



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Fourteen

### IX Matthew 13:54-16:20 - The Identity of the Messiah Revealed (continues)

#### IX.a Matthew 13:54-14:12 - Prophet(s) without honour (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Fourteen

Herod Antipas heard about the ministry of Jesus and feared that he is a resurrected John the Baptist, who Antipas had executed some time previously. Matthew will use this occasion to provide some of the details that occurred which led to John's death.

Jesus went out to seek solitude in the wilderness on the eastern shore of Galilee in order to continue teaching his disciples. However, a great crowd followed him so he healed their sick and taught them. When it became clear that it was too late for them to return home or to seek a source of food from elsewhere, Jesus miraculously fed them all from just five small loaves and two fish, collecting up twelve baskets full of leftover crumbs.

Afterwards, Jesus wanted some time alone with his Father so he instructed his disciples to sail back across the lake without him. They did so but encountered a storm and were struggling to complete their voyage. During the early hours of the morning, Jesus walked across the surface of the water to join them. Initially, they were afraid and thought he was a ghost, but when they realised it was Jesus, Peter asked to join him on the water, which he briefly did before starting to sink. Jesus saved him, got into the boat and the disciples all worshipped Jesus, acknowledging that he is the Son of God.

They then continued their voyage across the lake to arrive in the region of Gennesaret, a place that Jesus may not have visited previously but he was still recognised and all their sick people were brought out to Jesus in order for them to be healed, even by simply touching his clothing.

## IX.a.ii Matthew 14:1-12 - The Death of John the Baptist

The parallels between the missions of John and Jesus have been building toward the climax of this paragraph. John had introduced Jesus, proclaiming the same message that Jesus would. Afterwards, Jesus promised persecution and spoke of the prophets, then he praised John in prison as his ally; narratives about those who reject Jesus follow on from that account. But nowhere does John's fate prefigure that of Jesus' so clearly as here: if Jesus himself proves to be 'a prophet without honour' among his people, what is to keep him from the fate of John the Baptist? And if for Jesus, how much more so for those who follow him?

John the Baptist had publically criticised Herod Antipas for taking for himself the wife of his still living brother Philip and thus John was arrested. Antipas recognised John as a righteous man but his main reason for not executing him, as his wife Herodias wanted, was that the people held John in high esteem as a prophet. Like many people in high office, Herod sought approval of the people and feared their reaction to the things they disapproved of.

At his birthday celebration, attended by some of the most prominent citizens from the region, Antipas acted foolishly by allowing his wife to manipulate the rash oath he made to her daughter and thus he had John beheaded.

**<sup>1</sup> At that time Herod the ruler heard reports about Jesus;**

### Matthew 14:1

Herod the ruler or tetrarch. Herod Antipas was the Roman approved ruler over the region where Jesus ministered. He was only 17 years old when his father, Herod the Great, died. On the orders of the emperor, the kingdom was divided among three of Herod's sons – Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip; refer to comments made on Luke 3:1. Herod Antipas was made tetrarch, the ruler of a fourth part of a kingdom, of Galilee and Perea, and had a long reign from 4BC to AD39.

**<sup>2</sup> and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.'**

### Matthew 14:2

This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead. Herod Antipas' reaction at hearing of Jesus' ministry reveals a curious blend of theology and superstition, based partly on semi-pagan ideas of returning spirits. He would not have thought this to be the resurrection of John as that was held to be a corporate event at the end of time: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2).

These powers are at work in him further demonstrates the superstitious fear that Herod held in this situation; an irrational fear that could have driven him to anything: <<*The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion*>> (Proverbs 28:1), and: <<*There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous*>> (Psalm 14:5).

Although Antipas had executed John, he knew very well that John was a righteous man and feared his influence. The more evil a society becomes, the more likely its members are to kill the righteous whose words or lives reproach its character, even if they recognise that the righteous speak truth. The world can be assured that truth will be heard when it is the Gospel of Christ, for killing the messenger does not kill the message: <<For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant>> (Job 14:7-9).

