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### **Matthew 13:53 - 14:36**

#### **Resting in the Compassion and Power of Christ**

I've heard a very popular saying that I'm sure you've heard, too. There are different ways of saying it, but it goes something like this: "God will never put more on your plate than you're able to bear; God will never tell you to do something that you can't do." That sounds nice, doesn't it? It would go nicely on a Hallmark card, it might make us feel good. But here's the problem: you just can't find that anywhere in the Bible. In fact, we see the opposite, over and over again: God *constantly* calls us to do what we cannot do in ourselves - so that we will *constantly remember* that we are utterly dependent upon him alone, not ourselves.

Far too often, we fall into the *functional legalism* of thinking that if we just obey and do the right thing, then everything will work out well; that if it's really God's will, then the "doors will always open," it will come easily, and no suffering will be involved. But that wasn't even true of *Jesus*. He was rejected, he knew weakness and difficulty, he suffered. And He was perfect! Do we really think we're better than *Jesus*? Nevertheless, suffering and hardship inevitably comes - even the midst of our obedience and pursuing the Lord. We start to share the gospel and live out our faith publicly, even doing *hard things* out of love for Christ and others - only to be rejected, suffer hostility, and even receive the persecution of mockery, gossip, slander, or worse. We strive to repent, to put away old sins and walk in righteousness - only to still be tempted, to fail, to see even more of our sin than we knew was there. We try to stand on the truth only to fall flat on our faces.

And if we don't expect this - if we're not prepared for it - then we're prone to despair, aren't we? In fact, whether we expect it or not, I think we're all tempted at times to *question and doubt God* when this happens. We're tempted to think, "God must not really love me. Or he must be angry with me. Or if he does love me, then he must not really be able to take care of me and make good on his promises. I'm trying to obey the Lord, but everything's going wrong! Why would God let this happen to me? He must not love me. Or, maybe, He does, but his hands are tied and there's nothing He can do about it!" In short, we're tempted to doubt God's *compassionate love and almighty power* - two essential, fundamental aspects of who God is! Take those away, and you no longer have God. You see, a faulty understanding of the Christian

life actually reveals a *faulty understanding of God*. Therefore, a right understanding only comes by first *seeing the Lord for who He truly is*: full of more compassionate love for you than you can imagine! Full of all the power of the universe, able to fulfill all of His promises and care for His people to the end! And when we understand this, then we're prepared to *trust him*, even when the going gets tough, trusting that the point of it all is to turn us *away from ourselves* and to *run to our gracious Lord, resting in Christ's love*.

That's what we see in **Matthew 13:53 - 14:36**. We see a Jesus who is *far more compassionate and powerful* than we could even hope for! We see a picture of the Christian life that knows both *suffering and persecution* as well as *God's power and grace* for every bit of neediness and weakness that could ever be exposed in our broken lives. We see Jesus's incredible *power and compassion* on display, and we're reminded that *we, too*, get to experience such grace when we respond to Him in worship and faith.

So first, let us see that..

### **I. Jesus is Rejected By Those Who Refuse to Believe (13:53-58)**

After teaching with many parables throughout Matthew 13, the chapter concludes with Jesus leaving and eventually making his way back to his hometown: Nazareth. Up to this point, Jesus's ministry had largely been done in other areas, mainly in the broader region of Galilee, and he had been living and operating out of a different town: Capernaum. His ministry had earned him much popularity and renown for his powerful miracles, authoritative teaching, and signs - all of which pointed to the fact that He was the promised Messiah come to save God's people!

When he comes back to his hometown, he teaches them in the local synagogue - kind of like a "Jewish church" in that day, where they gathered together to read and teach the Scriptures. As Jesus taught from the Old Testament Bible, authoritatively showing them how He is God's promised savior, they were "astonished" - but not in a good way. Jesus was no hometown hero; the people of his hometown, the people who know him and helped raise him, *reject him in senseless unbelief*

Hear the way they respond in vv.54-56, saying, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" These questions they ask are not genuine and sincere.

