciples ahead is not explained. Jesus coming to them on the water.

No explanation is given for this. Why didn't Jesus just reverse the course of the wind, blow the disciples to the other side of the lake, walk around there and meet them the next morning? Why? This almost seems to be an artificially constructed circumstance. We know Jesus can control the weather.

If he's up on the mountain and through the moonlight or whatever, by some means natural or supernatural, he realizes the disciples are struggling to get across. Maybe he just senses the wind and knowing the lake having grown up in those environs, he knows that, well, they're never going to get across with this headwind. He, Jesus, could have prayed to his father, could have thought a thought, could have issued a command to the wind, blow thou from the southeast and send these guys home.

Instead, he walks on the water, which is just as extraordinary a conclusion to this section, if you will, as Herod thinking that John has been raised from the dead at the beginning of it. How did Jesus know to do this? Why did he do it? It is not explained in this text. However, if you only had the Gospel of Matthew and think about the theme of the book, the thrust of the book, the message of the book, the composition of it and its intention, it is like the parables.

It is possible to see and not perceive. It is possible to hear and not understand. It is possible to miss the import of these and just say, well, wasn't that a cool miracle? Jesus is just demonstrating his power over water, his power over bread.

But thinking just now about the Gospel of Matthew, we're going to do both in this second session. We're going to look at what we can conclude looking at Matthew's account in isolation, and then we'll turn to the back of the book and read the answer that John

provides us. So what do you think about this? Jesus looks at the crowds and has compassion on them.

They have a physical need. And in compassion, Jesus wants to meet that need. So what is his first word about this situation? What does he say first to the disciples? You look, if you conveniently have a red letter edition like I do, you can glance back at the early part of chapter 14.

Where's the first red ink? They're in verse 16, right? They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. The disciple solution is the practical, ordinary human solution.

These people need to go find themselves some food. Many times at the end of a day of teaching, that's what happened. The disciples have seen this as a pattern over and over and over again.

But here Jesus introduces something new. Is there anything wrong with sending the people away to go get their own food? They decided to come out. They wanted to get their loved ones healed.

Jesus has done so. And hasn't Jesus done enough? Isn't it time to just send them home? On many other days, many other venues, countless weeks. That's exactly what happened.

Jesus hasn't fed the crowds at the end of every teaching session, has he? The wonderful section we saw in Matthew chapter five through seven, the sermon on the mount, quote unquote, did Jesus feed the people at the end of that? No, he did not. But here. Because Jesus has gone off by himself to reflect, to commune with the father.

When these people show up and he's only had a few hours to do so, but the people find him and he spends all day long meeting their needs in terms of healing, he says. This time, they don't need to go away, you give them something to eat and we know from other gospels, which we're not looking at at the moment, that they have already been out on their missionary journey. The first sending out of the disciples, two by two, six teams went out and have come back.

But we don't have that account here. Instead, Jesus says to the disciples, you give them something to eat. Now, this is new.

He has never told him this before, so restricting ourselves to the gospel of Matthew, if you're a disciple, what do you do? You do exactly what they did. They said, we have here only five loaves and two fish. Fair, you're given a mission, you don't have the resources.

How many times in our lives do we have a mission and we look in the larder and the cupboard is bare and we go to the Lord and say, I'm supposed to do this? And I was

thinking about this this past week, you know, the old saying, there's too much month at the end of the money. I was thinking about it with this cold snap and the amount of firewood I had cut and split, and I thought there's too much cold at the end of the firewood. And we were able to go out and do a couple of auxiliary firewood runs and it ended up coming out just right.

But many times we have responsibilities before the Lord and we're happy to fulfill them. But the resources suddenly aren't there or maybe over time erode away and aren't there. There is a requirement, there is a need, and the physical provision does not seem to be there.

Well, we should do exactly what the disciples did. God in Christ has given the disciples a command, feed these 5,000 people and their dependents. And the disciples say, Lord, we don't have the wherewithal to do that.

So Jesus says, bring what you have to me. Now, in application terms, how do we do this? How do we bring the inventory before the Lord? We do this in prayer, right? We come to the Lord in prayer. We come to God the Father in prayer.

We say, Father, here is my responsibility. Here is my accountability. Here is the mission I have.

