

Mathew 14:13-21

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[0:00] The day is now over. Send the crowds away to go to 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.

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. 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. The central fact in history is this.

Two thousand years ago, a man died on a Roman cross. And on the third day, his tomb was empty. Why is that the central fact of history?

[1:16] The Romans crucified many, many people. What makes this even interesting, let alone the most important fact of all time? As brutal as it is, the fact that the Romans crucified any one man isn't historically that unusual or interesting.

But this was unusual, unique, because of who was crucified. All four of the Gospels, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each direct the greatest portion of their attention to one week of Jesus' life.

The week in Jerusalem, leading to his crucifixion, which we call Holy Week. That's the big event. And before Matthew shows us that event, the last stage of his Gospel, the largest section of this book, he is going to prepare us for its importance in chapters 14 through 17.

In these next few chapters, he is going to show us the full gravity of the cross by showing the full expression of who Jesus is.

To understand the cross, we must understand Christ. The power of the cross is bound up in the person who died there.

[2:49] Right? So, if Jesus was just some first century peasant who was crucified, what does that impact us with? Nothing. If he was even a great king, that doesn't affect us.

And even as we saw last week, as the great prophet of the Old Testament, John, John the Baptist was innocently slain for righteousness' sake, even his execution has no bearing on your life and mine.

Not really. But if, on that Roman cross, the God of the universe, crucified, dead, and buried for us. And that's the greatest story ever told. Now, until now, most of Jesus' ministry has been in the region of Galilee, which is kind of the northern corner of Israel.

And over the next few chapters, we're going to see him do sort of a farewell tour in this region before he sets off for Jerusalem and his trial and his cross and his two.

[4:02] And a question is going to loom large over this whole section. The question is this.

Who is this Jesus? And when we see the answer to that question, we are going to see what the cross means.

And so that question that hangs over everything here, who is Jesus? It's going to be the background and maybe the foreground of most of what's coming in these next few weeks.

Next Sunday, we're going to see Jesus walk on water. And the question is going to be, who is this guy? And at first, the disciples will say, it is a ghost. But by the end of the day, they will say, truly, you are the Son of God.

He will soon take up the prerogatives of God alone, declaring what is clean and what is unclean.

And then he's going to directly ask his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

[5:11] And even further, who do you say that I am? Peter's reply, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And then climactically, as we're considering this question, who is this Jesus? In chapter 17, God the Father will open heaven and speak, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Today, we're going to see one of Christ's most famous miracles, the feeding of the 5,000. And we're going to ask that same question, who is this Jesus?

So friends, let us pray to the Lord that he would reveal his Son to us. Speak, O Lord, to your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.

We ask that in the name of Jesus, who we wish to behold in this passage today. Amen. Amen.

Amen. The first preacher in the book of Matthew is not Jesus.

[6:37] It's John the Baptist. He preached two things before Jesus began his ministry. First, he said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then when Jesus arrived, he said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

And then came Jesus, preaching and teaching and healing many. And so what we see is that John's ministry inaugurated or launched Christ's ministry.

And just as the start of John's ministry signaled the start of Jesus' ministry, so too did John's death, which we saw last week, signal that the Messiah, too, was about to die.

Until now, Jesus has been ministering primarily in Galilee, that northern region of Israel around the lake of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee. He's about to take his last steps here before heading to Jerusalem, where he will go to the cross for your sins and for mine.

And as we said, it matters very much who this man on the cross is. Many died on Roman crosses, and that has no bearing on our lives.

[8:03] But Jesus' death affects you because of who he is. Who is this Jesus?

I think the first and most obvious thing we see in this passage today is that he is powerful. Look with me at verses 20 and 21. 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. The most obvious idea in this passage is that Jesus, in feeding the five thousand men and then a comparable number of women and children, has an incredible power.

With five loaves. And these aren't our loaves of sliced bread that are, you know, like a foot long. No, they're more like buns. So, like appetizers. So, five of them is not like five meals.

It's much less than that, right? So, and then two fish. He felled multitudes. How much food must it take to feed five thousand men and their families?

[9:21] I'm not in food services, but I imagine it is quite a lot. It's probably a staggering amount of food. So, in this miracle, there's a demonstration that Jesus is not only a teacher of the law, he's something more.

He has power unlike any man who has come before. This is part of a long-standing biblical theme that the Lord provides sustenance for his people.

The great wonder-working prophet Elisha did something similar to this, but much smaller. You can read about it in 2 Kings chapter 4. Elisha fed a hundred people with twenty loaves of bread.

