

Matthew 14.13-36

God and Man – Creator and Cheerleader

Seen Herod invited HOMIES to SCANDALOUS BANQUET in his PALACE

KING of Kings offers FEAST to 1000's of Party Crashers on Galilean Hillside

Herod's pals ATE in OPEN REBELLION against TRUE and LIVING GOD

Jesus offers BREAD of Heaven so His FOLLOWERS can be RIGHT with God

Matthew – 3 pictures of JESUS: God and Man – Creator and Cheerleader

1. Man of Sorrows

a. Real Loss

v. 13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

Mystery of INCARNATION – Jesus is FULLY God and MAN in One Person

Divine Mathematics – 100% God + 100% Man = One Lord Jesus Christ

...many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that *Jesus Christ has come in the flesh* is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist
1 John 4.1-3

JOHN: Teachers claimed Jesus NOT REAL Man – Spirit, Phantom, Demi-Urge

Gospels > Walked, Sat, Talked, Ate, Slept, Wept, Prayed, and even DIED

God...sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh Romans 8.3

CLOSEST Identification of Jesus with SIN – but Remaining without SIN

Jesus must be REAL MAN to REALLY Save Mankind

One Result being SINLESS Man who is also FULLY GOD > Misunderstanding

His VIRGIN Mother could NOT Understand how she could be WITH CHILD

PARENTS could not Understand why 12 yr old Son stayed BACK in Jer.Temple

BROTHERS did NOT Believe in Him / FAMILY that He was INSANE
 DISCIPLES could NOT Understand His SIMPLE PARABLES

One Guy who SHOULD have Understood Jesus BETTER – John the Baptist
 COUSINS – 6 months apart in Age – Boyhood Friends? – Understood Messiah
 John does have QUESTIONS while LANGUISHED in Herod’s Dungeon
 But John’s JOY was EXALTATION of his Cousin & KING Jesus

John: “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”
 John 3.27-30

Pain of SEPARATION part of LIFE & MINISTRY – Leaving Friends & church
 Regularly HEAR from People who’ve Left – Many say they MISS us at ZGC!

Leaving in just OVER a Week – See my BEST FRIEND, Ministry Partner
 Classmates in College, Seminary, Ordained to Ministry SAME WEEKEND
 Introduced me to DAYNA – Recently discovered INOPERABLE CANCER
 Urge you to LISTEN to his Sermon / Cancer Announcement from Romans 8
<http://www.sermoncloud.com/first-baptist-church-of-el-segundo/firmly-built-upon-the-solid-rock/>

Jesus FEELS Pain of John’s DEATH – Points to HIS OWN Year Later!

Jesus Fully QUALIFIED to be our High PRIEST – Experienced our Weaknesses
 He thought of GETHSEMANE – 39 Lashes with a STUDDERED Ripping WHIP
 CROWN of THORNS forced on HEAD / SPIKES thru His HANDS & FEET
 DRINKING Cup of Staggering WRATH of Almighty God down to DREGS
 Just YEAR Away – GRIM Appointment – Fixed on God’s Calendar - WAITED

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,
 Hebrews 5.7-9

b. Real Love

vs. 13,14 But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

EXPLAINED how SIMILAR the God-Man Jesus is to US in our STRUGGLES
 This Verse CLEAR how very DIFFERENT KING Jesus is from US who Follow
 Steps of BOAT – SEA of PEOPLE CRASH Against Him...

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”
 Exodus 34.6

I don't want MY PITY PARTY Interrupted by Pushy, Loud, Hungry CROWDS
 Want SPACE to Like My WOUNDS – Not More People bringing More Wounds
 But Jesus did NOT put the COME BACK LATER Sign on His Office DOOR

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 Hebrews 4.14-16

2. God our Savior

a. Human Impossibilities

1) Famine

v. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

UNDERSTANDABLE Concern – Like Nations push Boat People OUT to SEA
If THESE HUNGRY People land HERE – Then their Problem is OUR Problem!

Human Problem – MY Problem is FUNDAMENTAL SELFISHNESS

Dare NOT SHARE with Others because I MIGHT Lose Out

Seen God SUPPLY My Every Need for Almost 60 yrs – Still do not SHARE

Over-riding CONCERN is LOOK OUT for NUMBER # 1 – that would be ME!

2) Flood

FREE LUNCH GREAT SUCCESS! TOO Great...So Great WANTED More

Matthew TERSELY tells Story > FIRM Hand Jesus FORCES them Cross LAKE

v. 22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

Perhaps EAGER to FLEE Jurisdiction of HEAD-CHOPPING HEROD

So MASTER from HEAVEN launches them on BOATRIDE from HELL

vs. 24-26 ...the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified....

