

Part 26: The Amazing Jesus Christ

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My wife and I have started listening to audio books with our kids, and right now they are listening to Charlotte's Web by E.B. White. For those of you who haven't read the book or watched one of the movies, the book is about a pig named Wilbur and a spider named Charlotte.

Charlotte spins a web above Wilbur's pen and in her web she writes all sorts of phrases describing Wilbur like "radiant," "amazing," and "extraordinary." And the hope of the animals, and of Fern the young girl who is their friend, is that people will see Wilbur as an amazingly unique pig and spare him from being sent to the packing house.

We were listening to it in the car the other day, and a conversation between Fern's mother, Mrs. Arable and the Dr. Dorian caught my attention. Mrs. Arable is trying to make sense of the fact that a spider is writing words and that her daughter claims to speak to these animals.

White portrays the conversation between the two here: "Have you heard about the words that appeared in the spider's web?" asked Mrs. Arable nervously. "Yes," replied the doctor. "Well, do you understand it?" asked Mrs. Arable. "Understand what?" "do you understand how there could be any writing in a spider's web?" "Oh, no," said Dr. Dorian. "I don't understand it. But for that matter I don't understand how a spider learned to spin a web in the first place. When the words appeared, everyone said they were a miracle. But nobody pointed out that the web itself is a miracle." "What's miraculous about a spider's web?" said Mrs. Arable... "A young spider knows how to spin a web without any instructions from anybody. Don't you regard that as a miracle?" "I suppose so," said Mrs. Arable. "I never looked at it that way before. Still, I don't understand it, and I don't like what I can't understand."

This interaction is a fitting allegory for our modern thought today. We are skeptical of anything which seem extraordinary. In fact there is one man named James Randi who has set out on a quest to debunk anyone who claims to have any sort of extraordinary powers. He is a former magician who says: "Magicians are the most honest people in the world; they tell you they're gonna fool you, and then they do it." Randi realized that that sleight of hand and showmanship was being abused by people who used the tricks to manipulate and extort people.

So he offered what he called, "The One Million Dollar Paranormal Challenge." He offered a million dollar reward to anyone who could demonstrate supernatural or paranormal ability which cannot be explained by science. Seeking to eliminate shameful manipulation, he leverages his crusade in saying, "An electron or a galaxy is not capricious, nor deceptive; but a human can be either or both." His point is that in observing what is fixed and known we can gain objective understanding. But to trust humans, is to be able to be duped. Like Mrs. Arable, Randi says that what we can understand, the physical world, is more reliable than what we cannot understand, the hearts and minds of men.

These two vantage points are helpful background for what is going on in the book of Matthew. Last time we were in Matthew we saw Jesus being rejected by people because they were unable to reconcile his miracles and his teachings. They either didn't trust him, or they didn't believe him. But what we are

going to see for the next few weeks is Jesus continuing to work in the same area, and despite rejection, he is going to continue to do amazing things.

But Matthew provides an interesting distinction between both the views of Mrs. Arable and James Randi. When Jesus does miracles, his miracles are actually meant to bring us a greater understanding of who he is. You see when a magician attempts magic his tricks really tell us nothing about the character of the man himself. And when a con-man uses manipulation, his showmanship exists to cover up who he really is.

But as Jesus is walking the earth and working real, actual miracles, he means these miracles to not only be a mercy to those around him, but also a picture into the reality of who Jesus is and what his kingdom is like. Jesus' miracles aren't simply meant to amaze, they are meant to inform. The miracles of Jesus are not pauses in reality, they are pictures of it. They portray with stunning clarity who Jesus is, what his Kingdom is like, and how we can find ourselves in it.

This is why Matthew is doing what he is doing in this portion of his book. In chapters 13 and 14 we see Jesus rejected, but in chapter 17 we will see Jesus transfigured on a mountain showing who he really is. And all the while building up to that point the disciples are beginning to understand with greater clarity who this Jesus really is. Today what we are going to see is this: **The most amazing part about Jesus, is that he is Jesus.**

What we are going to look at today is a number of miracles Jesus did in Matthew 14 and we are going to see what those miracles tell us about Jesus. Specifically we are going to focus on Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus walking on water and we are going to see a God who is a compassionate provider for his people, and also a God who is an active Lord over the whole world. And all of this should culminate, as Matthew's story culminates with a clear picture of who Jesus is and a sincere worship in response to that.

So with that said, I want to dive into our first miracle this morning. Look with me at **Matthew 14:13-21**.

Both of the stories we are going to look at today are staple stories of anyone who grew up in church or who attended Vacation Bible School. It is important to teach kids at a young age the narratives of scripture, but what we want them to remember ultimately is not only what happened, but why it happened.

