

“Truly You are The Son of God”

Matthew 13:53-14:36

Key Verse: 14:33

by Joshua Jeon

America has now entered the post-Christian era. America was known as a Christian country, where the word of God and its values were a big part of our culture. But these days, the spiritual climate has dramatically changed. As a public school teacher, I see that if a Muslim or a Buddhist group wants to hold an event, they are welcome. But when a Christian group wants to do something, many objections are raised. Christian ministry is difficult because young people reject any notion of there being just one way to God. When we look at our situation, we can feel hopeless. But we should know that Jesus’ ministry was more difficult. Jesus called his generation wicked and adulterous. The religious leaders just burdened people with legalism. They rejected Jesus, and were looking for a way to kill him. The political leaders were corrupt and immoral. Jesus’ ministry was not easy by any means. What did Jesus do in this situation? Jesus accomplished exactly what God wanted him to do (John 17:4,8): He helped a few faithful disciples to see that he is the Son of God and worship him.

May God lead us to look at Jesus and worship him.

First, Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (1-21)

Chapter 14 opens with a story of King Herod and John the Baptist. When Herod heard reports about Jesus, he told his attendants, **“This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead!”** Herod was a king living in a palace. But when he did an evil thing, he was tormented by evil spirits. The Bible says that there will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah. He prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance. Many people came to him to be baptized, even Jesus. They respected John as a prophet. To them, he was a rare light in a dark time. John boldly challenged people’s sins with the spirit of Elijah. He even challenged the sin of a king, saying to Herod, who took Herodias, his brother’s wife, **“It is unlawful for you to have her.”** What was John’s reward? He was arrested, bound, and put in prison. Back in those days, there was no freedom of speech. Herod wanted to kill John, but he didn’t because he was afraid of the people. However, Herodias had been looking for a way to kill him. The opportunity came on Herod’s birthday. Mesmerized by Herodias’ daughter’s

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seductive dance, he promised her on oath to give her anything she wanted, even up to half the kingdom (Mark 6:23). Prompted by her mother, Herodias, she said, **“Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.”** Can you imagine? Such evil people. Herod was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted. So John was beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. Verse 12 says, **“John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.”**

From a human point of view, John died a meaningless death. But from God’s point of view, John had completed his mission. He was a great man of God. Jesus said of him, **“Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.”** (11:11) John meant a lot to the people. This event sent a shock wave throughout the nation, leaving the people deeply shaken, emotionally devastated, and probably outraged.

When John’s disciples came to Jesus, they must have been enraged. They might have been on the brink of blowing up and starting a revolution. Perhaps that’s why they came to Jesus. But how did Jesus respond? Verse 13a says, **“When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.”** Jesus was deeply grieved by the news. He withdrew by boat to a solitary place. Jesus wanted time alone with God in prayer that he might know what God wanted him to do in such a time.

But Jesus could not have this time. Verse 13b says, **“Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.”** When we read this, we sense desperation in the crowd. Why did they follow him like this? It was because they had tasted the love of God from Jesus and caught a glimpse of the kingdom of God through his words. Who else would they turn to? In their hurt and confusion after John’s death, they sought Jesus out for comfort and clarity. But to Jesus, this crowd could have been burdensome. He needed time to grieve and find comfort in God. But the people ran on foot, and got there ahead of him, and welcomed him as he docked. “Welcome, Jesus.” How burdensome. But how did Jesus see the crowd? Let’s read verse 14 together. **“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”**

Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus understood why they were. He felt their agonies, their pain, their inner sorrow. Jesus deeply empathized with them and wanted to help them by any means. Compassion literally means “suffer together.” Jesus willingly entered their pain and suffered with them. People like

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Herod and the Pharisees couldn't care less about them. With such leaders, people must have felt so alone and abandoned in their suffering. But in Jesus, they found someone who suffered together with them. Leaders have a lot of influence in people's lives. As you know, Pastor Ron is currently in North Korea. North Koreans are suffering so much under the ruthless and merciless leadership of Kim Jung II. While he is living luxuriously in his palace, many North Koreans are suffering and starving to death. Those who lead with the compassion of Jesus are different. Think about Jesus. Jesus has such great power and authority, but he understands us and suffers with us in his great compassion. He even became like one of us, that he may understand our troubles (Heb 4:15).

