

Matthew 21-02-18a

Good evening. Welcome to the Thursday night Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a pleasure to join you despite the frigid temperatures we've had this past week.

Our technology has survived the blizzard and we're able to join you here tonight. We'll be continuing our study in Matthew chapter 14. To which please turn.

Matthew chapter 14. We will take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and then we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for your grace, your faithfulness, the provision that you make for us in both the seen and unseen realms.

We're grateful for the scriptures and the unprecedented access to them and to the information that helps us to understand them, interpret them, and apply them in our lives. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together this evening, that God, the Holy Spirit, who far surpasses any of our human resources or technology, will be present to teach us, to impress these things on our hearts, to bring them back to our conscious mind at the point of understanding and application so that our lives can reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name.

Amen. Let's review where we are at this point. We have the story of John the Baptist, which is given by way of flashback, if you will, the story of his arrest and his demise.

And this gives the Lord Jesus pause for a moment. This is the story of John the Baptist. He is a man of concern.

And he, upon hearing that Herod believes he has come back from the dead, that John has come back from the dead, and that Jesus is him, he retires to a secluded place. And this is verse 13. And he departed from there by boat to a deserted place by himself.

Almost always when the Lord Jesus does this, he then engages in prayer. And this prayer is essential. It is a wonderful example for us.

It is a reminder of the importance of depending on God for guidance, for direction, for understanding of where we are in circumstances. What do changes in our circumstances mean? Not so much by way of it being a sign or a form of divine guidance as knowing how to use divine guidance to navigate those circumstances. So in my view, we don't look to circumstances for guidance.

We look to scripture for guidance in handling the circumstances that come our way. And when there is a change, there's often an opportunity to bring fresh understandings to bear in our application and our fruitful response to the word of God, that seed planted in our soil. So Jesus has gone to a secluded place by himself.

This is an opportunity just by virtue of the fact that it is secluded. It is a chance to reflect, to think without the press of the crowds, without the distractions that accompany circulating. And as we mentioned last time, this is always a good thing for us to do, to spend some quality alone time in fellowship with God through the word and through the spirit to stabilize ourselves, to establish our objectivity so that we can get our eyes off of ourselves, off of circumstances, off of other people, and fully and squarely looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, as we're reminded in Hebrews 12 too.

So Jesus himself does this, but when the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities. Now he went by boat, they went by foot. It's a longer journey.

So he gets a moment of refreshment. He gets maybe a few hours of respite, but then here come the crowds. And he sees this great multitude in verse 14, and he was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick.

So often in the scriptures, you see this in the gospel of Mark, you see it in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus moved with compassion. The Lord Jesus is the fullness of deity in bodily form. And it is a wonderful thing to realize that when God looks down on us, he too is moved with compassion.

In the old Testament, he asks his people, Israel, why will you die all day long? I have held out my hands to you, but you're a disobedient and a stiff necked people. It is not the arm of the Lord that is too short to save. It is not his ear that is too heavy to hear.

You remember our memory verse, it is our iniquity. It is our disobedience. It's our distraction and deflection that separates us from God and our sins, our sinful ways can hide his face from us.

And when we do make appeal, then he's not going to hear because we have not responded to his grace at the proper time. Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation.

You read those early chapters in Hebrews, this rest that remains for the people of God, the deliverance that God offers has to be something we are looking for when it is available. Call upon him while he is near, scripture says. Well, so many in Israel were not looking for him.

They were not like the disciples who met Jesus down at the Jordan where John the Baptist was baptizing. And because their interest was superficial, because it was self-centered. And by the way, that notion of subjectivity, eyes on self versus objectivity, eyes on the plan and purpose of God is really going to come to the fore tonight as we look at the details of this passage.

So he's moved with compassion and healed their sick. There's no mention here that they were healed because of their faith or healed because of anything other than the

compassion of the Lord Jesus. This is a pure, proactive expression of grace on Jesus' part.

It seems to be predicated on nothing except that he felt great empathy and sympathy for them. So when it was evening, his disciples came to him saying, this is a deserted place. The hour is already late.

Send the multitudes away that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food. Jesus said, they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.

They said, we have here only five loaves and two fish. Bring them here to me. And you remember what happened subsequently, they are sat down in groups of 50, in some cases, groups of a hundred.