Here is the inventory of what I have to do it with. I haven't got the time. I haven't got the opportunity.

I haven't got the wherewithal. I don't have the resource. I don't have the means.

Take it to God. The disciples conveniently have the Lord Jesus right there, and he says, bring what you have to me. And in a nutshell, what happens? Jesus makes what we have work.

God in our lives will make what he has provided work. Who created fish? Who created wheat and oil and the things necessary to make loaves of bread? God did. Whatever you've got comes from God.

What do you have that you did not receive? If it seems insufficient, take it before the Lord, hand it to God. The disciples have God in Christ right before them. We go directly to the Father through Christ.

So then Jesus commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. He gave the loaves to the disciples and instructed them to hand them out to the crowd. There are instructions that are to be followed.

What if the crowd had not sat down like they were told? What if the disciples had not distributed like they were instructed? Once we have taken a need to God and have given

him an account of what we perceive to be our available resources, the next thing to do is, what are the instructions I have for situations like this? Am I free to break the rules because I am in need? Many people justify crime, well, but he's got more than he needs and I don't have enough. I need to feed my kids. They won't miss it, they don't need it, I can break a window and steal this, take that, I can use subterfuge, the company won't miss the money, they've got buckets full.

There's rationalization that, well, I can break the rules because I have a need. In this scenario, when there is a need, we take the need to the Lord, we take the need to the Lord and we put it in his hands and then consult the instructions. What am I to do and what am I not to do? Jesus says, don't send them away, give them something to eat.

Haven't got enough, I'll take care of that. You make sure they sit down in an orderly fashion and I will give you what you need. It's reminiscent of when Jesus said, there are times of persecution that are going to come and you will be hailed before kings and rulers, do not worry about what you would say in that hour, it will be given to you at that time what you should say.

It will be given to you in the time of need what to say. It may be given to you to say nothing. Like the Lord Jesus, there's a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

There is a time to not say anything. There is a time in a debate. There is a time in an argument.

There is a time in a conflict to say nothing. Or there is a time to boldly speak the words that are given, the way Peter and John did on the steps of the temple in the early chapters of Acts. How do we know when to speak and when to remain silent? That's why Jesus went by himself and prayed.

Jesus knew what to do and when to do it because he was in communion with the Father privately and alone. How will we know? You've got a circumstance, got a situation, got a relationship that's under strain, got a decision to make, got pressure, got a great test underway, not sure what to do. Maybe long-term, maybe short-term, maybe an unfulfilled expectation.

It may be a pressure to go in a direction that you're leaving fingernail marks on the doorjams, not wanting to go in that direction. Whatever it is, do I speak? Do I remain silent? Do I send the people away or do I give them something to eat? How do I know? You have to be able to hear the voice of the Lord. Hear the voice of the Lord takes alone time, quality time.

Cannot emphasize that enough. That's how Jesus knew what to do here. That's how the disciples knew what to do in this situation.

They are listening to the Lord and following his instructions. The part that doesn't make sense where there is a lack and I've got no way to fill it, that's in his hands. But to follow instructions, that's in my hands.

There are things that I know how to do, things that I am able to do, and I've got my hands full and my brain full, making sure I do those. One of them is alone time with God in prayer, reflecting on his word. There is no substitute.

Would you go through a day without eating your meal or two days or three days? How many days do you go through with no spiritual meal? You cannot get by. Could you imagine if you only ate on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings? How healthy and productive you would be the rest of the week? Most people eat at least two, generally three, sometimes more often times a day. I've got people in my family that are nibblers and they'll just nibble all along through the day.

But that sustenance in the spiritual realm is vital. Think of this alone time as a spiritual meal time. You're going to open in prayer.

You're going to partake and be energized by the nutrition that is in God's word. Thankfully so, prayerfully so, same thing here. So there are commands.

Jesus commanded the multitudes to sit down and they obeyed. That's why they got fed. They followed the command.

People that didn't sit down didn't get fed. That's my view. He gave the loaves to the disciples to distribute to the multitudes.

They all ate and were filled. And then you have these baskets of fragments that remained, 12 big baskets of fragments and they are taken up. They're not just, they don't say, look at all those fragments on the ground.

Jesus sends the disciples up to pick up and conserve all of that food. The people go home, they are filled. They've had all they want.

