

Themes from Matthew 14

(Transcribed from an address given on 12.01.2020)

Our New Testament chapter for today comes from Matthew chapter 14, where we have three very significant incidents in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is the beheading of John the Baptist, which marked the end, of course, of his ministry. And we have the feeding of the 5,000, followed by the Master walking upon the waters. In our pursuit for exhortation, encouragement and instruction, we shall look at each of these three aspects, and see what points emerge from the Divine Record.

To begin with, we read in verse one of our chapter, how that Herod the Tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus and he said unto his servants, "this is John the Baptist. He is risen from the dead, therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him"

As an aside, it's interesting to note that he seemed to believe in the resurrection, because he thought that the Lord was John the Baptist, risen from the dead! But be that as it may, we are given the reason why John was put to death and beheaded. We read in verse 3 that Herod had laid hold on John and bound him and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife, for "John said unto him it is not lawful for thee to have her". And so John the Baptist then took it upon himself or was moved by the Spirit to testify against the iniquity of the ruler of his day. And we have a similar responsibility, not that we specifically have a commission to address the rulers of our day, but there is a principle that comes out from the example of John the Baptist here.

This is an aspect of the preaching work that we need to be engaged in, when we speak to those around us and see the terrible things that go on in the world. We read in verse nine of Ephesians chapter five,

"for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but **rather reprove them**, for it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret".

And so here is the command to us that we must be separate from the ways of the world around us to the extent that we're able to. We still have to live in the world even if we're not of it. But we need to try to stay separate and have no fellowship in the works of darkness, but rather reprove them. That's an aspect of our preaching which perhaps we don't often emphasize: when we present the good news of the kingdom of God to come, we must also reprove those who are dead in their sins that they might perhaps come to their senses and accept the things of the truth.

Returning to Matthew chapter 14, we read in verse 6 that when Herod's birthday was kept, "the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised her an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she being before instructed of her mother said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger"

And so these events described here are actually being orchestrated by her mother, the daughter of Herodias, because she'd already been instructed of her mother in verse eight. So her mother knew what was going to happen. He knew that the king was going to make this decree and this oath. And in preparation for this, she'd already given commandment to her daughter that John the Baptist's head would be taken in a charger.

We find then that he sent and beheaded John in the prison and his head was brought in a charger and given to the damsel who brought it to her mother. And so the ministry of John the Baptist came to an abrupt end with his death.

But of course, John the Baptist was a great man. The Lord Jesus Christ said elsewhere that there's none born of women greater than John the Baptist - saving himself, we would suppose. He was a very great man and he laid down his life in the service of the truth because he was not afraid to rebuke the darkness of the world round about. And in Revelation chapter 20, we have the hope that those who are like John the Baptist would have. In verse four we read:

"I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of them **that were beheaded** for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, which had not worshipped the beast nor his image. Now that I've received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

And so here we have reference to those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, which is an example of John the Baptist. Matthew chapter 14, appear to suggest there was a close relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and John. We know that John was the forerunner, preparing the way of the Master. And we read of the Master's response in verse 13 of when he heard that John the Baptist had been beheaded. When Jesus heard of it, he departed then by ship into a desert place apart. When the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ needed solitude. He departed into a desert place apart. Again we read in verse 23 that: "After he sent away those multitudes that we just read of, when he sent away the multitudes, he went up into a mountain apart to pray." When the evening was come, he was there alone. One of the examples of the Lord Jesus Christ of course, is that he was a man of prayer constantly praying to his Heavenly Father but he is also a man of meditation. We'll just look at this in a moment, but wish to look at Genesis chapter 24 first: here we have the example of another man who recognized the need for quiet reflection.

Genesis 24:16 recounts the first meeting between Isaac and Rebekah, his future wife. And verse 61, "Rebekah arose and her damsels, and they rode on the camels and followed the man, and the servant took Rebekah and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi, for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold the camels were coming". So here, Isaac, who was mourning for his mother, went into the field to meditate. He went out, just like the Lord Jesus Christ did on many occasions. He would go out for solitude, that he might reflect upon his thoughts and meditate upon those things. And so we see the importance of stopping and considering and meditating upon the things of the truth.

Again, if you turn over to Psalm 1, this is of great relevance here to our Lord Jesus Christ of whom this Psalm particularly speaks. It's been said that studying without meditating is like eating without chewing. It's something that we need to do in order to spiritually digest the food that the Father has provided for us. So we read in verse 1 of Psalm 1,

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but he is delighted in the law of Yahweh, and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

And whilst this is a general description of the believers, it is also specific to the Lord Jesus Christ because ultimately he is *the* man. It doesn't say blessed are men who walk not in the counsel of God. It says blessed is *the* man and that man is the Lord Jesus Christ who delighted in the law of Yahweh and in his law he did meditate day and night." And then verse 3 describes the tree of life and in verse five, therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous because they've chosen their lot with the men of the world, standing and sitting with them in verse 1. This is something that we tend not to do in this Western world in which we live. The hassle and bustle of life is so great it crowds out any space for quiet reflection and meditation. But that's something that we need to try to cultivate because meditating is a lost art in our day. But we need to cultivate that and try to be like the Lord Jesus Christ and thinking about the things of the word. - his delight is in the law of Yahweh.

