# Matthew 14 — Faith in the King

## Introduction: How Do We Respond to the King?

Matthew 13 concluded with a troubling picture. The people of Nazareth knew Yeshua's family, recognized His wisdom, and heard reports of His miraculous works, yet they took offense at Him. Their familiarity became an obstacle to faith. Now Matthew 14 introduces several more responses to the King. Some people are afraid of Him. Others seek Him because they need something. Some begin to trust Him but become overwhelmed by circumstances. Still others recognize Him and worship.

The chapter begins in a palace and ends beside the Sea of Galilee. Between those, we encounter a frightened ruler, a courageous prophet, hungry crowds, struggling disciples, and a fisherman who walks on water. Each scene raises a question about the nature of faith. What happens when the claims of God conflict with our desire for human approval? What do we do when our resources are inadequate? Where do we turn when the wind is against us? And what does it mean to recognize Yeshua as the Son of God?

The contrast between Herod Antipas and Peter is particularly striking. Both experience fear, but their responses lead in very different directions. Herod allows his fear to govern his decisions, with tragic consequences. Peter becomes afraid, too, but cries out to Yeshua and discovers that the King's hand is already reaching toward him. Fear itself is not the final issue. The question is what we do with it, and where we finally place our faith.

Matthew's central concern continues to be the identity and authority of Yeshua. The King who has been rejected in His hometown now demonstrates compassion, provides abundantly, exercises authority over creation, and receives worship. The chapter invites us to respond not merely to His extraordinary works but to Him.

## Herod and the Death of John the Baptiser (Matthew 14:1–12)

The chapter begins by introducing Herod the tetrarch, a member of the notorious Herodian dynasty. The family relationships can be confusing because several rulers shared the name Herod. Herod the Great, who ruled when Yeshua was born, was responsible for the slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem recorded in Matthew 2. After his death, his territory was divided among his surviving sons. The term ‘tetrarch’ (ruler of a fourth) may be mathematically confusing, and the Scripture doesn’t clarify the distribution. Even so, Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea, and it is this Herod whom we encounter in Matthew 14.

Antipas was not technically a king, although Matthew later uses that title for him. He was a tetrarch, a regional ruler whose authority depended upon Rome. His position brought privilege, wealth, and considerable power, but it did not bring freedom from fear. When he heard reports about Yeshua's miraculous works, he concluded that John the Baptiser had risen from the dead. That reaction tells us something about his troubled conscience. John was dead because Herod

had ordered his execution, and now the ruler was confronted by someone whose extraordinary works he could not explain.

Matthew then takes us backward to describe John's death. Herod had taken Herodias, the wife of his brother, and John publicly challenged the relationship. John's objection was not merely that the arrangement was socially embarrassing. He declared, “It is not lawful for you to have her” (14:4). The Torah prohibited such unions under the circumstances involved (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). John was confronting a ruler with the requirements of God's Word.

John's courage is remarkable. He had announced the coming of the Messiah, called Israel to repentance, and challenged religious hypocrisy. Now he confronted political power with the same uncompromising message. The law of God did not cease to apply because someone occupied a palace. John was not interested in protecting his popularity or securing an invitation to the next royal celebration. He spoke what he believed God required him to say.

Herod's response was very different. He arrested John, but Matthew tells us that he hesitated to execute him, because the crowds regarded John as a prophet. Herod feared the people. He was not guided by the truth of John's message but by calculations about public reaction. That’s fairly common among weak politicians. They love their job more than honor and integrity.

Then came Herod's birthday celebration. Herodias's daughter danced before the guests, and Herod was so pleased that he promised to give her whatever she requested. Prompted by her mother, she demanded they kill John and put the head of John the Baptiser on a platter. Matthew tells us that Herod was grieved, but because of his oath and his dinner guests, he ordered the execution. A real people pleaser.