What did Jesus do in his compassion? He healed their sick. This must have communicated such comfort and love in a difficult time. Even as he was healing their physical sicknesses, his compassion must have healed their emotional and spiritual wounds. Jesus always welcomes us when we come to him. He understands us, heals us, and will make us whole. Praise Jesus!

Look at verse 15. It starts, **“As evening approached...”** Jesus was healing people with such great compassion that he didn't realize how the time was passing by. When the disciples saw the long line of people still waiting to see Jesus, they realized this may go on all night long. They were hungry, but it seemed Jesus didn't notice. If they were hungry, the crowd was hungry, too. So they came to Jesus 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.”** Their suggestion was really good. They understood the situation well. We can even say that that the disciples had compassion for the hungry crowd. But the problem was that their compassion was very limited, and they didn't yet have the faith that Jesus could feed them all. They only looked at the situation. Like the disciples, when we just look at the situation and not at Jesus, we cannot but despair over our limitations. But when we look at Jesus, we realize nothing is impossible.

How did Jesus respond? Let's read verse 16 together, **“Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’”** Jesus' compassion was boundless. He didn't want to send the crowd away. He wanted to be with them a little longer. He wanted to feed them. Jesus wanted his disciples to have that same compassion for the crowd. Jesus didn't want them to be satisfied with their limited compassion, but wanted their hearts to be stretched until they had compassion like Jesus.

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We must know that God has compassion on people today who are perishing in their sins. God wants all people to be saved. That's why he sent Jesus. God is looking for people who share his compassion. May we hear Jesus' words to us, **“You give them something to eat.”**

It is exactly when we have this kind of compassion that we realize we have so little to offer. So Jesus wanted his disciples to learn to put their faith in him. To them, it was impossible to feed all those people. But for Jesus, it was possible, because Jesus is the Almighty, Creator God.

We learn here that we need be driven by compassion, and we need faith to depend on Jesus' ability. If we just have compassion and no faith, we'll despair because we can't do much for people. And if we have faith and no compassion, we amount to nothing. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:2, **“If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”** We need to grow in both compassion and faith. When we do, we will experience the power of God. Here's a good example. George Mueller was a minister in England in the 19th Century. He was a man of great compassion, who gave his life to serve orphans. He understood their pains and became like their father. But he was also a man of great faith. He absolutely believed that God would provide everything the orphans needed. So he prayed for God's provision for them, never asking people for money or going into debt - only prayed, and God came through every time. Throughout his lifetime, though he died penniless, millions of dollars came and went through his hands to over 10,000 orphans under his care.

God is doing a new thing at UIC these days. A few years back, the ministry looked rather desolate. The Bible House was always empty. We wondered why we spent so much money to build a new one. But then, a few people who had great compassion for the lost souls at UIC and the faith that God can do a great thing, challenged the situation, depending on God. These days, we are witnessing the great work of God among us - with about 60 UIC students coming for Bible studies, and many students aspiring to grow as spiritual leaders. It's amazing. Where there is great compassion and faith in God, there is the display of God's power.

I realized that I had compassion for people, but often despaired, because I did not have faith that God can really change a person and turn his life around. Compassion without faith leads to despair. I learned that I have to depend on God. By faith, I want to hold onto Jesus' words, **“You give them something to eat.”**

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How did the disciples reply? They said, **“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.”** Their answer shows that they accepted Jesus’ compassion for the people. But the fact was that they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus said, **“Bring them here to me.”** Though it was nowhere near enough, Jesus accepted it, gave thanks, and used it greatly. Verses 21-22 say, **“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand, besides women and children.”**

What did the disciples learn from this event? The disciples saw who Jesus really was. They saw how Jesus is full of compassion, wanting to serve each person until each one was fully satisfied. Ultimately, it is Jesus himself who is the bread of life, truly satisfy us. When we come to Jesus, we will never go hungry. The disciples also saw that Jesus is the Mighty God, who multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed more than 5,000 people. Jesus is mighty, and he is mightily working among us. Jesus is the main character here, not us. It's God who wants to save all people. And he is doing it. God wants us to participate in what he's doing. All we have to do is bring what we have to Jesus. And when we do, he will work beyond our limited ability, and even beyond our imagination (Eph 3:20).

