

Hamish Taylor: Matthew 14

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] We read there in Matthew chapter 14 the account of the miracle that we all know.

We've been reading about it, we've been hearing about it since we were children of the age of those who were with us earlier. And it's an account that we've known all our lives.

But if we look a bit into it, we will see hopefully that it is a miracle that happens in our experiences and general lives to this very day.

The feeding of the 5000 is maybe special among the accounts of the miracles performed by Christ. And we all know when we see on television those who in their worldly wisdom try to explain these miracles or usually explain them away.

We see them on programs such as the Bible code and other things like that that we see on television sometimes. But this one is, we might think of us being special among the others if only because we seldom hear anyone trying to explain this one away.

[1 : 30] And also because of how close it comes to circumstances in our own lives that account with the nine children that fell from my lips a week while ago is maybe an example of that also.

But this miracle, in this miracle and even in the circumstances surrounding the miracle and anytime the lack of that happens in our experience, God is speaking to each and every one of us.

Every time we read about it, every time we think about it even and every time we hear about it. And as I said, it's also a miracle that we've seen happening in perhaps our own lives or in the lives of others.

But before we go into the miracle itself, it's useful to sort of paint, I cannot have a backdrop to the picture. And we have that in the earlier part of the chapter where we write about Herod beheading John the Baptist and the effect that that had on Christ.

When Christ heard of the death of John the Baptist, it affected him kind of deeply and we're not surprised at that because not only were Jesus and John near the same age, there was about six months or so between them, they had possibly grown up close together.

[3 : 13] There were certainly cousins after the in the natural genealogical sense, but much more than that.

And in spite of that, John the Baptist had been the first to openly recognize and publicly declare Christ as being the long awaited Messiah.

And for these reasons, it clearly wouldn't be surprising if Christ needed time on his own to absorb what had happened and to reflect on what had happened and to settle his own human heart even over it.

But there's more than that also, there's another aspect which is quite significant as well.

Herod had heard of Christ, of Jesus, he believed as we read in the earlier part of the chapter that he was John the Baptist having come back to life and that fear, or the extent of that fear, bred in the heart of Herod.

[4 : 35] I'm not sure if it was hate, but sort of mixed feelings, negative feelings against Jesus and all he stood for.

And then we can ask ourselves, how often do we see this? How often do we hear this? How often do we experience this? Maybe not in our own islands, but we hear of it elsewhere, where hatred or certainly negative feelings for Christ and his cause, which spring not from, and is like based on an understanding of his cause or of Christ himself, but from a fear of what the heart doesn't know or even try to understand.

That's another aspect. But we read that when Christ heard of the mind of Herod against him, that he departed and we'll read that at verse 13, he departed, thanks by ship to a desert place.

Christ left the situation. He withdrew from the situation, maybe not because of that fear for his own life, he knew about his own life, his time was to come, but it hadn't yet come.

And he withdrew from the situation as it were to diffuse it. And then if we apply that to ourselves, how often do we in our own lives find that Jesus has perhaps moved away a little bit?

[6 : 30] And then when we think of it more deeply and more honestly and much more realistically, we realize that it was not he who moved away first, but us, that we moved away from him, we forgot him, and we moved away from him.

Now Christ did not abandon us. And when we realize what has happened and when we decide to come back to him, he is there where we left him and where we departed from him and he is still waiting for us.

He waits for us to follow. And when we do follow him into that private place, into the privacy of that secluded place, we find that he is there before us with compassion and with restoration and with healing.

And that's what the crowd found who had followed him. Because although Jesus went to this place apart, we see that the people followed him and we see that without hesitation, he healed their sick, he healed those who are in need of healing and his own circumstances and the trauma of his own mind and heart, his need of solitude and maybe safety were left aside and left aside in favor of the needs of others.

And that is the backdrop and the background and the context within this miracle took place.

[8 : 24] And we read from, or remember in Isaiah, when Isaiah was prompted by God to tell us, surely he had borne our griefs and yet we did esteem him stricken of God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our inequities and the chastisement of our peace was upon him.

And with his wounds and with his stripes, we are healed. The spirit of compassion and the spirit of self-sacrifice, that was once his way, that is his way, that was his witness to the disciples on that day and that says example to us in our day and that is the context in which this miracle is set.

We read in verse 13, the second half of verse 13, and when the people had heard that he had departed by ship to a place apart, they followed him.

They were on foot out of the cities. And then it continues, and Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude and he was moved with compassion toward them and healed their sick.

[10 : 05] And that sets the beginning of the situation in which the miracle took place.

Now as we approach the miracle itself and when we go through it, I didn't give a text but I don't intend to base what I'm going to say on a text, but maybe the words which will echo in our hearts when we leave here and as we come as it were to the punchline of the event are the words in verse 18 where Jesus said, bring them hither to me.

Bring them hither to me. Remember these words because these are the words in which the whole thing hinges. The cloud was there, Jesus was there, the disciples were there.

And at verse 15 we read, and when it was evening, his disciples came to him and said, this is a desert place, we are far away from civilization if you like, the time is now past, send the people away that they may by themselves food.

