

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 13, Matthew 14-16

Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome back, everybody. We're diving deep into the Gospel of Matthew today. Always a good place to be.

And we've got Dr. Craig Keener as our guide. You know, his lectures are always jam-packed. They really are.

You always come away learning something new. Absolutely. And this time around, we're looking at, well, I mean, it's Matthew, so we know there's going to be miracles.

Of course. Of course. But Dr. Keener really digs into what these miracles reveal about Jesus and also how Jesus interacts with people who have incredible faith.

Yeah, and that tension between, like, the power of the miracles and then the way Jesus kind of shakes things up. Right. Like, nobody's comfortable when Jesus is around.

He's always challenging assumptions. Always pushing people to go deeper. Exactly.

So let's jump right into it. We're starting with Matthew 14, Jesus walking on water. I mean, come on.

That's got to be one of the most iconic miracles in the whole Bible. It really is. And Dr. Keener, he makes this really cool connection back to the Old Testament.

Oh, right, right. He was talking about how this miracle echoes descriptions of Yahweh, God himself. Like, there's that part in Job where it talks about God treading on the sea.

Yeah, and passing by. Like, it's not just a random power display. It's Matthew subtly telling his readers, hey, this Jesus, he's got the same power as God himself.

So it's like a hint at Jesus's divinity. Exactly. Yeah.

And, you know, this happens right after the feeding of the 5,000, which is another miracle that points back to God providing for his people in the wilderness. Okay, so we're already seeing these parallels between Jesus and God the Father. But then there's that moment where Jesus actually says, I am, right? And that's not just any phrase.

No, no, not at all. I am is like a direct link back to the name God revealed to Moses. Oh, wow.

The burning bush. Yeah. It's a huge statement of authority, and it ties into the whole idea of Jesus being divine.

So it's like Jesus is really making it clear who he is. Absolutely. But then there's Peter, right? He sees Jesus walking on the water and decides to try it himself.

Talk about bold. Right. I mean, what do you think was going through his head? I don't know.

Like a mix of, if he can do it, maybe I can too. And maybe a little bit of this could go really wrong. Probably both.

Dr. Keener talks about how Peter's initial boldness shows this incredible trust in Jesus. Yeah. He's totally willing to step out of the boat.

Yeah. Literally. But then he gets distracted, starts focusing on the wind and the waves.

And down he goes. It's like, you know, we all have those moments where our faith feels strong and then doubt creeps in. And suddenly we're sinking.

It's so relatable. I mean, how often do we let fear or doubt stop us from doing something that we feel God's calling us to do? It's a constant battle, isn't it? And I think that's what Dr. Keener wants us to wrestle with. He even shared those stories about people unknowingly walking on water in moments of crisis.

Wait, really? What stories? Like people who were so focused on rescuing someone or escaping danger that they didn't even realize they were doing something impossible. So their focus on the task kind of blocked out the fear and doubt. Yeah.

It's like they were operating on pure adrenaline and faith without even realizing it. Wow. It makes you think about how often we might be experiencing little miracles every day, even without knowing it.

Maybe we're so caught up in our everyday worries that we don't even see them. That's a good point. And that's a good question.

Are we so worried about the storms in our lives that we miss the moments where we're walking on water? Whoa. I like that. All right.

So we've got Jesus walking on water, calming the storm, and then... He turns around and confronts the Pharisees. Ah, yes. Pharisees.

Yeah. Never a dull moment with those guys. Not at all.

Dr. Kuehner used that example of hand-washing to show how their focus on tradition was overshadowing what really matters. Okay. So back then, the Pharisees were all about ritual purity, right? And they had all these rules about washing your hands before you eat and all that.

Exactly. And they believed that following those rules was absolutely essential for pleasing God. But Jesus is like, hold on a minute.

You're so focused on the outward stuff that you're missing the point. Right. He was saying that their actions weren't always matching up with their hearts.

Like that example of people dedicating their money to the temple instead of caring for their elderly parents. That's prioritizing religious duty over honoring your own family. Yeah.

It's a classic example of missing the forest for the trees. And it made me think about how we might do similar things today. Ooh, good point.

Like, are we so caught up in following the rules or going through the motions that we forget about compassion? Or love? Exactly. It's a good question to ask ourselves. Are we really living out the heart of our faith? And that's the thing, right? Dr. Kiener shared that story about a rabbi using his own back as a footstool for his mother.

