This is a continuation of my ΕχεGreekις series in the Gospel of Matthew. You can read the previous article in the series “3 Unusual Healings – Matthew 7” here. In the below commentary, I have put the Greek text followed by my translation into English. I make textual and translational notes and then add my comments on the passage below.

### Seeking solace, showing compassion

**Matt. 14:13-14** Ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνεχώρησεν ἐκεῖθεν ἐν πλοίῳ εἰς ξημον τόπον κατ' ἰδίαν· καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ ὄχλοι ἤκολούθησαν αὐτῷ πεζῇ ἀπὸ τῶν πόλεων. Καὶ ἔξελθων εἶδεν πολὺν ὄχλον καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ᾿ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν τοὺς ἀρρώστους αὐτῶν.

So, Jesus having heard this, withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. And getting out of the boat, he saw a large crowd and had compassion on them and healed their sick.

To properly frame this verse, it is important to look back to what had just transpired. Jesus had just been told by his disciples that John the Baptist was beheaded. The TEV adds in "the news about John" to clarify this point. However, I think this addition—though possibly helpful—would be unnecessary, given the narrative is read in context. So, it would seem that most immediately, it is in response to hearing this that Jesus seeks solace, perhaps to grieve but also perhaps to remove himself from a likewise

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potential threat from Antipas. "A 'withdrawal' by boat from Capernaum would take him outside the territory of Antipas if it took him to the other side of the Jordan inflow (only a couple of miles to the east), into the tetrarchy of Philip." Thus I have rendered δὲ as "so." Even though the text says that Jesus went away κατ’ ἰδίαν (by himself), is assumed by Matthew that the disciples are with him, especially when Jesus travels by boat which requires a crew. The linking καὶ has been rendered as "when" since the crowds' action is in response to Jesus' and is simply a continuation of the narrative.

Some manuscripts add Jesus as the subject of εἰδειν here for the sake of clarity. The narrative seems to build a sense that Jesus is seeking some time alone in response to hearing about the death of John the Baptist, however the crowds keep pursuing him and allow no such opportunity. It then sets up the scenario so that Jesus' response of compassion toward the crowds, despite the fact that he himself may have been deeply distressed at the time, is even more astounding. The word ἐσπλαγχνίσθη literally means "his insides were stirred up" and speaks of his deep empathy towards them. The noun ἄρρωστος is only found here in Matthew, but also used in Mark 6:5, 13 and 1 Corinthians 11:30. "The literal meaning of the noun is 'powerless,' though it may also mean 'sick, ill.'" Perhaps the use of this word by Matthew is to draw attention by contrast to Jesus' power to heal. Matthew's focus of the account at this point is on Jesus' healing of the sick here, whereas Mark's and Luke's tell us that he also taught many things about the kingdom of God.

**We barely have five small loaves and two fish!**

**Matt. 14:15-18** Ὄψις δὲ γενομένης προσήλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ λέγοντες· ἐρημός ἦστιν ὁ

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4 Manuscripts which insert ὁ Ἰησοῦς include C, K, (L), W, Γ, Δ, 067. and several others. There is actually a fairly strong manuscript tradition with various ways of specifying Jesus as the subject here.
7 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 376.
Then as evening fell, the disciples approached him saying, "The place is deserted and it is already quite late. Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat." So, they said to him, "We barely have five small loaves of bread and two fish here." But he said, "Bring them here to me."

I think it is interesting that it is the disciples which suggest that the crowds should be sent away when initially it was Jesus who was seeking solitude. Perhaps this is drawing attention to Jesus’ heart for caring for others above his own needs, or to the disciples’ lack of similar compassion? Some manuscripts omit Ἰησούς (Jesus) in verse 16, however it is clear that he is the subject of the sentence. Craig Keener sees this narrative as standing "in deliberate contrast to the drunken feast of the evil ruler Herod Antipas in 14:6–11." Whereas the Herod was a king on earth who enjoyed lavish self-indulgence, Jesus—the King of Heaven—endured self-sacrifice to serve others. This exchange between Jesus and the disciples is marked by a series of adversative conjunctions (δὲ) which set the responses of the one over the other as they go back and forth.

