

A Passion for People - Matthew 15:29-39

Introduction: This morning, we come across a rather unusual story in the life of Jesus - not in its content, but in its context. In the previous chapters, Matthew presents Jesus' ministry in a very methodical way. It almost reads like a day-by-day, or hour-by-hour journal. But in chapter 15, Matthew switches gears, and leaps forward. Several months, perhaps as much as a year has transpired since the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

Many scholars believe that this feeding was a faulty account by Matthew. They claim that the two miracles were actually one in the same, and that Matthew's recollection of the one was fuzzy.

My question is this, "*Why would Matthew, a tax collector by trade, a man who would have been careful in record keeping and accuracy, make such a blunder? And how could the Holy Spirit, whose inspiration led Matthew to record his gospel, allow such a blunder to be entered into Holy Scripture?*"

No, we need to take this at face value and emphatically say that the feeding of the 4,000 was an actual event that took place sometime after the feeding of the 5,000. They are similar in their truthfulness, objectives, and in the fact that Jesus performed them.

Let's examine the two for comparison's sake. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Differences

5,000

4,000

Jesus was in Galilee, Jewish	Jesus was in Decapolis, Gentiles
Jesus wanted to be alone	Jesus went where the people were
Crowds came uninvited	Crowds were invited
Duration - 1 day	Duration - 3 days
Crowd was curious about Jesus	Crowd came for Jesus to heal
5 loaves, 2 fish	7 loaves, a few fish
12 small baskets leftover	7 large baskets leftover
Jesus sent disciples by boat	Jesus and disciples left by boat

Similarities

Large hungry crowds who didn't want to leave
Many in crowds were healed
Crowd ordered to be seated
Jesus compassion for the people was demonstrated

Same food

Same miracle

Prayer for food

Distribution of food by disciples

Leftovers picked up by disciples

Both miracles demonstrated Jesus' power, love, and compassion for people. Jesus was concerned for people's physical need for healing, and hunger. And He was concerned about the disciples need to become less self-sufficient, and more dependent on Him.

As we look at this miracle, let's first notice Jesus passion for people in His mission.

1. The Mission of Jesus (29)

Wherever Jesus went, He drew a crowd. If He went to be alone, the crowds followed. If He went to someone's house, the crowds found Him. If He went to the temple, the crowds flocked to hear Him speak.

But some in the crowd were not interested in Jesus' message. The religious self-righteous followed Jesus to find fault in Him, to put an end to His ministry. It seems there was always someone in the crowd who wanted to heckle Him and trip Him up. So Jesus drew the both the curious and the conniving, even when He wanted to be alone.

But on this occasion, Jesus intentionally went where the people were. Along the southeast coast of the Sea of Galilee was the area called Decapolis (Ten cities). Its inhabitants were mainly Gentile pagans who worshipped the various gods of the Greek pantheon. But some were also worshippers of Israel's God - Jehovah. They had either heard of Jesus and His mighty power, and His claim to be the Son of God, or, they may have even heard Him speak earlier in His ministry. No doubt some had even heard of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was delivered from her demon possession. So when the news that Jesus was in their area, was spread, they loaded up those who were "*lame, crippled, blind, and mute*" to come and lay "*them down at His feet.*"

Now, the words "*lame*" and "*crippled*" and "*blind*" and "*mute*" in vs. 30 is worth noting. This didn't refer to handicapped folks who merely walked with a limp or had some minor speech impediment or eye problem. It refers to people whose feet or legs had been amputated, or those who had been born deformed in some way. The "*blind*" and "*mute*" referred to people who were totally sightless and speechless; mostly from birth. So when we read in vs. 30 that "*He healed them,*" don't think of Him as dabbing a little medicine on an open wound. This "*healing*" referred to more of full restoration of limbs. People who came with only one

functioning arm left with two. People who came in blind left with their full sight restored. People who were deaf could hear. People who had never spoken a word were walking away praising God to the top of their lungs. No wonder “*the people were amazed and praised the God of Israel.*”

This tells us a couple of things about Jesus’ mission.

A. He Went Where the People Were.

Jesus said in Luke 4:18, “*The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...*” He came to help people. And in order to accomplish that, and in order to meet their eternal needs, He went where the people were.

But there’s something else noteworthy about His mission:

B. He Lead People to Worship

Jesus’ mission in preaching the gospel and healing the sick was to lead people to worship the true and living God. Although most of the people of Decapolis were pagan Gentiles, when they saw Jesus amazing healing power, they were led to “*praise the God of Israel.*” That was Jesus’ supreme goal. Yes, He had compassion for the people’s physical needs, but His main passion was to meet their eternal need. He wanted to guide people to learn to trust Him as their Lord Savior. He wanted more than anything else, to save their souls and make them citizens of His heavenly kingdom.

Next let’s notice Jesus passion for people in His ministry.

2. The Ministry Of Jesus (30-32)

In these three verses, we see the threefold ministry of Jesus:

A. Healing: We’ve already mentioned the healing ministry of Jesus. Certainly that was a major part of His earthly ministry. In many ways, His healing ministry was the bait, the carrot-on-the-stick so to speak. Jesus understood that by ministering to the body, He could minister to the mind and soul. But another part of Jesus’ ministry is seen here.

