

# CHAPTER 14

John the Baptist had said concerning Christ, He must increase, but I must decrease, ~~480~~ John 3:30. The morning-star is here disappearing, and the Sun of righteousness rising to its meridian lustre. Here is,

**I.** The martyrdom of John; his imprisonment for his faithfulness to Herod (v. 1-5), and the beheading of him to please Herodias (v. 6-12).

**II.** The miracles of Christ.

- 1.** His feeding five thousand men that came to him to be taught, with five loaves and two fishes (v. 13-21).
- 2.** Christ's walking on the waves to his disciples in a storm (v. 22-23).
- 3.** His healing the sick with the touch of the hem of his garment (v. 34-36). Thus he went forth, thus he went on, conquering and to conquer, or rather, curing and to cure.

## ~~481~~ MATTHEW 14:1-12

### THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

We have here the story of John's martyrdom. Observe,

**I.** The occasion of relating this story here, v. 1, 2. Here is,

**1.** The account brought to Herod of the miracles which Christ wrought. Herod the tetrarch or chief governor of Galilee *heard of the fame of Jesus*. At that time, when his countrymen slighted him, upon the account of his meanness and obscurity, he began to be famous at court. Note, God will honour those that are despised for his sake. And the gospel, like the sea, gets in one place what it loses in another. Christ had now been preaching and working miracles above two years; yet, it should seem, Herod had not heard of him till now, and now only heard the fame of him. Note, It is the unhappiness of the great ones of the world, that they are most out of the way of hearing the best things (~~482~~ 1 Corinthians 2:8). *Which none of the princes of this world knew,* ~~483~~ 1 Corinthians 1:26. Christ's disciples were

now sent abroad to preach, and to work miracles in his name, and this spread the fame of him more than ever; which was an indication of the spreading of the gospel by their means after his ascension.

**2.** The construction he puts upon this (v. 2); *He said to his servants* that told him of the fame of Jesus, as sure as we are here, *this is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead.* Either the leaven of Herod was not Sadducism, *for the Sadducees say, There is no resurrection* (<sup><4218></sup>Acts 23:8); or else Herod's guilty conscience (as is usual with atheists) did at this time get the mastery of his opinion, and now he concludes, whether there be a general resurrection or no, that *John Baptist is certainly risen,* and therefore *mighty works do show forth themselves in him.* John, while he lived, *did no miracle* (<sup><6141></sup>John 10:41); but Herod concludes, that, being risen from the dead, he is clothed with a greater power than he had while he was living. And he very well calls the miracles he supposed him to work, not *his mighty works,* but *mighty works showing forth themselves in him.* Observe here concerning Herod,

**(1.)** How he was disappointed in what he intended by beheading John. He thought if he could get that troublesome fellow out of the way, he might go on in his sins, undisturbed and uncontrolled; yet no sooner is that effected, than he hears of Jesus and his disciples preaching the same pure doctrine that John preached; and, which is more, even the disciples confirming it by miracles in their Master's name. Note, Ministers may be silenced, and imprisoned, and banished, and slain, but the word of God cannot be run down. The prophets *live not for ever, but the word takes hold,* <sup><3115></sup>Zechariah 1:5, 6. See <sup><3119></sup>2 Timothy 2:9. Sometimes God raises up many faithful ministers out of the ashes of one. This *hope* there is of God's trees, *though they be cut down,* <sup><3147></sup>Job 14:7-9.

**(2.)** How he was filled with causeless fears, merely from the guilt of his own conscience. Thus *blood cries,* not only *from the earth* on which it was shed, but from the heart of him that shed it, and makes him *Magor-missabib* — *A terror round about,* a terror to himself. A guilty conscience suggests every thing that is frightful, and, like a whirlpool, gathers all to itself that comes near it. Thus *the wicked flee when none pursue* (<sup><1311></sup>Proverbs 28:1); are in *great fear, where no fear is,* <sup><1345></sup>Psalm 14:5. Herod, by a little enquiry, might have found out that this Jesus was in being long before John Baptist's death, and therefore could not be

*Johannes redivivus* — *John restored to life*; and so he might have undeceived himself; but God justly left him to this infatuation.

(3.) How, notwithstanding this, he was hardened in his wickedness; for though he was convinced that John was a prophet, and one owned of God, yet he does not express the least remorse or sorrow for his sin in putting him to death. The devils believe and tremble, but they never believe and repent. Note, There may be the terror of strong convictions, where there is not the truth of a saving conversion.

II. The story itself of the imprisonment and martyrdom of John. These extraordinary sufferings of him who was the first preacher of the gospel, plainly show that bonds and afflictions will abide the professors of it. As the first Old-Testament saint, so the first New-Testament minister, died a martyr. And if Christ's forerunner was thus treated, let not his followers expect to be caressed by the world. Observe here,

1. John's faithfulness in reprovng Herod, v. 3, 4. Herod was one of John's hearers (Mark 6:20), and therefore John might be the more bold with him. Note, Ministers, who are reprovers by office, are especially obliged to reprove those that are under their charge, and *not to suffer sin upon them*; they have the fairest opportunity of dealing with them, and with them may expect the most favourable acceptance.

The particular sin he reprovng him for was, marrying his brother Philip's wife, not his widow (that had not been so criminal), but his wife. Philip was now living, and Herod inveigled his wife from him, and kept here for his own. Here was a complication of wickedness, adultery, incest, besides the wrong done to Philip, who had had a child by this woman; and it was an aggravation of the wrong, that he was his brother, his half-brother, by the father, but not by the mother. See Psalm 50:20. For this sin John reprovng him; not by tacit and oblique allusions, but in plain terms, *It is not lawful for thee to have her*. He charges it upon him as a sin; not, It is not honourable, or, It is not safe, but, It is not *lawful*; the *sinfulness* of sin, as it is the *transgression of the law*, is the worst thing in it. This was Herod's own iniquity, his beloved sin, and therefore John Baptist tells him of this particularly. Note,

(1.) That which by the law of God is unlawful to other people, is by the same law unlawful to princes and the greatest of men. They who rule over men must not forget that they are themselves but men, and subject to God.

“It is not lawful for thee, any more than for the meanest subject thou hast, to debauch another man's wife.” There is no prerogative, no, not for the greatest and most arbitrary kings, to break the laws of God.

(2.) If princes and great men break the law of God, it is very fit they should be told of it by proper persons, and in a proper manner. As they are not above the commands of God's word, so they are not above the reproofs of his ministers. *It is not fit indeed, to say to a king, Thou art Belial* (~~1848~~ Job 34:18), any more than to call a brother *Raca*, or, *Thou fool*: it is not fit, while they keep within the sphere of their own authority, to arraign them. But it is fit that, by those whose office it is, they should be told what is unlawful, and told with application, *Thou art the man*; for it follows there (v. 19), that God (whose agents and ambassadors faithful ministers are) *accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor*.

2. The imprisonment of John for his faithfulness, v. 3. *Herod laid hold on John* when he was going on to preach and baptize, put an end to his work, *bound him, and put him in prison*; partly to gratify his own revenge, and partly to please Herodias, who of the two seemed to be most incensed against him; it was *for her sake* that he did it. Note,

(1.) Faithful reproofs, if they do not profit, usually provoke; if they do not do good, they are resented as affronts, and they that will not bow to the reproof, will fly in the face of the reprover and hate him, as Ahab hated Micaiah, ~~1128~~ 1 Kings 22:8. See ~~2008~~ Proverbs 9:8; 15:10, 12. *Veritas odium parit — Truth produces hatred*.

(2.) It is no new thing for God's ministers to suffer ill for doing well. Troubles abide those most that are most diligent and faithful in doing their duty, ~~400~~ Acts 20:20. Perhaps some of John's friends would blame him as indiscreet in reproving Herod, and tell him he had better be silent than provoke Herod, whose character he knew very well, thus to deprive him of his liberty; but away with that discretion that would hinder men from doing their duty as magistrates, ministers, or Christian friends; I believe John's own heart did not reproach him for it, but this testimony of his conscience for him made his bonds easy, that he suffered for well-doing, and not as a *busy-body in other men's matters*, ~~1005~~ 1 Peter 4:15.

