

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Seventeen
Matthew 14:1-29

Day One

1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, 2 and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her."

vs. 1&2 – Matthew had mentioned that John was in jail; then he took the opportunity to give the account of John’s death. When Herod heard about Jesus, he concluded that Jesus was really John raised from the dead. I would imagine that Herod was being tormented with guilt over how he had killed John.

A man tormented by the guilt of murder will be a fugitive till death; let no one support him (Proverbs 28:17).

For some, Jesus is a prophet, for others a teacher. Herod came to the conclusion that Jesus was John reincarnated. The most important decision any person can make in life is a decision about who Jesus is. I am listening to a book right now and the woman who wrote it said early in her book that in her spiritual search, she determined that Jesus was not the only way to God, so she enlisted the services of an Indian guru. Her decision about Jesus is set her on a path to deception. Herod had done the same thing.

vs. 3&4 – Herod had arrested John because John had been condemning Herod’s relationship with Herod’s brother’s wife, Herodias. It is interesting to me that John went to speak to Herod after John’s public ministry was done. God sent His greatest Old Testament prophet to communicate with a notorious killer. When Jesus came before Herod right before His crucifixion, He said nothing to Herod. In essence, this was Herod’s last chance to set his life right, and God was willing to give him this last chance.

Authoritarian leaders are all the same, even those in the church. They don’t like to be told what to do or not do. They believe they are above the rules. They respond with anger and take vengeance when someone crosses their will. I once wrote an article for a magazine entitled, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Leader*. In that article, I came to the conclusion that anger is the hallmark of an authoritarian leader. They get angry when things don’t go their way because they believe they own whatever it is they lead – a business, country, church, or movement.

Anger is not a bad emotion; it comes to motivate us to action. What we do with that anger determines whether the anger is positive or negative. Because many have been hurt by anger, they avoid anger, but that isn’t the right course of action. The right course is to allow the anger to stir you to righteous or positive action, such as being angry that

you can't fit into your clothes, so you are motivated to eat better and exercise. **What are you doing with your anger? Do you even allow your anger to show, accepting it as a legitimate human, God-given emotion?**

Day Two

5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet. 6 On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much 7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."

v. 5 – Authoritarian leaders believe they are above the law; in fact, they often make the laws to suit their own interests or needs. Yet with all that power, Herod was still afraid of the people! These kinds of leaders want the people to love them, and will brutalize the people to make sure that they do! Herod and his family ruled because of their favor in Rome, not their popularity in Israel. All the Herods were seen as half-breed Gentiles, which is why Herod the Great, who was king at Jesus' birth, tried to win the Jews favor and approval with massive building projects, including the city walls in Jerusalem and Temple renovations.

So the people considered John a prophet and Herod, already sensitive to criticism of his lack of loyalty to Jewish causes, didn't kill John right away, although he wanted to do so.

vs. 6&7 – The king had a birthday party (this Herod wasn't really a king, but a tetrarch, but I'll continue to refer to him as a king). Herodias' daughter danced for and pleased the king. Herod made a rash promise to give the girl whatever she asked. Authoritarian leaders do those kinds of things. They make rash promises to win the favor and admiration of those closest to them.

v. 8 – What a wicked woman this Herodias was! She used her influence with her young daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist. This woman was a witch – someone who controls others for their own purposes. Herodias must have also held a grudge against John and she wasn't worried about what the public thought. What a grotesque gift she asked to be bestowed on her daughter – the decapitated head of a prophet. What a message that sent to the young girl! Roman society at the top was sick and this story reveals the depth of the sickness. This is why Jesus said nothing to Herod when He finally faced him in His last days.

You should decide what kind of leader you will be *before* you are a leader, *before* the money, power or people are part of your life. **How can you avoid the traps to which most leaders succumb?** First, define your values. Write them out and prioritize them. My values can be found on my website under the Leadership section at www.purposequest.com. Then you need to develop a leadership philosophy that emanates from your values. I also include my philosophy on my site in the same Section.

