



Study Series

Follow Me: Week Nine AM

The claims of Jesus post resurrection: Marc Rader

Bible

Matthew 14:13-21 (NIV)

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

18 "Bring them here to me," he said. **19** And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. **20** They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken

pieces that were left over. **21** The number _____ men, besides women and children of those who ate was about five thousand

Sermon Summary

The feeding of the 5000 is one of only a handful of stories that is told in each of the four gospels. In Matthew and Mark this story has a second, 'lesser' companion when Jesus feeds 4000. It is also referred to in Matthew 16:5-12 and alluded to in 15:21-28 (in the 'crumbs') and most significantly in the last supper when Jesus "took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples". This repetition reveals that this is obviously a significant story in Matthew's account.

The political context of the miracle shapes our understanding of its significance as much as the repetition and allusions do. The passage opens by reporting that Jesus withdrew to a solitary place "when he heard what had happened". Because the preceding passage narrates the execution of John the Baptist, at first glance it seems that Jesus withdraws due to grief at John's death. However, going back a bit further provides a different understanding of Jesus' retreat. Matthew 14:1-2 states that Herod the tetrarch had heard about Jesus and thought he must be John the Baptist raised from the dead. Matthew then tells us how John met his death. What Jesus heard was not about John's death, but about Herod's interest in Jesus. As a prophet and Messianic figure, Jesus would have been perceived as a threat by Herod and, as has happened elsewhere in the gospel, when there is political danger Jesus withdraws (2:22; 4:12; 12:14-15).

Craig Keener, in his commentary on Matthew, points out that there is another parallel between these two passages that is found in the two feasts: Herod's birthday feast (marked by fear and death) and the feeding of the masses in the wilderness (marked by healing). This miracle, then, contrasts two types of kingdoms and two types of kings.

This political contrast set up by Matthew is further strengthened by the fact that Jesus, upon arriving at the crowded solitary place, has compassion on the crowds (rather than being angry) and heals their sick (rather than retreating again). The reference to his compassion reminds us of Matthew 9:35-36 where we are told he had compassion because the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd. This is a metaphor used in the Old Testament to describe a people who have no leadership or poor leadership (see Num. 27:15-17; 1 Kings 22:17; Zechariah 10:2). Herod's leadership leaves a great deal to be desired; motivated more by fear than by compassion.

Jesus heals those who are sick until it is late at which point the disciples suggest that he send them to the surrounding towns to buy food. Jesus responds by saying that the crowd does not need to leave to be fed and then commands the disciples to give them something to eat. The disciples respond by listing their limited resources; two fish and five loaves. Jesus takes what is in their hands, has the crowd sit down, and then gives thanks, breaks the bread, and gives it to the disciples, who feed the crowd. All 5000 men (plus women and children) eat and are satisfied and there are twelve baskets left over.

The clear reference to the last supper points to the abundant provision of Jesus to all who need forgiveness (one of the primary meanings of Jesus' death). This is strengthened by the allusions to examples of God's provision in the Old Testament. The provision of manna in the wilderness under Moses (Exodus 16:4); the provision for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16); and the provision of a crowd under Elisha (2 Kings 4:42-44). The provision of Jesus is more than sufficient for all that we need; no one is outside of his provision and no need exceeds his provision.

There is, however, one other very important thing to note: Jesus invites his disciples to feed the crowd and this continues to be the case. In the face of all the need in our world we are sent as the twelve were here. "You give them something to eat." Jesus takes our insufficient resources and multiplies them to make them more than enough to provide for those who are looking for Jesus.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation, their depth comes from a willingness to engage with the implications of our reflections for how we live our lives. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Have you ever seen a miracle? What was it? For those who have not seen a miracle, do you think you would react with fear, amazement or scepticism if food started multiplying at a gathering?
2. Jesus was retreating to a remote place when a crowd of people set out on foot and met him at his landing. Today crowds of fans will try and track down where a celebrity is staying in order to get access to them. What do you think your response would have

been to hearing that Jesus is appearing somewhere? What kind of efforts do you make in your week to seek him out?

3. Though many of us would be angered to have our moment of retreat interrupted Jesus has compassion for the people and begins healing them. He has a hard time hiding from those who want to find him. Can you recall a time where seeking God resulted in your needs being met?
4. How does understanding the political context help to shape your understanding of the miracle?
5. Reflecting on the things that we need Christ's provision for, what does it mean to you that there is more than enough for you?
6. Who do you know who needs all that Christ offers? How can you "give them something to eat"? What do you have in your hand that you can give to Jesus to multiply for that purpose?
7. What keeps you, if anything, from acknowledging Jesus as healer or provider? What keeps you from giving others "something to eat"?

Prayer

This week each person needs a pen and paper to write down prayer points for themselves. Have members of your group answer these questions on their paper.

- * Something that could keep me from recognising Jesus in my life is...
- * A doubt I want to conquer is...
- * A miracle I want to see happen is...
- * A part of my life that I'm struggling to let God control is...
- * An area I want to grow in is...
- * A relationship I need to help meet a need in is...

After completing these, or all that you can, you may wish to swap lists with someone beside you so that in pairs you can pray for each other through the week.