3. The restraint that Herod lay under from further venting of his rage against John, v. 5.

**(1.)** He would have put him to death. Perhaps that was not intended at first when he imprisoned him, but his revenge by degrees boiled up to that height. Note, The way of sin, especially the sin of persecution, is down-hill; and when once a respect to Christ's ministers is cast off and broken through in one instance, that is at length done, which the man would sooner have thought himself a dog than to have been guilty of, <sup><1183></sup>2 Kings 8:13.

**(2.)** That which hindered him was his *fear of the multitude, because they counted John as a prophet*. It was not because he feared God (if the fear of God had been before his eyes he would not have imprisoned him), nor because he feared John, though formerly he had had a reverence for him (his lusts had overcome that), but because he feared the people; he was afraid for himself, his own safety, and the safety of his government, his abuse of which he knew had already rendered him odious to the people, whose resentments being so far heated already would be apt, upon such a provocation as the putting of a prophet to death, to break out into a flame. Note,

**[1.]** Tyrants have their fears. Those who are, and affect to be, *the terror of the mighty*, are many times the greatest terror of all to themselves; and when they are most ambitious to be feared by the people, are most afraid of them.

**[2.]** Wicked men are restrained from the most wicked practices, merely by their secular interest, and not by any regard to God. A concern for their ease, credit, wealth, and safety, being their reigning principle, as it keeps them from many duties, so it keeps them from many sins, which otherwise they would not be restrained from; and this is one means by which sinners are kept from being overmuch wicked, <sup><2077></sup>Ecclesiastes 7:17. The danger of sin that appears to sense, or to fancy only, influences men more than that which appears to faith. Herod feared that the putting of John to death might raise a mutiny among the people, which it did not; but he never feared it might raise a mutiny in his own conscience, which it did, v. 2. Men fear being hanged for that which they do not fear being damned for.

**4.** The contrivance of bringing John to his death. Long he lay in prison; and, against the liberty of the subject (which, blessed be God, is secured to us of this nation by law), might neither be tried nor bailed. It is computed that he lay a year and a half a close prisoner, which was about as much time as he had spent in his public ministry, from his first entrance into it.

Now here we have an account of his release, not by any other discharge than death, the period of all a good man's troubles, that brings the prisoners to rest together, so that *they hear not the voice of the oppressor*, <sup><818></sup>Job 3:18.

Herodias laid the plot; her implacable revenge thirsted after John's blood, and would be satisfied with nothing less. Cross the carnal appetites, and they turn into the most barbarous passions; it was a woman, a whore, and the mother of harlots, that was *drunk with the blood of the saints*, <sup><617></sup>Revelation 17:5, 6. Herodias contrived how to bring about the murder of John so artificially as to save Herod's credit, and so to pacify the people. A sorry excuse is better than none. But I am apt to think, that if the truth were known, Herod was himself in the plot; and with all his pretences of surprise and sorrow, was privy to the contrivance, and knew before what would be asked. And his pretending his oath, and respect to his guests, was all but sham and grimace. But if he were trepanned into it ere he was aware, yet because it was the thing he might have prevented, and would not, he is justly found guilty of the whole contrivance. Though Jezebel bring Naboth to his end, yet if Ahab take possession, *he hath killed*. So, though Herodias contrive the beheading of John, yet if Herod consent to it, and take pleasure in it, he is not only an accessory, but a principal murderer. Well, the scene being laid behind the curtain, let us see how it was acted upon the stage, and in what method. Here we have,

**(1.)** The humouring of Herod by the damsel's dancing upon a birth-day. It seems, Herod's birth-day was kept with some solemnity; in honour of the day, there must needs be, as usual, a ball at court; and, to grace the solemnity, the daughter of Herodias danced before them; who being the queen's daughter, it was more than she ordinarily condescended to do. Note, Times of carnal mirth and jollity are convenient times for carrying on bad designs against God's people. When the king was *made sick with bottles of wine, he stretched out his hand with scorers* (<sup><315></sup>Hosea 7:5), for it is part of the *sport of a fool* to do mischief, <sup><102></sup>Proverbs 10:23. The Philistines, when their heart was merry, called for Samson to abuse him. The Parisian massacre was at a wedding. This young lady's dancing pleased Herod. We are not told who danced with her, but none pleased Herod like her dancing. Note, A vain and graceless heart is apt to be greatly in love with the lusts of the flesh and of the eye, and when it is so, it is entering into further temptation; for by that Satan gets and keeps possession. See <sup><233></sup>Proverbs 23:31--33. Herod was now in a mirthful

mood, and nothing was more agreeable to him than that which fed his vanity.

(2.) The rash and foolish promise which Herod made to this wanton girl, to give her whatsoever she would ask: and this promise confirmed with an oath, v. 7. It was a very extravagant obligation which Herod here entered into, and no way becoming a prudent man that is afraid of being *snared in the words of his mouth* (<sup>218B</sup>Proverbs 6:2), much less a good man that fears an oath, <sup>219B</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:2. To put this blank into her hand, and enable her to draw upon him at pleasure, was too great a recompense for such a sorry piece of merit; and, I am apt to think, Herod would not have been guilty of such an absurdity, if he had not been instructed of Herodias, as well as the damsel. Note, Promissory oaths are ensnaring things, and, when made rashly, are the products of inward corruption, and the occasion of many temptations. Therefore, swear not so at all, lest thou have occasion to say, *It was an error*, <sup>218B</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:6.

(3.) The bloody demand the young lady made of John the Baptist's head, v. 8. She was before instructed of her mother. Note, The case of those children is very sad, whose parents are *their counsellors to do wickedly*, as Ahaziah's (<sup>421B</sup>2 Chronicles 22:3); who instruct them and encourage them in sin, and set them bad examples; for the corrupt nature will sooner be quickened by bad instructions than restrained and mortified by good ones. Children ought not to *obey their parents against the Lord*, but if they command them to sin, must say, as Levi did to *father and mother*, they *have not seen them*.

Herod having given her her commission, and Herodias her instructions, she requires John the Baptist's head in a charger. Perhaps Herodias feared lest Herod should grow weary of her (as lust useth to nauseate and be cloyed), and then would make John Baptist's reproof a pretence to dismiss her; to prevent which she contrives to harden Herod in it by engaging him in the murder of John. John must be beheaded then; that is the death by which he must glorify God; and because it was *his* who died first after the beginning of the gospel, though the martyrs died various kinds of deaths, and not so easy and honourable as this, yet this is put for all the rest, <sup>611B</sup>Revelation 20:4, where we read of *the souls of those that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus*. Yet this is not enough, the thing must be humoured too, and not only a revenge, but a fancy must be gratified; it must be *given her here in a charger*, served up in blood, as a dish of meat

at the feast, or sauce to all the other dishes; it is reserved for the third course, to come up with the rarities. He must have no trial, no public hearing, no forms of law or justice must add solemnity to his death; but he is tried, condemned, and executed, in a breath. It was well for him he was so mortified to the world that death could be no surprise to him, though ever so sudden. It must be given her, and she will reckon it a recompence for her dancing, and desire no more.

**(4.)** Herod's grant of this demand (v. 9); *The king was sorry*, at least took on him to be so, but, *for the oath's sake, he commanded it to be given her*. Here is,

**[1.]** A pretended concern for John. *The king was sorry*. Note, Many a man sins with regret, that never has any true regret for his sin; is sorry to sin, yet is utterly a stranger to godly sorrow; sins with reluctancy, and yet goes on to sin. Dr. Hammond suggests, that one reason of Herod's sorrow was, because it was his birth-day festival, and it would be an ill omen to shed blood on that day, which, as other days of joy, used to be graced with acts of clemency; *Natalem colimus, tacete lites* — *We are celebrating the birth-day, let there be no contentions*.

