

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Title: Feeding 15,000 or more People

Truth: Jesus teaches the disciples a lesson in practical faith and God's provision.

Date/Location: Wednesday February 2 & 6, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

The so-called feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four of the gospels. Here is Matthew's account of it:

Matthew 14:13-21 ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ He said, "Bring them here to Me." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. ²¹ Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

I. Background, v. 13a

- A. Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been killed (14:1-12).
Humanly speaking, this was a real blow to Jesus. A family member had been unrighteously arrested, imprisoned, and killed while in the service of God. It was a foreshadowing of what He knew was about to happen to Him in (and outside of) Jerusalem.
- B. Speaking from the divine perspective, John's death was a part of the foreordained plan of God to set the world into a situation

where the Christ the Messiah would finish His earthly ministry, and preparing vessels of wrath fitted for destruction (Romans 9:22-23).

- C. That being true, however, does not make death a happy experience. It is still filled with grief. I wonder if the Lord feeding the crowd was something of a funeral repast (meal).
- D. Another element of context is that in Mark 6:30, the apostles came back from their itinerant ministry and reported to Jesus what had happened with them and what they had taught. They had been swamped, and things around them were still very busy such that they did not even have time to eat. The Lord Jesus told them to come aside for a while to rest. Rest was necessary for them because they were human, after all.
- E. And that is the first **application** in this message for our souls: **rest**. It is not a full-time job like some people like to make it, but we must rest some of the time! When you do not even have time to eat, you know things are too busy, because we have to eat to survive. In order to do God's will the best, we have to sleep and rest and eat and care for our bodies. There is no other way around it.

II. The Crowd Had Other Plans and Jesus Helped, v. 13b-14

- A. The people had spiritual and physical needs, so they pursued the Lord from various surrounding cities. They went out to the rural area where the Lord had retreated with his disciples.

I will not speculate as to the relative weight they assigned in their minds to spiritual versus physical needs, but we can hope that it was at least somewhat balanced. **John 6:2 does make this comment: "a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased." This might lead us to think that their focus was on the physical. Remember that the signs Jesus did were designed to draw forth belief from the people who saw and heard about them (John 20:31).**

- B. Sometimes this happens: when things seem to start to calm down for a second, then they get as busy as they were moments or days earlier.

C. The Lord did not respond with frustration to this change of plans. Rather, He was moved with compassion because they were in great need. On that phrase “with compassion” notice 1 Kings 3:26, Matthew 9:36, Mark 1:41.

Not only did they have physical illnesses, but they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were lost, with no one to guide them. The Lord took the wide-open opportunity and began to teach them about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). **Application:** For us in Christian ministry, we need to be ready to teach, with or without sermon manuscripts, so that when the opportunity comes, we can use it.

D. The idea of inconvenience comes to mind here. “Prepare to be inconvenienced!” was one pastor’s advice to his young protégé who desired to get into ministry. There will be difficult parts of it, and this is one of them. For the Lord and for many pastors, ministry is 24x7 on call. It is not “heavy” on-call in a lot of average churches, but it is still that way. And when rest is needed, sometimes it does not seem available, or you have to say no to something or someone to make time for rest and family.

E. **Application:** Do *not* be frustrated when inconveniences come. Look at the “inconvenient” people who need compassion. Help them by sharing the Word of God, and, if needed, benevolence.

III. Test of the Disciples’ Faith, v. 15-16

A. The disciples became concerned about the practical need of food in such a situation. Good for them to be thinking of the needs of others.

The typical person of that era probably did not sit down to three meals a day. It may be that if they got one good meal, they would be very satisfied. But the disciples had nothing for such a large crowd: no vendors, no catering services, no nearby fast-food or take-out establishments. They were going to need food, and they were out in the middle of nowhere.

B. Jesus told them that they themselves could give the crowds something to eat. Humanly speaking, this appears to not be possible.

