

Communion Preparatory Sermon

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[0 : 00] Turn with me now please to the passage we read in the scriptures. Matthew's Gospel chapter 14 and reading verse 18. You can read verse 17 as well.

They said to him, we have only five loaves here and two fish. And he said, bring them here to me. And he said, bring them here to me.

Those who have been to what's normally called the Holy Land and Holy Land visits, many of them remark on how they've discovered just by being there and going from place to place, the distance that Jesus walked during his ministry on earth.

The sheer extent of that distance that he packed into these years that he ministered here on earth. And as you come here to Matthew chapter 14 or whether you go to John's Gospel along with the other three, that's something that you find very obvious from these Gospels.

But it's only as you go to the likes of the land itself that you realize just what an extent he walked. And also, as you come to this passage, you can see how much stress the Lord was under, if we use that modern description, because he found it virtually impossible, almost impossible, to take time out to rest.

[1 : 37] Here we find him having gone across in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But immediately the crowds heard it and they followed him on foot from the towns.

So when he came ashore, there was already a great crowd there. He couldn't find even much time to take rest as he himself needed rest. Himself is an interesting, if not remarkable thing, that the Son of God required to rest.

Of course, that's the Son of God in our human nature, tired in terms of his life in our human nature and requiring rest. Well, here he couldn't get that rest that he had gone to get.

And the same is true at other times also. So we think our lives are full of stress. They're nothing whatsoever compared to the stress and the lack of rest and the non-availability of rest that was true of the Lord in his journeys.

That itself should really be a reminder to us that even that is part of his sufferings, part of what he put himself through, though by no means the greatest part, but nevertheless it's a very valid part of the suffering, of what he put himself through in order to be the Redeemer of his people.

[2 : 55] Now this miracle, the miracle of feeding the 5,000, you find it mentioned in all four Gospels. And that's an interesting and significant feature itself because that tells us that it came to be hugely significant for the early church, for the apostolic church.

As the Bible came to be completed, as we now have it, this was something hugely significant for the church so that all four versions of the Gospels have a record of this feeding of the 5,000.

John deals with it in his own way, slightly differently to the way the other three Gospels, as most of the time he does anyway. But it shows that this was particularly important to them to actually show something of the identity of Christ, something of who he was, something of what he claimed himself to be.

And here was something that projected who is Jesus, what is he in the world to do, what is particularly remarkable about him, why is he here, what is he doing by this miracle.

And I want to just look at that this evening as we prepare for the Lord's Supper because there are a number of features here that will help us prepare our minds and our hearts to come to remember again the Lord's death.

[4 : 16] And I'm not taking this distribution of the food that was blessed by Jesus as symbolic of the Lord's Supper. That's not, I think, how we should take the passage.

Though in principle, of course, there's the element of feeding by the power of Jesus, which is something you obviously find attached to the Word and to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper too.

I'm taking it in terms of how the Lord here came to show his compassion, first of all. And we'll look at that word fairly closely.

As you find it earlier in the passage, he had compassion on them there in verse 14. So that's the first point. Christ's compassion engaged. Something engaged his compassion.

It drew his mind so that compassion flowed out of him. And secondly, we'll see Christ's compassion in action in verse 18 or verses 17 and 18 especially.

[5 : 16] He himself deliberately and in a very organized and purposeful way said to the disciples, look, there's no need for the crowd to go home. They had come, as we'll see, to say, how can we possibly feed this crowd you're telling us to feed them?

How can we possibly feed them with this little fish, this little food that we've got, the fish and the five loaves? And he said, bring them here to me.

They had to take the little that they had, place it in the hands of Jesus, and find to their astonishment that he multiplied it so as to feed that vast crowd.

Now, that has application to yourself and myself, as I hope we'll see tonight, that all the smallness that we associate with ourselves, that sometimes keeps us back from serving the Lord.

Jesus is saying, you bring that to me. You put that in my hands and see what I can do with it, whatever you can or cannot. That's really one of the things that enters into the passage.

