

## **Intro**

We all struggle with doubt to some extent. We may doubt certain truths because we can't understand how they fit with our experience. The person going through a serious health trial may believe in God's goodness generally. But they have a hard time believing God is actually good to them. God, if you're good, why is this happening to me?

We may intellectually believe truths about God while actually behaving like atheists. We confess that God works all things for our good (Rom 8:28), but our circumstances lead us to conclude otherwise. Circumstances erode confidence in God, which gives way to fear.

At times our doubt is driven by fear. Circumstances create fear. Fear creates doubt. Doubt forgets God's ability.

We might look at our circumstances and ask the question, is God really able? Is it actually possible to glorify God in this situation? Can God really sustain my joy in this affliction?

We're prone to fear when we look at our circumstances. But we're prone to trust when we consider God's character and ability. When we see God, when we feed our minds with his truth, we recall God's ability and God's care. This is the fight for faith. A fight to rest in God's ability and God's care. Despite our circumstances.

Let's look to Matthew as we consider the fight for faith...

## **READ PASSAGE**

## **PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

FCF: doubt connected to ignorance...doubt connected to fear

Grace given: Jesus' ability on display strengthens our faith

Gospel connection: saved by faith...continue by faith...we fuel our faith by feeding on Scripture, where we see Jesus' ability and goodness

- feeding of the 5,000 recorded in Mark 6, Luke 9, John 6

### **Point 1: Understand Jesus' ability and compassion (14:13-21)**

### **Explanation**

*"Now when Jesus heard this"* (14:13) refers back to Herod's belief that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead (14:1-2). Jesus withdraws because he's not interested in a

confrontation with Herod. Luke 9:10 tells us Jesus departed for Bethsaida. And Mark 6:31 tells us Jesus was seeking a place to rest. Jesus' disciples (= apostles) went with him (Luke 9:10).

Apparently the crowds are spying on Jesus. They discover Jesus in a boat and follow his movements in the water by land (see Luke 9:11). Jesus went by boat, the crowds by foot. Mark notes that the crowd arrived first (Mark 6:33).

Jesus departs from a town northwest of the Sea of Galilee for Bethsaida (see John 6:1), which is at the northern tip, slightly east. So the crowd runs several miles around the sea, following Jesus' boat, and arrives there before he does. The crowd's so desperate they'll go to great lengths for a meeting with Jesus. Jesus won't receive the secluded rest he desires. When the boat arrives, Jesus sees a crowd awaiting him.

Jesus denies his desire for rest. Why? He feels compassion. Concern for their condition. Compassion is the same Greek word used in the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:33). The Good Samaritan found a man robbed, stripped, beaten and left for dead. Compassion leads him to attend to the man's wounds, bring him to an inn, care for his physical suffering, and pay what's necessary for the man's lodging and care. Compassion led to care. Jesus' compassion moves him to forego rest and heal the sick. Luke records how Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God as well (Luke 9:11).

We don't know how long Jesus ministered teaching and healing, but this went till sunset when dinnertime was past. The disciples wish to send the crowds away: *"This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves (14:15)."* There's no food immediately available. Presumably the disciples want food and rest for themselves.

Jesus turns it on the disciples saying, *"They need not go away; you give them something to eat (14:16)."* The disciples are confused: *"We have only five loaves here and two fish (14:17)."* They're confused because they're told to do the impossible.

They had no category for what Jesus was about to do. John 6:6 notes that Jesus tested Philip here, so this was a test. How would Jesus' disciples respond to an impossible command? Jesus sees an opportunity to instruct the disciples by displaying his ability. The miracle reveals their short-sightedness. They forgot this was the man whom the winds and sea obeyed (Matt 8:27). A man with authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. Something didn't click. They didn't naturally assume Jesus could feed everyone.

Jesus proceeds to give thanks and the disciples distributed the loaves. *"And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over (14:20)."* The text doesn't describe how the bread actually multiplied. We're only given the results and left to guess. Multiplied gradually while handed out? Whatever the case, there's more left over (twelve full baskets) after everyone had eaten. There were 5,000 men plus the women and children. Probably an estimate and with women and children perhaps 10,000 total.

