

Matthew 14:13-21

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Matthew 14, verses 13 through 21. Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick.

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the day is now over. Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.

But Jesus said, They need not go away. You give them something to eat. They said to him, We have only five loaves here and two fish.

And he said, Bring them here to me. Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing.

[1 : 02] Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

And those who ate were about five thousand men besides women and children. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Thank you, Dante. I appreciate that.

Good to hear the word of the Lord, isn't it? I especially just want to thank each one of you. I know many of you were praying for me. I was gone for twelve days to South Africa.

And it was a full and busy time with the Charles Simeon Trust, a ministry that was birthed out of this church some twenty plus years ago now.

And I led two preaching workshops, one in Cape Town with ninety pastors. We were dealing with apocalyptic literature and had four different talks and three different sermons and two days of small group interaction before getting on a plane to Johannesburg and meeting with forty pastors there for three and a half days and preaching and teaching there.

[2 : 17] It was a wonderful time, although I will say the plane ride home was rather long. It takes you sixteen hours to get from Joburg to Newark. And then on arriving there, my flight from Newark to Chicago was canceled.

So I had to find my way to Boston and then finally home. But I'm here. I'm vertical. And I pray that I'll have enough energy to be worthy of the text that's in front of us.

But so grateful for your prayers. Well, let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, we now turn our attention to this passage in Matthew, our food as a faith family for this week.

I pray, Lord, that you would instrumentally minister to the needs of each one who has come in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Well, there are times in life when we need to be alone.

When the only thing to be done with other people is to put them away. The moments when even activity that swirls the normal events of life need to be set aside.

[3 : 47] Now, let me be clear. I'm not talking about introspection. I'm not talking about your disposition as an introvert and needing to recharge by being alone.

No, I'm talking about when life throws you something unexpected and unanticipated that even the busyness of a room needs to be replaced by the barrenness of walls that would not make any expectation upon the internal consternation of your soul.

Am I speaking to anybody here? Have you been there? Do you know what it is to realize that human interaction is just too much to ask of you?

Perhaps a relational wound that cuts too deep. Maybe a loved one that's been lost. Grief that's too great.

Devastating news that demands a desolate place. Where all of life becomes a white wall.

[5 : 05] Grief that's too great. So that you can sit and process the grief of your soul.

I just want to say to you if you've been there that it might help you to know that Jesus has been there too. Can I tell you that? Jesus knew what it was to need to be alone.

He knew when that was necessary. There it is right there in the opening verse. Verse 13. Now when Jesus heard this he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

I've had those moments even in my own life. I remember when I was young and had gotten into a difficult exchange and I just left the room.

I remember getting news of certain things and just needing to go out and walk. I remember even feeling that the voices of others and the ongoings of normal life seemed so inappropriate that I needed a desolate place.

[6 : 23] This is Jesus having that very need. Now when Jesus heard this he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

Our Jesus knows us. Now what was this that he heard? Well last week we were there together were we not?

The death of John the Baptist. It was the death of John. From their birth Jesus and John had been walking through life together.

Cousins. And filling the country with the expectation, the anticipation of what God would do.

Jesus had come to John and followed John and listened to his preaching and was baptized under the ministry of John. John.

[7 : 23] Jesus upon his baptism withdrew into the desert to be tested as a representative for God's people. And now upon the death of John, Jesus withdraws this need to be alone.

Do you see the word there? A desolate place. It's a word that returns in the text put in the voice of the disciples in verse 15.

This is a desolate place. The word desolate has right there in the middle solace.

Desolate. Think solo. Think alone. Think going it alone.

Think of being without a partner in life. Think of it of being a place without provision.

[8 : 32] Think of it as being empty, barren, deserted, destitute. Think of it as being incapable of sustaining life. Jesus withdrew to such a place.

Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners.

Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners.

Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Listeners. Interestingly, when the crowds heard it, it says they followed him on foot from the towns. The crowds followed Jesus into a barren place.

When people needed to be put away, they found him anyway. They raced around the lake and perhaps saw his boat in the distance and kept going quickly.

And as he arrived, well, they were already there waiting. The very people he wanted to get away from are now in front of him again.

[9 : 41] It must signal something of their own lives, right? In their own cities. It must signal something of the devastated dreams that they had.

It must signal something of the meagerness of their own sustenance. That they would leave their towns, their villages, their markets, their places and enter into this barren world.

