

## Jesus Fed the Four Thousand

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that Jesus did the miracles of healing to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and also to show that He was truly God. In this topic, we will see that Jesus fed the large crowd of people that had come to see and hear Him.

Jesus had healed many people with disabilities that could not be healed by doctors. Here, we see that the people had remained with Jesus on that mountain, so that they could hear Him teach. They were so interested in the things that Jesus taught that they did not even think about their hunger. In Matthew 15:32, we read, “Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.’” Mark added one detail when he wrote in Mark 8:2-3, “‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.’” Here, we see that Jesus knew that some of the people had traveled a great distance in order to hear Him.

Jesus recognized the need of the people even before they realized their own need. The people had been there for three days. They had not had anything to eat during that time. Jesus said that He had compassion on the multitude. The word translated “compassion” means *to be moved with love and pity from the inner man*. This word is used twelve times in the New Testament and ten of those times we see that Jesus is moved with compassion for people. The other two times this word is used in the New Testament were when Jesus spoke about someone showing compassion. One use of the word is in the passage about the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:33 says, “‘But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.’” The other use is in the passage about the prodigal son, in Luke 15:20, where we read, “‘And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.’”

The other ten uses of the word all speak directly of the compassion that Jesus felt as He saw people in physical or spiritual need. Jesus knew that these people had been with him for three days. He knew that, during that time, they had nothing to eat. He also knew that some of them had walked a long way to hear Him and some might have a difficult time making it home if He sent them away hungry. As a result, Jesus explained this need of the people to His disciples and explained to them that He had compassion for the people. In Matthew 15:33-34, we read, “Then His disciples said to Him, ‘Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?’ Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ And they said, ‘Seven, and a few little fish.’” We see that the disciples heard what Jesus said, but they could only see it as a problem.

The disciples explained the problem, as they saw it, to Jesus. They said that there was no place

where they could buy enough food to feed the people because they were in a wilderness area. This meant that there were no nearby towns where they could go to buy food. They had just seen Jesus heal many disabilities in the previous three days, but they could not make the connection between the power of Jesus to heal, and the power of Jesus to provide food for the hunger of the people. In Matthew 14, we saw that Jesus had fed a crowd of five thousand men plus the women and the children. Matthew 14:20-21 says, “So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” However, the disciples seem to have forgotten what Jesus had done and so all they could think of was the fact that there were no nearby towns where they could buy food for this very large crowd of people.

Instead of reminding the disciples of what He had done on the earlier occasion, Jesus just asked the disciples the question, “How many loaves do you have?” Here, we see that Jesus wanted the disciples to find out what they had available. This is an important principle for all Christians to learn. The Lord has provided what we have and He is able to meet needs through what He has provided us. Instead of focusing on the problem, we need to ask the Lord how to use what He has given us to meet whatever situation the Lord allows in our lives. Philippians 4:19 says, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” When we put the Lord first in our lives and service, we can trust Him to supply what is needed to carry out the work that He has called us to do.

The disciples said that they had seven loaves and a few small fish. The loaves of bread that the Jews made, in that time, were several inches long if they were oblong and about as thick as a thumb. Part of the time they were round, but about the same size. At the feeding of the five thousand, John 6:9 says, ““There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”” The disciples made it clear, on that day, that the amount of food would not normally do much to feed a large crowd. The same thing was true here because they only had a little more food that day than they had at the feeding of the five thousand. God led the disciples, both times, to give the amount of food available, to show how great a miracle Jesus performed in both events.

Once the disciples told Jesus what was available, we see what happened next. Matthew 15:35-39 says, “So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples *gave* to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.” Here, we see that Jesus commanded the crowd there, that day, to be seated on the ground. When Jesus fed the five thousand, Luke 9:14 says, “For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’” That time, Jesus organized the people so that it would be easier for the disciples to distribute the food. He probably did the same thing this time, as He commanded the people to sit down.

Once the people were seated, Jesus took the loaves and the fish and gave thanks to the Father for

the food. Here, we see that Jesus showed, by example, a very important lesson that we want to help our children show as they help new Christians begin to grow. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Many new Christians have never prayed and thanked God for their food. This is one of the ways that we can help our children learn to show new Christians, by example, an attitude of thankfulness to the Father for what He provides for us day by day.

Then, Jesus broke the loaves and the fish and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people who were seated on the mountainside. Jesus had performed the miracle which was impossible for anyone else to do. However, He gave the disciples the responsibility to distribute the food once He had performed the miracle. In this way, Jesus showed that we help people learn to serve the Lord by giving them small responsibilities where they can begin to serve the Lord. Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” In this verse, we see that Christ wants each Christian to learn to serve Him. Jesus used many different things to teach the disciples how to serve Him.

Next, Jesus showed the disciples that He had provided more than enough food to feed all of the people. Jesus did this by having the disciples gather up the food that remained after everyone had eaten all they wanted. We read, “They took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.” The word translated “baskets” is used in Acts 9:25, where we read, “Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” Here, we see that the basket was large enough to hold Saul while he was let down from the wall of the city of Damascus. Since the basket was large enough to hold Saul as he was lowered from the wall of the city, this meant that the seven baskets of food were very large baskets.

We also read that there were four thousand men plus women and children there that day. This meant that a very large crowd had eaten and been filled with the food that Jesus had multiplied. This is a reminder of the fact that Christ knows what we need and will provide what is needed as we are obedient to Him. Jesus then sent away the multitude to their homes. The people had been there for three days and Jesus knew that they needed to return to their homes, but also recognized that they would not leave unless He sent them away. When Jesus fed the five thousand, the people came back the next day because they wanted to be fed again. Jesus did not want the people to stay in that area for a similar reason. Instead, He wanted to meet their need this time so that they could return home. Then, Jesus and the disciples went to the Sea of Galilee and got into the boat. They traveled by boat to the region of Magdala. The town of Magdala was about five miles south of the town of Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the compassion that Jesus showed to the people by feeding them in an area where there was no place to get food. By our example, we can show our children how to have compassion for others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show compassion.