

## Let Them Eat Bread

30 June 2024

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As many of you would be aware, this Thursday is election day here in the UK. Now, as an American who cannot vote in this election, the day is significant for a very different reason.

It's the 4th of the July.

It's a day that Americans celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence – a Dear John, I mean, Dear George letter, if you will. My condolences to my British brothers and sisters.

Now, I'm not sharing this simply to have a laugh, but to highlight how such stories shape my identity, how I understand what it means to be American, and ultimately, to be me. It's part of what some have one's historical consciousness. And the crazy thing is that my ancestors don't even have to have been around during the Revolutionary War (they weren't) for these stories to powerfully shape how I see and interact with things the world. By virtue of being American, they've become part of my story.

Before we come to our text for today, I would like to consider two stories that were part of the history of the people of Israel. We will be in the gospel of Matthew – an early biography of Jesus – written with a primarily Jewish audience in mind. And so to better understand what Matthew is getting at when he tells the story of Jesus, it helps to ask, what may have been on the mind of a 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jew? What stories shaped how they would have understood and interacted with Jesus?

Perhaps the most formative story to the Jewish people – whether today or 2000 years ago – is the story of the Exodus. The story of God delivering his people from slavery in Egypt to bring them to a land He promised to them. The exodus – or the exiting, the departing from Egypt – reaches a dramatic conclusion as Pharaoh's army corners the Israelites at the Red Sea. With no other way to escape, God miraculously parts the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites walk through the sea on dry land.

...And they lived happily ever after.

If you know the story of the Exodus, you know that's not true. On the other side of the Red Sea, they would find themselves in a desert place. First, the desert of Shur, and then the desert of Sin, which is fitting as they would quickly take to grumbling and complaining – doubting that the God who had powerfully delivered them from slavery could keep them alive in a desert place.

We pick up this story in Exodus 16:3, “The Israelites said to them [Moses and Aaron], ‘If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.’”

But God was not blind to their need, as we see in verse 4, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you... (v.12) I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. *Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.*’”

Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.

The miraculous provision of bread was a sign of the Who – it identified the One Who not only delivered them from Egypt, but would sustain and fill them in the desert place.

This is part of the formative story that is the Exodus.

For our second – and less well-known – story, we’ll fast forward hundreds of years to the time of a Jewish prophet (a messenger of God) by the name of Elisha. One day, Elisha is with 100 men and he is brought 20 loaves of bread. Picking up in 2 Kings 4:42, to his servant, “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said. “How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, “Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’” Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, *according to the word of the Lord.*

God miraculously multiplies the 20 loaves, so that all 100 are filled with bread and still some remains.

Sustained and filled.

I would like these stories to be on our minds, just as they may have been on the minds of some 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jews who were either present for or later hearing about this through the words of Matthew.

I would like to invite Luke up to read for us this morning.

Matthew 14:13-20

13When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,” he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Thank you, Luke.

How many have read or heard that story before? It is perhaps one of the more well known miracle stories of Jesus. It is actually the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels – all four accounts of the life of Jesus – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Perhaps it was one of the more memorable occurrences for Jesus’ followers – 5 loaves, 2 fish feeding over 5,000 people. Jesus handing them basket after basket of bread, until all had eaten and still 12 baskets remained. I don’t know what they would have looked like close up. Did it all just magically appear or did each loaf begin to expand as Jesus tore piece after piece off?

Can you imagine the excitement? The move from exhaustion and annoyance – tired and wishing the people would just go away – to be participants in the abundant generosity that Jesus brought about.

I can imagine Matthew, John, Peter, with looks to one another in confusion, and then awe, and then smiles contagiously spreading across their faces as they witness this miracles, and get to hand out this bread to the hungry crowds – “uh’ this is for you from.”

“Thank you!”

“Oh’ no don’t thank me, it’s from Jesus.”

“From Jesus?”

“Yeah, he made it?”

“Like kneaded it, and baked it?”

“No, he like *made* made it appear. There was only a little, he looked up to heaven, and then there was a lot.”

“Bread from heaven? Like Moses?”

