

MATTHEW 14

FEEDING 5,000

It seems that King Herod was the last of all the people in his dominion to hear of the great tidings of the fame of Jesus. By this time, Christ's earthly ministry was well under way; and He was already immensely popular with many of the people. But up until this point (verse 1), Herod was apparently oblivious of all the attention that was being directed at the One Who was teaching and healing all over the region of Galilee. In many things, high rank and station are less favored than the lot of poverty. The life-giving Gospel is very often preached and welcomed more readily among the poor and common folk of this world.

In the remark of Herod to his servants (verse 2), we see a clear illustration of the force of an evil conscience. "This is John!" cries the guilty ruler. For he himself had put that righteous man of God to death; and this fact continues to remain alive in his memory, even after the fact. Here the historical narrative of Matthew's Gospel backtracks to fill in the details of the death of the man who had been the Messiah's forerunner. Herod had put John in prison, out of resentment for his righteous testimony by which he had denounced the king's sinful relationship with his brother's wife. On Herod's birthday, the daughter of the very woman in question pleased the king by performing a dance before the assembled guests. In fact, she pleased Herod so highly that he "foolishly "promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask." "Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger," was the request of the daughter, according to the previous instructions of her wicked mother Herodias – who had schemingly devised this whole matter as a means to get rid of John the Baptizer. Then "the king was sorry" – but not out of regard to John, of course; he was sorry to offend the multitude. Such was his deference to the dinner-guests who heard him promise with an oath, that he immediately "sent and beheaded John in the prison" – as if God would be honored by the scrupulous keeping of his oath, when his keeping it resulted in an act of blatant murder! And even though John lost his head to the vengeful pleasure of a cruel tyrant and his wicked partners in crime, yet his death at this despot's hands was only an immediate dispatch to heaven, where he received a glorious crown for his head. May God grant us grace to prefer the prison of John to the throne of Herod!

When John's disciples had reverently buried the body of their beloved master, they brought the sad news of John's death to the Lord Jesus. And when He heard the sorrowful tidings, He departed from the place where He was, and went to a desert place – going by ship along the coast of the lake, in order to bet-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The murder of John the Baptizer at the hands of Herod – verses 1-12
- ❖ Jesus feeds a crowd of 5,000 men, plus women and children – verses 13-21
- ❖ He walks upon the sea to meet His disciples – verses 22-33
- ❖ He heals the sick in the region of Gennesaret – verses 34-36

ter escape observation. The people, however, followed Him on foot by way of the shore. And although our Lord was desirous to spend some time alone, He was also ready to selflessly give up His personal resting-time for the purpose of doing good for the bodies and souls of mankind. He went forth, therefore, from His solitude in the wilderness; and in a spirit of compassion to the multitude, He “healed their sick.”

As the sun was going down that day on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the Lord Jesus worked a miracle of which even the healthy among the crowd were able to partake. It was evening, and the multitude (5,000 men, in addition to women and children!) had nothing to eat. Jesus’ disciples, therefore, proposed to send them away so that they might go and procure food in the surrounding villages. But the Savior said unto them, “They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” “But Master,” they replied, “we have here but five loaves, and two fishes!” Yet Jesus said, “Bring them hither to me.” However small our supplies, and however scanty our means; we are nonetheless bound to offer them to Christ – placing them in His hands, to be distributed as He sees fit. Then “he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass.” No further preparation was required of them in the meal that they were now about to partake of; they only had to expect with faith, and receive with humility. Such, also, is the most beneficial disposition that we can have toward the enjoyment of the living Bread from heaven. He distributes this Bread of eternal Life to each and all who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

After the miraculous feeding of the great crowd, the Lord told His disciples to get into a boat and go across to the other side of the lake, while He sent the multitudes on their way home. Afterward, He “went up into a mountain apart to pray.” Meanwhile, the boat that was carrying His disciples to the opposite shore “was in the midst of the sea tossed with waves.” “And in the fourth watch of the night” – that is, between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning – “Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.” But the disciples did not realize that it was our Lord, and they were terrified until He addressed them with His well-known voice: “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid!” Peter, by his reply to these encouraging words, showed the eagerness of his temperament and affection. He got down out of the ship, and walked on the water also to go to Jesus. “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid.” And yet so close at this moment was our Lord to Peter, that “He stretched forth his hand, and caught him.” It was doubting that made Peter sink, and it is doubting that makes us sin also. We are not persuaded that God will help us, or that His grace is sufficient for us. Alas! Gracious indeed is our God, Who lifts us up again when we fall! Gracious is our Savior, Who stretches forth His hand to catch and save us when we begin to sink!

Lord, we beg You for grace for our hungry souls! Help us feel the inadequacy of our own resources and look to You to multiply the Bread of Life in our hands! Amen.