The point of this episode is to highlight Jesus' ability to do the impossible. To astonish us. The disciples didn't grasp the extent of Jesus' ability. Matthew recorded this incident to persuade his Jewish audience that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

## **Application**

First, we see the compassion of Jesus. Jesus sees the pain of others and it affects him. They're suffering from illness and disease and there's no medical technology to help them. They're desperate. So Jesus halts his planned restful retreat to serve. He sees opportunity to alleviate their suffering. And he sees opportunity to instruct. So he cuts short his plans. Like our Savior, sometimes our plans need to be discarded in order to serve.

Second, we see the unhindered ability of Jesus. Like the apostles, we need a category for God's ability to do the impossible. The apostles look at their circumstances and concluded the situation was impossible. They left God the Son out of the equation. The lesson for us is this: when we face a seemingly impossible situation, we need to remember God before we conclude, "This is just not possible." Where God instructs and calls us, he provides a way. If we only look at our circumstances and forget about God's ability, discouragement is sure to follow.

## **Illustration**

This was an impossible task. Kind of like giving me a few pieces of wood, a hammer, and a nail and saying build a 2,000 square foot home with a finished basement. It's just not possible. It's only possible if I receive outside help from one who is able. One who has the ability to produce the necessary materials. One who has the ability to put the materials together.

Sometimes we find ourselves tasked with something we think is impossible.

- A divisive situation. We despair. We worry. We think the worst. We envision a painful conflict. We forget God's ability. God can turn hearts. God can turn our heart. God can bring unity out of division.
- A financial shortcoming. We see the circumstances. We see impossibility. We forget God's ability. God can raise up employment. God can move on hearts to send money. God can send wisdom.
- A medical issue. We see the inconvenience. We see our loss of ability. We see the long road to recovery. We see the threat it might get worse. We forget God's ability. God may chose to heal immediately. God may chose to heal after a time of waiting. God may chose not to heal. But God is able to strengthen and comfort us through the process (2 Cor 1:3-4; 2 Tim 4:17).

→ The principle isn't Jesus will heal everyone. Or healing is guaranteed for God's people. Jesus is doing what the Messiah came to do. Part of his task as Messiah was to heal. The principle that carries over is that Jesus is compassionate when we suffer. He will extend help. Whether healing or strengthening our soul or sending help in the form of people. While Jesus is certainly able, we can't be sure of healing. We can be sure of Jesus' compassion and comfort during our suffering.

▪ Preaching the gospel to sinners. We see resistance. We assume the worst. We assume rejection. We forget God's ability. God can call the most hardened sinners. He saved the apostle Paul.

When we don't see a way. When life feels impossible. Turn to the one who can carry us through.  
**Understand Jesus' ability and compassion.**

## **Point 2: Set your gaze on Jesus' ability and compassion (14:22-34)**

### **Explanation**

Following the meal, Jesus sends the disciples off by boat while he sends the crowds away and goes to pray alone (14:22). Let's recap the timeline. At sunset the disciples inquire about sending everyone away. After the meal the disciples and the crowds depart while Jesus prays. Now it's evening time (= the time after sunset yet before darkness; so sometime around 8-9pm). At the same time, the disciples are a long way from the shore and are experiencing turbulence. About 3-4 miles from shore per John 6:19.

It isn't until the "fourth watch of the night" that Jesus appears to them. The 4<sup>th</sup> watch lasts from 3-6am. So they were experiencing frightening turbulence for at least six hours. Turbulence began at evening (say 9pm) and Jesus arrived at the 4<sup>th</sup> watch (say 3am). In the Sea of Galilee, the wind could generate waves 8-9 feet high. The disciples were likely afraid for their lives for over six hours. They should have reached the other side by now. We should think they were at their breaking point. The trauma from over six hours in the waves had them despairing and emotionally exhausted.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> watch, Jesus arrives walking on the water and they're terrified, thinking Jesus is a ghost. Jesus immediately comforts them saying, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid* (14:27)." Jesus comes to bring comfort, not fear. Peter's not exactly sure so he says, "*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water* (14:28)." Jesus says, "*Come.*" And Peter begins to walk.

Let's consider the extent of Peter's faith here before condemning him. Without prompting, Peter declares his faith that Jesus can grant him ability to walk on water. That's pretty remarkable faith! As Peter begins to look at his circumstances, the presence of the wind leads to fear, and Peter begins to sink and cries for Jesus to save him. Jesus immediately grabs Peter and says, "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt* (14:31)?" Peter flops from extraordinary faith to doubt in a brief moment. Peter had faith, but his faith wasn't strong enough to withstand his fear.

