

Matthew 14-15:20 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

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We are in -

II. JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY	3-18
<i>K. John the Baptist's Fate • 14:1-12</i>	

¹ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus ² and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." ³ For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. ⁴ Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." ⁵ And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. ⁶ But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. ⁷ Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸ So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." ⁹ And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. ¹⁰ So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. ¹¹ And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother.

This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great.

Upon Herod the Great's death, Israel was broken up into different regions and put under the rule of his sons.

Herod Antipas was made the governor of Galilee and had his capital at Tiberias on the western shore of the Lake.

Word had reached him of Jesus' work in the area and how all kinds of miracles are being done by Him.

Herod was spooked by this because a short while before, he'd had John the Baptist executed – and was convinced Jesus was nothing more than John risen from the dead come back to torment him.

Herod had good reason to fear because he was the one responsible for John's death, even though he knew John as a prophet of God.

It happened like this –

Herod Antipas married soon after his father's death, but while visiting his brother Herod Philip in Rome, he was seduced by his sister-in-law, Philip's

wife, Herodias, who also happened to be his Antipas' niece!
Herodias lusted for power and wanted to rule, so she threw in her lot with Antipas, thinking it would secure her a throne.

Herod Antipas' wife left him and Herodias and Herod shacked up in an adulterous, & incestuous affair.

Along with wicked Herodias came her daughter, Salome, a 17 year old beauty.

One day while throwing a huge feast for his officials & underlings, Salome danced an enticing little number that inspired Herod to make a rash promise – he was so pleased, whatever she asked for, he would grant her.

Daughter went to mama and consulted with her. Herodias asked for the head of John the Baptist, who'd been arrested and lay in Herod's dungeon. [at Machaerus]

John had been arrested because he'd boldly denounced Herod's illicit affair with Herodias.

While John's preaching against the union made Herod feel guilty, it only inflamed Herodias' rage; John was standing in the way of her bid for power and she would not tolerate it.

Mark tells us that she "had it in" for John and was pressing Herod to kill him.

But Herod had had many interviews with John and had come to regard him as a genuine prophet of God.

Herodias knew Herod could not back down from a publicly made vow to her daughter, so John was beheaded.

Now, Herod is sure that Jesus is just John risen from the dead and working incognito, raising a support base from which he will eventually come after Herod.

The reason Jesus hadn't come up on Herod's radar screen until now is because Herod had been away at Rome and had been consumed with hostilities with his ex-father in law, who'd attacked some of Herod's outposts.

12 Then [John's] disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Since Jesus & John were cousins, and since John's disciples knew that John was the forerunner of Jesus, as soon as they'd taken care of matters with John's body, they went to Jesus to tell him what had happened.

If John had been martyred, Jesus needed to be warned!

But there was another reason why they went immediately to Jesus – they were distressed over the loss of their teacher, their leader.

They rightly reasoned that the best place to find comfort was with Jesus.

When you're distressed, when you're hurting, where do you go?

Do you go to Jesus *first*, or do you go someplace else?

A couple times now, I've had people tell me after I've been gone for a couple weeks, that they had a problem come up and the first thing they did was call me – but I wasn't around and wouldn't be for several days.

So, not knowing what else to do, they took their need to the Lord, and found the answer they were looking for. They were telling me because they

wanted to share the lesson they'd learned – that before you take your problem to someone or someplace else, you take it to Him first, and give Him an opportunity to work.

I'm not saying there's something wrong with asking others for advice, counsel, or help.

I praise God for spiritually mature and wise brothers & sisters who can help. But we need to take our problems and needs to God first, and to give Him some real time to speak to us and work in our situation before we go to others.

Really, we ought to ask Him for release to go to others *after* seeking Him.

Many Christians are missing out on seeing the miraculous hand of God work in their lives because they never give Him a chance to work.

George Muller is a great example of a man who determined that he would have God provide for every need and not look to man.

Muller was a hard living sinner who came to faith in Christ and a radical lifestyle of dependence on the Lord.

He opened a string of orphanages in England and instead of relying on the usual means of supporting them, which was through publicizing their needs and appealing to benefactors and Christians in the churches to take on their support, Muller instead made it his solemn commitment to support them and see them provided for by nothing but prayer.

