Always Working
Matthew 14

Intro

Over my time at Midland Classical Academy, it has been my privilege to teach Great Books II several times…

- In that class we read *The Aeneid*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Fahrenheit 451*…

In addition to these works of fiction, we also read some of Aristotle's writings…

- And I always enjoy studying what Aristotle had to say regarding ***the four causes***…

You see, Aristotle recognized that there are ***four causes*** that explain why *something exists* or *why it is the way that it is*…

1) Material Cause — *substance that something is made out of…*
2) Formal Cause — *the design of the item…*
3) Efficient Cause — *the one who brings the item into being…*
4) Final Cause — Telos — *the end goal, the purpose of the item…*

Now, for a moment, let's think about ***the four causes*** in relation to *a carpenter creating an intricate wooden cabinet*…

The ***material cause*** is the ***wood*** chosen for the project…

The ***formal cause*** is the ***plan*** — the design of the cabinet — the height, width and depth — the number and size of drawers, etc…

- The carpenter himself is the ***efficient cause*** — he is the one constructing the cabinet…

And the ***final cause*** — ***the telos*** — ***the end goal*** — is to have an aesthetically pleasing cabinet for storage and display…

- Now, if we were to observe this carpenter at different stages of the construction of the cabinet, we might wonder if he knew what he was doing…

We might not understand how all the cutting and sanding — all the mess and the different pieces — are going to come together…

- But if the carpenter knows what what he is doing — if he is skilled in woodworking — then we would be wise to trust him and simply look forward to seeing the end product…

Now, as believers I think that we find ourselves in a similar position to the observer in the woodworker's workshop…

- We seek to make sense of what is going on — both *in our lives* and *in the world as a whole* — and we wonder how it is all going to come together…

And when we come to that place, I believe that it is helpful to remind ourselves of Aristotle's four causes ***in relation to God Himself****…*

The material cause — all the stuff that our life is made up of — was created by God — and He has all the supplies He needs to finish the job…

The formal cause — *the design* — is in the mind of God — and it always has been — He understands His plan — even if we don't…

The efficient cause — *is God Himself* — and He has methods and means that we can't even imagine…

The final cause — *the Telos — the end goal* — is the accomplishment of His good and perfect will…

Ultimately, this world is God's workshop — He made it all — and though we can't make sense of so much of it — He is ***always working*** — He is still guiding history toward His desired end…

John 5:17 (NKJV)
…"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

So as we move through Matthew 14 this morning we will seek to remind ourselves that **God is always working**, no matter how confusing things seem to be…

Let's move now into our first section…

<u>1) Death of the Forerunner</u> (vs 1-12)

1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus
2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

Herod the tetrarch is also known as ***Herod Antipas***, one of the sons of Herod the Great…

- And as ***Herod Antipas*** hears about the ministry of Jesus, he believes that Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead…

This is an outlandish idea, especially as John the Baptist and Jesus had overlapping ministries — including the event where John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River…

- So, this is a reminder that people often have contradictory views of the Lord Jesus — and we can be of benefit if we have proper knowledge of Him…[expand]

Moving on to vs 3-4…

3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.
4 Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

Now, Herod was thinking about John the Baptist because they had a bad history together…

Herod was a leader of the Jewish people but Herod lived an ungodly lifestyle and John the Baptist rebuked him publicly…

- John openly criticized Herod because Herod had divorced his wife, seduced his sister-in-law Herodias and then stole her away from his brother Philip…

But it gets worse — Herodias was also the niece of both Philip and Herodias — *what a mess…*

5 And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Now, Herod was a man who was dominated by his desires — and as with all people who live life in submission to their desires, Herod was inwardly conflicted…

- Herod had imprisoned John to satisfy Herodias — and Herod wanted to go ahead and kill John — but Herod feared how the people might react since they considered John a prophet…

At the same time, we are told in Mark's gospel that even though Herodias wanted John dead, Herod kept John alive because he liked to talk with John from time to time…

- This is why you can't trust people who live by their conflicting desires — because you never know which desire they will choose to follow…

And as we discussed last week, *purity of heart is to will one thing — to do the will of God in every situation*…

- Unfortunately, Herod was not interested in the will of God — Herod simply did what seemed best to him in the moment…

Herod is an example of what we read about in…

Psalm 10:4 (NKJV)
The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God;
God is in none of his thoughts.

Continuing on in Matthew 14 to vs…

6 But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod.
7 Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

At Herod's birthday party, the drunken men are entertained by Herodias' daughter performing a sensual dance…

As a reward for the dance, Herod foolishly promises to give Herodias' daughter whatever she asks for…

8 So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter."

This was the opportunity that Herodias was looking for — this was her chance to take out John the Baptist — and she wanted it done in a humiliating way…

9 And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her.

Though Herod didn't, at that moment, want to kill John the Baptist, Herod also doesn't want to lose face in front of his guests so he gives the command to execute John…

10 So he sent and had John beheaded in prison.
11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.
12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

What a gruesome and humiliating end for John the Baptist…

And in these sort of situations it is hard to understand how God is working…

John was a man who was prophesied in the OT and whose conception was proclaimed by the angel Gabriel…

- John was a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, who had a dynamic public ministry and who was the forerunner of the Messiah…

And yet John also a man who spent the last portion of his earthly life wasting away in the prison of an ungodly king…

- While in prison, John suffered the mental torment of wondering why things were the way that they were…

Finally, John suffered the humiliation of being beheaded as the payment for a woman who suggestively danced for drunken men…

- Even so, God was still working through that situation…

And I believe that there are a couple of lessons for us to learn through this situation…

1) God is willing to allow godly people to die in ungodly ways…

- [ex. Abel to Jesus / Stephen to our present day…]

Even so, God does not treat the death of the believer lightly…

Psalm 116:15 (NKJV)
Precious in the sight of the LORD
Is the death of His saints.

