

# FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

Date: April 1, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 15:29-38

Good morning! My name is Jonathan Christian and in this Lent season we are working through some of the miracles of Jesus shared with us across the gospel accounts and then we are looking at how each of these miracles points us to the greatest of all the miracles, which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So let's dive in.

The miracle of Jesus we are focused on today is found in Matthew 15:29-38 and tells the story of when Jesus feeds the four thousand, which is sometimes mixed up with the more commonly known feeding of the five thousand. But in Matthew 15, starting with verse 29, we read:

<sup>29</sup> Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> 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, <sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke

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them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 15:29-38

So, just one chapter after Jesus fed the five thousand in Matthew 14, we come here to Matthew 15 and read that Jesus has been healing a lot of people. And it is after three days worth of healing that Jesus presented what had to have been a familiar dilemma to His disciples. In verse 32, Jesus essentially says, “Guys we have a bit of a situation here, there are thousands of hungry people here that have nothing left to eat!”

At which point you might think that the disciples would’ve recalled Jesus’s other feeding miracle and picked up on the context clues here and said, “Jesus here is my lunch, feed them with this!” But no, instead, their nervous reply makes it clear that, like most of us, they are still learning what it means to trust Jesus entirely, when they say, “Where can we find enough food for all of these people Jesus?”

To which Jesus replied, “Well, how much food do you guys have left?” And yet again, it was fish and it was bread, but notice that the number is different than the feeding of the five thousand. This time it is seven loaves of bread instead of five.

As we continue in verse 36, we read that Jesus thanked God for the seven loaves of bread and bit of fish, divided it up and once again asked His disciples to hand it out. And hand it out they did until everyone, all four thousand men plus women and

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children, had eaten as much as they wanted, even with enough food to fill up several baskets of leftovers. How many baskets exactly? Seven!

Which is an important number given the context of where the feeding of the four thousand took place. You see, the feeding of the five thousand, just one chapter before, took place near Bethsaida, close to the Sea of Galilee in a region where only Jews, God's chosen people, lived. But in contrast, here the feeding of the four thousand took place in the region of the Gerasenes, in the region around the Decapolis, where all of the frowned upon Gentiles, or non-Jewish folks like you and I lived.

Which brings us back to the numbers, which are rarely incidental in Scripture.

In the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus takes five loaves and feeds five thousand, which is reminiscent of the five books of the Jewish Law, the first five books of the Old Testament called the Pentateuch; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Not only that, but when everyone had finished eating, 12 baskets of leftovers were collected, which many scholars believe is probably alluding to the 12 tribes of Israel found in the Old Testament.

But here in Matthew 15, when Jesus feeds the four thousand, seven loaves are used and seven baskets are collected, which is the number the Bible often uses to symbolize completeness as it is evocative of the seven days of creation when God created all of humanity. So in light of this, the number of loaves, seven, and the

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number of baskets, seven, seems to be used here to send the message that Jesus had come for all people, completely, not just Jews, but Gentiles too.

So in summary, where both miracles show the provision of the Lord, it is the feeding of the four thousand that really highlights God's complete love for all people including you and I. A love that was ultimately put on full display when Jesus's body would be broken on the cross like the very bread He broke with the four thousand plus and also symbolized by the bread we share when we partake in the sacrament of Communion today.

And if God's love for all people wasn't already enough, how awesome is it that His display of love on the cross was accompanied by His display of victorious power as well, when He would be raised to life again on the third day so that all people would have the opportunity to discover and deepen a relationship with Him.

Let's pray.

God, thank You so much for Your Word and for Your miraculous power that reminds us, not only of Your ability, but also Your desire for all people to surrender to Your Lordship and Your desire for all people begin a life-long and a life-changing relationship with You. It is in Your Son, Jesus's name that I pray. Amen.