

Session 9

JESUS IDENTIFIED

Matthew 14:13-21; John 6:1-13

Memory Verse

Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces.

– MATTHEW 14:20, CSB



Jesus Identified

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God radically, abundantly provides for us.

CALL TO ACTION: Reflect on the way you treat others. What do your actions point to? Are you full of optimism, compassion, and kindness, pointing to an incarnational God inviting the lost into faith?

You likely know of Mother Teresa, but do you know her story? She was born in 1910 in the Ottoman Empire (now North Macedonia). After her father's death, her family faced financial hardship, but her mother raised her to understand the importance of faith and serving others.


When she was 12, she felt called to become a nun, taking her vows in May 1931. She went on to teach at St. Mary's High School in Kolkata (Calcutta), India, where she not only taught, but also witnessed the suffering and deep needs of the impoverished living in the city's slums.

In 1946, she felt another call on her life (she described this as a "call within a call"), to serve the needy in the slums, some of the city's poorest and sickest residents. She would go on to found an order to help serve the poor with kindness, compassion, and empathy. It eventually reached around 90 countries around the world.

Mother Teresa's decades of ministry to the needy was honored by the Pope and through the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. After her death, she was named a Saint by Pope John Paul II. Today, her name is synonymous with sacrificial service.¹

Mother Teresa was an imperfect human, but she answered the Lord's call with a yes and dedicated her life to mimicking Jesus's own ministry. She put others first, saw needs she could meet and met them, cared for the image bearers society overlooked, and she deeply loved the Lord. She is a beautiful example of living like Jesus might in today's world.

In our reading today, we'll see Jesus do all these things. When He was tired, possibly grieving, and seeking solitude, He put others before Himself. As the day grew late, He cared for the crowd further by multiplying a boy's lunch and feeding them until they were full. In the story of the feeding of the multitude, we'll see God's radical, abundant provision and proof that He can work with anything we offer Him.

 Who do you know that stands out as a servant for Jesus? What about them makes you say this?

 What are some ways we could better care for our community, like Jesus and many of His followers have done?


Session Summary

When Jesus withdrew in solitude after learning about John the Baptist's death, the crowds followed Him. Instead of being annoyed by this (like we might), Jesus "had compassion on them" (v. 14) and served them by healing the sick among them.

This created a dilemma, though. Jesus had withdrawn to a remote place, and now the massive crowd grew hungry as it was late. By human standards, with only five loaves and two fish, Jesus and the disciples couldn't help them. But God can do *more than we could ask or imagine* (Ephesians 3:20), and Jesus turned a boy's lunch into a radically abundant feast. This miracle was so profound, all four gospel writers recorded an account of it.

1. Solitude and Compassion (Matthew 14:13-14)

 How do we see Jesus process the news of John the Baptist's death here? Why is this significant?

 What do we learn about Jesus from His response both to John's death but also to the crowd that followed Him in the moment?


During Jesus's earthly ministry, the gospel writers recorded many instances of Jesus going off alone in solitude to pray, process, and prepare. In one instance, Jesus woke up early and was gone so long that He worried the whole company of followers who were searching for Him (Mark 1:35-37).

In this particular case, Matthew recorded that Jesus withdrew to a remote place after He heard about the death of John the Baptist, brought about by a manipulative plot.

In Hebrews 4:15, the author wrote Jesus is sympathetic to our plight as humans. He experienced grief (John 11:35). Though the text doesn't say this explicitly, we can imagine He might have been processing this grief in solitude with God. Can you relate? Have you ever grieved an unfair situation or death in our fallen world? Jesus's example gives us a model to follow in times like this: Seek time in solitude with the Lord. He can help us carry our burdens and give us shalom, divine peace and wholeness that makes no sense apart from Him.

But as Jesus sought solitude, the crowd followed Him. Don't miss how Jesus responded—He “had compassion on them” (v. 14). He didn't turn them away or respond in frustration. He showed compassion and helped them by healing their sick. He embodied Paul's later words, “consider others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3-4).

This one verse holds not just an example for us to follow (to have compassion on people always, showing kindness and empathy and helping them if we can), but also a truth to embrace: You're not “bothering” God. He loves you. He has time for you. He delights in hearing from and helping you.

 Application: What can we learn about compassion in these verses? What about the compassion God has for us?

2. Fed and Satisfied (Matthew 14:15-21)

 Consider the disciples' response to Jesus. How might you have responded in the same situation? Why?

 Think about Jesus's other miracles. What was similar about this one? How was it different?

At this point, Jesus, His followers, and the large crowds were in a remote place and it was late. We get the sense that they had been at this for a while ("when evening came" v. 15), and it was time for dinner, but here, in the remote place they found themselves, there was nowhere to buy food.

