The King's Compassion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2019

Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0:00] Good evening, everyone. Great to see you all. My name's Jeremy. I'm one of the ministers here at St. John's. If you are new-ish to the evening service to St. John's, I'd love to meet you after the service.

If you've been here for a while, I don't really want to talk to you. We are now in the very center of Matthew's Gospel. Tonight is chapter 14 out of a total of 28 chapters.
We've seen and heard Jesus do some pretty amazing things. We have seen him teach like no one who ever lived.
We've seen him heal like no one who ever lived. He has authority over sin and sickness and evil like no one who ever lived. By chapter 14, this Jesus, well, he ought to be the talk of the whole Roman world.
Wouldn't you think? That everybody would be following his every step, waiting with bated breath for what he will say and do next? Instead, though, just these last several weeks, we have seen Jesus rejected by his own hometown in chapter 13.
[1:16] We've seen that he's hated by the religious leaders all over Israel. Last week, his own cousin John the Baptist was brutally murdered by Herod, the sociopath.

And last but not least, his band of 12 married disciples, they just don't seem to really understand who he is or what he is doing.
The light bulb has not come on. But then again, hasn't Jesus already told us that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed?
Which means that Jesus isn't going to give up on his disciples yet. In fact, it's the very opposite. Beginning here in chapter 14, Jesus is increasingly involving his disciples in his ministry.
So two remarkable miracles are before us tonight. Jesus first creates food for more than 5,000 people out of nothing.
[2:22] And then, second, he walks on the chaos of the stormy sea as if it was dry land. No one has ever done anything like this before or since.

And in both cases, the focus of Matthew's story is not primarily on the miracles, a bit puzzling, but on the disciples, on their lack of understanding and on their feeble faith in who Jesus is and what he's come to do.
But don't worry, that's good news for us. Because Jesus is the king, the son of the living God. His power is large, huge. And yet the disciples' vision of who Jesus is remains small.
It's like they're looking through binoculars turned around the wrong way. Because our faith in Jesus is often small like the disciples'. Our hearts are often full of doubts like Peter's.
But Jesus' compassion is large. And best of all, he uses us in our weaknesses. In fact, he shares his ministry in and through us.
[3:38] Our faith is small, but his grace is large. So let's examine these two stories, one at a time. And we're going to keep it simple. We're going to ask the same three questions for each one.

First of all, who is Jesus? Secondly, what tempts us to doubt Jesus? And lastly, how does Jesus respond to this?
So starting in verse 13 and 14, who is Jesus? Matthew shows us Jesus' identity here using one very simple word.
The key word in verse 14. Compassion. Compassion. Imagine that you've just heard about the death of a dear loved one. In Jesus' case, it was his cousin John the Baptist, who he's known his whole life, who had just been murdered by Herod recently.
Verse 13. Now when Jesus heard this, this news, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. So Jesus needs time to grieve, but he doesn't even get the chance.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:31:35

[4:42] Verse 13 continues. When the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns, so that when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd. What would you do?

I have three children, and when I'm emotional or tired, I am impatient, selfish, and short-tempered. And I love my kids.
So imagine how I would respond if it was a crowd of needy strangers. That's exactly what Jesus is facing.
But his response is completely different. Verse 14 continues. And he had compassion on them and healed their sick. This verb, had compassion, it's only ever used in the Gospels to describe Jesus' emotion.
Nobody else has this kind of emotion. It's a strong word, and in the Greek it literally means it's a feeling, a passion that comes right from your guts, right from deep down inside you.
[5:45] The Greeks thought the only feeling that could come from that deep inside of you was anger. But for Jesus, what comes from the deepest part of his guts, what is it?

Compassion. He is the compassionate one. He heals the sick despite his own fatigue and grief. He possesses and displays the tender mercy of God himself. That's who he is.
So what tempts us to doubt this Jesus? Look at verse 15 with me. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the day is now over.
Send the crowds away to go into the villages to buy food for themselves. Seems reasonable. Send the crowds away. It's a command. The disciples are tired and hungry, and so they tell Jesus what to do.
Pretty cheeky. And not much compassion, is there? Jesus' compassion, we've said, is huge. It's...
But the disciples' vision of who Jesus is and what he can do in this situation, well, it remains small.
[6:50] And so when they look at this situation, this vast crowd in the middle of nowhere, they look at it with materialistic eyes. And they see a resource shortage.

That's what they see. There is no food trucks in this area. Send the people back to the towns. Hope that they can get a little bit of day-old bread. So they take control of the situation, and they're going to tell Jesus what to do.
Which brings us to our third question. What is Jesus' response going to be? Look at verse 16. But Jesus said, They need not go away.
You give them something to eat. The you is emphatic. Jesus confronts them with the need for a better solution. And it continues like this. They said to him, We only have five loaves here and two fish.
And it makes me wonder, Are they feeling incredulous? Or are they being a bit of a smartass? I don't know. But despite everything they've seen Jesus do from chapters 1 to 13, they don't seem to think that he can fix this problem.
[8:00] So, does Jesus give up on them? Nope. They tried to take control of the situation and tell him what to do. He turns it around and he takes control of the situation.