Oh, yeah. What a wild image. It's supposed to be an example of, you know, extreme devotion, but it kind of makes you wonder.

If that's really what honoring someone looks like, like sometimes even good intentions can go astray if they're not rooted in genuine understanding and love. So it's not just about doing the right thing. It's about doing it with the right heart.

Exactly. And that leads us to this incredible encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. I love this story.

Oh, me too. It's such a powerful example of faith and persistence. And it's interesting that this encounter happens right after that whole debate about clean and unclean.

The timing is definitely significant. Jesus has just challenged the Jewish leaders about their ideas of purity. And then he encounters this woman who, by their standards, would have been considered unclean and an outsider.

Right. Because she's a Canaanite. Exactly.

And not only that, but Jesus initially seems to dismiss her. He even compares her to a dog. OK, I've got to admit, that part always throws me off a bit.

It seems so harsh. It was definitely meant to be a challenge. Dr. Kiener explained that in that culture, calling someone a dog was a serious insult.

Oh, I see. So Jesus is actually testing her faith here. Absolutely.

He's creating an obstacle to see how she'll respond. And her response is amazing. She doesn't back down.

She even uses that dog analogy to her advantage. Right. She says, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

She's acknowledging the cultural hierarchy, but at the same time, she's showing incredible faith. It's like she's saying, OK, I might be a dog in your eyes, but I still believe you have the power to heal my daughter. And not only that, but she uses that title, Son of David.

It's a messianic title, recognizing Jesus as the promised king. Wow. And she's not even Jewish.

Exactly. It shows that Jesus's mission extends beyond all those cultural and religious boundaries. So her faith is, like, off the charts.

Totally. And Jesus recognizes that. He commends her for her great faith and heals her daughter.

It's such a beautiful reminder that God's grace isn't limited by our categories or assumptions. And that sometimes he uses obstacles to actually challenge and refine our faith. It's like he did with the wedding at Cana, too, you know, when he told Mary his time hadn't come yet.

Right. He waited till the very last minute to perform that miracle. It's like he's pushing us to go deeper, to trust him, even when we don't understand.

I love that. It's a good reminder for all of us. He wants to see how badly we want it, you know? Yeah.

How deep our faith really goes. And speaking of deep, what about that whole yeast of the Pharisees thing? That's always been a bit of a cryptic one for me. Yeah, it's a weird image, right? What did Jesus actually mean by that? Well, Dr. Keener explains that Jesus was talking about how influence spreads.

It's like, you know, a little bit of yeast can leaven a whole loaf of bread. Right. Right.

So the Pharisees, their ideas, their attitudes, it's like they could easily infiltrate and corrupt genuine faith. OK, so it's a warning to be discerning, right? Like, be careful about what influences we let into our lives. Exactly.

What we read, what we watch, who we hang out with. It all shapes how we see the world, how we understand God. In some sense, we don't even realize it.

That's the scary part. But you know, this section of Matthew also highlights how important it is to understand the cultural context of the Bible. Oh, right.

Dr. Keener talked about that with the feeding miracles. Like when it says 4,000 men, besides women and children, it doesn't mean women weren't there. Right.

It's just that they weren't counting women in crowds back then. It was a cultural thing. So we have to be careful about reading our modern ideas into the text.

Absolutely. Context is key. And speaking of context, the next scene takes us to Caesarea Philippi.

Kind of a wild setting, actually. Why? What was going on there? Well, it was known for its pagan temples. It was like this hub of idol worship.

Oh, wow. So it's a place that's like totally opposed to everything Jesus represents. Yeah.

And it's in this setting that Jesus asks his disciples that super important question: Who do you say that I am? And Peter, bold as ever, steps up and declares, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. Mic drop. That's a huge statement, especially in that context.

Right. Like, he's surrounded by all these symbols of false gods, and he's proclaiming Jesus as the true king. And Dr. Keener points out how Matthew intentionally sets this scene up to highlight the radical nature of Peter's confession.

It's like he's saying, look, even in a place dedicated to other gods, Jesus is the one who reigns. Exactly. And then Jesus calls Peter the rock upon which he will build his church.

That's a pretty big deal. Right. I mean, what does that even mean? Well, there's been a lot of debate about this passage over the years.

Oh, I bet. But Dr. Keener explains that in the original Greek, the words for Peter and rock are basically the same. So it's not so much about Peter's personality or his strengths as it is about the truth he has spoken.

