

Several years ago... when my wife and I attended pastor's conferences at Hume Lake Christian Camp (every October)... we developed a close bond with several pastors and missionaries. ... These were men and women who believed the Bible... who had good ministries... some of them had long and successful ministries. ... These were evangelical pastors and their wives of larger churches and smaller churches... as well as those who had significant ministries overseas.

Hume Lake always provided big-name conference speakers for us to be inspired by. ... But what I always found most refreshing... was sitting down at meals and times between conference sessions... have having honest... deep... raw conversations... of things that you seldom hear pastors discuss. In fact... a person who is not in full-time ministry might even wonder if such topics were something pastors should discuss.

For example... would you think it would be right... if we discussed our personal doubts...? How about our questions about Christianity? What about our faith...? Our ministries...? Our careers...?

If anyone within the sound of my voice this morning is OK... with any of that... then let me invite you to be as a fly-on-the-wall... to one of these conversations... late at night... around a table in the dining hall... at Hume Lake.

One man says to the group... "When I hear the story of Job... it ticks me off. Oh... sure... Job at the end gets money back... and he has a family given back to him... but once you lose a child... you never replace that child. And the fact that Job lost his entire family... that part of this was

because of some cosmic argument between God and Satan with Job being the pawn--that story... if you really think about it... makes me angry."

Another pastor said... "When I read the book of Jeremiah... I get depressed. I get frustrated. I get discouraged. After all... here's a man who gave years of his life to God... and from a human standard... there was no demonstration of success."

Another pastor jumps-in, "I was in a church for ten years; the church was growing; it was prospering. Six months before I resigned... the chairman of the board of deacons came to me and said, 'My goal is to get you out of here.' When I resigned... that same man came to me... and he said, 'I will give you credit for one thing - you're a man of integrity. You have always spoken the truth... and you could have split the church over what has happened in the last few months. And if you had... you would have won. But you didn't do it because you were a man of integrity.'

"That happened two years ago. Since then I have sent out resumes and talked to churches about being their pastor... and not one church has invited me to candidate. I'm angry because I'm out of work since I'm a man of integrity."

From this springs-up a host of battle stories... from pastors (and their wives) eager to tell their own account of how they too were treated horrible – because they did the right thing. Every pastor has his own story to tell and if it were a competition – no one would win! All of them are just as bad... and each of these difficult and impossible predicaments had the same affect. ... The pastor and pastor's wife suffered a period of doubt.

Of course... pastors aren't alone. In general... MANY believers have gone through a sustained period of doubt... that rises from an injustice done against us. I am probably talking to several of you who have been through it... and know exactly what I am talking about. Some of you may be in such a period of doubt right now... because a wrong has happened in your life... and God has seemed to allowed it... if not caused it.

Our passage today opens with such a picture. Evil wins out over a person – because he did the right thing. ... And then Matthew takes us to two other scenarios... in order to show us... how Christ has given us a wonderful tool for dispelling doubt.

How to dispel doubt... is the theme of our passage this morning in Matthew chapter 14. What an incredibly important topic for the disciples of Jesus... when He taught it to them. And what an incredible topic for us!

Jesus had just told His Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13. These revealed how the Kingdom of God (as it remained here on earth) would be mixed all sorts of evil influences. And these parables followed chapter 12... where Jesus was officially rejected by the Jewish leaders... so Christ (then) stopped offering them the Kingdom... and turned to His disciples... for the rest of the Book of Matthew. Jesus now focused on training His disciples. Today... we get some important training.

We begin with an awful event of unfairness... the kind that might cause believers to doubt that God really is good.

Matthew 14:1-12

Let fill-in some details... in case this event doesn't show enough darkness... to turn your stomach. ... I'll start with the Herods. There are four of them mentioned in the New Testament... and we should not get them confused. However... they all share the similarity of being worldly... deceptive... selfish... and Edomite by ethnicity. They ruled over Jews but were not Jewish. (They were appointed by Rome.)

Herod the Great founded the dynasty of the four Herods. "He was... a heathen in practice... and a monster in character." He had nine wives (some say ten), and he thought nothing of slaying his own sons or wives if they got in the way of his plans. It was he who had the infants slain in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:13-18).

Herod Antipas... is the Herod of this chapter. He was one of Herod the Great's three sons. ... His title was "tetrarch," which means "ruler over the fourth part of the kingdom." ... After Herod the great died... his kingdom was divided into four parts... This young Herod loved luxury and was very ambitious to become a great ruler.

There are two more Herods of the Bible. *Herod Agrippa* is the Herod who imprisoned Peter and killed James" (Acts 12). He was a grandson of Herod the Great. ... And *Herod Agrippa II* was the Herod who tried Paul (Acts 25:13ff). He was a son of Agrippa I... Herod the Great's – great-grandson.

