

Matthew, chapters 14-15 More Training of the Twelve for Mission

Jesus continues and intensifies His training of the Twelve as He enters what is [more or less] His final year of ministry before His crucifixion.

This period of His training emphasizes His compassion for the lost crowds, His working of many more powerful miracles, and the growing antagonism of His enemies from all fronts.

CONTEXT & MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

1 / In **Matthew 13**, Jesus had delivered His third of five major teaching/training discourses that Matthew uses to form the ‘skeleton’ of his writing plan for His Gospel [**chs 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25**]. In all of these discourses, Jesus is ‘making disciples’ of His disciples—with the end in view of commissioning them in the end [**ch 28.16-20**] to go with His **“all authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth”** and **“make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.”**

2 / **Matthew 13** is especially instructive in that Jesus teaches them how the Kingdom of Heaven [of which He Himself is the Sovereign King] will be received by the hearers of the coming ages; how it will grow until the end of this age; and how God’s eternal, covenant, and redemptive purposes will be fulfilled.

3 / **Matthew 13 ends** with yet another ‘homecoming’ visit to Nazareth [different from the **Luke 4.16-30** visit]. They have not changed their minds nor softened their hearts of unbelief toward Him. They are a representative example of the ‘beaten pathway’ hearers of the first parable [**ch 13.1-4, 18-19**]. What we have to see in all these illustrative vignettes that Matthew records is the representative experiences and encounters follow each of Jesus’ teaching sessions.

4 / So now we come to **chs 14-15**. We are going to see yet still more examples of how the various groups of hearers among the cultures of their communities received Jesus and how we can expect them to receive us also.

5 / There are just a few prominent themes or ‘threads’ that are interwoven into these two chapters that will connect Matthew’s writing plan with what he’s written before and what he will write following:

[1] Jesus continues to impress upon His disciples **what the Kingdom of Heaven is—the essential and spiritual character and workings of the Kingdom of Heaven [especially in ch 15.1-20]**;

[2] He continues to display **His identity as Messiah, Son of God, Son of David, and Sovereign King** by working wonderful miraculous works in their presence...and the belief, confidence, and acknowledgement among His disciples continues to mature—even as they also display seasonal lapses in that faith;

[3] He continues to ignite **growing and mounting enmity and antagonism**, especially from the elite ruling classes of the religious leaders—a power struggle and conflict between the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of this world, in other words, *spiritual warfare* [see again **ch 12.22-30, 43-45**]. [I know this is getting ahead of ourselves, but when we come to the next lesson in **ch 16**, Jesus will begin His intense pre-conditioning His disciples for what lies before Him by foretelling His death and resurrection.]

6 / So again, what we will do here in **chs 14-15** is break down the content of the text into its larger movements and connect them with the context of what Matthew is developing as Jesus trains His twelve...

Chapter 14

I | ch 14.1-12 | Matthew records the guilt-ridden and superstitious reactions of Herod Antipas upon hearing the reports of Jesus’ miracles; and the flash-back account of Herod’s beheading of John the Baptist

1 / This Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great [**ch 2**]. He was the governing tetrarch of Galilee where most of Jesus’ ministry was conducted. Of course, he is going to hear and know of Jesus’ widespread works, fame, and acclaim. [Jesus finally has a face-to-face confrontation with this Herod in **Luke 23.6-12**—but that will be about a year in the future from this account.] But when Herod hears about Jesus, his

guilty conscience begins to plague him because he had ordered the execution of John the Baptist shortly before this, and he fears that John had been resurrected—and with these miraculous powers, might be coming back for revenge against him. John had repeatedly [**“been saying to him”**] that his adulterous marriage to his brother, Philip’s, wife was **“not lawful.”** Herod’s adulterous wife, Herodias, no doubt stoked his vendetta against John. So **“Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias...”** John was incarcerated from some time and even had some intriguing conversations with Jesus [Mark 6.19-20]. It was during this time also that John had sent some of his disciples to Jesus with his questions [ch 11.1-18]. Matthew is connecting this passage with that one.

2 / John’s execution was occasioned by this debauched birthday party Herod threw for himself and by the sensual, provocative dancing of Salome, Herodias’s daughter—pleasing the men attendees. In Herod’s drunken and senseless pleasure, he offered Salome any reward she asked. She consulted with her wicked mother, Herodias, who demanded the decapitated head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod was too proud to take back his promise and too cowardly to deny Herodias, so he ordered the beheading.

3 / Two touching scenes here: [1] John’s disciples bravely associated with John and went to request his body for burial; [2] **“and they went and told Jesus,”** John’s friend and the One whom John had introduced. NOTE: We also need to see here another stark example of the enmity Jesus had warned His disciples that they, too, will encounter as they identify and witness for Him; AND we should also see here a foreshadowing of Jesus’ own ultimate death at the hands of His enemies.