And so, as some have observed, Elisha multiplied the bread five times, twenty loaves to a hundred people, while Jesus multiplied it a thousand times or more.

This miraculous provision for God's people at a scale that is just mind-boggling would make the Jewish people remember something.

[10:37] Something from long before in their history. In Exodus chapter 16, you can read about God feeding his people after he freed them from slavery. He feeds them in a wilderness place.

And if you look to the beginning of this passage, you will see that this is in a wilderness place. One commentator put it this way, providing bread for Israel in the wilderness almost certainly was meant to call people's minds to God's supernatural feeding of the Israelites with manna in their wilderness wanderings in Moses' day.

Now, at the end of chapter 13, Jesus called himself a prophet. But the scale of this miracle is so much larger than that that the prophets did.

Right? Much more than Elisha did. And so this calls to mind the feeding of the whole nation that the Lord did during the Exodus. And so our minds then jump maybe to Moses.

Right? He was a prophet. There was miraculous bread associated with him. It was in the wilderness. But it wasn't Moses who gave the bread to the people in the wilderness.

[11:51] It was God himself. If you read in Exodus chapter 16, the bread comes from heaven. It's basically the dew on the ground. And friends, it is Jesus who gives bread to God's people here.

What does that say? The servants, the Moses figure in this narrative are the disciples. And Jesus stands in this narrative in the place of God.

When Pastor put it this way, the God of the Exodus who divided waters and provided manna from heaven was at work in history again.

Jesus isn't simply a prophet with works of power. He is the power behind the prophets.

That is the greatness of his power. What does that mean about the cross? It means that the almighty God died on behalf of sinners.

[12:59] It means that the blood spilled that day belonged to the one of infinite worth. worth. It means that the everlasting God took on a human body and nature so that he might go to the cross and die in our stead.

Yet, this passage is not simply about the power of his miraculous sign. Signs point somewhere, right? Matthew wants us to look at this sign and have it guide us to something.

one writer said, his miracles were not ends in and of themselves, they were flaming arrows pointing back to him and the quality of his kingship.

In what direction does this sign point? It's a powerful sign, that's the first thing we've observed. But it's not just raw power, right?

We don't ever see Jesus casting a mountain into the sea. Jesus never makes a display of just his power.

[14:14] He doesn't fly, right? He doesn't turn the sky green. As God, he certainly could do all of those things and more, things that we couldn't even imagine.

But he doesn't. We never see Jesus displaying untamed, bare power. Why not?

Who is this Jesus? He is compassionate. Look with me at verse 14. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Jesus' miracles are not just spectacles, right? They aren't simply exhibitions of raw power. They're restoration or their generosity or their rescue.

His miracles are always acts of love and redemption. All of Christ's miracles are directed towards people or towards restoration of the world.

[15:24] That's where his focus is. Matthew means for us, certainly, to see the greatness of God's power, but just as much to appreciate the bigness of his love.

Yes, God is powerful. beyond our understanding, but it isn't the power of a prideful showman or a disinterested deity or, worse, a tyrant.

He is powerful and directs his power in a personal and loving and restorative way. Matthew has been drawing us not only to Jesus' power, but also to his heart.

One writer said of these passages that refer to Jesus' compassion, he says, these verses indicate that Jesus looked thoughtfully at others who were experiencing difficulty.

He put himself in their place and intentionally tried to feel what they were feeling. His compassion for them arose from this empathy. Hebrews 4 says that even now in heaven he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

[16:44] In this miracle, we see not only Jesus' power, but also his compassion. And this compassionate God makes his people compassionate.

who is this Jesus? He involves his people in his work. He calls his people to do things they cannot do on their own and then provides the way.

Look with me at verses 17 and 18. I'm really excited about this. I hope you are too. Like the God of the Hebrew Bible, Jesus takes what his servants bring to him and he multiplies it.

When Moses insisted that he needed a sign to take with him, God asked Moses what was already in his hand and then transformed it using what had been merely a shepherd rod to part the Red Sea.

When a widow needed financial help, Elisha asked what she had in her house. She responded that she had only a small amount of oil. So Elisha commanded her to borrow jars into which to pour the oil and multiplied it until all the jars were full.

[18:10] In the biblical tradition, God frequently transformed the ordinary things of his followers' lives, and it is the same with the disciples. Verse 17, they said to him, we have only five loaves here and two fish, and he said, bring them here to me.