<sup>3</sup> For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, <sup>4</sup> because John had been telling him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'

#### Matthew 14:3-4

For Herod had arrested John indicates that vv.3-12 are an historical flashback. Herod Antipas had fallen in love with Herodias, the wife of his half brother Herod Philip II, even though both men were married at the time. Herodias divorced Philip and Herod Antipas divorced his wife Phasaelis, who was the daughter of the Nabataean King Aretas IV, and the two were married.

John the Baptist had publicly condemned Herod Antipas for his actions, i.e. it is not lawful for you to have her. Although Antipas was not a Jew, he claimed to be a proselyte, a full Jewish convert. Whether or not he was a Jew was irrelevant to John who still considered him to be a law breaker: <<**You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness**>> (Leviticus 18:16), and he spoke out publically against him for doing so, something that may have seemed reckless in that era but for John it was a duty, as it would be for Paul: <<**I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house**>> (Acts 20:20).

Antipas had probably married Phasaelis to cement political power with the Nabataeans living in Perea, who had remained faithful to their own king. Aretas IV was a powerful king who ruled much of the area to the north of Galilee including Damascus and was still in power when Paul was converted: <<**In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands**>> (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). The divorce of his daughter would have had political ramifications and the last thing that Herod needed was John adding to the debate.

In AD26, Phasaelis fled to her father. Aretas IV invaded Herod's holdings, defeated his army and captured territories along the West Bank of the Jordan River, including the areas around Qumran. Josephus connects this battle, which occurred during the winter of AD26/27, with the beheading of John the Baptist. If Josephus' dating of this event is accurate and Jesus' ministry lasted for 3 years, then it supports the argument of those who believe Jesus was crucified in AD30 rather than the favoured AD33. Refer to comments made on Luke 23:54 for the likely dates of Jesus' death.

Josephus reports that John the Baptist was imprisoned at Herod Antipas' fortress-palace called Machærus (Jewish Antiquities 18.116-119, and Jewish War 7.164-177), which was a fortress built on the top of a steep hill east of the Dead Sea. It had been fortified by the Hasmonæan Jewish kings during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, then destroyed by the Romans in circa 56BC, before being rebuilt as a palace by Herod the Great. Archæological investigation has delineated the Herodian palace enclosure, including a cistern from this era.

<sup>5</sup> Though Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded him as a prophet.

#### Matthew 14:5

He feared the crowd. History is full of poor leaders who have feared the crowd more than they feared God, something that is both sad and foolish: <<*Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:17). Herod was not the only man in authority to have his decision making process and subsequent actions swayed by likely reactions of others: <<*When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realised that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet*>> (Matthew 21:45-46). The actions he would later implement would have nothing to do with justice either, just his human foolishness: <<*The clever do all things intelligently, but the fool displays folly*>> (Proverbs 13:16).

<sup>6</sup> But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod <sup>7</sup> so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask.

#### Matthew 14:6-7

When Herod's birthday came a great celebration was held in his honour at the palace at Machærus. Herodias had her daughter, named Salome by Josephus in Jewish Antiquities 18.136, perform a dance for Herod Antipas. She was only 12 to 14 years old, but in that debased setting it was most likely a sensual dance, which pleased Herod.

Birthday parties were more of a Greek and Roman tradition rather than Jewish. Herod had a reputation for holding parties of drunken debauchery.

Danced before the company. These were the influential people drawn from the upper echelons of society: <<*But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee*>> (Mark 6:21).

He promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask. Mark records just how rash the offer Antipas made was: <<*And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom'*>> (Mark 6:23). He laid his own trap with his own hasty words: <<*you are snared by the utterance of your lips, caught by the words of your mouth*>> (Proverbs 6:2). He should have heeded other words of Solomon: <<*Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:6).

<sup>8</sup> Prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.’