[6 : 23] So let's look at these two, under these two headings. First of all, Christ's company engaged. Now, Mark gives us some additional details. As you go to Mark's gospel, you'll find that in Mark chapter 8, the same incident there, but he gives us, as you find in the gospels anyway, it's in many ways, it's a kaleidoscopic presentation.

You take the four gospels together and they give you the complete picture, if you like, that the Bible is giving us. Chapter 8 of Mark and verse 34, he called the crowd and said, chapter 8 and verse 34 of Mark.

Sorry, I think I've got the wrong reference there, but it's, I think it should be chapter 9 maybe. In any case, Mark is telling us, Mark is telling us that he saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

That's what, that's the point that Mark was making, that he's adding to Matthew's version of it. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. Now, if you think naturally or ordinarily of sheep without a shepherd, just imagine some sheep that have escaped somewhere, maybe they've been out in the moors and haven't been gathered in at the end of that period with the rest when they're taken back to the croft or back to wherever they're going to and they've been left out there and then months and months afterwards, maybe even years afterwards, they're discovered they've not been tended by a shepherd, they've not been cared for.

What do they look like? What are they like? They're filthy, they're diseased, their wool has never been clipped all that time. They're really a sorry mess. And Jesus, as he looked out at that vast crowd, he saw them like sheep without a shepherd.

[8 : 08] In other words, yes, they were physically in need of food, but he went deeper than that. He saw into their souls, he saw into their spiritual need, he saw how they were without being saved, without being gathered by a savior, without having a shepherd over them to tend to their spiritual and moral needs.

He saw them as sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them. That's what drew his compassion. That's what drew his compassion towards them. And if you're coming to the Lord's table, as most of you are, God willing, tomorrow, having been there before, doesn't matter, even if you're there for the first time, this is something that is in your experience, isn't it?

When you're conscious of the fact, as we were singing in the psalmist, how grateful he was that the Lord heard his cry in the grip of death, bedraggled, filthy in our own sins.

And yet here the shepherd came and he had compassion. He saw as no one else could. He saw as no one else could.

Who else was going to look at us the way that Jesus looked at us? Who else was going to look into our plight the way he was able to measure our plight? Who could see into the filth of our souls the way he looked into the filth of our souls?

[9 : 27] That's what drew his compassion. And it's an amazing thing for you and for me as you come to approach another Lord's table that the compassion of the Son of God was drawn towards you and I in our lost condition.

That you and I in that condition, if you like, were the moving cause of drawing the compassion of Jesus. We didn't create his compassion, but we drew it out from him as he had pity on us, as he saw us as sheep without a shepherd.

He saw as no one else could. But secondly, he reacted as no one else would. Because this word compassion as used here in Matthew in verse 8 is a very deep and a very comprehensive word. It actually literally means that he was moved inwardly. The older translation has he was moved with compassion. And that's a very good way of putting it because there is an inner movement of the soul of Jesus, of the mind of Jesus, in this reference to having compassion on the crowd. It wasn't just a formality. It wasn't just something that flicked through his mind without really moving him inwardly. He was moved with compassion. It's a word that is used literally sometimes of our bodies as the inward motions that you have within your bowels.

[11:00] That's why the old translations would say that God's bowels were moved with pity and compassion for his people.

It's a way of using what is physical in order to describe what is spiritual. That inner motion, movement of the heart, of the soul, that's what's in this word.

He was moved with compassion. He was stirred at the side. Now just think of what's happening.

Here was a crowd of people who had followed him. Here were people that weren't really wanting to give him any rest whatsoever, that wouldn't let him out of their sight.

And instead of being irritated and saying something like, please, could you not just give me some space for an hour or two? He was moved, was compassion to them. He was moved with that inner stirring of his compassion towards them, stirred emotionally in himself.

And isn't that wonderful for yourself as you come to do this in remembrance of him in the Lord's Supper? That's what you're doing. You're remembering his death, but you're remembering all that he packed into his life upwards to his death and his death itself.

[12:18] He was moved with compassion for you. His very inner being was stirred as he saw you as one of those sheep without a shepherd.

And you come, God willing, to the Lord's table tomorrow and one of the primary thoughts, the main thoughts in your mind is, Lord, thank you for your compassion. Thank you that your heart was stirred as you saw me in my lostness.