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The you (ὑμεῖς) in verse 16 is emphatic. As if He said, well... YOU give them something to eat! The text uses the infinitive φαγεῖν (to eat) without an object, however to facilitate smoother translation I have provided "something" as the object of the verb. The repetition of specifying ὅδε (here) in verses 17-18 perhaps serves to contrast sending them away to buy food in verse 15. The phrase ὡς ἔχομεν ὅδε εἰ μὴ πέντε ἄρτους καὶ δύο ἱχθύων is literally "we don't have here if not five loaves and two fish." However, such a stiff literal translation is clumsy. What is being communicated seems to be to stress how little food the disciples have in response to Jesus' command to feed the huge crowd. So, I have rendered it, "we barely have five loaves of bread and two fish here." Their initial concerns that it was getting late and urging Jesus to send the crowds away to find food for themselves further emphasize the disciples' concerns. Jesus' command to the disciples to feed the multitude must have seemed like a hollow joke and is reminiscent of Elisha's command to his servant in 2 Kings 4:42-43 to feed the large group of men with what seemed to be to be small a portion of food. However, "both Elisha's disciple and Jesus' disciples should have been with their master long enough to expect that what the master said, he had power from God to perform."11

One must ask however, why did the crowds seem to follow Jesus into a deserted place unprepared with any rations of their own? Was it just an oversight of their enthusiasm in the moment? The surrounding towns were relatively small—at most Capernaum and Bethsaida 'had only 2000–3000 inhabitants each'—and probably would not have been able to supply food for such a great crowd. What about the disciples' own scarce rations—five loaves and two fish are barely enough to satisfy thirteen grown men (assuming all twelve came along). Some may think of five loaves of bread being sufficient to feed several people. However, "the Palestinian bread loaves were much smaller, and three loaves were generally considered sufficient for one person during a meal."13 I have inserted the adjective "small" along with the loaves to make this clear in light of possible modern presuppositions. So, were they not expecting to take this journey? Or perhaps were counting on finding hospitality somewhere nearby to where they were going? Or is this maybe a commentary on the fact

that they were poor, and this was the normal meagre existence? Matthew doesn’t specify any details for us to speculate here, however in John’s account the food belongs to a small boy and "the loaves were 'barley loaves' (John 6:9), the food of the poor." Whatever the reason, the fact that the disciples eventually do hand over what little they have to Jesus does display some level of trust and faith.

**A feast of fish sandwiches to satisfy a multitude**

**Matt. 14:19-21** καὶ κελεύσας τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνακλιθήναι ἐπὶ τοῦ χόρτου, λαβὼν τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους καὶ τοὺς δύο ἱχθύας, ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν καὶ κλάσας ἔδωκεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς τοὺς ἄρτους, οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ τοὺς ὄχλους καὶ ἔφαγον πάντες καὶ ἐχορτάσθησαν, καὶ ἤραν τὸ περισσῶν τῶν κλασμάτων δώδεκα κωφίνους πλήρεις. οἱ δὲ ἐσθιόντες ἦσαν ἄνδρες ὡσεὶ πεντακισχίλιοι χωρίς γυναικῶν καὶ παιδίων.

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down to eat on the grass, and taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven and gave thanks. Then breaking them, he gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples gave it to the crowds. So, they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve baskets full of the leftovers of the broken pieces. And those eating were about five thousand men, not including women and children.

**Verse 19 uses quite a bit of linking conjunctions and participles which would form a run-on sentence in English if followed too strictly. So I have broken up the verse to try to help it flow more naturally in English in my translation. The verb χελεύω (order) is quite authoritative and shows Jesus taking control of the situation and giving instructions about how it is to be resolved.** The word ἀνακλιθήναι in the lexicons is defined as "to recline at table" for a meal—it "is normally used for the practice of reclining on couches in a triclinium in the Greek and Roman world and which in the Jewish context can suggest a more formal or special meal." In the immediate context, what is being communicated here is that Jesus was instructing the crowds to sit down on the grass to eat. The text οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ τοὺς ὄχλους just says "and the disciples to the crowds." So I have inserted "gave it" to make it clear that the verb ἔδωκεν is being carried over from the previous clause.