Here is a man who had the authority to release a prisoner but lacked the courage to disappoint his guests. Earlier, he feared the crowd outside the palace. Now he feared the opinions of those seated around his table. His audience had changed, but his governing principle had not. Human approval mattered more to him than righteousness.

Proverbs 29:25 warns, “the fear of man brings a snare, while those who trust the Lord are secure”. Herod illustrates the proverb with terrible clarity. He became trapped by his own reputation. He could have admitted that his promise was reckless. He could have refused the murderous request. Instead, he allowed embarrassment to become an excuse for injustice.

This is not merely an ancient political problem. We all know the temptation to measure our decisions by what others will think. We may remain silent when truth should be spoken, compromise a conviction to preserve a friendship, or make promises that we later regret because we want to appear generous or important. The consequences may be far less dramatic than John's execution, but the underlying temptation is recognizable.

Paul addressed the same issue when he asked the Galatians whether he was seeking the approval of people or of God. If he were still trying to please people, he said, he would not be a servant of Messiah (Galatians 1:10). The distinction is not between treating people kindly and

treating them harshly. It is between serving God faithfully rather than allowing other people's opinions to become our ultimate authority.

John's death was brutal and unjust. His disciples came, took his body, buried it, and then went to tell Yeshua. Matthew offers no elaborate description of their grief. He simply records what happened. Yet the report creates a deeply personal transition in the chapter. The prophet who had prepared the way for the Messiah had been killed, and Yeshua now withdrew.

## The Compassionate King (Matthew 14:13–14)

“When Yeshua heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself” (14:13). Matthew does not explicitly tell us what Yeshua was feeling, but it is reasonable to understand His withdrawal in light of John's death. John was His relative, His forerunner, and the prophet who had publicly identified Him as the Coming One. His execution also demonstrated the danger posed by rulers who feared losing their authority.

We should not overlook the humanity of Yeshua. The Gospels present Him as the Messiah who heals the sick and commands creation, but also as One who experiences weariness, sorrow, and the need for solitude. Later, at the tomb of Lazarus, in what many memorize as the shortest verse in the Bible, He will weep. In Gethsemane, He will be deeply distressed. We need not imagine Him as untouched by the suffering of those He loves. Isaiah said, “In all their affliction He was afflicted.” (63:9)

Yet the crowds would not leave Him alone. When they heard where He had gone, they followed on foot from the towns. Yeshua stepped ashore and saw a large gathering of people. Matthew tells us that He felt compassion for them and healed their sick. He had ‘felt compassion’ in chapter 9 and taught the disciples to pray for laborers.

This is one of the chapter's most beautiful moments. Yeshua had sought solitude, but He did not regard the people as an inconvenience. Their suffering mattered to Him. His compassion was not merely a feeling of sympathy; it resulted in action.

There is a challenge here for those of us who serve others. Ministry can be demanding, and there are times when we genuinely need rest, prayer, and renewal. Yeshua Himself sought those things. The lesson is not that we must ignore our limitations or never say no. Rather, we see that compassion remained central to His character even when circumstances were painful.

The King did not use His authority to keep suffering people at a distance. He moved toward them. The death of John has exposed the cruelty of a ruler who protects himself at another man's expense. The next scene reveals a very different kind of King, One who uses His authority to provide for others.

## Feeding the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:15–21)

As evening approached, the disciples became concerned about the practical needs of the crowd. They were in a secluded place, and the hour was growing late. Their solution was reasonable: send the people into the surrounding villages to buy food.

Yeshua answered with an unexpected instruction: “They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat” (14:16).

Imagine hearing that command. Thousands of people are gathered along with you in a remote location. The disciples have neither the money nor the provisions to feed them. Their response is straightforward: they possess only five loaves and two fish. They have counted their resources and concluded that the task is impossible.

Yeshua does not dispute their arithmetic. He simply says, “Bring them here to Me.”

