

Matthew 21-03-18a

This is the 18th of March, 2021. And we continue our study in the gospel of Matthew. This is such an exciting section.

I can hardly wait to dive into it. We've been looking at the words of the Lord Jesus as he teaches and heals. We saw the Seraphim woman and the significance of that miracle in the demonstration of faith, which Jesus applauds as he does the centurion.

These non-Jewish people seem to recognize things about the Lord Jesus that his own people do not. And it is a harbinger of things to come. We're gonna see something similar tonight.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our fellowship, on our reflections, and meditations on these things in the days ahead, and that God's Holy Spirit will be present with us. Shall we pray? Father, it is a wonderful privilege to be sustained daily by your grace, to experience your provision, even when that provision involves challenges and things that the world would classify as hardships, we recognize that you are working all things together for our good and for your glory. We thank you for the position that we occupy in your attention and in your plan because of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work on our behalf, and the unique privilege we have of being your gift to him, representing him as his body now, and joining with him to rule and reign in the kingdom that is to come, and finally destined to enter your own kingdom if we are enduring to the end, if we are patient and faithful, and lay claim to your promises and the wonderful fruits of righteousness that are available by faith.

We pray that as we look at these episodes from your word tonight, that your Holy Spirit will minister them to each of our hearts, help us to understand their pertinence and applicability for ourselves as we seek to redeem the short time that remains to us in this life. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Well, if you pick up the story in Matthew 15, verse 29, after the episode of the Syrophoenician woman up in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on a mountain and sat down there.

What we're going to find out tonight is the method of transport. It isn't mentioned here in verse 29, but we will see it before the night is over. Then great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others.

Sometimes we have a very general description that people brought the sick and Jesus healed them. But here, for some reason, we have it broken down into various categories. Why do you suppose that is? I'm asking, why do you think that is? Why doesn't it just say they brought the sick and afflicted round about them and Jesus healed them? But we have this detail, lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others.

If you think about the symbolism in the Bible, when it comes to specific parts of the body and what their function is, I immediately think, and you probably do as well, of the anointing of the priests, the Levitical priests in the Old Testament, starting with Aaron, the high priest, and the application of blood was to the earlobe, to the thumb, remember that, where the blood went, the thumb and the toe, and sanctifying what they take in through the ear gate, what they hear, the thumb indicating what they do, their service with their hands, and then the toe, their walk, their manner of life. And anytime, this is what I think, I think anytime you see specific parts of the body mentioned, anytime you see a specific healing, whether it's dealing with blindness or deafness or lameness, there is this added channel of information that it is speaking of a specific kind of spiritual disability that is symbolized and metaphorically depicted in that particular malady. So Jesus, having come to this Eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, and it's sort of Northeastern, really, well away from Capernaum, this is in the region of Decapolis, we find this out reading Mark, what kind of people are there? Physically speaking, they've got these disabilities, but if these are communicating at the metaphorical level, what would you say about the lame? Don't have a proper walk, their manner of life is corrupt and unstable and not in a positive direction.

The blind, unable to see reality, unable to comprehend what is actually going on, what are the real causes and effects in their lives. Mute, unable to articulate needs, unable to articulate answers, unable to even articulate questions. I saw a famous pointy eared Vulcan in a movie last night, and this big thing in outer space comes to earth and is fixing to destroy everything.

It's making noises. And so Spock says, well, it's hard to answer, it's give it an answer when we don't understand the question. And of course it was looking for whales and that's a long story.

But only the whales can answer, because only the whales can understand the question. They said, well, why don't you just play back some whale songs off the tape? Well, it would just be gibberish because we don't know what the question is that's being asked. And just stringing together a bunch of random words doesn't answer the question.

So being mute, being able to speak is an exchange. We can ask questions, others can speak and provide answers. When you're mute, you can do neither.

You can't articulate questions or answers. Maimed, disfigurement and disability, broken bones that weren't set properly, all kinds of accidental incursions that take a healthy body and make it unhealthy. And this is what Shakespeare called the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

As you go through life, accidents happen. Most of us have broken one or more bones and suffered various terrible bruises and cuts and insults to our body. And in those days, medical practice being even more primitive than it is now, and I still consider it relatively

primitive, people would live with being maimed.

So things that are beyond your control, no fault of your own, you didn't ask to break a bone, you didn't ask to lose a limb or to be otherwise maimed, but you are. Well, these and many others are brought to the Lord Jesus. So there are needs of every kind.