They are not legitimately weighing the evidence before them to try and understand who He truly is; instead, they have already decided beforehand that Jesus *cannot* truly be who he claims to be. They are “astonished” by his teaching and recognize his “mighty works” of miraculous power, and yet *they still refuse to believe Him*. In their eyes, he is still the kid they watched grow up and have known all his life. They were *offended* by the truth of who Jesus truly is. Even though His power and authority are on display, they refuse to acknowledge, believe, or submit to it. The truth is too uncomfortable and inconvenient for them to bear, and so they *reject it outright with complete disbelief*.

*Verse 58* concludes the brief encounter by explaining the consequences of their rejection and unbelief. Since they do not believe in Jesus, “he did not do many mighty works there.” This isn’t because their unbelief made him *unable* to do so by stripping him of his power; Jesus is God, and His power to heal and perform miracles is not contingent upon whether or not they believe in Him; God doesn’t need our permission. But why, then, does he not do many miraculous works there? Because *faith* is the whole point of his mission; he was *unable*, that is, *unwilling*, to do something contrary to his mission. Jesus performed miracles for a *purpose*: as a sign, backing up his claims that He is the Messiah - God’s promised Savior and King.

By rejecting Jesus outright and refusing to acknowledge his power, authority, or claims, they cut themselves off from the opportunity to witness and benefit from Jesus’s mighty works. But this represents a *greater reality* that was also taking place: Jesus’s refusal to perform miracles because of their unbelief represents the fact that their *unbelief* cuts them off from the opportunity to receive and benefit from the miraculous power of Jesus’s saving grace, mercy, and salvation. Because they refused to believe and rejected Jesus, they rejected and refused His mighty works of redemption. They rejected Jesus because of their unbelief. In turn, God rejects them for rejecting Jesus.

*Application*: Many reject Jesus in our day; it is to be expected; it is often *senseless, unreasonable rejection*, not because of lack of evidence or truth, but because they simply *refuse to accept it*. Many people today *scoff* at the biblical picture and idea of Jesus Christ for *no good reason whatsoever*. They hear the Word of God plainly; they hear the gospel clearly. Yet, they refuse and reject it - not because they have intellectual doubts or logical obstacles in their way, but simply because *they don’t want it to be true*.

When we *see Jesus for who He truly is* and *hear His Word and all that He demands of us* - when we're confronted with the *real Jesus*, the *real gospel*, the *real Bible*, the *real version* of the Christian life - *how do we respond?*

We must be *very quick* to remind both *ourselves* and *others* that *if we reject Jesus in unbelief*, then *God will reject us* on the day of judgment.

## **II. Jesus's Followers Also Suffer Rejection Because of Obedience (14:1-12)**

Chapter 14 opens with a *flashback*. We're told that Herod, the local ruler of the broader region, has heard of Jesus's ministry, and he's alarmed by it. He tells his servants, in v.2, that he thinks Jesus is "John the Baptist" who has "been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work with him." His superstitious beliefs mingle with his sense of guilt to produce fear. Vv. 3-12 tell us why with a flashback: because Herod already killed John.

This is not the "King Herod" of chapter 2, who tried to kill Jesus; this is his son. But this Herod is also a wicked man. He divorced his first wife and married his *brother's wife*, Herodias, considered *incest* by Jewish Law. And so, John the Baptist, who was not shy to proclaim truth and call people to repentance, did just that: he told them that their marriage was "unlawful," according to the Law of God. And of course, this made Herod and Herodias *very angry* - they both wanted to put him to death. Herod threw John in prison, but did not kill him out of fear; not fear of God, but because "he feared the people" (v.5) who knew John was a prophet. But Herodias's hateful rage and thirst for revenge trumped her politics. On Herod's birthday, he threw a lavish party and his step-daughter danced for the crowd (most likely a highly inappropriate situation). Nevertheless, this pleased the wicked Herod, so much so that he publicly promised to give her anything she wished. Being a young girl, most likely a pre-teen, she consulted her mother, Herodias - and Herodias knew exactly what she wanted: John's head. And Herod gave her just that. And so, the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, who feared God and not man, was unjustly martyred for proclaiming the truth of God's Word.