We have our six to eleven year old's in the sanctuary with us this summer and I'm going to give right now a little homework for parents and kids. I want parents to ask two questions for each of these miracles and I want you kids to try and answer the questions. So the first question we want to ask about this is: What was the miracle? The miracle was that Jesus provided food and care to all who came to him. Now here is the second question: "What does this miracle teach us about Jesus?"

Here is the answer I want all of us to remember: **Jesus is the God who provides for his people.** Now across all four gospels there are six recorded instances of Jesus doing miraculous feedings like this. Other ones look at the same event which Matthew describes here and include other details such as the thoughts of the disciples, or even the boy who provided the fish and the loaves.

But Matthew doesn't include any of those peripheral stories because he wants us to specifically focus on who Jesus is. Jesus is the God who sustains and provides for his people.

In this text Jesus provides for people in two ways. In verses 13 through 14 he healed those who were sick because he was moved with compassion. This window in the affections of Jesus show that his miracles are more than a parlor trick. They stem not from a desire to show off his flare, but instead they stem from the heart of Jesus. Jesus was moved by the humanity he saw.

So much so that he not only healed those who had debilitating illnesses, but he also provided for those who were hungry. You see it's one thing for Jesus to heal the select few who so obviously need help: the sick and the broken. But here we see Jesus actually moving towards the needs of humanity in general.

All too often we can think that the gospel is for those who are so obviously in need of Jesus. But what we fail to realize is that Jesus didn't come only for those in obvious need, he came for the needs which all of humanity is prone to. We all need the work of Jesus in our lives. And even Jesus' simple kindness of providing food shows us our need. We are weak, we are dependent upon things, and in Jesus' kingdom all of our needs are met by him.

In looking at the compassion of Jesus in this story we see a God who is not blind to the human condition. We see a God who not only knows the human condition because he took on flesh to live as a human, but we see a God so kind and compassionate that he provides for such an ordinary need as hunger. All this to say, Jesus knows you.

The author of Hebrews says **Hebrews 4:15**. Why is this important? It means that the Jesus who at one point only existed in perfection in heaven, the Jesus who never knew sickness or hunger, is not unaware of the weight and burdens of this life. Whatever circumstance you are going through in your own heart right now, it is not foreign or unimportant to God who took of flesh.

Jesus cares, Jesus is able to provide. Jesus is compassionate towards you. But let's be real. People still go to bed hungry. People still die of sickness. So what hope do I draw from this story of Jesus feeding 5,000 men and more women and children with five loaves and three fish?

If the point of this miracle was to show that Jesus is able to feed everyone, then his ministry would have been a stunning disappointment, because he didn't solve world hunger. In other words the importance of this story is not ultimately what Jesus did, but who Jesus proved himself to be in doing these things. In this miracle we see a God who sustains his people with bread in the desert, and to the Jews who witnessed this, they understood the symbolism of it.

Bread was the central food in at this time in this region of the world. So much so that there was a common Jewish prayer during that time which went like this: "Blessed are thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who created the fruit of the earth."

For the Jews, part of the way in which God's goodness was shown to people in general was in God's provision of the fruits of the field. When Jesus took those five loaves roughly the same size as a dinner roll, and multiplied them, he wasn't providing a meal out of a side dish as we would think bread to be. Jesus was providing a meal out of the most central and valuable piece of food during that day.

So again, what does this teach us about Jesus? This is where our view of the Old Testament is important. You see for Jesus and the New Testament writers, they made it clear that all of scripture

points to Jesus. This means that the events and activities we know about in the Old Testament were meant to be a kind of sign post pointing to Jesus.

Matthew has been showing the Jewish audience that in his book by showing the similarities between Jesus and Moses. And this story is no exception. After Moses delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, and across the Red Sea, they came to abide in the desert. In this place the people of God became hungry, in their hunger they began to doubt the goodness of God. But look and see what happened: **Ex. 16:2-4, 14-18.**

The Jews in the desert thought that the salvation of God was sufficient to get them out of slavery, but not comprehensive enough to have practical and daily relevance. This scene in Exodus 16 is not about hunger, it is about salvation and God's ample provision of it.

Did you hear the echoes of Matthew 14 in that text? The people were hungry in the desert. Look back at **Matthew 14:13, 15.** Matthew stresses the location of this event as a "desolate place," a word which in other translations is often left as "desert." In Exodus 16 all the people received exactly what they needed with no lack and no excess. But look again at **Matthew 14:20-21.**

Jesus provided bread for his hungry people in the desert. But he didn't have to wait for God to rain down bread from heaven, because he was God himself. He produced the bread for his people and there was so much more than they could have ever eaten. Jesus provides a new feast for God's people in the desert.

What I love even more about this story is that the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to send the people away because they are hungry. And did you see what Jesus said to the disciples? **Matthew 14:16.** He commands the disciples to give them something to eat. The disciples reply with the obvious facts of this overwhelming situation. But then Jesus provides for his disciples the very thing which he also commanded of them. Jesus says feed them, and the disciples say "we can't." But Jesus can.