He sent out no newsletters or lists of needs!

Instead, on a daily basis, often several times a day, Muller would take the list of needs given him by the house directors, and would lay them before the Lord and ask God to provide for each need specifically.

It was Muller's testimony that over the years they operated those orphanages, every single need was met by the Lord – often through miraculous means.

It was not uncommon for the groceries needed for the meal the children had already sat down for, to appear on the steps outside the kitchen door as the children, unknown to them, were saying grace at the table.

I'm not saying that Muller's conviction our commitment must be ours.

What I am saying is that we ought to learn from his example and what we see here, and go *first* to Jesus when we're in need, when we're hurting, when grief is great and the pain hard.

L. Jesus' Mighty Power 14:13-36

1. Multitude healed & fed • 14:13-21

13 When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

Jesus & John were cousins, born just 6 months apart, and had known each other growing up.

Surely Jesus was pained at the death of John, and needed some time alone to process his grief, so He took off, it says, to a deserted place by Himself.

But the crowds of sick and needy were still thick and we're going to let Him get away that easily. They came watched what direction His boat went in, then ran around the shore in the same direction till they found him.

14 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

Jesus had wanted some time alone – really, He needed it, but there was an even more pressing need – there were so many sick.

His grief, great as it was, was small compared to the suffering being experienced by the multitude.

So Jesus deferred His own needs, knowing He'd be able to get some time alone later, and went to work once again healing those who came.

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." 17 And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 He said, "Bring them here to Me."

We took a look at this story of the feeding of the 5000 last Sunday, but we looked at one small part of it and the lesson it teaches.

Tonight we want to consider its main lesson!

Since this was a unsettled region they were in, and it was getting late, the disciples became concerned over what the crowd would have to eat for dinner.

They knew Jesus needed to wrap things up and send the people home, or at least to one of the nearest villages so they could get food.

When they suggested this to Jesus, He replied by telling them to feed the crowd.

They tell Him they only have a meager amount of food, barely enough for the 13 of them; 5 loaves of bread and a couple fish.

Now, don't get the idea they were *suggesting* anything – they were stating the impossibility of feeding the crowd.

It was this admission of their own inability and insufficiency Jesus was waiting for.

Once stated, He told them to bring the little they had, and give it to Him.

19 Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. 20 So they all ate and were filled [stuffed], and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. 21 Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This means there were between 7 & 10,000, not just 5000!

This is a huge crowd and would have required a lot of food.

There was a lot – in fact, there were 12 baskets left-over.

It was these 12 baskets that got across the main lesson Jesus was teaching the disciples!

There were 12 disciples, and each would have been holding a basket.

Do you see what's going on here?

Jesus had told them to minister to the needs of the crowd – needs by the way,

they had brought to Jesus and told Him how to handle it!

But then Jesus had said – “No – YOU guys take care of it.”

“I’ve taken care of their sicknesses through my healing power. You now take care of their hunger.”

They replied, “We don’t have the resources – all we have is this puny little bit.”

Jesus said, “Bring you puny little bit to me.”

Then He blessed, it, broke what they brought, and gave it back to them – and they, going out with the little they brought to Jesus that he blessed and broke and gave, satisfied every one of those 10,000 – and the 5 loaves and 2 fish for 12 disciples turned into a whole basket full of food in *each* of their hands.

Jesus was teaching them an important lesson.

You see, it wouldn’t be much longer till He would be gone from them and they would be charged with the mission of carrying on His work.

They would look at the need of an entire world and see themselves as totally insufficient to meet that need – but if they would just bring themselves to God, offering their puny little selves, God would bless them, break them, and then give them in such a way the needs would be met and satisfied.

Those 12 disciples, standing there each with a basket in his hand, would realize that their little, in the hands of Jesus, is made much.

It’s not about our *ability*, but *His*!

It’s not our ability, but our *availability*, bringing ourselves to God as the disciples brought their pitiful supply and simply gave it to Jesus.

I think there’s another lesson in the 12 baskets.

In the Jewish mind, 12 was the number associated with the tribes of Israel.

While they looked out over a vast crowd of folk, some 10,000 strong, the 12 baskets spoke of the fact that Jesus could have feed the whole nation if need be. His power is limitless.