There are specialists today. And if you have a particular kind of problem, you go to a particular kind of doctor. And if you say, well, but what about this knee? He says, well, I'm not a knee doctor.

I'm a gastroenterologist or I'm a odiologist or an ophthalmologist or some other kind of anologist. I don't do knees. You've got to go see some other person.

And there are people who specialize in different kinds of psychological and psychiatric issues. There are people that deal with metabolic issues and all different kinds of things. Well, there doesn't seem to be any one GP doctor anymore that you can go to that can fix whatever's wrong.

I took my truck to a place that does almost everything. They started out as Claremore Tire, but they do engines, they do mufflers, they do brakes, they do carburetors, they'll do almost anything. But I took the truck in and they said, well, sorry, this is not something we do, it's transmission, which was what I was afraid of.

And so I may become a transmissionologist because the truck's not going anywhere, either literally or figuratively. I'm keeping it and I'm fixing it. So we'll have to figure that out.

But even these guys that are just monster men to doing all different kinds of things for vehicles, couldn't do that. They did put on some new wiper blades for me, which I could have done myself, but I was glad to have them do it. So look at the Lord Jesus.

If you want a quick example of the all sufficient savior, this is a great metaphorical example. There is nothing that the Lord Jesus in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, operating to fulfill the plan of the father. You've got the entire Trinity involved.

There is nothing God cannot do. There is no problem. There is no situation.

There is no circumstance. There is no government. There is no economy.

There is no political, criminal, social, cultural element that God has not got complete ability to overcome, resolve, confront, handle on our behalf. If God be for us, who can be against us? And as you are inevitably exposed to the hot wind of commentary and media, just remember, look at the Lord Jesus. Got a lameness problem? Take it to the Lord.

Got a blindness problem? Take it to the Lord. Got a deafness problem, a mutinous

problem, any kind of an insult that left you maimed or is in danger, you think you're going to be maimed. Oh, fuel prices are going to go up.

Taxes are going to go up. This and that's going to happen. People are swarming over our borders.

It's all in the handbasket. Like Merle Haggard said, are we rolling downhill like a snowball headed for hell? It often looks that way. But just remember, great multitudes came to him having all of these different kinds of problems.

They laid them down. They threw them down. Remember that last time they hurled them down at Jesus feet and he healed them.

No rejects. No, I'm sorry, but I need to give you a referral. No, why don't you head down to the pool of Salome and wait for an angel to stir the water and that'll fix you there.

He healed them. He healed them all. All comers, nothing he cannot do.

It was true then and it is true now. This is a physical metaphor for the absolute truth that there is nothing that God has not foreseen. There is nothing that he cannot handle on our behalf.

All we have to do is be in his presence and we know what that requires. Jesus has made a way through the veil into the Holy of Holies. We know what that is.

We know how it works. And there's no excuse for any of us to have a spirit of fear, to have uncertainty, to be malcontent. Whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, we should be just like the apostle Paul.

Whatever state I find myself, therewith to be content. God's got it. If I'm in a circumstance, it's for my benefit and his glory.

End of sentence, beginning of faith. So, the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maim made whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel. There would not have been an occasion for people to marvel at the power of God in the person of Jesus Christ if there had not been blind, lame, maimed, mute people.

Remember when in John chapter nine, they're talking about the blind man and the disciples asked the Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? And Jesus said, it's not a matter of him sinning or his parents sinning. He's blind for the glory of God. And then when Jesus heals him, you've got an entire chapter in the gospel of John devoted to this man, his dialogue, his parents, Jesus finding him and speaking to him again.

He was blind from birth. He waited years, decades until the Lord Jesus came. But look at

what God has done in and through his life.

We're talking about in 2000 years later, and there's not a generation, there's not a year that has gone by in the last 2000 that that man has not been in the forefront reflecting the glory of God. That's what God can do with our lives when faith is present. And that John nine never gets old.

So people see and people see the presence of God and the power of God in our lives. We are not perfect. We have got areas of weakness.

We've got areas of challenge. We have areas of shortcoming and even of our own failure. Some of these people may have gotten maimed or blinded at their own fault.

Watch people on the 4th of July and realize that sometimes we're just the victim of our own lack of common sense. It doesn't matter. Jesus didn't say, well, sorry, you blinded yourself by doing a stupid thing.

So I'm not going to heal you. Or you got maimed because you were incautious. You were three sheets in the wind trying to hook up an ox to a cart.