Serious TROUBLE – Boat might SINK – Ghost came from World of DEAD?

Many of their SEAFARING Friends Drowned – Coming to Escort them DOWN?

Another Human Problem – Walk by SIGHT – Guided by Experience

He GAVE them a WORD to Hang on to

v. 22 get into the boat and *go before him to the other side...*

No matter how DARK our Circumstances – CLING to ROCK of God's Promises

3) Faith - BIGGEST Problem Not Food or Flood but Shortage of FAITH

Even when Jesus was in the KITCHEN thought Banquet would FAIL

v. 17 They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.”

After watching Lord of Creation walk about the SEAS, still Doubted...

v. 31 “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Even ONE of Greatest PREACHERS of Gospel confesses Struggle of FAITH

“Truly, he who writes this comment has often felt as if he had neither loaf nor fish; and yet for some forty years and more he has been a full-handed waiter at the King’s great banquet.”
Charles H. Spurgeon

But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
Matthew 19.26

b. Divine Possibilities

1) Calm

vs. 16-21 But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Here is ONE Greater than MOSES – Feeds the NEW ISRAEL in this Wilderness

Prophet ELIJAH been SENT – Great and Awesome Day of LORD NOW Come!

Jesus’ ministry was an integrated whole, in which physical and spiritual needs were met together.
R.T. France

STORM Struck FEAR in hearts of FISHERMAN – No Worries for Carpenter

v. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.

DEEP into NIGHT – btwn 3 and 6 AM – So EXHAUSTED and ANXIOUS
 Here comes Jesus – Strolling thru SQUALL like it’s a SUNNY Day in the PARK
 Jesus NATURE Miracles NOT CIRCUS STUNTS – Practical Response to Need

CLEARLY the Wilderness Supper & Wind Surfing – Man Jesus is MORE
 Jewish Disciples knew their SCRIPTURES – Only God commands the SEA
 Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea,
 the LORD on high is mighty! Psalm 93.4

TRUE Faith Confesses OUR POVERTY but Celebrates HIS POWER

2) Challenge

v. 16 But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

v. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

vs. 28,29 And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.”

...by Peter’s example believers are taught to beware of over-much rashness...
John Calvin

CALVIN Scolds Peter for getting OUT of the Boat and TESTING Jesus
 FEW times I have to with my FAVORITE GENEVA PROFESSOR

JESUS invited PETER to Get OUT of the BOAT – to Come to Him

Jesus was CHEERLEADER Calling Peter to WINDSURF with Him!

Tells PETER – “Hey Water is FINE!” Come on IN and JOIN Me!

vs. 30,31 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

When I thought, “My foot slips,” your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.

Psalm 94.18

Peter – like us here at ZGC – was Gathering, Growing, Going

FAITH in ACTION – WALKING his TALK – TALKING his WALK

...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith

Hebrews 12.1,2

Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking.

Charles Spurgeon

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4.11-13

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1.5-8

To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle; but to enable a poor weak disciple to the same, was a mightier miracle still.

J.C. Ryle

3) Consecration

v. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

CRITICS of Christianity are HAPPY to POINT Out – FAKE Miracle Workers
 Corrupt People HIRE people to FAKE Illnesses – PRETEND they get Healed!
 NEVER See PHONY Televangelist gather Thousands in Auditorium: Feed Them
 5 Little Pita Loaves and 2 Sardines – Taken Up front and Passed Around
 Thru every Row, to every Seat, every Person – EATS to their FULL Satisfaction
 12 Baskets passed thru Seats and FILLED with the DA'BAO
 NO Fake does that because You Can't Fake It

David Copperfield could make Statue of Liberty DISAPPEAR – So it Seemed
 No TV Spectacular where Modern Magic Man feeds THOUSANDS of Eaters!