- C. Stop here for just a second: the disciples knew they had very little to no food available on site, so what could they have said? They could have extrapolated from the other miracles that the Lord had done, and his teaching that God would supply (legitimate) needs of His people, and in turn speculate that the Lord could do some miraculous thing to assist them in providing food. “We can do that, with your help, Jesus. What would you like us to do exactly?”
- D. Rather, they responded this way: “We have here only five loaves and two fish.” If they had only dropped the word *only*! John 6:9 records that they also said, “But what are they among so many?” These words indicated doubt, not faith. Instead, they could have said, “Lord, we do have five loaves of bread and two fish. Can you bless them so as to feed these people?”
- E. **Application:** It has been well said that the Lord permits us to be involved in His work by using what we have—as small as it might be. But it must be done in faith, without doubting (James 1:6). Remember that the fish and loaves were given by God too—as is everything else that we have. We use the resources that God gives us to do God’s work, even if those resources at first seem insufficient to do the job. **The boy with the loaves and fish—and the disciples too—had to give them up so that the other people could be fed. We give and often get back...not in the prosperity gospel way, but in a way in which God’s grace ordains to supply so that His people have an abundance for every good work (2 Cor. 9:8).**

IV. Miracle: Food Created, Faith Strengthened, v. 18-21

- A. We must read this text as it is meant by human author Matthew and divine author God’s Spirit: as an historical account. It is not a legend, myth, or fable. It is not a story—it is *history*. It really happened, just like all the other miracles in Scripture like the crossing of the Red Sea, resurrections from the dead, healings, and so on. If this is not actual history, we would have to conclude that the Bible is completely unreliable, not God-breathed, not infallible, not true, and therefore worthless to our lives. But we know from the Bible’s own testimony and the Spirit’s work in us that the

Scriptures are indeed God's Word in truth. There is no doubt about it.

- B. The Lord commanded that the small provision of food they had was to be brought to Him. The disciples did so.
- C. Verse 19a explains that the Lord had the crowd sit down to prepare to eat. Mark 6:39 says that he directed them to sit down in groups. There was green grass there, which makes this a nice picnic setting! Luke 9:14 adds the detail that they were to sit in groups of about 50 people each,¹ which would make 100 groups if there were 5,000. As there were perhaps three times that many people when women and children were included, there could have been 300 groups of 50 people each. That is enough to fill a huge auditorium or a small stadium.
- D. The Lord gave thanks for the food to His (and our) Heavenly Father. "He blessed" the loaves and fish means the same thing as "He gave thanks" (John 6:11). This is one passage that we use as justification for why we pray before we enjoy a meal. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 is another. Then they distributed the miraculously sufficient food supply to the gathered thousands.
- E. **Application:** We should not be surprised at this historical account whatsoever, for the Creator of the universe (John 1:3) who used nothing but His divine power to make all things in six days can easily use something to create something more. Somehow He used the loaves and fishes as "seed-starters" because He "broke them," meaning that he divided them into portions. Maybe He created the rest of the food out of pure nothing. One time He used dirt to create (new?) working eyes (John 9:6). The situation is a miracle, so trying to find a physics-based or natural-law explanation is futile.
- F. Everyone ate to the full. They did not just have a snack. They had several pieces of bread and perhaps several fish, or a large one. No one went away from the Lord's provision hungry.

¹ Perhaps several of the groups were near one another so there were ranks of 100 or 50. Mark 6:40 indicates so.

G. They gathered the leftovers. There were 12 baskets worth, which is more than the original amount of food to start with! I do not believe there is a major significance to the number 12. Mark 8:19-20 reminds us that the disciples collected 7 baskets after the feeding of the 4,000. With 12, there is one basket per disciple.

The text does not tell us what they did with the leftovers. I presume they ate them, but maybe they gave them away to others in need. We grant that the text does not say specifically what they did with the leftovers, but apparently they did not leave them to the birds and other scavenging animals.

The disciples definitely did not turn the remnants into a fetish or relic to be stored up and worshipped by later people.

Application: Do not waste the Lord's provision, whether it was miraculous or not! (I am not suggesting that the Lord supplies via miraculous provision today.)

Conclusion

Today, where are the multitudes going out to find Jesus? Of course, no one finds Him in person today on this earth. But the analogous situation is this: people must come to true churches if they are to find Jesus. They will find there the message of Jesus, the people of Jesus, the provision of eternal life from Jesus, and the love of Jesus.

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