At first glance, it might seem a little odd for this story to be inserted right after the story of Jesus's rejection in his hometown; we might ask, "Why the interruption to the narrative?" But the link between these two sections soon becomes obvious: they're connected by the *common theme of the hostile response* of the unbelieving world. Just as Jesus was *rejected, disbelieved, and opposed*, so also John, the last of the Prophets and forerunner of Christ, was also *rejected and persecuted* - even to the point of death. Indeed, he was *martyred* for obeying God, and

declaring God's Word as truth to those who did not want to hear it. It is no accident that Matthew puts these two stories back to back; they are not in chronological order, so he is clearly linking these two stories together *thematically*; and the point, I think, is to drive home the fact that *those who follow Jesus and proclaim the truth of God's Word* will also suffer rejection, hostility, and persecution by those who do not believe, just like Jesus did.

To be a Christian is to be a *disciple* - a student, a *follower* of Christ. This means we must truly *believe, obey, and proclaim* what Jesus says - and ultimately, this includes the entire Word of God, as rightly understood through the lens of the gospel. We are called to follow Christ; we are called to live by and proclaim the truth of the Bible, God's Word. But as we do so, we must not be fooled: just as many will reject the gospel we proclaim, so also they will *reject, despise, and even persecute us*.

We proclaim that we are all sinners; and this means we have to call out and repent from *specific sins*; the ones that you and I struggle with, the ones that our friends and neighbors are enslaved to. To proclaim the gospel is to tell people that *we're the bad guys* and we *have to repent, beg the Lord for forgiveness, and receive his merciful grace*. This is the best news in the world to us! But is it a *scandalous offense*, an "aroma of death" to those who are perishing in unbelief. You see, if you genuinely strive to believe, obey, and follow Jesus, *you will face opposition*; there will be those who get *angry with you* for following the Lord, who are even *offended* by it.

We proclaim *God's Word* as the ultimate standard for truth, goodness, justice, and righteousness. And this includes the areas that are *unpopular and uncomfortable* for our postmodern values and sensibilities. What if we live and speak as if we *truly believe* what God says about *purity, marriage, gender, and fidelity*? What about if we live and speak as if we truly believe what God says about *repentance, confession, personal character, holiness, selfless humility, gentle patience, and gracious forgiveness*? What if we take seriously God's demands for the way we live our lives and follow Jesus - even as a local church? What if we are a church community that follows Christ, *even publicly*, no matter what that entails?

If we do so, then there will be those who *don't like it*. They'll find us offensive. But make no mistake: it's because they *don't like Jesus*; they find His Word offensive. It's because they are rejecting Christ. And to reject Christ and His Word is to reject the gospel in unbelief.

Therefore, let us stand firm and take courage by remembering clearly *why it is all worth it!* Let us remember clearly *who Jesus is* that we may rightly *respond to him*.

Which brings us to point 3...

### **III. Jesus Overflows with Power and Compassion (14:13-21, 34-36)**

Verse 13 resumes the narrative of vv.1-2, before the flashback about John; when Jesus hears of Herod's response to his ministry (not the death of John the Baptist), he decides to withdraw. However, the crowds follow him. He and his disciples take a boat to escape the crowds, only to find they have already beaten them there on foot!

So here we have it: Jesus has just withdrawn, trying to escape the crowds and get some alone time and rest, only to have his plans and rest *interrupted* by crowds of the needy. The million dollar question is: how will he respond? If he were like us (or like *me* anyways), we might expect him to be annoyed and cranky. But incredibly, he doesn't! He had *compassion* on them. Hear v.14: "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had *compassion* on them and healed their sick." Not annoyance or frustration; mercy, compassion, kindness, and grace. This is what flows out of our wondrous Lord and Savior!

