

Jesus, A Provider to the Hungry

Matthew 14:13-21

Halifax: 27 November 2005

Introduction:

Today we come to the fourth sermon in our series on “What Jesus is among us.”

- I introduced this series to you with a sermon from Psalm 48.
 - In that I showed you how Jesus comes among us as King to establish God’s city of perfect righteousness and peace.
 - We have been singing from that Psalm each week in connection with this series.
- The second week, we saw what Jesus is among many who are familiar with Him according to the flesh—
 - He is an offense to them.
 - From Matthew 13:53-58,
 - I showed you how the people in Jesus’ hometown simply could not think of Him as a prophet!
 - He had grown up in their town!
 - How could He be that different from anybody else?
 - The fact that He came in true human flesh has caused many to stumble through the ages.
 - They suppose that if He is one of us, He cannot truly be the Son of God.
- The third week (last week), I showed you from Matthew 14:1-12 that Jesus is a terror to the impenitent.
 - We saw this illustrated through the life of Herod Antipas, who, although he was a ruler, was afraid of Jesus.
 - Anyone who tries to oppose the Son of God and work of God will be afraid, because he is trying to fight against God..
 - Such a person will especially be terrified on the Day of Judgement.
- This week, we come to Matthew 14:13-21.
 - Here we are told how Jesus, with two small fish and five loaves of bread, fed 5000 men (not even counting women and children)!
 - From this text I wish to show you that Jesus among us is a provider for the hungry.
 - First, I want to show you the compassion of Jesus.

- Second, how Jesus calls you to imitate His compassion.
- Third, how He supplies you with what you need to show compassion to others.

But before developing these points,

- I want to take a few minutes to consider how all these things came about.
 - It all began when Jesus heard about John's death and Herod's response to it.
 - The other gospels tell us that Jesus' disciples had just returned from their first mission—you will recall how Jesus had sent them out to preach and heal the sick...
 - And so it was because of these two things—John's death and the disciples return—
 - that Jesus purposed to get away from the multitudes and spend some time in a deserted place with just His disciples.
 - It would give Him an opportunity to speak to them about John's death and about their ministry experiences...
 - and in relation to these, about his own death (which was now only a year away) and their future ministry at that time.
 - There was a need to get away from all the crowds.
- But as you all know very well from experience, plans to get away are often interrupted.
 - You plan to get away with your wife or your family,
 - and somebody gets sick or injured—
 - or you get news of a crisis that has to be tended to.
 - Well, it was no different for Jesus!
 - He and His disciples set out in their little boat to a deserted spot near Bethsaida—
 - probably Bethsaida Julias, a little fishing village on the north-eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee—in the region of Herod Philip—
 - not the same as the Bethsaida that was the native place of Peter, Andrew, and Philip.
 - The name “Bethsaida” means “house of fish,” so it was the name of more than one village on the Sea of Galilee.
 - So Jesus and His disciples are going there to get away and spend some time alone,

- But the multitudes discover their plans and follow them on foot, walking around the shore to head them off.
- There would have been more people than usual in the area at this time because Passover was at hand.
 - Travellers from the north would have begun making their way toward Jerusalem for the great event...
 - You can imagine how many of them who stopped over with friends and relatives in Galilee would have been very excited to hear reports about Jesus and the signs He was performing!
 - They would have wanted to see Him and to be healed by Him if they had any infirmities.
 - This explains why there was such a large crowd and why they were so eager to pursue Jesus at this particular time.
 - Many of these had never seen Jesus.
- And so it was in this way that Jesus' plans to be alone were completely foiled...
 - instead being along with the 12, there were these 5000 who have come together in deserted place!
 - But of course, there was really no mistake in all this at all!
 - The Lord's plan was being unfolded just as He intended.
 - The intrusion of the multitudes on their retreat was divinely arranged in order to teach the disciples some very important lessons:
 - Namely, the three things I mentioned before:
 - First, that Jesus is compassionate...
 - Second, that Jesus wants them to imitate His compassion...
 - Third, that Jesus gives them the resources to be compassionate.