Second, Jesus Walks on the Water (22-36)

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. In prayer, he found God’s great comfort. In John’s gospel, we see that the people wanted to make Jesus their king by force after this event. Jesus prayed so that he may not follow people’s demands but God’s will.

In the meantime, what was going on with the disciples? Verse 24 says, **“and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.”** After serving a big event, they were probably exhausted. It would have been a nice night to have the wind pushing them forward. But the wind was against them. As we know, the wind is not always pushing us forward. In our lives, we often face the wind against us. Still, if we’re not so tired, we could probably enjoy the challenge, even surf the waves. But when we’re emotionally or spiritually exhausted, we are buffeted by the waves.

Jesus sensed that the disciples needed help. So shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake! Why did Jesus walk on the water? Maybe there were

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no boats left. Or maybe he was just trying to take the fastest way. We again see how compassionate Jesus is. He was ready to help his disciples, like a mother who runs to her child in danger. But when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake, they were terrified. **“It's a ghost,”** they said, and they cried out in fear.

After struggling against the wind for hours, they were exhausted and emotionally unstable. Their faith became weak. This kind of thing sometimes happens to us. Our faith is not always strong. Sometimes, we feel that our faith is hanging on by a thread. We are very vulnerable during this time. We feel like the whole world is against us. We become susceptible to all kinds of fear. And fear paralyzes us.

Let's look at verse 27: **‘But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.’**” Jesus did not rebuke them for their fear. Jesus was gentle with them. Jesus understood them in their weakness and encouraged them, **“Take courage!”** Let's read verse 27 together, **“But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.’”**

After Jesus' encouragement, Peter, of course, said, **“Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.”** Jesus accepted his suggestion, saying, **“Come.”** Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. As long as he looked at Jesus, he experienced God's power. But when he saw the wind, he began to sink. He cried out, **“Lord, save me.”** Jesus immediately reached out for him and saved him, saying, **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** Though we start something by faith, there are external factors that make us doubt. We have to keep our eyes on Jesus and finish by faith.

Then Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. Then it became crystal clear to the disciples. Jesus was not just a man. He was God. For the first time, they worshiped him, saying, **“Truly you are the Son of God.”** Let's read verse 33 together: **“Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”**

Back in chapter 8, in a similar situation, Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and it became completely calm. The disciples were amazed and asked, **“What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”** But that was it. But by this time, they saw Jesus feeding the five thousand. They saw Jesus walking on the water. They came to realize that Jesus was the Son of God, and they worshiped him.

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What does it mean that they worshiped him? Worship calls out our whole being, not just a part of us. It is giving honor, love, and adoration. It requires devotion. Only God is worthy of all these things. Worshiping something other than God is idolatry. The disciples worshiped Jesus because they came to see that Jesus is God and the object of worship.

Like the disciples, we are to worship Jesus. In fact, we were made to worship Jesus. When we worship Jesus, we're proclaiming that Jesus is everything, and that our whole lives belong to Jesus. We're acknowledging that Jesus is our true hope and the meaning of life. In the moment of worship, in the presence of God, all fears and despair and darkness fade away. As the hymn goes, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace."

So, we see here how Jesus had victory over the darkness of his time. He didn't get involved politically. Instead, he chose to plant faith in his disciples until they could come to see him as the Son of God and worship him. This may seem small (just a few men!), but this was a tremendous victory. It would be through these men that Jesus would conquer the world with the gospel. How precious it is when one person turns to Jesus and worships him!

Last night, as I was meditating on this passage, I felt led to repent. Somehow, my Christian life became living out principles and nuggets of wisdom, and not living day by day to worship the Person of Jesus Christ. Lord, help me to see Jesus and worship him!

If we're looking at the situation around us, we will always find reasons to despair and fear. The world around us is so dark and hostile. I often feel intimidated. But when I just see Jesus and worship him, I realize that God is with me. Who can be against me (Ro 8:31)?

Through this passage, we got to see Jesus in his compassion and power. May we look at Jesus and worship him with all our hearts, saying, **“Truly, you are the Son of God.”**