Have you identified your values? Written out a leadership philosophy? If so, are you true to them? Do you find ways every day to express them?

Day Three

9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12 John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

vs. 9&10 – Herodias and her daughter had their request granted – Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. What foolishness to think that by silencing the messenger they could change the message. The message was that they needed to repent, and killing John wasn't going to change that reality. It makes me think of what David wrote in Psalm 2:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them (Psalm 2:1-4).

The Lord does indeed laugh at anyone who believes that he or she can conspire to throw off His righteous demands or can resist the decrees of His righteous Son, Jesus. Herod had received his last chance to repent, although he did not know it was his last. From this point, God just laughed at him.

v. 11 – This was such a terrible thing for a young girl to witness. Not only did Herodias' daughter make the request for John's death, she then had to view John's head on a platter and carry that platter to her mother. How that must have scarred her! What a message that sent to her – that you amass power to have your opponents killed!

Yet that same spirit operates today, even in the Church. When someone loses their job or is shunned or condemned for speaking out against leadership, it is the same spirit at work. I have been around long enough to see some pretty nasty things happen in church work and I realize the truth of what Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely!"

This is why I made the appeal in yesterday's study that you determine how you will handle power *before* you have it. Power does tend to corrupt, but it doesn't have to corrupt. We look at Joseph and Daniel and see two men who handled power well. We see that Paul did as well, and of course the Lord Jesus is the ultimate example of how any leader should handle the power of his or her position. **How did Jesus do it?** That is explained in Philippians 2:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in

appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8). 2

What is your strategy for handling power? How can you be a leader who handles power effectively like Jesus did?

v. 12 – John’s disciples carried John’s body away to be buried and then they went to report all that had happened to Jesus. There is a chance that John had sent his disciples to Jesus as we saw in Matthew 11 because John knew that his death was imminent. By doing so, his disciples knew where they were to go when John was gone. I wish that every religious leader would send his or her disciples to Jesus, but alas church leaders often keep their disciples to themselves. They talk about Jesus, but the leader expects the followers’ loyalty to focus on him (or her). **Where do your loyalties lie? To your denomination? To your bishop? To your church? Or to Jesus?** Don’t answer too quickly. If you cannot oppose or cross your leader for fear of rejection, then your loyalties don’t lie with Jesus. Please don’t give to a leader in any situation what you should only be giving to Jesus.

Day Four

13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." 16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

v. 13 – Jesus received the news of John’s death by getting in a boat so He could get away to pray and meditate. This news must have brought the reality of His own death much closer to home for Jesus. He needed time to get away and be with His Father, but the people would not let that happen. Jesus was a celebrity and people wanted access to Him so their needs could be met.

v. 14 – The crowd arrived before Jesus did, that’s how desperate they were to see and connect with Him. And even though the crowd interfered with His immediate plans, He had compassion on them. That is one dynamic that I have prayed for in my life – compassion. Compassion is deeply felt mercy and identification with the needs of someone else that motivates one to action. You cannot feel compassion toward someone or some situation and stay uninvolved. Compassion is the motivation to do something.

I also admire how often Jesus surrendered His schedule to the needs of those around Him. I suppose you could say that Jesus was flexible according to the needs of the moment. **How flexible are you in your daily business?** I am working on this or rather I should say that I am asking God to help me with this and I have for many years. Mercy and compassion are not among my strengths, but I think there has been progress.

vs. 15&16 – The people were so desperate to be with Jesus that they had flocked to a remote area with no provisions! Jesus’ disciples made a reasonable suggestion: “Let’s send the crowd away now so they can go get something to eat.” The disciples were thinking normally and rationally, which wasn’t good enough in this case.