He has them bring what they already have, and as little as it is, that's what he works with. So, friends, your resources, your skills, and your eloquence, and your bank account, and your charm, and your abilities may seem small to you, and they may truly be, but that is not the limiting factor. The limiting factor is the God who works through you, whose words formed the sun and the stars. And often, he is most glorified in using the least resources and the least qualified people. He is glorified in our weakness because it demonstrates that the work was done by God, not on our cunning, not in our strength, and God does this over and over throughout redemptive history. Moses, the messenger who couldn't speak well, the judges of Israel, each of whom had a critical weakness or defect, the apostles themselves, who were men with no formal training, no riches, no accolades, whom he sent out to the whole world as messengers of the gospel and the leaders of his church.

[19:53] And here we see today him using almost nothing and making it everything his people need. God takes his people, no matter their ability, and in his compassion, sends them to the world to serve his mission.

That means that this passage, friends, has more to do, or sorry, has less to do with what we're supposed to do when we have a need. This passage is not about what to do when I'm hungry. This passage has more to do with what I'm supposed to do when I see a need. God's need. The Lord made his disciples part of the solution.

James chapter 2 says, If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

We live an active and outward faith. The Lord expects of us similar compassion that comes in the form of our generosity and our hospitality and the relational support that we give to the world where people are starving for connection.

[21:19] Now, in verse 15, we read that 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. Now, there actually isn't anything wrong with the disciples' suggestion here. Right? They were actually looking to other people and saying, Oh, look, they have a need here.

Let's figure out how to solve that. And it's evening, so presumably everybody has to leave eventually to go to bed, so they're going to leave soon anyway.

And the Lord has established normal and natural means by which we are to support our basic needs. Even during his earthly ministry, Jesus rarely did things like this miracle.

So, why not send them home? after a long day of healing and teaching, Jesus has one more lesson for his disciples, and this is awesome, friends, and I want it for you.

[22:30] Verse 16, Jesus says, they need not go away. You give them something to eat. And there's a feature of the Greek text here that I can nerd out for you, but you don't really underline that word you at the beginning there.

You give them something to eat. There's an extra emphasis on it. See, the Lord doesn't just give us redemptive tasks. He gives us impossible tasks.

You give them something to eat. You make disciples of all nations. You grow in Christ likeness. You look above your circumstances and find joy in God. You go comfort the broken hearted. You put sin to death.

These are not possible, right? A professor of mine who left a profound impact on my life died this Friday morning.

[23:40] If you know me, you know that it takes something really big to get me to move my emotions. But I have been weighed down with grief. And the scriptures tell me not to grieve like those who have no hope.

That's not something I have within myself. God's word says, you admonish the idle, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

You, do not be anxious, but cast your cares on Christ because he cares for you. Do you have that power? You, do the work of an evangelist.

And perhaps the hardest three commands in all the scriptures, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.

God with you. You, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Love your enemies.

[24:53] Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Who can do these things? Who is able?

who is equal to this task? The Lord calls his people to do impossible things.

With man, it is impossible. But with God, the Holy Spirit, all things are possible. and we see it happen in this passage today.

John Calvin, looking at this passage, said, Jesus intended to give them a command which at first sight appeared to be absurd. Right?

It is completely absurd. You have five bread buns. Feed all these thousands of people. You give them something to eat, go for it. As no provisions were at hand, there was reason to wonder why Christ was making arrangements that resembled a feast.

[26:10] The word for sit down here is kind of like recline at a feast. The same purpose is what follows, that he gave them the loaves in order that in their hands the astonishing increase might take place.

and that they might thus be the ministers of Christ's divine power for as if it had been of small importance that they should be eyewitnesses.

Friends, Christ determined that his power should be handled by them. what's Calvin saying? Jesus was about to perform a miracle, but the disciples were not merely there to witness it.

He gave them a command to do the impossible and worked his power through them.

Christ gave his disciples an impossible task so to accomplish it, Christ, as Calvin said, determined that his power should be handled by them.

[27:26] And that is exactly what our God does today. He calls us to impossible tasks like the ones we just mentioned.

be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

Make disciples of all nations. Do not be anxious, but cast your cares on Christ, for he cares on you. Friends, these are impossible things that he commands us to, and then he gives us the strength from heaven to do.

Just this week, I want you to know that this is what God does all the time. Just this week, I have seen supernatural growth in the lives of God's people.

I have seen the Lord reach down into people's hearts and change them, conforming them to his own likeness, not just our outward behavior, but the root of our actions.

[28:31] He changes our desires and the way we see the world. You and I, we do not have this power. But, he does it through us, his people, just as he did it through the disciples here in the wilderness.