So what happens to these baskets? Is there a nearby charity orphanage or something? What happened to these 12 big heavy baskets of bread? They're in the boat. I don't think Jesus would have them collect them and then just leave them sitting on the shore. The people didn't take them.

They're filled. They've got full bellies. They can go in the strength of that meat like Elijah, 40 days and 40 nights.

So what happens to this carefully collected, conserved and counted bread? That's my alliteration for the morning. Carefully conserved, counted, collected. What do they do with it? Jesus didn't take it up the mountain.

So it's in the boat. Probably weighs as much as two or three extra people in the boat. They've already got 12 disciples plus all the bread.

And now they're rowing this back across the lake. So immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat. So what conclusion do we draw here? When it comes to negotiating needs and challenges in our physical circumstances, this is the procedure.

Bring it before the Lord. The part that we cannot do, you know, the serenity prayer. There are things I cannot change.

There are things I cannot do. I cannot print money on my laser printer. I can't create time that I don't have.

I can't be in places two at once. I can only be one place at a time. So I put that before the Lord.

I say, Lord, there is this need, but I have not got the wherewithal. The Lord basically says, you leave the wherewithal up to me. You follow the instructions that you have and that you know.

Well, to sort all of this out, I need time to reflect and time to think. And to allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate my circumstances from what I know of the Word of God. And that is an answer to prayer.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much as we pray for others, as we pray for ourselves. The peace of God keeps our hearts and minds. The light of God's Word illuminates our path, stabilizes us, gives us the fruit of the Spirit.

And we can both be blessed and be a blessing in those circumstances as the disciples are here. We get all of that right out of the Gospel of Matthew, right? Now, Jesus made his disciples get in the boat and go before him to the other side. Now, suppose you are a disciple.

Lord, wouldn't it have been convenient if when you finished with the crowd, instead of doing this whole feeding thing and running us out of time in the day, this contrary wind came up after the sun went down and the atmospheric conditions changed. If we had left when we wanted to leave, if we had sent the people away and gotten in the boat at that time, we would already be to the other side. But because of your plan, because of your purpose, because of what you had us do, we're now out here in the middle of the water, in the middle of the night, rowing for nine hours.

Do you think there could be some resentment, some questioning of God's timing? Why did you tie me up feeding these people who could have fed themselves, not understanding the wonderful spiritual points that we can see in hindsight? But now, as a result, the reason the disciples are on the lake, rowing against the wind for hour after

hour after hour after hour. And if you've ever rowed, and I have a tiny bit of experience with rowing and trying to row hard and do it right, it's exhausting. And it can be discouraging if you're not making the kind of progress you would have liked to make, if you're not able to pull your weight like you wish, and the whole thing is just a tribulation.

You're rowing in a contrary direction and you need to get somewhere and you're tired and you're thinking, why am I even in this situation? Jesus put them in that situation. And I don't think any of them were happy about it. Oh, I love a good row in the middle of the night for nine hours against the contrary wind.

Give me more of that. Nobody wants that. And I'm thinking they're looking over at these baskets of bread, you know, maybe grabbing a piece to sustain themselves as they're rowing and rowing and rowing and rowing.

And you could imagine the implication of this is, this is not happy and why are we even doing this? But Jesus knows, Jesus has sent the multitude away. It was for their own good. The multitude might have grabbed the disciples and held them hostage or done any number of other things to try to make Jesus king, as we know from John.

But we trust that Jesus knew what he was doing in the gospel of Matthew. We understand without being told. When Jesus made his disciples get into a boat and go before him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away, they just have to trust him that he knows what he's doing.

Why doesn't he get in the boat? Couldn't he get away from the multitudes by getting in the boat? But he's got to deal with these multitudes. He's going to spend more time in communion with his father. And he can't do that in the boat.

They don't understand all of that. They just have to trust and obey. And there are times when we don't know why things are happening.

We don't know why we're rowing against the wind in the middle of the night in a contrary sea. But we know that this is what God has asked us to do. Jesus told his disciples.

He made them get in the boat and head for the other side. They, I am sure, think as sailors, the timing is off. The wind is off.

We know what's going to happen once we get out here. They do it anyway, don't they? So Jesus sends the multitude away. He goes up and prays.