Send the people away was the gist of what the disciples were advising him. But that wasn't Jesus's way, that's not what we saw in the earlier part.

[11 : 49] Sending the people away was not in his vocabulary, not in the vocabulary of his heart or mind or speech. His way was and is to draw people to himself, he even said, I when I am lifted up will draw all people to me.

I will draw all people to me and more pressingly perhaps he also said, he who comes to me I will in no wise reject or cast out.

Send the people away, said the disciples. At verse 16 we see Jesus's reply, they need not depart, give ye them to eat.

The people needn't go, you feed them. The duties of discipleship pointed out to them in their time, the duties of discipleship pointed to us in our time.

They need not depart, you feed them. At another time Jesus said Simon son of Jonas he asked him do you love me.

[13 : 19] And Peter said yes. Then feed my lambs. Simon son of Jonas he asked a second time do you love me.

Yes of course I do. Feed my sheep. Feed my flock. Feed my young flock.
Feed my older flock. Feed my young flock with the milk of the word that they might grow.
Feed my older flock with the food of spiritual maturity. And Peter perhaps remembered these words because we find them almost echoed to us in his first epistle.

At verse 17 remember what Jesus said you feed them give ye them to eat are the words here.
[14 : 27] And here we see the disciples response and isn't it so typical of us?

The response was we have but five loaves and two fishes. And there's one little word there that makes all the difference.

See they didn't say we have five loaves and we have two fishes. They said we have but five loaves and two fishes.

And what a difference that little word but makes. What a small word three letters but how full of excuses.

How full of denial. How full of condemnation. We have only. Because it's an example to us of how careful we must be how very careful we must be that we don't deny the blessings of God.

[15 : 41] We have but. Are we not saying how little God has given us? Are we not denying that God has given us anything and not just spiritually but materially also?

We have but. In next October I think it'll be 59 years since I was walking back from a funeral in Grimsley North UST that was three years before the cost was were built and there was no road around the island.

And I was walking back from a funeral in company with Willie Shure to once the boatbuilder son. And the funeral was that of Donald MacAskill an old man in his 80s who had fought in the war and had a very tough time then fought in the first world war again had a very tough time then he got married had two maybe three children and his wife died.

Then he remarried some years later and had another two or three children and he brought these two families up. With very little again just like the old lady I spoke about earlier on and he brought them up with very little and he brought them up well.

And he died in the autumn of I'm almost sure it was 1957. And I remember walking back from the funeral with Willie and.

[17 : 39] He came over the hill just behind. Behind Donald MacAskill's house and I can still almost feel Willie's hand on my arm as he stopped me.

He put out his hand and he stopped me. Oh, shawl. Look, he said Donald didn't have an awful lot of time he lived but see when he left over and when I looked and where Willie was pointing his hand. The yard where he where he kept his feet for the animals. The other was full of stacks of hay and corn and his potatoes are put away.

Also he had all he needed. And I mean Willie was then in his twenties I was 17 or something and Willie saw this as the hand of God and the the provision of God to whom Donald had been looking all his life and God had been faithful.

Even in the. That material sense and had given him what he needed when he needed it.

[19 : 22] Just to put a sort of a face to the name that Donald MacAskill was the grandfather of whatever in Kenneth Stuart and of Ian MacAskill.

But both first cousins Ian is a son of Donald's son and and Kenny was the son of Donald's daughter. And there may be no connection in it but I can't help thinking that from grim say over the generations I'm not aware of any other minister arising from that place except these two did have an uncle.

They did have they did have an uncle was a lay preacher in in the very net. But as far as I'm aware was no minister ever wrote some grim say except these two.

We have but five loaves and two fishes we so often say just like the disciples said bring them hither to me.

[20 : 39] Was the answer given by Christ. What you have you bring it here to me Christ's advice to his disciples Christ's advice to us all that you have however little it may be bring it to me and bring it to me for blessing.

Because remember anything we have and all that we have we have from the hand of God and anything we have from the hand of God has been given to us for a purpose.

It is to be used to his glory and so anything we have from his hand is it not proper however little we may think it to be that we should bring it to him for blessing.

We don't have all that much we say bring it to me bring it hither to me bring it to me for blessing. However small you may think of it if it is only your worries or your concerns or the burdens of your heart you bring them to me for blessing.

Again a personal anecdote if you'll forgive me. I think it's probably over 30 years ago I happened to be in Stornoway and I was in the Lewis Castle College and it was the castle then at a two day conference and coming down the stair on a Wednesday halfway down the stair at lunchtime I met four people.

[22 : 22] One was John McLeod who was then the principal. And was the captain and McKenzie who was the head of the navigation and the sea stiff in the college.

Third person was Janet McPhail now who lives along the road.

And the fourth person I can't remember because I didn't recognise him I didn't know him and also can't remember who it was. But they stopped me and they said we're going upstairs for half hour to pray for the welfare of the college and of the students.

We do this every Wednesday. They said at lunchtime we'll go upstairs for a short prayer meeting. And you come with us and being me I slithered out of it and I found some excuse not to go.

But I never forgot the event and I never forgot the impression that I had then of the college and of the work of these people because I remember certainly in the engineering section that there were companies waiting for students to come out of there to take them on.