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham,
 Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven Matthew 8.11

12 BASKETS Remained – SYMBOL of 12 Apostles of NEW ISRAEL

vs. 32,33 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the
 boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

They don't YET Know all Christological Implications of WHAT they Confess
 But SAYING Right Thing – Will Grow Deeper in Understanding & Experience
 ONE who Feeds Multitudes is ONE who WALKS on the WATER

v. 27 “It is I AM” – Living God STROLLS over His SEAS

O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.
Psalm 89.8,9

Jesus decided on this particular day to walk on water...because he wanted to make something clear before he would journey to Jerusalem to be the Passover sacrifice for our sins...He was “Immanuel” on that cross, God incarnate was the one who took on in his flesh all of our iniquities. Douglas Sean O’Donnell

NEW Believer? Not yet Believer? – Jesus is SON of God – Life of Learning
By FAITH – End our SELFISHNESS – Live by FAITH, NOT by SIGHT

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; Isaiah 43.1,2

3. Kingdom Seen

vs. 34-36 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Variations

Pond has WARM and COLD Spots in this World

DISCOURAGING to Labor where People do NOT Want to HEAR

Jesus soon to MEET Rejection – Execution in Jerusalem

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Matthew 17.2

Kingdom of Heaven is for rich and poor, religious and non-religious, Jew and Gentile, male and female, adult and child.

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 3.2,3

Vision

Victory

Matthew 14.¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.¹⁵ Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."¹⁷ They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me."¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle; but to enable a poor weak disciple to the same, was a mightier miracle still. J.C. Ryle

When I thought, "My foot slips," your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. Psalm 94.18

³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty!
Psalm 93.4

³⁴ And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. ³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick ³⁶ and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Notice BROAD Brush Strokes Matthew is PAINTING with in these Final Vss.

ALL that Region, ALL who were SICK, As MANY as Touched His garment
FORESHADOWING – the REALIZED Kingdom – ALL, MANY, FULLNESS
LIKE the Nano-Seconds of TRANSFORMATION Glory of Jesus

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Matthew 17.2

[Matthew 14–16](#) “The Withdrawal of the King.”

Warning to Cities of Galilee in ch [11](#), Denouncing Failure to Repent & Believe

3 things: (1) Jesus’ private teaching of the twelve disciples,
(2) repeated failures on the disciples’ part to understand or respond to Jesus’ teaching, and
(3) glimmerings of true faith and growth.

Climax ch [16](#) - Peter’s great Christological confession (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” v. [16](#))

Instead of rejecting Crowds, Jesus continues to Teach & Heal & Feed seekers

Jesus withdrew Remote Area on NE corner of Sea of Galilee, near Bethsaida
He wanted to be alone with his disciples - People saw where he was heading, many walked around the lake - Waiting for him when he & disciples Landed

“he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (v. [14](#)

). In this way Matthew sets the stage for the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand that follows.

The feeding of this great crowd is the only miracle found in each of the four Gospels (see [Mark 6:30–44](#); [Luke 9:10–17](#); [John 6:1–15](#)), so it must have made a tremendous impact on those who were present. However, each Gospel contains different emphases. Mark is the closest to Matthew. Luke says that Jesus used the occasion to teach the people about the kingdom of God ([Luke 9:11](#)), which he had commissioned the disciples to do themselves in the passage immediately before this. John’s version is the most independent and detailed. He says that the miracle was performed before the Jewish Passover ([John 6:4](#)), and he follows his account with Jesus’ discourse on the bread of life (vv. [25–59](#)). John’s points are obvious! Jesus is the new Moses who feeds his people with spiritual food, and if they eat it, they will live forever. John’s account ends with Peter’s double testimony: “You have the words of eternal life” and “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (vv. [68–69](#)).

Two Banquets

But we are studying Matthew, not John or one of the other Gospels, and we want to learn what Matthew is teaching through this incident. The first lesson is stated clearly: Jesus cares about people, especially those who are poor or suffering.

Verse [14](#) says, “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”

There is probably more to it than this, however, important as the mere fact of Jesus’ compassion is. We should remember that Matthew makes some of his best points by the way he links incidents together, and if he is doing that here, we can hardly overlook the contrast between the party King Herod threw on his birthday for his friends and the party Jesus throws in the wilderness for the crowds. The first party is given by a king in his palace, the second by a Galilean preacher in the desert. The first was for the important people of this world, the second for the masses. The first was for Herod; it was his birthday. The second was centered on the crowds. The first was a drunken orgy, the second a pleasant country meal. The first was immoral; the high point was Salome’s provocative dance. The second followed holy, edifying teaching by the Lord. The first ended with the murder of John the Baptist, the second by the feeding of those who had no food. The first was for this world only; the second anticipated the heavenly marriage supper to which people from every tribe and nation are invited and to which the poor of many nations will come.

What explains this contrast? The answer is this: Herod cared for no one but himself—his actions were determined by his lust for power and a desire to save face before his friends—while Jesus cared for other people. Jesus took time to heal, teach, and feed them, even though his first desire was to be alone with his disciples and teach them. Jesus’ compassion for the masses is a reiterated theme in Matthew (see [9:36](#); [15:32](#); [18:27, 33](#); [20:34](#)).