I had a question after we covered this on Sunday, why this particular size of group? I personally think that if you have groups of 50 to a hundred and you have 12 disciples, how many total groups are there? If there's 50 in each group and there's 5,000 men, then that's a hundred groups, right? A hundred times 50 would be 5,000. So there would be, if they were exactly 50 or very close to it in each group, there would be about a hundred of these groups. Well, you've got 12 disciples distributing the bread and the fish that has been multiplied.

And so you have roughly eight groups per disciple, right? Eight times 12 is 96. That gets pretty close to it. So less than 10 groups per disciple.

This is feasible that they can manage this without wearing themselves out. They would make eight to 10 trips back to Jesus for more bread and more fish, carry it. They could probably carry a basket full to each of these groups, come back and return for more.

So two things I would point out here, and it's speculation on my part, but A, it is practical. And the Lord Jesus is practical. You could ask a lot of questions.

If he's got the miraculous ability to multiply the bread and the fish, then why doesn't he miraculously distribute it? And I think that's a very good question to ask, which is why I'm asking it. I asked it of myself and I thought it was a good question. So I'll ask you.

If Jesus can miraculously provide this, why doesn't everybody look in their pocket and suddenly there's bread and fish in their midst? It seems like the hard part is getting it to multiply. The easy part would be having it already be there. But so often, and we've seen this principle over and over and over again, God chooses to involve us in his work.

And if you've heard any of our studies over the last several years, you will know that I phrased that exactly as I phrased it for a reason. God has chosen to involve us in his work. Do any of those terms and phrases ring a bell with a recent, very popular Christian ministry program that swept the nation and the world and has sold all kinds of books and quote unquote resources? You may have heard somebody say, look around and see

where God is at work and then join him in his work.

I would commend to anyone's attention who finds that compelling. This passage, the Lord Jesus has looked at a work that he wants to do, that is motivated by his own compassion, and he has involved his disciples in his work. Could have done the whole thing himself.

Could have said, disciples, sit here on the ground, watch this and bread and fish start flying in great quantities through the air, landing in the laps of all the people right where they are. He could have used efficacious grace on the people and they would have all spontaneously sat down in groups of 50 because they were divinely motivated to do so. They were effectually selected and called to sit down in a group and they just did it because it was the will of God.

But how does this take place? Jesus commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. I'm back in Matthew, of course. We looked at this in all four gospels.

Turn over to the Gospel of John, the parallel in John chapter six. We have a bit more detail here. We find out that the bread and fish come from the lunch or the early dinner that a lad had brought.

And notice what it says in John six, verse 10, you make the people sit down. In Matthew, it says, Jesus commanded the multitudes to sit down. In John, it says, Jesus commanded the disciples to command the people to sit down.

In Genesis chapter one, God says, let there be and there was, let it bring forth and it is brought forth. Just as we see in Matthew, you can leave out the intermediate agency and not be contradictory or incorrect. We know from John chapter one, that without Jesus, nothing in this earth was made that was made.

And yet you don't see the Lord Jesus appear in Genesis chapter one. You see the presence of the Holy spirit. But John is very clear more than once without him was not anything made that was made.

He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not all out of John one. So we need to allow scripture to speak in normal human terms where sometimes you say the president sent money for COVID relief. Other times you can say, well, the president motivated these people and got this cabinet agency involved and talk to the treasury who printed the checks and the the, you know, intermediate agency that accomplished the work.

But in broad terms, we just say the person that initiated it is the person that gets the credit for making it happen. And we leave out intermediate agency. It's very important to note and remember this point, much of the confusion in the interpretation of scripture, particularly when it comes to understanding what it means to be chosen, what to be

elect, what it means to be predestined what it means to be called, what it means to be justified, what it means to be glorified.

As you find in Romans eight, 28 through 30 is often misunderstood. Just as Romans chapter nine is misunderstood. Jacob, if I loved you, saw if I hated, just as in John chapter six and in John chapter 10, my sheep hear my voice.

No one can come to me unless the father draws him. If you ever wind up starting to wonder if maybe we've got it wrong and Calvinists or reformed theologians have a point that it's all a giant marionette show with God pulling the strings. Remember this point to decide that scripture is being specific when it is being general to decide that scripture is being general.

When it is being specific is always a violation of context. We saw this last time. And I pointed to the passages in John six and John 10 that are often misunderstood and are waived printed on banners by those who think that, that God effectually moves calls and saves only those that he chose in eternity past.

