

Healing Many & Feeding More

Three Reasons to Worship Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 15:29-39

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Healing, Gentiles

Introduction

Join me in turning to Matthew 15:29-39, where we will find **“Jesus Healing Many and Feeding More.”**

While you’re finding that, I would like to thank you for praying for me and my family as we were away the past two Sundays for my mother’s memorial service and then for my youngest son’s wedding. Both services a blessing to participate in and I am thankful to you for your prayers and to the Lord for his mercy in each situation.



In the portion of Scripture before us, Matthew presents us with several pieces of evidence aimed at leading us to worship Jesus at God’s Son and our Savior. The evidence centers around his power to heal and his compassion to provide for needs. Neither of these are new. Both are repeated. Matthew has told us several times before of Jesus’s power to heal and this is the second time he has told us about Jesus’ compassion for crowds being manifested by a massive provision of a meal.

So why tell us again? Why present us with more of the same evidence? In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote,

Romans 15:4 (ESV) For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

The Holy Spirit¹ may have multiple motivations for leading Matthew to record these events, but they have at least been written down for our instruction so as to accomplish two goals of giving us endurance, encouragement, and hope.

May the Lord grant to us through the consideration of this portion of his word endurance, encouragement, and hope.

Pray

Jesus Went from Tyre to Galilee (v.29-30)

The first verse of this section locates the scene for us.

Matthew 15:29-30 (ESV) Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. ³⁰ And great crowds came to him...

Jesus Went on From There. Where is “there?” From where did Jesus go? Last week Robbie very helpfully took us through Jesus’ encounter with a Canaanite woman whose daughter was “severely oppressed by a demon.”²

This took place in “*the district of Tyre and Sidon*” (Mt 15:21). Thus, the ‘there’ (in v.29) refers to the area around the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon, which is to the northwest of Galilee.

This area is a predominantly Gentile area. The Canaanites lived in these areas, so Jesus has been ministering among the Gentiles and not among the Jews.

Walked Beside Sea of Galilee (v.29). But now Matthew tells us that Jesus leaves the district of Tyre and Sidon and goes south along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. But where exactly was he “*walking beside the Sea of Galilee?*” Matthew does not tell us exactly where, but Mark does.

Mark tells us that after leaving Sidon, Jesus went to the “*the region of the Decapolis*” (Mk 7:31), which is on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This also is a predominantly Gentile region. Thus, Jesus continues to minister in Gentile locations.



¹ 2 Peter 1:21.

² Matthew 15:22.

Jesus goes from ministering among the Gentiles to ministering among the Gentiles.

He went up on the mountain and sat down there (v.29). The exact mountain is unimportant to Matthew. However, Jesus' posture is important. Jesus '*sat down there*.' Sitting was the "normal posture for rabbinic teaching (cf. 5:1; John 6:3)."³ Matthew does not tell us explicitly that Jesus was teaching, but we can easily assume this since that is what Jesus did everywhere he went and Matthew does tell us that a crowd of people were with him '*for three days*' (v.32).

And great crowds came to him (v.30). After Jesus "*sat down there*," the crowds responded by drawing near to Jesus. Seeing Jesus seated acted as a kind of invitation to draw near to him. It communicated a readiness to receive people and engage in conversation. It would be putting your phone away on the train and making eye contact with someone. These crowds of people accepted the implicit invitation. They came to him.

Jesus was already well known in this region. Matthew has already told us that Jesus' fame had reached into this area (Mt 4:25). In fact, some people from this region—and beyond⁴—had begun to follow Jesus.

Application

This is a sweet picture. Can you see it? Jesus, "the Son of David"⁵ and "he who was born king of the Jews"⁶ is seated on a Gentile hillside, not on a Jewish throne! He is seated not among Jewish royalty, but among Gentile peasants. He is seated, not standing towering over them. He is not with a select few of Jewish nobility, but rather among the noisy crowds of Gentile commoners, inviting them to come to him and they come.

It's not easy to get close to royal people or celebrities, but it is easy to draw near to Jesus. Today, on this very day, Jesus is seated on the throne of heaven, and yet from his throne he invites all who can hear his voice to "*Come to me you who are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest for your souls*" (Mt 11:28-29).

This is the first piece of evidence that this text offers us to worship Jesus. He is one to whom anyone can go.

Jesus Healed Many (v.30-32)

The crowds see Jesus seated and they come to him.

³ Grant R. Osborne, "Matthew," *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold. vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2010), 601.

⁴ Matthew 4:25.