And that's what discipleship is. Taking what God has given to us and inviting others to partake of it. In discipleship we help others follow Jesus in all of life not by giving away ourselves and our unique views and strengths. But instead we take up what Jesus has given us in the gospel and we give it to others. And those same disciples who at one point stood with nothing to offer, now stood each with a basket brimming with all the bread which was too much to be eaten.

This bread, which now was in great abundance, was often seen as not only a gift from God, but a sign that God has visited his people. In fact in Ruth 1:6, Naomi returned to Bethlehem because she "heard that the Lord had visited his people and given them bread." For Ruth she traveled from the famine stricken lands of Moab to the bread basket of Bethlehem.

And on this day, for the disciples and for the Jews, the famine had ended. The Bethlehem born Messiah had come and the people would have no lack. Church, this Jesus has come also for you. And his salvation is no limited event, but is a daily provision in every area of our lives. In John 6:48, Jesus calls himself the bread of life. Do you see him as the provider in areas which seem more ordinary than others? Does his salvation sustain your relationships, your parenting, your career goals, or your desires even for comfort?

What this parable teaches us about Jesus is that he alone is able to provide for his people because he is the very provision of God.

Now we move on to the second miracle we are going to focus on this morning. Read with me **Matthew 14:22-36**.

Again, this story is one of the most repeated tales in our Sunday school classes and children's Bibles. So parents and kids, here are the two questions we want to look at: The first question: What is the miracle of Jesus? Jesus walks on the water. What does this teach us about Jesus? This teaches us that **Jesus is the God who controls all things**. Jesus is the God who is sovereign over all. He has complete control.

Now often one of the primary take-a-ways from this story is that Jesus helps us through the storms of our life. In seasons of uncertainty and doubt, if we like Peter keep our eyes focused on Jesus and not the storm, we will make it through. And this is true, and this is good. Paul himself says in 2 Corinthians that his affliction existed to make him rely on God and not himself.

We can rely on Jesus because he is in control of all things. But we need to remember that the feeding of the five thousand and the passage we just read are not parables. Meaning, they are not stories which are meant primarily to have a sort of allegorical application to our life. The parables of Jesus are illustrations of hidden realities, the miracles of Jesus are vivid displays of reality. They are real stories which really happened so that we might better understand who Jesus is and what that means for us.

So to find the true reality of this text we need to ask ourselves some questions: Why is it that we should take confidence that Jesus can calm the storms in our life? Why is it that we feel safe to bridge a gap between the events on the Sea of Galilee two thousand years ago to the interpersonal and emotional trials we experience in 21st century America? In other words, what does this teach us about Jesus which provides us real confidence today?

Again, to answer this question we don't have to find magical meaning inside of symbolism. God in his word has given us the answer. When Jesus says the OT testifies to him, he meant it.

This is because the salvation of God, the prophet of God, and the sea have always had a unique connection in the Bible. Look with me at **Genesis 1:1-2**. Before God created he was hovering over the face of the waters. This is why most of the time in Hebrew poetry it defines creation as being brought out of the sea. In Psalm 104 we see the Psalmist describe creation like this: **Ps. 104:5-8**. The sea was the place from which God brought about the land, it was metaphorically the cradle of all God's created life.

In Genesis 1 God brought life and land out of the sea, but in Genesis 7 we see God punish sin by destroying life and covering the land with flood waters. In the flood we see the danger and power of the water to bring about death and destruction. Sin stirred the sea into a realm of chaos and danger.

The sea began to be synonymous, not only in biblical literature, but also in secular literature of the place where we have no control. The sea was to be feared. This is why Job uses imagery of the sea being stirred up by the great Leviathan. It was hostile and unsafe. It was completely out of the control of man. We can till a field, we can mine a mountain, we can dynamite a rock, but we cannot control the seas.

Just this past week we were at the lake, and my daughter asked me, "Who makes the water go down?" And I thought that was a really interesting question, so I said "Well, men can control the water levels with a damn, but it's only God who can control the water levels." She said, "Yeah but what human can control the water." And I said, "We can't. Only God can."

This is the point the Bible makes too. Look with me at **Isaiah 51:15** and **Job 26:12**. The Lord alone stirs the sea, the Lord alone stills the sea. Seventy percent of our earth is covered in the ocean, and even in the age of scientific discovery, it is estimated that we have only explored 5% of it. Yet the Lord can control the most volatile and unknown sphere of our existence.

This is why Moses parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites was such a fantastic event. They knew the danger of the sea. They knew they had no control over it. But Moses, God's prophet raised up his hands and the sea parted by the power of God.

