

# Sermons on Matthew

## Feeding Five Thousand

*Matthew 14:13-21*

*With Study Questions*

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4/23/2006*

## Feeding Five Thousand

*Matthew 14:13-21*

When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.<sup>-14-</sup> And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He    was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.<sup>-15-</sup>    When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, “   This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.”<sup>-16-</sup> But Jesus said to them, “   They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”<sup>-17-</sup> And they said to Him, “   We have here only five loaves and two fish.”<sup>-18-</sup> He said, “   Bring them here to Me.”<sup>-19-</sup> Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven,    He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.<sup>-20-</sup> So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.<sup>-21-</sup> Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:13-21)

We will now examine the only miracle recorded in all four gospels.

When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. (Matthew 14:13)

## A Needed Rest

Jesus had heard of the death of John, His cousin and fellow minister. We must not think that Jesus had no emotional reaction to this. He was fully human. And having no sin likely added to the sorrow, because of the pure love He had for John.

On the busy western shore of Capernaum, there was no opportunity for rest and solitude; there are things all people require, even the Savior. Jesus desired to be alone (with the disciples), so they departed to Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).

But we see here there would be no rest for Jesus; the multitudes followed. Those who are truly hungry (spiritually) will follow those who are providing true food.

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

### **Willing to be Inconvenienced**

Sometimes you don't get to rest as long as you would like. A rest is not a vacation from ministry—caring about and loving others. Pastors, in fact all Christians, should ever be ready to be inconvenienced due to their love and compassion for others.

There is a time to be alone, a time to be with friends and family, and a time to go beyond those boundaries. These types of decisions are often made by virtue of compassion, wisdom and providence.

It was no accident that the people had followed Jesus, it was providential (that is, God ordained it). Though Jesus desired solitude and, in some inaccurate sense, needed rest, His wisdom and compassion dictated that He would minister.

I often feel the sincerity of my Christianity is demonstrated, not by what I do when I'm on the ministerial clock, but when I am seeking leisure—doing a crossword puzzle at the pool.

It is of interest to note that this very well-known miracle of feeding the five thousand was not the only, or first miracle, Jesus does here. He was healing the sick. Jesus' power to do miracles ever testified to who He was and the authority of His words.

### **A Different Sort of Miracle**

But the feeding of the five thousand would be a different sort of miracle. Jesus would bring the apostles into the dialogue in this miracle. That this miracle had an instructional design to it is revealed in John where we read,

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

How would God's people be taken care of? What role would the apostles play? There is a quest here. Jesus didn't need the apostles, but they would be brought into the mix. What would they learn? What do we learn?

**\_\_When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, “\_This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.”<sup>-16-</sup> But Jesus said to them, “\_They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” (Matthew 14:15, 16)**

### **Giving Jesus Advice**

Perhaps the first thing we learn is that we shouldn't give Jesus advice. We don't bring our wisdom to Christ, but go to Christ for wisdom. For in Christ **“. . .are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3b)**

Here they sit in a deserted place with hungry people. The sun is going down and they run to Jesus with a suggestion. This is no terrible sin; it's almost funny. I find it amusing when my seven-year-old gives me suggestions on how to proceed through a particular maze in my life.

Their suggestion is not outlandish. It seems reasonable. They need to send the people to a place where they can get some food. When we go to presbytery meetings, they will often have little maps of surrounding restaurants. That is fine and helpful.

### **Spiritual Food**

Jesus certainly isn't suggesting that for the remainder of history, groups of people at Christian gatherings should not make any plans for food. I don't want to overly spiritualize this event, but it is hard to imagine that the apostles didn't recognize there would be some spiritual application here, especially in light of what bread represented.

John's account of the feeding of the five thousand is followed by Jesus comparing himself to manna—bread which God supernaturally

provided to those in the wilderness. Those who ate the manna eventually died; whoever eats from the Bread of Life will live forever (John 6:35-59).

## **Shouldering Responsibility**

The second thing we learn is that we see Jesus calling His followers to shoulder the responsibility. **“You give them something to eat,”** He commands. How could Peter not reflect back on this during his very intense conversation with Jesus where three times he is told by Jesus to “tend” and “feed” His sheep (John 21:15-17).

