

Matthew 14 • The God of the Impossible

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Matthew chapter 14 is where we are continuing our Sunday morning study through the Gospel of Matthew. We're going a chapter at a time, which has been interesting and challenging all at the same time. Probably more challenging for me than anybody because my natural tendency is to want to slow down and just really take time with this. And we've done that in the past but this time we're getting more of an overview.

And I think that that overview does give us kind of a unique perspective, just like when you're in an airplane. I remember the first time I was in an airplane and I looked down from the window in my seat. And I was, look! You see the world in a completely different way from an airplane rather than just walking along the ground.

Well it's the same thing with the Word of God when you take a view that steps you back a little bit, there's some interesting perspectives that that come our way. We'll begin with prayer here and just ask the Lord to guide us.

Father we thank You so much for just Your grace in our lives. The grace to understand the Word of God. Lord through Your Holy Spirit You bring understanding, and insight, and revelation and I thank You for that Father. And just pray that You would be with all of us today as we take this time this morning to be in the Word.

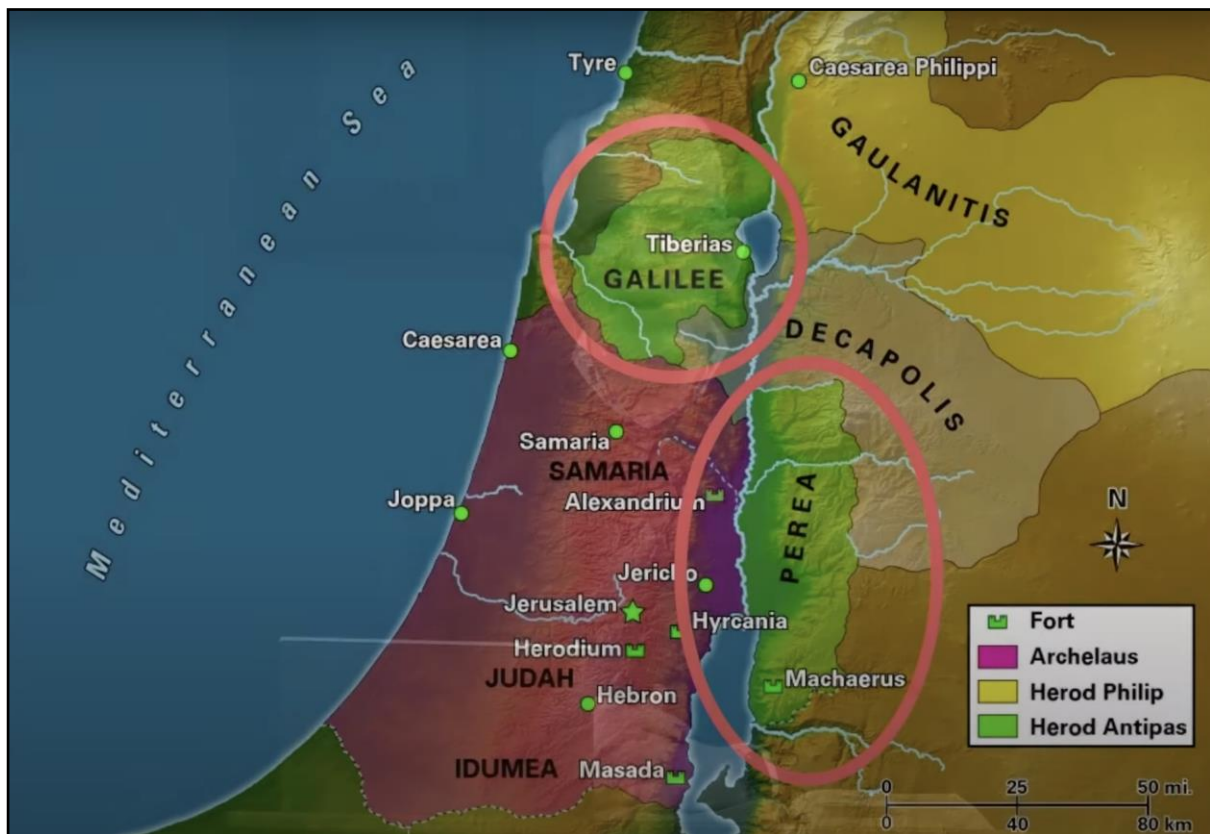
And I just really pray that the ministry of Your Holy Spirit would find freedom among our hearts to speak as You see fit, as You desire and to instruct us. Lord as we've said many times throughout the years, we recognize You as the Teacher and we are your students, and we long to learn. So fill us with understanding, we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew chapter 14 begins this way. *“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus,² and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.”³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,⁴ because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”⁵ And though he*

wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. ⁶ But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." ⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. ¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, ¹¹ and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. ¹² And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus." (ESV)

I'm going to have you stop there, please for a bit. Herod the Tetrarch. The long line of just really wonderful people from the Herod line; the family line. This is the son of Herod the Great who has his own things that we know him for. Atrocities and so forth. He did some pretty cool things too.

But Herod the Tetrarch, the son of Herod the Great, ruled over the region of Galilee and also over the area of Perea. We don't refer to Perea very often because it was a Roman name that was given for an area of the Transjordan. Let me, in fact, let me put a map up on the screen for you. You can see there, I've circled these two areas that Herod the Tetrarch ruled over. And Perea is that lower, more oblong circle that you see there, this was his area.



And he got all bent out of shape because as Matthew tells us, John the Baptist had been saying publicly that he was wrong to have taken his brother's wife because his brother was still alive. They'd been married but Herod liked her, took her, and John told him that was wrong. And so, we're told that he imprisoned him. And after doing so, he eventually beheaded... Herod, as we read here after making a foolish promise to the daughter of Herodias, that he would give her anything she wanted.

It says that she danced and it pleased Herod. And you read between the lines, and you figure, well, it probably more than pleased him. It probably aroused him, to some degree. And he made this incredibly foolish promise.

And when she came back saying, fine, give me Herod John's head on a platter. We're told that he couldn't do anything but capitulate to that request because he didn't want to be seen as going back on his word and so forth.

Now Herod's obviously filled with such incredible guilt over this whole thing and the superstition that goes along with paganism. And all the other things that go with it. He's convinced that when he hears about some of the things that Jesus is doing, that this is John the Baptist returned from the dead.

Well, of course, if he knew what he was talking about, he would have known that John and Jesus had lived at the same time, and had spoken together, and so forth. But yet, he's just plagued with fear. He makes all kinds of assumptions related to this, and it's just a kind of a sorry sort of a picture of a man who refuses to walk with God, and instead is just given over to the things of this world.

And then Matthew tells us in verse 13 that after Jesus had been told about this, it says, "*... when Jesus heard this, (we're told) he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place (all) by himself.*"

He got into a boat all by himself and He just rowed out, we assume to some area. And we're not given any comment in the passage as to why. It just says, He heard what happened to John and He went off by Himself. And we're left to speculate. And of course you guys know and I've said this for many years, when we're given that freedom to speculate, we often are wrong about it.

But I think rather than speculating about what we don't know, what I would rather do is choose to see here in Jesus's actions an example for you and me as to what we ought to do when we receive troubling news. What do you do when you receive troubling news?

You remember that John the Baptist was a cousin, actually, of Jesus, and He hears that John has been beheaded in prison. And it says He goes off by Himself and I think this is just a great example. When you get troubling news, take it to the Lord in prayer. It's so simple. I mean, this isn't rocket science, you guys. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

I don't know, I find so many people just second guess taking things to the Lord in prayer. Maybe you've thought this before. I've had people ask me in the past, what good does it do anyway? What good? I mean, for one thing, the thing has already happened. Whatever I heard or know that is troubling to my heart, it's already happened. So what good is it going to do to go to the Lord and just spend time in prayer?

Well, the fact of the matter is you don't know what good it's going to do. In fact, you don't know much. Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you there. I'm including myself in that. We don't know much. But what we have in the Bible, over and over again, are examples, but yet we second guess them. Well, Jesus went off and prayed when He heard John had been beheaded. But I don't know, what good does that do anyway?