II | ch 14.1-21 | Jesus seeks to withdraw from those regions, seeking rest; but the crowds continue to seek Him out; Jesus has compassion on them [again] and heals their sick; then He miraculously feeds the crowd of 5000+ with meager supplies

1 / John’s martyrdom forebodes the same dangers that Jesus faces in these same regions of Herod’s jurisdiction. In fact, just a few short months after this, more toward the end of His ministry, Jesus will be warned **“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you”** [Luke 13.31]. But here in Matthew, Jesus senses the growing hostility from Herod, and so **“...when Jesus heard this, He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself.”** Jesus is exhausted by His constant ministry labors and now compounded by His grief over the martyrdom of His beloved friend and prophet, John. ANOTHER THING HERE: His disciples had returned from their short mission trips [see ch 10], and they, too, were tired [Mark 6.30-31]. So Jesus takes them away on a respite retreat—to debrief them, hear their ministry stories, and reinforce His ministry teachings and preparations for theirs.

2 / However, He can’t escape the crowds. They were waiting for Him on the shore where they thought they were going for a get-away. Matthew repeats and emphasized Jesus’ **compassion** for the needy crowds [chs 9.36; 14.14; 15.32]. Jesus heals their sick, and then when evening fell, they were still there. His disciples urged Jesus to **“send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”** Jesus wants to teach His disciples that it *their* responsibility to minister to the needy crowds [see ch 9.35-38]. That is to be their mission! **“YOU give them something to eat!”** Jesus takes what they give Him and miraculously creates and multiplies it—not only feeding the **“five thousand men, besides women and children”** but having twelve large baskets of leftovers! **The disciples, and we, need to learn from this that wherever Jesus sends us on His mission, whatever He assigns, gives, and commands us to do, HE will provide and supply the ability and resources to do it!** As we will see here in a minute, the disciples were slow learners of this vital, essential, and fundamental rule of ministry. And us...?

III | ch 14.22-33 | After feeding the crowds, Jesus commands His disciples to get into their boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee; they encounter a terrifying storm at sea; Jesus comes to them walking on the stormy waves; Jesus commands Peter to get out of the boat and come to Him—Peter does, then begins to sink, and Jesus saves him; Jesus commands the storm to cease; the disciples confess Him as “Truly you are the Son of God”

1 / There are three miracles here: [1] Jesus comes to them, walking on the waves of the terrifying storm that had tired and exhausted them after vainly fighting against it all night; [2] Jesus commands Peter to

jump out of the safety of the boat, into the frightening waves, and *walk* on them [like He was] to come to Him—and then rescuing Peter when he began to sink helplessly into the stormy waves; [3] Jesus commands the storm to stand down, reminiscent of the previous event in **ch 8.23-27**.

2 / This is yet another demonstration of Jesus' Kingdom Authority—He is teaching His disciples to trust Him. And yet, **Mark 6.51-52** says that, in this instance, the disciples were afraid because their hearts were hardened from remembering Jesus' feeding the multitudes just a few hours earlier!

IV | ch 14.34-36 | They landed at Gennesaret, another town on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee; multitudes more are brought to Jesus to be healed

1 / **“And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent around to all that region and brought to Him all who were sick...And as many as touched [Him] were made well.”** This is yet another brief account of Jesus' abundant and indiscriminate compassion on the crowds—yet it includes what may have been hundreds of cases of healing all sorts of maladies, afflictions, and disorders of the curse of sin.

2 / We have encountered a number of these 'group healings' in Matthew alone: **chs 4.23-24; 8.16; 9.35-36; 14.14, 34-35; 15.29-31**.

Chapter 15

V | ch 15.1-20 | Jesus is confronted again by the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, questioning and accusing Him of violating the 'traditions of the elders'—their sacrosanct interpretations, extrapolations, and applications of the Law; Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, countering that they were using their 'traditions' to negate and nullify the very Laws of God they were pretending to uphold; He also quotes Isaiah again [Isaiah 29.13]; then follows with two more 'application' messages to the people in attendance and to His disciples

1 / This is a 'follow-up' intentional confrontation from **ch 12.14**: **“But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, how to destroy Him.”** When Matthew says they **“came to Jesus from Jerusalem,”** they sent this embassy some ninety miles to stage this encounter. Matthew is showing us here how the murderous plots of Jesus' enemies among the elite religious ruling class were obsessed with publicly discrediting and undermining Jesus' influence among the people—which, of course, was pitting them against God Himself and The Kingdom of Heaven. **[Matthew traces this intensifying hostility here in his Gospel with a few linking connections: chs 9.3, 11, 14, 34; 12.2, 24; etc.** It will eventually come to their murderous fulfillment in **ch 26.1-4**.]