And when evening comes, and this would have been sundown, the evening actually began at the end of his healing time. And they spent probably a couple of hours providing for the crowds and collecting the fragments. And Jesus, I'm sure the sun was setting when the disciples got in the boat.

Jesus climbs the mountain. And this part of the evening would have been the latter part of the evening when the sun goes down. And in the fourth watch, Jesus comes walking on the sea.

Why in the fourth watch? Why not in the first watch or the second watch or the third watch? Jesus could have instantly transported himself there. Jesus could have just popped up in the boat without walking on the water. Why does he walk on the water? It's very fascinating.

He only does this once. And they're on the water a lot. You know, Jesus could have, instead of having the disciples put him in a boat and pushing off a little bit so that he could teach the crowds in the natural amphitheater of the shore.

Why didn't Jesus just walk out on the water and turn around and teach them from there? Wouldn't that have kept their attention? He only does this once. But he comes to them. He went to them in this account, walking on the sea.

The disciples see him walking on the sea. They were troubled saying, it's a ghost, a spirit. And they cried out for fear.

This is understandable. Jesus does not rebuke them for being afraid. He doesn't chastise them.

He doesn't say, why are you afraid? Oh, you little faith. This is understandable. It's natural.

They've never seen anything like this before. And they can't identify him through the darkness. But something that strikes, they're having a hard enough time.

And now they appear to be under some sort of demonic oppression or some sort of, because they're afraid, I have to believe they thought it was a malevolent spirit. They didn't think it was Moses or Elijah or an angel. They cry out in fear.

So they're not only challenged by circumstance, but now this seems to be some sort of supernatural threat. But what they perceive initially as a threat turns out to be the power of God at work. And sometimes when we're in the midst of a difficult circumstance, it seems like all of a sudden there is an unexpected development that seems to make things 10 times worse.

And we can lose hold of our faith. We can lose hold of our confidence. We can be afraid of consequences.

It's natural. And there's nothing wrong with reacting to the unexpected in a fearful manner. But we have to be able to hear the voice of the Lord saying, don't be afraid, it's me.

Be of good cheer. It is I, don't be afraid. Nice little chiasm there.

Do you see that mini chiasm? Be of good cheer. Don't be afraid. And right in the middle, it is I. That's the important thing.

What made you afraid is actually the presence of the Lord. Peter needs some affirmation. Lord, if it is you, and this is one of those first class conditions, Lord, since it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

Where did Peter get this idea? I would think in a normal situation, you see Jesus out there, you'd say, well, Lord, please get in the boat. But he says, since it's you, or if indeed it is you, then have me come out on the water. This is bold.

I am so impressed with Peter that he would have this idea. I think maybe it was a bit of an overreach. Maybe he suddenly thought, well, this is so spectacular.

I want to be a part of it. I can't account for how this idea ever entered his head. But Jesus says, come on.

So Peter came down out of the boat, and he walked on the water to go to Jesus. So Jesus is still at a distance that requires walking to get there. 15 yards, something like that.

And Peter is the only other person to walk on water besides the Lord Jesus himself. Peter literally walks on water, at least for a while. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid.

Jesus has not stilled the storm yet. You would think it would have been easier walking for him if he had done so. But the wind is still blowing and the waves are still choppy.

And Peter begins to look around at these negative circumstances. And when he gets his eyes on the wind instead of his eyes on the Lord, he begins to lose that supernatural support. Think about this.

It is not believing that it is the Lord that enables Peter to walk on water. Jesus honors his faith. Since it is you, bid me come.

Jesus says, come and you'll be able to stand on the water too. What is it that's holding Peter up? It is a supernatural support in recognition of his faith. Why does the support disappear and Peter begins to sink? Did God's supernatural abilities fail? Did the power of God in Christ weaken? What changed that Peter is no longer standing on top of the water? He's not being held up by his faith and losing his faith doesn't make him sink.

If you think about this carefully, God is able to provide supernatural support so long as faith that he can recognize and honor is there. When the faith begins to disappear and how and why does the faith disappear? Did Peter suddenly not believe that it was the Lord anymore? He does, but he's not thinking about that. Peter sinks because he

changes what he's thinking about.

Think about that. This reminds me of Dr. Alan Ross, a wonderful guy. We used his Hebrew grammar and he was at DTS for a long time.

