

Jesus Identified

November 9, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

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

Session Outline

1. Solitude and Compassion (Matthew 14:13-14)
2. Fed and Satisfied (Matthew 14:15-21)
3. More Than Enough (John 6:1-13)

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?



Leader Guide

Jesus Identified

Introduction

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?

A New Moses

Jesus miraculously fed the five thousand from a few loaves and fishes, reminiscent of manna in the wilderness in the days of Moses and the exodus. Jesus was a new and greater Moses, bringing full, spiritual redemption for His people Israel if they would accept it.

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?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the radical provision He has shown in your own life. Ask for His help as you consider how you can use your gifts for His kingdom and better live like Jesus in your church and community. Ask for His help as you seek to trust Him more fully, even and especially in situations where it doesn't make sense.

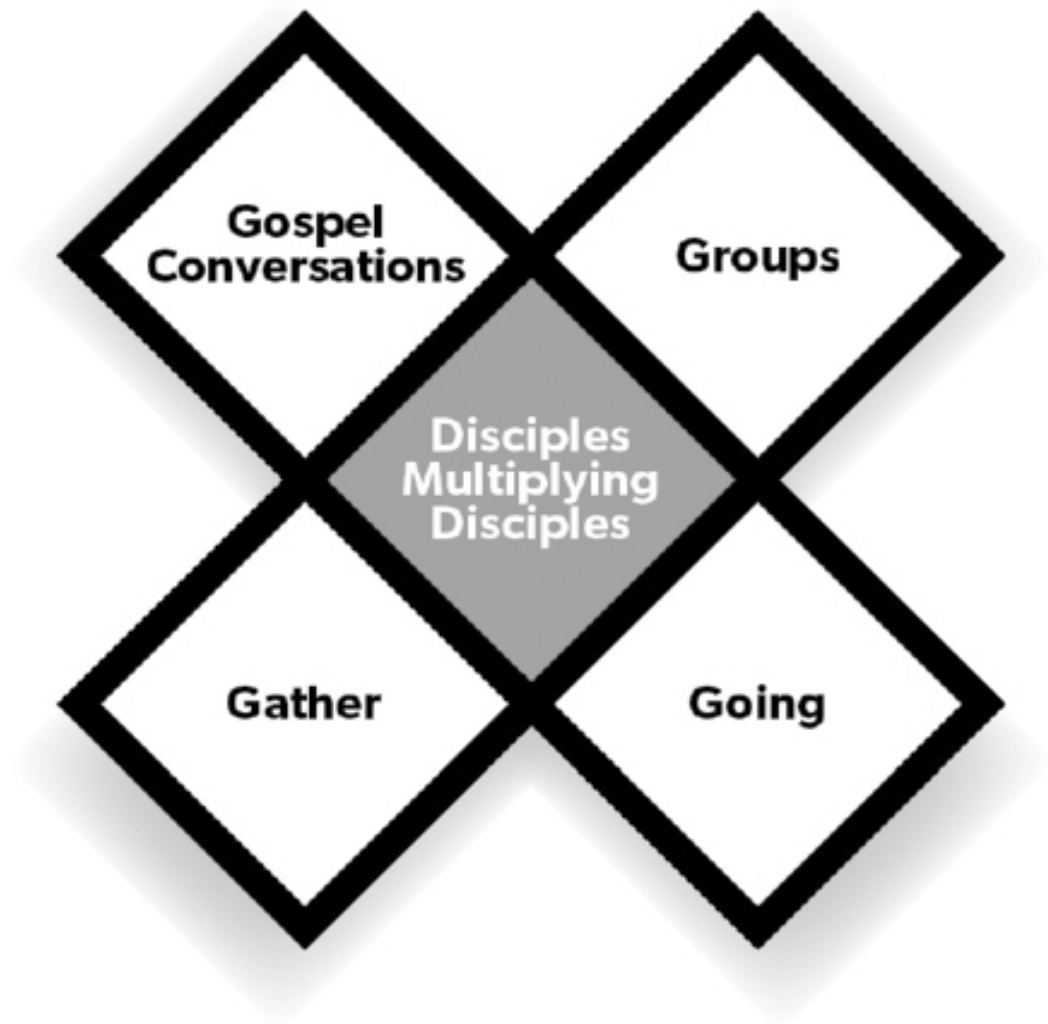
Memory Verse

Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces. —Matthew 14:20

Additional Resources

- *The Gospel of Matthew* by R.T. France
- *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* by David Platt
- *Matthew* by R.C. Sproul

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Extended Commentary

Matthew 14:13-21

14:13–14 On Jesus’s compassion for the crowd, see 9:36.