So now with the background understood,

- I want to impress these three lessons upon each of you:

I. First, see here the compassion of Jesus.

A. We are told in verse 14 that when Jesus came out of the boat and saw the great multitudes who had arrived ahead of Him,

1. He did not say, "Oh no," and head off to another spot to avoid them...

a. Now don't misunderstand—

1) There were many times when Jesus did deliberately avoid the crowds...

- He did it to get away and pray...
 - He did it when it was time to move on to another city...
 - He did it to confer with His disciples.
 - We will even find Him doing it after this great feeding miracle.
- 2) You will often find that in order to minister according to God's calling you will have to avoid the multitudes.
- It is wise to turn off the ringer on the phone when you do family worship...
 - to break away from a family reunion to keep the Lord's Day...
 - to set aside an evening to be with your spouse or your family.
- b. But there will also be times when you need to lay aside your plans to help out someone in need...
- to open up your home to strangers who are stranded or who just need a place to stay...
 - to take time out of your regular activities to speak to someone who is distressed and struggling...
 - to clean house for one who is sick...

TRANS> Jesus looks at the multitude with all their needs coming to Him and He does not say, "Oh no," but rather,

2. He is moved with compassion!

- a. The word translated "moved with compassion" is a very strong one—
- it suggests that He was **deeply** moved when He saw these multitudes!
- 1) He looks upon them and He sees all the affliction that sin has brought.
- He sees them as sheep without a shepherd—with no one to care for them...
 - He sees the blind and the lame...
 - He sees the oppressed and the abused...
 - He sees the sick and the poor...
- 2) But most of all, He sees their destiny if they are not reconciled to God!
- He knows that the infirmities they now experience are but a small foretaste of the judgement that is to come at the last day...
 - the judgement that awaits them all if not for His work on the cross...
 - and the judgement that fall on each one who does not repent.

TRANS> Jesus looks at them, and He is moved with compassion.

- He is not cold and calculating about human suffering.

b. In fact, there is no one with compassion like Jesus!

- His compassion stands out on two accounts:
 - First, because it is a holy compassion,
 - Second, because it is such great compassion.
 - Let me explain how He stands out in each of these ways.

1) First, that His is a holy compassion.

- a) There are, in this world, many people who are known to be very compassionate whose compassion is in fact a very unholy thing...
 - It is not driven by love for God, but rather by hatred of Him.
 - They resent our heavenly Father for afflicting the human race with His dreadful curse.
 - They feel that He has been most cruel and unjust to the sons of men.
- As a result, their compassion toward the suffering is actually a way of expressing their hatred against God.
 - It is a compassion that is saturated with poison that oozes out in disparaging and even blasphemous little comments about God.
 - They are ready to weep with others and even to lend out a helping hand, but it is all rooted in wretched bitterness against God.

b) But not our Lord Jesus!

- His is a holy compassion...
 - A compassion that fully recognises, accepts, and even rejoices in the holy justice of God...
 - A compassion that abhorred the idea of the justice of God being laid aside to forgive sinners...
 - A compassion that even wanted to magnify the justice God in His own public crucifixion before the whole world...
 - that everyone might know what God required to save sinners.

TRANS> His compassion stood out from all others as a holy compassion!

2) But it also stood out as a great compassion!

- a) It was a compassion in which He was fully pleased to take the place of others in their sufferings!
 - And not just in theory, but to actually be afflicted with the affliction that they would otherwise have been afflicted with!
 - He was willing to have all our diseases put upon Him!
 - He was willing to have the eternal curse of God put on Him so that we who believe would never have to taste it!
 - There are many who are willing to help those who suffer, but there are not many who are willing to take the place of another in suffering.

