

Rejection Exemplified**Matthew 14:1—24**

Matthew has been writing from the perspective of Jesus as King. Everything he does points to His Second Coming and the process of taking the world away from Satan who is the current ruler. The parables of Matthew 13 are all about the Kingdom, including the birth pangs leading up to the actual setting up of the Kingdom and are all instructional for the Disciples to help them understand what it will take to get through the Kingdom. The Disciples will be using their knowledge to encourage the tribulational believers to endure unto the end and overcome the evil one, Satan.

The end of Chapter 13 exemplifies these parables by showing them that even Jesus' neighbors rejected His works and words. They were unable to look past the man to see the deity. Chapter 14 points to another rejection of His preaching through the death of John the Baptist.

The death of John the Baptist (verses 1—13; Mark 6:14—29; Luke 3:18—20; 9:7—9)

John the Baptist had been held in prison by Herod Antipus the Tetrarch. A tetrarch literally means ruler of a quarter so called because after his father, King Herod the Great, had died the kingdom was split into four parts. His half-brother, Herod Phillip I, also ruled a portion of his father's kingdom. John had strongly spoken out against Herod Antipus taking his brother's wife (Herodias) for himself.

At Herod Antipus' birthday, Herodias' daughter danced for him and pleased him greatly—most likely in a sensual manner. Feeling quite magnanimous and probably full of wine, he promised to give her anything she asked for, up to half his kingdom. Mom (Herodias) told the daughter to ask for John the Baptist's head on a platter. The king did not have the courage to refuse her request and granted it.

Notice that verse one starts out with Herod Antipus seeing the works of Jesus and fretting that John the Baptist had come back to life. It's interesting that there are no recorded miracles performed by John and in fact the Bible indicates that he did not do any miracles—at least in the area of Judea (John 10:41). Also, Christ said He would do greater works than John (John 5:36). It would make sense that he did no miraculous works since he was the forerunner of Jesus and everything he did pointed to Jesus, not himself.

This story of John's death emphasizes the parables Matthew recorded in chapter 13 and fits in with the rejection of Christ in His hometown at the end of that chapter. The Disciples are learning that things are going to get bleak, especially during the soon-to-come Tribulation and it will appear that the Kingdom promises will not be fulfilled. We understand now that the Tribulation and Kingdom were put on hold after Israel rejected her Messiah but according to prophecy, the Tribulation was to happen shortly after Jesus died on the cross. This 70th week of Daniel's prophecy would begin followed by the Second Coming and the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom seven years later. Most people are confused by the 2,000-year gap between the Last Days as announced by Peter in Acts 2:16—17 (the end of Daniel's week 69) and the beginning of the Tribulation because they don't distinguish between God's plans for Israel and the Church.

What is significant about John's death is that he was a prophet sent from God the Father to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom. Israel apathetically stood by without protesting his imprisonment. By this lack of action Israel rejected the Father's plea for them to come into the Kingdom.

Feeding of the 5,000 (Verses 14—21; Mark 6:32—44; Luke 9:10—17; John 6:1—13)

The crowds followed Jesus to Bethsaida, a city on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus began to teach about the Kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing (Luke 9:11). Since it was getting late and the people were hungry the Disciples told Jesus that He should send the crowds away to find lodging and get some food. Jesus told the Disciples to feed the people. They inventoried their resources and came up with five small loaves of bread and a couple of fish, not nearly enough to feed 5,000 men plus

women and children. Their only other plan is to go to buy the food they needed to feed the crowd. They apparently had 200 denarii available but probably not enough to completely satisfy everyone's hunger.

Jesus now took control and had the people sit down, He took the five loaves and two fish, gave thanks and began splitting the food until all were fed and satisfied. Not only were they completely satisfied but there were also 12 baskets of food left over.

I believe this was a lesson for the Disciples. They were so wrapped up in doing things from a human standpoint that they lost sight of a heavenly solution. They had seen Jesus performing many miracles but it never occurred to them to depend upon Him for their other physical needs. Just as Jesus depended completely on the Father, He was training the Disciples to depend completely on Him. With the Tribulation on the horizon, the Disciples and Little Flock of believers will need to trust Christ to get them through this time of trial. Christ was showing them that it was up to them to take care of the followers. Originally the Disciples put the burden on the crowd to feed themselves. Christ put the burden on the Disciples and showed them that to accomplish that they needed to depend on Christ. It is Christ and Him alone who will be able to supply abundantly all their needs and desires. The Disciples were to play a critical function during the Tribulation, that of helping to sustaining the Little Flock. Believers during the Tribulation will be praying for their daily bread (Matthew 6:11) and this will be supplied through Christ.

Just as these Kingdom saints need to rely fully on Christ we need to do the same. Paul implores us to continually go to God in prayer with all our requests. Praying is an indication of dependence and trust. If we think we are capable within ourselves then there is no reason to depend upon the Lord. However, when we feel we have run out of options we suddenly fall to our knees and beg God for help. If only we would have the same urgency before we get to that place of helplessness. It's God who will supply us with all our needs (Philippians 4:19) but we often get our needs and desires mixed up and think God will supply us beyond what He has promised.

The struggle in the boat at night (verses 22—33; Mark 6:45—52; John 6:16—21)

Matthew now continues the story after the feeding of the 5,000 with the account of Peter walking on water. Almost all of Christendom views this incident as a demonstration of Peter's faith to get out of the boat and the wavering of his faith when he takes his eyes off of Jesus. We will expand on this in the next lesson.

A careful reading of the accounts shows that Jesus made the Disciples get into the boat to cross the sea while He stayed behind to send the crowd home and to commune with the Father alone. According to John He left the people because they were going to make Him King by force instead of at the proper time. The Disciples were rowing against the wind all night and had traveled only about 3—4 miles and it was now sometime after 3 a.m. Jesus was on a nearby mountain and could see them struggling even in the dark. This would not normally be possible but the Father had enabled Him to see the Disciples from a great distance in the darkness, just as Christ will be watching the Little Flock going through the Tribulation.

Showing the Disciples struggling against a storm pictures what the Little Flock will be going through in the Tribulation. Their only hope will be Christ but He will seem far away. He will have hidden His face from Israel (Deuteronomy 32:19—22; Psalm 27:7—10 notice that David is seeking the face of the Lord meaning He has hidden Himself. David is a picture of the Little Flock. Psalm 44:22—26; Psalm 143:7—9; Micah 3:4; Ezekiel 39:29 Morning is a metaphor for the dawning of the Kingdom after the darkness of the Tribulation. See Psalm 5, 46, 88.).

Whether going through the Tribulation or just getting through life in this Age of Grace we need to recognize the importance of continual reliance upon God. As soon as we are doing things in our own power we are depending on the old nature. It's impossible for the sin nature to please God. Paul admonishes us to put off the old and put on the new (Ephesians 4:22—24). We are to walk in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16—25; Romans 8:4; 13:14). Anything less is not pleasing to the Lord.

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