**[2.]** Here is a pretended conscience of his oath, with a specious show of honour and honesty; he must needs do something, for the oath's sake. Note, It is a great mistake to think that a wicked oath will justify a wicked action. It was implied so necessarily, that it needed not be expressed, that he would do any thing for her that was lawful and honest; and when she demanded what was otherwise, he ought to have declared, and he might have done it honourably, that the oath was null and void, and the obligation of it ceased. No man can lay himself under an obligation to sin, because God has already so strongly obliged every man against sin.

**[3.]** Here is a real baseness in compliance with wicked companions. Herod yielded, not so much for the sake of the oath, but because it was public, and in compliment to *them that sat at meat with him*; he granted the demand that he might not seem, before them, to have broken his engagement. Note, A point of honour goes much further with many than a point of conscience. Those who sat at meat with him, probably, were as well pleased with the damsel's dancing as he, and therefore would have her by all means to be gratified in a frolic, and perhaps were as willing as she to see John the Baptist's head off. However, none of them had the honesty to interpose, as they ought to have done, for the preventing of it,



as Jehoiakim's princes did, <sup>285</sup>Jeremiah 36:25. If some of the common people had been here, they would have rescued this Jonathan, as <sup>945</sup>1 Samuel 14:45.

[4.] Here is a real malice to John at the bottom of this concession, or else he might have found out evasions enough to have got clear of his promise. Note, Though a wicked mind never wants an excuse, yet the truth of the matter is, that *every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed*, <sup>304</sup>James 1:14. Perhaps Herod presently reflecting upon the extravagance of his promise, on which she might ground a demand of some vast sum of money, which he loved a great deal better than John the Baptist, was glad to get clear of it so easily; and therefore immediately issues out a warrant for the beheading of John the Baptist, it should seem not in writing, but only by word of mouth; so little account is made of that precious life; *he commanded it to be given her*.

(5.) The execution of John, pursuant to this grant (v. 10); *He sent and beheaded John in the prison*. It is probable the prison was very near, at the gate of the palace; and thither an officer was sent to cut off the head of this great man. He must be beheaded with expedition, to gratify Herodias, who was in a longing condition till it was done. It was done in the night, for it was at supper-time, after supper, it is likely. It was done in the prison, not at the usual place of execution, for fear of an uproar. A great deal of innocent blood, of martyr's blood, has thus been huddled up in corners, which, when God comes to make inquisition for blood, the earth shall disclose, and shall no more cover, <sup>282</sup>Isaiah 26:21; <sup>492</sup>Psalms 9:12.

Thus was that voice silenced, that burning and shining light extinguished; thus did that prophet, that Elias, of the new Testament, fall a sacrifice to the resentments of an imperious, whorish woman. Thus did he, who was great in the sight of the Lord, *die as a fool dieth, his hands were bound, and his feet put into fetters; and as a man falleth before wicked men*, so he fell, a true martyr to all intents and purposes: dying, though not for the professions of his faith, yet for the performance of his duty. However, though his work was soon done, *it was done and his testimony finished*, for till then none of God's witnesses are slain. And God brought this good out of it, that hereby his disciples, who while he lived, though in prison, kept close to him, now after his death heartily closed with Jesus Christ.

5. The disposal of the poor remains of this blessed saint and martyr. The head and body being separated,

(1.) The damsel brought the head in triumph to her mother, as a trophy of the victories of her malice and revenge, v. 11. *Jerome ad Rufin*, relates, that when Herodias had John the Baptist's head brought her, she gave herself the barbarous diversion of pricking the tongue with a needle, as Fulvia did Tully's. Note, Bloody minds are pleased with bloody sights, which those of tender spirits shrink and tremble at. Sometimes the insatiable rage of bloody persecutors has fallen upon the dead bodies of the saints, and made sport with them, <sup><498></sup>Psalm 79:2. When the witnesses are slain, they that  *dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and make merry*, <sup><610></sup>Revelation 11:10; <sup><614></sup>Psalm 14:4, 5.

(2.) The disciples *buried the body*, and brought the news in tears to our Lord Jesus. The disciples of John had fasted often while their master was in prison, their *bridegroom was taken away from them*, and they prayed earnestly for his deliverance, as the church did for Peter's, <sup><417></sup>Acts 12:5. They had free access to him in prison, which was a comfort to them, but they wished to see him at liberty, that he might preach to others; but now on a sudden all their hopes are dashed. Disciples weep and lament, when the world rejoices. Let us see what they did.

[1.] *They buried the body*. Note, There is a respect owing to the servants of Christ, not only while they live, but in their bodies and memories when they are dead. Concerning the first two New-Testament martyrs, it is particularly taken notice of, that they were decently buried, John the Baptist by his disciples, and Stephen by devout men (<sup><402></sup>Acts 8:2); yet there was no enshrining of their bones or other relics, a piece of superstition which sprung up long after, when the enemy had sowed tares. That over-doing, in respect to the bodies of the saints, is undoing; though they are not to be vilified, yet they are not to be deified.

[2.] *They went and told Jesus*; not so much that he might shift for his own safety (no doubt he heard it from others, the country rang of it), as they might receive comfort from him, and be taken in among his disciples. Note, *First*, When any thing ails us at any time, it is our duty and privilege to make Christ acquainted with it. It will be a relief to our burthened spirits to unbosom ourselves to a friend we may be free with. Such a relation dead or unkind, such a comfort lost or embittered, go and tell Jesus who knows already, but will know from us, the trouble of *our souls in adversity*. *Secondly*, We must take heed, lest our religion and the profession of it die with our ministers; when John was dead, they did not

return every man to his own, but resolved to abide by it still. When the shepherds are smitten, the sheep need not be scattered while they have the great Shepherd of the sheep to go to, who is still the same, ~~5818~~ Hebrews 13:8, 20. The removal of ministers should bring us nearer to Christ, into a more immediate communion with him. *Thirdly*, Comforts otherwise highly valuable, are sometimes *therefore* taken from us, because they come between us and Christ, and are apt to carry away that love and esteem which are due to him only: John had long since directed his disciples to Christ, and turned them over to him, but they could not leave their old master while he lived; therefore he is removed that they may go to Jesus, whom they had sometimes emulated and envied for John's sake. It is better to be drawn to Christ by want and loss, than not to come to him at all. If our masters be taken from our head, this is our comfort, we have a Master in heaven, who himself is our Head.

Josephus mentions this story of the death of John the Baptist (*Antiq.* 18.116-119), and adds, that a fatal destruction of Herod's army in his war with Aretas, king of Petrea (whose daughter was Herod's wife, whom he put away to make room for Herodias), was generally considered by the Jews to be a just judgment upon him, for putting John the Baptist to death. Herod having, at the instigation of Herodias, disobliged the emperor, was deprived of his government, and they were both banished to Lyons in France; which, says Josephus, was his just punishment for hearkening to her solicitations. And, lastly, it is storied of this daughter of Herodias, that going over the ice in winter, the ice broke, and she slipt in up to her neck, which was cut through by the sharpness of the ice. God requiring her head (says Dr. Whitby) for that of the Baptist; which, if true, was a remarkable providence.