How often I have done the same thing! My thinking has been wrong and too small. I think I see all that there is to see, but there’s so much more that I don’t see. The disciples didn’t think there was any way possible to feed the people, and they made their recommendation accordingly. **What opportunities have I missed because of wrong thinking? What opportunities have you missed?** This is why Paul to the Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2, emphasis added).

A change of thinking can transform you into something and someone new. Ask God to show you where you’re thinking is too small and limited. Then act on the new thoughts that you will have. Jesus expanded their thinking by making a suggestion that had never crossed their mind. He wants to do the same for you, and me.

Day Five

17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. 18 "Bring them here to me," he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

v. 17 – The disciples had an “only” mentality. They were focusing on what they didn’t have. They only saw their lack and not their opportunity. The word *only* is a key word when you are searching for your purpose, along with the word “just.” When I ask people what they love to do, they sometimes respond: “I *only* love to paint. I *just* enjoy being with people.” Purpose is so second nature to you that you don’t even think about who you are and what you do; it’s not very special, to you at least. Yet it can be very special and meaningful to someone else.

What do you have? Who are you? What can you do better than almost anyone else? What do you have that can bless and “feed” the multitude? Are the answers to those questions prefaced by “just” or “only”? If so, then you are probably onto something significant. The disciples “only” had five loaves and two fish, yet it was enough to feed more than 5,000 people!

v. 18 – Jesus issued a simple command, “Bring them here to me!” That is all you have to do with what you have and who you are. Just bring it all to Him! Let Him work with it, expand it, breathe the Spirit on it, and make it all it can be. **What can you bring to Jesus today so that He can use it for His purposes? What have you been holding back, thinking it is too small and insignificant?**

v. 19 – What a simple, unpretentious act Jesus performed! He didn’t blow on the people so they would fall down. He did not make a big deal at all, He just directed them to sit down. He prayed and thanked God for the food that they had. Then He gave the food to the disciples who in turn gave it to the people. When it was all over, they had leftovers, and 5,000 men plus their families had been fed. **What are the lessons from this story?**

1. We must expand our thinking for meeting the needs of others to include options that we had not previously considered. Our thinking is often too small and limited.
2. We must learn to focus on what we have and not on what we don’t have.
3. We can bring what we have to Jesus and He will make it adequate for the task.
4. There is no limitation in God. There is enough to do the job plus some left over.
5. Jesus will give us what we need to give to the people in need.
6. The people were so desperate to get in touch with Jesus that they followed Him without making plans for their personal provision. We all need that kind of godly desperation.
7. Jesus did not rebuke the people for their lack of preparation. He taught them, healed them and then met their physical needs.

Can you think of any other lessons from this story? Feel free to write and [add them to this study.](#)

Day Six

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

v. 22 – Keep in mind that the Sea of Galilee was a large lake dominating life and commerce in northern Israel. Jesus told the disciples to get in a boat and go to the “other side,” wherever that happened to be. If you remember, Jesus had come to where He was in the first place to pray and meditate after He received the news of John’s death. The crowd had interrupted that goal but, now that they were healed, fed and gone, Jesus spent some time alone with the Father.

Jesus had quite a commitment to prayer. Yet He never seemed to put that on the disciples. He valued His time alone and, in this case, sent the disciples away rather than drawing them into prayer. At no point, did Jesus legislate that this was how everyone should pray or that this was the standard for prayer. He prayed to spend time with His Father.

I say this because there are many “intercessors” who spend gobs of time in prayer. They often say, “Nothing happens apart from prayer.” While this seems and sounds spiritual, it isn’t. **Why do I say this?** I say that because Jesus never put that kind of focus on prayer. To me, the modern prayer movement often sounds like a New Testament system of works, sort of like the sacrifices offered at the Temple. Unless “sacrifices” of prayer are offered to God, good things won’t happen. **Is this too harsh? Am I off base in saying this?**

vs. 23-24 – Meanwhile, the disciples were having a tough time of it, as the wind and waves were impeding their progress. Even though this is a lake, it can still have strong winds come from the north side that whip through a mountain pass. The disciples were working hard, even though Jesus had directed them to go. **Has Jesus directed you to do something, but you are having a harder go of it than you expected? Could it be that Jesus has another lesson in mind for you, just like He did in this instance?**

v. 25 – Now we see part of why Jesus sent them ahead. He came to them walking on the water! **What a sight this must have been! What would this indicate to His disciples?**