I've thought of the irony of this. There's someone here this morning who left a country, South America, traveled by foot through seven countries.

There's someone here, South America, in order to arrive in this place where promise, opportunity might come. I think of my friends in Cuba who for decades have been making rafts and boarding boats and leaving desolate places for the opportunity of provision.

But this is something different, isn't it? This is people who are in great need going to a place where the only provision is the person of Jesus.

[11 : 21] I mean, this is something where individuals have looked at their life circumstances to the point where they would put some faith in him even when nothing else exists.

These are people who know they have nothing but wonder if that might be nothing to him. And so they come. So here's Jesus and the crowds together on Desolation Row.

Oh, now, you've got to be a little old to know that line. Desolation Row, 1965, Bob Dylan, Desolation Row.

Do you know that desolation is also used by the prophet Isaiah to describe the condition of Israel and their estrangement from God?

Isaiah opens. Your country lies desolate. Your city is burned with fire. In your very presence, foreigners devour your land.

[12:43] It is desolate. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Isaiah goes on and says, The Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah's support and supply, all support of bread and all support of water.

Isaiah will go on to depict Israel as a vineyard. And God's saying, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured.

I'll break down its wall. It shall be trampled down. I'll make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed. And briars and thorns shall grow up.

And I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. And so now we have the prophetic discourse of Isaiah. Isaiah fulfilling its way down into the time of Christ.

When Israel herself is in a desolate condition and the people meet Jesus in a desolate place. It does kind of make you wonder what's going to happen now.

[13:59] The man who needs to be alone. The one who needs to put people away for a while. Now is standing amidst the people who are representative of Israel herself.

And no resources. What happens is extraordinary.

Yes, you could call it miraculous. Our text gives two indications that Jesus uses this moment to fulfill some great work of God.

Can I show you the two things? There's a word and a phrase. Look at verse 14. And when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion. That's the word.

And this wonderful little phrase in verse 16. But Jesus said, they need not go away. What a phrase.

[15:12] Compassion. We came across that word in chapter 9, verse 36.

He looked out upon the crowds and he had compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel himself says, I will be their shepherd. I will cause them to lie down in peace.

And so what's happening in this very moment, when desolation is in play, Jesus comes like a good Samaritan.

He's dressing. He's getting ready for the show. He's going to the carnival tonight on Desolation Row. He's actually willing to enter into their aloneness, their barrenness, and to meet their need.

Isaiah said, sing for joy, O heavens, and exalt, O earth. Break forth, O mountains, singing to the Lord, for I will have compassion on the afflicted.

[16:26] Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated lands. With compassion I will gather you. With everlasting love I will have compassion on you.

Your redeemer, my steadfast love will not depart from you. All of these things are happening for the people of God through the compassion of Christ.

Let me just put it to you as clearly as I can. When you need to get away from everyone, when life deals you an unexpected blow and you've got nothing and no one, he stands ready.

To meet every one of your needs. He says something to the disciples that I love. They need not go away.

5,000 people without resources to go on need not go away if he is with them.

[17:29] That is the most stunning claim in the text. They need not go away. They need not go away. He understands that he can sustain them.

And I want to say to you that he can sustain you. Isaiah again, the Lord called me from the womb and said to me, you are my servant to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages.

They shall feed along the ways. On all the bare heights shall be their pasture. They shall not hunger or thirst. For he who has pity on them will lead them. And by the springs of water he will guide them.

And therefore he provides this miracle in their midst. He does something impossible. Have you ever seen him do anything impossible?

I've seen it. We had just started this church. We had a young family. Lisa hadn't returned to work yet.

[18:37] Our resources were meager. We were under huge anxiety. We weren't going to be able to pay the bills.

Meet someone from the church. She sticks an envelope in my hands. Says my husband and I were just thinking of you. Don't know why, but there you go.

We paid our bills. I've seen God do impossible things.

The place in which we sit. Man, we had given everything to try to resource the renovation.

I went home in the midst of the construction of this place one day for lunch. Lisa and I were splitting a can of Progresso soup. That way it's 120 calories for each one.

[19 : 51] Beef barley is my favorite. I'd left this. Scaffolding, everything was still in play. I got a call from Josh Stortzbach who was running the project.

He said, we're in trouble. I said, what do you mean? He said, well, the construction timelines. I need to make three decisions right now.