The first clear lesson of this story, therefore, is that Jesus cares for you, even though most of the other people in the world, especially the great and powerful people, do not. Most people who have power, prestige, or money do not care about others at all, even though they may pretend to, unless they have been saved and changed by Jesus himself. Your coworkers probably do not care a great deal about you. Even your friends are more interested in themselves and their problems than about you and your problems. So why do you spend so much time worrying about what others think and so little time bringing your cares to Jesus? Joseph Scriven’s poem of 1855 asks a good question and provides the correct answer:

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 Cumbered with a load of care?
 Precious Savior, still our refuge—
 Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 In his arms he’ll take and shield thee;
 Thou wilt find a solace there.

When we bring our problems to Jesus, we bring them to one who not only cares about us and is compassionate but who understands us and is able to help us in our need. Peter wrote, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” ([1 Peter 5:7](#)).

We Can Do Nothing

The second point of the story is clear in each of the Gospels, though it is introduced in different ways. It is this: In spiritual matters we can do nothing apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus said it himself in [John 15:5](#): “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” In one way or another each of the Gospels indicates that Jesus pressed this point on the disciples. In John, Jesus initiates the lesson by asking Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ([John 6:5](#)). The next words explain, “He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do” (v. [6](#)). The story continues by showing how Philip assessed the situation from a human perspective, replying, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread

for each one to have a bite” (v. [7](#)). It is after this that Andrew brings forward the boy with the “five small barley loaves and two small fish” (v. [9](#)), which Jesus then uses for the miracle of the feeding. The emphasis is on the poor quality of the bread, only barley bread, and the smallness both of the loaves and fish. Mark repeats the assessment that it would take “eight months of a man’s wages” to buy food for so many people ([Mark 6:37](#)), and in Luke the disciples say, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd” ([Luke 9:13](#)). The first three Gospels also record the disciples’ opinion that it would be best to send the people away so they could go into the surrounding towns and villages and buy food for themselves ([Matt. 14:15](#); [Mark 6:35–36](#); [Luke 9:12](#)).

What seems to have stuck out most clearly in the minds of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is that Jesus told the disciples to do something to improve the situation. He said, “*You* give them something to eat” ([Matt. 14:16](#); [Mark 6:37](#); [Luke 9:13](#)). The emphasis does not come across as forcefully in the English translation as it does in Greek. In Greek there is the added and usually unnecessary pronoun *you*. The emphasis seems to have been, “You, you do it; why do you come to me?” Since Jesus knew the nature of the problem and was already aware of what he was going to do, the only reason he said what he did was to impress on the disciples that they could do nothing by themselves.

What a lesson for us to learn! We tend to think that we can do at least something and that at worst all we really need is some specialized help from Jesus. We need to remember what Martin Luther said when he was reflecting on our “nothing.” He said that our nothing really is nothing and not “a little something.”

Yet we do have what God has first given to us, and although we can do nothing of spiritual value with it by ourselves, we will find that it is useful and sufficient if we place it in Jesus’ hands. That is what happened here, of course. The disciples could do nothing, but they had five small loaves and two fish, and when they gave them to Jesus, they found that they were all that was necessary.

What did Moses have when God sent him to Pharaoh with the demand, “Let my people go”? All he had was a staff in his hand. But although Moses could do nothing with the staff, when he gave it to God, God used it to perform the miracles that led to the emancipation of the people.

What did David have when he went up against Goliath? A sling and a few small stones. But they were enough when God guided David’s missile.

What can you do for Jesus? You know the answer to that as well as I do: nothing at all. But God has given you something that can be used effectively if you place it in Jesus’ hands.

When I was preparing this lesson, I came across a wonderful quotation from, relating the matter of the loaves and fish to his preaching. Spurgeon wrote,

It is like that for anyone who recognizes his or her own spiritual impotence and places all he or she has been given in Christ's hands.

The Sufficiency of Jesus Christ

All I have said about our impotence leads directly to the next lesson, for the story is meant to direct us to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. That is what [John 15:5](#) says, after all. The last part stresses our inability to do anything, but it does this so we will draw on Jesus' resources: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." Only after that does it say, "apart from me you can do nothing."

We *can* bear fruit, indeed, "much fruit" (v. [5](#)) and even "fruit that will last" (v. [16](#)). But this will be the case only if Jesus is working through us since he alone is able to meet anyone's spiritual need.

In this story Jesus meets the needs of the crowds abundantly. He took the five loaves of bread and two fish, directed the people to sit down, and then, looking to heaven and thanking God for the food, broke the food and distributed it to the people. The story concludes by saying, "They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children" (vv. [20–21](#)).