#### Matthew 14:8

Prompted by her mother. Herodias stepped in to eliminate the accusing voice of John the Baptist, a threat to her husband’s reign, although her rage was mostly personal for he would have accused her of adultery and incest: <<*If a man takes his brother’s wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother’s nakedness; they shall be childless*>> (Leviticus 20:21), and Salome was Philip’s daughter not Herod’s. A mother’s guidance is not always what it should be, as with King Ahaziah: <<*He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly*>> (2 Chronicles 22:3).

<sup>9</sup> The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he commanded it to be given; <sup>10</sup> he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.

#### Matthew 14:9-10

The king was grieved. This is not the outcome he had intended but he had been manoeuvred into it by his own foolish oaths, made in the presence of some of his most esteemed subjects who were the invited guests at his celebration, as well as by the scheming of Herodias, who had always wanted the death of John in revenge for the things he said relating to her marriage.

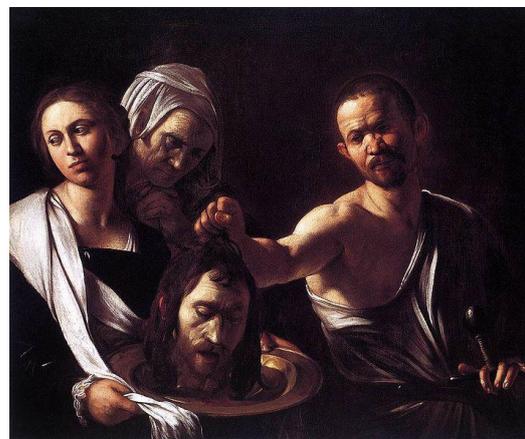
He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. As for so many great OT prophets and servants of Christ, the end of his earthly service was martyrdom. He was the long awaited prophet who was to announce the coming of the Messiah and yet he was ultimately rejected: <<*but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands*>> (Matthew 17:12).

<sup>11</sup> The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who brought it to her mother.

#### Matthew 14:11

The head was brought on a platter.

Presenting the head was proof of the execution and has been a common practice throughout history. It had been the fate of King Saul: <<*The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head, stripped off his armour, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to the people*>> (1 Samuel 31:8-9), and the



Salome with the Head of John the Baptist by Caravaggio

apostle James, also on the orders of Antipas: <<*About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword*>> (Acts 12:1-2).

These are just some of the martyrs that will be avenged when the appropriate time comes: <<*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and they had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*>> (Revelation 20:4). Those who are the perpetrators of such deeds shall come before justice: <<*For the Lord comes out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no longer cover its slain*>> (Isaiah 26:21).

John the Baptist thus became the last in a long line of OT prophets to suffer simply for doing their duty before God and his people: <<*They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground*>> (Hebrews 11:37-38).

<sup>12</sup> His disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.

#### Matthew 14:12

It seems that some of John's disciples at least had remained loyal to him throughout his imprisonment. This would have taken great courage for they could easily have become victims themselves for doing so. They now devotedly cared for his burial, since all of John's family were most likely deceased by this time: <<*But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years*>> (Luke 1:7), and he was an only child as indicated.

Took the body and buried it. Not all martyrs for Christ have been honoured in this way although it is appropriate that it is done so whenever possible, as was recorded for the first NT saint to die: <<*Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him*>> (Acts 8:2).

They went and told Jesus. John had taught them all about Jesus and it seems logical to assume that they then became his disciples since their own teacher was now dead.

According to Josephus, Herodias was later banished to Lyons in France by the Emperor for her part in this act. Whilst there she apparently slipped on ice and her head was severed on a sharp edge; thus God required her head in exchange for that of John. This may be just legend but it would seem a fitting end.

#### IX.b Matthew 14:13-21 - Feeding the Five Thousand

Jesus withdrew from Galilee (vv.13-14) and fed the five thousand (vv.15-21). It is the only miracle from Jesus' earthly ministry that is recorded in all four Gospels, apart from his resurrection that was performed through his Holy Spirit.

This feast in the wilderness was not only reminiscent of the provision that God had made for his people in the desert, it also prefigures the great banquet to be held at the marriage supper of the Lamb and it stands in stark contrast to the wild birthday party of Herod Antipas.