The disciples suggested sending the people away, but Jesus had other plans: "You give them something to eat" (v. 16). Can you imagine being one of the disciples in that moment? Tired and hungry themselves and certainly not in possession of enough food to feed the masses, they replied to Jesus with hard facts to illustrate the impossibility of Jesus's request. They only had five loaves and two fish, a poor man's meal, enough food only to feed a little boy for dinner.²

We still do this today when God calls us to do things that defy our understanding of what is possible. By human standards, the odds were impossible. But God is able to do more than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21). He did it with the loaves and fishes and He does it in our lives today, too, bestowing gifts, opening doors we thought were locked shut, and providing abundantly when we're in the middle of the remote valley and it doesn't make sense. God is so much bigger and better than we can fathom.

Jesus took five loaves and two fish and turned them into a feast of radical, overwhelming abundance. This meal, meant to feed only one boy, was blessed by the Messiah and fed “about five thousand men, besides women and children.” (v. 21)

? Application: Where have you not believed Jesus’s ability to work in daunting circumstances? What do you need to submit to Him today?

3. More Than Enough (John 6:1-13)

? This is John’s account of the same miracle we read about in Matthew. What similarities and differences do you notice?

? This is the only miracle of Jesus mentioned in all four Gospels. Why might this have been significant enough for all four writers to include it?

The feeding of the five thousand is the only of Jesus’s miracles recorded in all four Gospel accounts. But why?

As Westerners, we tend to approach Scripture and ask the question “How?” How did that happen? When reading about the feeding of the multitudes, we might naturally ask what did it look like when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes? How did this all go down? We want to understand. This isn’t a bad approach; God wants us to come to the Scriptures and learn.

As ancient Middle Easterners, though, the gospel writers were thinking differently. The Middle Eastern approach to understanding the Scriptures would be to ask, “Why?” Why would Jesus do that? What was Jesus teaching and showing through the feeding of the multitude? What does this teach us in light of the big picture of Scripture?

John provided a little more detail than Matthew. The huge crowds were, presumably, around because of the Passover feast, requiring Jews to travel to Jerusalem. John recorded that Jesus specifically asked Philip, who was from Bethsaida (Luke recorded that this is where this miracle took place; Luke 9:10-17), what to do. Philip's response gives a little more color to this story: Two hundred days' worth of wages wouldn't be enough money to feed this crowd.

What would Jesus have wanted His disciples, and us, to learn from this? Here are a few takeaways to consider:

Jesus provides abundantly. Have you ever been to a dinner party or event where food was exact or scarce? Everyone could have an exact number or someone wouldn't get any? That wasn't true with Jesus's miracle. Both Matthew and John recorded that everyone ate until they were full. They ate as much as they wanted, and Jesus made so much that there were twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus didn't just provide for the people; He abundantly provided. These events have echoes of God's provision for the twelve tribes of Israel in the wilderness. God's abundant provision was true in the Old Testament, it was true in the New Testament, and it is true now.

God can multiply what we give Him. We shouldn't understand this idea as supporting the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel focuses inward, on personal gain and benefit. The real gospel focuses outward, putting others before yourselves, like we saw Jesus do in first section of our study.

An offering we see as meager can be multiplied in the hands of God. For the huge crowds on this day, that offering was five small loaves and two fishes, a child's lunch. But Jesus turned it into a feast that was overwhelmingly abundant.

God can multiply our financial giving to bless others and use them for His purposes also. It might be our offering of gifts. God has given each of us unique gifts that are intended for His glory and for the body of believers. When we offer our time in children's ministry, God can multiply that offering to lead others to Him. When we offer our gifts of administration, and our group and church run more effectively, we can share the gospel more widely. When we offer a gift of teaching, we make disciples and the gospel multiplies. The list could go on and on.

When we fully trust God and rely on Him, even into the wilderness of our lives where it doesn't make sense that we could be taken care of, He shows up and provides, multiplying what we bring for His own glory.

? Application: Why is faith required in bringing what we have to God and seeking His multiplication? What makes this challenging for you?

Conclusion

Our passage today opened with Jesus's reaction to hearing the news of His cousin, John the Baptist's, death. In response, Jesus withdrew in solitude. We read many examples of Jesus doing this in the Gospels.

But when Jesus went to be alone, He was followed by crowds. When we are tired or grieving, we might respond with irritation to such an intrusion, but Jesus doesn't. Instead, He "had compassion on them" (v. 14), and helped them by healing the sick among them.

When it came time to feed the crowds, the disciples didn't think that Jesus could do anything with the only food available—a boy's lunch. They saw it as too small. But in the hands of God, it multiplied. What are you holding back from God today that you see as too small? Do you think your financial gift is too "little" to make a difference? Do you think your time or talent is too "insignificant" to make any sort of kingdom impact? The feeding of the multitude tells a different story: God can multiply your gifts, no matter how small you think they are, for His glory and for the good of His people. He can abundantly provide, even when it doesn't make sense to us.

? Where do you need to remember God's compassion to you through Jesus? What makes it hard for you to embrace this?

❓ How can we seek to live as people of compassion with the needy around us?

❓ How does offering our resources to God openly give us a different perspective on the mission of sharing the gospel with everyone we can?

Memorize

Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces.

—Matthew 14:20, CSB

References

¹History.com, “Mother Teresa,” <https://www.history.com/articles/mother-theresa>.

²Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).