And now he's going to tell them what to do. Matthew narrates verse 19. And he narrates it in such a way that there's two main verbs that govern what happens here.
There's two verbs. Jesus gave thanks. In the ESV it's translated, He said a blessing. He gave thanks. And he gave the food to the disciples. Those are the two most important things happening here.
And what did the disciples do? Well, they gave the food to the crowds. They fed the crowds. In other words, Jesus includes his stubborn, half-witted, short-sighted disciples in his ministry.
The miracle is going to be performed through the disciples. He mediates his grace to the crowds through these men. Amazing.
[9:03] Verse 20. And the whole crowds, they all ate and were satisfied. And afterwards, they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

And those who ate were about five thousand men besides women and children. As many as twenty thousand people. If you've been a Christian for a while, then you've already experienced many tangible examples of the power of God in your life.
Yet, each one of us is so easily discouraged when a seeming lack of money or time or energy in our gospel kingdom work.
Makes it seem as if our problem is too big for God to overcome. We forget that we serve a bigger God. And the Lord Jesus has proven that his power can overcome any odds.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:31:35

Sometimes we need to be reminded of what our God can do. So I remember hearing this fantastic story from our evening service missions team who stood up just a few moments ago. This is the team that went to India and Nepal.
[10:10] And they shared this story through Jeremy and Krista Curry, working with YWAM in Nepal. The YWAM team was delivering Bibles in a village.

The team had packed sixty Bibles for this village. But once they arrived, they counted out the houses and they realized that they needed eighty-four Bibles. In order for every house to have one. They began pulling Bibles out of their bag and handing them out door to door. When they had finished their visit, they realized that God had miraculously multiplied those Bibles so that there was eighty-four Bibles, one for each home in that village.
Our faith is often small. But our Lord Jesus delights to use us in our weakness for the glory of his name. Here's a great quote from one commentator I read this week.
We often feel that we have an insufficient five loaves and two fish with which to address the great needs of our world. We are easily discouraged by realities that tell us we cannot cope.
[11:17] But the Christian faith is nothing if it is not a supernaturalism. If it can only count to seven. If it does not believe that Jesus is risen and can do all things.

The disciples think that they have nothing except seven items. They forget that wherever Jesus is present, disciples should always count to eight.
End quote. So tonight, where are you tempted to tell Jesus what to do? Send the crowds away. Where do you see only a lack of resources?
Where does it feel like you have so little to bring to Jesus? And can you count past seven? Do you believe, truly believe, that Jesus' power is made perfect in your weakness?
So let's move along to our second miracle. Jesus walks on water. Verses 22 to 23 is where we begin. And once again, we begin with this question. Who is Jesus? After the great feast, Jesus makes his disciples go ahead of him while he dismisses the crowds.
[12:36] So that by verse 24, the disciples have been rowing in the boat against the waves and the wind for perhaps around eight hours. They are exhausted.

And Jesus has once again orchestrated this moment in order to show them more of himself and invite them into deeper ministry with him.
We jump right to verse 25. In the fourth watch of the night, sometime between 3 and 6 a.m., Jesus came to them walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified.
And they said, It's a ghost. And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. Jesus is not in the habit of doing miracles of convenience. Remember he said to Satan, I will not put the Lord God to the test. So, him crossing the water, walking on the water, it's not just a quick way to catch up with the disciples.
[13:44] In the Old Testament scriptures, it is only God who can control the chaos of the seas. It is only the Lord alone who is ever pictured as hovering or walking on the water, over the deep, and calming the storm.

Of course, the disciples here fail to recognize Jesus, which is noteworthy and not very surprising. It's a ghost. But Jesus' words in verse 27, they declare who he is beyond any doubt.
It is I. Literally, ego ami. I am. Yahweh. The divine name, which is now uttered by Jesus himself. Demonstrating his power as the God of creation. His identity as God himself. Coming to them over the sea. And in this part of the story, we get actually the question, the second question and the third question, find themselves mixing together.
So, the question, what tempts us to doubt Jesus, is actually mixed right in with Jesus' response. So, let's not even try to tease them apart, but let's look at them together.
[15:06] What tempts us to doubt Jesus here? And how does Jesus respond? Verse 28 to 30. Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

And Jesus said, Come. So, Peter gets out of the boat, and he walks on the water towards Jesus. Amazing. And it's Peter who's representing the disciples here. Some commentators are very critical of what Peter does.
They seem to think that he might be showing off. Or that when he says, If it is you, as in he's not quite sure, so I'm going to walk on water to prove it.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:31:35

That's pretty risky. I think Matthew gives Peter more credit here. Because this seems to me to be a huge step forward in faith from where we just saw the disciples a few verses ago commanding Jesus what to do in the middle of the wilderness when there's a food shortage.
You remember then they said, Send them away. Well, what's happening here? It's the exact reverse. Peter asks Jesus. He says, You command me to come to you on the water.
[16:15] I'm not going to tell you what to do anymore. And Jesus honors Peter's request. He says, Come, in verse 29. And for a brief time, Peter participates in that amazing miracle of walking on water.

