

Feeding the 4000

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[0:00] In the region of Tyre and Sidon, and he says in verse 28, Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted. And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet.

And he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing.

And they praised the God of Israel. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people. They have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.

I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way. His disciples answered, Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?

[1:09] How many loaves do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied, and a few small fish. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.

Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples. And they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

Afterwards, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was 4,000, besides women and children.

After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magaddon. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

He replied, When evening comes, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.

[2:14] You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

Jesus then left them and went away. When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. Be careful, Jesus said to them.

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They discussed this among themselves and said, It is because we didn't bring any bread. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, You of little faith, Why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?

Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered? All the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered?

How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

[3:33] Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And we just commit all this time to you now in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. As I said before, this is the one and only slide.

We're coming to a climax and a change of scene. It's a climatic point in Matthew's narrative. If you read the next passages, if you look in your Bibles and see the headings, you'll see that we're coming to Peter's confession of Christ.

Christ's confession of Christ. And it's followed by Jesus' prediction of his death. From now on, many things will be different. The tone and shape of the narrative, the emphases, but we're not at the end. It's almost exactly 12 months, this side of his death. And Jesus' moment has not yet come. And this is a good moment for us all to stop and consider.

[4:44] So, I'm not doing much hill climbing at the moment, but one of the things I used to enjoy when I went up hills was actually not getting to the top, but just pausing before you got to the top, looking back and seeing where you'd come from.

And really sort of storing up the moment of reaching the summit. And that's what we're going to do tonight. Just having a pause and looking back.

Different responses becoming crystallized. Jesus has been revealing himself in clearer ways, both by parables and miracles. He has ratcheted up the revelation of himself, but at the same time exposing the spiritual desert and the death in the hearts of men, especially remarkably those who claim to be religious leaders.

It's very sad, isn't it? Romans 1 verse 20 says, they are without excuse. And that's a good commentary on what is happening here.

For some, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, the hearts are just getting harder and harder. For others, although superficially enthusiastic, like the crowds, they're still in the dark.

[6:12] And for a very few, like that Canaanite woman, entire light is dawning. And Jesus keeps revealing himself in deeper, more wondrous ways.

Even the disciples are struggling in a half-light thought pattern. There was exuberant enthusiasm on the part of the crowds.

They're amazed and dazzled by the breadth and effectiveness of Jesus' healing miracles. They were quite ready to bear him off by force to Jerusalem as the long-promised king.

The disciples are caught blinking and bewildered in all this, showing the measure of their unbelief and the stale traditional thinking that still lingered with them by inappropriate and earthbound behaviour, which is unsparingly presented to us in the Gospel accounts.

It's embarrassing, isn't it, to hear them speaking. And one by one, they're all in this place where it's so hard for them to understand what is taking place.

[7:30] How much we all need a miracle of God's grace so that we can understand God's truth. None of us today have found the truth except it be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of God.

How blessed and privileged we are to be in that place. Matthew 16, verses 29 and 30.

Why another feeding miracle? Why do we have another feeding miracle here? It's a fair question to ask what the story of the 4,000 adds to the story of the 5,000. In fact, is it a new miracle or just another version of the first one?

And you might feel it was a bit of a letdown. He fed 5,000 and now he's only feeding 4,000. The 5,000 story seems weightier because told by each of the four evangelists, while the 4,000 story is only told by Matthew and Mark.

So has this second passage got anything to offer in addition to the first? Well, there are substantial differences and in some ways the 4,000 story is even more exciting than the 5,000.

[8:52] The map will help us. These chapters speak about a lot of crisscrossing. It's really quite confusing to understand what is going on.

The disciples, sometimes with Jesus, sometimes without, they're crossing the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about eight miles wide breadthwise and about 12 or 13 miles long and we keep on hearing about them getting into a boat and going to the other side and then the people count the boats and say, a bus missing, they must have gone that way and they go around the north side of the Sea of Galilee.

There's a lot of scurrying around, a lot of movement and that's confusing. It's also confusing because a place like Bethsaida, which is noted here, firstly, people don't know exactly where it might have been and secondly, there were two of them and so, you can get quite confused as to what is happening but there is enough clarity for us to know that the feeding of the 5,000 happened on the west shore of Galilee so that's in the sort of brown territory where you can see clustered Capernaum, Gennesaret, Magdala and Tiberias.

Whilst the feeding of the 4,000 happens on the other side, the pinkish area where the only name that's mentioned there on the shore side there's Bethsaida, Julius and Gergesa, question mark. The significance of this is that whilst the west shore is predominantly Jewish and busy, the east shore is mixed ethnicity, Jew and Gentile and relatively desolate.

[10:38] In verse 33 of chapter 15, the disciples answered, where can we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?