- b) And not only that, but Jesus was also willing to do this for those that were His enemies!
 - Indeed, they were afterwards to become His friends,
 - But when He died for them, their conduct was utterly abhorrent to His holy eyes—
 - more abhorrent than any one's conduct has ever been to your eyes!
 - And yet, even so, He was willing to suffer the penalty for them that they justly deserve!
 - I tell you, there is no compassion as great as His compassion!

- 3) And so there He is, looking upon the multitude coming to Him...
 - looking upon them the same way He looks upon such people today!
 - Even though He had to suffer far more than any of them will ever suffer in this life,
 - yet He does not disparage their sufferings or discount them in any way...
 - He does not say, "Oh but that is nothing compared to my sufferings."
 - No! He sees in these the great disorder that sin has brought into the world...
 - And He is deeply moved with compassion.
 - His heart goes out.
 - He is not disgusted with them, but broken over them!
 - He says, "I will do all that I must to put an end to these sufferings."

- “I will go to the cross for their sake!”

TRANS> There is no one as compassionate as Jesus!

- He does not weep with us as one shaking His fist at God the Father for afflicting us...
- But He weeps for us and with us as one who does what is required to put us right with God that we might be reconciled to Him!

B. And I say brothers and sisters,

- you need to take a fresh look at Jesus over and over again,
 - You need to consider all that the Bible has to say about Him!
- 1. It is instructive to remember that Matthew is here speaking about Jesus compassion for the multitude a second time in connection with the sending out of his disciples to minister.
 - a. In chapter 11, when Jesus was just getting ready to send them out,
 - Matthew explained that His motive was that He looked on the multitudes and felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without shepherd.
 - He was minded to train His disciples to carry the gospel to the needy world because of His great love for people.
 - b. And now, here is Jesus at the end of their first missionary experience, once again looking on the multitude with compassion.
 - The disciples did not fully understand this compassion, and neither do we.
 - By repeating it, the Holy Spirit is trying to impress the reality of it upon us.
 - It is hard to believe that the Son of God, who has such an abhorrence for sin, should have such compassion for His lost sheep!
 - But He does!
- 2. You need to hear about His compassion again and again!
 - I want to warn you to be sure that you never lose sight of Jesus’ compassion in your zeal for reforming the church’s doctrine today.
 - a. I have recently spoken to you about Christ’s judgement and how in holy justice He will destroy all His enemies!
 - I have mentioned how this is a point that is often lost in our generation, even in the church.
 - We see Jesus as a lamb only and not a lion.

- We think He would never hurt anyone...
 - The church desperately needs to see His holiness and wrath today!
 - It is a thing that is continually neglected in our day and we must emphasise it if we want to know Jesus as He is...
- b. But as we emphasise these things,
 - we must not react so that we lose sight of the compassion of our Lord!
 - If we do, we have gained nothing!
 - All we have done is substitute one idol for another!
 - We have dismissed the sentimental god of our age and replaced Him with a cruel god that delights judgement.
 - With such a theology, you will be sanctified with vinegar instead of with grace...
 - A bulldog rather than a saint!
 - Oh how our hearts are prone to idolatry!
 - How easily we slip from one error into another about our Lord!

TRANS> And so here you see how Jesus was moved with compassion for the people.

- Behold His great compassion!
 - That is the first thing I want you to see from this passage...
 - Now for the second:

II. See that Jesus calls you to have the same compassion for people.

- A. The disciples frequently show that they do not yet have the compassion of their Master...
 - They have about had enough of the multitude for one day!
- 1. In v. 15, we told that
 - “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 some food.’”
- a. I should explain that the Jews speak of two evenings—
 - The first evening began at about 3:00 PM and the second began at 6:00 PM after the Sun went down.
 - Here, they speak of the first evening.