“Yes! But this didn’t rain down, this came from Jesus own hands.”

“A little became a lot? Like Elisha?”

“Yes! But instead of 20, he only had 5 loaves. And instead of 100 men to feed, there’s 5,000 men plus women and children here.”

“Do you think there won’t be enough to go around? Should I only take a little.”

“No, no, Jesus wants you to take as much as you need to be filled. Enough to be satisfied.”

Now, I have no clue what was said amongst the crowds that day. I’m not claiming that they got it. In fact, we’ll see in coming weeks that they hadn’t quite got it in the moment. We’ll see in Matthew 16:9, Jesus ask them, “Do you still not understand?”

Them not getting it in the moment doesn’t take away from the significance of what Jesus was doing, what they should have understood, and what – or should I say *Who* – Matthew is pointing us to.

There is great power on display here, one could even say that this miracles power rating is over 5,000 ... (if you’ll forgive me a slightly dated niche reference. It’s okay if you don’t get it).

Witnessing that kind of power would have been absolutely incredible, but the power was not the point.

The point is the person.

The power points to the person.

The *what* is a sign of the *who*.

There is a danger i getting stuck in the what and missing the who.

And this isn’t simply a problem for those who witnessed Jesus’ miracle that day. It is danger for us each and every day.

How often do we get caught up in being in awe of power, while missing the person?

Caught up in the power of creation, while blind to the person – the Creator.

Wrapped up in the pleasure of gifts – forgetting God, as gift giver.

You might say, hold up Pat, I've never witnessed this kind of power. The power Jesus displays in feeding the 5000.

I get you.

But, let's pause for a second and ask ourselves, have we never witnessed a miracle, or have we become too used to them?

I love how the writer GK Chesterton put it when speaking of the importance of Fairy Tales, "[Fairy tales] make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water."

We are surrounded by a world filled with wonder, that doesn't make sense on its own, that points to a person, and yet we're too distracted by the whats of life that we miss the Who.

Maybe, we're too used to miracles.

Though, I'm with you that it would have been really cool to witness that special miracle that Jesus did that day.

The point is that the power points to the person.

Over the coming weeks, we'll see Matthew sharing a series of stories leading up to Jesus asking a pivotal question, "*Who* do you say that I am?"

I don't want to steal all the thunder from whoever is teaching that week, but I believe that Matthew is sharing this story of Jesus feeding the 5000 to continue laying the groundwork – pointing to the person – so that when he gets to Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" the informed reader will be ready to shout in unison with Peter, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God!"

And so let's look more closely at the who that is feeding the 5000.

From a quick surface reading, we could say that in feeding the 5000,

Jesus is...

The one who sees

With eyes of compassion, Jesus sees the need of the crowd before they ask.

We see this compassion begins even before they were hungry. Jesus had retreated to a “solitary place” after hearing of the death of John the Baptist. He was likely seeking some rest and quiet time away with his closest followers. And yet even despite the disruption of his time away, we see that when Jesus saw the crowd “he had compassion on them and [first] healed their sick.” And then as it got late, as his disciples wanted to send the crowds away, Jesus saw their need for food and refused to send them away still in need.

Despite everything else that this miracle points to about Jesus, we shouldn’t miss one of the most obvious – Jesus was moved with compassion. Compassion – a kind of “suffering with” one who is lacking or in place of need, such that you are moved act in love to meet that need.

Jesus, the one who sees, with eyes of compassion – suffering with – those in need.

Jesus is not only the one who sees, but He is also the one who sends

The one who sends

with words of authority, Jesus asks his disciples to go meet the need  
He says, “You give them something to eat.” (Matt 14:16)

But, ah...with how are they to give when they lack themselves?  
I find it fascinating that Jesus asks his disciples to go before He multiplies the bread.

I actually wrestled with whether to put “the one who sends” before or after are next point. I originally had it after, but rereading the text, we see Jesus sending (or at least asking his disciples to go) before he supplies.

Does this feel like anyone’s life here? Being sent before receiving something to give.

In this passage, Jesus is the one who sends before he is the one who supplies.