And there was a really unique Psalm that is important to our text today. In Psalm 89 the Psalmist is praising the coming messiah of God. The Psalm opens with the same admission that we have seen earlier: **Psalm 89:9**. Only God can control the sea. But look at where it goes when it starts talking of God's prophesied deliverer: **Psalm 89:24-26**. There will be a messiah of God whose hand will be on the sea. There will be one who brings peace in the realm of chaos.

Never in all of Israel's history do we see a prophet or king come close to this. But then there is the man who makes his ministry by the sea. And after feeding five thousand people, he sent his disciples across a lake to go to the other side. At some point in the night he looks out and he sees his disciples, as Matthew 14:24 says, they were overwhelmed and overpowered by the waves. At this point they had been trying to cross a relatively moderate sized lake (only a third the size of Flathead) and they had been rowing throughout the night and were still trapped a distance from the shore. They were helpless and powerless against the forces of the sea.

But this man sees his disciples, he sees their need, he understands their struggle, and so he goes to them. How does he go to them? He walks on the sea. Again, showing himself as the greater Moses, Jesus exercised his authority over his creation. But unlike Moses, instead of appealing to God for provision, Jesus himself tread on the waters because he was God.

If you look at the disciples, there was no doubt about what happened. These were men who knew the sea well. Jesus wasn't upon a sandbar. Jesus was walking on the water. So much so that they thought it must have been a ghost for who could do such a thing.

Jesus can. And this miracle wasn't a violation of what was normal. It was picture into what was already true about all of creation. The water didn't change. The water didn't alter its form through a miracle and become something it wasn't. The water did what it was always meant to do: obey and serve the God who made it.

And then this God answered Peter's request and said: "Come." The same God who caused the storm was the same God who strode upon it, and who now was the same God who called Peter to himself in the midst of it.

And yes, Peter goes to Jesus on the water, and yes Peter begins to sink, but more important is his cry, "Lord, save me!" Let's not forget that Jesus is in control of everything here. Jesus is walking on the water, it is by Jesus power that Peter begins to walk on the water. But that also means that Jesus was not powerless when Peter began to sink.

Jesus let Peter sink because Jesus knew that the command of Christ to come and the cry of man to be saved by him are both necessary. If Peter went to Jesus with a lack of clarity of what was going on, he would have missed the point. Peter needed to see that being around Jesus isn't what made him safe, being a disciple of Jesus isn't what made him stride on the waters. It was in being saved by Jesus, and only in being saved by Jesus that we see Jesus for who he really is: The Lord who controls all things and calls men to himself.

In the miraculous feeding Jesus commands the disciples to feed the people, and then provides for them food to give. In the story of walking on the water, Jesus commands Peter to come to him and then provides for him the very salvation he needed.

In both miracles Jesus knowingly calls his disciples to do things which apart from him they cannot do. He wants them to see their dependence upon him and his overwhelming control over all things. So I want to ask you today, where in your life is scripture compelling you to do things which you have tried for too long to do apart from Jesus?

Where in your life are you functionally doubting Jesus' capability to provide and deliver?

The amazing thing about Jesus is that he's Jesus. And when we turn away from ourselves and see Jesus for who he is, our response to this should be the very response which happened in the boat: **Matthew 14:32-33**. We may desire to examine the person and work of Jesus, we may be fascinated by the miracle of conversion in the lives of others around us. We may even eagerly desire the relief it brings for our own hearts. But if our appreciation or experience of Jesus does not end up in clear and realistic worship of who Jesus already is, then we miss the very miracle itself.

The miracle is that Jesus is God and he has moved towards men in need so that he might save them. C.S. Lewis says: **"All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think, remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Mohammedanism. But you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great Miracle."**

Why do we take heart, why do we trust God? Because if Jesus is who Jesus is, then he has complete control over all things. Not because he walked on water, but because he is Lord over it. It is the man not the miracle which is truly amazing.

So what do we do with these texts and miracles? I'm asking you to look beyond them. For that's what Jesus wanted. Yes, this event brought clarity to the disciples, but they still didn't fully understand who this Jesus was. There is still another event. An event which I call you to examine today, where Jesus proves himself and his character.

The greatest event, the great miracle Lewis speaks of, is the cross of Jesus Christ. Where his body is broken as bread to be given to those who need, and where the water which poured from his pierced side bids us to come to the glassy eternal sea. So who is Jesus? Jesus is the God who provides and the God who is in control of all things. And while these are illustrated in these stories, they are proved on the cross.

Our most common need is not hungry, it is salvation from sin, and our greatest threat is not the waves, but the wrath of God, but on the cross Jesus overcame both of these. With hungry souls and strained oars, let us cast our gaze to this Jesus and see him for who he really is. Let us not doubt him. Let us

worship him. Let our doubts and our circumstances give way to the unchangeable reality of Jesus Christ, the compassionate and sovereign God who saves.