- The disciples were concerned that it was getting late.
 - The people needed to go into the surrounding villages to buy food or they would miss supper.
- b. Now you might wonder what made them even think of such a thing.
- 1) Perhaps they themselves were hungry and wanted to go and get something to eat...
 - Often when you see a person showing concern for others in a situation like this,
 - it really has to do more with their own interests than anybody else's.
 - 2) But I think it is more likely that the disciples bring up this concern about the multitude because Jesus had brought it to their attention earlier.
 - In John's gospel,
 - He presented the problem of feeding these people to Philip when the multitude was first starting to come to Him.
 - Not at the end of the day, but when He first began teaching He said to Philip:
 - John 6:5: "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"
 - And John adds:
 - John 6:6: But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.
 - Philip's initial response is given in verse 7:
 - John 6:7: "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."
 - Now two hundred denarii is more than half a year's wages!
 - It seems that Jesus had given this problem of feeding all these people to Philip for him to mull over with the other eleven disciples while He was teaching and healing.
 - Jesus had asked him this while the multitude was first gathering...
- c. And so it seems reasonable to surmise that when the disciples come to Jesus at the end of the day and tell Him to "send the multitude away so that they can buy something..."
- they are bringing to Him the solution to the question He had given to Philip earlier.
 - They are saying,

- “Lord, we have thought this through and there is only one thing to do if these people are going to eat—
 - “Send them away to the villages and let them buy food for themselves.”
2. Well now, that seems like a very reasonable solution, doesn't it?
- a. It is reasonable enough, but cold!
 - It is without compassion!
 - These people have come to Jesus to visit Him and He is minded to show proper hospitality to them!
 - He does not want His disciples to be cold!
 - He wants them to be warm and outreaching—caring!
 - He wants us to extend ourselves in love to others!
 - He wants us to be a people of compassion.
 - b. Here is another thing about which we must be very careful as reformed people!
 - When we first started this congregation,
 - I used to emphasise that we want this to be a church that is sound in doctrine but at the same time loving in practice!
 - We need to remember that!
 - It is too often the case that the church that is careful about its doctrine is not very careful about its love and its hospitality!
 - Sometimes, the sovereignty of God is used as an excuse to be cold to others...
 - It is supposed that we need not witness or reach out because God is going to take care of it anyway.
 - Well I am here to tell you that Jesus believed in the absolute sovereignty of God,
 - but this did not make Him cold—it made Him warm toward others!
 - In fact, I would say that if your understanding of the sovereignty of God makes you cold,
 - you don't really understand the sovereignty of God in a biblical way at all!
 - It is because of the sovereignty of God that we ought to respond to the needs of those around us,

- knowing that God has brought those needs to us and that He wants us to minister to them!

B. Jesus responds to His disciples with a shocking commandment here:

1. He says:

- “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat!”
- And the word **You** is emphatic!
- **“You** give them something to eat!”

2. Now the disciples begin to look at their resources.

a. They look at what they have—

1) It would seem that there was young boy there was trying to sell some food...

- Such boys are often around when there is a crowd like this—they set up a little concession stand and sell lemonade or something.
- This boy had two fishes (probably salted or dried and ready for eating)...
- And five pieces of barley bread—not really loaves, but those little flat round breads that were common in those days—something like pita bread.
- The disciples apparently bought these from him, but that was all they could find in the whole place.

2) Now I want you to think about this....

- Suppose we had five thousand men along with women and children show up to church one week and we decided that we ought to feed them all!
- Incidentally, I think we should be more diligent about showing hospitality to our visitors—
- but what if there were five thousand families that showed up and you were told to give them something to eat?

b. You would certainly conclude as the disciples did that we don’t have the resources to feed them all!

- And this would be true!
- In ourselves, we would not have the resources!
- It is proper for us to understand our own weakness and inability.