That is worth some serious reflection. In the first place, having enough food was a serious matter in the ancient world, because the rains would often fail, crops would wither, and people would starve. In our day, when we want something to eat, all we have to do is go to the store and buy it. In biblical times, however, if a person had enough food to eat, it was a gift from God and something for which to be particularly thankful. People knew that God alone provided food. Isaiah told the people,

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" Exodus 34.6

"If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land" ([Isa. 1:19](#)).

"The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him" ([Ps. 22:26](#)).

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” ([John 6:35](#))

we can never exhaust God. I admit that the needs of other people drain us. Some are so needy that the church staff sometimes refer to them as bottomless pits. But there is no pit so deep or hole so black that Jesus cannot fill it or bring light to it. He will satisfy you, if you go to him.

Maybe you are like the prodigal in a far country. You thought life was to be enjoyed without the presence of your heavenly Father. So you squandered the inheritance he gave you, and you are at the point when your stomach and heart are empty and you are filling yourself with the slop that is fed to pigs. You are starving, miserable, abandoned, and alone. You need to do what the prodigal did. He came to his senses, saying, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men” ([Luke 15:17–19](#)). When he confessed his sin and returned to his father, he found his father waiting for him. The father received him with open arms and lavished the riches of his household on him.

Then they had a party. The father said, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (vv. [22–24](#)). I promise that if you go back to Jesus, you will never find that he is begrudging to you or insufficient for your need.

God Works Through People

The fourth lesson of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is that God works through people. That is, although Jesus alone is sufficient for all human need, he nevertheless chooses to work through us as channels by which he meets that need. In this case, he worked through the disciples, who were given the broken loaves and fish, distributed them to the people, and gathered up the pieces left over.

Years ago I took part in a management seminar conducted by a company called ServiceMaster Industries. I found much of it helpful, but one thing especially I’ve remembered. It was a definition of management: “Management is getting the right things done through other people.” I have tried to keep that definition in mind and profit from it over the years, but I have also often thought of it in

connection with the work of Jesus, especially in this story, though it applies to other examples of Jesus' work too.

In this story Jesus demonstrated his managerial skill by working through the disciples in the distribution of the food. He could have called down manna from heaven, thereby imitating Moses; the fact that the miracle took place at the time of the Jewish Passover ([John 6:4](#)), which was meant to recall the Exodus and the years of wilderness wandering, would have made manna appropriate. Again, Jesus might have caused a loaf of bread and a fish to appear in each man or woman's pocket. There were probably other things he could have done. But Jesus did not proceed in any of these ways. Instead he worked through other people: through all the disciples, according to Matthew's account; especially through Philip, Andrew, and the boy with the five small loaves and two fish, according to John's Gospel.

In this respect, the distribution of the food by the disciples to the five thousand people of the story becomes an illustration of what Jesus was doing when he sent them to preach among the cities of Galilee, as recorded in chapter [10](#), or what he will do at the end of the Gospel when he declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" ([Matt. 28:18–20](#)). We are to be the distributors of that blessing.

Here is a story that will tie this together. On one occasion Jesus described a man who was visited at midnight by a friend but who had no food to serve him. So he went to a neighbor, who was already in bed, and called out to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him" ([Luke 11:5–6](#)). The host must not have had any food, or he would not have bothered his neighbor in the middle of the night. But he had nothing; he knew it, and he knew his neighbor could help. So he went to his neighbor to get what he needed.

We are in exactly that position. You and I have nothing, but we have a friend in heaven who is able to supply what our friends need. We go to God with empty hands and cry out, claiming that double friendship: "Friend, a friend has come." The wonderful thing we discover is that God then supplies our friend's need as he has supplied our own.

In the last study I said that [Matthew 14–16](#) is characterized by three important themes: (1) Jesus' private teaching of the twelve disciples, (2) repeated failures on the disciples' part to understand or respond to Jesus' teaching, and (3) some small glimmerings of true faith and growth. We saw Jesus teaching the disciples

in the account of the feeding of the five thousand. When he told the disciples to feed the people, he was obviously impressing on them that they could do nothing on their own. When he then fed the masses from five small loaves of bread and two fish, he was imparting a lesson about his own utter sufficiency. When Jesus used the disciples to distribute the food to the people, he was teaching them about their role as messengers. They had nothing to offer, but they would become bearers of the bread of life to those who were starving spiritually.

