

Matthew 14:13-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-14/matthew-1413-14/>

Jesus is back in Galilee. Having learned of the murder of John the Baptist, He seeks a place of solitude. He gets in a boat to find a secluded place, but the crowds see and follow Him on foot. When Jesus gets to shore He has compassion for them and heals their sick.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 6:31-34, Luke 9:10-11, and John 6:1-3.

Matthew returns his narrative's focus to *Jesus*. The last time Matthew narrated about *Jesus*, *He* was in Nazareth (Matthew 13:54-58). Mark tells us that after His marveling about the unbelief of Nazareth, *Jesus* sent out His disciples in pairs to cast out demons, heal the sick and preach repentance (Mark 6:7-13). They gathered together with *Jesus* and reported back to Him about the same time or shortly after *Jesus* heard about the murder of His cousin *John* (Mark 6:30). They were in Galilee.

The Gospels do not specify which of Herod's palaces or the nearby prison John the Baptist was executed. Herod the tetrarch had palaces both in Galilee and a hundred miles to the south in Perea. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, claims John was executed at Herod's fortress at Macherus in Perea (Antiquities of the Jews 18.5.2). But Mark's Gospel says that "leading men of Galilee" were among Herod's guests (Mark 6:21). While this statement is not conclusive to where John was put to death, it possibly indicates that the execution took place at Herod's palace in Tiberias on the western shore of Galilee. In either case, this Herodian town would have loomed on the horizon as *Jesus*'s thoughts turned toward His cousin's fate, and His own.

The gospel writer John informs us that "the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near" (John 6:4). We know that *Jesus* was killed at Passover. This means that either this event took place shortly before His death or a year before it. Given the travels of *Jesus* that Matthew records for his readers between now (Matthew 14) and *Jesus*'s final week in Jerusalem (Matthew 21), the latter is more likely to be the case than the former.

When Jesus first heard about John's murder, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself. Jesus recognized His need to be alone with His Father during this emotional time. This was not unusual for Him. As we are told in Luke:

"But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray."
(Luke 5:16)

But given what *He* had just learned about the death of his cousin and fellow-minister, it was natural for *Him* to go to His Father during this difficult moment. The Gospels usually do not tell us specifics about what *Jesus* prays when *He* was alone (the clear exceptions being Matthew 26:38-42, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:39-46, and John 17). Neither do they tell us what was said or done on this particular occasion. But it is clear that *Jesus*'s time *by Himself* with His Father was

an important and integral part of His life and ministry. In them we see *Jesus's* sense of utter dependence upon His Father for strength and wisdom (John 5:19). We see His humility. And we see the frailty of His humanity. Consider *Jesus's* words to His disciples when *He* invited them to participate from a distance during a time of solitude and prayer on the night *He* was betrayed.

“Then He said to them, My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”
(Matthew 26:38)

It is evident that *Jesus* felt human emotions such as grief (John 11:33-35) and fear (Luke 22:42-44). And sometimes *He* was greatly troubled by them. But rather than be controlled by His emotions or desires, *Jesus* acknowledged His frailties with His Father, sought His Father's comfort and counsel and, chose to obey *Him* (Matthew 26:38-42). It is reasonable to deduce that this was a moment that *Jesus's* emotions upset *Him* and that is why *He withdrew to a secluded place by Himself*.

Jesus got in a boat to find His *secluded place*, along a quiet cove or shoreline away from the cities and crowds of *people*. Apparently because of His fame, the only solitude *He* received was when *He* was in the *boat* traveling to His destination. Because *when the people heard* that *Jesus* was back in Galilee and saw the direction His *boat* went, *they followed Him on foot from the surrounding cities*. As *Jesus* was desperate to spend time with His Father, *the people* were hungry to see *Him*. Although their desire to be near *Jesus* seems to be more transactional than relational.

Instead of finding *a secluded place by Himself when Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd*. Matthew later records that the *crowd* would eventually grow to “five thousand men... besides women and children” (Matthew 14:21). And instead of being annoyed that *the people* would not let *Him* have a moment *by Himself* during a time of grief, *Jesus felt compassion for them*. As a servant, *Jesus* considered of the needs of others and put them above His own. *Jesus* acted on His *compassion and healed their sick*.

Biblical Text

Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.