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The usage of similar verbal patterns all the Synoptic narratives of the feedings are worthy of mention. The same pattern of "took... blessed/gave thanks... broke... gave..." occur in all, as well as in Luke 24:30 at the meal at Emmaus. "This can hardly be accidental, and suggests that the evangelists framed their accounts of the feeding (and of the Emmaus story) to reflect the wording of the eucharistic formula with which they and their readers were by now familiar." 18 So in these narratives there is a sort of foretaste of the central act of worship which would come from the emergent Christian community, and due to the close connection of the Last Supper and Eucharist as a foretaste of the final eschatological messianic banquet (26:29), coupled with the usage of the verb ἀνακλιθῆναι which may carry such overtones, we might consider this dimension to the narrative.19 However, for the people there, it would be anachronistic to read it into their experience of the miracle. Craig Blomberg comments that the miracle

"almost certainly was meant to call to people's minds God's supernatural feeding of the Israelites with manna in their wilderness wanderings in Moses' day. Jewish tradition had come to believe that the Messiah would repeat this miracle of abundant provision of food on an even grander scale... Applications of this passage must focus on Christology and spiritual sustenance rather than making vague and sometimes false promises about God meeting all our physical needs. John develops precisely this spiritual import of the miracle by placing Jesus' "Bread of Life" discourse, given in the Capernaum synagogue, shortly after his account of the feeding miracle (John 6:26–59)."20

What is envisioned is not some kind of token piece of bread which every person managed to scrounge, but rather a healthy banquet feast satisfying all who were there. "The collecting of the left-overs is probably mentioned not so much as an example of avoiding untidiness or waste, but to underline how much food has been provided—hence perhaps the focus on this aspect of the two feeding miracles in 16:9–10."21 The inclusion of the detail of twelve baskets full may imply that each disciple took a basket and filled it with the

20 Blomberg, Matthew, 233.
The verb used, χορτάζω is used properly of animals with the meaning "to feed, fatten." It thus comes to signify a satisfying meal. Interestingly, there is no reaction recorded from the crowds, it is only the disciples who are expected to have noted the miracle in 16:9-10.

**Sent into the storm**


Immediately afterward, he compelled the disciples to embark on the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side while he would dismiss the crowds. Then, he dismissed the crowds and went up to the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already many metres away from land being beaten by the waves for the wind was against them.

The καὶ here serves to link with the previous section and continue the narrative, so I have rendered the opening phrase as "immediately afterward." However, "some scholars feel that 'immediately' was later introduced into the text by some scribe who was influenced by the Marcan form (6:45), the conclusion of TC-GNT is 'that its absence from a few witnesses is due to accidental omission.'" The relator ἕως οὗ is introducing the circumstance of Jesus going to dismiss the crowd as to happen concurrently with the previous circumstances of the disciples going into the boat to go ahead of him. The verb ἀπολύσας is subjunctive because it is contingent on the fulfillment of his initial command to the

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disciples. I might have translated it a bit more stiffly as "until which time he should dismiss the crowds." However, that seemed too clumsy so I opted for a smoother paraphrase of the same idea.

From John 6:15, we learn that some of the people from the crowd were wanting to try to make Jesus king. This was presumably the reason why he sent the disciples off straightaway to the other side while he dismissed the crowds and handled the situation. "It was important that the Twelve be not involved in king making and, indeed, that the whole project be squashed without delay, and Matthew stresses this." After an eventful day with the multitudes following him, Jesus was not looking for more attention or any public expression of devotion. Matthew use of κατ’ ἰδίαν (by himself) and μόνος (alone) stress that Jesus was away from everyone, seeking quiet solace and private time with the Father. He was indeed practicing the type of prayer which Matthew had previously recorded him as prescribing in chapter 6.

