

The Compassion of the Rejected King

by John F. Walvoord

This sermon highlights the compassion of Jesus Christ, demonstrated through His miraculous feeding of the five thousand and healing of the people in Gennesaret, despite being rejected by the leaders of Israel.

Scripture: Matthew 14:1-34, Mark 6:14-45, Luke 9:7, Luke 9:10, John 6:1, John 6:16

Topics: "Divine Compassion", "Faith Amidst Trials"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the execution of John the Baptist, highlighting his fearless denunciation of Herod Antipas and Herodias, leading to his imprisonment and eventual beheading due to Herodias' plot. This event serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of sin and unbelief, as well as the growing rejection of Jesus and His message. Following this tragic event, Jesus performs the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, demonstrating His compassion and power to provide abundantly from little resources, despite initial doubts from His disciples. Subsequently, Jesus saves His disciples in a storm, showcasing His authority over nature and encouraging faith amidst fear. The healing in Gennesaret further reveals Jesus' compassion and willingness to heal all who come to Him in faith.

Transcript

Execution of John the Baptist, 14:1-12

The growing rejection of Christ and His ministry, anticipated in the preceding chapter, now had its toll in the execution of John the Baptist. John had been fearless in his denunciation of Herod Antipas who was living unlawfully with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Herodias, a New Testament Jezebel, had plotted against Herod's first wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, who had to flee for her life. Herodias, although a niece of Herod Antipas, began to live with him in an unlawful union.⁶⁸

John had said plainly, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Mt. 14:4). For this affront to Herod and Herodias, John had been placed in prison, but Herod was restrained from doing more because he feared the reaction of the Jews who counted John as a prophet.

This did not deter Herodias, however, but she bided her time. When Herod was having a drunken feast in honor of his birthday, she had her daughter, Salome, dance before those celebrating the birthday. This pleased Herod to the point that he promised Salome anything she would ask, to half the kingdom. She, having been instructed by her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist on a large platter, such as was used for food. Herod, although reluctant to give the order, nevertheless, under the pressure of the

circumstances, commanded that it should be done. John, summoned out of his dark cell where he had had gloomy thoughts about his own future and the future of the kingdom, ended his lifework abruptly at the executioner's block, and the head was delivered to the damsel on a platter as she requested. His sorrowful disciples came, claimed the body which had been thrown out as refuse, and gave it a decent burial.

For John, it meant leaving the damp castle of Machaerus, built on the cliffs east of the Dead Sea, for a sudden entrance into glory. Like many great prophets before him, he had sealed his testimony with his own blood. When the disciples came to tell Jesus, it was another evidence of the growing rejection of Jesus and His message and a stark reminder of the awfulness of sin and unbelief. Parallel references are found in Mark 6:14-29 and Luke 9:7-9.

Feeding of the Five Thousand, 14:13-21

Upon hearing the tidings of John's execution, Jesus withdrew into an unpopulated place. He wanted to be alone with His disciples and desired to confer with them privately, according to Mark 6:30-31. Although Jesus was rejected by those in authority, the people were still enthusiastic followers of Jesus, and they followed Him out of many cities until they found Him. As Jesus viewed the great multitude, His heart was moved with compassion toward them both for their physical ills and their spiritual needs. All four gospels record this important incident in the life of Jesus (Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14). Although Matthew does not mention that He taught them, Mark 6:34 declares, "He began to teach them many things."

After a long day of teaching and healing, the disciples counseled Jesus to urge the multitude to go away that they might find food in the villages nearby. As far as the disciples were concerned, this was an easy way out. As in the case of the Samaritan woman in John 4, and in the case of the little children who were brought to Jesus in Mark 10, so here they wanted to avoid involvement in the need. But Jesus replied, "They need not depart; give ye them to eat" (Mt 14:16). The disciples, forgetting the power of Jesus to do miraculous things, protested that they had only five loaves and two fishes--enough for one person but not for five thousand.