So the church is built on the foundation of that confession. The belief that Jesus is the Christ. And then Jesus adds that powerful line: the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

It's this image of ultimate victory of the church's enduring strength, even in the face of death. Wow. It's an incredible promise of hope, especially when you consider the persecution that early Christians faced.

Yeah. Dr. Keener reminded us about Tertullian, one of the early church fathers. He actually said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Wow. That's intense. But it also shows how strong their faith was, like they were willing to die for what they believed in.

Absolutely. Their belief in Jesus's resurrection gave them this unshakable hope, even in the face of death. But then we see this really dramatic shift in the narrative.

Oh, yeah. Peter, who just moments ago was being called the rock, suddenly becomes a stumbling block. Yeah.

He rebukes Jesus for talking about his suffering and death. It's almost like he can't handle it. Like one minute he's getting this incredible affirmation from Jesus, and the next minute he's being called Satan.

It's wild, right? It shows us that even those closest to Jesus struggled to understand the full scope of his mission. So why do you think Peter reacted so strongly to the idea of Jesus suffering? Well, the Jewish people at that time were expecting a Messiah who would come and overthrow Roman rule and establish a glorious earthly kingdom. They weren't expecting a suffering servant.

Right. They wanted a conquering hero, not someone who would be crucified. Exactly.

And even though Peter had just made this incredible confession of faith, it seems like he still hadn't fully grasped what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. So when Peter tries to talk Jesus out of suffering, he's basically trying to fit Jesus into his own preconceived notions. Yeah.

He's imposing his own expectations onto Jesus, rather than allowing Jesus to redefine what it means to be the Messiah. And Jesus calls him out on it big time. He does.

He calls Peter Satan because he recognizes that this kind of thinking is a temptation. It's a distraction from the true mission. It's like Dr. Keener pointed out.

It's the same temptation that Satan offered Jesus in the wilderness to take a shortcut to power, to bypass the path of suffering. Right. It's the idea of a kingdom without a cross.

And Jesus is making it clear that that's not how his kingdom works. So this isn't just a personal disagreement between Jesus and Peter. It's a clash of worldviews.

Absolutely. It's a spiritual battle between two very different ways of understanding power and victory. And it leads into one of the most challenging teachings in the whole gospel.

Jesus' call to discipleship. He tells his followers to take up your cross and follow him. It's a radical call to self-denial, to putting Christ above everything else, even our own comfort and safety.

Dr. Keener even shared that personal story about facing persecution for his faith. It was really powerful. Yeah.

He talked about how that experience forced him to confront what really matters. And ultimately, it's not about this life. It's about eternity.

Exactly. Following Jesus isn't a guarantee of an easy life. It's a call to radical surrender and unwavering commitment, even when things get tough.

It's definitely a challenging message. But even in the midst of all this talk about suffering and sacrifice, there's this glimmer of hope. Right.

Yeah. Oh, Jesus promises that some of his disciples will see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. It's like a sneak peek of the glory that's to come.

Exactly. And Dr. Keener pointed out how seeing in the Gospel of Matthew is often connected to understanding, to spiritual insight. So it's not just about physically witnessing something.

It's about perceiving the deeper reality, the spiritual truth. Absolutely. And that brings us to another interesting detail that Dr. Keener unpacked.

That whole keys to the kingdom imagery. What do you make of that? Hmm. It's a good one.

Keys. I mean, they represent authority and access. Right.

So by giving Peter the keys to the kingdom, Jesus is entrusting him with a special role in the early church. But what does that mean for us today? What are the keys to the kingdom in our own lives? That's the question, isn't it? Are we using the keys we've been given to open up God's kingdom for others, or are we keeping them hidden away? Ooh, that's a good one to ponder. It's like, are we willing to step into the authority and responsibility that comes with following Jesus? Exactly.

And, you know, as we reflect on everything we've learned in this deep dive so far, I'm struck by that tension between expectation and reality that runs through this whole section of Matthew. Yeah. The disciples, the Pharisees, even Peter at times, they all struggled to reconcile their expectations with the reality of who Jesus was and what he came to do.

That makes me wonder if we're still grappling with that tension today. Oh, I'm sure we are. Are we so caught up in our own ideas of how God should act, what faith should look like, that we miss the ways he's actually working in our lives? It's a valid question.

