

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 26

THE TRUTH OF HIS ACTIONS



MATTHEW; MARK; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.’”

—John 11:25-27



JESUS PROVIDES

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 14:13-21

CONTEXT

Each Gospel writer told the story of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit inspired them to put their own unique emphasis on it. Mark focused on the action. Luke focused on detailed, eyewitness accounts. Matthew narrated Jesus's life by alternating between a specific event and teaching. Matthew 14 begins with John the Baptist's disciples informing Jesus of his execution at the command of King Herod. Jesus then withdrew to a desolate place, presumably to grieve, but the crowds followed Him. Instead of frustration, Jesus responded with compassion, and the people witnessed His power to provide.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus is always able to provide for His people beyond what is needed.

As you examine Matthew 14:13-21:

- Take comfort that Jesus's compassion and love motivate His actions.
- Give Jesus glory because He is "able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).



TIMELINE

Jesus Teaches with Many
Parables (Matthew 13:1-53)

Jesus Walks on Water
(Matthew 14:22-33)

Jesus Raises Lazarus from
the Dead (John 11:1-44)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Feeds the
Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

Jesus Heals in Gentile Regions
(Matthew 15:21-31)

Daily Readings

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|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: Matthew 14:1-12 | ☐ Day 4: Mark 6:30-44 |
| ☐ Day 2: Matthew 14:13-21 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 13:1-35 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 6:14-29 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 100 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS ACTS WITH COMPASSION AND LOVE IN HEALING AND PROVIDING FOR HIS PEOPLE (MATTHEW 14:13-17).

Underline all the reasons the disciples wanted to send away the crowd.

13 When Jesus heard about it, he withdrew from there by boat to a remote place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd, had compassion on them, and healed their sick. **15** When evening came, the disciples approached him and said, “This place is deserted, and it is already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” **16** “They don’t need to go away,” Jesus told them. “You give them something to eat.” **17** “But we only have five loaves and two fish here,” they said to him.

Jesus wanted to be alone, either grieved by the death of John the Baptist, wary of Herod’s interest in Him, or perhaps both. Yet despite His desire for silence and solitude, the desperation of the crowds wouldn’t allow it. What was a relatively short trip by boat for Him and His disciples was matched by the crowds taking the long way around on foot. Jesus couldn’t escape the mass of people. But rather than be annoyed by the presence of the crowds, Jesus had compassion on them. This compassion was a visceral emotion, a pulling on the heart strings. Jesus cared.

LEADER NOTE: In this narrative, Matthew intentionally contrasted Jesus with Herod in 14:1-12, pointing out that both fed people, but the differences could not be more stark. Herod invited nobility to dine with him, whereas Jesus would feed the needy. Herod’s feast was in the palace; Jesus’s feast was in the wilderness. Herod’s actions were driven by baser impulses, but Jesus was moved by compassion. Herod’s banquet resulted in injustice and death; Jesus’s picnic would result in people witnessing His power to provide. Jesus may have been the rejected King, but His kingdom was superior to Herod’s earthly kingdom.

Jesus had compassion for the crowd and healed their sick, but the disciples eventually noticed some logistical issues. It was late, and the people hadn’t eaten. Dispersing the crowds would take time, and the nearest village was a distance away. The disciples had no idea how the crowd of people would eat, and they didn’t want the responsibility of trying to feed them. They saw their situation through the eyes of reality: lots of people and little food on hand.

What challenges keep you from showing compassion like Jesus?

Jesus responded to the disciples' logical concerns with what sounded like a problem-solving challenge: "You give them something to eat" (v. 16). Jesus involved the disciples in what was to come by putting the initial responsibility on their shoulders. Again, the disciples looked around at the reality of their situation and saw it for what it was: "We only have five loaves and two fish here" (v. 17). The disciples were being truthful. The cost to feed this crowd would be over half a year's salary (John 6:7). Obviously, more than five thousand people could not be fed with five loaves and two fish.

Yet for all their human logic, the disciples failed to take into account Jesus's power: Jesus had healed diseases, cast out demons, and calmed a storm at sea (see Matt. 8–9). Here, Jesus was involving the disciples in His solution to the problem at hand, but He would supply what they needed. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand their role and acknowledge that He could provide for them even with the little they had. Jesus wanted His disciples to see reality through the eyes of faith.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus's mission is our mission as believers. Just as Jesus involved the disciples in His ministry, so too does He involve the church today. And the recipe for involvement hasn't changed. First, we must see people as Jesus sees them—with compassion. Without compassion, we might see the needy as a nuisance or burden. Second, we must see every need through the eyes of faith, trusting that Jesus can multiply what we have from Him to meet the needs of others.

