

## Matthew 14:13-21 – “Feeding The 5000”

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Have you ever been tasked with doing a job that you thought there was no possible way of making that happen? Staff at Riverside please don't answer that. I remember when I was a young guy, I was asked to fill in one day for a friend and do his paper route. Instead of writing down the addresses of the houses I was supposed to deliver the papers to, he just took me out one day as we rode our bikes through the route and he just said, deliver to this house, that house, this house as he pointed to each one.

The next day I picked up the papers went on the route and had no idea what houses I was supposed to deliver to. I couldn't remember a thing, and I wasn't smart enough to actually ask for a list of addresses. I was stumped and lost. So, I just dumped a bunch of the papers in a ditch and went home.

What we see developing in our study through Matthew is Jesus taking time to teach and train His disciples and give them opportunities to grow in their faith. He doesn't want them just giving up and leaving everything in a ditch the moment difficulty comes. So what we see happening over the next few chapters is Jesus preparing and developing His disciples for ministry. How do you prepare and develop these things in others? By testing them and giving them opportunities to depend on God and see Him at work.

That's what we see happening in a couple examples in Matthew 14. We'll get to one of them today – the feeding of the 5,000. It's a very familiar account and it's the only miracle of Jesus that's recorded in all 4 gospels.

“However, each Gospel contains different emphases. Mark is the closest to Matthew. Luke says that Jesus used the occasion to teach the people about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11), which he had commissioned the disciples to do themselves in the passage immediately before this. John's version is the most independent and detailed. He says that the miracle was performed before the Jewish Passover (John 6:4), and he follows his account with Jesus' discourse on the bread of life (vv. 25–59). John's points are obvious! Jesus is the new Moses who feeds his people with spiritual food, and if they eat it, they will live forever. John's account ends with Peter's double testimony: “You have the words of eternal life” and “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (vv. 68–69).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 264–265). Baker Books.

## 1. Jesus' Compassion – 14:13-14

**14:13 - *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.***

What did Jesus hear? If you weren't with us last week, we looked at the beginning of Matthew 14 which detailed the death of John the Baptist. He was martyred because of his witness and speaking truth to Herod over an immoral act he committed. Herod and Herodias didn't like being called out, so they took John's life. It's showing the increasing hostility and animosity against God's representatives and especially to Jesus. This is why we'll see Jesus withdrawing more and more from the crowds. This is what Jesus is responding to here in vs. 13. This is why He is departing. He's departing because the people of Israel have pretty much rejected Him and that rejection is becoming more violent, as is the case with Herod.

But He's also departing to give His disciples rest. They've no doubt felt the pressure of ministry, and along with it the excitement and blessing. But we have to understand our own limitations and take that time to be refreshed in the Lord.

**Mark 6:31** records Jesus saying to them, *“Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”*

- Vance Havner said, “If you don't come apart and rest, you will come apart.”
- This is so important in ministry and in all we do for the Lord. All ministry for the Lord must flow out of intimacy with the Lord. We need to be rested and filled by the Lord if we're going to give out for the Lord.

Jesus Himself modeled this for us. If He did it during His earthly ministry, how much more must we?

So, Jesus departed. And this time He ventures to Bethsaida, on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. The Eastern side of the Galilee was primarily Gentile country while the west side was predominantly Jewish.

But Jesus comes right to the border of these two divisions. This unique miracle takes place for all to see and becomes a real dividing line of how people will receive Jesus. But let's look first at how Jesus receives the people...

**14:14 - *And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.***

Many came to see Jesus. He's in the area where many of His miracles have been done. Though many did not receive Him as their Messiah, many were excited for the potential help He could bring.

And though Jesus has been rejected by many, He still had compassion for them and ministered to them. In fact, it says He was ***moved with compassion***.

- This word compassion used here speaks of more than just feeling bad about someone. It implies that Jesus felt this deep concern and need for the people where He was literally moved, almost pained with compassion.
- It's from the Greek word: **σπλαγχνίζομαι** [*splagchnizomai* /splangkh·nid·zom·ae/] to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity).