14:15–17 Loaves of bread and small fish were staple foods in Galilee. The loaves were the size of dinner rolls. John’s description of the fish (Gk opsarion) indicates that they were either dried or pickled (Jn 6:9). He also identified the loaves as made of barley, the food of the poor. He implied that the loaves and fish were small since they were sufficient for only one boy’s lunch.

14:18–21 This is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all four Gospels. A true miracle is clearly expressed by the words everyone ate and was satisfied. Normally, a few small loaves and fish divided among so many people would provide each person with only a very tiny crumb. However, everyone ate to satisfaction and the disciples collected in leftovers more food than was originally available. Collecting these baskets full of leftover pieces served as a powerful reminder of Jesus’s ability to provide abundance for his disciples (6:11, 25–33). John’s Gospel shows that many bystanders compared Jesus’s miracles to God’s provision of manna in the wilderness (Jn 6:22–33). The miracle also closely resembles a miracle of Elisha (2Kg 4:42–44). Although the miracle is referred to as the “Feeding of the Five Thousand,” the five thousand men, besides women and children might equal a total of fifteen thousand people. Thus Jesus’s miracle was far greater than that performed by Elisha.³

John 6:1-13

6:1 After this again indicates the passing of an indefinite period of time (5:1). Half a year may have passed since the previous event. Sea of Tiberias (cp. 21:1) was an alternate name for the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas founded Tiberias, the largest city on the Sea of Galilee, in honor of his patron, the Roman emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37). The name gained currency toward the end of the first century.

6:2 Generally, John portrays the crowds as following primarily on account of his miracles, and as mired in confusion and ignorance.

6:3 Mountain may not refer to a specific mountain. It could designate the hill country east of the lake, known today as the Golan Heights (Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46). Like other rabbis, Jesus sat down to teach (Mt 5:1; Mk 4:1; 9:35; Lk 4:20), although teaching is not mentioned here.

6:4 This is the second of three Passovers mentioned by John, and the only one Jesus spent in Galilee (see note at 2:13).

6:5–6 The huge crowd apparently walked several miles around the north side of the lake and caught up with Jesus and the disciples. Philip would be the natural choice for Jesus’s question since he, like Andrew (v. 8) and Peter, was a native of nearby Bethsaida (see note at 1:44). Jesus’s question echoes Moses’s query in the wilderness: “Where can I get meat to give all these people?” (Nm 11:13). Other parallels between Jn 6 and Nm 11 are the people’s grumbling (Nm 11:1; Jn 6:41, 43); the description of the manna (Nm 11:7–9; Jn 6:31); the reference to the eating of meat/Jesus’s “flesh” (Nm 11:13; Jn 6:51); and the overabundance of the provision (Nm 11:22; Jn 6:7–9).

6:7 Two hundred denarii was roughly eight months' wages, since one denarius was about one day's pay for a common laborer (12:5; Mt 20:2).

6:8–9 Boy may refer to a child, a teenager, or even someone in his early twenties. The same word is used in the Septuagint (an ancient Gk translation of the OT, abbreviated LXX) to refer to young Joseph in Gn 37:30 and Daniel and his friends in Dn 1. Barley was common food for the poor (the well-to-do preferred wheat bread); the fish were probably dried or preserved, perhaps pickled. In a similar account, Elisha fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves (2Kg 4:42–44).

6:10 The men numbered about five thousand, plus women and children (Mt 14:21), totaling perhaps as many as fifteen thousand people. Plenty of grass may allude to the messianic age (10:9–10; Ps 23:2). Mark (Mk 6:39–40) mentioned that the grass was green, which points to springtime.

6:11 A common Jewish thanksgiving prayer was, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

6:12 Jesus's words echo Ru 2:14: “She ate and was satisfied and had some left over.” Jesus took the same care in providing for those whom the Father gave him (Jn 10:28–29; 17:11–12, 15).

6:13 The number of baskets may allude to Jesus's symbolic restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴

References

1. History.com, “Mother Teresa,” <https://www.history.com/articles/mother-theresa>.
2. Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
3. Ibid.
4. “John” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*. Edited by Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).