## ~~4143~~ MATTHEW 14:13-21

### THE FIVE THOUSAND FED

This passage of story, concerning Christ's feeding *five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes*, is recorded by all the four Evangelists, which very few, if any, of Christ's miracles are: this intimates that there is something in it worthy of special remark. Observe,

**I.** The great resort of people to Christ, when he was retired *into a desert place*, v. 13. He withdrew into privacy when he heard, not of John's death, but of the thoughts Herod had concerning him, that he was *John the Baptist risen from the dead*, and therefore so feared by Herod as to be hated; he departed further off, to get out of Herod's jurisdiction. Note, In times of peril, when God opens a door of escape, it is lawful to flee for our own preservation, unless we have some special call to expose ourselves. Christ's *hour was not yet come*, and therefore he would not thrust himself upon suffering. He could have secured himself by divine power, but because his life was intended for an example, he did it by human prudence; *he departed by ship*. But *a city on a hill cannot be hid; when the people heard it, they followed him on foot* from all parts. Such an interest Christ had in the affections of the multitude, that his withdrawing from them did but draw them after him with so much the more eagerness. Here, as often, *the scripture was fulfilled*, that *unto him shall the gathering of the people be*. It should seem, there was more crowding to Christ after John's martyrdom than before. Sometimes *the suffering of the saints* are made to further the gospel (<sup>AMB</sup>Philippians 1:12), and “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Now John's testimony was finished, it was recollected, and more improved than ever. Note,

**1.** When Christ and his word withdraw from us, it is best for us (whatever flesh and blood may object to the contrary) to follow it, preferring opportunities for our souls before any secular advantages whatsoever. *When the ark removes, ye shall remove, and go after it*, <sup>GRB</sup>Joshua 3:3.

**2.** *Those that truly desire the sincere milk of the word*, will not stick at the difficulties they may meet with in their attendance on it. The presence of Christ and his gospel makes a desert place not only tolerable, but desirable; it makes the wilderness an Eden, <sup>2SB</sup>Isaiah 51:3; 41:19, 20.

**II.** The tender compassion of our Lord Jesus towards those who thus followed him, v. 14.

**1.** He went forth, and appeared publicly among them. Though he retired for his own security, and his own repose, yet he went forth from his retirement, when he saw people desirous to hear him, as one willing both to toil himself, and to expose himself, for the good of souls; for *even Christ pleased not himself*.

2. When he saw the multitude, he had compassion on them. Note, The sight of a great multitude may justly move compassion. To see a great multitude, and to think how many precious, immortal souls here are, the greatest part of which, we have reason to fear, are neglected and ready to perish, would grieve one to the heart. None like Christ for pity to souls; *his compassions fails not*.

3. He did not only pity them, but he helped them; many of them were *sick, and he, in compassion to them, healed them*; for he came into the world to be the great Healer. After awhile, they were all hungry, *and he, in compassion to them, fed them*. Note, In all the favours Christ shows to us, he is *moved with compassion*, ~~260~~ Isaiah 63:9.

**III.** The motion which the disciples made for the dismissing of the congregation, and Christ's setting aside the motion.

1. The *evening* drawing on, the disciples moved it to Christ to send the multitude away; they thought there was a good day's work done, and it was time to disperse. Note, Christ's disciples are often more careful to show their discretion, than to show their zeal; and their abundant affection in the things of God.

2. Christ would not dismiss them hungry as they were, nor detain them longer without meat, nor put them upon the trouble and charge of buying meat for themselves, but orders his disciples to provide for them. Christ all along expressed more tenderness toward the people than his disciples did; for what are the compassions of the most merciful men, compared with *the tender mercies of God in Christ*? See how loth Christ is to part with those who are resolved to cleave to him! *They need not depart*. Note, Those who have Christ have enough, and need not depart to seek a happiness and livelihood in the creature; they that have made sure of *the one thing needful*, need not be *cumbered about much serving*: nor will Christ put his willing followers upon a needless expense, but will make their attendance cheap to them.

But if they be hungry, they have need to depart, for that is a necessity which has no law, therefore, *give you them to eat*. Note, *The Lord is for the body*; it is *the work of his hands*, it is part of his purchase; he was himself clothed with a body, that he might encourage us to depend upon him for the supply of our bodily wants. But he takes a particular care of the body, when it is employed to serve the soul in his more immediate

service. If we *seek first the kingdom of God*, and make that our chief care, we may depend upon God to *add other things to us*, as far as he sees fit, and may *cast all care of them upon him*. These followed Christ but for a trial, in a present fit of zeal, and yet Christ took this care of them; much more will he provide for those who follow him fully.

**IV.** The slender provision that was made for this great multitude; and here we must compare the number of invited guests with the bill of fare.

**1.** The number of the guests was *five thousand of men, besides women and children*; and it is probable the women and children might be as many as the men, if not more. This was a vast auditory that Christ preached to, and we have reason to think an attentive auditory; and, yet it should seem, far the greater part, notwithstanding all this seeming zeal and forwardness, came to nothing; they went off and followed him no more; *for many are called, but few are chosen*. We would rather perceive the acceptableness of the word by the conversion, than by the crowds, of its hearers; though that also is a good sight and a good sign.

**2.** The bill of fare was very disproportionable to the number of the guests, but *five loaves and two fishes*. This provision the disciples carried about with them for the use of the family, now they *were retired into the desert*. Christ could have fed them by miracle, but to set us an example of providing for those of our own households, he will have their own camp victualled in an ordinary way. Here is neither plenty, nor variety, nor dainty; a dish of fish was no rarity to them that were fishermen, but it was food convenient for the twelve; two fishes for their supper, and bread to serve them perhaps for a day or two: here was no wine or strong drink; fair water from the rivers in the desert was the best they had to drink with their meat; and yet out of this Christ will have the multitude fed. Note, Those who have but a little, yet when the necessity is urgent, must relieve others out of that little, and that is the way to make it more. *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* Yes, he can, when he pleases, a plentiful table.

**V.** The liberal distribution of this provision among the multitude (v. 18, 19); *Bring them hither to me*. Note, The way to have our creature-like comforts, comforts indeed to us, is to bring them to Christ; for every thing is sanctified by his word, and by prayer to him: that is likely to prosper and do well with us, which we put into the hands of our Lord Jesus, that he may dispose of it as he pleases, and that we may take it back from his

hand, and then it will be doubly sweet to us. What we give in charity, we should bring to Christ first, that he may graciously accept it from us, and graciously bless it to those to whom it is given; this is *doing it as unto the Lord*.

Now at this miraculous meal we may observe,

**1.** The seating of the guests (v. 19); *He commanded them to sit down*; which intimates, that while he was preaching to them, they were standing, which is a posture of reverence, and readiness for motion. But what shall we do for chairs for them all? Let them *sit down on the grass*. When Ahasuerus would *show the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, in a royal feast for the great men of all his provinces*, the beds or couches they sat on *were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble*, <sup><1016></sup>Esther 1:6.

Our Lord Jesus did now show, in a divine feast, the riches of a more glorious kingdom than that, and the honour of a more excellent majesty, even a dominion over nature itself; but here is not so much as a cloth spread, no plates or napkins laid, no knives or forks, nor so much as a bench to sit down on; but, as if Christ intended indeed to reduce the world to the plainness and simplicity, and so to the innocency and happiness, of Adam in paradise, *he commanded them to sit down on the grass*. By doing every thing thus, without any pomp or splendour, he plainly showed *that his kingdom was not of this world, nor cometh with observation*.

**2.** The craving of a blessing. He did not appoint one of his disciples to be his chaplain, but he himself *looked up to heaven, and blessed, and gave thanks*; he praised God for the provision they had, and prayed to God to bless it to them. His craving a blessing, was commanding a blessing; for as he preached, so he prayed, *like one having authority*; and in this prayer and thanksgiving, we may suppose, he had special reference to the multiplying of this food; but herein he has taught us that good duty of craving a blessing and giving thanks at our meals: God's good creatures must be *received with thanksgiving*, <sup><5001></sup>1 Timothy 4:4. Samuel *blessed* the feast, <sup><0913></sup>1 Samuel 9:13; <sup><4026></sup>Acts 2:46, 47; 27:34, 35. This is *eating and drinking to the glory of God* (<sup><4318></sup>1 Corinthians 10:31); *giving God thanks* (<sup><5416></sup>Romans 14:6); *eating before God*, as Moses, and his father-in-law, <sup><0182></sup>Exodus 18:12, 15. When Christ *blessed, he looked up to heaven*, to teach us, in prayer, to eye God as a *Father in heaven*; and when we receive

our creature-comforts to look thitherward, as taking them from God's hand, and depending on him for a blessing.

