

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING - MATTHEW 14:12-21

BACKGROUND

Matthew 14:1 - Herod thinks that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead.

Matthew 14:2-11 explains how and why John's death came about.

Matthew 14:12 leads to our passage today:

And [John's] disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and they went and reported to Jesus. (Matthew 14:12)

JESUS' RESPONSE TO JOHN'S DEATH - MATTHEW 14:13

Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself (Matthew 14:13a)

Desolate = secluded, solitary, deserted, lonely, desert place = ultimately, uninhabited.

Why?

Mark 6 says that Jesus was taking His disciples away to rest after their short-term preaching tour through Galilee.

It's also possible that Jesus was avoiding a confrontation with Herod, who was clearly disturbed about what he heard.

But I believe that Jesus personally sought the comfort of His Father following John's death.

Jesus is fully God, with all the attributes of God.

He is also fully Man, with all the attributes of a sinless Man, including emotion.

He wept outside the tomb of Lazarus.

He felt anger at times.

He was frequently moved with compassion for people, as we see in our passage today.

The feeding of the 5,000 interrupted Jesus' plans, but once they were fed He continued with His purpose, as we see in Matthew 14:22-23:

Immediately **He made the disciples get into the boat and go** ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away. **And after He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray** (Matthew 14:22-23)

JESUS' GRIEF IS INTERRUPTED - MATTHEW 14:13-14

Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself; and **when the crowds heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities**. And when He went ashore, **He saw a large crowd** ... (Matthew 14:13-14)

Jesus didn't make it to the desolate place before He was interrupted.

He and His disciples traveled by boat to Bethsaida (the house of fishing).

They intended to head east from Bethsaida into the wilderness.

But the crowds saw which way they were heading and moved ahead of them on the shoreline.

Bethsaida was a short distance, about 4 miles.

Mark writes that the crowd was like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34).

Sheep can be headstrong and stubborn.

They are also dependent on a shepherd to lead them to good food and water, protected them from predators, and care for them when they are injured.

That was the crowd: confused, needy, and aimless.

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

And when He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)

Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Jesus was frequently surrounded by crowds.

He had to deliberately withdraw from them in order to have private time with His disciples, or the privacy and quiet for prayer.

And yet His character is such that even in such a time of need, He bore no resentment toward the crowds and showed no signs of frustration.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

He came to teach and proclaim the Kingdom of God, performing miracles that confirmed His identity and authority.

He continued to do that work even when burdened by fatigued disciples and personal grief.

To the contrary, He fully accepted the providence of God the Father, and continued to carry out His ministry.

I want you to take notice of Jesus' attitude toward the multitude: He was moved with compassion.

This is not a mild feeling of sympathy but deep inner emotion.

William Tyndall translated this phrase, "His heart did melt upon them."

That's not quite literal, but it is a beautiful statement.

A MOMENT OF APPLICATION:

Can we stop for a moment?

Christian, when you come before your Father in prayer, how do you imagine He responds?

Does He sit there impassively, unmoved?

Does He frown a little at how little you pray or your weakness of faith?

Or do you believe what you see here, that His heart melts upon you?

Jesus said to His disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father?"

What JESUS felt for the multitudes is what the FATHER and HOLY SPIRIT feel as well.

Jesus is kind, compassionate, patient, forbearing, gentle, and merciful; so the FATHER and the HOLY SPIRIT.

To be the precious children of God means to be the objects of His tenderness, compassion, and joy.

Let's look back to the Scripture.

We are not told the specifics, only that Jesus healed their sick, but that means He healed all sorts of conditions.

Matthew summarizes it as "He healed their sick," because he has another point to make.

AN UNMEETABLE NEED - MATTHEW 14:15

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." (Matthew 14:15)

The crowd is getting hungry; I imagine the disciples are as well.

So they come to Jesus and point out a need that isn't being met, a need that CAN'T be met.

Let's try and imagine this conversation:

Jesus is making His way through the crowd. He touches a leper and heals her. He puts His hands on the ears of a deaf man, and the man hears. The disciples say to Him while He is working, "This place is desolate." They pull their cloaks closer to them and look around while Jesus kneels and heals a child of a birth defect. He looks up at them and then turns and speaks softly to a demon-possessed man, freeing him from his torment. "The hour is late," they continue. He raises His eyebrows, waiting for them to get to the point. "So, send the crowds away," they say. He turns to a weeping father holding his dying son in his arms and touches the boy's cheek. The lad's eyes burst open wide, and his father puts him on the ground and watches him scamper away to play with his friends. The father throws his arms around Jesus. The disciples say, a little impatiently, "So, send the crowds away that they may go into the villages and buy food." Jesus turns back to His men. "They do not need to go away," He says nonchalantly; "YOU give them something to eat."

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING - MATTHEW 14:16

But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" (Matthew 14:16)

This stuns them. Philip says in John's account,

Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." (John 6:7)

Now, let's stop and think about their unbelief.

Jesus has been healing the sick people in this crowd.

He has healed every sort of disease and condition.