And relatively speaking, is less inhabited. Well that gives us a clue to how significant this may be that the feedings happened on the west or the east shore.

The two stories of the miraculous feedings sandwich the story of Jesus walking on the water, the debate about clean and unclean with the Jewish religious leaders and the pleadings of the Canaanite, this Gentile woman.

These stories put a different perspective on the second feeding. The unique majesty of the creator king is shown in his unique and personal utter mastery of the waves and wind.

Waves and wind were things that tended to terrify Jewish people. people who are in the world. But here we have the creator king in complete control of that situation. But the Jewish religious leaders are more and more enveloped in stubborn darkness whilst on the other hand, light is dawning for the Gentiles.

[12:03] The one response fills Jesus with dismay and anger. There's one verse which I can't recall which gospel it comes from. It says Jesus sighed.

He sighed at the measure of the unbelief and the hardness of heart that in spite of all the mighty things that Jesus was revealing about himself, their hearts were becoming harder and harder and less responsive.

to. On the other hand, he's filled with joy at the behaviour of a Gentile woman.

Jesus answered, woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted. It's quite a remarkable thing in the gospel accounts to see how Jesus is so encouraged by faith.

That's the thing that the Lord God looks for. That's what pleases him. The people should trust him.

[13:16] The response to the religious leaders shows the path of unbelief. The second, the way of faith. And we remember the words in Hebrews where it says without faith it is impossible to please God.

Thirdly, upon Jesus' return from Tyre and is nearing the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds, plural, start assembling. We can see these little knots of people coming from different places.

They're hearing that Jesus has come back to the area and they're gathering. And these crowds coalesce into one and appear to move towards the east shore. It is this crowd who sees the same but possibly bigger healing miracles than the 5,000 saw.

But they do so with a Gentile response. Whilst Matthew records both healings, the first crowd, the one who saw the 5,000 miracle happening, the first crowd is ascribed, no recorded response.

It just said it happened. Healing took place. Whilst the second crowd were amazed and they praised the God of Israel.

[14:35] Indeed, because the healings appear to be indiscriminate. Jesus doesn't set them apart and say, Jews on the left, Gentiles on the right, I'll deal with the Jews first.

Oh no, there's this massive healing taking place on a wonderful scale. And how rich that account is that we read here great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet and he healed them.

The people were amazed. Indeed, the Gentiles would be so amazed because nothing like this had ever sort of happened in their area and their district.

Gentiles were as blessed as the Jews. This wasn't their natural God, but their next door neighbor's God.

This was the start of the something that Isaiah had prophesied. A light to the Gentiles was coming. What a day that was if you were a Gentile.

[15:47] Your true Messiah is coming. The wall was tumbling down. I was just reminded as I had that thought of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and how on that day just everything began to crumble.

The dividing wall between East and West Germany was coming down. And here at this moment the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and the distinctions that were being made historically was tumbling down.

The cracks were appearing. something rather marvellous was taking place. And we are the blessed recipients of that aren't we? I don't know as a Jewish person with a background here at all tonight but we are Gentiles in the main and we look back to that seminal moment as it were when something rather splendid, rather rich and wonderful happened.

oh thank you Lord Jesus that you wanted to do that, to be such a saviour and such a miracle worker and such a healer for ones like us.

So the big significance of this second feeding miracle is that bread from heaven is coming not just to the Jews but to the world. Is it significant?

[17:08] And it is significant that whilst the general numbers seem a bit down in terms of the baskets of the second feeding. Well, there is something rather wonderful in the language here.

In the communion I was telling you about the baskets, the twelve baskets the disciples took with them which were like little hand baskets and in Sussex we would call them a trug, something like that.

But the word that's used for the description of the baskets in the second case, the seven, is the same word that's used for the basket. The apostle Paul was lowered down the walls of Damascus when he was escaping the Jews.

And now I think that's a pretty sizable basket that would have been necessary to get a man down the side of a wall like that, much bigger than a trug, a significant hamper size basket.

And that's a rather blessed thought, isn't it? the kingdom of God is emerging in its fullness. Hearts are becoming soft and other hearts are becoming hard.

[18:20] Every parable and every miracle is progressing this duality. Jesus is always and undeniably controversial. There's a sword, there's a division taking place and it's both tragic and wonderful at the same time.

all are being welcomed. Are we embracing or rejecting him? Where is our trajectory?

Are our hearts becoming harder or are they made softer? Are we welcoming him into our life or pushing him away? Fourthly, the demand for a sign from heaven.

Matthew 16 verse 1, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven like manna.

Ah, they were very keen on manna because it came from heaven. Apparently, there was a Jewish expectation that when the Messiah came, that manna feeding would come again.

[19:31] Jesus had fed 5,000 but Moses had fed a nation. Jesus had done it once.