The distinction is important. The disciples are looking at what they possess, while Yeshua directs their attention to Himself. He does not ask them to manufacture food from nothing. He asks them to place what they have in His hands.

After directing the people to sit on the grass, Yeshua takes the loaves and fish, looks toward heaven, says a b’racha (blesses the food), breaks the bread, and gives it to the disciples. They distribute it to the crowd. Everyone eats and is satisfied, and afterward the disciples gather twelve baskets of leftovers.

I think of the disciples as distributors rather than manufacturers. They cannot create the provision, but they can faithfully pass along what Yeshua supplies. That is a useful picture of ministry. We do not manufacture God's truth, His grace, or His power. We receive what He gives and make it available to others.

The numbers are striking. Five loaves and two fish become enough to feed five thousand men, as well as their accompanying women and children. The actual gathering was therefore considerably larger than five thousand people. And when everyone had eaten, twelve baskets remained. The provision was not barely sufficient. It was abundant.

There may be significance in the twelve baskets, especially in a Gospel so concerned with Israel and the twelve disciples. The number naturally invites us to think about the twelve tribes of Israel. I’ve often heard that 12 is a Kingdom number. Matthew, however, does not explain the symbolism, so we should be careful not to insist upon an interpretation beyond what he tells us. At the very least, the baskets testify that nothing was lacking.

The feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four Gospels. John adds that the crowd, recognizing the significance of the sign, wanted to take Yeshua and make Him king (John 6:14–15). They understood that something extraordinary had happened, but their expectations of kingship were not necessarily aligned with His mission.

That distinction matters. It is possible to seek Yeshua because we want something from Him without yet understanding who He is or His plans and timing. The crowd needed food, and He fed them. Others needed healing, and He healed them. These were genuine expressions of His compassion. But the miracles were also signs directing attention beyond the immediate benefits to the identity of the One performing them.

The feeding reflects God's provision of manna in the wilderness. Israel learned that its survival depended upon the Lord, who supplied this unusual food where ordinary resources were unavailable. Now Yeshua provides bread in a secluded place, revealing the generous care of the King.

The question for the disciples is whether they will learn to trust the King when their resources appear inadequate. The question for us is much the same. We can become so occupied with calculating what we lack that we forget to bring in faith what we have to Him.

## Alone with the Father (Matthew 14:22–23)

Immediately after the feeding, Yeshua makes the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the lake. He then dismisses the crowds Himself. Once the people have departed, He goes up a mountain alone to pray. Matthew emphasizes the solitude. Yeshua had attempted to withdraw earlier, but the crowds followed Him. Now, after meeting their needs, He finally spends time alone with His Father, perhaps finishing his initial grieving for his cousin John.

The sequence is worth considering. The King who has just fed thousands of people does not conclude that His work makes prayer unnecessary. His authority and miraculous power do not replace communion with the Father.

We should resist the temptation to treat prayer as something reserved for emergencies or for moments when we have exhausted every other possibility. Yeshua's practice demonstrates that prayer belongs at the center of a life devoted to God. Regularity is key in prayer.

I appreciate the quiet of the early morning—that’s when I pray the best. There is something restorative about sitting with the Scriptures before the day's demands begin, speaking with God and listening for what His Word has to say. That rhythm does not make life's difficulties disappear, but it helps restore our perspective. We remember whose world this is and whose purposes we are serving.

Matthew does not tell us the content of Yeshua's prayer that evening. Perhaps John's death weighed upon Him. Perhaps He prayed for His disciples or for the crowds He had just fed. What we do know is that He deliberately sought time alone with His Father. His faith is pointed. Mine should be as well. Meanwhile, the disciples were out on the lake, and their circumstances were becoming increasingly difficult.

## Walking on the Water (Matthew 14:24–33)

The boat was already far from land, battered by waves because the wind was against it. Several of the disciples were experienced fishermen who knew the Sea of Galilee well. Yet their experience could not remove the danger or bring the storm under control. Matthew tells us that Yeshua came toward them during the fourth watch of the night, approximately between three and six in the morning. He was walking on the sea.