I don't know if you remember, but the apostle Paul made a statement about how much we know. Here's what, let me put it on the screen. It's from 1 Corinthians 13:12. He simply said this,

1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)

...now we see in a mirror dimly...

...now we see in a mirror (darkly) dimly...

In other words, when we view life, when we view eternity, when we view the kingdom of God, when we view the happenings of man, when we view, take all of these things in view, he says, it's still, it's like looking into a bad mirror. A bad image, and it's just wonky, and we're not getting. Here's the point, we're not getting the real picture, okay?

We're not getting the real picture and we're told this in the Word of God. And either there's a great many Christians that simply don't understand it, or they flat out don't believe it. When God's Word says, we view all things through a mirror darkly.

And the reason I say, I think some people don't believe it is because I hear, people saying things like, I don't get it. Am I supposed to be surprised by that

statement? When somebody says, I don't get it, especially when they're talking about God and His ways and His judgments. They'll say, well, you know what? And they say it like they're a little bit peeved. They look at me and they say, I don't get it. Yeah, okay, join the group. We could start an, I don't get it club. We should make a t shirt, too: I don't get it, right? And we'll put 1 Corinthians 13:12 there. Personally, people, I believe it is the height of human arrogance to judge what you can't see clearly and yet it happens all the time. All the time.

I have over my lifetime tried to adopt a philosophy that is expressed by king David in the Psalms and I just, I love it. I really do. And it just fits my intelligence. Let me put this up on the screen. Psalm 131, he says,

Psalm 131:1 (ESV)

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

That's it. That's me. That's my address. David felt that way. I feel that way. Personally, I think this is probably a fairly wise philosophy as it concerns trying to understand the things of God, and the ways of man, and all the other things in between. But yet, when people look at me with that, not a quizzical look, but almost an angry look, and they say, I don't get it. I, like, what did you think of yourself? I mean, do you think you're of yourself so highly that you thought you could get it? I mean, it's just really amazing.

You get to the end of the Book of Romans. I've always mentioned this before, but you get to, not the end of the Book of Romans, the book. Wonderful, wonderful book. It's divided basically into 2 parts. You've got this incredibly powerful doctrinal thesis that is encompassed in the first 11 chapters of Romans. And it's stuff that we're still trying to figure out today. We read through those first 11 chapters of Romans and we're just like, wow, that was heavy. I got to put on my hip waders to get through some of this stuff. I mean, doctrinally speaking.

And then you get, and then Paul launches into the second half of Romans where he's talking about application. But how does he end the first 11 chapters? He says, and I'm going to paraphrase this because I'm not reading it right now. But his message is, how far is all of this beyond our understanding? That's Paul's statement. After saying things that we struggle to understand. How far beyond our understanding are the ways and the judgments of God. And yet there's

people out there that think, well I better understand it or God's in trouble. And what they're doing is they're judging God by their limited, dim vision.

Coming back to the middle of verse 13, I'm sorry I stopped you in the middle of a verse there. It says, *“But when the crowds heard it, (and they heard that Jesus had taken off by Himself, it says,) they followed him on foot from the towns. (and) ¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”*

And I want to remind you again, that every time you see something in the Bible that's about something Jesus did, or said, or felt, you're hearing about God, okay? Because Jesus is the perfect reflection of God.

So what is the heart of God toward hurting people? It's right here. It's compassion. Say, don't ever question that. Don't ever wonder how He feels about you when you're going through hard times, when you're going through a difficult season, don't ever question. Don't let the enemy plant any sort of a doubt in your heart and mind as to how the Lord feels about your situation. He has compassion.

Verse 15, *“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 and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶ But Jesus said, (and I want you to pay attention here) “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷ They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” ¹⁸ And he said, “Bring them here to me.” (and) ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides (and that means, not counting) women and children.”* All right, stop there.

Well, we know this story. It's a wonderful miracle. The Lord feeds through supernatural means, this enormous crowd. We say 5,000 men. Oh, I don't know if there's a woman for every man. Even if there wasn't a woman for every man. If there was only a woman for only half of the men, that's another 2,500 people. And then you've got the children on top of that. Who knows? Who knows how large of a crowd this was? But the statement is significant in and of itself.