Are we open to the unexpected? Are we willing to have our assumptions challenged to let the reality of Jesus transform our expectations? That's a really good point. You know, speaking of expectations, what about that story of the rabbi using his back as a footstool for his mother? It's supposed to be an example of, like, ultimate devotion, but... It's also a bit strange, like... Yeah, like, I'm all for honoring your parents, but maybe there's a limit. Right.

And I think Dr. Keener was getting at that. Like, we need to be careful about taking those kinds of stories too literally. So it's not about blindly following a rule.

It's about understanding the principle behind it. Exactly. The point of that story isn't to encourage everyone to use their backs as footstools.

It's to highlight the radical selflessness that should characterize our love and care for others. So it's about the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law. Exactly.

And it's about finding creative and authentic ways to live that out in our own contexts. It's not about blind obedience. It's about cultivating a heart that's aligned with God's heart, a heart that's motivated by love, compassion, and a desire to honor him in all that we do.

Beautifully said. And that's a perfect transition into the next section of Matthew, where we see Jesus continuing to challenge those religious leaders, heal the sick, and cast out demons. It's like every encounter is an opportunity for transformation.

Both for the people who are interacting with Jesus directly, and for us, the readers, who are encountering him through the text. That's the power of the Gospels. They invite us into this transformative encounter with Jesus, allowing his words and actions to challenge us, to reshape our understanding, to deepen our relationship with him.

It's been such a rich conversation so far, and I have a feeling there's even more to uncover as we continue our deep dive into the Gospel of Matthew. It really does make you want to keep reading, doesn't it? Yeah. Like, what happens next? Oh, absolutely.

And what happens next is amazing. That promise that Jesus makes, it leads right into the transfiguration, you know, where Jesus is revealed in all his glory. The mountaintop experience, literally.

Exactly. And Dr. Keener really emphasized that this isn't just about spectacle; it's about revelation. Oh, I see.

It's like God is giving the disciples and us a glimpse of who Jesus really is. Right. The glorious King, the Son of God.

And, you know, to make things even more incredible, Moses and Elijah show up. Wait, what? Moses and Elijah, like from the Old Testament? The one and only. It's like this amazing convergence of the law and the prophets, affirming that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan.

Wow. That's heavy. It's like the whole history of Israel is pointing to this moment.

Exactly. And it's this incredible foreshadowing of what's to come. But this is what I thought was really interesting.

Right after the transfiguration, Jesus starts talking about his death again. Oh, right. He brings them back down to earth, so to speak.

He does. And I think there's a really important lesson there. The transfiguration, it's not an escape from suffering.

So what is it? It's like God is giving them a glimpse of the ultimate victory so they can endure the trials that are still to come. OK, so it's like a source of strength, not a way to avoid the hard stuff. Exactly.

And, you know, it made me think about how we often approach our faith like we want the mountaintop experiences, the moments of glory. But we don't always want the valleys, the times of suffering and uncertainty. Right.

But what if those difficult times, those are the times that actually shape us the most? What if, like the transfiguration, they're preparing us for something even more glorious? Whoa, I like that. So it's not about avoiding suffering. It's about embracing it as part of the journey.

And trusting that God is with us every step of the way. And, you know, that idea of seeing that we talked about earlier, it comes back here, too. Oh, so.

Well, true faith. It's not just about seeing the miraculous. It's about seeing God at work in all circumstances, even the tough ones, especially the tough ones.

It's about trusting that he's using every experience to shape us into the people he's calling us to be. So the mountaintops and the valleys, they all have a purpose. They do.

And that's a message that's woven throughout the Gospel of Matthew. We're reminded that the path to glory often leads through hardship. Right.

Like Jesus himself. He suffered on the cross. Exactly.

But we're also given hope. Hope that God is working even in the midst of suffering. Hope that he will ultimately triumph over evil and hope that one day we'll see him face to face.

Wow. That's an amazing thought. It's been incredible diving into Matthew with you.

I feel like I've learned so much. Me too. It's always fascinating to explore these familiar stories and find those hidden gems.

Absolutely. And a big thanks to Dr. Keener for his incredible insights. He's a treasure.

And thank you, everyone, for joining us on this deep dive into the Gospel of Matthew. We hope you've been challenged, inspired, and maybe even a little bit transformed. Until next time, keep exploring, keep asking questions, and keep seeking God's truth.