And you got gored by the ox and run over by the cart. And it's your own fault. No questions asked.

Jesus healed them all. And the power of God manifest in these lives caused people to A, marvel, to be impressed and B, to glorify God. Be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you.

Because this gives us a chance to glorify God and to have others glorify God. Let your light so shine before men that they see the good in your works and glorify your father in heaven. They look at you and they glorify God.

Here, they were looking at these healed people and glorifying God. They draw a direct connection. So in verse 32, Jesus called his disciples 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. Now, this is a great opportunity to compare and contrast the feeding of the 5,000. What brought the hunger and status of the multitude to attention in the feeding of the 5,000? If you go back to chapter 14 and it was evening, after one day, the disciples came saying, this is a deserted place.

The hour is late, send the multitudes away so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves food. The disciples come to Jesus and say, this is a hungry crowd, dismiss them, send them away. Here, they don't do that.

They didn't do it on the first day. They didn't do it on the second day. And at the close of the third day, the disciples have not said to the Lord Jesus, these people need to go home, send them away and let them go find themselves some food.

And it's really interesting and it's very encouraging. This has been one of the most encouraging observations I have made with regard to the disciples in quite some time because they remembered. Now, granted, it's only been a fairly short time, something measured in weeks or maybe a few months at most since the feeding of the 5,000.

But the disciples might've had the thought at the end of the first day, well, you know, look at all these people. And they thought, well, remember last time when we said, send the people away, Jesus said, you give them something to eat. I'm not sure I'm quite ready for that.

I don't know how that conversation is gonna go. So let's just say nothing and see how it goes. So they say nothing the first day.

People camp out under the stars there, wrap up in their robes, snuggle their children, wake up the next morning, more healings, more people streaming in on the hillside. Jesus heals them all. No doubt does some teaching.

We never see him healing and having a multitude without teaching as well as healing because that is the concomitant. That's the spiritual component that comes with. Second night comes, disciples look at each other.

Well, do you wanna ask him if he said, I'm not gonna ask him. People bed down for the night, sleep under the stars, snuggle their kids, wake up, feed the last of the picnic baskets they brought with them. More people come, more people are healed, but the original people stay because Jesus says, I have compassion on the multitude.

And this compassion is really something. We'll look at it in a moment because they have now continued with me three days. The crowd has grown over the three days, but the people there the first day did not leave.

They have stayed and they're listening to what Jesus says and they're watching what he does. And they are glorifying the God of Israel. This is a mostly Gentile crowd.

That's why they are impressed at the God of Israel. It's the region of Decapolis, very few. I'm sure there's a sprinkling of Jews in here, but this is majority, almost entirely Gentile crowd.

They have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way. So the disciples said to him in verse 33, where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude? Now, this is different.

Do you see what's different than the feeding of the 5,000? It's something Philip said in the feeding of the 5,000. He said, how could we possibly get enough food so that everyone could have a little? But by the time the feeding of the 5,000 is over, when you get to chapter 14, verse 20, it says they all ate and were filled. Ate and were filled.

This is the very same verb. So the disciples now are not thinking of, well, could we give somebody a snack to kind of keep them from collapsing on the way? What they say is, where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude? And what's really interesting is, if you keep your place here and turn over to Mark 8, verse 4, telling the same, giving the same account, account of the same episode. In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples and said, I have compassion on the multitude.

They have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way. For some of them have come from afar.

You know where afar is. Many of you are tuning in from afar. And his disciples answered him, now look at this closely.

How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness? How can one, this is one of us. Remember they said we in Matthew, how can one? So when you put the two together, well, how can one of us fill and satisfy this multitude? You know what this means? When you put Mark and Matthew together, the disciples are doing just what we have been encouraging ourselves to do over the past few studies, the past few weeks, and that is they thought about what happened at the feeding of the 5,000. They remember that you can read all kinds of commentaries.

I found endless commentaries where they say, what's the matter with these disciples? They just saw Jesus feed 5,000 and they've already forgotten. And they're asking the very same question they asked the first time. No, they're not.

They are not asking the same question. Look at it closely. Where can one, i.e., well, Lord, you're the one can fill this great multitude, not give them a snack, but they're thinking, but they're not telling the Lord what to do.

