

The Messiah's Power (Matthew 14:13-21)

Apart from the resurrection of Jesus, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only one recorded in all four gospels. This passage is bracketed by references to the unrelenting pressure of the crowds upon Jesus (v. 13). It was exhausting for him, and so Matthew records two occasions when he went away by himself to pray.

Today, we will look at the first instance where the crowds followed him. There were 5,000 men, and so, with women and children, around 15,000 to 20,000 people (v. 21). Matthew contrasts this vast crowd with the paltry amount of food of just five barley loaves and two fish from a young boy's lunch. Jesus then did what only God does, and miraculously created food and fed them all.

In the Bible, the number 12 is very significant (e.g., 12 tribes, 12 disciples). It can symbolically mean "all" or the "whole." so the fact that there are 12 baskets of

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leftovers implies that there was enough food that day to feed all of God's people and more (v. 20).

What Jesus was doing in this event is twofold. (1) He was demonstrating and proving His Messiahship, and (2) he was teaching his disciples their part in the work of God. He was teaching them the raw essentials for ministry. He had called them to minister, to show people that He, the Messiah, was the answer to human helplessness. They were to meet the day-to-day needs of people, helping them through the trials and problems of life. He had to teach them a critical truth: they would never be able to do the job in their own strength. Their human resources were just too inadequate to meet the needs of the world. Humanism, man and his ability alone, could never get the job done. Man, and his resources could only take care of some of the needs, and man and his resources would always end up having to send crowds away to fend for themselves (v. 15).

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Why is this true? Why is humanism such a futile failure? Why can man himself not meet all the needs of the world? Because so few see the crowds in their needs and even fewer experience compassion for them (Mt, 14:14). Most say, "Send the crowds away, that they can go...and buy themselves some food (v. 15). But Jesus said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat (v. 16).

It is at this point that man fails and fails so miserably. He has his eye stuck to the earth, only on human resources. What Jesus said is profound: "Bring them (your human resources) here to me" (v. 18). What would happen if men would bring their human resources to Christ? The resources would become wonderfully multiplied, and the world's needs would be met.

So, now let's look at **three** essentials for ministry. The **first** essential for ministry is seeing people and

having compassion. There is a sharp contrast between the

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compassion of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus' compassion was very strong. We can refer back to v. 14 for the picture of Jesus' example of compassion. His compassion had caused his heart to pour out to the crowd, and he had been ministering most of the day. Note **two** things about Jesus and the crowds. Jesus saw the crowds.

First, he was very observant, always looking for people in order to help them. He "did not come to be served, but to serve," as we are told in Matthew 20:28. The **second** thing about Jesus was that He felt compassion. The helplessness of the people pierced his heart. He saw precious, immortal souls who were hurting and being pressed under the weight of human problems. He was moved to help them and to teach his disciples the great necessity of seeing people and of feeling a gripping compassion for them.

The **second** contrast between Jesus and his disciples was that the compassion of the disciples was very weak. They had a concern for the people, but a

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gripping compassion was missing. Their problem was the same problem that has always enslaved men. Men see nothing but their own human power and resources, they see nothing but man, his **humanness**. Their eyes are on the earth and on man alone. Therefore, they live only as humanists. The result is this: their power and resources are just as they have always been—inadequate. They think in terms of doing just what the disciples did: ignoring and sending the crowd away.

The **second** essential for ministry is accepting one's duty to minister. The charge of Christ is, "Give"—give what resources you have—it is your duty to give. The command of Christ is to every man: "give." We are to take what resources we have and give to meet the desperate needs of the

multitude. We all have the duty and responsibility to give whatever we have, no matter how little or how small.

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The disciples' humanism still showed itself. They still could not see beyond the physical world although they were at least thinking about the human need and the resources they had to meet the need. This is understandable, for the only life they had really known was the life *lived on the human plane*. They had always looked at what they had, only at what man could do with what little he had. They had not yet seen what God could do with human resources yielded to him.

Note that the disciples were being awakened to the need and moved by Christ. They were now willing to offer and share what they had. But note: being aware and being moved to share will not get the job

done. God is needed! We have to take our resources and turn them over to God. Why?

Because man has a problem deep down within that underlies all his problems, a problem that causes the physical needs of his experience. His physical needs

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are only the symptom or results of the underlying cause. The underlying cause is **sin**, that is selfishness, greed, pride, prejudice, lying, stealing, cheating, indulgence, extravagance, hoarding, and so much more. Man's spirit has to be changed before the needs of the world will ever be met.

The **third** essential of ministry is trusting Christ to use one's resources. The disciples' duty is to bring His resources to Christ. Christ did not meet the need apart from the disciples' resources. We have to bring our resources to him if we are to see the needs of men met. Two facts are universally true: we are helpless in meeting the needs of men apart from

God, and God is helpless without the commitment of his disciples. No matter how little we have, it is needed, and we are held responsible for bringing it to Christ.

Jesus' example of how our resources are to be used is threefold. (1) Christ took the resources given to him, (2) he gave thanks, and (3) he used the resources. He

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will without fail, do the same with whatever we give—if we will just give all that we have. In these three acts, Jesus teaches how to use what resources we have. (1), Take them: surrendering them to Christ and his purposes. (2) Thank God: acknowledging him as the source of the resources. (3) Use them: giving all we have to those who are so hungry, lost, and desperately needful throughout the world.

The disciples' part in the ministry of the Lord was also threefold. (1) They had to share. (2) They had

to save and demonstrate thriftiness, showing the glorious bounty of God. They had to be serving as an example of how resources should be used. (3) They had to observe the power of Christ themselves, ever learning and strengthening their own faith, so they could serve ever more forcibly in the future.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from the Scripture reading in Matthew?

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This Scripture reading teaches profound lessons about compassion, faith, and divine provision. Jesus' deep passion for the crowd is highlighted in this scripture reading. Even though he was seeking solitude after hearing of John the Baptist's death, Jesus chose to heal the sick and feed the hungry, demonstrating that compassion should guide our actions. The disciples' initial doubt about feeding the crowd reflects a common struggle with faith. Jesus encouraged them to bring what they had, teaching that even small offerings can be used for great purposes when placed in His hands. And this reading

illustrates God's ability to provide abundantly, even from seemingly insufficient resources.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word of truth and the lessons that it teaches us. Thank you for Jesus and his beautiful example of a life which demonstrated how to live in this frail human body, to your praise and glory. May we live as he did and be prepared to say in all things, "Thy will, not mine be done." We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**