***How often we forget just how much loving compassion and gracious mercy Jesus has for us and so willingly lavishes on us!*** Do you ever fail to approach the Lord with your problems and needs, your sin and brokenness, your fault and flaws - simply because you're afraid He will be angry, frustrated, and annoyed with you? That your prayers will inconvenience or disappoint Him? Oh praise the Lord that is not how our Father is! Our God overflows with *compassion*, especially when we come to him with our *brokenness and neediness!* Do you ever forget that? Do you ever struggle to remember this reality - the depth of Jesus's compassion for you, even when you're at your worst, your lowest, your neediest?

Apparently, the Twelve Disciples were slow to grasp the depth of his compassion, too. When dinner time came, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "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." But Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." And they said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." (vv.15-17). They still didn't get it; even if they understood now Jesus's compassionate desire to provide for these needy people, they still *doubted* His ability and power to do so.

But Jesus replies, in v.18, “Bring them here to me.” There were five thousand men there, and *even more* women and children; thousands and thousands of people all gathered together. Two fish, five loaves of bread? That’s no problem - not for the God who created everything out of nothing. So he tells the thousands of people to sit down, he takes the bread and the fish, he looks up to heaven, and he *prays*, blessing the food. He breaks the bread, and the fish, and breaks it *again*, and *again*, and *again*, multiplying the food until it *fills up every plate and belly there*, leaving twelve baskets full of leftovers! The Lord *miraculously provides and satisfies* those who come to him - those who are needy and hungry, desperate and broken! They come to Jesus seeking compassion - and they find more than they even hoped for!

What an incredible reminder to us, a *picture* of who Jesus really is! Full of both *merciful compassion* to meet our deepest needs and the *miraculous power* necessary to meet them!

We see this again in vv.34-36, the last section at the end of the chapter: Jesus and his followers step off a boat into a different land and as soon as the people recognize him - as soon as they *see and understand* who Jesus is - they “brought to him all who were sick and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well” (vv.35-36).

Jesus overflows with more mercy, grace, compassion, and kindness than we could possibly hope for or imagine! That’s how he feels about you this morning. He cares about you. He cares about your needs. Even your deepest need: to have your sin, guilt, and shame washed away by grace; to be healed and cleansed not just from physical sickness, but the sickness of your soul; to be saved even from the disease of *death*. And he has the *power* to do just that! Jesus displayed such compassion in power not only in his life, but in his *death* on the cross, where he died in our place, and three days later when he rose from the grave!

Draw near to Christ; He will wrap His arms of compassion around you, in the fullness of His might and power! Simply behold Jesus for who He is and *cling to him by faith*.

Which brings us to our final point...

#### **IV. Jesus’s Followers Should Trust, Obey, and Worship Him No Matter What (14:22-33)**

Once again, we see Jesus display his compassion and power; but this time, we also see clearly *how we are supposed to respond*: with *true faith*. After feeding the thousands, Jesus

withdrew alone “to pray” and sent his disciples ahead to cross the lake by boat. Late at night, the boat was not making much progress; they were caught in a storm, beat back by the wind. And in the middle of the storm, Jesus started walking across the water to them - an overt display of His divine power. The disciples were scared at first, thinking it was a ghost - after all, it’s the middle of the night, in a storm, and people usually don’t walk on water! But their fear turns to faith *when they recognize Jesus.*

Peter cries out to Jesus, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (v.28). And Jesus tells him, “Come.” Sure enough, Peter gets out of the boat and begins walking across the water to Jesus! But then, “when he saw the wind, he was afraid,” and he began to sink (30). Jesus responds by compassionately reaching out and grabbing him, saving him from sinking, but also a gentle rebuke: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Clearly, this shows us two things about the relationship between *faith* and *obedience*: *first*, that true faith is revealed by our obedience. But *secondly*, that *true obedience* is impossible without faith! When Jesus tells Peter to come to him, this is a command that *Peter cannot do on his own* - he can only obey this with Christ’s help. True faith is *obedient*; true faith hears and obeys the call and command of Christ - but faithful obedience means obeying not in our own strength but by *trusting in Christ.*

