

Week 15

Matthew Series: Ministry of Jesus

Matthew 14: Lessons in Faith part 1

Matthew 14-17 are interesting. In Matthew 13 we have Jesus do some heavy teaching. In Matthew 18 we have Jesus do some heavy teaching. Yet, in-between these chapters are lessons in faith. In university I was told that word appearances should not be taken too deeply. Yet, the word faith is seen 18 times in the old testament and 238 times in the new. Different versions of the Bible use different words, so I get that word use is depending on the version. However, Matthew clearly talks about faith more than the other gospels. John does not use the word "faith" at all. What is your understanding of faith?

I can't tell you how many times I have heard of people walking away from God because of an incident. There seems to be two things going on right at the beginning of chapter 14. Clearly the faith of John the Baptist was tested. We know John was in Jail. In Matthew 4, Jesus had just been tested in the wilderness by the devil. When he heard about John being arrested, he retreated to a deserted place. Crowds followed him and he had compassion for them.

Here in chapter 14 we read that Jesus is told about John's death. He tries to retreat to a deserted place again, but the crowds followed him. Again, Jesus has compassion for them. I get the feeling that Jesus is still being tested by the Devil. What is different this time is that Jesus is not alone. His disciples are with him. To me, it's like Jesus now plays the ministering role to his disciples.

This story of John's death is gut wrenching. Herod, so as not to look bad, has John killed. Why had he not done it before? I believe deep down he knew that adultery was wrong. I believe that the faith of Herod is tested and he failed. Jesus' faith is tested yet again. This time it's with the death of a friend, but he never falters. Now, in chapter 14 we see the faith of his disciples is being tested. I also believe we are witnessing the faith of the religious community too. Things have clearly changed.

Matthew 14:13 "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns."

Luke 4:13 "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."

I feel these four chapters are telling us something. All through Matthew so far, he is building our faith. His readers are told the old scriptures. They are told of prophesy. They are given connections for Jesus to be the Christ. Teaching is given on what your faith should look like (a mustard seed). Now

Matthew is testing your faith through a series of stories. He is showing us what faith looks like when it's weak and when it's strong. What does weak and strong faith look like to you?

Psalm 106:24 **"Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise."**

Psalm 116:10 **"I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted."**

Matthew 13 ends as many great chapters in the Bible do.

Judges 21:25 says **"In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes."**

Malachi 3:18 **"Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him."**

Matthew 13:58 **"And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief."**

Nothing is written in Matthew by accident. All the chapters are linked together by themes. At the end of chapter 13 Matthew puts out a primer of unbelief. It is for you, me, and the people in the stories. We are like everyone else. Our faith and unbelief will vary from day to day and moment to moment. The people in these stories are not bad examples. I have met many people who claim to have great faith. Greater faith than the people in the Bible. Matthew is training us to be good Christians. That means our faith is not to be taken lightly.

What does lightly mean? That means we are not claiming to have cornered the market on faith like the religious rulers. On the flip side we have to trust in the Lord. Jesus is the bench mark. We won't hit that mark as some claim. Yet, it's something to strive for. Grow in faith. Learn in faith. Challenge God to make your faith stronger. The stories in Matthew 14, if read properly, will challenge you. They will also comfort you by the humanness of these people trying to understand. Put yourself in the place of these people.

Read Matthew 14. Also read Hebrews 11. For extra fun try reading Judges 6:11 to the end of chapter 8 (the story of Gideon).

1. There are moments in time that change us forever like 9/11. When you hear of a death or tragedy and it moves you. Here in the beginning of Matthew 14 we find Herod having a party. If you notice right before the party, Matthew gives us some interesting background. I love this soap opera like story. I have noticed that Jesus picked on the Pharisee religious rulers all the time. John obviously picked on the rulers too. I can't say why this story is here. It's like it's insight into the life of Jesus. Yet, here we are seeing Johns final moments being played out.

I called this chapter Lessons in Faith. What is faithful about this little inside story of Herod and John. Matthew opens this chapter with a question: who is Jesus? Herod ponders if this is John. In a way, the question is also who is John? How about what is going on around here? Something has caused a stir in this period of time. They say Jesus was tested in all things. Maybe his faith was tested at this point. We must remember he was 100% human and 100% God. To be helpless and faithful at this time must have been tough on Jesus.

So, John pledged an allegiance to God and was killed. Herod pledged an allegiance to his daughter and had to kill John. Jesus is forced to see death, feel death, and experience real human grief. For a god, it must have been hard. Jesus could have reacted. He could have toasted Herod. He could have lashed out and took over, yet he prays.

Matthew 14:14 "When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick."