Moses had done it for 40 years. What Jesus had done was restricted and earthbound. Well, come and show us a sign from heaven. This is really addressed head on in John's account.

And here is Jesus saying to them in 16, verse 2 and 3, you know about signs in the skies. You're pretty expert at that.

You can look at the sky in the evening and predict how the morning is going to be. You can look at the sky in the morning and tell how the rest of the day will be. And he says to them, you know how to interpret signs.

You have capability. But this is only on an earthly scale. Perversely, they have no spiritual eyes to see spiritually. They've had plenty of signs and have just witnessed because they were surely mingled with the crowd.

[20:44] Not one, but two miraculous signs. Not just of manor type supply, but of bread multiplication. And ministered not remotely from a heavenly realm, but right before their eyes.

Jesus' hands touching earthly bread and doing something miraculous with it, making the ordinary extraordinary. Don't look at the bread. Look at the bread giver.

And this bread of life has come down from heaven. Jesus is also the one who looked up to heaven as he gave thanks for the bread.

heaven was not a strange place for Jesus. That was his true home. And he comes down from heaven to this earth.

In John chapter 6, the word heaven is used ten times. It's a dominant theme, a dominant thought, a sort of a counterbalance to this sad unbelief and disbelief of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

[22:01] You're wanting something from heaven? This is the one who comes from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. You want bread from heaven?

The bread God gave you could only satisfy bodily hunger. And despite such miraculous feeding, Jesus tells him so plainly in the gospel account, they died, both physically and spiritually.

The bread that God is now offering is the bread that satisfies as much as they wanted. And it can truly give eternal life. Jesus offers himself as the bread of life.

John 6, 35. John 6, 35. 35. John 6, 35. Jesus declared, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. come down from heaven as life to the world.

[23:20] John 6, 33. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And John 6, verses 50 and 51.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

We have the stark contrast reflected in verse 58. This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.

They've had enough signs. Only one stupendous one is still to be given. Matthew chapter 16 verse 4. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

The sign of Jonah is reflected in many places in the gospel accounts, and it's a precious thought, as Jonah was three days effectively buried before a resurrection type experience.

[24:36] There is a foreshadowing of Jesus, who indeed will be dead and buried, but will enjoy resurrection life. Dead and buried, but raised to life.

What a rebuke to the Sadducees who didn't believe in resurrection at all. What a rebuke to the Pharisees. what a rebuke to us if we cannot see those clear signs from Jesus and bow the knee and know that he is the living God, the one who has come down from heaven, the one who has come to give us eternal life.

life. This climatic moment comes to a close in the section chapter 16 verses 5 to 12.

Jesus says to them, as they start arguing about, or rather muttering to themselves, he's bothered about the bread, we've forgotten the bread. Do you still not understand?

Don't you remember the five loaves to the five thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves to the four thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand?

[25:56] I was not talking to you about bread, but be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What you've seen and experienced is not about bread, the stuff that fails and doesn't prevent death.

No, this is about rejecting the earthbound, works-based, human endeavor philosophies, of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were desperately blinkered in their man-made traditions, and rather than having faith in the bread from heaven, the bread of life, the one who's come down from heaven to give life to the world, well, they're just earthbound.

Their heads are down, looking at the all of it around them. They embrace the religion of what can be seen and touched and measured, the externals overwhelming and stifling the heart.

And Jesus is calling us, all of us, away from all of that to a spiritual life nurtured in our hearts, softened and nurtured by God, living in the realm of faith, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of that faith.

faith. Are we still clinging to what is seen or craving in the life of heart faith, depending on our blessed Jesus Christ?

[27:14] Jesus Christ. Dear Lord Jesus Christ, how blessed we are that we come tonight with a measure of desire to be close to you.

We have known what it is to be fed by you. We've known what it is to be satisfied and our thirst quenched. And it is our desire that we should know this more deeply and richly.

Please save us from those fruitless wanderings into man-made traditions and those things that cannot truly satisfy.

Do not allow us to be stuck in that place. Do not allow us to be people who are just looking at the things that can be measured and counted, seen.

But oh, may our spiritual eyes be opened to behold you. Oh, to be entranced and in love with all that you are, to recognise your majesty and greatness.

[28:36] Oh, open our eyes to see this more clearly, that we may love and desire you and serve you all our days. Oh, may we be found happily looking forward to seeing you face to face.

our Lord Jesus, please do this wonderful work within us, that we may have that testimony that you have loved us, you have saved us, you're keeping us, and you are drawing us to yourself.

As we reminded this morning, what a wonderful truth it is, that somehow, miraculously, you can look upon us with a measure of love and desire and longing, that you want us to be with you.

Oh, may that be matched in our lives, Lord Jesus, that we should want to be with you. We ask this in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Let's sing.