I'm so thankful that we serve a Saviour who is moved with compassion. He doesn't see us as nuisances. We're not just little pesky people that He tries to shew away. He has compassion, care, and He ministers to those in need out of love and concern.

The disciples on the other hand had a different attitude...

## 2. The Disciple's Concern – 14:15-18

**14:15 - *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 disciple's response is to send the crowds away. Now granted, they are thinking it's getting late, they're in a deserted place, there's no 24/7 drive-thru nearby; no 7-11. It's a legitimate concern. The disciples know there's going to be some hungry people in a short while. They better act now before it's too late.

- But this seems to be driven more from a concern for themselves than a concern for others. To send them away seems selfishly motivated and lacking the kind of care Jesus wants to see developed in His disciples.
- And isn't this something Jesus wants to develop in us? To have a concern and compassion for others above ourselves? That's the whole program of the kingdom – *"Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant"* (Matthew 20:26).

But here comes the test. Remember, Jesus is using this time to build up the disciples, to grow their faith and train them for ministry.

**14:16 - *But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”***

*Give them something to eat???* Can you imagine the pressure and the apparent impossibility of this?

Now some insight we receive from the other gospels that we don't have here is what Jesus was doing in all this.

- **John 6:5–6**, *“Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”<sup>6</sup> But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.”*

When Jesus said, ***they do not need to go away***, they didn't, because Jesus was going to provide for them all in a wonderful way. He already had it all figured out. But He puts us in positions and opportunities for us to see these things in action. He wants us to learn that we don't have to make things happen on our own, or be anxious when things are looking beyond us. He gives us opportunity to have our faith tested and to rely on Him and see what is possible when we give God a chance to work.

- We need to understand our insufficiency. That we lack the ability to carry these things out through our own resources. But then that brings us to the sufficiency of God. He's the one we look to for our help.
- These disciples needed to learn Who was with them. The Son of God is in their midst. They had all they needed in Him. Thinking that the crowds had to go away is like standing next to Niagara Falls and wondering where you are going to find water for everyone.
- Jesus was the power and the provider for them.

The disciples then come with what little they have...

**14:17 - *And they said to Him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.”***

Is that ever our attitude? *Lord, You want to use me how? But I **only** can do this. Or I **only** have that.*

When Andrew brought this food to Jesus, he said, *‘but what are they among so many?’* (John 6:9).

- It can certainly feel like this at times. *What is this little bit going to accomplish? How can my small talent serve others?*

- But Jesus is not looking for the amount you are bringing to the table, or the quality of the gift. He's simply looking for people to allow Him to work through what we give. He's the One to multiply and magnify that gift into something substantial and profitable.

But what does He need us to do? Offer it to Him. Come to Him with open hands. Let Him use whatever we have...

**14:18 - He said, "Bring them here to Me."**

You see, it's in our surrender that He can then use our seemingly insignificant offerings for His purposes.

Now here's the thing, does Jesus need our gifts and talents to accomplish His purposes? Absolutely not. He could have just called down manna from heaven like in the days of Moses. He could have just had an instant buffet a mile long through the desert to feed everyone in an instant. But God loves to partner with us. He will meet needs *in us*, so that He can then meet needs *through us*.

- And there's a blessing of fellowship gained as we allow the Lord to use us. These become times of training but times of building trust as we see what He does.

Now one thing that Matthew doesn't bother to mention, and only John includes, is that this food came from this one lad that seemed to be the only one to think of packing a lunch. Think about his sacrifice? He could have easily thought, *too bad for the rest of you. Should have thought ahead.*

He could have thought, why should I give up my food, it's not going to be able to help everyone anyways. I might as well eat it so we can at least have one person happy here.

- But again, this boy brought all he had. As insufficient as it might have seemed, it becomes more than enough in the hands of the Saviour.
- I wonder how many things we've missed out on because we didn't give God a chance to use what we had. Perhaps we thought it was just too small or insignificant. Yet we see clearly here that we just can't limit God.