Exodus 33:19 "And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

2. A lesson in faith comes in many forms. To have the power to kill your enemies is tempting. If the Father in heaven gave you a mission, do you have the faith to stick to it no matter what? In the Christian world, things rarely go the way we plan. Yet, God's will prevail. John is dead, and Jesus is struck by grief. He leaves to a solitude place to pray and grieve. Then God draws the crowds to him. What to do? Faith comes through patience and knowing when to act. Prayer does two things. One it gives us perspective. Secondly, it gives God time to move. Jesus realized that John was gone but the work of the kingdom was still here waiting. He did the only thing a loving God would do: he felt compassion for them in his time of distress.

The faith of Jesus is strong at this point. It's cool, because it shows the poise and strength of the savior. We need him to be like this. It's interesting that so many people get caught up in the loaves and fish in this next story of the feeding of five thousand. Yet, here is Jesus, by faith feeding the needy while grieving. The disciples have little compassion for Jesus and start panicking. Faith is tested in both Jesus and the disciples. In the Old testament we see the Israelites grumble for food. In this narrative the people say nothing. The disciples notice and grumble to God. Jesus notices and says feed them. Faith is displayed in different ways.

Matthew 14:19 "Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds."

Exodus 16:2 "In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron."

3. Right after the feeding of the five thousand we have two verses that are sad. Jesus found out John was killed and tried to go pray. Then the crowds came and he felt compassion to tend to them. Then he prayed over them and the food. Quite possibly he helped gather and clean up. Quite possibly he taught them just had he done several times before. After serving I am exhausted. After my mom died I was drained. I bet Jesus was spent. In verses 22-23 Jesus sends the disciples on the water. He disperses the crowds and it says finally, he was alone.

You have to wonder what God the Father was doing. It does not say, but did God bring testing of faith to Jesus in the form of a storm? Is the Father in heaven testing the disciples? I do think there was time between Jesus walking on the water towards the disciples and his alone time. It says the boat was far out to sea. That sea was about 13 miles across.

Suddenly there is Jesus getting up and walking on the water to help his disciples in a storm. Jesus has enough faith to walk on water. So, did Peter until the wind picked up. We always look at the miracle. Rarely do we see the inside story. The faith of Jesus is solid on water and in a storm. In Matthew 17 Jesus will comment on the faith to move mountains. Here in chapter 14 Jesus has the faith to walk on water. You and me, and the disciples don't have that kind of faith. Is this chapter about miracles and death or faith?

Matthew 14:31 **"Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"**

Psalm 9:10 **"Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."**

4. I would like to point out a few extra things about this chapter. One, is that after the boat incident Jesus is found healing and curing the crowds again. There is no rest for God. I think we forget that. It says God rested on the seventh day. People think God needed a vacation. It's more likely that it was finished. The Job was done. Here the job is not done. There are always sick, poor, and lame. There is always work to do as a Christian.

Secondly, is Bible time. We assume too much in the Bible. Time is not back to back. There are gaps all through the Bible. Nowhere do we see that more than in the gospels. It says in Matthew 13 that Jesus was in Nazareth. It's a hike from Nazareth to Gennesaret. It's also a fair hike from that place to Jerusalem in chapter 15. These are incidents and stories. In a way, time is not involved. Yet, we think it is. On the other hand, I think this chapter 14 is in time. I feel Jesus is being tested back to back. Just remember that most of the Bible does not use time as a factor. It's about the message.

As a side note. Jesus is worn down in the testing in Matthew 4. I seriously wonder if the Devil is trying his best to wear Jesus down by having his ministry go none stop in chapter 14.

Matthew 14:35 **"After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him."**

Jerimiah 32:27 **"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"**

What it all means?

Matthew 14 is the beginning of a sandwich of stories about Jesus. In a way, it gives us an insight into being with Jesus in ministry. We see his heart. We see the hearts of the religious rulers and the disciples. This is not just a story. These are real people that live real lives. There is a song called "what if God was one of us" by Joan Osbourne. Matthew uses these chapter of 14-17 to say "what indeed."

How would church react today if Jesus came back? Have we learned? I doubt it. People are people. We give the disciples a hard time for their seemingly lack of faith. Would it really be any different for us? Could we have the faith to walk on water. I have heard Pastors say we

could. Maybe? I think they miss the point. Isn't it more about Jesus having God like faith. He will be there for us. He can do anything he puts his mind to. It's not about moving mountains or walking on water. It's about strong faith in the Lord.

Finally, this chapter means we need to grow in faith. The disciples are us. If we fail to have strong enough faith to feed five thousand. We have faith enough to get out on the water, but fail when we sink. What happens then? Jesus holds out his hand and picks us up like he did for Peter. Stop looking at power and miracles. This is a faith section. Faith in God rather than faith in ourselves. There is a difference.

Matthew 14:27 **"But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."**

Isaiah 48:12 **"Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last."**