But there's another statement that I asked you to pay attention to. Did you remember in verse 16 there? And when Jesus said this, I'm quite sure it sent a

shudder down the backs of the disciples. He said, “*you give them something to eat.*” In verse 16.

Can you imagine being there? Can you imagine being one of the disciples and seeing this mass of people? Let's say 10,000 plus. Okay? Easy with children and women on top of everything. So 10,000 plus, and you're looking at this sea of people.

And you go to Jesus and say, it's starting to get late, you should probably send them into town to get something to eat. And Jesus says, no, there's no reason to send them away, you feed them. And I wonder if any of the disciples laughed. I would just, I'd be interested to know if some of them just chuckled about that. Because frankly, the statement was utterly laughable when you think about it. You feed them. Yeah, what are you talking about here? Give them something to eat? We, there's not even enough for us. There, there isn't enough food here for the closest followers of Jesus.

And so, here Jesus says, “*give them something to eat.*” But what's the first thing they do? They take inventory of what they have, don't they? They come back and they go, well, here's the deal. We got a couple small fish and these 5 loaves of bread.

And what's interesting about that people, is that's what we do whenever we are presented with a situation for which we have no answer. And perhaps which God speaks to us about related to how we should respond in faith. And immediately we come back and take inventory of ourselves. We take inventory of our surroundings and we say, well, this is what I got. Sorry. What you just asked is impossible because this is what I have and it's not enough. It's not good enough. Right? We review our abilities. I don't have the goods.

And this passage ought to be a reminder to you and me that as believers, there will be times when God will ask more of you than you can do. Okay? Just write that one down. Just so you remember.

There will be times in your life when God will ask more of you than you can do. Don't let anybody misquote a verse in the Bible. Well I know it says in the Bible, God will never give you more than you can do. Didn't say that. And here's an example of Jesus doing the exact opposite. He gave them far more than they could do, and they knew it. And when they assessed their situation and their circumstances, they immediately responded in that very same way.

But here's what we so often forget. And that is that when God asks you to do more than you can do, He stands at the ready to give you everything you need to accomplish His purpose. If they were really walking in faith, the disciples would have said, this is going to be fun. Because we got 5 loaves of bread, and a couple of small fish, and He said, He just said, feed them all. This is going to be interesting. That's the heart of faith.

How many times have you responded that way when God has put something in front of you that seemed impossible. How many of you went, whoa, this is going to be fun. We don't, do we? No. We just take inventory of our circumstances and we say, can't do it. Can't do it. We forget. We forget, don't we, who God is and what He can do.

I got to tell you, I remember watching this very scene that we just read here in Matthew in the movie, Jesus of Nazareth that came out back way back in 1977. That's my generation's version of, The Chosen. It was a 6 hour thing that had an all-star cast. And it really was. I mean, it was, there were pretty incredible people that starred in that particular movie.

But I remember when they were portraying this scene of the feeding of the however many, they depicted Jesus in a very interesting way while the bread and fish were being passed out. They did a really good job of depicting the disciples and just their amazement and awe at the idea that they were going to feed that multitude with this little bit of food. And they were like, okay, here we go. This is going to be interesting, not in a good way.

But they had Jesus sitting on the ground, eyes closed, hand up in the air, a finger pointing toward heaven. I remember this very distinctly. And vibrating, shaking a little bit as they're passing out this. As if to depict that this is hard work; doing these kind of miracles. And I remember thinking that at the time. I thought, well, this is really interesting.

And then I thought, well, these are human beings making these movies and they can't feed a multitude with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. So they got to obviously, they got to make it look hard because to them, it's impossible. But, I always thought about that picture of Jesus sitting on the ground, working hard at making all this bread and fish. And I thought, I don't think it was hard at all.

I don't think there was anything difficult about this particular miracle because, I mean, what is the multiplication of some bread and fish to the God who filled the oceans on the day of creation, when, you know what I mean? I mean, was

that hard? Was He struggling? And did He work up a sweat in any of the days of creation and in any of the things that He did? No I don't think so.