**3.** The carving of the meat. The Master of the feast was himself head-carver, for *he brake, and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude*. Christ intended hereby to put honour upon his disciples, that they might be respected *as workers together with him*; as also to signify in what way the spiritual food of the word should be dispensed to the world; from Christ, as the original Author, by his ministers. What Christ designed for *the churches he signified to his servant John* (<sup><400></sup>Revelation 1:1, 4); *they delivered all that, and that only, which they received from the Lord*, <sup><412></sup>1 Corinthians 11:23. Ministers can never fill the people's hearts, unless Christ first fill their hands: and what he has given to the disciples, they must give to the multitude; for they are *stewards, to give to every one his portion of meat*, <sup><424></sup>Matthew 24:45. And, blessed be God, be the multitude ever so great, there is enough for all, enough for each.

**4.** The increase of the meat. This is taken notice of only in the effect, not in the cause or manner of it; here is no mention of any word that Christ spoke, by which the food was multiplied; the purposes and intentions of his mind and will shall take effect, though they be not spoken out: but this is observable, that the meat was multiplied, not in the heap at first, but in the distribution of it. As the widow's oil increased in the pouring out, so here the bread in the breaking. Thus grace grows by being acted, and, while other things perish in the using, spiritual gifts increase in the using. God ministers seed to the sower, and multiplies not the seed hoarded up, but *the seed sown*, <sup><430></sup>2 Corinthians 9:10. Thus *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*; that scattereth, and so increaseth.

**VI.** The plentiful satisfaction of all the guests with this provision. Though the disproportion was so great, yet there was enough and to spare.

**1.** There was enough: *They did all eat, and were filled*. Note, Those whom Christ feeds, he fills; so runs the promise (<sup><4379></sup>Psalms 37:19), *They shall be satisfied*. As there was enough for all, *they did all eat*, so there was enough for each, *they were filled*; though there was but little, there was enough, and that is as good as a feast. Note, The blessing of God can make a little go a great way; as, if God blasts what we have, *we eat, and have not enough*, <sup><4016></sup>Haggai 1:6.



2. There was to spare; *They took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full*, one basket for each apostle: thus what they gave they had again, and a great deal more with it; and they were so far from being nice, that they could make this broken meat serve another time, and be thankful. This was to manifest and magnify the miracle, and to show that the provision Christ makes for those who are his is not bare and scanty, but rich and plenteous; *bread enough, and to spare* (<sup><Q57></sup>Luke 15:17), an overflowing fulness. Elisha's multiplying the loaves was somewhat like this, but far short of it; and then it was said, *They shall eat and leave*, <sup><Q48></sup>2 Kings 4:43.

It is the same divine power, though exerted in an ordinary way, which multiplies *the seed sown in the ground* every year, and makes *the earth yield her increase*; so that what was brought out by handfuls, is brought home in sheaves. *This is the Lord's doing*; it is *by Christ* that all natural things consist, and *by the word of his power* that they are upheld.

## <sup><Q42></sup>MATTHEW 14:22-33

### JESUS WALKS ON THE SEA

We have here the story of another miracle which Christ wrought for the relief of his friends and followers, his *walking upon the water to his disciples*. In the foregoing miracle he acted as the Lord of nature, improving its powers for the supply of those who were in want; in this, he acted as the Lord of nature, correcting and controlling its powers for the succour of those who were in danger and distress. Observe,

**I.** Christ's dismissing of his disciples and *the multitude*, after he had fed them miraculously. He *constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side*, v. 22. St John gives a particular reason for the hasty breaking up of this assembly, because the people were so affected with the miracle of the loaves, that they were about *to take him by force, and make him a king* (<sup><Q15></sup>John 6:15); to avoid which, he immediately scattered the people, sent away the disciples, lest they should join with them, and he himself withdrew, <sup><Q15></sup>John 6:15.

When they had *sat down to eat and drink, they did not rise up to play*, but each went to his business.

1. Christ sent the people away. It intimates somewhat of solemnity in the dismissing of them; he sent them away with a blessing, with some parting words of caution, counsel, and comfort, which might abide with them.

2. He *constrained the disciples to go into a ship* first, for till they were gone the people would not stir. The disciples were loth to go, and would not have gone, if he had not *constrained* them. They were loth to go to sea without him. *If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.*

~~235~~ Exodus 33:15. They were loth to leave him alone, without any attendance, or any ship to wait for him; but they did it in pure obedience.

II. Christ's retirement hereupon (v. 23); *He went up into a mountain apart to pray.* Observe here,

1. That he was alone; *alone; he went apart into a solitary place, and was there all alone.* Though he had so much work to do with others, yet he chose sometimes to be alone, to set us an example. Those are not Christ's followers that do not care for being alone; that cannot enjoy themselves in solitude, when they have none else to converse with, none else to enjoy, but God and their own hearts.

2. That he was alone at prayer; that was his business in this solitude, to pray. Though Christ, as God, was Lord of all, and was prayed to, yet Christ, as Man, had *the form of a servant*, of a beggar, and prayed. Christ has herein set before us an example of secret prayer, and the performance of it secretly, according to the rule he gave, ~~406~~ Matthew 6:6. Perhaps in this mountain there was some private oratory or convenience, provided for such an occasion; it was usual among the Jews to have such. Observe, When the disciples went to sea, their Master went to prayer; when Peter was to be *sifted as wheat*, *Christ prayed for him.*

3. That he was long alone; *there he was when the evening was come*, and, for aught that appears, there he was till towards morning, *the fourth watch of the night.* The night came on, and it was a stormy, tempestuous night, yet he continued *instant in prayer.* Note, It is good, at least sometimes, upon special occasions, and when we find our hearts enlarged, to continue long in secret prayer, and to take full scope in *pouring out our hearts before the Lord.* We must not *restrain prayer*, ~~884~~ Job 15:4.

**III.** The condition that the poor disciples were in at this time: *Their ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves*, v. 24. We may observe here,

1. That they were got into the midst of the sea when the storm rose. We may have fair weather at the beginning of our voyage, and yet meet with storms before we arrive at the port we are bound for. Therefore, *let not him that girdeth on the harness boast as he that puts it off*, but after a long calm expect some storm or other.
2. The disciples were now where Christ sent them, and yet met with this storm. Had they been flying from their Master, and their work, as Jonah was, when he was arrested by the storm, it had been a dreadful one indeed; but they had a special command from their Master to go to sea at this time, and were going about their work. Note, It is no new thing for Christ's disciples to meet with storms in the way of their duty, and to be sent to sea then when their Master foresees a storm; but let them not take it unkindly; what he does they *know not now, but they shall know hereafter*, that Christ designs hereby to manifest himself with the more wonderful grace to them and for them.
3. It was a great discouragement to them now that they had not Christ with them, as they had formerly when they were in a storm; though he was then asleep indeed, yet he was soon awaked (~~4082~~ Matthew 8:24), but now he was not with them at all. Thus Christ used his disciples first to less difficulties, and then to greater, and so trains them up by degrees to live *by faith, and not by sense*.
4. Though *the wind was contrary*, and they were tossed with waves, yet being ordered by their Master *to the other side*, they did not tack about and come back again, but made the best of their way forward. Note, Though troubles and difficulties may disturb us in our duty, they must not drive us from it; but through the midst of them we must press forwards.

**IV.** Christ's approach to them in this condition (v. 25); and in this we have an instance,

1. Of his goodness, that he went unto them, as one that took cognizance of their case, and was under a concern about them, as a father about his children. Note, The extremity of the church and people of God is Christ's opportunity to visit them and appear for them: but he came not till *the*

*fourth watch*, toward three o'clock in the morning, for then the fourth watch began. It was *in the morning-watch* that the Lord appeared for Israel in the Red sea (<sup><024></sup>Exodus 14:24), so was this. *He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps*, but, when there is occasion, *walks in darkness* for their succour; helps, and that right early.