We see the next step in Jesus' teaching when he walks on the Sea of Galilee and allows Peter to walk on the water too. This is a story about the disciples' slow growth in faith. Peter began in faith, but his faith wavered, and he began to sink. The story teaches that we will only grow strong in faith when we keep our eyes on Jesus, the source of our faith, and do not turn aside to fret over threatening circumstances.

The story of Peter walking on the water is unique to Matthew. Mark and John tell about Jesus walking on the water, but their stories do not include the incident with Peter.

A Volatile Moment

The story does not begin with Jesus walking on the water, however. It begins with Jesus sending the disciples away in a boat while he dismisses the crowds and goes up a mountain by himself to pray. Taken together, the Gospels give three reasons why Jesus stayed behind and dismissed his disciples: (1) He wanted to be alone to pray ([Matt. 14:23](#); [Mark 6:46](#)), (2) he wanted to escape the crowds and get some rest ([Mark 6:31–32](#)), and (3) he wanted to defuse the popular movement that would have made him a king by force ([John 6:15](#)).

These fit together nicely and are obviously all part of one picture. If the people were beginning to talk about making Jesus a king, which is what John specifically reports, it was likely that the disciples would have been swayed by the grassroots movement. Jesus sent them off to isolate them from these popular sentiments and at the same time dismissed the crowds to keep this demand from growing.

It was a critical moment in his ministry, and Jesus must also have felt a need for serious prayer. The people were offering a smaller version of what the devil had offered in the wilderness: “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” ([Matt. 4:8](#)). All Jesus had to do was bow to popular opinion, as earlier he had been asked to worship Satan. In the first case Jesus had spent forty days in prayer before the devil came to him. Here he needed to spend at least a few hours. Howard Vos wrote of this critical moment in Christ's ministry, “His need for prayer was evident in view of the temptation to swerve from a course of action

that would make him the Sin-Bearer of the world and the anticipation of defection of many of his followers.”

Peter’s Remarkable Faith

Jesus sent the disciples away and dismissed the crowds before it got dark, perhaps by 7:00 or 8:00 at night, and Jesus prayed from that hour until he came to the disciples during the fourth watch of the night (v. [25](#)). Early in their history, the Jews had divided the night into three watches. At this point, however, they were following the Roman system, which included four watches and assigned to the fourth the hours between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M. This suggests that Jesus had been praying for six or seven hours and that the disciples had been rowing for the same length of time. Crossing the lake would normally not have taken that long, but a storm had come up suddenly, and the boat was being buffeted by waves and wind.

Jesus must have seen all this from the mountain. He did not need some supernatural insight to know what was happening. But Jesus did exercise his divine power when he went to them walking on the waves. The disciples were terrified when they saw him. They thought they were seeing a ghost, but that was probably not their only reason for being afraid. Most likely they took the apparition for an omen warning them that they were doomed men and were going to drown.

When Jesus came walking on the water, he was filling a role that in the Old Testament was reserved for God alone. An example is [Job 9:8](#), which says, “[God] alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.” It may be too much to suggest that a verse such as this was on Matthew’s mind as he recorded this story, even less that he expected his readers to make this connection. But there may be something to be said for this connection. For one thing, in Mark’s parallel account he says that Jesus seemed to be about “to pass by them,” using a verb that occurs in [Job 9:11](#). Again, when Jesus calms the disciples’ fear, using the words “It is I” (v. [27](#)), what he utters is actually the personal name of God, Jehovah, which means “I am.” “I am” is the literal rendering of Matthew’s quotation. The thought that Jesus was demonstrating his deity by walking on the water may have been a part of the oral tradition that both Matthew and Mark knew and were using.

As soon as the disciples understood that the figure they saw walking on the water was Jesus, Peter asked to come to him, walking on the water himself. “Lord, if it is you,” he cried, “tell me to come to you on the water” (v. [28](#)).

Charles H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, believed that Peter was out of line to make this request. “What did Peter want with walking on the waters?” Spurgeon queried. Spurgeon suggested that his name, Peter, which means “rock,”

might have warned him that “like a stone he would go to the bottom. ... Surely, he wist not what he said.” Spurgeon reasoned that when Jesus told Peter to walk toward him, knowing he would sink, it was to teach him a practical lesson. He was not to do anything as foolish as this in the future.

Such an interpretation is probably a bit too harsh, since Jesus’ rebuke in verse [31](#) is not for Peter’s impetuous faith but for his vacillating faith once he had started out. Most people see Peter’s request as brave and faithful, and they are probably right to understand the story that way. Whatever the case, we *are* sometimes too presumptuous. We *do* ask to do what we are not called to do and often flounder in our attempts.