What might having eyes of faith mean for your present reality?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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x

STEWARDSHIP: God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to view the details each of the Gospel writers gave to the feeding of the five thousand.

JESUS CAN PROVIDE ABOVE AND BEYOND WHAT WE NEED (MATTHEW 14:18-21).

Circle descriptions of the extent to which Jesus provided for the people and His disciples.

18 “Bring them here to me,” he said. **19** Then he commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. **20** Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces. **21** Now those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

With the five loaves of bread and two fish in hand, Jesus said a blessing, thanking God for the miracle He was about to perform. Matthew would have expected his readers to recall the Old Testament connections for this miracle. First, the miracle would have called to mind the manna in the wilderness that was announced by Moses. God led the Israelites through the barren desert without food so they would learn to trust Him. In response to their hunger, God promised to “rain bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4). Like the Israelites, the crowds were in a desolate place without food, and Jesus miraculously provided bread.

Second, Matthew alluded to the story of Elisha recounted in 2 Kings 4:42-44. After a man brought twenty loaves of bread, Elisha told his servant to feed the people. The servant, like the disciples, saw only the small amount of bread compared to the large number of mouths to feed. But Elisha commanded him: “Give it to the people to eat . . . for this is what the LORD says: ‘They will eat, and they will have some left over’” (v. 43), and it happened as the Lord promised. Sound familiar?

LEADER NOTE: An undisputed biblical truth is that God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of everything. As Creator, God owns everything, and that means all created things are at His disposal. This truth also means that created, physical things are good, including our bodies and the food we put in our bodies. Jesus miraculously provided food for the crowd, revealing His power to provide as God the Son, the Creator and Sustainer of all.

Why do you think Matthew wanted his readers to remember these stories from Israel’s history?

Key Concept: Jesus is always able to provide for His people beyond what is needed.

It would be miraculous enough for the five loaves and two fish to barely feed the crowd, but they were “satisfied,” or full (Matt. 14:20). And then there were leftovers—twelve baskets full—a number generally used for completeness, like the twelve tribes and twelve disciples. Jesus doesn’t provide the bare minimum—He satisfies; He fills; He completes.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“One basket for each apostle: . . . This was to manifest and magnify the miracle, and to show that the provision Christ makes for those who are his is not bare and scanty, but rich and plenteous.”¹

—Matthew Henry (1662–1714)

Just as this miraculous feeding recalled the past, it also foreshadowed the future. Both in the Old Testament (Isa. 25:6–10) and in the New Testament (Luke 14:12–24; Rev. 19:6–9), the kingdom of God is compared to a feast. Jesus gave the crowd—and us—a glimpse of what His kingdom will be like: satisfaction, and even more, salvation.

LEADER NOTE: In Matthew 14, Jesus “took,” “blessed,” “broke,” and “gave” the bread (v. 19). At the last supper, Matthew recorded: “As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples” (26:26). Matthew wasn’t implying the feeding of the five thousand was the same as the Lord’s Supper, but he was pointing ahead. He wanted his readers to see how this miraculous meal pointed to a future meal. Just as Jesus provided bread and fish to satisfy the crowd, He would provide His flesh and blood on the cross to satisfy our need for salvation.

How have you experienced satisfaction in Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus is a provider, providing salvation from sin and death.

Notes



Notes



ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As people arrive, ask: “How has someone surprised you with generosity far beyond what you expected? How did you respond?”

CONTEXT

REVIEW: In the chapters leading up to today’s passage in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom of heaven and demonstrating His authority through miracles. Crowds were growing. People were bringing the sick to Him, and everywhere He went, needs seemed endless. At the same time, opposition against Him was rising, and news reached Jesus that John the Baptist—His forerunner—had been executed by the order of King Herod. Seeking a moment of solitude, Jesus withdrew by boat to a quiet place. *(Call attention to **Pack Item 2: Jesus’s Ministry Map** and point out the place where Jesus may have fed the five thousand.)* But the people followed Him. Thousands of men, women, and children walked around the shoreline just to be near Him. Even in His grief, Jesus responded to them with compassion. He healed their sick, cared for their needs, and ultimately took five loaves and two fish and fed more than five thousand people.