The next event that we have described in this chapter, is the feeding of the 5,000. And we're told in verse 14, Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion toward them and he healed their sick.

And then we read in verse 15 of the disciple's concern for their needs, their physical needs. They needed to eat food. And Jesus said in verse 16 unto them, they need not depart, 'give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, we have here but five loaves and two fishes". And so we know the account very well that the whole multitude was fed by these loaves and fishes. Just a couple of passages that are relevant to this: It says in verse 13 that the Lord Jesus Christ went into a desert place apart. And when the people heard him, they followed him out into the desert, out into the wilderness.

There are a number of particularly interesting passages in connection with this. There is the need to go out into the wilderness where there's no distraction, where we can meditate. And so, and that essentially is what the people were doing here to listen to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hosea chapter two demonstrates this principle: this is a prophecy to do with Israel when they will be led out of the nations and brought back into the land. And in Hosea chapter 2, we read in verse 14, "therefore will I allure her and bring her into the wilderness". And that's what the Lord Jesus Christ did with the multitudes that he was going to feed. He led them into the wilderness.

They followed him into that desert place. And then it says in the margin, where it says, speak comfortably unto her, it says, speaks to her heart. And so the Lord is brought them into the wilderness where there is no distractions, there's nothing to blur the focus of those who want to focus on the things of the spirit. No cares of this life there, is nothing, only one's own thoughts in a wilderness. And he said, I'll speak to your heart. Bring forth into the wilderness and speak to your heart. Verse eight of Hosea two, states that "she did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore I return and take away my corn in the time thereof and my wine in the season thereof and recover my wool and my flax to cover her nakedness." And so we see that they didn't know that Yahweh Himself was feeding her with the corn and wine and oil.

Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33 reads: "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." And so the people did that. They sought after the Lord Jesus Christ and he provided for their temporal needs. They sought the Lord Jesus Christ and all those things were added to them. In John chapter six, we read in verse one, that after these things, "Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a

great multitude followed him because they *saw the miracles* which he did on those that were diseased". And so here they're following him because of the miracles. And then the Lord Jesus Christ gave the food for them to eat and the miraculous provision was made for the 5,000 men, and also women and children.

And so they were given free food. And that's what they wanted. They wanted the free food. John chapter six and verse 26, they came searching for the Lord Jesus Christ when he'd gone over the sea. And Jesus answered them and said, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, "but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." You see the point being made here: in verse two, they followed him because they saw the miracles. Verse 25 and verse 26, they followed him now, not because of the miracles, but because they ate the food. And they were looked after in terms of being given free food. And so the Lord tells him in verse 27, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life which the Son of Man shall give unto you. For him has God the Father sealed." So we see that the fickleness of the people, one moment they're following him in faith, believing he'd provide for them, next moment they're not interested in the miracles anymore, they just want free food.

Turning back to Matthew chapter 14, we read in verse 23, that when he sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when evening was come, he was there alone. So he went out to be alone. He needed solitude, as we said above. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary. And then they saw the Lord Jesus Christ coming towards them in verse 25 and they cried out in fear, they didn't understand what was happening. Verse 27, "Jesus said unto them, be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord if it be thou bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said come and when Peter was coming to the ship he walked on the water to go to Jesus". Sometimes we can be very critical of Peter, but of course he had the faith and the privilege to be able to walk on the water to the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll come back to that again in just a moment. I just want to notice this aspect of the raging waves of the sea. Isaiah chapter 57 describes the nations in similar terms.

Isaiah chapter 57, and we read there in verse 19. "I create the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith Yahweh, and I will heal him". And we think of the healing miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. "But the wicked are *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*. There's no peace, saith my God, to the wicked". And we see, particularly in the world around us at the moment, and the raging of the sea of nations, where there's a lot of controversies and difficulties and raging, as it were, nations against nation, fighting against each other. And the world around us is like that, they're like a troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. And that's what they do, they cast up mire and dirt against each other. But by contrast, if you go to Revelation in chapter 4, this is the sea of nations in the kingdom. Before the throne, this is the throne of glory that the Lord Jesus Christ is sitting upon: "... there was a sea of glass likened to crystal. And in the midst of the throne and round about the throne were the four living ones full of eyes before and behind. So you've got the sea is no longer a raging sea casting out dirt and mire. It's a sea of glass without any ripple of violence. And again in Revelation chapter 15, Revelation chapter 15 and verse two, we think of Peter. Revelation chapter 15 and verse two, "I saw as it were a sea of glass", Brother Thomas translate this, "*having been mingled with fire*."

And those that got the victory over the beast and over his image and over the mark and over the number of his name, *stand on the sea of glass* having the hearts of God. And so as the judgments of God have taken place, the fiery judgments have ceased – and as a consequence, the sea is without any ripple of violence. It's a sea of glass, like crystal, for clarity. And the saints are depicted as standing upon it, just like Peter was walking on the raging waves of the sea. Here the believers, immortalized with the Lord Jesus Christ, stand in authority over the sea of glass.