The Nature of True Faith

What is most important in this story is what it teaches about the nature of true faith, which is certainly why Matthew included it. These chapters record the disciples’ first feeble attempts to understand and trust Jesus.

What is faith? Faith is not merely knowing that Jesus is the Son of God and believing that he can save us from sin but actually committing ourselves to him. I have often highlighted the three essential elements of faith by using the Latin words for them: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. *Notitia* refers to faith’s content. It concerns understanding the doctrines of the gospel, particularly who Jesus claimed to be and what he accomplished on the cross. *Assensus* means agreement, assenting to the doctrines that are taught. It is like saying, “I understand what the Bible teaches about Jesus, and I believe it. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that his death was a true atoning death for human sin.” *Notitia* and *assensus* are two necessary parts of faith, but they are not yet saving faith in the full biblical sense. True faith also involves *fiducia*, which is an actual trust in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior. It means that a person actually commits himself or herself to Jesus. To use the image of the story, it means stepping out toward him in faith.

Peter’s action demonstrates this well. He believed that the figure he saw on the water was Jesus and that Jesus had power to call him and hold him up as he walked toward him. It is as if Peter had said, using the words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” ([Phil. 4:13](#)). And he could! As long as Jesus told him to come and as long as he kept his eyes on the Savior! It was only when he turned his eyes away from Jesus that he began to sink.

Peter’s Faltering Faith

When Peter looked around and became aware of the fierce wind and saw the rolling waves, he became afraid and started to sink. His faith faltered at this point. But it is important to recognize that Peter’s faith did not fail utterly. He

had lost faith in Jesus' ability to keep him above the water, but he still trusted Jesus at some level since he immediately called out to him for help. "Lord, save me," he said (v. [30](#)).

I said a moment ago that this incident is a good illustration of the trusting nature of true faith, but it is also a good illustration of true but faltering faith, which is what the faith of most of us is like. If Peter had no true faith at all, his act of getting out of the boat would have been mere foolishness or bravado, and when he began to sink, he would have started to flail his arms about, desperately trying to get back into the boat. He would not have cried out to Jesus. The fact that he cried out is proof that he really did trust Jesus. On the other hand, his faith was weakened by the waves, just as our faith is often undermined by difficult circumstances or by tragedies in life. When Jesus rebuked him, it was not for having no faith at all but for having little faith. "You of little faith," Jesus said, "why did you doubt?" (v. [31](#)).

A moment ago I disagreed with Spurgeon, believing that Peter's attempt to walk to Jesus was a bold but proper act. Spurgeon thought Peter was wrong to do it. Yet said something else with which I agree entirely. He said that

"Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking."
Spurgeon

It was when Peter was in trouble that he was driven to Jesus and was closest to him.

It is exactly the same with us, and it is why Jesus permits storms to come into our lives too. As long as life is going along smoothly, we may be genuinely trusting Jesus for our salvation as true Christians, but our faith can be somewhat distant, abstract, or even peripheral. We trust Jesus, true enough, but if the truth be told, we also trust ourselves and our abilities. We may even trust ourselves more than we trust Jesus. Let trouble come, and suddenly we are confronted with our own lack of ability and weakness, and we are driven to Jesus simply because we have nowhere else to turn. It is in times such as these that faith in Jesus grows strong. The Jews were not seafaring people, so there are not many stories in the Bible about peril on the sea. But I can think of one! It is the story of Jonah, who tried to run away from the Lord by taking a ship from Joppa to Tarshish on the far side of the Mediterranean. He was not acting in faith as Peter was. He was defiantly disobedient. But when God sent the storm that threatened to sink the ship in which he was sailing and the sailors finally threw him overboard to drown, which he had told them to do, Jonah found himself inside the belly of a great fish and turned to God again in prayer and found salvation. Jonah wrote:

In my distress I called to the LORD,
 and he answered me.
 From the depths of the grave I called for help,
 and you listened to my cry.
 You hurled me into the deep,
 into the very heart of the seas,
 and the currents swirled about me;
 all your waves and breakers
 swept over me. ...
 When my life was ebbing away,
 I remembered you, LORD,
 and my prayer rose to you,
 to your holy temple.

[Jonah 2:2–3, 7](#)

God heard Jonah from inside the great fish and saved him, just as Jesus saved Peter when he was sinking in the waves. It often takes such things to turn us from disobedience to obedience and change our failing faith into robust faith in the Savior.