This is an extraordinary scene. The disciples are struggling against the wind and waves, and the One who had sent them across the lake now approaches in a manner no ordinary human being could imitate. When they see Him, they are terrified. They think they are seeing a ghost and cry out in fear.

Their reaction is understandable. They have witnessed healings and the multiplication of bread, but they have never seen anything like this. The storm has already unsettled them, and now something apparently impossible is taking place before their eyes.

Yeshua immediately speaks: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (14:27).

Notice that His reassurance begins with His presence. He does not first explain how He is walking on the water or promise that the wind will stop within a few minutes. He tells them who is approaching. The words “it is I” translate the Greek expression egō eimi. In this context, they plainly identify Yeshua to His frightened disciples. They may also invite readers familiar with Scripture to hear an echo of the language of divine self-disclosure. (Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 43.10) Either way, the central point is unmistakable: the disciples need not fear because Yeshua is with them. Faith seems to ever be in conflict with fear.

The scene also recalls the Tanakh's descriptions of God's authority over the sea. Job 9:8 speaks of the Lord treading upon the waves, while Psalm 77:19 describes God's way through the sea and His paths through mighty waters. The sea frequently represents forces beyond human control, yet it is never beyond the authority of Israel's God.

Yeshua is not struggling against the water as the disciples are. He walks on top of it. Peter responds with a remarkable request: “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (14:28).

Peter does not simply announce that he has enough faith to attempt something extraordinary. He asks for Yeshua's command. His confidence is tied to the authority of the One who calls him. Yeshua answers with one word: “Come.” Peter climbs out of the boat and begins walking toward Him. For a moment, the fisherman experiences something that should be impossible. He is not walking because he has mastered the sea, but because he has responded to the command of the King who has mastered wind and sea.

Then Matthew tells us that Peter sees the wind, becomes afraid, and begins to sink. It is tempting to criticize Peter for losing his confidence, but we should remember that he was the one who got out of the boat. His faith was genuine, even though it was not yet mature. He trusted Yeshua

enough to step onto the water, but he struggled to continue trusting when the danger became overwhelming.

His cry is brief and urgent: “Lord, save me!” There is no elaborate prayer, no carefully constructed theological argument, and no attempt to demonstrate that he deserves rescue. Peter knows he is sinking, and he knows whom to call. Matthew says that Yeshua immediately stretched out His hand and took hold of him. Only then did He say, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (14:31).

I find the order significant. Yeshua rescues Peter before addressing his wavering faith. The correction comes from the One whose hand has already secured him. The Greek word here is distazō, suggesting hesitation or wavering, as though standing in two places at once. Peter had responded to Yeshua's command, but now his confidence was divided between the One who called him and the threatening circumstances surrounding him. His fear had not erased his faith, but it had unsettled it.

We should not turn this passage into a promise that every believer who trusts God will escape danger or accomplish extraordinary physical feats. The disciples were in the boat because Yeshua had sent them there. Their hardship was not evidence that they had disobeyed Him.

Scripture describes storms arising for different reasons. Jonah encountered a storm in the context of his flight from God's command. The disciples encountered one while following Yeshua's instructions. We cannot assume that every difficulty is punishment, nor can we confidently identify God's particular purpose in every experience of suffering.

What we can learn is that hardship does not necessarily mean the Lord has abandoned us. The disciples were far from shore, but they were not beyond His reach.

When Yeshua and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind stopped. Those in the boat worshipped Him and declared, “You are certainly God's Son!” (14:33).

This is the chapter's decisive response to the King. Herod heard reports about Yeshua and reacted with fear and confusion. The crowds received His provision, though their understanding of His kingship was incomplete. The disciples have now witnessed His authority over the sea, His power to rescue, and His presence in their distress. Their response is faith and worship.