<sup>13</sup> **Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.**

#### Matthew 14:13

Now when Jesus heard this. The account of John's death was historic, therefore placing this event earlier in Jesus' ministry than some of those in preceding chapters.

This is the second time that Jesus withdrew due to the fate of John the Baptist: <<*Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee*>> (Matthew 4:12), which he did to avoid a gathering storm that the imprisonment had caused. In a similar fashion, Jesus would withdraw when the religious leaders first started to plot against him: <<*When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them*>> (Matthew 12:15). Jesus was not trying to escape all opposition but often did so to prevent its escalation until the time came for his predicted betrayal and death.

Whether disciples are called to flee a situation, bringing hardship in doing so, or are called to stand and suffer, makes no difference providing they are doing the will of God, for as Paul writes: <<*I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel*>> (Philippians 1:12); there is a purpose behind all of God's decisions for his people.

To a deserted place. When people meet with Jesus in a wilderness, it and they become transformed: <<*For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song*>> (Isaiah 51:3). Many scholars believe this place was located on the north eastern shore of Lake Galilee, somewhere between Bethsaida and Gergasa. Refer to comments made on v.34, which also shows a map of the region.

Followed him on foot. The people were willing to put themselves through great inconvenience to hear Jesus and to have their illnesses and disabilities cured.

<sup>14</sup> **When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.**

#### Matthew 14:14

He saw a great crowd. It was foretold by a dying Jacob that the people would gather to the Messiah: <<*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*>> (Genesis 49:10 KJV).

He had compassion for them and cured their sick. Jesus often performed healing miracles to support his Gospel proclamation but this is another example of when

he simply did so because of his love, grace and mercy: <<*It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them*>> (Isaiah 63:9b).

<sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’

#### Matthew 14:15

Having followed Jesus to a deserted place, the great crowd (v.14) is stranded late in the day without food. The scene recalls the nation of Israel wandering in the wilderness after the exodus, and God’s gracious provision of manna for his people.

The hour is now late; go into the villages and buy food for themselves. It is unlikely that the local small villages would have been able to cope with such an influx of people at any time. As it was late then almost all bread would have been consumed as it was baked fresh each day.

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’

#### Matthew 14:16

They need not go away. Jesus never wanted anyone to be dismissed from his presence and he still doesn’t.

You give them something to eat. To the disciples this would have seemed like a ludicrous suggestion given their situation. They did not realise that Jesus was testing their faith in him: <<*When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little’*>> (John 6:5-7).

The provision of food was something Jews would have been expected to do even for their enemies, let alone for this crowd that had made the effort to follow Jesus. This was something that Elisha had expressed with regard to Arameans taken prisoner in battle: <<*He answered, ‘No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master’*>> (2 Kings 6:22).

Jesus teaches his disciples throughout the ages that they should not send people away hungry to fend for themselves but should seek to feed them from their own provisions, even though it may be a simple meal of bread and fish. In doing so they honour and serve their Lord: <<*And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”*>> (Matthew 25:40).

<sup>17</sup> They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' <sup>19</sup> 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.

#### Matthew 14:17-19

The five loaves and the two fish represented the staple foods of bread and dried or pickled fish, ideal for short journeys into the hills. The loaves were most likely small cakes sufficient for one person's afternoon meal. Elisha had already been used by God in a similar miracle of food provision, albeit on a much smaller scale: <<*A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, 'Give it to the people and let them eat.' But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left."*>> *He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord*>> (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Bring them here to me shows that all disciples are to give into the central storehouse so that it may be collected and then distributed to those who are in need: <<*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing*>> (Malachi 3:10). This was the standard model for the early church: <<*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common*>> (Acts 4:32).

He ordered the crowds to sit down indicates they had been standing to listen to him teach, which was the normal posture as noted before in Matthew 13:2.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish. God often takes what people bring as an offering to him, multiplies it and then puts it to good use, either for the benefit of the giver or to others in greater need.