2 / This particular confrontation was over what they perceived as Jesus' chronic violations of their **'traditions of the elders'** over washing their hands to cleanse themselves from 'uncleanness' they might have unknowingly come into contact with. This was not hygienic washing from bacteria or microbes; it was 'uncleanness' from coming into contact with 'unclean' persons **[see Mark 7.1-8]**. The Pharisees believed that their long-standing 'traditions' held the same God-given authority as the words of God. But what they had done was taken the original commandments of God, extrapolated from them, expanded them, and built numerous 'fences' around them—all in the effort to prescribe situational applications that would keep people from even getting close to violating the original commandment. This is just another example like the numerous “Sabbath laws” they had prescribed—and accused Jesus of violating.

3 / Jesus gives them a prominent example of how their 'traditions' had created 'loopholes' that actually *allowed* people to violate and desecrate God's commandment; **“And many such things you do” [Mark 7.13]**. [1] This conversation was with the accusing Pharisees. [2] Then, **in v 10**, Jesus initiates a second conversation with the people in attendance to straighten out their understanding of the true nature of The Kingdom of Heaven and spiritual uncleanness—that which comes from the heart...which is cleansed or purified by His Gospel, and His Word, and by faith in Him. [3] Then, **in v 12**, Jesus has another more private conversation with His disciples to warn them against their 'traditional' false teachers, calling them bad plants and bad guides. They must understand that they are not contaminated by external contact with socially 'untouchable' people, but by the evil that resides and comes from their own hearts.

VI | ch 15.21-28 | Jesus takes a preaching tour further NW into the district of Tyre and Sidon [ancient Phoenicia]; He is approached by a Gentile woman, a Canaanite, who passionately and insistently petitions Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter; she wins Jesus' heart and grace by her faith—her confession and confidence in His Sovereign and gracious mercy

1 / Matthew inserts this encounter where he does because it is a perfect follow-up and application of Jesus' compassion, mercy, and grace for those who were considered 'unclean' by the 'orthodox' Jewish religious culture of their day. Notice also the linking of Peter's specific interest and questioning of Jesus' 'defiling' parable in vv 15-20. Link this experience of Peter with **Acts 10** when Jesus sent Peter to Cornelius' house.

2 / This whole episode is an intense, significant training experience for Jesus' disciples on so many levels: [1] By going into these regions of **"the districts of Tyre and Sidon,"** Jesus demonstrates His willingness to take His Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Gentiles also. [2] The disciples must learn to face their own cultivated prejudices against those whom their religious upbringing considered to be 'unclean' or 'defiled'—the disciples voiced their cultivated prejudice of considering Gentiles to be 'unclean dogs'; [3] Jesus tests the sincerity and genuineness of this Gentile, Canaanite, Syro-Phoenician woman/mother's faith in Him by reiterating His mission's first-in-time focus on **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** [4] She 'passes the test with flying colors' by her clear insight into the heart of Jesus by her repeated 'come backs': she demonstrates her humility by calling Him **"O Lord, (even) Son of David"**; she pleads for **mercy**; she acknowledges she doesn't deserve Jesus' mercy, either from a cultural or personal perspective; but she also pleads for covenant **mercy** even for her a Gentile and woman from Jesus' power and grace; [5] Jesus graciously grants her request that comes from her deep conviction of **faith** in Him: **"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."** **And her daughter was healed instantly.**

VII | ch 15.29-31 | Jesus returns southward, again to the Sea of Galilee; He ascends again the slope of a mountain to preach and teach the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven; more multitudes of "the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others" are brought to Him to be healed—and He does; this prompts Matthew to record: "And they glorified the God of Israel"

Here is yet another 'combined group example' of Jesus' miraculous healing works. See comment on **14.34-36** above... Matthew points out how these acts of mercy demonstrate the Kingdom Authority of Jesus Christ: **"And they glorified the God of Israel."** Remember how Jesus taught us that our own works of grace and mercy that we perform in His Name should evoke the same response in **ch 5.16**.

VIII | ch 15.32-39 | Once again, this audience crowd who have been with Jesus "now three days" are hungry, having run out of their food supplies; and once again, Jesus commands His disciples to feed them; and once again, the disciples have no idea how they are going to feed that many hungry people; and once again, Jesus feeds them by multiplying what they have on hand; this time, there were four thousand men, besides women and children

1 / Here is yet another instance of Jesus' gracious mercy and **compassion**. The crowds who have been following Him—and whom He has been teaching The Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven—have been with Him **"now three days."** This was an extended, intensive 'camp meeting' of teaching and healing ministry. **"Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I have compassion on the crowd because they...have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.'"** This time, as Matthew says, there were another 4000+ present.

2 / And, once again, when confronted with such a daunting, humanly impossible task, the disciples freak out, **"Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?"** We can almost hear Jesus heave a frustrated sigh—we don't know exactly how long it had been since He had fed the 5000+...but it was relatively recently.

3 / So, once again, Jesus takes what they have, creates and multiplies as He serves, gave His provisions of grace to His disciples to distribute, everyone at to the full and were satisfied, and gathered up seven baskets of leftovers. **Two takeaways for us: [1] Christ is sufficient! [2] When will ever learn to trust Him?**