Now, we would think that after seeing a miracle like this, they would have been forever set and never would have doubted Jesus ever again.

Such was not the case – and the next story shows it.

2. Walking on water • 14:22-33

22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

This was our passage two weeks ago, so I’ll be more summary with it tonight.

As soon as the feeding was done, Jesus *compelled, urged, demanded* that the disciples get into the boat they’d used to get there, and sail to the other side of the Lake.

Then He dismissed the crowd, telling them His ministry to them was complete – they must go home.

Then He went up onto one of the many hills that surround the Lake of Galilee for that time alone He needed. While there, He prayed.

24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

The Lake of Galilee is 8 miles across at its widest and it's not uncommon for fierce winds off the Mediterranean to run down out of the western canyons and onto the surface of the lake, whipping it into a churning tempest of waves that splash into the small boats that sail it. That's what happened here.

Mark tells us that Jesus was watching them from the hill and was well aware of their distress.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

The 4th watch is from 3 to 6 a.m., which means the disciples had been trying to cross the lake for hours!

These were tough men, and well-versed in the handling of such craft, but at this point, they'd be exhausted, and by now, fearful.

Being in the middle of the lake, and nearly out of strength, if the ship capsized, which looked very likely, there would be no way they'd have the strength to swim for shore.

So, there they are, digging in with the oars with as much strength as they have left, when they see a sight that freaks them out – They see a figure walking across the waves toward them.

26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled [the word means 'freaked out!'], saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

They shrieked in total panic. You see, they well knew the sailors' lore of how the spirit of the deep would come to a ship and drown its occupants.

They thought this was it – the end!

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

I love this – Jesus' words are not rebuke – they're cheery words of encouragement. Matthew says they were freaked out; Jesus said, "Cheer up!"

They said, "It's a ghost!" Jesus said, "It's Me!"

They cried out in fear. Jesus told them *not* to be afraid.

And all of a sudden, you sense this pause in the story; like a moment of hesitation as the disciples quickly process what's going on.

Suddenly they remember it was Jesus who'd commanded them to get in to the boat and sail to the other side.

Peter was the first one to grasp what was going on, that Jesus had actually engineered this whole thing and that as long as they were obeying Him, no real harm could befall them.

So he decided to test his new found insight and asked a question . . .

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter grasped the lesson Jesus meant to teach them, but as all too often happens with us, his moment of insight was quickly followed up with a reminder of his imperfection.

The truth we grasp today, may tomorrow be obscured by our circumstances.

We took a good look at this in our study two Sundays ago.

32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

The wind ceased the moment they got into the boat because the storm had served its purpose and there was no longer any need for it.

The disciples realized that everything that had just happened to them over the last hours was designed by God and effected through Christ.

It's one thing to see the miracle of the loaves and fishes – but another to realize that the weather is in Jesus' hands!

They came and worshiped Him, declaring He was the Son of God.

The lesson Jesus wanted them to learn through this storm was that He is no less present with them, & His power no less real when He is not *physically* among them.

They needed this because soon He'd be taken from them permanently.

3. Healings abound • 14:34-36

34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret.

35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, 36 and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched *it* were made perfectly well.

Gennesaret is a plain on the NW shore of Galilee.

When Jesus stepped off the boat, some of the people recognized Him and immediately the word spread He'd come.

So the sick lined up, presumably sitting on the ground, and as Jesus walked by, they held out their hands so the tassels that hung from the hem of His robe would touch them.

The mention of the fringe that hung from Jesus' hem here in v. 36 is an interesting insight into Jesus.

In Numbers 15:38–41 & Deuteronomy 22:12, Jewish men were told to attach tassels to the hem of their garments as a reminder of their call to be a holy people.

That Jesus wore such a garment, when they had really gone out of fashion in that time, indicates His complete obedience to the Word of God and His willingness to defy the fashionable trends of the day in order that He might please God, rather than appear hip to man. [Expand: Modesty]

Interesting that in His diligent obedience, even His garment became the means of the healing of those in need of the touch of God!

[Fishhooks pins]

M. Opposition From Jerusalem • 15:1-20

1. The Pharisees' challenge • 15:1-2

1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ² “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

Note where these guys were from – Jerusalem!