And we saw, did we not in John chapter five, Jesus said, you do not have the love of the father in you. That is why you don't listen to me. That is why you don't follow me.

That is why you are not my sheep. You've already dismissed the father. Why would you suddenly accept the son? They had already left the path of faith and obedience with what the father had in the law and the prophets and the writings.

They were not down there by the Jordan with John, the way Peter and James and Andrew and John and Philip were. They weren't down there. Did they go out to see John? Yes, they did.

And Jesus says, what did you go out to see a physical phenomenon, something blowing in the breeze? You should have been there looking for God's salvation. That's what these half a dozen disciples behind me came to see. And that's why they followed me when I walked away from John and went into the town and then went north to Cana in Galilee.

These men followed me because they're interested. Did you follow me? No, you did not. Why the love of the father is not in you.

And my sheep hear my voice. And the reason they hear my voice and follow me is it has been given to them by the father to understand. Why did the father give them to understand? Give the disciples in John 13, the ability to understand what the parables were, especially when Jesus interpreted them.

Why was it given? Because they already love the father. The love of the father was in them. The desire to be pleasing in God's sight, to believe and to obey was already there.

People lacking that. You remember well, let me finish my sentence. I have a bad habit.

I've noticed when I listen to myself, I start a sentence and then I just cut it off and don't finish it. People lacking that, if you don't have, they're not going to love me and hate you. We're connected.

Jesus is connected to the father. We are connected to the Lord Jesus. People who do not love the father, do not love the son.

If they do not love the son, they're not going to love the Holy Spirit or his message of sin, righteousness and judgment. And they are not going to love us because hopefully we are manifestly filled with the spirit and operating in the truth of God's word and shining as lights reflecting that glory and that word in our generation. And we are going to attract hostility.

We are going to be opposed where people are going to want to suppress and to cancel and to eliminate and to penalize and to punish those associated with what they hate. And they do not love God or the things of God. Therefore, they don't love the people of God.

So count it all joy, brethren, when you fall into various kinds of trial, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. Let that patience have its work in you that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Trial is designed to refine us, to boil up and out those impurities that need to be scooped away and removed.

It's a hard thing. It's easy to think of in the abstract when we're reading it in the word or reviewing it as we are here. But when it is actually taking place, it's a different thing.

Whom the Lord loves he chastens and he scourges every son that he receives. Sometimes our suffering is because of the hatred of the world, wrestling against the flesh and the minions of the devil. Other times we're suffering because God is encouraging us to do what Jesus did, get off by ourselves and reflect and think about what we've learned, examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, hate the garment spotted by the flesh, touch not the unclean thing, separate from that which is holding us back, lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us.

Sometimes we need a bit of a wake up. We need something to make us stop short. If we will not give ourselves quiet time, sometimes God will do it for us.

He'll slow us down, either health-wise or employment-wise or frigid blizzard Arctic air-wise. I personally think that this is God smiling at all the people who believe in anthropogenic global warming and also people that have not thought ahead to have a plan B for the highly unusual. So many people everywhere from companies and utilities to electric networks and so on weren't prepared for the unexpected.

I think God gives us a sense when times are unstable that nature itself is unusual and unstable at this time. And those who are sensitive to the leading of God are going to take stock and say, it's one thing to be prepared for the spread of a disease or an unusual spell of weather. It's something else to be prepared at that unforeseen time when the Lord returns.

We should not be of the night or of the darkness that that day overtakes us as a thief. Well, here's what I want to point out for tonight. Here we are at the feeding of the 5,000.

And what is at the core? This is your first pop quiz question for the night. What is the very essence and heart of this episode? What is it that happens that makes it stand out and lets us call it the feeding of the 5,000? What happens? Jesus makes bread out of practically nothing, right? What was the first recorded temptation of Christ during the 40 days in the wilderness? Since you're the Son of God, remember that's a first-class condition if, if and it's true, since you're the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. And Jesus refuses to do so.

Here, He takes what's barely enough for one person and feeds 5,000 men and whoever came with them. So in one case, He refuses to make bread. And in another case, He makes fantastic quantities of bread.

The leftovers are going to be a hundred times what He started with. In one case, not going to make bread. In another case, making buckets of bread.