Well, in Matthew chapter 14, Peter said to the Lord Jesus Christ, bid me come unto thee on the water. He believed that the Lord was able to do that so that he would be able to walk in the water with him. And then we read in verse 28. Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come on the water. And he said, come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him and said unto him, O thou little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

And so we think of this doubting of Peter when he took his attention off the Lord Jesus Christ, as it were, instead of focusing solely on him. Verse 30 informs us that it was when he saw the wind boisterous. What he saw was the wind whipping up the waves. And he was afraid when he saw this happening, fearing the waves of the sea. And he cried out and said, Lord, save me – who did in turen save him. Sometimes we can be a bit too critical of Peter in this occasion, because he had the faith to get out of the boat in the first place. I don't know that I would, to walk on the water in a storm! It must take a man of great faith to do that. And Jesus doesn't say he had no faith. He says in verse 31, "O thou of *little* faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" So he did have faith, but he doubted when he saw the raging waves all around him. And of course, we're in that same situation. We see, as we said earlier, the raging waves of the sea around us. And we need to try to be buoyant, as it were, to walk on the waters, as it were, with the Lord Jesus Christ, that we don't sink because of fear of the things that are raging on around us.

We see then this aspect in verse 30, that he said, oh, he cried saying, Lord, save me. Lord, save me, he says. In Psalm 69 in verse 1, we read: “save me O God for the waters are coming unto my soul.” We think of Peter, he says save me because he's sinking in the water. In verse two, “I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am coming to deep waters where the floods overflow me. You see the example of Peter there. I'm weary of my crying, my throat is dried while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head. They that would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully, are mighty. Then ***I restored that which I took not away.*** And so we see the afflictions of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice he says, I restored that which I took not away.

What was that? What is it that the Lord restored without taking away? I think it's the righteousness of God. And the Lord restored the righteousness of God that had been denied in Eden, and which had been denied by mankind down the ages since. The Lord Jesus Christ restored that. “Then restored that which I took not away”. He didn't take it away, it was already taken away by man and he restored it. And another psalm, Psalm 18, again is very significant in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 16, “he sent from above. He took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy and them that hated me, for they were too strong for me. And so the Lord Jesus Christ is here described as being surrounded by raging waves. In verse four it says, “the sorrows of death compassed me and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. And so here he was afraid. The floods of ungodly men all around him. But he trusted in the Lord to save him. He trusted in his father. That was the point that comes out in the example of the Lord to save him. He trusted in his father. That was the point that comes out in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He trusted in the Lord to save him out of the waters.

Just a final point: We think also of the example of the prophet Jonah. Jonah is the story which is very well known to us. Jonah was seeking to flee from the presence of God. In verse four, that Yahweh sent a great wind into the sea and as a mighty tempest in the seas that the ship was likely to be broken. And then in verse five, the mariners were afraid. So you've got the waters again, they're being tossed around by the waves. The mariners are afraid and they cried, every man to his God and cast forth the wares that were in the ship to the sea to lighten all of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship and he lay and was fast asleep. And of course, this is what the Lord Jesus Christ did in a different occasion.

When the disciples were upon the waters, he was there asleep in the boat because he trusted implicitly in his Father to save them. And we know what happened in verse 12, that Jonah said to them, “take me up and cast me forth into the sea. So shall the sea be calm unto you. For I know that for my sake, this great tempest is upon you.” And so we find that's what they did. In verse 15, they took up Jonah, cast him forth into the sea and the sea raged from his raging. And the men feared Yahweh exceedingly and offered and sacrifice unto Yahweh and made vows. And verse 17, we're told that Yahweh had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And we know that Jonah was preserved in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Also, the particular significance of course, is that the Lord Jesus Christ uses this event to describe his own death and resurrection. Just as it talks about the sign of the Prophet Jonah, he said, there shall no sign be given to this generation, say the sign of the Prophet Jonah, which was the sign of going down into the grave, into the waters and being lifted out again through the belly of the fish. And the means whereby the troubled sea is healed is through the Lord Jesus Christ who will bring healing to the situation. Finally, we turn back over to Matthew chapter 14. There read of the consequence in verse 33 of these things. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, of a truth, thou art the Son of God.

And so we'll bring our considerations to a conclusion. We demonstrated how John the Baptist was reproving the darkness of the world in which he lived and he was willing to lay down his life to accomplish that. A tremendous example for us in our preaching when we speak to those around us about the word of God.

We've seen the feeding of the 5,000, the way in which the Lord is able to fill the hungry with goodness, as it says in the Psalm 107. And to see his wonders in the deep. We've seen this aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ walking on the waters and Peter trying to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, walking with him. Then we've seen the importance of the future age when the sea will be a sea of glass like crystal, having no ripple of violence, the judgments will have taken place, and the earth will be at rest. And we therefore look forward to that time when the Lord Jesus Christ will come to gather his saints to himself, that they might be with him in that day of rest to come. And we look therefore to the emblems before us, representative of the sacrifice of Christ. And as we partake of these things, let us be mindful of the example of our Lord who laid down his life for his friends.

Christopher Maddocks

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