The genitive absolute phrase ὁ σῶμα τὸ πέρακεν δὲ γενομένης is used again here to introduce this section, however, within the progression of the narrative, some time has passed so I thought it would not be best to translate it the same as before "as evening fell" but rather "when evening came." I was considering rendering σταδίους πολλοὺς, which is literally many stadia, as many kilometres. A stadia was about two hundred yards, or about 600 feet. John’s account says that they had gone 25 to 30 stadia out. The lake "measures about four and a half miles across" and its greatest width is 61 stadia. However, as we’re unsure exactly how far the boat was from shore, I felt it safer to say "many metres." Some other translations opt to render it as "far out on the lake" or "in the middle of the lake"—both of which I think would be suitable options as well. The phrase ἦν γὰρ ἐναντίον ὁ ἀνεμος—"for the wind was against them" has no expressed object for the adjective for "against." However, if one was to be supplied, it should probably be assumed that it is the boat rather than the disciples.

25 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 381.
26 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 381.
since the boat is the expressed preceding subject of the sentence.28

Going for a stroll on the lake


But then at about 4a.m. in the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. And the disciples, seeing him walking upon the sea, were greatly afraid saying that it was a ghost and cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus said to them, "Take courage. It is I. Don’t be afraid."

The phrase τετάρτη φυλακῇ τῆς νυκτὸς is literally "the fourth watch of the night." However, this is not terminology which modern readers are very familiar with. It is in reference to the hours between 3a.m. and 6a.m., so I have rendered it as "about 4a.m." to help with understanding the time period in mind.29 It also indicates that Jesus had spent most of the night in prayer, and also that the disciples at this point had probably spent equally as much time rowing.30 R.T. France argues that the term φάντασμά (ghost) used here "represents instinctive superstition rather than a theologically formulated belief, and may reflect the popular belief that evil spirits lived in the sea or that those who had drowned haunted the water."31 So it may be interesting that in a moment of distress they return instinctively to superstitious beliefs.

This miracle comes right after the feeding of the multitude, which would have been fresh in the disciples’ minds. Already they would have probably been awed by

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Jesus, however this record of a very spectacular instance of his supernatural power would understandably evoke even more awe and justifies the theologically loaded response of the disciples in verse 33. "Behind their reaction lies the OT imagery of God walking on or through the sea (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16), a potent symbol of the Creator's control over the unruly forces of his world. It thus follows naturally that when Jesus, like God, walks on the water the storm yields to his authority."32 Jesus' first response to them θαρσεῖτε (take courage) normally used in the New Testament of being cheerful (see 9:2, 22).33 This is directly followed by ἐγώ εἰμι (it is I)—literally "I am,"—the form reminds me instantly of Exodus 3:14, and it might be an intentional reference. "The expression has overtones of deity, and who but God could walk on the stormy waters?"34 Blomberg comments, "Though still somewhat veiled, this is perhaps Jesus' clearest self-revelation of his divinity to date."35 Also the reassurance to not be afraid harkens back to many OT references and commands to not fear.

Peter walks on water

Matt. 14:28-29 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν· κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ, κέλευσόν με ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ϊδατα. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἐλθέ. καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλοίου ἔλθε. καὶ ἠλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Peter responding to him said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." And he said, "Come." So, after Peter got out of the boat, he walked on the waters and went toward Jesus.

The phrase καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλοίου [ὁ] Πέτρος sets the circumstance preceding what comes next, so I have rendered it "after Peter got out of the boat." France argues that περιεπάτησεν may be taken as an 'inceptive aorist' rather than a statement of fact, in which case the clause would mean "stepped onto the water intending to come to Jesus."36 This would make the reading of Peter's attempt a failure.