The Bible says He spoke those things into being and Jesus did the same. He spoke the multiplication of bread and fish into being. And it wasn't a big deal to God. It's a big deal to you and me but it wasn't a big deal to Him.

We forget that though. And it's just funny. It just it's just humorous to me that when human beings make a movie about God doing a miracle, he's got to make it look like it's hard. And yet, this is God!

Speaking of miracles and things that are impossible for man, look at verse 22 and following. It says, *“Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. (this is the sea of Galilee) ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear.”*

By the way, just, this is a side note, but the word that is translated, ghost here in the Greek is the word, phantasma. And it's where we get our word, phantasm, or phantom. And it literally means an apparition. Alright. Like a spiritual apparition or a spirit like appearance, if you will. The reason I bring that out is because, technically speaking, the Greek language doesn't have a word for ghost. It just means, again, a spiritual apparition. Alright? Anyway, these guys are freaking out at what they're seeing.

Verse 27 says, *“But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”*

²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” (and) ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.”

If you can imagine what that's like, it's just this instantaneous calming of the wind and obviously the seas with them. *“³³ And those in the boat (it says) worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.””*

We'll pause there for just a moment. You got to of course, love Peter. Bold on the one side, prone to so much failure on the other. But someone we can all relate to concerning just the way he views life and that sort of thing.

But even more, I think we easily understand the mistake that Peter made that is given to us in this passage. And it's summed up so perfectly in verse 30 where it simply says, "*when he saw the wind, he was afraid.*" In other words, what that's telling you is Peter was doing great, until he looked at the threat. And when he looked at the threat, he started going down, he started to sink.

Had he not looked at the threat. Had he not fixed his eyes on the threat and instead fixed his eyes on Jesus, there would have been a completely different outcome, right? We all know that. We've, we've read this story, we know this story. Good grief, you probably know all, even the details about this story. About how those squalls can come up on the Sea of Galilee without warning and just instantly turn this thing into a churning death trap. And I'm sure you've heard that so much.

But what this story is all about is this powerful illustration of something that all of us need to learn as we walk through life. And that is, don't take your eyes off Jesus. I don't care what's in front of you. You get your eyes on what is threatening you, and it will loom larger than ever. And that's a simple fact.

Whatever you are facing, whatever is causing fear, and trepidation in your life, the more you look at it the scarier it will be. Simple. And we've all been there. Every single one of us. We've all faced something that was fearful. And we looked it straight in the eye and freaked out and started to sink. Every single one of us. That's why this story is just, it's so classic.

Taking your eyes off Jesus is deadly. Keep your eyes on Him. I know it's hard. Especially when that thing, whatever that thing is, is right in front of your eyes, yelling at you, and saying look at me.

It reminds me of when Jesus was talking to Pilate and Pilate's, after his arrest, and Pilate's peppering Him with all these questions, which Jesus didn't answer. And Pilate finally did just what every threat that we go through in life. He said to Jesus what every threat says to us. Look Him right in the eye and say, do you not understand that I have the power to crucify you? And that's what every threat says to you and me. Don't you realize? I have the power to destroy your life. Yeah.

I love what Jesus said. You would have no power over Me if it had not been given you from above. And you and I can say that to the very same threat that comes against us. Is something threatening your life? Yeah, well, been there, done that. You need to learn. I need to learn how to look those threats in the face when they say, don't you realize I have the power to destroy you?

We come back and we say, you know what? You would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above. And so if it's been given you from above, there's no fighting about it anyway. I will take what my Father gives because He is good and His mercies endure forever. That's what we need to learn to say.

And that's why the writer of Hebrews said what he did in the 12th chapter up on the screen. Let me show you. He says,

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV84)

...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, (which we have throughout the Bible) let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (and this is the important part here, he says) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

That's the exhortation. There it is. Right? Whatever's going on, fix your eyes on Jesus. Fix your eyes on Him. Don't fix your eyes on what's going on in your life, in your marriage, in your body, in your home, in your finances. Don't fix your eyes there. You can't ignore that those things exist and I'm not telling you to ignore them. This isn't some word of faith nonsense. We recognize the threats for what they are. We also recognize our God for who He is, that's the point.