[23 : 47] And I couldn't help connecting the two that these four people the most modest people you could ever meet they might have said in a way we have but.

But the difference was that every Wednesday they made a point of taking however little they thought they had to God for blessing.

And it was blessed even in the secular sense and God was faithful. They were faithful in their duties and they connected that with spiritual lives.

They were all one and they brought what they had to God for blessing and he did. We can have some duties per form which we don't find easy.

Bring it to me for blessing. There may be someone that we've not called in on for far too long and the more we procrastinate the more difficult it becomes.

[25 : 03] There's not an elder among us who doesn't know what I'm talking about. Bring it to me for blessing. And when we do we find that that door we go to has already been opened and the hospitality of the Holy Spirit is there to welcome us.

That house that we maybe were reluctant or afraid to go to when we bring that to God for blessing he does and he's there before us.

God is in that place and he has opened the door for us. And if you remember the blind hymn writer, Reverend George Matheson in one of his most famous hymns he wrote, Oh love, you said that will not let me go.

I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe. That in thy notions depths its flow may richer fuller be.

And he wrote that at a very difficult time in his life. Bring them hither to me.

[26 : 28] And he took the five loaves and the two fishes and he looked up to heaven and he blessed them and he broke them and he gave them to his disciples and his disciples gave them to the multitude.

Verse 19 Christ blessed for us to feed the multitude and we read at verse 20 and they did all eat and were filled.

They did all eat and were filled. What little the disciples had when blessed by Christ was enough for the needs of all. And it's that blessing, it's that blessing that is the light and perhaps the only light of life for the weary sinner on the path of this life on which we are.

We read they did all eat and were filled. Now this must have included with disciples and again we learn from this in our discipleship.

In the service of Christ in imparting the blessings of Christ to others, the disciples themselves received, received blessing themselves in full measure.

[28 : 04] They did all eat and were filled including the disciples. And no one who works in the service of Christ can deny that we receive as much and perhaps even more blessing than we ever convey.

Even in the simple little things we receive back so much more than we ever give.

And at verse 20, the end of verse 20, they all did eat and were filled and then it continues. And they took up of the fragments that remained, 12 baskets full.

Not only did everybody eat and were satisfied, but there were 12 baskets left over. Now I'm no mathematician, but five loaves and two wee cuddies feeding 5,000 people and 12 baskets left over doesn't work for even me in the secular sense.

But that's where this miracle comes in. Herein lies the recurring miracle and the miracle that we see enacted in our own lives and in the lives of others.

[29 : 43] Because in using worldly things they diminish. In using the spiritual attributes with which God has blessed us, they grow and they multiply and they strengthen.

The more we use them, the more they grow, the more they multiply, the more they strengthen. 12 baskets.

And the question we might ask and the question I asked myself the first time I looked at this, they couldn't have been very big baskets.

Were they small baskets or were they large baskets? The English version of the Bible merely uses the word basket, which could be small or large.

The Gaelic Bible uses the word cleav, dah leav yek. Now when I looked into a commentary to see whether I could find out whether they were a large basket or a small one, I came across the word kofi noi, k-o-p-h-i-n-o-y, I think it was.

[31 : 19] And that's referred to the kind of conical basket you see in pictures in Africa, that are made for carrying on the back, which really does approximate to the cleav.

And our own cleav was a creel that could carry as much as a man or a woman could carry over a reasonably sustained distance fairly comfortably.

So those who wrote that commentary, they mentioned this kofi noi, which was the same concept with a slightly different shape.

But it seems to have been a basket for carrying on the back, and carrying as much as a man or a woman could carry fairly comfortably.

Twelve creels left over from five loaves and two small fishes, after having fed five thousand people at least.

[32 : 35] And then our mind may be turned round, and we come to the twelve. Twelve creels, goodness me, one for each disciple.

And if these disciples themselves ever needed convincing, as we all do in our own low times, then each one of them, when thinking of this event later on, or being challenged about this event later on, could truthfully say and truthfully reflect their experience of not just having but five loaves and two fishes, but as much as each one of them could carry in surplus blessing.

The v'an me g'ram, the v'anachan we would say.

Each disciple rewarded with as much blessing as he could carry.

And that is the recurring miracle which we see in life to this very day, and in our own time also.

[34 : 09] This which we read of two thousand years ago, which is still, demonstrably, the living word which we read and which we experience in our own time.

And why do we come into this? We can ask ourselves. Well, are we not those who perhaps followed Christ into the lonely place, into the private place?

Hopefully we are. Are we not also perhaps the disciples who thought we didn't have enough?

But are we not also those who have been drawn, those who have been fed, those who have been convinced and who have been blessed beyond words by the grace of God in Jesus Christ?

And are we at least not those who are witnesses of that grace and of that continuing grace and of that continuing blessing in our own world and in our own time?

[35 : 27] These are questions for each and every one of us. And I'm always saying that a sermon doesn't have an end, but that it is merely a food for thought, food for the heart, food for the soul to think on and to apply to our own lives, that we may be fed, that we may be blessed and that we may continue to grow.

Amen. And his blessing is rich blessing to our thoughts upon his word.