1. There was a storm raging, but Jesus had complete control in the midst of it.
2. Jesus was superior to the laws of nature. He could multiply bread, heal the sick and walk on water.
3. Jesus was always doing the unexpected, at least the unexpected from a human perspective.
4. While the disciples were laboring, Jesus was having no trouble getting where He wanted to go.
5. Jesus had energy, even though it was late at night, or early in the morning, depending on how you look at it.
6. Jesus had set up this whole scenario, not only to have some time to pray, but to teach the disciples.
7. How did the disciples expect Jesus to get back to them? They probably thought he would catch another boat in the morning. I wonder if anyone questioned Him about that before they left?

Can you think of any other lessons from this story? Feel free to write and [add them to this study.](#)

[Day Seven](#)

26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It

is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

v. 26 – I have always chuckled at the disciples' conclusion when they saw Jesus walking on the water. They thought He was a ghost! That means ghosts were a legend and in the back of people's minds just like today. While it is somewhat humorous now, it wasn't then, for these men were terrified and cried out in fear. Jesus was always doing the unexpected, but this instance went way beyond multiplying loaves and fishes or healing a blind man.

Why would Jesus do something like this? Jesus was constantly trying to expand the thinking of His disciples where faith was concerned. They were raised in a culture in Israel that expected today to be like yesterday and tomorrow to be like today. Yet Jesus had come to shake up the status quo in every sphere of life.

What about you? How much of the unexpected happens in your life? Or are your tomorrows going to be like today? Is this a good thing? Is this what God would want for your life? If God did shake things up in your life, how would you respond? Like the disciples in terror? Would you see those changes for what they are, or would you think it was something bizarre like a ghost?

v. 27 – Immediately Jesus spoke to put their minds at ease. I am not sure that He expected them to react with such fear. He ordered them to "take courage." **Is that what you need to do as well?** Courage is something you can summon at will and act accordingly. **How courageous are you? With how much courage do you operate on a daily basis?**

v. 28 – Peter asked for confirmation that the "ghost" speaking to them wasn't a ghost at all, but rather Jesus, who He claimed to be. Peter knew that if it was truly Jesus, then Jesus could call him onto the water and he [Peter] could walk on it as well. What quick thinking on Peter's part. While the others were still processing the moment, Peter summoned the courage to ask for the impossible. Peter was looking at what he had previously considered impossible and then decided not to be content just watching. He wanted to participate.

v. 29 – Jesus did not rebuke Peter for his request. He didn't say, "This isn't a show my friend. This is something that is reserved for me. You just stay in the boat. I am showing off what I can do for you to watch." Instead, Jesus immediately told Peter to come on out.

Jesus is saying the same thing to you and me: "Don't be a spectator, don't be content to watch someone else do what others consider impossible. Go for it!" **What does getting out of the boat represent for you today? Is it starting a business? Speaking before a group of people? Praying for the sick? Breaking with your family traditions to do what is in your heart?**

At Jesus' command, Peter got out of the boat, stepped into a raging storm and performed the impossible. Peter walked on the water, too. The storm and waves became irrelevant. The only thing that mattered was Jesus' word to come and Peter's faith to obey.

What about you? Are you focusing on the storm or Jesus? Are you looking for where you can go or where you can be safe? Are you properly interpreting what Jesus is doing or seeing it to be a "ghost" – something that is unpredictable and fearful?

There are so many lessons to be drawn from this story of Jesus walking on the water. I urge you to consider this story seriously and apply the lessons to your faith walk today.