**2.** Of his power, that he *went unto them, walking on the sea*. This is a great instance of Christ's sovereign dominion over all the creatures; they are all under his feet, and at his command; they forget their natures, and change the qualities that we call essential. We need not enquire how this was done, whether by condensing the surface of the water (when God pleases, *the depths are congealed in the heart of the sea*, <sup><028></sup>Exodus 15:8), or by suspending the gravitation of his body, which was transfigured as he pleased; it is sufficient that it proves his divine power, for it is God's prerogative to *tread upon the waves of the sea* (<sup><008></sup>Job 9:8), as it is *to ride upon the wings of the wind*. He *that made the waters of the sea a wall for the redeemed of the Lord* (<sup><210></sup>Isaiah 51:10), here makes them a walk for the Redeemer himself, who, as Lord of all, appears with one foot on the sea and the other on dry land, <sup><002></sup>Revelation 10:2. The same power that made iron to swim (<sup><006></sup>2 Kings 6:6), did this. *What ailed thee, O thou sea?* <sup><015></sup>Psalms 114:5. *It was at the presence of the Lord. Thy way, O God, is in the sea*, (<sup><079></sup>Psalms 77:19). Note, Christ can take what way he pleases to save his people.

**V.** Here is an account of what passed between Christ and his distressed friends upon his approach.

**1.** Between him and all the disciples. We are here told,

**(1.)** How their fears were raised (v. 26); *When they saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; phantasma esti* — *It is an apparition*; so it might much better be rendered. it seems, the existence and appearance of spirits were generally believed in by all except the Sadducees, whose doctrine Christ had warned his disciples against; yet, doubtless, many supposed apparitions have been merely the creatures of men's own fear and fancy. These disciples said, *It is the Lord*; it can be no other. Note,

**[1.]** Even the appearances and approaches of deliverance are sometimes the occasions of trouble and perplexity to God's people, who are sometimes most frightened when they are least hurt; nay, when they are

most favoured, as the Virgin Mary, <sup><119></sup>Luke 1:29; <sup><116></sup>Exodus 3:6, 7. The comforts of *the Spirit of adoption* are introduced by the terrors of *the spirit of bondage*, <sup><115></sup>Romans 8:15.

[2.] The appearance of a spirit, or the fancy of it, cannot but be frightful, and strike a terror upon us, because of the distance of the world of spirits from us, the just quarrel good spirits have with us, and the inveterate enmity evil spirits have against us: see <sup><114></sup>Job 4:14, 15. The more acquaintance we have with God, the Father of spirits, and the more careful we are to keep ourselves in his love, the better able we shall be to deal with those fears.

[3.] The perplexing, disquieting fears of good people, arise from their mistakes and misapprehensions concerning Christ, his person, offices, and undertaking; the more clearly and fully we know his name, with the more assurance we shall trust in him, <sup><110></sup>Psalms 9:10.

[4.] A little thing frightens us in a storm. When *without are fightings*, no marvel that *within are fears*. Perhaps the disciples fancied it was some evil spirit that raised the storm. Note, Most of our danger from outward troubles arises from the occasion they give for inward trouble.

(2.) How these fears were silenced, v. 27. He straightway relieved them, by showing them their mistake; when they were wrestling *with the waves*, he delayed his succour for some time; but he hastened his succour against their fright, as much the more dangerous; he straightway laid that storm with his word, *Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid*.

[1.] He rectified their mistake, by making himself known to them, as Joseph to his brethren; *It is I*. He does not name himself, as he did to Paul, *I am Jesus*; for Paul as yet knew him not: but to these disciples it was enough to say, *It is I*; they *knew his voice, as his sheep* (<sup><104></sup>John 10:4), as Mary Magdalene, <sup><116></sup>John 20:16. They need not ask, *Who art thou, Lord? Art thou for us or for our adversaries?* They could say with the spouse, *It is the voice of my beloved*, <sup><118></sup>Song of Solomon 2:8; v. 2. True believers know it by a good token. It was enough to make them easy, to understand who it was they saw. Note, A right knowledge opens the door to true comfort, especially the knowledge of Christ.

[2.] He encouraged them against their fright; *It is I*, and therefore, *First, Be of good cheer; tharseite* — “*Be courageous; pluck up your spirits, and be*

courageous.” If Christ's disciples be not cheerful in a storm, it is their own fault, he would have them so. *Secondly, Be not afraid;*

1. “Be not afraid of me, now that you know it is I; surely you will not fear, for you know I mean you no hurt.” Note, Christ will not be a terror to those to whom he manifests himself; when they come to understand him aright, the terror will be over.

2. “*Be not afraid* of the tempest, of the winds and waves, though noisy and very threatening; fear them not, while I am so near you. I am he that concerns himself for you, and will not stand by and see you perish.” Note, Nothing needs be a terror to those that have Christ near them, and know he is theirs; no, not death itself.

2. Between him and Peter, v. 28-31, where observe,

(1.) Peter's courage, and Christ's countenancing that.

[1.] It was very bold in Peter, that he would venture to come to Christ *upon the water* (v. 28); *Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee*. Courage was Peter's master grace; and that made him so forward above the rest to express his love to Christ, though others perhaps loved him as well.

*First*, It is an instance of Peter's affection to Christ, that he desired to come to him. When he sees Christ, whom, doubtless, during the storm, he had many a time wished for, he is impatient to be with him. He does not say, *Bid me walk on the waters*, as desiring it for the miracle sake; but, *Bid me come to thee*, as desiring it for Christ's sake; “Let me come to thee, no matter how.” Note, True love will break through fire and water, if duly called to it, to come to Christ. Christ was coming to them, to succour and deliver them. *Lord*, said Peter, *bid me come to thee*. Note, When Christ is coming towards us in a way of mercy, we must go forth to meet him in a way of duty; and herein we must be willing and bold to venture with him and venture for him. Those that would have benefit by Christ as a Saviour, must thus by faith come to him. Christ had been now, for some time, absent, and hereby it appears why he absented himself; it was to endear himself so much the more to his disciples at his return, to make it highly seasonable and doubly acceptable. Note, When, for a small amount, Christ has forsaken his people, his returns are welcome, and most affectionately embraced; when gracious souls, after long seeking, find their Beloved at last, they *hold him, and will not let him go*, <sup>2004</sup> Song of Solomon 3:4.

*Secondly*, It is an instance of Peter's caution and due observance of the will of Christ, that he would not come without a warrant. Not, "If it be thou, I will come;" but *If it be thou, bid me come*. Note, The boldest spirits must wait for a call to hazardous enterprizes, and we must not rashly and presumptuously thrust ourselves upon them. Our will to services and sufferings is interpreted, not willingness, but wilfulness, if it have not a regard to the will of Christ, and be not regulated by his call and command. Such extraordinary warrants as this to Peter we are not now to expect, but must have recourse to the general rules of the word, in the application of which to particular cases, with the help of providential hints, *wisdom is profitable to direct*.

*Thirdly*, It is an instance of Peter's faith and resolution, that he ventured upon the water when Christ bid him. To quit the safety of the ship, and throw himself into the jaws of death, to despise the threatening waves he so lately dreaded, argued a very strong dependence upon the power and word of Christ. What difficulty or danger could stand before such a faith and such a zeal?

[2.] It was very kind and condescending in Christ, that he was pleased to own him in it, v. 29. He might have condemned the proposal as foolish and rash; nay, and as proud and assuming; "Shall Peter pretend to do as his Master does?" But Christ knew that it came from a sincere and zealous affection to him, and graciously accepted of it. Note, Christ is well pleased with the expressions of his people's love, though mixed with manifold infirmities, and makes the best of them.