All of the Herods practiced the Jewish religion... ONLY when it helped fulfill their plans for gaining more power and wealth. Otherwise they were very pagan.

Now... let's go back to Herod the Great and his three sons...

Herod Philip... Herod Antipas... and Aristobulus were all sons of Herod the Great... but they were born of different women. ... (Now try and follow along with this...) Herodias (who is part of the story here in Matthew 14)... was the daughter of Aristobulus (son #3). Herodias had incestuously married her half-uncle... Herod **Philip** (son #1). ... After spending some time in that marriage... Herodias left Herod **Philip** (son #1 – her half-uncle)... and moved in with Herod **Antipas** (son #2 - her *other* half-uncle... and key player of John's beheading.) She was committing incest again... *and* adultery.

John looked at the immoral behavior of Herodias and Herod Antipas and declared that the relationship was unacceptable.

Boldly, John the Baptist warned Herod and called him to repent. John knew that the sin of a ruler would only pollute the land and make it easier for others to sin, and that God would judge the sinners (Mal. 3:5). We must commend John for his courage in naming sin and denouncing it. Israel was God's covenant nation, and the sins of the rulers (even though they were unbelievers) would bring the chastening of God.

There's an application here for anyone who speaks the truth of God's Word: as long as you and I call sin for what it is in our culture, it will be costly. However, regardless of the cost, speaking the truth is worth it. As one writer has put it, "It cost [John] his head; but it is better to have a head like John the Baptist and lose it than to have an ordinary head and keep it" (A. T. Robertson, as cited by John MacArthur).

Let us stand for Christ with conviction - no matter the cost. ... And let us pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who are doing so at this moment at the risk of their lives.

John heeded moral law and openly challenged the immoral relationship between the king and his niece. Mark's gospel reveals the real source of contention:

Mark 6:19 (ESV)

And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not,

Herod apparently agreed with his wife that John should be killed, but was constrained by political considerations. Many of his followers had ventured into the wilderness to be baptized by John as the visible sign of their repentance. Large crowds had witnessed his prophetic ministry. Herod did not want to stir up these people, and thus he refrained from his personal desire to get rid of this meddlesome prophet.

So Herodias plotted to have her teenage daughter perform a strip tease kind of a dance at Herod's birthday feast. Herodias knew that her husband would succumb to her daughter's charms and make some rash promise to her. She also knew that Herod would want to "save face" before his friends and officials. The plot worked... (and whoosh)... John the Baptist was slain.

Jewish law required a trial before execution. But here... Herod completely ignores this law. ... Because of a sensual infatuation with a young girl... John the Baptizer—relative of Jesus... forerunner of the Messiah... and preacher of repentance — was dead. ... He was executed not for any legal offense... but by the whim of a mighty king... filled with debauchery and

political corruption... being seduced by a young girl's dance. AND HE GETS AWAY WITH IT !

THIS story probably wins at the table of the Pastor's conference up at Hume Lake. This is a terrible injustice! How could God allow such wonton evil to have such victory ...? ... This is the kind of stuff that calls for doubt in God... isn't it...?

So Matthew moves right into two events from the life of Christ... where He teaches how to dispel doubt... whenever we encounter devastating circumstances.

The Lord withdraws to a desolate place. ... Now... I don't think Christ was doubting His heavenly Father. ... There was a distance of time between John's beheading and Jesus' withdrawing. John had died some time BEFORE Jesus took off with His disciples to a desolate place. Jesus withdrew (remember verse one and two)... because Herod Antipas thought Jesus was John the Baptist – reincarnated. ... “Crazy-who-knows-what-he-will-do-next Herod”... was spooked.

Jesus took practical action. He quietly withdrew from there and went to a lonely place. He did not want to deliberately provoke trouble with “Crazy Herod.” Jesus was on a divine timetable... and knew it was not yet time for His crucifixion. ... He wanted to quell things down. The crowds being amazed had stirred Herod. So Jesus tries to seclude Himself for some quiet teaching time with His men. There was training to be done.

Matthew 14:13-14

The Lord was not irritated over the fact that they had broken in on His seclusion. He did not tell the multitude to go home and leave Him alone. “*I am here for a quiet... private... retreat...*” “*I have other very IMPORTANT plans...*” ... Instead... He embraced them in the arms of love. They were poor lost sheep and their scribes and rabbis were no shepherds. The religious leaders did not care for the people or even like them, but they did not want Jesus to shepherd them either.

The word translated "moved with compassion" literally means "to have one's inner being (viscera) stirred." It is stronger than sympathy.

And these individuals were like the second type of soil in the parable of the Sower, people who received Jesus gladly one moment, and then rejected Him completely the next (13:20-21). Even in the face of such shallowness, Jesus was compassionate.

Jesus was teaching His men a lesson on compassion. But it is another lesson that I would like to mainly focus our attention upon this morning.