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33 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 382.
34 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 382.
35 Blomberg, Matthew, 235.
from the start. However, an "inceptive aorist" is not usually used in this way and it would have been better expressed by an imperfect if this was the desired meaning. So, most interpreters "agree that we are intended to see Peter's attempt as initially successful, until doubt overcame him."37

"Disciples were expected to imitate their masters, and Jesus is training disciples who will not simply regurgitate his oral teachings but who will have the faith to demonstrate God's authority in practice as well (see especially 17:19–20; 21:20–22). Stepping into the water on faith presumably recalls the faith of the priests in Joshua's generation (Josh 3:8, 13, 15–17)."38

“Little-faith”

Matt. 14:30-31 βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον [ἰσχυρὸν] ἐφοβήθη, καὶ ἀρξάμενος καταποντίζεσθαι ἐκραξεν λέγων· κύριε, σῶσόν με. Ἐνθέως δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἐπελάβετο αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ὁλιγόπιστε, εἰς τί ἔδιστασας?

But seeing the mighty wind he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus, extending his hand, grasped him and said to him, "Little-faith, why did you doubt?"

The word ὁλιγόπιστε [oligópiste] is vocative, which means that Jesus was calling Peter by this name. It seems like it might be a sort of nickname "Little-faith." It has traditionally been rendered "you of little faith," but perhaps that tends to imply more of a derogatory criticism of Peter's faith than what is intended. Let us not forget that Peter just walked on water! Could it be seen as a commendation of Peter's faith? Like, "oh look at that! You've got a little faith there!" Of course, this is not the usual view of this episode, as it has often been preached condemning Peter's lack of faith. However, I struggle with that when it is coming

from pastors or commentators who have never stood on mere aqueous surface tension themselves! Surely even the momentary victory is somewhat praiseworthy? Also, Peter still knew who to cry out to, and he demonstrated greater faith than the disciples who just stayed in the boat.\(^{39}\) R.T. France comments:

"The faith which can move mountains (17:20) would have kept Peter safe, if he had not allowed his obedience to Jesus’ call to be overwhelmed by his very natural perception of the danger to which he had rashly exposed himself. It is thus an illustration of the vulnerability of the disciple who allows doubt, the natural human perspective, to displace the faith which relies on the supernatural power of God."\(^{40}\)

However, France goes on to say that it is not clear whether this is intended to be seen as an example of valid faith gone wrong, or as a cautionary tale warning others not to take foolhardy risks.\(^{41}\) Blomberg comments that the word ἐδίστασας used for "doubt" here "suggests the idea of trying to go in two different directions at once or of serving two different masters simultaneously."\(^{42}\) However, it should be noted that it doesn’t necessarily denote "theological uncertainty unbelief, but a practical hesitation, wavering, being in two minds. Peter’s problem was not so much lack of intellectual conviction as the conflict between the evidence of his senses and the invitation of Jesus."\(^{43}\) Peter isn’t faithless as in the sense seen in 6:30 or 8:26—lacking practical confidence in God—but rather he does in the end cry out in faith that Jesus is the one who can save him.

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**Truly you are the Son of God**

**Matt. 14:32-33** καὶ ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον ἐκόπασεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ άνεμος, οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες· ἀλήθως θεοῦ γιός εἶ.

*And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those who were in the boat worshipped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

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At first, I was considering translating the opening phrase "while they got into the boat" due to the genitive construction of ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν, however, in light of the full clause it seems better to translate it as a simple action, "when they got into the boat" which


sets up the circumstance for the next clause. The word group οἱ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ (those in the boat) makes up the subject of the predicate προσεκύνησαν (worshipped). The imperfect present participle λέγοντες opens up how they were worshipping Jesus—by saying "Truly you are the Son of God"—and perhaps implies some sort of continuity to their speech beyond just this summary phrase. If it were aorist, we may argue that it is seen as a completed simple action and therefore that was all they said. Ascribing this confession of deity to him was their worship.

"Only Matthew records Peter’s unsuccessful attempt to walk on the water (verses 28–31), and he alone climaxes the narrative with the confession "Truly you are the Son of God!" (verse 33). This confession then becomes the clue to the understanding of the account in Matthew's Gospel."

This confession is reiterated again in Matthew 16:16 by Peter again, and confirmed by the voice from heaven in 17:5, then by a Gentile in 27:54.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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