2) The death of the godly is not the end — it is the ultimate fulfillment of life…

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NKJV)
6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.
7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.
8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

With that said, let's move into our second section…

2) Feeding the 5000 (vs 13-21)

13 When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.
14 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

So, even though Jesus wants to get away and consider the death of John the Baptist, the multitudes follow Him…

- But instead of hiding from the people, the Lord Jesus was **moved with compassion** for the multitude and healed them…

And as we consider how God was working in this situation, I believe that we find a helpful lesson…

Self-preservation is not the goal of the Christian life…

With this idea in mind, please turn to…

Matthew 16:24-26 (NKJV)
24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Now to…

Matthew 20:27-28 (NKJV)
27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—
28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Paul also exemplified this sort of self-sacrifice…

2 Corinthians 12:15 (NKJV)
And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.

Now, it is true that we must take times to *rest* and *recharge* but that is only needed if we are actually working…

- [ex. only players on the field need a rest / those remaining on the sidelines are already resting…]

Let's turn back to Matthew 14 as we move into vs…

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

The disciples seem to be instructing the Lord Jesus — and I would argue that this is unwise — *even though I have attempted it countless times*…

So, instead of trying to instruct the Lord, I would suggest we simply make requests of the Lord and leave the choice to Him…

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Jim Elliot
"God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him."

Tim Keller
"God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knows."

Moving on in Matthew 14 to vs 16, Jesus responds to the disciples…

16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

Instead of submitting to the disciples' directive, the Lord Jesus gives them a command…

- And we are told in John's gospel that Jesus said this to test His disciples — He already knew what He was going to do…

IMPORTANT — You and I never give the Lord Jesus any new information — He always knows the best thing to do — our job is to simply walk in faith and obey what He has to say…

Continuing on to vs 17-18…

17 And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."
18 He said, "Bring them here to Me."

These five loaves and two fish were from a little boy — and a Christian singer Josiah Queen has a great song about this event…

- With that said, we don't know how the disciples got the little boy to hand over his lunch…

But we do know that the disciples made the right choice when *they brought the food to Jesus*…

- We may have only five loaves and two fish — but we should bring them to the Lord Jesus and see what He does with them…

This is a vital lesson to consider regarding the fact that God is always working…

So often we can't see what He is doing — we can't understand it — so we pull back — we withdraw…

- Instead, we should bring what we have to Him — we should offer ourselves to Him — and trust that He will continue working even though we don't have any idea how…

As Paul wrote in…

Romans 12:1 (NKJV)
I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Moving on in Matthew 14 to vs…

19 Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.

- [expand — blessed / broken / given — picture of the life of the Lord Jesus // picture of the disciples — blessed / broken / given…]

Please notice that the Lord Jesus chooses to use the disciples in the process of distribution — this is part of how God works in this world…

- The fact is, the Lord Jesus invites us to be coworkers with Him — because that is how He forms us into the people that He wants us to be…

The Lord Jesus wants to increase our capacity — He wants to continually transform us into vessels of honor through which He can bless the people of this world…[expand]

20 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.

21 Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

- [expand — how many fed in total?…]

Also, there were 12 baskets of leftovers (one for each of the disciples?)…

- If so, then this is a reminder that you cannot out-give God — if you spend the life He has given you on serving Him then you will find that it was a life well-spent…[expand]

Let's move now to our third section…

<u>3) Walking on Water</u> (vs 22-33)

22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

Once again, the Lord Jesus demonstrates that *He is the leader* as He commands His disciples to get in the boat and head across the Sea of Galilee as He sends the multitudes home…

23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

The Lord Jesus seeks some time to pray to His Father, reminding us that this is an important part of the life of a disciple…

- It seems clear that God works in our lives as we spend time with Him in prayer…[expand]

24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Please do not miss this truth — *the Lord Jesus sent His disciples into the storm* — He directed them into the path of difficulty…

- It is vital to understand that God works in this way — that you can be in the center of God's will and as a result be encountering great difficulty…[expand]

In fact, this is the consistent testimony of believers throughout human history…[expand]

This truth reminds be of hymn written by Isaac Watts called ***Am I a Soldier of the Cross?****…*

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

For more on this subject, please turn to…

1 Peter 4:12-16 (NKJV)

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Let's turn back to Matthew 14 as we consider vs 25-27…

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

[expand on situation — clear sign of deity…]

Job 9:8 (NKJV)
He alone spreads out the heavens,
And treads on the waves of the sea…

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

This is a bold request — and I appreciate that Peter wants to be out there where the Lord is — this is a step of faith…

29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

The Lord Jesus honors Peter's request and Peter walks on the water!…

LESSON — There is no telling what God might do when we step out in faith and obedience…

Continuing on to vs 30-31…

30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"
31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

LESSON — We must keep our eyes on Jesus in the midst of the storm — if our eyes are on the storm then we will begin to sink…

We must remember that storms are frightening and ever-changing but Jesus remains the same…

Hebrews 13:8 (NKJV)
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Now to vs 32-33…

32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.
33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

REMINDER — For the believer, no storm lasts forever — no pain is permanent — and God is working through those storms…

As Paul wrote in…

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NKJV)
17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,
18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This brings us to our final section…

<u>4) Healing the Sick</u> (vs 34-36)

34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret.
35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick,
36 and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

Jesus continues working as He makes Himself available to those in need…[expand]

<u>Conclusion</u>

As we begin to wind down our time together, I want to encourage you and me to remember that God is always working…

- *The God of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers — He is always working toward His Telos — He is always working toward that good end He has in mind…*

Though the storms may come — God's plan remains, He is still working all things according to the counsel of His will…

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)
And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.