*First*, He bid him *come*. When the Pharisees asked a sign, they had not only a repulse, but a reproof, for it, because they did it with a design to tempt Christ; when Peter asked a sign, he had it, because he did it with a resolution to trust Christ. The gospel call is, "*Come, come, to Christ; venture all in his hand, and commit the keeping of your souls to him; venture through a stormy sea, a troublesome world, to Jesus Christ.*"

*Secondly*, He bore him out when he did come; Peter *walked upon the water*. The communion of true believers with Christ is represented by their being *quicken'd with him, raised up with him, made to sit with him*, (~~405~~ Ephesians 2:5, 6), and being *crucified with him*, (~~421~~ Galatians 2:20). Now, methinks, it is represented in this story by their *walking with him on the water*. Through the strength of Christ we are borne up above the world, enabled to trample upon it, kept from sinking into it, from being

overwhelmed by it, obtain a victory over it (1 John v. 4), by faith in Christ's victory (<sup><BIB></sup>John 16:33), and with him are *crucified to it*, <sup><BIB></sup>Galatians 6:14. See blessed Paul walking upon the water with Jesus, and *more than a conqueror through him*, and treading upon all the threatening waves, as *not able to separate him from the love of Christ*, <sup><BIB></sup>Romans 8:35, etc. Thus the sea of the world is become like a sea of glass, congealed so as to bear; and they that have gotten the victory, stand upon it and sing, <sup><BIB></sup>Revelation 15:2, 3.

He walked upon the water, not for diversion or ostentation, but to go to Jesus; and in that he was thus wonderfully borne up. Note, When *our souls are following hard after God*, then it is that his *right hand upholds us*; it was David's experience, <sup><BIB></sup>Psalms 63:8. Special supports are promised, and are to be expected, only in spiritual pursuits. When God bears his Israel upon eagles' wings, it is *to bring them to himself* (<sup><BIB></sup>Exodus 19:4); nor can we ever come to Jesus, unless we be upheld by his power; it is in his own strength that we wrestle with him, that we reach after him, that we *press forward toward the mark*, being *kept by the power of God*, which power we must depend upon, as Peter when he *walked upon the water*: and there is no danger of sinking while *underneath are the everlasting arms*.

(2.) Here is Peter's cowardice, and Christ's reproving him and succouring him. Christ bid him come, not only that he might walk upon the water, and so know Christ's power, but that he might sink, and so know his own weakness; for as he would encourage his faith, so he would check his confidence, and make him ashamed of it. Observe then,

[1.] Peter's great fear (v. 30); *He was afraid*. The strongest faith and the greatest courage have a mixture of fear. Those that can say, *Lord, I believe*; must say, *Lord, help my unbelief*. Nothing but *perfect love* will quite *cast out fear*. Good men often fail in those graces which they are most eminent for, and which they have then in exercise; to show that they have not yet attained. Peter was very stout at first, but afterwards his heart failed him. The lengthening out of a trial discovers the weakness of faith.

Here is, *First*, The cause of this fear; *He saw the wind boisterous*. While Peter kept his eye fixed upon Christ, and upon his word and power, he *walked upon the water* well enough; but when he took notice withal of the danger he was in, and observed how *the floods lift up their waves*, then he feared. Note, Looking at difficulties with an eye of sense more than at



precepts and promises with an eye of faith is at the bottom of all our inordinate fears, both as to public and personal concerns. Abraham was strong in faith, because he *considered not his own body* (<sup><408></sup>Romans 4:19); he minded not the discouraging improbabilities which the promise lay under, but kept his eye on God's power; and so, *against hope, believed in hope*, v. 18. Peter, *when he saw the wind boisterous*, should have remembered what he had seen (<sup><408></sup>Matthew 8:27), when the winds and the sea obeyed Christ; but *therefore we fear continually every day*, because we *forget the Lord our Maker*, <sup><281></sup>Isaiah 51:12, 13.

*Secondly*, The effect of this fear; *He began to sink*. While faith kept up, he kept up above water: but when faith staggered, *he began to sink*. Note, The sinking of our spirits is owing to the weakness of our faith; we are upheld (but it is as we are saved) *through faith* (<sup><401></sup>1 Peter 1:5); and therefore, when our *souls are cast down and disquieted*, the sovereign remedy is, *to hope in God*, <sup><194></sup>Psalms 43:5. It is probable that Peter, being bred a fisherman, could swim very well (<sup><401></sup>John 21:7); and perhaps he trusted in part to that, when he cast himself into the sea; if he could not walk, he could swim; but Christ let him begin to sink, to show him that it was *Christ's right hand and his holy arm*, not any skill of his own, that was his security. It was Christ's great mercy to him, that, upon the failing of his faith, he did not leave him to sink outright, to sink to the *bottom as a stone* (<sup><135></sup>Exodus 15:5), but gave him time to cry, *Lord, save me*. Such is the care of Christ concerning true believers; though weak, they do but begin to sink! A man is never sunk, never undone, till he is in hell. Peter *walked* as he *believed*; to him, as to others, the rule held good, *According to your faith be it unto you*.

*Thirdly*, The remedy he had recourse to in this distress, the old, tried, approved remedy, and that was prayer: he cried, *Lord, save me*. Observe,

1. The manner of his praying; it is fervent and importunate; *He cried*. Note, When faith is weak, prayer should be strong. Our Lord Jesus has taught us in the day of our fear to *offer up strong cries*, <sup><387></sup>Hebrews 5:7. Sense of danger will make us cry, sense of duty and dependence on God should make us cry to him.
2. The matter of his prayer was pertinent and to the purpose; *He cried, Lord, save me*. Christ is the great Saviour, he came to save; those that would be saved, must not only *come* to him, but *cry* to him for

salvation; but we are never brought to this, till we find ourselves sinking; sense of need will drive us to him.

[2.] Christ's great favour to Peter, in this fright. Though there was a mixture of presumption with Peter's faith in his first adventure, and of unbelief with his faith in his after-fainting, yet Christ did not cast him off; for,

*First*, He saved him; *he answered him with the saving strength of his right hand* (~~1806~~ Psalm 20:6), for immediately *he stretched forth his hand, and caught him*. Note, Christ's time to save is, when we sink (~~1808~~ Psalm 18:4-7): he helps at a dead lift. Christ's hand is still stretched out to all believers, to keep them from sinking. Those whom he hath once apprehended as his own, and hath snatched as *brands out of the burning*, he will catch out of the water too. Though he may seem to have left his hold, he doth but seem to do so, for they shall *never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand*, ~~1809~~ John 10:28. Never fear, he will hold his own. Our deliverance from our own fears, which else would overwhelm us, is owing to the hand of his power and grace, ~~1804~~ Psalm 34:4.

*Secondly*, He rebuked him; for as many as he loves and saves, he reproves and chides; *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* Note,

1. Faith may be true, and yet weak; at first, like a grain of mustard-seed. Peter had faith enough to bring him upon the water, yet, because not enough to carry him through, Christ tells him he had but *little*.
2. Our discouraging doubts and fears are all owing to the weakness of our faith: *therefore we doubt*, because we are but *of little faith*. It is the business of faith to resolve doubts, the doubts of sense, in a stormy day, so as even then to keep the head above water. Could we but believe more, we should doubt less.
3. The weakness of our faith, and the prevalence of our doubts, are very displeasing to our Lord Jesus. It is true, he doth not cast off weak believers, but it is as true, that he is not pleased with weak faith, no, not in those that are nearest to him. *Wherefore didst thou doubt?* What reason was there for it? Note, Our doubts and fears would soon vanish before a strict enquiry into the cause of them; for, all things considered, there is no good reason why Christ's disciples should be of

a doubtful mind, no, not in a stormy day, because he is ready to them a *very present Help*.

**VI.** The *ceasing of the storm*, v. 32. When Christ was come into the ship, they were presently at the shore. Christ *walked upon the water* till he came to the ship, and then went into that, when he could easily have walked to the shore; but when ordinary means are to be had, miracles are not to be expected. Though Christ needs not instruments for the doing of his work, he is pleased to use them. Observe, when Christ came into the ship, Peter came in with him. Companions with Christ in his patience, shall be companions in his kingdoms, ~~609~~ Revelation 1:9. Those that walk with him shall reign with him; those that are exposed, and that suffer with him, shall triumph with him.

