

Jesus Has Compassion

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Matthew 14:13-21 ¹³ When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." ¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ He said, "Bring them here to Me." ¹⁹ Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. ²⁰ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. ²¹ Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The account of the feeding of the five thousand is one most of us are familiar with. Thinking back on this account, what part do you remember best? What stands out the most.

For a lot of people, the focus of this miracle is that "they all ate and were full." This is what the crowds cared about and that is what we often care about as well. It appeals to our selfish lazy nature. However, what we should remember best is that Jesus " had compassion on them."

When I was in India there was a guy laying on the side of the road, badly injured. Looked like it was probably a motorcycle accident. There were a lot of people standing around. I suggested to our driver that we should stop and help him out. Our driver said it was not a good idea because people would assume that we were responsible.

Not helping was probably the smart choice but that doesn't mean it was the right choice.

There are always lots of good reason not to help, and all of them apply to the situation in our text, but Jesus had compassion.

When the children of Israel were lost in the wilderness God gave them bread from heaven. Here in this account Jesus declares himself to be the same gracious God by again giving bread to his people in the wilderness. What is important is not the bread, but the graciousness of our God who had compassion on sinners.

What are some of the reasons we don't help?

There are too many. I can't make a difference.

That of course is exactly what the disciples say, "what are they among so many?" But Jesus had compassion.

There is a famous starfish story that encourages people to help out even if it means helping only one.

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die." "Son," the man said, "don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said..." I made a difference for that one."

This is an inspiring story, but we have something better in our text this morning. We have the promise of God that if we trust him, we can feed 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes.

Jesus tells the disciples "You give them something to eat."

He also tells the disciples to seat the people. He's not just feeding five thousand people. He is teaching his disciples, including us, that if they trust him, they can move mountains.

This is one of the temptations that Satan uses for Jesus. Jesus died for the sins of all people, but many reject his gift. Satan suggested to Jesus you can go through all that suffering and save some, or you can bow down to me and have all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus of course rejected the easy way out. He also rejected the temptation that it wasn't worth it just for a remnant.

Yes, those who are saved are a remnant but for those few the death of Christ and the word of the gospel is heavenly manna. Jesus had compassion.

It's their own fault. It's their responsibility not mine.

Again, this is the disciples' first response. They suggest to Jesus that he should send them away to go get their own food. They are responsible for their own supper. They should have brought it with them. Jesus, however, had compassion.

It is also often the way that we treat others. They made the mess let them deal with it.

It is never the way Jesus treats us.

When the disciples say, "send them away," Jesus responds, "you give them something to eat." When Adam and Eve ruined God's creation, God said, "I will fix it, I will send the Messiah." When the people of Israel forsook God and the surrounding nations invaded them, God send judges to save them.

Sin is our responsibility, but Jesus took the responsibility to fix our mistakes. Jesus had compassion.

They will abuse the gift. They will just use it for drugs or alcohol or cigarettes.

This is not something the disciples are worried about in our text, but it is certainly true. Instead of appreciating the gift and looking to Jesus as the Savior from sin, the crowds try to make him their bread king. When he won't do it, they reject him and turn against him. Despite knowing what they would do, Jesus had compassion.

There is a saying, "no good deed goes unpunished." This might not be 100% true but is often true. My father brought some food to a couple once and they literally threw the bag at him.

Jesus knew full well that many people would abuse his grace. Having received forgiveness of sins, how many abuse his forgiveness as an excuse to continue in sin.

Paul reminds us how sinful this attitude is.

Romans 6:1-3 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Jesus knowing full well that many of the people he fed would turn on him, fed them anyway. Jesus knowing full well that many would abuse his forgiveness as an excuse for more sin, died for us anyway. Jesus had compassion.

It's not why we are here.

Although the reasons we've mentioned have some truth behind them. There is some truth to this reason also. Jesus did not come to feed our bodies but to give us bread for our souls. Nevertheless, having given them the word of life, he had compassion on them.

Jesus has promised us the word of life which gives us forgiveness and eternal salvation, but he also promises to provide all that we need for this life, even our daily bread.

God's word must always come first, there is nothing more important than the forgiveness that is ours through Jesus Christ, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't follow it up by also helping.

1 John 3:17 ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

To many churches these days care only about helping with physical bodily needs. They neglect what is far more important the spiritual needs and the heavenly bread which Jesus brings us. We, however, might be tempted to only provide the spiritual and forget the physical. Jesus brought the word of God first but also had compassion.

We arrived this morning like that man I saw on the road in India, spiritually weak and bleeding and sick, our souls laying on the ground begging for God's mercy, but Jesus had compassion. He has given us bread from heaven, to forgive our sins and strengthen our souls for the week ahead. As Isaiah reminded us in our OT reading: Come and eat and drink at the feast of the Lamb. Amen.