Christ commands us, as his followers, to do the impossible - that is, to do what is impossible *on our own, apart from Christ.* Look back at the last section: just before Jesus feeds the tens of thousands in the crowds, he first turns to the disciples and commands them, “*You* give them something to eat” (14:16). This is utterly impossible: they are utterly incapable of fulfilling this command! It is absolutely impossible for us, humanly speaking, to feed tens of thousands of people when we only have a few pieces of bread and fish. If I have 5 loaves of bread and 2 pieces of fish, and my wife tells me, “Feed this to the kids for dinner,” that’s no problem; I can obey that command. But I cannot feed it to tens of thousands! Yet Jesus commands them to feed the thousands and do the impossible. Why? Because the whole point is that *they need Jesus’s help to do so!* He commands them to do something that they cannot do apart from him - but *can* do with his help! In order to obey Jesus’s command, they were supposed to *come to him and ask him to do it.*

And that’s what we see again here, isn’t it? Peter recognizes that he can’t walk on water - but he also believes that *he can, if Jesus empowers him to do so!* And so it is for us. It is



*impossible* for us to obey the weighty commands of God on our own; we are wretched sinners, bent towards selfish desires! If we try to be morally good and obey the Law of God on our own strength, thinking we are capable of being good and righteous enough, we will *utterly fail*. Our only hope is that He will empower us to obey Him! And part of the grace of the gospel is: He will!

So when we see that God commands us to do something - like put away anger and lust, selflessly serve others, share the gospel with the lost, or be patient and gentle with someone who is wronging us - the proper response is not to say: OK, I think I can do that, I will try my best.” If that’s our plan of action, we’ve already failed. The only way forward is to humbly acknowledge, “Lord, I *cannot* obey your commands! It’s impossible! But Lord, if you’re commanding me to do this in the Bible, then *I trust that you can and will* empower me to do so! I believe you are gracious and powerful enough to do so! Help me to trust in you for the strength I need to obey!” This is the only path forward. The only path to obedience begins with *recognizing our utter need for Christ’s grace to obey, and trusting that He really will help us obey Him*.

But we might ask: why? Why does Christ command us to do what he knows we can’t do apart from his help? What’s the point of repeatedly going through the process?

The point is that we *worship the Lord*. Sure enough, that’s where this story ends. After Jesus helps Peter, they climb back in the boat, in the middle of the storm, and Jesus once again displays his miraculous power, displaying who He is: “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased” (v.32) *He made the storm stop*. How do the disciples respond? The right way: “And those in the boat *worshipped him*, saying, ‘Truly, you are the Son of God.’” (v.33) They *worshipped him*, seeing Jesus for who he truly is: the Son of God, the *God-Man*.

As we step out of the boat and onto the water - as we fix our eyes on Jesus and strive to obey his impossible commands by trusting in His infinite grace, then *we experience for ourselves who Jesus is!* And when we see Jesus, the only right response is to *worship Him*. True faith *trusts, obeys, and worships* Jesus.

This is an exercise of faith, in which we constantly have to come to terms with our own brokenness and weakness, and truly trust in what we claim to believe: the *good news of God’s grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ!* We have nothing to offer the Lord. We cannot obey God on our own. But the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that He has *mercy* on us; that He lived, died, and was raised in our place, so that *by grace through faith in Him alone* we are saved

*from our sins!* And that's not just a past reality, it's a *present reality*; by grace through faith in Christ alone we continue to *trust Him, obey Him, and worship Him forever.*

So let us cast our eyes on Jesus! Let us truly believe in who He is, and *trust Him.* No matter what the cost, no matter what we might suffer, no matter how impossible it may seem - let us obey and worship the Lord by His incredible compassion, power, and grace!

If you have any questions about how to rightly respond to our glorious Lord Jesus - questions about faith, becoming a Christian, baptism, or even church membership, I would love to speak with you. You can come now or find me after the service. Let us pray.