Jesus did not argue with them, but commanded them to bring the five loaves and two fishes to Him. He then ordered the multitude to sit down in an orderly fashion on the grass, and, having the food in His hand, He broke it and gave it to the disciples to distribute. The miracle of multiplication took place, and verse 20 records, "They did all eat, and were filled." The fragments gathered in twelve baskets were far more than the boy's lunch that had been placed into the hands of Jesus at the beginning. The multitude, described as five thousand besides the women and children, had been miraculously fed.

This illuminating incident of the miraculous power of Jesus to take what little was placed in His hand and to bless it until it was sufficient for the multitude has encouraged all believing hearts. They have realized their own impotence and lack of resources, but have been encouraged by the miraculous power of God to take little and make much of it.

Matthew does not mention what is recorded in John 6:14-15, that the multitudes, impressed with this tremendous miracle, not only recognized Christ as the predicted Prophet but wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king. The multitude reasoned that with such a miraculous king who could heal the sick, raise the dead, and multiply food, they had one who had sufficient power to give them victory over the oppression of Rome. Like Moses, who gave manna from heaven and Elisha who miraculously fed a hundred men (2 Ki 4:42-44), Jesus seemed to be a great leader. This was not the way, however, in which

the kingdom was to come, and their faith was a superficial confidence that came from having full stomachs. All too soon, some of them would be part of the mob crying, "Crucify him."

Jesus Saves the Disciples in the Storm, 14:22-33

The disciples were undoubtedly thrilled at the enthusiasm of the multitude to make Jesus King, and it served to renew their hopes, in spite of the growing rejection, that Jesus would be victorious and that they would reign with Him in the kingdom on earth. Jesus had to impel them to get into a boat and go to the other side, somewhat against their will. Meanwhile, Jesus Himself sent the multitude away, and, in the gathering darkness, went alone to the nearby mountain to pray.

Meanwhile, the disciples, crossing the Sea of Galilee, perhaps at its northern tip, were caught in one of the sudden storms that were so characteristic of the sea, located as it was between high hills which surrounded it.⁶⁹ According to Matthew 14:24, they were tossed with waves and the wind was against them. Early in the fourth watch, probably between three and six a.m., Jesus joined them, walking across the sea to their boat. In the darkness, this was a terrifying spectacle to the disciples, who cried out with fear because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

To alleviate their fears, Jesus spoke to them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (v. 27). Peter, wanting reassurance, said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (v. 28). Jesus invited him to come, and Peter began to walk on the water to see Jesus. Seeing the sea lashed by the wind, he became afraid and began to sink. When he cried, "Lord, save me" (v. 30), Jesus extended His hand and, rebuking Peter, said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (v. 31). When they both arrived in the boat, suddenly the wind ceased. The disciples worshiped Him, bowing down before Him and exclaiming, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (v. 33). There is no reason to reject this outstanding miracle, except on the unsupportable assumption that miracles are impossible.

Healing in Gennesaret, 14:34-36

Upon landing on the other side, they came to Gennesaret, the area between Capernaum and Tiberias, northwest of the Sea of Galilee. According to John 6:24, Jesus probably landed first near Capernaum and then later, leaving Capernaum, went into the larger area of Gennesaret. His privacy was short-lived, for as soon as the people learned of His presence, they streamed out of cities from as far away as Tiberias, according to verse 23, in order to be healed. Matthew summarizes their confidence in Jesus in these words: they "besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole" (Mt 14:36). Although rejected by the leaders of Israel, Jesus still had compassion on those who put their trust in Him. In a world so wicked that it would behead a prophet like John the Baptist, and so unspiritual that it wanted to make Jesus a king by force, the compassion of Christ was yet extended to all who had genuine need. What was true of a wicked and unbelieving world in the first century is still true in the twentieth.

68 For more details, see R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 555-57.

69 For discussion on the route across Galilee, see R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, pp. 144-45.

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