⁵ Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22.

⁶ Matthew 2:2.

Matthew 15:30-31 (ESV) ³⁰ And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, ³¹ so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

The lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others... and he healed them (v.30-31). We have seen this kind of summary statement before, several times. In fact, Matthew has so far in his gospel written this kind of summary six times.⁷ Why write it again? Why repeat more of the same? It appears that Matthew is unable to get over the fact that everywhere Jesus goes those who are weak, weary, and wounded people run to him. No matter in what location Jesus enters, to him go the suffering, the solitary, and the insignificant—and he receives them. Matthew is clearly amazed at Jesus. He is unable to stop giving more evidence for his readers to be amazed at who Jesus is.

Is this you? Are you wounded, weary, and weak? Are you broken, battered, or bruised? Are you suffering, solitary, or feeling insignificant? Matthew wants your eyes on Jesus.

Bringing them... they put them at his feet (v.30). The crowds “*come bringing*” to Jesus “*the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others.*” These crowds *brought* to Jesus any number of broken people and they laid them at his feet. These are people who cannot get to Jesus by themselves. They need help to get to him. They must be *brought* to him. They are so weak, so sick, so wounded, so disabled that they cannot take themselves to Jesus, but rather they must be *brought* to him.

They brought these broken individuals to Jesus and laid them “*at his feet.*” Just as the Canaanite woman came to Jesus and “*knelt down*” at his feet (Mt 15:25), so these broken people are brought to the feet of Jesus. They kneel before him. They acknowledge his power and authority over them. Their posture proclaims the greater worth and authority of Jesus. As Robbie clearly communicated last week, they—and we—deserve nothing from Jesus, but they humbly lay before him, hoping for mercy and healing.

And and he healed them (v.30). There, at the feet of Jesus, they find that for which they are looking. They find healing. Jesus heals those who come humbly and lay at his feet.

- The mute were brought to Jesus and they went from him talking.
- The lame were brought to Jesus and they went away walking.
- The crippled were brought to Jesus and they went from him healthy.
- The blind were brought to Jesus and they went away seeing.

Jesus healed all these and “*many others!*” (v.30). There is more that Matthew could have written, but he did not. Jesus is so much more than even what we see here. He is greater than

⁷ Matthew 4:23-25; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:13-14, 35-36.

we can even imagine! There are “many other” kinds of disabilities and diseases that were laid before Jesus on this day, and he healed them!

The crowd wondered... And glorified the God of Israel (v.31). Notice the result. The crowds “glorified the God of Israel.” They glorified God! They praised him for this great work. They ‘wondered’ at all they saw that day. They wondered and glorified God. These Gentiles were amazed and they praised! This means they *worshipped* God.

They worshiped ‘*the God of Israel.*’ This title is found only here in Matthew and only in one other place in the NT⁸ (which is a quote of the OT⁹). This may point us to the conclusion that by this time, the title is more frequently used by Gentiles, thus confirming that Jesus was at this time ministering among a predominantly Gentile audience.

Application

This is a sweet picture. Can you see it? Can you see crowds of people bringing their broken family and friends to the feet of Jesus and he heals them? Can you see the hurting and helpless finding wholeness and help in Jesus? Can you see the wonder and amazement on the faces of these people? Can you see them glorifying and worshiping the God Israel through Jesus?

This is the second reason to worship Jesus; he heals the sick and makes whole the broken. And there’s more to come.

Jesus Fed Four Thousand (v.33-39)

After worshiping the God of Israel through the work of Jesus, he gives the crowds what they were not expecting.

The Compassion of Jesus

Notice that compassion is what motivates Jesus.

Matthew 15:32 (ESV) ³² Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”

I have compassion on the crowd. (v.32). Jesus initiates with his disciples because he is moved with *compassion*. The word (σπλαγχνίζομαι *splanchnizomai*)



⁸ Luke 1:68

⁹ Wherein the title is found 199 times.

means “to experience great affection... love”¹⁰ for someone and to see their hardship and be “deeply moved in your inner being,”¹¹ in your heart, such that you seek to alleviate their suffering. Note that the word compassion entails affection. Jesus is emotionally engaged with these crowds of Gentile people.

Jesus saw the crowds who had been with him for three days and he knew their food was gone. He also knew that if he sent them away, then they would not have the strength enough to make it until they food. He knew that many of them would pass out before getting to Trader Joes. He was “*unwilling to send them away*” without giving them what they need. Jesus was unwilling to let them faint. He loved the crowd, that is, he was affectionately disposed toward them. His heart was moved deeply within him and he therefore sought to solve their problem.