Why? Perhaps it’s because he is trying to move them to compassion even before they know they have anything to give. Perhaps it’s to make the nature of the miracles painstakingly obvious – seeing clearly that they have nothing to give and will have nothing to give if not for Jesus.

Whatever the reason, Jesus is...

The one who supplies (and then he sends again)

with hands of power, Jesus provides what they need – for both his disciples to serve and for the people of the crowd to eat and be sustained..

“They all ate...”

But Jesus goes beyond mere provision of what was necessary, we see in this story that Jesus is also...

The one who satisfies

with a heart of generosity, Jesus gives in abundance.

“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”

Jesus is...

The one who sees.

The one who sends.

The one who supplies.

And, the one who satisfies.

But we're not finished yet.

With all these things, if he is these things alone, we could say that Jesus is a powerful but kind miracle worker.

This would be seeing only a glimpse of the person that we are meant to see.

Putting on Jewish lens as we read to text something much richer is being pointed to.

It is that this Jesus is not simply the one who sees...

Jesus is the God who sees.

He is the God who sends.

He is the God who supplies.

He is the God who satisfies.

Why should we think that this is what Jesus is doing through this miracle, and what Matthew is trying to help the reader see?

Admittedly, the other gospel writers seem to make this point a bit more obvious, like John telling us that Jesus calls himself, “The bread of life,” and Mark drawing parallels between Jesus and the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.

Even without this in Matthew’s account, the parallel to between Jesus the bread that rained down from heaven is there.

In v.13, we see that Jesus withdrew to a “solitary place.” Now this isn’t immediately obvious in our translation, but that word for “solitary place” can carry the idea of wilderness or desert place. And so it is in a “desert place” that this crowd finds themselves hungry, and Jesus looking to heaven and gives them bread and they are filled.

“... you will be filled with bread. *Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.*”

Moses received a promise of bread but relied on God to rain it down from heaven.

Jesus looking to heaven provided bread, because He the Lord your God.

“... you will be filled with bread. *Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.*”

Elisha set out 20 loaves trusting God’s word that it would be enough ... “and they ate and had some left over, *according to the word of the Lord.*”

Jesus himself broke the 5 loaves and multiplied it, because He is the Word of the Lord.

Some of you might be sitting there wondering why Matthew didn’t make it more obvious. I think to the Jewish reader of Matthew, it was, but I also think he’s building suspense, which will continue next as they respond to another act of Jesus in worship, and as I mentioned before, leading up to Peter’s bold affirmation in Matthew 16 that Jesus is the “Messiah, the son of the living God.”

And so when we realize the meaningfulness of the who – the person that this power is pointing to – we learn something essential to seeing Jesus for who He is, and what that means for us

And as Jesus is God in human form – the image of the invisible God as another put it – we see the character of God on display in the life and actions of Jesus.

Know that God sees your needs – even the needs you don’t see yourself – and he is moved with compassion.



Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Like the crowd that needed food, Jesus didn't wait for us to ask for his help. Because he is the God who sees, He saw our greatest need – our need to be made right with God, to be forgiven, to have life, true eternal, abundant life in God. And, he was moved with compassion to give, not physical bread like that to the 500, but the bread that is Himself, so that we would not only have what we need, but that we would have far more than we need. That we would be satisfied.

Matthew 11:28

As we saw some weeks back, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

And as he says elsewhere, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Reflecting on the need that Jesus meets for us, Paul wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Do you believe that Jesus truly sees your greatest need?

Do you believe that Jesus is truly moved by compassion to meet that need?

Are you willing to take and eat and be satisfied? We read that "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

May "...you will be filled with bread. *[and] know that [He is] the Lord your God.*"

Jesus is the one who satisfies.

If you've put your trust in Jesus, if you've received this bread, he – with his words of authority – is sending us out to share this bread. To share this hope that we have within us, so that the world might also be satisfied.

If you feel like you've got nothing in-and-of-yourself to give, it's because you don't.

Like the disciples, it all comes from Jesus. We're just passing along what we receive from Him. And what a joy – sometimes terrifying – but absolute privilege that is.