

# Five Loaves, Two Fish, and Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Deeper with Jesus*, 5, March 2, 2014

*Matthew 14:13-21* [Cf. Mt 15:29-39; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-15]

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a **wilderness place** by himself. But when the **crowds** heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

<sup>14</sup> When he went ashore he saw a **great crowd**, and **he had compassion** on them and **healed their sick**.

<sup>15</sup> Now when it was evening, **the disciples** came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, “**They need not go away; you give them** something to eat.”

<sup>17</sup> They said to him, “**We have nothing** here **except** five loaves and two fish.”

<sup>18</sup> And he said, “**Bring them here to me.**”

<sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he **looked up to heaven** and said **a blessing**. Then he **broke the loaves** and **gave them to the disciples**, and the **disciples gave them** to the **crowds**. <sup>20</sup> And they **all ate** and were **satisfied**.

And they took up **twelve** baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about **five thousand** men, besides women and children.

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*Exodus 16:4, 32*

[God describes the ‘manna’ that he gave to Israel as] “**bread from heaven**” and as “**the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness**, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

*Deuteronomy 8:2-3*

<sup>2</sup> And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God ... **fed you with manna**, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know **that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD**.

*Matthew 4:3-4*

<sup>3</sup> And [in the wilderness] the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written, ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*’” [Deut 8:3]

*Exodus 4:1-2*

<sup>1</sup> [At the burning bush] Moses answered [the Lord], “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” ...

*John 6:27, 32*

<sup>27</sup> [Jesus said,] “**Do not work for the food that perishes**, but for the **food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give to you. ... <sup>32</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not **Moses** who gave you the **bread from heaven**, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.”

*Matthew 26:26*

<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after **blessing** it **broke** it and **gave** it to the disciples, and said, “*Take, eat; this is my body.*”

## **A Window to See and Experience God's Kingdom**

Matthew has taken us deeper with Jesus into the challenge of seeking God's kingdom. Parables: the varied soils, hearing and not hearing, hiddenness, mixed up reality, pearl worth everything. We've watched events / parables of the negative side: Hometown offence; King's murderous power. Now he points us to events that take us into the newness / wonder of the in-breaking kingdom. Both involve divine power, but show how ordinary disciples are drawn into that power and learn. First is the feeding of throngs in the wilderness – the only miracle of Jesus in all four Gospels.

## **Deep Reservoirs of Meaning for Jesus' Actions**

Matthew simplifies and focuses the narrative. He points us to the clearest resources for seeing the larger meaning of the story: wilderness, lack of food, people in need, miraculous bread. All echo the Exodus deliverance. Manna in the desert. God provides. But also the people must learn what it means to trust God in a larger sense, God's word, promise: Jesus' temptation. The creation/gift of bread/life comes to fulfillment only in the last supper and death of Jesus. But the story has even wider resonances in the gift of grain celebrated in so many rites. The creator of grain and fish does quickly what he otherwise does slowly. Corn king. C. S. Lewis.

## **Perceiving People through Jesus' Eyes and Hands**

But Mt lets us watch not abstractions but concrete events. Jesus responds to John's murder by seeking to be alone. Sadness, the dying has begun. He knows where it leads him. He goes by boat to a deserted area. It's natural! But the persistent, needy crowds! They see him, pursue, demand. No respect, no consideration! How would I react? Leave me alone! I need some space! But we watch Jesus. His deep compassion shapes how he sees the demanding throngs. They may understand no more than the people of his hometown, but they come with real needs. They're seeking. His personal desires turn into compassion and flow into powerful service for people.

## **My Good Ideas in the Hands of Jesus**

But we also watch the disciples learning Jesus' compassion. Time passes. The line is unending. People also need food. They won't go unless Jesus sends them away. It's the right thing to do. We've understood things so far. But now Mt helps us see the surprise of God's Kingdom. Jesus loves their idea, but says the need is not to go away; they need food. You give them some! The command throws the disciples into a quandary. We're unprepared. How can you ask this? "We have nothing here except ... five loaves and two fish." Nothing! Except ... something. Again, like Moses in Exodus: I can't do it. They won't believe me ... "What is that in your hand?" Jesus says, "Bring them here to me!" When Jesus commands, he participates. He gives himself in the command. A continuation of his compassion. Leading the disciples. There's more power, more possibilities than you think. The disciples learn by handing the loaves over in trust. Jesus takes what they have and sees it within God's power. He breaks it apart, and gives it back to them. Their compassion and Jesus' command stand. "You give them some!" Now, astonishingly, they can fulfill both! The 12 baskets show the abundance of God's renewal.

## **Learning the Revolution of God's Kingdom**

The miracle almost disappears. Or rather it spreads through the whole like yeast. God and God's rule are present everywhere here. Jesus' compassion. The crowds seeking. The disciples imitating. Receiving Jesus' surprising challenge. Giving what they have to Jesus. Receiving it back and giving it to others. Matthew says look! God's rule is here in every moment. What's more, this is the same God who was with Moses and with you today. Seek him! Seek him!