Where are we to get enough bread... to feed so great a crowd? (v.33) The disciples confess they cannot help in this situation. They do not have enough food to accomplish what Jesus wants to do. They’ve heard the compassion in their master, but they were unable to help. Jesus was unwilling to let the crowd faint, but the disciples were unable to do anything about it.

Seven [loaves], and a few small fish (v.34). Jesus asked them what they did have and it turned out that they had ‘seven loaves’ of bread and a ‘few small fish.’ The emphasis here is on ‘small.’ These were personal sized fish, not family sized. This was clearly not enough to feed the massive crowds before them.

Directing the crowd to sit down on the ground (v.35). Jesus here acts as the host. He is in command of this scene. He has a plan to solve the hunger problem and in faith he ‘directs’ them to sit down on the ground. Jesus gives the command to sit. The word here translated ‘sit down’ (ἀναπίπτω αναπτῶ) means, “to be in a reclining position as one eats—‘to recline, to eat, to be at table, to eat, to dine, to sit down to eat.”¹² Jesus is here telling to sit down and prepare to eat.

Will they obey? Why should they? They are in “a desolate place” (v.33).

They know they are miles from the next truck stop.

If they were to do a quick search for “restaurants near me,” the nearest place is Daves Hot Chicken and that an hour and fifty-four minute hike away, it’s 99 degrees outside, and the canteen on your hip is empty. This is not a good situation.

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 293.

¹¹ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

¹² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 217.

There is no point in sitting down in "a desolate place" to eat where no food is available. Unless, you think Jesus may be able to do something wonderful. No one will sit down, unless they think Jesus can do something amazing.

He took... he gave thanks... he broke... he gave... (v.36). Jesus is the primary actor here. He **took** the loaves and fish, he gave **thanks** (εὐχαριστέω *eucharisteō*) to God the Father, he **broke** the bread and fish and he **gave** to the disciples who then gave to the crowds.

They all ate and were satisfied (v.37). Every one ate and was full. Jesus created enough bread and fish to fill all the stomachs. He created food. Jesus is the creator. He took '**seven loaves**' of bread and created bread enough for a whole town. He took a "**few small fish**" and created thousands of fish. Jesus satisfied the hunger of the crowds people. Through Jesus God commanded that all be fill and sure enough, '**they all ate and were satisfied.**'

They took up seven baskets full of broken pieces left over (v.37). Not only was there enough to eat at the table, there were seven doggie bags full of leftovers.

It's nice to go out and eat a nice meal, but sometimes meals are expensive. The pain of paying for a meal out is mitigated when you have enough left over that you can take a doggie bag home and get a second meal out of it. (We don't have a dog, so the food in the bag is for a second meal.) Two meals for the price of one, is not bad. But when you have seven doggie bags full of leftovers, AND you didn't even have to pay for the meal! Well now, that's exciting.

These 'baskets' (σπυρίς *spyris*) were not mere doggie bags. They were big. The word means a "basket or hamper; any flexible woven basket made of rushes or similar material; usually used to carry fish and other foodstuffs."¹³ This '**basket**' is what Paul's friends put him inside when they lowered him down over the wall of Damascus to escape from the Jews who were seeking to kill him (Acts 9:25). These baskets were big. And there were seven of them full of bread and fish when it was all over.

Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children (v.38). Matthew only counts the men who were there and not the women and children. Some conservative estimates speculate that there could have been as many as a total of 6,000 to 8,000 people who were fed that day. Jesus has once again demonstrated his compassion for people in supplying their need.

¹³ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

Answering the Critics

Did this really happen or is this a mere duplication or exaggeration of the feeding of five thousand? Is Matthew such a poor author that he would forget what he wrote one page earlier? Why repeat, but corrupt, the same story? Matthew is not such a poor author. There are sufficient differences to understand that these are two different events.

| | Feeding 5,000 (Mt 14:13-21) | Feeding 4,000 (Mt 15:32-39) |
|------------------|---|---|
| Crowds | Jewish (from Nazareth) | Gentile (from Sidon to Decapolis) |
| Food | Five loaves & two fish | Seven loaves & a few small fish |
| Location | Grassy place | No grass, "ground" |
| Remainder | 12 baskets | 7 baskets |
| Number | 5,000 men | 4,000 men |
| Basket | <i>kophinous</i> (rigid wicker ~1.5 gallon) | <i>spyridas</i> (woven of rushes, fish/fruit) |

Matthew, in the next chapter, will answer the question of whether or not these are two different events because Jesus references them as two different events.