And you see, that's what Paul said. He said I've come to the place of understanding that compared to what awaits me, all of these things here on earth, he called them light and momentary troubles. Some of us would say, well, now wait a second here, Mr. Apostle Paul, what I'm going through isn't very light momentary. He said, well, yeah, in the perspective of eternity, it is.

You see, you're looking at it through the perspective of limited, finite time, and it sounds pretty overwhelming, but in the context of eternity, it's light and

momentary. Wow. See, I need that, don't you? I need that heavenly perspective. If I don't get that heavenly perspective, I'm going to be just like the world. Like people in the world, and I'm going to need, I don't know what I'm going to need. Let your imagination run wild, I'm going to need something to get me through, because I don't have God. Our goal is to keep our eyes on Jesus and to say, Lord, come what may, help me to keep my eyes fixed on You.

And finally verse 34 and following it says, *“And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.”* I want to remind you that Gennesaret is the same as this area that was referred to as the Gadarenes. Right? You guys remember that? Remember we talked about that just recently?

Jesus went to the region of the Gadarenes, what did He find there? Found a demoniac living in a tomb, or rather among the tombs. Nobody could, restrain this guy. They tried chains and ropes and whatever. This guy has, I don't know how many demons invested, I mean, living, and he's just, he's a mess. He's a train wreck, and nobody can touch him. Nobody can heal him. Nobody can restore him.

And Jesus comes along, and you'll remember what happens. And with a word, with a word, He gives all those demons the permission to go run off and invest themselves in a herd of pigs, which freaks the pigs out. They run down a hill, into the water, drown themselves. It's almost funny. And so now you've got a bunch of floating bacon in the water there. And what happened, it says the people came out and they begged Jesus to leave their region.

But then there was this interesting conversation that took place after that. It says the demoniac, who had now been delivered, came to Jesus and he said, I want to follow You. I'll go anywhere you go. And Jesus said, you know what? I need you to stay home and I need you to tell anybody who will listen about what happened. I need you to tell them how desperate was your situation and how impossible it was for you to be healed and delivered. I want you to tell them what happened here today.

And the man did it, and apparently he did a pretty good job, because as Jesus makes His way back there, which is what we're seeing right here, I want you to see what happens in verse 35 and following. it says, *“And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick³⁶ and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.”*

I'd say this guy was a pretty, pretty good evangelist, wouldn't you? Yeah, he primed the pump, and by the time Jesus came back to the area, it was a completely different response. Rather than coming to Him and saying, You need to go. They said, Jesus, we want what You have. I love that. All because this man, out of obedience, went back to his hometown, and probably not town, but towns because there were a lot of them out there. And he began to tell people what Jesus did for him.

And my question to you is, when was the last time you told someone what Jesus has done for you? You see, I get a pass because I get to do it all the time. I do it in front of you guys all the time. Well, not a pass but you know what I mean. God gives me wonderful opportunity. But some of you, it's challenging, isn't it? But you know it can have incredible, powerful effect on people's hearts to just simply hear your testimony and it, and maybe you weren't invested with a thousand demons. All right, fine. And you weren't living among the tombs and, it's okay, but you've got a story. You've got a testimony. You have received a work of the Lord that is worth telling about. And I would encourage you when you get an opportunity to do that.

Tell others what Jesus has done for you, amen? Let's stand together and we'll close in prayer. If you need prayer this morning for any reason, come on up. We'd be happy to pray with you.

Father, thank You so much for the Word of God. Thank You for Matthew chapter 14. Thank You for the wisdom that we gain just by reading through the Scriptures and talking about them. Thank You, Father God, for being the God of the impossible.

And I thank You, Father God, that there are times in our lives, just like we've seen here in this chapter, when you will call upon us to do or to go in a way that is otherwise impossible for us, humanly speaking. But help us, Father God, we pray to remember always, that we serve the God who says, nothing is impossible for Me. And may we walk in the reality of what that means every day in real, genuine, faith that doesn't limit You in any way.

And I pray, Father God, that we would be people who not only have faith, but share our faith as often as we can.

Be with us, we pray. Strengthen us as we go. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all God's people said together, amen.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.