*When they were come into the ship, immediately the storm ceased*, for it had done its work, its trying work. He that has *gathered the winds into his fists, and bound the waters in a garment*, is the same that *ascended and descended*; and his word even *stormy winds fulfil*, ~~488~~ Psalm 148:8. When Christ comes into a soul, he makes winds and storms to cease there, and commands peace. Welcome Christ, and the *noise of her waves will soon be quelled*. The way to be still is, to know that he is God, that he is the *Lord with us*.

**VII.** The adoration paid to Christ hereupon (v. 33); *They that were in the ship came and worshipped him, and said, Of a truth, thou art the Son of God*. Two good uses they made of this distress, and this deliverance.

**1.** It was a confirmation of their faith in Christ, and abundantly convinced them that *the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him*; for none but the world's Creator could multiply the loaves, none but its Governor could tread upon the waters of the sea; they therefore yield to the evidence, and make confession of their faith; *Thou truly art the Son of God*. They knew before that he was the Son of God, but now they know it better. Faith, after a conflict with unbelief, is sometimes the more active, and gets to greater degrees of strength by being exercised. Now they *know it of a truth*. Note, It is good for us to know more and more of *the certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed*, ~~408~~ Luke 1:4. Faith *then* grows, when it arrives at a full assurance, when it sees clearly, and saith, *Of a truth*.

**2.** They took occasion from it to *give him the glory due unto his name*. They not only owned that great truth, but were suitable affected by it; *they*

worshipped Christ. Note, When Christ manifests his glory for us, we ought to return it to him (<sup><4815></sup>Psalm 50:15); *I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.* Their worship and adoration of Christ were thus expressed, *Of a truth thou art the Son of God.* Note, The matter of our creed may and must be made the matter of our praise. Faith is the proper principle of worship, and worship the genuine product of faith. *He that comes to God must believe;* and he that *believes* in God, will come, <sup><5016></sup>Hebrews 9:6.

## <sup><4148></sup>MATTHEW 14:34-36

### THE PEOPLE OF GENNESARET FLOCK TO CHRIST

We have here an account of miracles by wholesale, which Christ wrought on the other side of the water, in the land of Gennesaret. Whithersoever Christ went, he was doing good. Gennesaret was a tract of land that lay between Bethsaida and Capernaum, and either gave the name to, or took the name from, this sea, which is called (<sup><4011></sup>Luke 5:1) *The Lake of Gennesaret*; it signifies the valley of branches. Observe here,

**I.** The forwardness and faith of *the men of that place.* These were more noble than the Gergesenes, their neighbours, who were borderers upon the same lake. Those *besought Christ to depart* from them, they had no occasion for him; these besought him to help them, they had need of him. Christ reckons it the greatest honour we can do him, to make use of him. Now here we are told,

**1.** How *the men of that place* were brought to Christ; they *had knowledge of him.* It is probable that his miraculous passage over the sea, which they that were in the ship would industriously spread the report of, might help to make way for his entertainment in those parts; and perhaps it was one thing Christ intended in it, for he has great reaches in what he does. This they had knowledge of, and of the other miracles Christ had wrought, and therefore they flocked to him. Note, They that know Christ's name, will make their application to him: if Christ were better known, he would not be neglected as he is; he is trusted as far as he is known.

They *had knowledge of him*, that is, of his being among them, and that he would be put awhile among them. Note, The discerning of the day of our opportunities is a good step toward the improvement of it. This was *the*

condemnation of the world, that Christ was in the world, and the world knew him not (<sup><411D></sup>John 1:10); Jerusalem knew him not (<sup><409D></sup>Luke 19:42), but there were some who, when he was among them, *had knowledge of him*. It is better to know that there *is* a prophet among us than that there *has been* one, <sup><36E5></sup>Ezekiel 2:5.

**2.** How they brought others to Christ, by giving notice to their neighbours of Christ's being come into those parts; *They sent out into all that country*. Note, those that have got the knowledge of Christ themselves, should do all they can to bring others acquainted with him too. We must not eat these spiritual morsels alone; there is in Christ enough for us all, so that there is nothing got by monopolizing. When we have opportunities of getting good to our souls, we should bring as many as we can to share with us. More than we think of would close with opportunities, if they were but called upon and invited to them. *They sent into their own country*, because it was their own, and they desired the welfare of it. Note, We can no better testify our love to our country than by promoting and propagating the knowledge of Christ in it. Neighbourhood is an advantage of doing good which must be improved. Those that are near to us, we should contrive to do something for, at least by our example, to bring them near to Christ.

**3.** What their business was with Christ; not only, perhaps not chiefly, if at all, to be taught, but to have their sick healed; *They brought unto him all that were diseased*. If love to Christ and his doctrine will not bring them to him, yet self-love would. Did we but rightly seek our own things, the things of our own peace and welfare, we should seek the things of Christ. We should do him honour, and please him, by deriving grace and righteousness from him. Note, Christ is the proper Person to bring the diseased to; whither should they go but to the Physician, to *the Sun of Righteousness, that hath healing under his wings?*

**4.** How they made their application to him; *They besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment*, v. 36. They applied themselves to him,

**(1.)** With great importunity; they besought him. Well may we beseech to be healed, when God by his ministers beseecheth us that we will be healed. Note, The greatest favours and blessings are to be obtained from Christ by entreaty; *Ask, and it shall be given*.

(2.) With great humility; they came to him as those that were sensible of their distance, humbly beseeching him to help them; and their desiring to touch the hem of his garment, intimates that they thought themselves unworthy that he should take any particular notice of them, that he should so much as speak to their case, much less touch them for their cure; but they will look upon it as a great favour, if he will give them leave to *touch the hem of his garment*. The eastern nations show respect to their princes, by kissing their sleeve, or skirt.

(3.) With great assurance of the all-sufficiency of his power, not doubting but that they should be healed, even by touching the hem of his garment; that they should receive abundant communications from him by the smallest token of symbol of communion with him. They did not expect the formality of striking his hand over the place or persons diseased, as Naaman did (<sup><1751></sup>2 Kings 5:11); but they were sure that there was in him such an overflowing fulness of healing virtue, that *they* could not fail of a cure, who were but admitted near him. It was in this country and neighbourhood that the woman with the bloody issue was cured by *touching the hem of his garment*, and was commended for her faith (<sup><1001></sup>Matthew 9:20-22); and thence, probably, they took occasion to ask this. Note, The experiences of others in their attendance upon Christ may be of use both to direct and to encourage us in our attendance on him. It is good using those means and methods which others before us have sped well in the use of.

**II.** The fruit and success of this their application to Christ. It was not in vain that these seed of Jacob sought him, for *as many as touched, were made perfectly whole*. Note,

**1.** Christ's cures are perfect cures. Those that he heals, he heals perfectly. He doth not do his work by halves. Though spiritual healing be not perfected at first, yet, doubtless, *he that has begun the good work will perform it*, <sup><1006></sup>Philippians 1:6.

**2.** There is an abundance of healing virtue in Christ for all that apply themselves to him, be they ever so many. That *precious ointment* which was poured on his head, *ran down to the skirts of his garment*, <sup><1132></sup>Psalms 133:2. The least of Christ's institutions, like the hem of his garment, is replenished with the overflowing fulness of his grace, and he is able to *save to the uttermost*.

**3.** The healing virtue that is in Christ, is put forth for the benefit of those that by a true and lively faith touch him. Christ is in heaven, but his word is nigh us, and he himself in that word. When we mix faith with the word, apply it to ourselves, depend upon it, and submit to its influences and commands, then we touch the hem of Christ's garment. It is but thus touching, and we are made whole. On such easy terms are spiritual cures offered by him, that he may truly be said to heal *freely*; so that if our souls die of their wounds, it is not owing to our Physician, it is not for want of skill or will in him; but it is purely owing to ourselves. He *could* have healed us, he *would* have healed us, but we *would not be healed*; so that our blood will lie upon our own heads.