Christians should seek to have the same compassion Jesus has on the lost and recognize their responsibility to bring food. Sometimes we do this spontaneously and individually, and other times in a more organized, corporate fashion by supporting through prayer, finances, encouragement those who are ministering. The bottom line is expressed through Paul’s rhetorical questions:

**How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear \_\_without a preacher? <sup>-15-</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Romans 10:14, 15a)**

Whether it is a material need or a spiritual need, Christians are called to give.

**And they said to Him, “\_We have here only five loaves and two fish.” <sup>-18-</sup> He said, “\_Bring them here to Me.” <sup>-19-</sup> Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, \_\_He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. <sup>-20-</sup> So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. <sup>-21-</sup> Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:17-21)**

## **A Child’s Offering**

Five loaves and two fish provided by some lad (John 6:9)! Passages like this make me ponder just how valuable children are to the advancement of the kingdom of heaven; their words, their prayers, their love may seem small but here Jesus used the fish and bread provided by some un-named child. How like Jesus to use a child!

### **Discard or Give to Jesus**

Certainly there are things which must be discarded when one comes to Christ (sin, for example), but there are also things which must be given to Jesus that they may be used for the benefit of all and the advancement of His kingdom.

Skills, possessions, and stations in life can all be used for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, the glory of God and the good of men. Let us pray that we not become so boxed in to our little agendas that we forget why we exist and why we own that which God has given us.

### **Bring it to Jesus**

Jesus said of the bread and fish, **"Bring them here to Me."** Had they attempted to feed the people with the meager appropriations they had, the meal would have ended before it started. It is only when our plans are brought to and through the hands of Christ that they will be of true value. We bring all things to Him in prayer and lay all things before the wisdom of His judgments.

### **Follow and Obey**

The multitudes had followed Him, now they must obey Him. In order to be fed they had to sit on the grass (this they did in groups of fifty). Those who left or sought food on their own would not be fed by Jesus.

We have set before us either the wisdom and provision of man or the wisdom and provision of God; there are no other options. One leads to life and the other to death.

**And Jesus said to them, \_\_" \_I am the bread of life. \_He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never \_thirst." (John 6:35)**

### **Bless and Break**

Jesus looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks (\_\_\_\_\_—the same word Jesus uses in the breaking of the bread in communion) the food. A blessing in the Jewish culture is not different than thanking. It blesses me as a parent when I see that my children are thankful. Christians should ever seek to bless God through their thanksgiving for all God has provided.

## Stewards of Grace

Jesus hands the food back to the apostles who, in turn, feed the multitude. Truly, Jesus could have had it rain down manna from heaven to feed these people. But the means by which God blesses and provides is through people. What a great honor and blessing for the apostles to be instruments used in such a gracious manner.

***Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. -10- As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:9, 10)***

They all ate until they were full. God provides according to His riches and abundance (Philippians 4:19) which is both good and without limit. If we find ourselves wanting, it is due to our lack of awareness of what our true needs are, for the Scriptures clearly teach,

**For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
The Lord will give grace and glory;  
No good thing will He withhold  
From those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)**

## Twelve Baskets

Twelve baskets of leftovers would serve as a hearty reminder that this was no dream, and that there is plenty for others who hunger.

## A Public Miracle

Five thousand men, plus women and children, would observe this very public miracle. It would serve its purpose. As we continue through Matthew, we will see how these great deeds have a polarizing effect. Some will be drawn to Christ and others will conspire against Him.

As we turn to the Lord's Supper, may God grant us the wisdom to ever feed upon Christ.

### Questions for Study

1. How did Jesus respond to the death of John (Page 2)?
2. What should Christians be willing to do (page 3)?
3. How was the feeding of the five thousand different than other miracles (pages 3, 4)?
4. Where should Christians go with their problems (page 4)?
5. What kind of responsibilities do Christians have (page 5)?
6. Should people discard everything when they become Christians (page 6)?

7. What did the multitudes do in order to be fed (page 7)?
8. Who fed the people (page 7)?
9. What is this miracle about?