Looked up to heaven represents a typical posture for prayer: <<*After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you'*>> (John 17:1). Jesus didn't even request that the food be multiplied for he knew and trusted that God would know what was needed, thereby practising what he preached: <<*Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*>> (Matthew 6:8).

Jesus gave a blessing, i.e. he thanked God, for the meal that he knew would be miraculously provided by God the Father; a fitting practice for all who trust the Father for the daily provision of their needs and simply ask: <<*Give us this day our daily bread*>> (Matthew 6:11).

Broke the loaves is reminiscent of the Last Supper and the act of communion that has come from it: <<*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Gave them to the disciples. God produced the miracle in response to Jesus' prayer and yet the miracle would be made manifest through the hands of the disciples as they served the people for it was the disciples who gave the food to the crowds. For the God who created the whole cosmos from nothing, transforming natural items and equipping people to make good use of what they have is but a small task, something he clearly expressed to Gideon: <<*Then the Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you'*>> (Judges 6:14), and much more so for those who follow Jesus: <<*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father*>> (John 14:12).

Paul may have had this miracle in mind when he wrote of God and Christ: <<*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness*>> (2 Corinthians 9:10).

<sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

### Matthew 14:20-21

They all ate and were filled may also be a prefiguring of the messianic banquet in the Kingdom at the end of the age: <<*I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*>> (Matthew 8:11).

The explicit mention of twelve baskets full left over may symbolise the 12 tribes of Israel, as well as the lavish abundance of God's provision. In the desert there was no manna left over as it was to be provided each day: <<*And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any of it over until morning.'* But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted>> (Exodus 16:19-21), whereas this miracle was a rare occurrence for a different purpose, teaching his disciples to have faith in him for what they need, when they truly need it.

Jesus trusted that God's provision would always be available when it was needed, but like most moralists he refused to squander what was available. The extra bread, which was more than the amount started with, could be used for other meals.

This idea of the abundance of God's provision for those who return to him is also reflected in the Parable of the Prodigal: <<*But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!"*>> (Luke 15:17).

Five thousand men, besides women and children would indicate that the total number may have included 10,000 or more people. Jesus is the new and better Moses, who supplies the needs of his people.

#### IX.c Matthew 14:22-36 - The Son of God worshipped

Jesus walks on the water (vv.22-27), saves Peter and calms the storm, while teaching the need for faith at the same time (vv.28-32), with the result that the disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God (v.33). After the storm, the Son of God heals many people in the region of Gennesaret (vv.34-36).

#### IX.c.i Matthew 14:22-33 - Jesus Walks on the Water

Jesus instructed his disciples to sail on ahead of him across the Lake while he spent time in prayer alone. Early in the morning, while they were still battling the elements out at sea, Jesus went out to join them by walking on the water. Initially, they thought he was a ghostly apparition but soon realised it was him and acknowledged his deity through their worship of him.

Although his healings and provision of food were miracles, some might have seen these as the work of a magician. However, to have the power over nature to walk on the surface of the lake during a storm was something that was only in the domain of God: <<*who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea*>> (Job 9:8), <<*Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen*>> (Psalm 77:19), and: <<*You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters*>> (Habakkuk 3:15).

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

#### Matthew 14:22

Immediately signifies that Jesus did not want to delay after the people had been fed and satisfied for he had other work to attend to that night and the following day that could not be delayed further.

He made the disciples get into the boat. The disciples would have been naturally reluctant to depart without him and so he had to command them to leave. They did not feel as secure when he was not with them, which is a feeling known to many believers and was something expressed by Moses long before: <<*And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here*>> (Exodus 33:15).

The other side often marks the movement from a Jewish to a Gentile territory and vice versa: <<*When he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way*>> (Matthew 8:28), and: <<*When the*

*disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread*>> (Matthew 16:5).

<sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

#### Matthew 14:23

He went up the mountain. Jesus had dismissed the crowds and went away because he knew what their response to the miracles they had just witnessed would be: <<*When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself*>> (John 6:15). It may have taken him some time to persuade them against taking such action and to start their homeward journey.

By himself to pray. In preparation for his mission into Gentile regions: <<*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon*>> (Matthew 15:21), and with his impending trials in Jerusalem, Jesus spent the evening and night in concentrated prayer with his heavenly Father: <<*Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God*>> (Luke 6:12). This is something Jesus had taught others to do and he was doing so himself in accordance with his own commands: <<*But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you*>> (Matthew 6:6). Any good teacher will live by their own teaching. If they do not, how can they expect others to?

<sup>24</sup> but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

#### Matthew 14:24

By this time the boat, battered by the waves is a reminder that the Christian may embark upon a journey or mission in fair conditions but that can so easily change before the destination is reached. That is the time to persevere in faith and not to turn around in order to return to the safety of the shore. Jesus will reward those who endure to the end: <<*To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne*>> (Revelation 3:21).

Was far from the land. The disciples were probably 3 miles or 4.8km out into the lake: <<*When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified*>> (John 6:19), which would have been 4-5 miles or 6-8km wide at that point, depending on exactly where they started out from: <<*When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret*>> (v.34), and: <<*When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them*>> (John 6:16-17).

The wind was against them indicates a north easterly wind causing them to drift toward the southwest, away from either Capernaum or Bethsaida.

<sup>25</sup> And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake.

#### Matthew 14:25

Early in the morning. Other translations are more precise: <<*And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea*>> (v.25 ESV).

The Roman military divided the night into four watches of three hours each, from 18:00 until 06:00. The fourth watch would have been between 03:00 and 06:00, which means the disciples would have been battling the storm for over nine hours: <<*by this time*>> (v.24). Light was still poor so it seems that it was just coming up for dawn.



The Sea of Galilee at Dawn

He came walking towards them on the lake was an amazing miracle that indicates his deity.

<sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear.

#### Matthew 14:26

Ghost represents *phantasma*, a Greek term for spirit appearances or apparitions. The disciples may have thought an evil spirit was trying to deceive them: <<*dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh bristled*>> (Job 4:14-15).

<sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’

#### Matthew 14:27

Immediately Jesus spoke to them. He did not rebuke them for fearing spirits but recognised their anxiety. In his compassion for them he put their minds at ease, knowing they would be at peace once they had him with them again.

It is I is the Greek *egō eimi*, which literally means ‘I am’. It recalls Yahweh’s voice from the burning bush: <<*God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I am has sent me to you”’*>> (Exodus 3:14), which when spoken now by Jesus provides assurance to the disciples of the Lord’s presence in their midst as Saviour: <<*You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord. I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?*>> (Isaiah 43:10-13). Jesus astounded the Jews in Jerusalem by making this same link between himself and God: <<*Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell*

*you, before Abraham was, I am'>> (John 8:58). The disciples would have instantly recognised the call of their Lord and master for it was: <<The voice of my beloved!>> (Song 2:8a).*

Do not be afraid. God has always tried to reassure his people in their fearful moments. For example: <<After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'>> (Genesis 15:1), <<Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed>> (1 Chronicles 22:13), <<and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you">> (Acts 27:24). However, fear of God is healthy for: <<The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge>> (Proverbs 1:7a), and he is the only one that a believer needs to fear for he is the true and just judge: <<I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!>> (Luke 12:4-5).

<sup>28</sup> Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' <sup>29</sup> He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' <sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

### Matthew 14:28-33

Lord. By walking on the water in a furious storm, Jesus demonstrated that he indeed is the Lord over all creation, and so there is no need for Peter to become frightened. The only fitting response when confronted with Jesus' Lordship is to worship him and to acknowledge by faith that truly he is the Son of God, which is the only time in Matthew that the disciples use this full title to address Jesus. Faith is the proper principle of worship, and worship the genuine product of faith.