But I remember him saying somewhere that when you're presenting a message from the word of God, the main thing is to make the main thing, the main thing. When you think about the word of God, the main thing is to make the main thing, the main thing. Don't get off on angels on the head of a pin.

Peter looks at Jesus and says, that's the Lord. That's the main thing. Since it's the Lord, Lord, let me come out to you.

Jesus says, come on. As long as the Lord Jesus is the main thing in Peter's thinking, he's walking on water. But when he looks at the wind and starts thinking about his experience of wind and his nine hours of rowing, his support from the Lord is removed.

Why would Jesus let him sink when he started looking at the wind? Why would Jesus do that? The man is braver than any of the other disciples. He's got the faith. He's ahead of them in many ways.

He's going to make the great confession here before long. Why would Jesus let him sink? Terrify him. This is a teaching moment, isn't it? You have got to keep your focus You have got to keep your eyes on the Lord.

If you get your eyes on circumstances, eyes on people, eyes on self, I cannot supernaturally support you. Powerful lesson for us. Now, in case you didn't hear the nine times I emphasized it earlier this morning, what is the way to keep our eyes on the Lord? Follow Jesus' example, and I'm not going to give it a tenth time.

You know what this is. What is Peter not doing? The thing that we should do. The thing that Jesus gave an example of.

At the beginning of this time, in the middle of this time, later on, he's going to do it again. That's what we've got to do. If you want to train your soul to keep its eyes on the Lord, that's what you do.

You have to spend time. So, Lord save me. The good thing about Peter is he doesn't start using his fisherman's breast stroke.

He doesn't try to float on his back. He doesn't dog paddle. He goes right back to the source.

He, look at how momentary this distraction is and how quickly he starts to sink and how quickly he gets his focus back on the Lord. Lord, save me. Immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand, caught him.

And what is the rebuke? Now we get it. Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? As long as you weren't doubting, I could support you. The moment you got your eyes on the wind and doubted, the support from God is conditioned on faith.

The arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that he cannot hear. It's our failures that separate us from the presence and the power of God.

How can we avoid that? Concentration, focus, reflection, meditation, and prayer dedicated, exclusive to that purpose. If it doesn't matter to us, it's not going to matter to God. If it matters to us, it will matter to the Lord.

It's just that simple. All of that is right here in Matthew. When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Why? Test complete. Tells us that this entire construction was of divine manufacturer. Once its purpose is accomplished, the laboratory is dismantled.

Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him saying, truly, you are the son of God. Now that is a wonderful conclusion. It is a wonderful observation, but what needs to happen? How should we then live? Since you are the son of God, do what Peter did at the beginning.

Since it is you, command me to come to you. Now the rest of the people in the boat say, you're the son of God. What should their next response be? Give me commands that will draw me closer to you.

Let me live and act on the basis of faith and have the power of God and the glory of God demonstrated in and through me. They've got the recognition. Peter had the recognition, but Peter did a great thing.

He drew a conclusion from that recognition that I can come to you on the water. Since that's you, I can do something. And he was able to as long as he did it in faith.

When he got to realizing what he was really doing and comparing normal human life and the laws of physics and let science overtake his faith, he sinks. Now the rest of the ones in the boat say, truly, you are the son of God. You wish there was another verse, you know, and they all got out of the boat and walked on the water and so on.

Well, this brings us to verse 34 and the extra conclusions that we can draw going to the answers at the end of the book. We'll see next time we got a foretaste of glory divine on Thursday night, looking at what Jesus says in John. I encourage you to read John chapter five and John chapter six in anticipation of our study this coming Thursday night, where we're going to look at that in connection with what we have just seen and what we are about to see.

But we have plenty to reflect on and to pray over in this wonderful section of God's word, the words and the works of the Lord Jesus. It just doesn't get any better than this. We'll close here in a word of prayer and Lord willing, we'll see you Thursday night.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the nourishment that it provides for our souls. We pray that we will consume it fully so that there is nothing left over, that we are enabled by reflecting on it and talking to you about it to see where we are clearly in your plan and purpose to understand our responsibilities and where our resources fall short and where you are able to supply many times in a supernatural fashion so that we can see and do that good and acceptable and perfect will that you have for us.

We thank you for these things and we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.