When Peter and Jesus got into the boat, the wind ceased (14:32). The event provoked worship with the disciples saying, "*Truly you are the Son of God* (14:33)." They sensed Jesus was the cause behind the wind stopping. He was behind the storm they faced. That's why he was able to stop it. Jesus does what God alone can do. He truly is God the Son in human flesh.

Jesus uses a storm to instruct his disciples. Peter's fears reveal the weakness of his faith. They're understanding of Jesus isn't fully grounded. Mark 6:51 says, "*they were utterly astounded*" by what they saw. Jesus' ability is still shocking.

## **Application**

First, Jesus intentionally sent a trial for teaching purposes. Stuck in a turbulent storm for over six hours. Surely some thought they'd die. Jesus sent this storm to reveal his deity. Ability to walk on water. Authority over nature. And to reveal to Peter the weakness of his faith. Peter wasn't as strong as he thought he was. This is the way Jesus dealt with his chosen apostles. His intimate friends. The people he invested most in. If he dealt with them in this way, surely he deals with us the same. Why trials? According to this account, sometimes God sends trials into our lives to reveal his power. Sometimes to show us the shallowness of our faith. Jesus uses trials to teach his people.

Second, fear hinders faith. Peter possessed extraordinary confidence in Jesus' ability. At the same time, fearful circumstances hindered Peter's trust. The issue is, where was Peter looking? At first, Peter looked to Jesus. And he believed he could walk on water at Jesus' command. However, after starting to walk on the water, Peter's gaze turned towards the wind. Seeing the wind, Peter feared and sank. Evidently, Peter's ability to walk on the water was contingent on trust. When his trust departed, Peter sank.

The point I want to highlight is that our faith is either strengthened or weakened depending on where we're looking. If we see the wind our faith will wither. If we're looking at Jesus our faith will grow. It all depends on where our focus is. Are our thoughts dominated by unfavorable or seemingly impossible circumstances? Or are our thoughts dominated by the goodness and wisdom and sovereignty of God?

Like Peter our faith goes up and down depending on what has the attention of our mind and heart. Our faith can be overwhelmed by dangers. Our faith can rise above dangers when our gaze is on Jesus. Peter's faith was little because his eyes were on his circumstances. But his faith would have been great if his eyes were on Jesus.

Let's think about evangelism. Last time I mentioned perhaps the greatest reason why we don't engage in gospel conversations. Because we're afraid of rejection. If our mind is consumed with the possibility of rejection fear ensues. If our mind is on the person of Jesus, the gospel is beautiful to us. And we'll rejoice. If our mind is on Jesus' ability, we'll have some confidence that Jesus is seeking out lost people (Luke 19:10). We'll have some confidence that Jesus is revealing the Father to sinners (Matt 11:27). It all depends on where our gaze is. If all we see is the possibility of rejection, our confidence in the gospel and God's saving power is crushed. If we see the beauty of the gospel and its power to save sinners, our confidence to proclaim God's Word will increase.

What is it for you? What fears hinder your faith? Difficult relationships? Finances? Health? Gospel conversations? Your own lack of ability? How might gazing on Jesus strengthen your faith? Set your eyes on Jesus' ability!

### **Conclusion (14:35-36)**

When their boat arrived at shore they were at Gennesaret (northwest section of the Sea of Galilee). As they arrived, Jesus and his disciples were immediately recognized. In faith, the people of Gennesaret brought "*all who were sick*" to Jesus. They asked only that they touch the fringe of his garment. When they touched Jesus' clothing, they were healed.

The people of Gennesaret serve a radical contrast to the disciples. The disciples were perplexed as to how they could feed the 5,000 plus. They were astonished by Jesus walking on water and calming a storm. But the people of Gennesaret believed all they had to do was touch Jesus' garment. They had firm confidence in Jesus' ability to heal, and his willingness to heal.

They didn't think it terms of impossible. They thought in terms of Jesus' ability and his kindness to sinners. This is the faith commended to us. **Understand Jesus' ability and compassion. Set your gaze on Jesus' ability and compassion.**