3. But I would submit to you that this is exactly the place where God often puts His people!

- He puts them in the place where his strength can be made perfect in their weakness—
- a. Is this not where the disciples were when Jesus went away into heaven?
 - 1) Jesus had commanded them to carry His gospel to the nations,
 - but they were only poor uneducated men!
 - They only had two fishes and five breads!
 - How could they possibly take His word to the ends of the earth?
 - Humanly speaking, it was impossible!
 - 2) And look at ministers of the gospel today!
 - We are called to take the two fishes and the five breads (a sermon we have prepared) and to minister God’s saving benefits into people’s lives!
 - It is absolutely absurd!
 - Humanly speaking, it is impossible—
 - Yet Jesus commands us to do it anyway!
 - Unless He adds power to the word, there will be no life for the dead!
- b. Do you not very often find yourself in the same position as Christ’s disciples?
 - You look at what He has called you to do and it seems utterly impossible?
 - 1) Think about initial salvation:
 - He comes to a sinner and says,
 - Isa 1:16-17: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.”
 - And you say—“How can I do this?”
 - “I have no soap to wash away my sins, and how can I change my heart?”
 - “All I have is these two fishes and five breads.”
 - But look to Jesus—He takes that little measure of faith and repentance you have and saves you by His grace...
 - not because your faith is adequate, but because He is adequate.

TRANS> And as you go on as a disciple, He keeps calling you to love people above and beyond your resources and strength!

- 2) He says to you wives,
 - “Respect your husbands...”
 - And you say, “But you don’t know my husband!”
 - and if you are more honest you say,
 - “You don’t know me!”
 - “All I have is these five breads and two fishes.”
 - And still He says, “Respect him and submit to him.”

- 3) And He says to you husbands:
 - “Love your wives and live with them in an understanding way...”
 - And you say, “But I am too busy.”
 - And besides,
 - “My wife is a very difficult person to understand—she changes all the time...”
 - And still the Lord says: “Love her and understand her...”

- 4) And I could go on and on with all the things He calls you to do that you feel like you just can’t do—
 - things that seem entirely impossible and out of reach to you!
 - a) Children, He calls you to honour your parents and obey them...
 - “But my parents are unreasonable.”
 - “Honour them anyway!”
 - b) Fathers, He calls you to train up your children in the nurture and discipline of the Lord.
 - But I don’t have time! I don’t have the training! I don’t know where to begin!
 - Jesus says, “I didn’t ask you if you have the qualifications, I told you to do it.”
 - c) And when you have offended your brother, the Lord calls you to go and be reconciled.
 - “But I know what he will do if I go to him—he will just get angry with me...”
 - “It won’t do any good...”
 - Jesus says, “I didn’t ask you if it would do any good, I told you to go and reconcile with him.”

- d) And you who have enemies,
 - He calls you to love those enemies and do good to them.
 - “But Lord, I can’t; you don’t know what my enemy is like.”
 - e) He calls you to do your work heartily and with love to your neighbour—even when you are depressed.
 - But I just can’t—I just don’t feel like it!
 - But I have this lazy streak in me...
 - But I get easily distracted!
 - f) He calls you to be generous to others.
 - But you see, it’s different for me... I don’t have as much as others and I can’t.”
 - g) He calls you to give a reason of the hope that you have.
 - “But I need to understand more first.”
 - h) He calls you not to give yourself to crippling worry or fear that keep you from serving others...
 - “But Lord, I have been diagnosed with this anxiety disorder—I can’t help it.”
 - i) He calls you to love as He loves, and to be compassionate as He is compassionate!
- c. I agree that in yourself, you clearly don’t have the resources any more than the disciples had the resources to feed the five thousand...
- any more than they had the resources to lay the foundation of the gospel on which the whole church was to depend!
 - But Jesus called them do it anyway!
 - He called them to minister to the five thousand just as He calls you to minister to those He has given to you!
 - He calls you to do it even though you don’t have the resources in yourself.

TRANS> And this brings us to the third thing I want you to see, namely, that...

