

# Session 12

## Miracles, Controversies and the Cross: Mt 14-17

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### Context

As we enter into Mt 14-17, it would be helpful to remember where Matthew has been taking us:

Mt 1-2 look at Jesus' Israelite identity and his relationship to God. This relationship, reflective of covenantal loyalty, is faithful, demonstrated in his baptism and the temptation event (Mt 3-4). This experience releases Jesus' powerful word, in which he teaches about discipleship, integrity, Israelite fidelity, enemy teaching, and deep listening to God's Word (Mt 5-7). His healings affirm this connection to God and the way Jesus' ministry reveals God's Reign (Mt 8-9). Jesus prepares (or affirms) Matthew's Gospel household about mission (Mt 10) and also their rejection and experience of opposition—echoing Jesus' experience anticipating the Passion and the Gospel's denouement (Mt 11-12). In the last session, Matthew presents Jesus' parabolic teaching (Mt 13). His parables are enigmatic and surprising. They become bearers of the "Reign" (*basileia*) of God.

In Mt 14-17, the focus of the present session, opposition to Jesus mounts. Jesus continues to heal, though the symbol of the cross emerges more clearly.

### Video Teaching Session 12

As a result of this video, you will:

- Sense Matthew's narrative dynamic in this section with mounting opposition to the person of Jesus;
- See how Jesus' identity, despite opposition, is reiterated, especially Jesus as Wisdom figure;
- Appreciate how Matthew's Jesus is a source of food and nurture in contrast to the way the religious and political authorities act;
- Recognise how Matthew anticipates the final chapters of the Gospel. Suffering and death await Jesus.

## **Mt 13.54-58: Jesus' Credentials Questioned**

### **Key Narrative Themes**

In 13.54: Explicit rejection of Jesus' familial and local "wisdom" and "power".

This is explicated in verses 55-57: "Is not this the carpenter's (τέκτων) son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?"<sup>57</sup> And they took offense (σκανδαλίζω= *Skandalon* = *Scandal*) at him."

13.58: Jesus cannot do any deeds of "power" amongst his own people because of their "unbelief"—an echo of the experience of the Matthew's audience.

## **Mt 14.1-36: Jesus, feed, rescues and "crosses over"**

In this section:

- Matthew contrasts the sumptuous banquet of Herod Antipas, and its execution of John the Baptist (14.1-12), with Jesus' nurturing banquet (14.13-22).
- 14.22-33: Jesus, imaging the rescuing power of the Creator God from the First Testament, walks on water. We note, too, how Peter—that primary disciples—seeks to emulate Jesus' action. Flawed leadership is a concern in Matthew's community.
- 14.34-36: Jesus continues his healing mission.

## **Mt 15.1-16.28: Faith contrasted as hostility grows and Jesus continues to teach the disciples**

In this section:

- 15.1-20: Jesus critiques the practice and faith of the religious authorities ("Pharisees and Scribes")
- 15.21-28: Two examples of contrasting faith
- 15.29-31: A healing summary of Jesus' activity
- 15.32-39: Jesus feeds a second group in a Jewish context.
- 16.1-4: Further antagonism towards Jesus
- 16.5-12: Disciples' confusion clarified

- 16.13-28: Jesus teaches, leads to misunderstanding by the disciples, which gets clarified. Peter is affirmed as the “founding rock” and “stumbling block” (v24-28)!



*Christ Handing the Keys to St Peter*, by Pietro Perugino (1481–82)  
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## **Mt 17.1-27: Jesus continues to instruct his disciples**

In this section:

- 17.1-13: Jesus is transfigured on a mountain, attested by the Torah and Prophets.
- 17.14-20: Jesus exorcises one whom the disciples are unable to exorcise.
- 17.22-23: Jesus teaches again about his impending suffering and death. The disciples are “very sad”.
- 17.24-27: Jesus pays the temple tax

About the temple tax, Daniel Harrington writes,

“The episode in Matthew 17.24-27 allowed them to hold on to their theological claims about Jesus, to retain their standing as Jews, and to keep out of trouble with the Romans...The episode in Matt 17.24-27 fits in with the generally early Christian attitude toward taxes and the state ...Closer to Matthew’s heart here was balancing his identities both as a Jew and a follower of Jesus. He retained his faith in Jesus as the son of God and his identity as a Jew by paying the Temple tax. This episode allowed Jewish Christians such as Matthew to be Jewish and Christian.”

D. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 262-3.

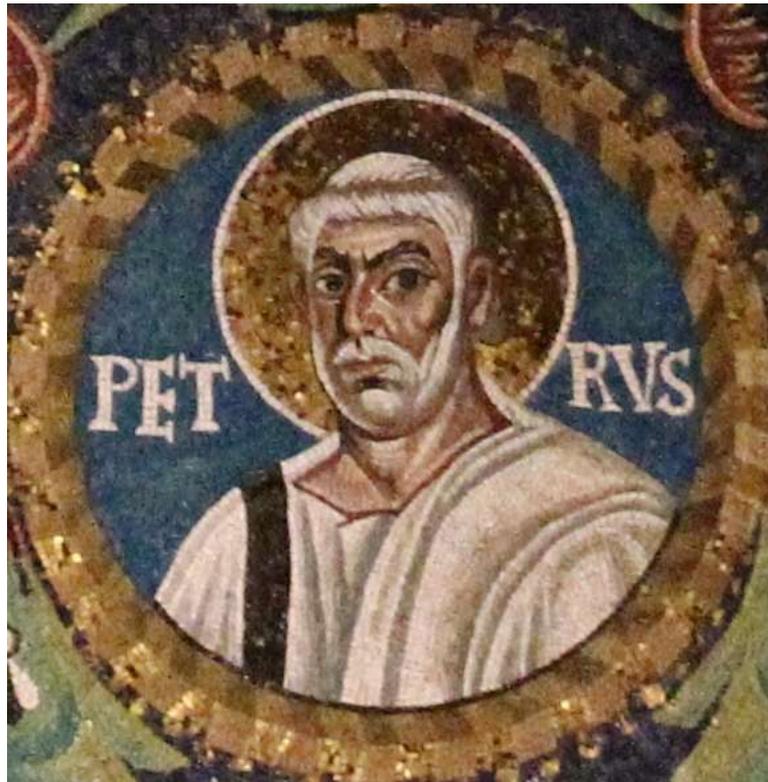
## Summary

We note in Mt 14-17:

- There is growing opposition to Jesus while Matthew also reiterates his identity. This happens before his antagonists, on the mountain and in his deeds.
- The family and domestic context of Jesus is affirmed as the source of his wisdom. Wisdom becomes a domestic virtue—reflected of the “household” context of Matthew’s audience.
- Jesus continues to nurture and sustain those who come to him.
- Matthew affirms Peter’s role amongst the disciples. He is both a “rock” (= Gk. *Petros*) and a “stumble block” (Gk=*skandalon*). Matthew’s portrait of Peter invites a spirit of humility among Jesus followers.
- Parables are word-agents that bring about the Reign of God. Their encounter, with an openness of heart, can lead people to conversion. They are religiously and theologically dynamic.
- Jesus continues to teach about his impending suffering and death. This becomes more explicit. The disciples appear to be more aligned to Jesus in Mt than in the Gospel’s Markan source.
- The “temple tax” scene illustrates for Matthew’s audience how Jesus models the capacity to mediate between the religious authorities.

## For Reflection

- How do you see church authorities negotiating between the political and religious?
- Peter is a flawed character in Mt. What might this portrait of Peter say to leadership today?



Peter the Apostle, detail of the mosaic in the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, 6th century  
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