Word of Jesus hasn't just been sounded in Herod's palace at Tiberius; it's finally reached the Jewish capital & power center of Jerusalem.

The local Pharisees in Galilee had finally been able to convince their elitist brothers in the south that Jesus posed a dangerous threat.

So they came with a challenge, probably thinking that since they were from Jerusalem, this country bumpkin would quickly back down.

If so, they had another thing coming!

Their big issue was to criticize Jesus' disciples because of their hygiene!

By attacking *the disciples*, they were saying Jesus was *disqualified*.

If He couldn't make sure His official followers would comply with something as basic as washing their hands before eating, then, well, what kind of a teacher could He be – after all?

[People do this today with us; they attack us and our behavior and use it as a criticism of Christianity.]

In their minds, a guy who doesn't have the fundamental issue of ritual washings down can't possibly know anything about the deeper secrets of the Kingdom of God!!!

This was like math professors from USC asking the head of the Physics department at UCLA why the physics students at UCLA don't know what 2 + 2 equals?

But these arrogant Pharisees had made one crucial blunder in their reasoning.

Their question, which was meant to belittle Jesus, was based, not on the actual Law of God, but merely on the traditions of man, and Jesus nails them on it!

Look at v. 2 again –

2 “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

The rabbis had developed an elaborate ritual for the washing of hands.

Have you ever seen how a surgeon washes his/her hands prior to surgery?

That is something akin to what they did. It was a silly waste of time and water.

2. Jesus' answer • 15:3-9

3 He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?”

They had admitted washing hands was merely a tradition of the elders, which in their minds they had elevated to the place of scripture.

But now Jesus shows them that their traditions had replaced scripture.

In keeping their traditions, they in fact *violated* the commands of God!

4 For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ ; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever

profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”—⁶ then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

The 4th Commandment calls for the honoring of parents and this includes a commitment to their welfare, taking care of them and providing for them when they’re in need, if one has the capacity to do so.

But the Pharisees had developed a tradition that allowed them to dance around obedience to the 4th Commandment.

They said that any money or property they had that they had dedicated to God was exempt from using to support their parents.

This then degenerated into a whole system by which a Pharisee could dedicate his money to the Lord for a season, avoid using it to support his parents when they were in need, then, once they were gone, redeem, or reclaim it for their own use.

These guys had neatly danced around the clear command of God by adding their traditions.

7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:⁸ ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.’⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, a passage that would have been a stinging rebuke to the Pharisees since they decried the people of Isaiah’s day for their religious hypocrisy – but Jesus said Isaiah was talking about *them*.

3. Turning opposition to opportunity, Pt. I • 15:10-20

The Pharisees had made an issue of ritual washings and wanted to criticize Jesus over His and His followers practice.

Jesus uses their opposition as an opportunity to teach about real cleanliness.

10 When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, “Hear and understand:¹¹ Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”

God is far more concerned with what’s on the inside, what occupies our heart and minds, than whether or not we’re doing the religiously approved set of outward rituals.

12 Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”¹³ But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.¹⁴ Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

When Jesus said vs. 10-11, the disciples were watching the Pharisees from Jerusalem and saw the look of outrage on their faces.

These were guys you did not want as enemies and they cautioned Jesus.

But His reply was a nonchalant, “So what?!”

“They are nothing but blind guides, and anyone who follows them is also

blind.”

Jesus says, “In time, every person will be discovered for what he/she truly is.
Those who are mere pretenders will be exposed.”

15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.”
Meaning the parable of v. 11, about what defiles.

16 So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. ²⁰ These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

Jesus gives them a simple lesson in biology and theology.

When you eat something, it goes through the body and is eliminated.

Such things don't affect your standing before God, despite what the Pharisees said.

What God is far more concerned with is what on the inside of us, what's in our hearts, what occupies our thoughts, what motivates us.

Are far greater determiner of our intimacy with God is what comes out of, rather than goes in to our mouths.

What one talks about, the words that come out of the mouth are a reflection of what's in the heart.

In this age when so many are so concerned with diets and have made what one eats a criteria for gauging spiritual maturity, what Jesus says here is crucial.

Of far greater importance than your diet is your conversation.