The miracle is not merely that Peter briefly walked on water. The greater revelation is the identity of Yeshua, the One who comes to His people in their fear and receives the worship that follows.

## Healing at Gennesaret (Matthew 14:34–36)

After crossing the lake, Yeshua and the disciples arrive at Gennesaret, on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. The people recognize Him and send word throughout the surrounding district. Soon the sick are brought to Him from every direction.

Matthew tells us that they beg merely to touch the fringe of His garment, and all who touch it are healed. The reference to the fringe is particularly meaningful within the Jewish setting. Numbers 15:37–41 instructs the children of Israel to wear fringes, or tzitzit, on the corners of their garments as reminders of God's commandments. In modern days, Jewish men wear a shawl with fringes attached. The command highlights the ordinary clothing having those fringes. Deuteronomy 22:12 contains a related instruction. These were ordinary markers of covenant identity, not magical objects.

Matthew does not describe the precise construction of Yeshua's garment. Nor does he suggest that the fringe itself possessed independent healing power. The people were reaching toward Yeshua, and healing came through Him.

There is a beautiful contrast between the opening and closing scenes of this chapter. Herod hears about Yeshua and becomes disturbed. The people of Gennesaret hear about Him and bring their sick. Herod is preoccupied with protecting his position. The people at the lakeside are concerned with reaching the One they believe can help them.

Yet we should not confuse seeking a miracle with the fullness of discipleship. Physical healing is a wonderful gift, but the Gospel continually directs us toward the greater question of Yeshua's identity. The miracles reveal His compassion and authority so that people might recognize the King Himself.

The chapter ends with people reaching out in faith, trusting that the slightest contact with His garment will be enough. It is a fitting conclusion to a chapter concerned with fear, confidence, and the question of whom to trust.

## Conclusion: Will He Find Faith?

Matthew 14 has introduced us to several very different responses to Yeshua. Herod fears the opinions of people and allows that fear to govern his actions. The crowds come to Yeshua with genuine needs and experience His compassion. The disciples discover that their limited resources are sufficient when placed in His hands. Peter responds to the King's command, falters in fear, and is rescued. Finally, those in the boat worship Yeshua as the Son of God.

The chapter does not present faith as the absence of uncertainty, danger, or weakness. Peter's experience makes that impossible. He believes, becomes afraid, and cries out for help. His faith is imperfect, but he knows where to turn with whatever amount of faith he has.

Nor does Matthew present faith as merely accepting certain facts about Yeshua. Herod had heard extraordinary reports, but that knowledge did not produce obedience. The crowds witnessed miracles, but receiving a benefit from Yeshua was not necessarily the same as submitting to His authority.

Faith involves trusting the King Himself. It is personal, active, and expressed through obedience. Sometimes it means speaking truth when doing so is costly, as John did. Sometimes it means offering what little we have, as the disciples were instructed to do. Sometimes it means stepping

forward at Yeshua's command. And sometimes it means admitting that we are sinking and calling upon Him to save us.

The disciples' declaration, “You are certainly God's Son,” brings the chapter to its proper destination. The miracles are extraordinary, but their purpose is not simply to amaze us. They reveal the One who deserves our confidence, obedience, and worship.

Later, Yeshua will ask whether the Son of Man, when He comes, will find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8). That question belongs naturally beside us here in Matthew 14. When circumstances become difficult, when human approval competes with obedience, when our resources seem inadequate, will we trust Him?

“He who has ears, let him hear” was the challenge of Matthew 13. Here the challenge becomes equally personal: when the King says, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid,” will we believe Him?

## Takeaways

- Fear of people can silence our obedience to God.
- Compassion sees people, not interruptions.
- We distribute what the King provides.
- The right response to the King is trust and worship.
- Take courage tells me that it’s available to be taken. Reach out and collect it.

## Memory Verse

Matthew 14:27 — “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”