III. Jesus will supply you with everything you need to show compassion to others.

A. But you must begin with what you have now.

1. Jesus commanded His disciples to bring what was wholly inadequate—those two fishes and five breads—to Him.
 - a. He said simply, “Bring them to Me.”
 - by which He implies:
 - “Bring them to Me and I will take care of the matter.”
 - b. And then Jesus had everyone sit down in companies at His grassy table under the vault of the open sky.
 - He prepared this great multitude to be served dinner by His disciples.
 - And He took those two fishes and five breads and He blessed them and gave them to His disciples to distribute to the whole multitude...
 - c. And as the disciples went forth to distribute this food,
 - They found that it was just as it was with the widow’s flour and oil in 1 Kings 17.
 - They kept taking out of their baskets and the Lord kept filling up their baskets...
 - And the more they took, the more He gave so that at the end of it all, everybody in the whole place was fed,
 - and each one of them still had a full basket!
2. And I want you to see that everyone who ate this food was wholly satisfied!
 - a. When verse 20 says “they ate and were filled,”
 - it uses a word that was used to refer to animals when they were given all the feed they wanted—
 - when they were allowed to eat until they didn’t want any more.
 - It was not just that everyone had a snack,
 - it was like the “all you can eat” restaurants where people just keep going back as long as they want...
 - Still there were leftovers!
 - b. Now of course this illustrates what Jesus does for His people...
 - 1) He fills them up completely so that they lack absolutely nothing!
 - a) He Himself is our inexhaustible supply.
 - Whoever comes and feeds on Him will never hunger again!
 - It is a wonderful thing.

b) In heaven, we will still have needs because we are creatures, but we will have no lack at all!

- It is part of being human to have needs
 - And it is the part of Jesus' compassion to perfectly satisfy every one of those needs.

2) But don't miss the **way** He supplies these needs...

- It does not give it directly to each individual...
 - but He gives it to His disciples who then give it to the people.
 - As one man put it,
 - "There is one Mediator who wins God's gifts; there are many mediators who distribute them."
 - He gives to us so that we may give to each other.
 - As long as we keep giving, we will keep having more.
 - The liberal soul will be made fat.

B. I submit to you that Jesus was teaching His disciples through this miracle the way that He would give Himself to the whole world as the bread of life.

1. The disciples had no bread but what He had given them,

a. Even the two fishes and the five breads had come from Him.

- Their abilities to speak and to walk about and to learn had all come from Him...
- And as small as those abilities may have been, they were still wonderful gifts...

b. But all the more wonderful when brought to Him!

- In His hands, they became the instruments that laid the foundation of the gospel for all ages on which the church is built.
- It was an impossible task for them...
 - but it was not impossible for Jesus to accomplish through them!

2. And so now I ask you what it is that you have been called to do?

a. What have you been called to do that you feel you have inadequate resources to do?

- Is it to love your wife? respect your husband? train up your children? express the reason of your hope to a neighbour?
- Well I will tell you right off that you are right...

- you don't have in yourself what it takes to do what Christ has called you to do.
- b. But He tells you to go ahead and start doing what He says...
- And this passage teaches you to do it in faith, looking to Him!
 - He will supply you with all you need to do His will!
 - Bring and use those ordinary means that you have and He will bring about extraordinary things!
 - There is David's slingshot that kills a giant!
 - There is the widow's little bag of flour and jar of oil that sustain a prophet.
 - There is a young servant girl's counsel to Naaman that brings him to faith.
 - There is a widow's mite that supplies more than all the other gifts.
 - There is a child's prayer that changes the destiny of nations.
 - There is the Word of a fisherman that saves 3000 souls in one day.
 - There is that tiny seed of faith that saved your soul forever.
 - There are those two fishes and five breads that feed 5000 men besides women and children!
 - The Lord works this way so that no flesh can glory in His presence.
 - He teaches us that without Him we can do nothing,
 - but that by His grace, we can do all that He calls us to do.
- c. How this passage ought to get you to praying and working!
- When you see how compassionate Jesus is toward us... how ready to help...
 - When you see how insufficient your resources are...
 - And when you see how He multiplies whatever you do for Him...
 - What else can you do but start giving out your bread and fish?
 - I can assure you, it will go a whole lot farther than you might think.