So why does He not do it in one case and He does do it in the other? And we've, we've got the glimmer of the idea here. Satan didn't walk up and say, why don't you feed this crowd? But what is the essence? How did Jesus know that it was not the time to make bread when Satan suggested it? But it is time to make bread when He sees this crowd. How many times have we reviewed the idea that it is not so much what we do as why we do it? If Jesus in the wilderness had made the bread that Satan suggested that He make, what, it's like, it's like an actor, this is one of the, one of the caricatures of an actor.

Well, what's my motivation? What was Jesus' motivation? What would it have been to create the bread in the desert? What does scripture specifically say? After 40 days, He was what? In the old King James, it says He was and hungered. He was hungry. So if He made that bread, who's He making it for? No disciples, no crowd.

Well, since you're the Son of God, don't you need to feed yourself? Just turn these rocks into some bread. What does Jesus reply? And this ties into what we covered last Sunday. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

He says the real bread is the word. He is the incarnate word. Scripture is the written word.

And life doesn't come from mere problem solving in circumstances. Life comes from reflecting the glory of the Father. If Jesus had merely turned a few stones into some bread and fed Himself, where is the Father's glory in that? Contrast that with this situation.

Here are these people who have walked a long distance. We're not told what the inner motivation of their hearts was, but they have come a long way to see Jesus and to have their sick healed. You think about these sick people that they had to bring on foot all the way around the lake shore.

And if you've ever walked a lake shore, you know that there's all kinds of inlets and outlets and unevenness. It's rarely a smooth and unbroken beach. It's usually for a lake, especially the northern side of the Sea of Galilee.

If you look at that on a map, this is some rugged country. That's why people had boats and would cross it with a boat. These people carried their sick, brought those who were diseased all the way around to see Jesus.

Why do you think Jesus would have compassion, especially on those people? Who are those people thinking of when they round the shore to find Jesus? Are they thinking of themselves or are they doing it on behalf of that sick and afflicted person that they've got with them? This is my child. This is my parent. This is my uncle or my cousin or my sibling.

If Jesus can help them, I want them to be helped, just like the fellows who let the man down on the bed through the roof. And Jesus sees that and has compassion on them. There's not so much an element of faith here as the difference between selfishness and selflessness, looking out not only for our own interests, but also the interests of others.

This is Philippians chapter 2. Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus. Did not look out only for his own interests, but for the interests of others. This is the key, I think.

And when Jesus is moved with compassion on behalf of the multitudes, then he makes bread that he would not make for himself. He doesn't do it for himself, but he does it for them. Not once, but as we're going to see, twice.

And in both cases, he has compassion on the multitudes because they have come out to see him. He didn't come in to see them and it was a convenient turn aside from a nearby block. They have traveled a great distance to see him.

Even more so in the second case, as we'll see. But the element here is compassion. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor. All the law and the prophets are summed up in these.

So I would suggest that the connection back to the temptation begins here with what the bread is. And instead of Jesus making bread and feeding himself, he is basically multiplying himself. I am the bread of life.

He who partakes will never hunger. He who comes to me will never thirst. And that's the difference between doing what we do for our own gratification and doing it before the Lord in the interest of others.

The key is to do it the way Jesus did. The way he involved his disciples. His disciples didn't look at Jesus and figure out where Jesus was at work and join him in his work, did they? Jesus picked the time.

Jesus picked the place. Jesus picked the means. Jesus gave the instructions.

The disciples were faithful and obedient to the direction and the opportunity that they were given by the Lord himself. They didn't create this opportunity. They didn't guess at it.

They weren't even sure about it at the beginning. But Jesus essentially says, trust me, I know what I'm doing. And they are dubious at the beginning, but as they carry the provisions out to this crowd, they themselves learn a wonderful lesson about the grace of God and the power of God that they would not have learned had they not been involved.

We learn and grow and are blessed in participating in those things that God assigns us. He assigns them to us for a reason. We benefit even as we may be used to benefit others.

Not so in grabbing a few rocks, thinking a thought, turning them into bread, consuming them to satisfy his own hunger. There's a great gulf fixed between those two ideas. Satan suggests the selfish approach.

God involves us in the selfless, genuine love approach. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to continue our analysis of this because we are not finished with the Lord Jesus in the wilderness.

And as you reflect on this over the next 10 minutes or so, you will probably see where we are about to go. But for now, let's pause here and take our break.