Matthew 14:15

It takes little imagination to picture the embarrassing plight of the disciples. Here were more than 5,000 hungry people and they had nothing to feed them! Certainly the disciples knew that Jesus was powerful enough to meet the need, yet they did not turn to Him for help. Instead, they took inventory of their own food supply (a lad had five barley loaves and two fish) and their limited treasury. When they focused only on the circumstances... the time (evening)... and the place (a desolate place)... they came to the conclusion

that nothing could be done to solve the problem. Their counsel to the Lord was: "Send them away!"

Matthew 14:16-18

Jesus watched His frustrated disciples... as they tried to solve the problem. Now look at this detail from John's Gospel account... of this very event.

John 6:6 (ESV)

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

Jesus was in "full-on teaching mode." ... He wanted to teach them a lesson in faith and surrender.

Matthew 14:19-21

I believe that when Jesus gave thanks... it was the most remarkable part of the whole incident. (Let me explain... it might just astonish you too...)

Each of the four gospels tells this story of the feeding of the 5,000... and every single one notes this point. When referring back to it later... John's gospel speaks of it as the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks'. They did not say 'after he had performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand'. It was the place where he 'gave thanks'.

Thanks is the focal point of each Gospel writer. It was the cause which lay behind the miracle. What preoccupied Jesus in the situation was not the hunger of the people... nor was it the inadequacy of the food... or the

impossibility of the problem. That was the mindset of the disciples. ... But Jesus' act of *giving thanks*... was acknowledgement of the complete sufficiency of His Father to meet the people's need in an impossible situation.

To give thanks is to express grateful confidence in someone else's ability and willingness to do something on our behalf. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ is expressing to His Father. His confidence lies not in Himself but in His Father.

The act of 'giving thanks' is a crucial one in the New Testament. At the grave of Lazarus, as he was about to be raised from the dead, Jesus prayed, 'Father I *thank you*...' (John 11:41). In Matthew's very next chapter... at the feeding of the four thousand with seven loaves and fishes, Jesus once again '*gave thanks*' (15:36). ... But perhaps most remarkable of all... The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given *thanks*, He broke it...' (1 Cor. 11:23-24). ... Make no mistake - Jesus did not give thanks for His betrayal or for his death... but for His Father's ability to accomplish that for which He had been sent into the world. His Father would accept His offering and raise Him from the dead.

A key to growth and progress in the Christian life is described by Paul to the Colossians...

Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

To the Thessalonians Paul said, '*Give thanks* in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thess. 5:18).

(LISTEN) Here is the BIG POINT... In every situation that is bigger than our ability and resources... we are to do as Jesus did, 'give thanks' and we are to have a disposition of trust in the Father.

The disciples looked only at the circumstances and suggested the only practical thing to do – “*Send them away Jesus!*” ... Jesus told them, “*They don't need to go away. You feed them.*” ... He was calling them to do something that they could not do in their own power and with their own resources. He wanted them to recognize their *ins*ufficiency... and at the same time to realize His sufficiency!

How might this miracle impact you and I where we live? ... Are you surrounded by needs among the people you live with and work around? Are you aware of urgent spiritual and physical needs?... Have you ever thought in light of such great need that is all around us - "Well, what can I do about it? I have so little."

As followers of Christ... we are standing at Niagara Falls and don't even see that there is plenty of water. ... Jesus stands ready to meet the deepest needs of our souls *and* to use our lives... with all of His resources at our disposal... to meet others' needs.

We doubt that we can help. We doubt that God can use us. We doubt that we will have enough resources for ourselves... let alone enough to give away. Doubt... doubt... doubt... Just like the disciples when their eyes

were on the impossible circumstances (or resources) that faced them. ... Jesus is teaching that this will always be the case... until we recognize our insufficiency... and at the same time realize His sufficiency! ... Jesus was so sure of His Father's ability that He gave thanks – right away.

But the disciples needed more training in this.

Matthew 14:22

John recorded the reason why Jesus was in such a hurry to dismiss the crowd and send the disciples back in the boat: The crowd wanted to make Jesus King (John 6:14-15). The Lord knew that their motives were not spiritual and that their purposes were out of God's will. If the disciples had stayed... they would certainly have fallen in with the plans of the crowd. (The disciples did not yet fully understand Christ's plans. And on the night when Jesus was betrayed... they would be guilty of arguing over "who was the greatest." – I am fairly certain that a popular uprising would have suited them perfectly... so Jesus sent them away from it.

Jesus is the One who sent the disciples off into the boat... probably sometime around seven to nine o'clock at night. ... Later... the text will tell us... that Jesus came out to them... walking on the sea... in the fourth watch of the night... (which is anywhere between three and six o'clock in the morning.) ... This means that the disciples were in the boat by themselves for at least six hours... if not more... while Jesus was over on the mountainside. ... These disciples were battling the wind... using all their might for 8 hours... for a trip that should have been 2 hours at the most.

