

THE MESSIAH'S POWER TO FEED FIVE THOUSAND: THE ESSENTIALS FOR MINISTRY MATHEW 14:15–21

Introduction

What Jesus was doing in this event is twofold. (1) He was demonstrating or 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). 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 need and even fewer experience compassion for them (Mat 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.

- I. Essential 1: seeing people and having compassion (v. 15).
- II. Essential 2: accepting one's duty to minister (vv. 16-17).
- III. Essential 3: trusting Christ to use one's resources (vv. 18-21).

MATHEW 14:15–21 FEEDING OF CROWDS

The feeding of the five thousand has been said to picture several significant events in the Christian's life.

- 1. It pictures how Christ miraculously multiplies the believer's human resources.
- 2. It pictures the Lord's Supper. The early church saw the miracle as a picture of the blessing that comes to the believer when he partakes of Christ, the bread of life. There is the picture of Christ “looking up to heaven,” blessing, breaking,

and passing the loaves out to the people through the disciples who were acting as the elders and deacons of the church.

3. It pictures the great marriage feast or banquet of the Lamb yet to take place in the future kingdom of God (Mat 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24). □

I. *Mathew 14:15 Compassion*

The first essential for ministry is seeing people and having compassion. There is a sharp contrast between the compassion of Jesus and the disciples.

1. Jesus' compassion was very strong. 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. (See *Compassion*, Mat 9:36 for the meaning of *Compassion*.)

Note two things about Jesus and the crowds.

- a. Jesus saw the crowds. He was very observant, always looking for people in order to help them. He had "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mat 20:28).
 - b. Jesus 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.
2. The compassion of the disciples was very weak. They had a concern for the people, but a 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.

Thought 1. We often feel that we need what resources we have in order to take care of our needs. Therefore, we ignore the crying needs of those who are around us and those who are scattered all over the world.

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

Gal 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

MATHEW 09:36 COMPASSION (SPLANCHNISTHEIS)

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. **Mathew 09:36***

Compassion means to be moved inwardly; to yearn with tender mercy, affection, pity and empathy. It is the very seat of a man's affections. It is the deepest movement of emotions possible, being touched with the deepest feelings possible. It is being moved within the deepest part of a person's being.

Rom 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

Heb 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Psa 78:39 *He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.*

Psa 103:13 *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*

Psa 103:17 *But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children..*

Lam 3:22 *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*

Isa 63:9 *In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them: he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. □*

II. **Mathew 14:16–17** *Accepting One's Duty to Minister*

The second essential for ministry is accepting one's duty to minister.

1. The charge of Christ is, "Give"—give what resources you have – it is your duty to give.

Thought 1. 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.

2. 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 life *lived on the human plane*. They had always looked only 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.

Mat 16:24-25 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."*

Luke 12:33 *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."*

Thought 1. 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 down deep within that underlies all his problems, a problem that causes the physical needs of his experience. His physical needs are only the symptoms or results of the underlying cause. The underlying cause is sin, that is, selfishness, greed, envy, 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 earth has the potential *to meet some needs* of every man, but few men have the free spirit to act unselfishly.
- => The earth itself does not have the means to give abundant life (security, self-esteem, godly esteem, love, joy, peace, etc.). (See John 10:10.)
- => The earth itself does not have the means to give eternal life (Eph 2:4-7).

III. **Mathew 14:18–21** *Trusting Christ in One's Ministry*

The third essential for ministry is trusting Christ to use one's resources (See *Lessons*, Mat 14:18-21).

1. 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.

Thought 1. No matter how little we may have, it is needed, and we are held responsible for bringing it to Christ.

Thought 2. Christ wants disciples who will give what resources they have. It is the resources of His disciples, not angels, that God uses to show *His love and His truth* to others. Thus, for the cause of Christ and for the sake of the world, we must bring our

resources to Christ, trusting Him to effectively use them in meeting the needs of so desperate a world.

Luke 6:38 *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

1 Cor 16:2 *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Deut 16:17 *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.*

Prov 3:9 *Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops.*

2. Jesus' example of how our resources are to be used is threefold. (1) Christ took the resources given Him, (2) gave thanks, and (3) used the resources. He will always, without fail, do the same with whatever we give if we will just give *all that we have*.

Thought 1. In these three acts, Christ 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.

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Thought 2. Christ "gave the loaves back to His disciples" – He filled and filled their hands continually, unceasingly.

3. The disciples' part in the ministry of the Lord was also threefold.
 - a. They had to share.
 - b. 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.
 - c. They had to observe the power of Christ themselves, ever learning and strengthening their own faith so that they could serve ever more forcibly in the future.

Thought 1. Christ did not heap up the bread all at once. The provision grew as it was distributed. It was *in the breaking, in the use* of the resource that it met the need of men. We must give what we have to Christ and then trust Him to multiply it enough to meet the need.

Very simply, that is our part in meeting the needs of the world. We take what we have and do what we can, trusting Christ to multiply it enough to meet the need.

Thought 2. When we share what Christ gives, He fills everyone. There is enough, more than enough, and there is satisfaction. The needs of people are met. But it all depends upon one thing: our sharing. We must share what God gives.

Thought 3. Whatever we share, God multiplies. God can take a little and make it go a long way.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (Eph 3:20)

Thought 4. When plenty comes, man too often...

- overuses it on himself • hoards what self does not need
- wastes the leftovers • forgets the past
- ignores the real Giver • shuts his eyes to others

Luke 12:19-20 *“And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ”*

1 Tim 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. ■*

MATHEW 14:18–21 LESSONS

Note five things.

1. The disciples exercised great faith in Christ. They brought their resources to Christ despite the fact that the resources were few in number and small in size.
2. Christ used *all* the resources – all that was available.
3. Christ worked through the disciples, the individuals who brought what they had. The persons who gave what they had become the agents of Christ.
4. Christ multiplied what was given to Him manyfold.
5. The disciples and the people witnessed a miracle from God: the need was met. □