Asaph, one of the great psalm writers, was almost thrown off balance by the apparent easy life of the wicked. He knew God had been good to Israel. “But as for me,” he explains in [Psalm 73](#),
 “my feet had almost slipped;
 I had nearly lost my foothold.
 For I envied the arrogant
 when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
 They have no struggles;
 their bodies are healthy and strong.
 They are free from the burdens common to man;
 they are not plagued by human ills.”

verses [2–5](#)

He goes on like that for several stanzas until he explains how his faltering faith was at last restored. It was when he “entered the sanctuary of God.” Then he “understood their final destiny” (v. [17](#)). The rest of the psalm says that God held him by his right hand, just as Jesus must have reached out to save Peter. The psalmist ends by claiming that from that time on he made the sovereign God his refuge (v. [28](#)).

If you have been sinking in life because of troubles or because you doubt the wisdom and power of God, stop looking at the waves and look to Jesus. He is the Lord of all circumstances, and he will be there to see you through them.

The Disciples' Growing Faith

After Jesus rescued Peter, the two of them climbed into the boat and the wind died down. That was impressive in itself. A similar effect had caused the disciples to react with awe on an earlier occasion ([Matt. 8:23–27](#)). But this is not the climax of the story in [Matthew 14](#). The climax here is not the stilling of the waves or even Jesus' earlier words to Peter: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" The climax is the disciples' confession of faith in Jesus and their worship of Jesus in verse [33](#): "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' "

This is the first time Jesus is called the Son of God by the disciples, and the words build on what they had said earlier. In chapter [8](#) they had asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him" (v. [27](#)). Here they say, "Truly you are the Son of God." They still have a long way to go. If Peter's confession in chapter [16](#) is the all-important breakthrough in the disciples' spiritual understanding, what they say here could not have had its full spiritual significance. Still, it was a step on the way. They were growing in their faith and understanding.

And let's not forget their worship. This is also the first time the disciples are said to have worshiped Jesus. In chapter [2](#) the Magi from the East worshiped Jesus (v. [11](#)). Later a leper is said to have worshiped Jesus, though the New International Version translates the word merely as "knelt before him" ([Matt. 8:2](#)). A synagogue ruler does the same thing in chapter [9](#) (v. [18](#)). But this is the first time the disciples worshiped, and it is important to note that their worship in [14:33](#) is joined to their confession. That is what worship is, of course! It is acknowledging who God is and praising him both for who he is and for what he has done. In this case the disciples took the first step and worshiped Jesus as God's Son.

I notice too that they focused on Jesus entirely in their worship. Peter had experienced a great deliverance, but they didn't ask Peter to give his testimony. The wind had died down, but they didn't hold a discussion about miracles. They worshiped Jesus, and they worshiped only him because they were entirely taken up with him.

The Work Goes on

Meanwhile, the work that Jesus had begun months before continued as he now moved into the region of Gennesaret and healed those who were sick. Apparently Jesus had not been here before, because the people did not know him by face.

But when they recognized that this traveling teacher was Jesus, they brought their sick friends and relatives to him to be healed.

These people knew of his reputation, and one of the things they had probably heard was that the woman with uncontrolled bleeding had been healed merely by touching the edge of his garment ([Matt. 9:20–22](#)). This is what they did too. The text does not say that these masses of people believed on him, any more than those in the upper regions of Galilee. (Gennesaret was a plain between Tiberias in the south and Capernaum to the north.) They were using Jesus only for their own ends, just as the people who had been fed with the loaves and fish wanted to use him by making him a king. Nevertheless, the Lord had compassion on these people and healed them anyway.

Jesus has also been caring for you, even if you have not committed your life to him. The friends you have, the health you possess, the possessions you own, the job you work at, even the life you are living are God's good gifts to you. Do not be like the people of Gennesaret who stopped there, and so perish in your sins. Turn your eyes to Jesus. Trust Jesus. Commit yourself to Jesus. Say, as Peter did, "Lord, save me!" Cry out with the disciples, "Truly you are the Son of God." That is how a person passes from spiritual death to life.

Matthew 14.¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.¹⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.¹⁵ Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."¹⁷ They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me."¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.²⁰ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up

on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear.²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”³⁴ And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick³⁶ and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

1. Jesus’ cousin and colleague, John the Baptist, is tragically killed. How can His reaction to this separation help us as we are far from loved ones back home?
2. Why is the feeding of 5000 the only miracle of Jesus told by all four Gospel writers? What would be incomplete in our understanding of Jesus without it?
3. Jesus told the disciples, “*you give them something...*” How do you cope with limited resources in the face of overwhelming ministry needs?
4. Are you more likely to hunker-down in the safety of the wind/wave battered boat, or would you dare to step into those stormy seas toward Jesus?