Matthew 16:9-10 (ESV) "Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?"

Clearly we are to believe that these are two different feeding events.

Why Two Feeding Events?

The feeding of the 4,000 men (excluding women and children) is a second massive miracle of Jesus. Jesus fed thousands of people on two different occasions. On the first occasion, among the Jews, there were twelve baskets left over. On the second occasion, among the Gentiles, there were seven baskets left over. Clearly the twelve baskets represents the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is the Savior and Supplier of Israel.

But here on this second occasion with seven baskets left over, what is being communicated? Why seven baskets? Why not four or fourteen? Or eight or eighteen? Why seven? Seven is often a number of completion or perfection in Scripture. God completed all of creation in seven days (six days of work with one day of enjoying what had been created). Perhaps we are to understand that what is being communicated is that Jesus is Savior and Supplier of all men who trust him, not only those of Israel alone. Jesus is the Savior and Supplier of all Gentiles who trust him, as well as the Savior and Supplier of the Jews.

Conclusion

So where is the encouragement, endurance, and hope in this passage?

Encouragement

Jesus likes to go for walks along the shoreline of lakes. He likes crowds. He loves crowds of people, even needy, broken, wounded people. Jesus sits down with high maintenance people. He welcomes the weary and lonely and the suffering to come sit at his feet and surrender to his authority and to rest in his power. He is a man of compassion. He is wonderful.

He is worthy of worship.

Endurance

Jesus has the power to heal any disease or any sickness. But sometimes—for reasons he does not always disclose—he chooses not to heal. It is not his will to always heal everyone.

- Once at the pool of Bethesda he went into a crowd of sick people and he only healed one man (Jn 5:1-9). It was not his will to heal every person.
- It was not his will to heal the apostle Paul of his chronic, physical suffering (2 Cor 12:9). Jesus said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient" to sustain you through this suffering.

Sometimes it is the will of Jesus to perfect his work in our lives by supplying us with strength to endure weakness rather than by supplying us with strength to overcome weakness.

Sometimes he walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death rather than walking us away from that dark valley. But he never abandons his children.

Jesus can heal and he can create bread and fish out of nothing. However, he does not do that every day. Therefore, we must endure in faith in Jesus even when he chooses not to heal and not to miraculously supply our need or immediately deliver us from our trouble.

He is still worthy of our worship.

Hope

I see hope in this passage because when Jesus is rightly worshipped, then all my needs will be sufficiently met. When worship of Jesus has its proper place of priority in my life, then will follow the supplying of all my needs, whether that be the supply of miraculous bread or the provision of sustaining grace to help me endure when things are lacking. Paul said it best,

Philippians 4:11-13 (ESV) I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I have a sure and certain hope that Jesus alone can supply all my needs. If I need strength to abound in seasons of plenty, then he give me strength will abound. Or if I need strength to go hungry in seasons famine, then he will give me the strength to go hungry. In whatever circumstances I find myself in, I have a sure and certain hope that Jesus will sustain me.

Jesus is worthy of worship. Worship him because he welcomes the weak. Worship him because he heals the sick and suffering. Worship him because he provides for the needy. Worship him because he is the Savior of all who trust in him, whether Jew or Gentile. Worship him because he sustains his people through whatever season he wills us to endure. Worship him because he is with us and strengthens us.

Come to Jesus in faith. Trust him to save you from your sins. Rest in him to supply all your need. Worship him in sickness and in health. Confess with your mouth that he alone is more than enough and that he alone is all you need.

If you need encouragement, go now to Jesus in prayer.

If you need endurance, go now to Jesus prayer.

If you need hope, go now to Jesus in prayer.

If you need forgiveness of your sins, repentance, and salvation, then go now to Jesus in prayer. And the prayer team is available if you would like someone to pray with you.

Discussions Questions

1. In your own words, what is the main point of vs. 29-39?
2. Based upon this text what is Jesus' opinion of Gentiles?
3. Why does Matthew record and repeat these healing summaries?
4. Do you believe this really happened? Do you think this is a repetition of the feeding of five thousand? Why or why not?
5. In what ways is the feeding of the four thousand similar to the feeding of the five thousand? In what ways is it different?
6. What do you think is the significance of seven baskets of leftovers?
7. What does this passage teach about Jesus?
8. What reasons does this passage give for worshiping Jesus?
9. What does it teach about people in general?
10. What from this passage gives you the most encouragement?