I would like for you to notice something in the verses we are about to read. The storm that we are about to see... came because the disciples were in the will of God... and not like Jonah (out of the will of God.) ... Did Jesus know that the storm was coming? Certainly! ... Did He deliberately direct them into the storm? Yes!

(LISTEN) They were safer in the storm in God's will... than on land with the crowds (out of God's will.) ... We must never judge our security on the basis of circumstances alone.

Matthew 14:23-29

The same Greek word for “if” can just as easily be translated into English as “since.” ... And here I think Peter actually said, “Lord, SINCE it is you command me to come to you. I think Peter trusted that he could join Jesus out on the water – in light of this amazing power and authority Jesus was demonstrating. Why else would Peter step out of the boat...? ... Peter recognized the power and authority of the Lord... and he wanted to share it in his own experience. And Jesus replied – “Come!” ... Notice that Jesus did not rebuke Peter for making such a foolish request.

As Peter obeyed that invitation... got down out of the boat... and stepped on to the water... he discovered that **obedience coupled with trust results in divine action.** ... He too walked on the water... and experienced a miracle over the physical laws of nature that should have plunged him into the water.

In the previous incident of feeding the five thousand... it was Jesus' attitude of trust in his Father... evidenced by his *giving thanks* - coupled with his

action of *breaking the bread*... that resulted in his Father's intervention and the miracle occurring. ... The same principle is once again activated... as Peter adopted a disposition of complete trust in Christ... took the action of stepping onto the water... and experienced the miracle.

(LISTEN) Trust that does not express itself in obedience is mere sentiment. Action that does not grow out of trust in God is arrogance.

William Carey said, "Expect great things of God, and attempt great things for God." Certainly Peter did that! I am afraid that most of us are satisfied with little things from God. We are OK to remain in our doubt!

Matthew 14:30

To say '*he saw the wind*' does not mean he suddenly noticed a wind blowing! ... He had been rowing against the wind for most of the night and was fully aware of it.

(This is very important... don't miss this) ... "He saw the wind" means - His attention went from Christ (upon whom he was depending)... to the problem (against which he was fighting.)

When his attention so changed... the inevitable happened... 'he was afraid'. ... Fear is the emotion we experience when faced with something stronger than we are... and more threatening than our resources.

When Peter stepped out of the boat... the power of the Lord Jesus Christ was stronger to Peter... than the wind and waves. ... Now the wind and

waves had become stronger to him - than the Lord Jesus Christ... and not only did he become afraid... but he began to sink.

Matthew 14:31

Jesus does not berate Peter... here. He gives the point of the lesson.

What is doubt? The wind and the waves had become stronger to Peter... than the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what doubt is!

(LISTEN) you doubt... because you make the unwanted circumstances of your life to falsely appear stronger than the Lord Jesus Christ. ... Your Jesus is too small! That is the point of the feeding of the 5,000... as well.

The abiding lesson of this incident.. lies in our understanding that anything which threatens to be over our head... is under His feet.

Paul writes that when Jesus rose again from the dead, the Father '... put everything under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:27). ... We will not experience the stability and security that may be derived from this... until we acknowledge our utter dependence on Him... and obey Him in what is right in the situation.

Matthew 14:32-33

This is the first time that the disciples addressed Jesus in this way. We've seen the Father call Jesus the Son (3:17), and we've even seen demons call Jesus the Son of God (8:29), but this is the first time the disciples identify and worship Him in this way. It has been quite a day at school for the disciples!

Matthew 14:34-36

Well... so much for their quiet and private retreat... but yet another lesson on compassion for others... rather than a selfish adherence to keeping our own agenda... important as it may be.

... ..

Do you often have doubts about the goodness of God in your life? Have certain events clouded your ability to see God the way He truly is...?

My eyes teared up this week... when I read about a pastor... who returned to his pulpit ten days after his son committed suicide. Under duress he read his text: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Visibly struggling, he said, "I cannot make my son's suicide fit into this passage. It's impossible for me to see how anything good can come out of it. Yet I realize that I only see in part. I only know in part.

"It's like the miracle of the shipyard. Almost every part of our great oceangoing vessels are made of steel. If you take any single part...be it a steel plate out of the hull or the huge rudder...and throw it into the ocean, it will sink. Steel doesn't float! But when the shipbuilders are finished, when the last plate has been riveted in place, then that massive steel ship is virtually unsinkable.

"Taken by itself, my son's suicide is senseless. Throw it into the sea of Romans 8:28, and it sinks. Still, I believe that when the Eternal Shipbuilder has finally finished, when God has worked out his perfect design, even this senseless tragedy will somehow work to our eternal good."