He does this one, conforming people to Christ through us, his people, as we share the Bible together, as we pray for one another and prompt each other on towards love and good works.

I have seen this miracle. God changing the very fabric of a person's inmost being. The work of God we call sanctification, and he does it through his people.

God's miracle through our hands. Christ determined that his power should be handled by us. Just last week we celebrated a baptism.

The testimony that God has spiritually raised someone from the dead. You and I, we don't have that power. But how does he do it?

[29:55] He does it through his people. He doesn't reach down in isolation and abstractly zap someone. Right? He works through his people. He brought certain people into someone's life, and those children of God preached the gospel with a boldness not their own, answered question with wisdom from above, and showed the grace of God through their lives in such power that the Lord drew someone to himself and resurrected him from spiritual death and darkness.

God's miracle through our hands. Christ determined that his power should be handled by us. How do we do these impossible tasks?

The same way the disciples did. They simply obeyed and found that God worked through them. We don't have the power to convert anyone's soul. That's a miracle of God. So we simply and obediently share the good news of Jesus and find that he does indeed work in people's hearts. God's power through our words. we don't have the power really to console the grieving. Have you ever felt anything but powerless to help someone in their bereavement?

[31:37] Or maybe better yet, have you ever found yourself powerful in the moment of someone else's bereavement, like you could actually do anything to help that person? But, we minister the comforts of the scriptures anyway.

Simple obedience, and God does something through that. So friends, how do we do the impossible?

Because that is exactly what Christ calls us to do. How do we do the impossible? Faith. We exercise our trust in God by walking forward in obedience and find that he actually does work. So do not be dismayed when he calls you in his word to do something that you don't think is possible. That's exactly the point. He intends for you to trust him and to walk forward in obedience and find that like the disciples, there is far more at work than your resources.

So who is this Jesus? Who is this one who is going to the cross? We've seen that he is powerful more than even the wonder working prophets of old.

[33:10] Not only is he powerful but he is compassionate. He works his power not in just raw displays of his glory but in compassionate and restorative ways.

And he involves his people in his mission. He determines that his power should be handled by them. And who is this Jesus? He is the aggrieved party who reaches out in love.

Look with me at verses 13 and 14. 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.

Those first words there now when Jesus heard this what is this that he heard there are two options here it could be what immediately came before last week the report of John's disciples that John the Baptist Jesus cousin and the prophet who announced him to the world was murdered it could be that report or since verses 3 through 12 are actually a flashback it could be a reference that this might be that he heard what happened in verses 1 and 2 that Herod has taken notice of Jesus and sees him as a rival it could be either of those things or it could be both it could be that John's disciples brought both of those reports to him at once whether Jesus is in Jesus is the wounded or the grieved party here he's the one who needs to be made whole to have restoration restitution made to him he is the one who needs justice he is the one who has been wronged yet when the people come to him asking for him to give to them he shows them compassion and not just a token compassion oh you guys have it rough no it's an active one right he gives

[35:42] I'm going to heal and teach and feed you kind of compassion Calvin said he did not spare himself Jesus is the grieved party in this passage he deserves restoration but instead we see him give we see him sacrifice we see him love and friends this is a picture of his heart and it is a picture of the gospel because in the relationship between God and

man God is the grieved party we sinned against him we have transgressed his laws we have profaned his name and his image and his world and so he is owed justice and retribution but instead of that instead of acting exacting a just retribution he chose compassion he chose to pour out mercy and grace and life in great sacrifice the judge took on himself the justice was due the guilty defendant you and

I the grieved party paid the debt owed by the very ones who sent him to the cross and so the Lord had Jesus bound up all our sin and suffered our justice at the cross friends who is Jesus he is powerful more than even the wonder working prophets of old not only is he powerful but he is compassionate he works his power in restorative ways not only that but he calls his people to be part of his mission calling them to an impossible task one through which he works his power he determines that his power should be handled by us and friends he is the party the grieved party who moves outward in compassion the wronged party who pays the villain's debt let's pray oh lord our god thank you that you are so powerful powerful beyond our understanding but that you do not exercise your power against us even though that would be just you do it in compassion and restoration thank you lord that not only do you do that but you involve us in your mission and have determined to use your power through your people that your power should be handled by us and thank you lord that you did not come in judgment but in mercy showed that power and showed that love the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus lord will you make us bold to attempt the impossible to be obedient to you knowing that we do not have the strength but confident in the lord who works we ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our king our only hope amen go to to to go!
go to! go go