The seating that you wanted, we're not going to be able to have it. He sent me these images of folding chairs where you now sit. The platform, the three-quarter inch oak that actually would be representative of a building over 50 years.

Well, we're going to have to go with laminate. By the way, all the stained glass. We can take it out. We got enough money to take it out, but we don't have enough money to do anything with it, so we're just going to leave it open.

You know, that greeted me over lunch. Got off the phone. Lisa could tell my spirit was anxious.

[21 : 01] She said, well, what's happening? And I told her. I had asked Josh on the phone, well, when do you need to know by?

He goes, well, I think we're probably going to need about 1.8 million more over time, but we need a million dollars by tomorrow. I had gotten to a point where I was quite certain that anyone around the country that saw my name on their phone did not want to answer it.

I had been there. And I had told Lisa when I got off the phone with Josh, I said, I'm not calling a soul. I'm done.

I mean, this is impossible. She said, well, let's pray. I said, well, you're going to have to pray.

And she prayed. Lord, it's your thing. And evidently, we need a million dollars tomorrow.

[22 : 13] I finished my soup. Was depressed. That night, we were watching some Netflix thing. I don't know what it was.

The Crown or something like that. My phone rang. Someone I hadn't talked to in a long time. Paused the show.

Hello? Hey, just checking in. Great. How you doing? Doing great. Well, but how's the building going?

Oh, we're going to be fine. Well, where are you at? Well, the construction's going on. I suppose over time, we're going to need, you know, about 1.8 million now.

But the Lord is doing everything. I'm not saying a thing to this person. He goes, well, I'll tell you what. I'm good for a million dollars. I'll put the check in the mail tomorrow.

[23 : 06] I'll put the check in the mail tomorrow. That's impossible. And I've only given two examples that are financial, but I could give you more.

I could tell you how the Lord meets me and you when the circumstances of life are impossible. I can tell you that if he's present, you need to run to him anyway because he has provision available.

He is life. He is life. I can tell you, like even in our own congregation, when your mother passes, when somebody dies, when the provision of even breath is gone, that in Christ, they just sit down at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

I can tell you that Jesus lives, and so shall I. I can tell you that he has every resource you need.

[24 : 46] That your nothing is nothing to him. So where are you going when you need to be alone?

What are you running toward when there's just no way around? Just follow him.

Follow him into the desolate place. Just find him. Chase him down.

Let me personalize it. You need not go away. Go away. He's not embarrassed or put off by having to attend further needs that would help you on your way.

He's evidently got enough capacity within him that even when he needed to be alone, even when he wanted to put people away, he was able to sustain them along the way.

[26 : 11] This is this is the story of the gospel. And he's able to do it with abundance.

Says they broke the loaves, gave it to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They took up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces left over.

You know, there's a lot of people wonder what's going on with the 12 baskets? You know, and people like to play numerology. Well, 12 was the number of tribes.

And so this is representative of Israel. That may or may not be true, but it just seems to me he's trying to say he met their need and then some.

I mean, you ever been at Thanksgiving table with anybody? I mean, you could eat all day long and still like, I can't believe how much food is still left over. I think I think what he's saying is Jesus can meet your need with abundance.

[27 : 21] Now, I'm not talking health and wealth and happiness here, but I'm talking your soul need. I'm talking when when when life has you he'll he'll have compassion on you.

I'm talking when you know the spiritual condition of your soul is I am a desolate place. I am a desert. I I don't have the capacity to do anything.

I I am estranged from God. Jesus will help you to lie down in green pastures. He will lead your soul beside quiet waters.

He'll invite you to his table. Let me just shut this down. Let Jesus enter into your aloneness. run to him when you require solitude.

[28 : 42] As your resources fail and expire and rot, find your way to the foot of his cross.

Find your way to the seat of his throne. Come everyone who thirsts come to the waters.

he who has no money. Come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Return to the Lord and he will have compassion on you for our God will abundantly pardon.

Our Heavenly Father for men and women here who are alone barren empty without resource or ability for those who have come to the end and wonder if there is any hope yet for them.

[30 : 32] May this passage which speaks of Jesus compassion give them hope to at least approach him. May this word that they need not go away give us encouragement to seek him and Lord we pray that you would save and sustain all who are weary and heavy laden give them rest in Christ's name.

Thank you.