Command me to come to you. Peter had a tendency to speak without thinking first and offered himself in faith to walk to Jesus on the water. Jesus did not give him any instruction on how to achieve this but simply commanded him to come and Peter obeyed. However, Peter teaches all disciples a good lesson in that they should *seek* the Lord to call them to action and not just wait around until he does.

So what changed that he should suddenly start to sink, after all Jesus was not sinking? It seems that he simply took his eyes off his Lord and allowed his human logic to replace his faith in Jesus, i.e. he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, for which he was rebuked, you of little faith. He was the only one to have sufficient faith to try it and yet was rebuked for its insufficiency. He was

learning that faith grows out of a relationship with the person of Jesus, and in no other way.

**Matthew is the only one to record Peter walking on the water. It is omitted by both Mark and John in their retelling of the incident, for they chose to focus on what Jesus did. Mark adds the detail that Jesus appeared to be passing by their boat when they saw him. Refer to comments made of Mark 6:47-48.**

**Peter got out of the boat.** All disciples should be prepared to get out of their comfort zone when called to action by Christ. However, they should be aware that to do so before being called is presumptuous. Care is needed though in order to avoid just sitting around waiting when there are plenty of instructions in the bible that call all disciples to actions at all times, and do not require a second call. Neither does it require praying through when the opportunity to respond to a call does arise. The general call includes showing love to a neighbour, feeding the hungry, praying for the sick, providing relief to the poor and sharing the Gospel with all who will hear it.

**Lord, save me** is a cry that has gone out from millions since Peter's day. Although Jesus would no doubt wish to hear it from more people and more often, for he will respond to those for whom it is a genuine cry from the heart: **<<Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love>>** (Psalm 6:4), **<<But I call upon God, and the Lord will save me>>** (Psalm 55:16), **<<The Lord will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the Lord>>** (Isaiah 38:20), and: **<<The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen>>** (2 Timothy 4:18).

**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.** Even though it may seem that God does not respond quickly to a cry for help, the fact is he does so **immediately**. It is down to the recipient to allow their faith to overcome their human fear in such circumstances in order for them to recognise the presence of God in even the direst of situations.

**When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.** On a similar occasion, Jesus had commanded the sea to be calm: **<<And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm>>** (Matthew 8:26), however it appears on this occasion that the elements were already under his control without the need for a word to be spoken.

#### **IX.c.ii Matthew 14:34-36 - Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret**

After Jesus landed on the western shore of Galilee, word soon spread of his arrival and the people brought all their sick to him and were healed.

<sup>34</sup> **When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.**

#### **Matthew 14:34**

**Gennesaret** refers to either the town or the plain on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, southwest of Capernaum, known for its fertile soil and abundance of walnuts, figs and olives. It either received its name from or gave its name to the lake by which it stood: **<<Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of**

***Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God***>> (Luke 5:1).

A north easterly wind may have caused the boat to drift south-westward, bringing them to Gennesaret instead of their intended destination of Bethsaida or Capernaum. This would indicate they had fed the 5,000 somewhere between

Gergesa and Bethsaida on the map.

John indicated they were heading for Capernaum, see comments on v.24, whereas Mark records it as nearby Bethsaida: <<***Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd***>> (Mark 6:45). However, they came to land at Gennesaret.



Galilee and the surrounding region

<sup>35</sup> After the people of that place recognised him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, <sup>36</sup> and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

#### Matthew 14:35-36

They sent word throughout the region. Despite the lack of communications equipment, news spread fast in that era, with runners often used to take messages to the surrounding areas as well as throughout the town itself.

Brought all who were sick to him indicates that people were still being drawn by the miracles rather than the Gospel message that would have offered them so much more than comparatively short-term physical healing.

After the people of that place recognised him. There is no record of any prior ministry by Jesus in Gennesaret, but its people had certainly heard about him, knowing that to touch even the fringe of his cloak could bring healing. This had been the case for the woman following twelve years of menstrual bleeding: <<***She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease***>> (Mark 5:27-29). It seems likely that news of this had spread throughout the region to reach them in Gennesaret.