What grace from Jesus. But then verse 30. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me. Because Peter's gaze, it turns away from Jesus.
And he begins to see those rolling waves. And he feels the harsh spray in his face. And the stormy wind in his hair. And he falters. He's afraid.
He's afraid that the storm's power is greater than Jesus' power. And in his doubt, he begins to sink. And he cries out for help. Peter has shown once again that his faith is small.
It's a moment of weakness. But Jesus responds in verse 31. Jesus immediately reaches out his hand and he grasps hold of him. And he took hold of him and he pulls him up.
[17:24] Because Jesus is showing his patient and steadfast compassion once again. He reaches out, grasps onto Peter, and then he rebukes him, but gently.

A gentle rebuke in verse 31. Saying to him, Peter, oh you of little faith, why did you doubt? You of little faith.
This was the same thing that Jesus said to all the disciples in chapter 8 when they were in another storm on the Sea of Galilee. And the disciples grew afraid that they were going to die.
And Jesus calmed the lake with a word. It's like Jesus is saying here in chapter 14, Peter, haven't you learned anything from experiencing my saving presence in your life?
Just in this sort of situation. Is your memory so short? And then he says, why did you doubt? And doubt here, this word, it literally means to be divided in two.
[18:30] It's not an intellectual doubt. That's not what it means. It means more like a hesitation. It's the same word that's used by Jesus referring to his disciples during the Great Commission in Matthew chapter 28, verse 17.

It reads like this, when they, the disciples, saw the resurrected Jesus and they worshipped him, but some doubted. Some hesitated. I don't think, I don't think that this doubt like this, it's meant to be seen as sinful.
Our hesitation, that feeling that we're being pulled in two different directions at the very same time, I think that Jesus knows that that's a reality for us, as it was for Peter, and that Jesus will honor it and he will love, he will love to draw near, draw nearer to us if we bring those doubts to him in humble prayer.
Lord, help me to be single-minded, to focus on you alone. So again, I ask you, where do you find yourself doubting Jesus?
Where are you growing fearful because your gaze has turned away from his face and is looking towards the wind? Perhaps a medical diagnosis, or unemployment, or your child's foolish decisions, too much money, chronic pain, heartbreak, loneliness, or despair at the state of our world.
[20:08] All these cares, they blow in our faces and they threaten to turn our eyes away from Jesus. But friends, fix your eyes on this, on this Jesus.

Christian faith is not blind faith. It's not close your eyes and walk off the cliff. fix your eyes on this Jesus.
What's the difference between faith and superstition? What's the difference? Christian faith has an object. And the object of our faith is Jesus Christ, who is trustworthy and true.
But neither is Christian faith a perfect faith. I watched, last week I watched the movie Free Solo. Anybody seen Free Solo yet? My palms were sweating, bottom of my feet were sweating.
Alex Honnold is attempting to climb El Capitan, a 3,000 foot vertical sheer rock face without any ropes. That climb required perfection.
[21:22] Any single mistake meant death. Christian faith is not like that. You'll be happy to know. Because you will let Jesus down. I let Jesus down.

But the good news is that he's compassionate and gracious. He takes hold of us when we are falling and we cling to him as he carries us to safety. If there's anybody that is climbing that rock

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:31:35

face in your life, it's Jesus.
And you are a little child clinging onto his back like a backpack. Go away with that picture in your mind. So we conclude where the story concludes. Verses 32 and 33.
When they got into the boat, the wind ceased and those in the boat worshipped him saying, Truly you are the Son of God. we need to end with this big question.
What is the proper response to a big Lord even when our faith feels so small and so riddled with holes of doubt? I think it's simple.
[22:26] I think it's worship. Because worship is not dependent on getting it right. Worship is not measured by how smart we are or how spiritual we are or how strong our faith has been in the last seven days.

Worship is simply entering into the presence of the one who knows you and loves you and gave himself for you so that you might have life abundant life in his name.
Truly you are the Son of God. Did the disciples understand what they were saying? Probably not. Did it matter?
Nope. Because though our faith is small God's grace is large. And I think that Jesus probably smiled in the boat that morning.
He saw that the mustard seed was growing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[23:29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:31:35