RECAP

ASK: What details stood out to you from the passage as you prepared this week? What questions might you have about the text?

TRANSITION: Today we will look closely at the miraculous feeding of a multitude of people. This will help us consider how Jesus provides far more than we expect, both for our physical needs and for our faith.



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GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 56 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “From Scarcity to Surplus.” Recreate this chart on a board so you can record the group responses as they interact with Scripture.

From Scarcity to Surplus

Read Matthew 14:13-21. Write down the problems as the disciples saw them. Then record what Jesus did to overcome the obstacles and meet the need.

WHAT THE DISCIPLES SAW	WHAT JESUS DID
MATTHEW 14:13-17	
MATTHEW 14:18-21	

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 14:13-17.

INSTRUCT: Direct your group to divide into smaller groups of 3-4. Instruct the small groups to look back at the passage and identify (1) what the disciples saw in the situation and (2) what Jesus did in the passage. Encourage them to record their findings in their PSG and to reference the comments in the PSG’s personal preparation section for additional insight, if needed.

READ: Invite a second volunteer to read aloud Matthew 14:18-21.

ANALYZE: Direct the small groups to identify and record what the disciples saw and witnessed along with what Jesus did in the passage. Remind them to write down their findings in the PSG.

REPORT: After a few minutes, invite groups to share their responses. As they report, record their findings in the chart on the board. Encourage participants to record them in their PSG as well. Clarify and add Scripture references as needed.

Notes

ENGAGE: Ask your group: “What stands out to you as we consider the disciples’ perspective side-by-side with Jesus’s actions?” (*The disciples focused on what they lacked and the size of the crowd; Jesus saw an opportunity to provide for the people and to teach His disciples that His resources are limitless.*) Note that Jesus intentionally invited His followers to bring to Him what little they had, even when it seemed insufficient.

APPLY: Encourage your group to think about what small “loaves and fish” Jesus might be calling them to bring to Him this week. Lead the group to identify at least one practical area in which they can trust Jesus’s abundant provision.

DEBRIEF

Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples to bring what they had, even though it wasn’t enough?

Where do you tend to see “what the disciples saw” in your own circumstances?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus is always able to provide for His people beyond what is needed. The disciples brought to Jesus only five loaves and two fish, but Jesus welcomed their small offering and turned it into more than enough for thousands. In the same way, Jesus invites us to bring Him whatever we have, no matter how limited it seems. He can take our meager offerings and multiply their amount or impact so that His compassion can reach the world through us. His resources are limitless, and by His grace, Jesus meets not only physical needs but the deeper spiritual needs that only He can satisfy.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 57). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: While we trust Jesus to save our souls, we often lack faith to trust Him with our everyday physical needs. Reality forces us to believe that our only options are worry and hustle. Jesus’s feeding of the five thousand encourages us to trust God with all of our needs, including the physical ones.

What are some needs that you should entrust to God’s care?



HEART: It is far easier to acknowledge that we should trust God than to put that trust in action. Often something deeper in our hearts holds us back from trusting Him. Before we can trust God fully, we need to identify those heart issues that cause us to doubt Him and address them with prayer and remembering the history of God’s faithfulness.

What keeps you from trusting God to provide for all your needs?

Key Concept: Jesus is always able to provide for His people beyond what is needed.



HANDS: As with the disciples, Jesus wants to involve His church today in meeting physical and spiritual needs. When we make ourselves available to Jesus, He can use us to meet needs all around us. Yet while we are available, involved, and active, we must know it's really Jesus doing the work through us through the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

How will you make yourself available this week to be used by God to meet the needs around you?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Spend time this week re-reading Matthew 14:13-21. Reflect on one place in your life where you feel you “don’t have enough,” and write a short prayer asking Jesus to help you trust His provision.
- Identify one small “loaf and fish” in your own circumstances, something that feels limited or insignificant, and offer it to Jesus for His use.
- Share with a trusted friend or group member a need or challenge you are facing. Invite them to pray with you and help you look for signs of Jesus’s abundant provision.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 57 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 100:1-3 with your group. Pray for opportunities for your group to serve the Lord with gladness. Thank Him for all He has done.

References

1. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1685.

Notes