Now I remember you with delight and with thankfulness that you remembered me to that extent as I now remember you in what you did for me.

And actually, there's one other minor point. It's important in its own right. That word compassion, you see how it says he had compassion on them. Well, literally, it's actually he had compassion upon them.

It's really saying to us the compassion of Jesus is not something from a distance, something that's moved him inwardly, but he's kept it very distant, very private.

[13:20] It's not something that really had any effect upon themselves or led to nothing more than just an attitude of mind on his part towards them. What this is telling us is he had compassion upon them.

His compassion came to rest upon them. The compassion, if you like, went out of him and was seen through the actions of what he did next. The Lord's compassion is not just not just something in an acting of his mind.

It's not something just theoretical. Not something cold and distant from you. It's come to rest upon you. It's come to rest upon you.

Compassion of Jesus came upon them. He had compassion upon you. And you come with thankfulness as you realize what that compassion has done for you.

That that compassion didn't miss you and didn't pass you by. That Jesus did far more than just look in your direction and pity you but could do nothing about it.

[14:30] His compassion came to rest upon you. To take you and deliver you out of your plight as a sinner lost and dead. He had compassion upon them.

It's a productive compassion. In other words it doesn't stand at a distance. It's a compassion in which Jesus sees as no one else can and in which Jesus reacts as no one else will.

That's the compassion of Christ engaged towards these people. This crowd before him. Christ's compassion is a compassion in action.

Because what you find here is really a need beyond the ordinary means of meeting it. This huge crowd massive crowd 5,000 men besides women and children and don't listen to the liberal theologians who will tell you that's just the church making things up.

That's not really to be taken literally. Yes you take it literally. That's what God is telling us.

Otherwise it's not a miracle. That's what liberal theology always tries to do is to take away the supernatural elements of the Bible.

[15 : 46] Take away the likes of the miraculous from the word of God. Here is something you believe happened and you believe happened because God is telling you there were 5,000 men there as well as women and children.

That's what Jesus did. He fed that vast crowd half the population of Stornway all gathered there before him and 5 loaves and 2 fish that's all they had that's all the food they had and need beyond ordinary means.

And that's verse 15 you see he says then the disciples came and said they're looking at it in just merely human terms we don't blame them for that that's how you and I would have looked at it this is a desolate this is a desert place the day is far over now far gone send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves that was how they looked at that's their reasoning that's how they're going to provide for the the needs of the crowd that they will disperse and go and find buy food for themselves but Jesus said no there's no need for them to go away you give them something to eat you see the way he's leading them the disciples especially he's leading them to see something more of himself more of his ability more of his stature more of his identity as to who he is and what he can do no he says you give them something to eat they said we have only five loaves here and two fish that's their response and then Jesus says bring them here to me now if you look at these two verses you can see the word here appears in both verse 17 and verse 18 and when you read it if you stress these two words each time you read it he said they said we have here only five loaves and two fish and Jesus said bring them here to me he is drawing a distinction between how they are seeing things and how he sees things what they think is possible or necessary and what he knows is possible and necessary human resources in verse 17 you could say that's what is indicated by the word here there as Matthew uses the two words very deliberately here are human resources here is human reasoning here is human inability here is human lack to meet that great need and as they look out at it in human terms using no more than human logic or human understanding this is what they are saying we only have here these few loaves and fish and then he says bring them here to me transfer them from your here to my here he is saying take them take them from what represents human resources only and your inability and your only human logic bring them to me put them in my hands let me deal with them let my wisdom let my ability deal with the need that you see that is Christ's response bring them here to me and as you look at verses 19 and 20 that is then how you see the application of Christ's own words in that he ordered the crowds to sit down 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 they gave them to the crowds and they all ate and were satisfied they didn't just get a meager ration they didn't just get something that would do them for a few moments and then they would feed hungry again they actually had enough to satisfy them the multiplying by Jesus miraculously of this little that he began with was enough not only to satisfy the crowd but then to fill these baskets afterwards twelve baskets full of the broken pieces that were left what is that telling us how do we apply that what do we take from that this evening in the application of this from here to here from the here