### 3. The Crowd's Content – 15:19-21

**14:19 - 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.**

Jesus has everyone sit down. There's some real wisdom in this as there's some hungry people here. The moment they see there's food getting handed out, you know people are going to be rushing to be first in line.

Marks gospel says that they sat in ranks of hundreds and fifties. So, there's some manageable groups to work with to make sure everyone is getting fed.

- God does all things decently and in order.

Notice what else Jesus does. He looked up to heaven and blessed the food.

- What a reminder that it's God who is the source of all good and needful things. Even though there was just a little portion of food, Jesus gave thanks.
- How many of us would have been perhaps grumbling over this small insignificant amount of food. *How is this going to help this many people?* Instead of complaining of what we don't have, let us give thanks for what we do have, and He will bless it!

When Jesus finished giving thanks, He broke the bread and gave it to the disciples. And notice, they were to distribute it to others.

- What a great picture this is of our own intake from the Word – our daily bread. We receive from the Lord so that we can pass it on to others. We're to be nourished, so that we can serve.
- And if we're going to be effective, we need to be receiving from Jesus.
- Now the disciples didn't just hand out this food at once. There's 5000 people (not including women and children). In other words, they had to keep coming back to Jesus so they could be replenished. As they came to Jesus, they could be refilled and serve others.
- And as they came back to Jesus, they had to believe there would be more for them. Do you believe that Jesus wants to keep pouring into your life? He does, and He will when we come to Him.

**14:20-21 - *So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. <sup>21</sup> Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.***

Look at what's going on. The disciples are walking around picking up all the food that didn't get eaten. How is that possible? And there were 12 baskets full of the leftovers. A basket for each of His disciples.

- These very 12 that were one minute saying to Jesus, ‘*Send them away*’ were now seeing the great blessing of partnering with the Lord and carrying out His work

God will faithfully provide for those who carry out His work and will.

Lastly, I love what we read here: ‘they **all** ate and were **filled**’. Nobody was left out. Nobody got just a little. In fact John 6:11 said the disciples gave to the people ‘*as much as they wanted.*’

- You know those buffets where they limit how many times you can go up. Well, that wasn’t the case here. Everyone ate until they were filled or satisfied! Isn’t this the way with Jesus? Only He can bring the satisfaction to our lives that we crave.
- Just like He said to the woman at the well: You’re going to need to keep coming back to the well because you’re going to keep being thirsty. But the water He desired to give her would become a fountain springing up to everlasting life.
- Jesus desires to bring true and lasting satisfaction in our lives where we are filled with His goodness.
- The question today is, are you experiencing that satisfaction? Have you been lacking and hungering after that which will truly satisfy? Only Jesus can provide that.

The next day the crowds continued to seek after Jesus. But they’re seeking Him for the wrong reasons. Listen to this dialogue between the crowds and Jesus: **John 6:26–35**, *“Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”<sup>27</sup> Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”<sup>28</sup> Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?”<sup>31</sup> Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”<sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”<sup>35</sup> And Jesus said to them, “I am the*

*bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."*

Jesus alone can satisfy that deepest longing we have in our souls. Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Christ. Perhaps you've turned to Jesus for some of the material things you think He will provide for you. Maybe you've had expectations of Christ that aren't in line with His purposes. And when they've gone unmet it's left you dissatisfied and discouraged.

We have to recognize that Jesus is that true bread from heaven and it's only in Him by which we will ever find contentment and peace. Because He does more than just provides our material wants, He provides for our spiritual need.

He did that by coming to this world and dying on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Our sins caused us to be guilty before God and separated from Him. But Jesus sacrificed Himself in our place to bring forgiveness of sin. He rose again defeating sin, death, and the devil. And it's through Him we can be given the gift of everlasting life. This is what truly satisfies. Have you received Jesus today as your Lord and Saviour?