B. Calling: Jesus’ ministry was also calling disciples. Vs. 32 says, “*Jesus called His disciples to Him...*” Now obviously He had already called these men to follow Him, but now He was issuing a call for them to learn of Him.

Jesus had so many things to teach His disciples. He knew His time was short, and He would not be able to reach everyone by Himself. He knew that these men must be trained to carry on His work. They needed to

learn of Him.

Jesus told His disciples that He has “*compassion for these people.*” Could He also have been asking them if they had learned the same compassion? He told them, “*...they have already been with me for three days....*” Was He also asking them if they had learned a willingness to stay with Him? He told them, “*I do not want to send them away hungry.*” Could He be asking them if they had learned how to feed a starving soul?

The response of the disciples in vs. 33 sounds familiar. It seems essentially the same response they had in 14:15. But is it? Could they possibly have forgotten what Jesus did just a few months earlier? I don't think so. I mean, how could anyone who witnessed such a miracle forget it in just a few months?

So let's give the disciples a little credit here. They certainly remembered how Jesus fed the hungry people awhile back. So I see the disciples' response here as simply a statement of fact. “*Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?*” They were saying, “*We're not humanly able to provide for their needs, but you can Jesus.*” They hadn't forgotten Jesus' powerful miracle awhile back, and they weren't doubting Jesus either. They were simply saying that they knew the Lord could satisfy their hunger, but they could not.

They were learning of Jesus. They were learning a very basic element of faith in God...that with man, some things are impossible, but with God, all things are possible. They were learning to trust in His ways and not their own. They were learning to follow His word and ways, and not their own thinking.

Jesus is calling us to do the same. He issues an invitation to “*Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me*” (11:29 NIV). He says, “*Don't lean on your own understanding, learn My word. Don't follow what someone else says, follow Me. Learn to hear and obey My voice. Learn to imitate My ways. Learn to rely on My power and not your own.*” Jesus is calling His disciples everywhere, and He's calling us to learn of Him.

C. Nurturing: The ministry of Jesus also included nurturing. He told His disciples “*I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.*” Jesus was saying, “*If I let them go away hungry, they'll get sick. I must nurture them as well as heal them.*”

Many Christians think soul winning means leading a person in the sinner's prayer, and then moving on to the next one.

Jesus' example in the Scriptures is far from that. When Jesus lifted a person from the depths of despair, He didn't leave them teetering on the edge of a hole. He set them on a solid foundation. When Jesus called His disciples, He didn't just give them an instruction manual and send them away. No, Jesus' idea of bring a person

into salvation meant both getting them started and seeing them through. It was birthing and feeding and burping, and changing, and disciplining, and educating. It was parenting.

Nurturing is a basic parental responsibility. It's providing children with the best care they need in order to grow healthy.

The feeding of the 4,000 is a wonderful example of nurturing. He wasn't just concerned with healing bodies, He was more concerned with nurturing souls to become more Christlike.

We need to learn the lesson of nurturing if we want to be the church and the people God called us to be. If we don't, people will continue to collapse from spiritual starvation. They'll shrivel up on the vine and die. Finally, Next let's notice Jesus passion for people in His manner. The way He operated.

3. The Manner of Jesus (32-34)

A. He Operated with Compassion.

He told His disciples, *"I have compassion for these people."* Jesus was a people person. He put their needs over popularity. He's shown in our study of Matthew that His main irritation with religion was that it put more emphasis on keeping a set of laws than with meeting the needs of a person.

I wonder if that is His main irritation today – with churches today who say, *"You can't be a part of **our** church if you don't do this."* Listen, it's not **OUR** church. This is **HIS** church. And **HIS** church is made up of people, not plywood. **HIS** church is people, not popularity. This church and any church should never be exclusive. As far as I'm concerned, everyone is welcome. It doesn't matter to me if they are rich or poor, tithers or tightwads, highbrows or homeless, white, black, or green. If we are to follow the manner of Jesus, then our concern and our compassion should be for people. One more thing about the way Jesus operated is that:

B. He Obeyed with Commitment.

Jesus' purpose was to be an obedient Son and please His Father in Heaven. That is why He came to seek and to save the lost. That's why He went where the people were. That's why He called disciples out from among them. That's why He endured the cross, and died for the sins of the world. Above everything else, Jesus lived to please God. And so should we.

Conclusion: John 1:14, *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..."* In Christ, God became human, and lived among people. He chose to experience the same pain, trials, and heartaches that we do. He chose to know what hunger, fatigue, and rejection felt like because He's a people person. He has a passion for people that reaches all the way down from heaven to the outcast, to the poor, to the rejected.

He has called His church to have that same passion for people - to bear one another's burdens, to help heal each other's heartaches, and to bond together in love. He's calling us to have empathy, not just sympathy, and to keep the doors open instead of closing them. I pray that we'll always have a passion for people.