of human resources only and human inability only human smallness only to the here of Christ's hands Christ's blessing Christ's ability well first of all we obviously have to place ourselves in his hand we have to place ourselves by the grace of God as God enables us but we have to place ourselves in his hand has to be a willing placing of ourselves into the hands of Jesus not just for once and for all as we do when we come to him in the first place that's what we do all along life's journey all along the Christian journey every day you come to pray to him every day you begin with your devotions every day that you come to read his word and pray to him what are you doing you're putting yourself again in his hands you're saying Lord I'm happy that I'm in your hands I'm satisfied with being under your control I'm satisfied with the way that you are able to use me the way I could never do it myself your personal development our personal development as individual Christians our protection our growth and indeed our taking of communion as well all of these things enter into this great principle of putting yourself in the hands of Jesus if you look at verse 17 again

that's what many people will say as they look at themselves and realize that they really ought to be coming to take communion but haven't yet done so they love the Lord but they're hesitant they measure themselves by others they think of themselves as inadequate they see themselves as very small this is effective what they're saying maybe you're saying that tonight I have only here five loaves and two fish how can I possibly go further than this how can I possibly achieve anything for Christ how can I possibly come and see myself as worthy to sit at his table with others of his people well you're not and you never will be but this is not about the worthiness of the disciples or the ability of the disciples that's the here of verse 17 which if it were left at that would never have provided anything for that crowd but look at what he's saying in verse 18 bring them here to me are you worried tonight about what will it mean for you if you go to the Lord's table for the first time are you worried tonight that perhaps you're not what you were last time you came to the Lord's table are you concerned perhaps that you don't see yourself as having grown very much over the period since you last took communion what is he saying bring it here to me put it in my hands let me deal with it let my power let my ability take what you see as very small and very insignificant and very inadequate let me he says be the judge of that bring them here to me put them in my hands so you see friend if you are here tonight and you are definitely the Lord's and you know that the Lord has changed your life and you're still hesitant because you see yourself as so small and so insignificant compared to others that you see bring that to Jesus put that in his hand let him deal with it see what he can make of you and leave it to him and to his control let his creative power all this reminds us doesn't it when he took these loaves and gave them to the disciples and the disciples then gave them to the crowds well doesn't it remind us really that these are the hands of the creator the hands that formed the universe in the first place nothing was made without him the very bread that he was taking and the fish that he was handling he had created them in the first place he knew how far they would go because he brought them into being in the first place bring them here to me don't let any other voices interrupt that voice that emphasis because that's where your confidence must lie bring them to him bring yourself all of yourself bring it to the

[25 : 10] Lord but then you apply that to your witness as well as we come to think about outreach and church activities all the things that we associate with the work of the congregation work that goes on among our young people and older people as well the over 55s the campaigners the youth club everything really that is included in the work of the congregation put it all together and what do you do you put it in his hands bring them he says here to me let's not forget where the blessing where the multiplication comes from and we're not just talking remember about numerical increase and multiplication in that way though that is not by any means to be left out of things we're talking about growth spiritual growth moral growth increase in grace sanctification where does it come from does it come from yourself does it come from your ability does it come from the excellence of your prayers of your witness of course it doesn't nor mine bring them here to me don't take yourself daily to

Christ and ask him to multiply your love and your faith and your hope and your aspirations and your efforts bring them here to me put them in the hands of Jesus and let's think of this too especially in terms of our children our children that are bombarded so much in our day with all kinds of warped teaching the evil one is abroad in our society trying to take ourselves and particularly our young people away from the truth away from the truth that guards their lives truth that really comes from God so that it will shape their lives in a positive and proper and meaningful way all of you who have teachers need much prayer for you you're facing challenges that previous generations didn't have you need to be upheld and guided and directed by God and not saying that because you don't know it you do obviously better than