He has done so as easily and effortlessly as we would give a cup of water to a child.

They have watched Him do dozens or hundreds or even thousands of miracles this day.

But when it came to FOOD, they were sure that Jesus was as helpless as they were.

And Jesus expects THEM to feed thousands of people!

A few weeks ago I mentioned that there are three primarily periods of miracles in the Bible.

The time of Moses.

The time of Elijah and Elisha.

The time of Jesus and His apostles.

Did you know that each of these periods of miracles involved miraculous food?

The manna in the wilderness with Moses (and the quail, and the water from the rock).

The flour and oil and bread miracles during the time of Elijah and Elisha.

The disciples should have known that there was precedent for God feeding His people.

But, they have forgotten their own history.

Jesus fed 5,000 men this time and, not long after, fed 4,000 Gentiles.

"WE HAVE ONLY ..." - MATTHEW 14:17

But they said to Him, **“We have here only five loaves and two fish.”** (Matthew 14:17)

“What are these for so many people?”, Andrew says in John 6.

Remember, they were speaking to a Man **who had been miraculously healing people** for hours.

Leprosy? No problem.

Blindness? Barely an inconvenience.

No food? Impossible! There’s no way! Send them away!

I’m reminded of the people of Israel complaining to Moses in the wilderness about the lack of food:

“If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt,” they moaned. “There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.” (Exodus 16:3, NLT).

God’s response was to rain down food from heaven for them – manna.

So, the disciples only have five loaves and two fish. Look at what happens next:

TAKEN, BLESSED, AND BROKEN - MATTHEW 14:18-19

And He said, **“Bring them here to Me.”** And ordering the crowds to sit down on the grass, He **took** the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He **blessed** the food. And **breaking** the loaves, He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. And there were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:18-21)

He **took** the loaves in His hands.

He **blessed** them as God’s gift: *Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*

And He **broke** the loaves, and began the process of multiplying the food.

Luke’s Gospel says that Jesus **“kept giving them** to the disciples to set before the crowd.”

So this was not a single miracle, but a series of miracles, one after the other.

Five loaves + two fish = one meal for one person.

Five loaves + two fish ≠ enough for 5,000.

But five loaves + two fish in the hands of Jesus Christ = an infinite amount, plus twelve baskets.

This was not just an act of kindness, but a fulfillment of Old Testament shadows.

God gave His people food in the wilderness, and no one ever went hungry.

Jesus fed the multitudes, and no one went hungry; there was plenty left over.

IT’S NOT ABOUT FOOD

Following the telling of this story in John’s Gospel, Jesus says this:

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” (John 6:35)

The feeding of the 5,000 is kind of like baptism; it was a physical illustration of a spiritual reality.

Life comes through Jesus Christ.

He is the Bread of Heaven given by God who gives life to the world. (John 6:33).

We “eat” the bread of life by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and following Him as Lord.

We know that people around us are starving for eternal life, even if they don’t know it.

The Gospel is the promise that Jesus satisfies the hunger for life.

But the need is enormous, isn’t it?

Billions around the world are separated from God by their sin.

All of us encounter unbelievers on a daily basis.

Each of them has needs that we cannot begin to meet.

And what do we usually say?

“I have only ...”

That’s because we compare OUR resources to THEIR need, and we almost always come up short.

And what does the Lord say to us in that moment?

“Give your resources to Me.”

He takes what we offer Him.

He blesses what we have.

He multiplies it.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let me encourage you today.

First, Jesus didn't command His disciples to feed the entire world, just those immediately around them. That's still an enormous need but much more manageable.

Likewise, we are not expected to personally reach the billions who are separated from God.

We are to pray for and serve those who are around us.

I've heard it said that no one who is unwilling to cross the street should be sent across the ocean.

Second, Jesus didn't expect His disciples to figure out how to feed the crowd on their own. He took what they had, blessed it, and broke it, and they handed it out.

Likewise, we are not expected to come up with our own solutions for the problems of others.

He has given us His Gospel and promised to save sinners for His eternal glory.

Whom He saves and when is up to Him, not us.

Third, the adequacy was not theirs, but His. The miracle was not theirs, but His.

Likewise, the power of the Gospel is not in you or me but in God who gave it.

If someone rejects the Gospel, they are not rejecting you or me, but God who gave it.

If someone receives the Gospel and believes in Christ, it is not because you or I did such a fantastic job, but because of God who had mercy on them.

We do not have to be successful in order to God to succeed through us.

Finally, it was not what they possessed that satisfied the crowd but what He did with what they had.

"Little is much when God is in it", the old song says.

*In the harvest field now ripened, there's a work for all to do
Hark! the Master's voice is calling to the harvest calling you*

*Does the place you're called to labor
and does the place you're called to labor seem so small and little known?
It is great if our God is in it for He will not forsake His own*

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame
There's a crown, and you can win it
If you go in Jesus' name*

Likewise, you and I might have very little, but if God takes it, blesses it, and multiplies it, it will powerfully impact those to whom we give it.