I do but I know from just even visiting schools from time to time and reading what you read and knowing what you know is going on throughout the country that our teachers are under huge huge pressure and it's very difficult for them to be true to their faith to God to Christ in these settings but thank God for them and thank God for their dedication and for their being committed to the principles of God's truth and for these to be applied as much as possible in this society of ours in this situation of theirs but remember that our children are also to be placed in the hands of Jesus bring them here to me put them in my hands it's not the Sunday school that's going to convert them it's not the minister speaking to them that's going to convert and change them it's not any human wisdom that's going to bring their lives to be in the right shape if you like morally that conforms to the word of

God and to the will of God and to the requirement of God it's Jesus who does that he himself shapes our lives and as we bring our children to be baptized as we bring our children to Sunday school to church services what are we actually saying aren't we saying this Lord I'm putting them in your hands doesn't mean we haven't a lot to do ourselves in regard to their teaching or to teaching them or to praying for them of course there's a lot of responsibility on us to do that but above everything else let's pray let's pray that God that Jesus himself by his own creative hands will take these young lives and mould them into his image and make them a power for himself in these years to come bring them here to me your personal development our corporate witness our children there's so many other things we could add to that because this principle really covers all of our Christian lives everything you pack into that Christian life every activity of yourself personally or corporately with others bring them here to me let me handle them let me be the means of multiplying them Christ's compassion in action there's a need beyond ordinary means bring them here to me there's one other point I want to make just before I conclude and it's this way that Jesus said they need not go away you give them something to eat and then he says we they say we only have five loaves here and two fish and he said bring them here to me and you carry on reading right through he then looked up to heaven and said a blessing then he broke the loaves he gave them and their fish to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowd and that's what he was saying to begin with you give them something to eat and by

[30 : 48] Christ's blessing they had something to give out to the crowds tomorrow you hope to sit at the Lord's table you come to the Lord's table to be fed spiritually to find at the Lord's table that food for your soul that just as this food here satisfied those who ate it so that food that spiritual food and that's nothing less than Christ himself and the benefits of his death that will reach into your soul that you will reach and take these elements and by faith see in them the body and blood of Christ and receive from God the benefits of that death in your salvation in feeding your soul in your sanctification in your being strengthened and coming to rest again in Jesus himself but that's what you anticipate but it doesn't stop there does it because what you get from the

Lord and what we what I and you together get from the Lord it's not so that we'll keep it to ourselves this is what Jesus said to the disciples you give them something to eat and they're astonished where are we going to find this food well they found this food now by the blessing of Jesus it's been multiplied so what does Jesus do he gives it to the disciples they give it to the crowd if Jesus as you trust feeds your soul tomorrow it's so that you will go from what you've got and reach out to others with it tell what the Lord has done for you take off the food that you have received the benefit that you have received and seek to feed others with it bring it out show it speak of it let it be seen by those who have never been at the table by those who have never been to a church service by those who don't know

Jesus at all but they know you they know what you do every Lord's day they know that you're a Christian they know that you've come to take communion they'll know that you've done that tomorrow give from what you receive let it be on your heart to say now that I've been fed I need to tell others where they can get feeding to so there is Christ's compassion engaged and Christ's compassion in action and may we tomorrow experience again for ourselves that compassion of Christ upon us resting upon us once again and may we know of that compassion in action where again he meets our need and demonstrates that we need nothing in addition to what is in himself to feed our souls both now and throughout all eternity we shall be satisfied with Jesus let's pray we pray for your blessing

Lord as we anticipate tomorrow coming together to worship you we pray for your blessing throughout the day we pray for your blessing upon the day we pray for your compassion to be experienced once again by us and for us to be caught up with a sense of great wonder that you have used this occasion once again that such as we could draw your compassion toward us receive our thanks now we pray pardoning all our sin for Christ's sake amen well let's conclude our service tonight we're singing in psalm 37 psalm 37 in the scottish psalter that's on page 252 verses 3 to 7 set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food psalm 37 on page 252 we're singing four verses the verses mark 3 to 7 saith thou thy trust upon the

Lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have birth.

[36 : 29] Delight thyself in what he'll give. Thine heart desire to thee.

Thy way to God come with him trust it bring to pass shall lead.

And like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display at he thy judgment shall bring forth.
Like noontide of the day. Rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him do not dread.
For him who falls free in his way success in sin doth get.
[38 : 02] there's you go and answer the ■n o also believe him