They're not saying, well, Lord, you told us to feed them last time. Why don't we tell you to feed them this time? The disciples are thinking and they're at least cautious here. And so they tentatively suggest, well, one of us could potentially fill this multitude, but where do we get the grub stake, literally? Where do we get the start? So where can we get something so that one can fill this multitude? They have not forgotten the 5,000.

It is eerily similar and they know it and they get it. And look at them. They're doing a great job here.

They're not telling the Lord how to solve this problem, but they are not doubting that he can solve it. They have been watching him heal all comers for three days. They are not unaware of the Lord's power and they've not forgotten the feeding of the 5,000.

So the shrugging of the shoulders and Andrew and these others saying, well, you know, there's no way we can, nothing possible to feed so many and give them even a little. They're just saying, well, where can one get the wherewithal to fill this group? So it's really great. And I think it had to have been an encouragement to the Lord Jesus that not all of his teaching and all of his effort in training his disciples has fallen on deaf ears.

They're coming along. They're starting to get it. Now, there are limits to how far they're getting it and how far they'll go, but this is a step in the right direction.

They're thinking and they're remembering and they're judging and they've got some faith that Jesus can actually do this. So Jesus said, how many loaves do you have? And now they have to be having *deja vu*. How many loaves have you got? And so they say, we've got seven and a few little fish.

Why did they throw in the fish? Jesus didn't ask about fish because there were fish last time. But these are little fish. Last time, it appears that they had some dried fish sides.

The word is different. This little fish thing, these are like sardine size fish. These are little snack fish.

And that's why they're not even counted. They're so small that you look at them and you say, well, I've got a few. When they had the fish sides, they could say two.

So seven and a few little fish. So he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. Now, when Jesus passes along this command to sit on the ground, what do you think the disciples do? Exactly the same thing as last time.

This is implied strongly in the context. These people will sit down in groups of 50 or 100 just like the others. That's how they can get a count.

You got 80 groups of 50, that's 4,000 men with their families, right? Did I do that right? Eight times five is four. I think that's right. Now, when it says sit down on the ground, last time they sat down on the grass.

This is the bare ground. Why? Enough time has passed that we're now into the summer and the grass has dried up. This is a more barren setting, less promising.

There's grass on the ground, you think, well, maybe some grazing goats or something will come by that we could feed the multitude with. Maybe there'll be some quail flyover that are looking for bugs in the grass. This is bare ground.

And they sit down on the bare ground. It actually means to recline. They're gonna be

down on one elbow as one does when one eats in the Ancient Near East.

He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks. Last time it said he blessed, but it's the same thing. We ask the blessing, we give thanks, we return thanks.

There are many different ways of talking about asking the blessing at the beginning of a meal. But it is a wonderful and largely lost custom anymore, partly because people don't sit down as families as much as they used to around a supper table. But you sit down and ask the blessing and then eat.

So Jesus gave thanks, broke them, that's an heiress. He seems to have broke these into a pile. So he takes the seven loaves and tears them, breaks them.

If you've seen this kind of bread, you know that it's basically, it's not crisp. So you kind of tear it. They're like real thick tortillas.

And so that's an heiress. He broke them, i.e. he made a small pile in front of him, probably on a cloth or whatever. Then he kept on giving to his disciples.

Gave is an imperfect. If you want the technical term, it's an iterative imperfect, which means he did this over and over. Iteratively, he would grab a handful, hand it to a disciple, grab a handful, hand it to a disciple.

And he kept doing this for quite some time. And they would return empty-handed. He would hand them some more, they would take it.

They might've used a fold of their cloak. This was a common quick basket. You would just take a part of your robe and just make a little hollow and you would carry stuff in it.

And gave to his disciples and they gave to the multitudes. Again, a consistent pattern. The Lord Jesus gives to someone who he has trained to minister and those then in turn, minister to the multitudes.

We do this even today, even in the church. This is why you have, and he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry to edify the body of Christ and so on. Go back to Ephesians.

But there are ministry gifts and those individuals are to receive from the Lord and pass along. You know, when Paul is writing to the Corinthians and he says, I pass along to you what I received from the Lord. On the same night that he was betrayed, he took bread and broke it.

And that's a double metaphor. I pass on to you what I received from the Lord. And then he tells the story of the bread that Jesus broke on the night that he was arrested.

And that's what Christian worship, that's what Christian ministry, that's what Christian

fellowship, that's what churches should do, is receive from the Lord and distribute to one another. That's how it works. I have, as many, many individuals do, a special gift in that area to be the primary bread carrier.

But I am not the one who created the bread. I am not the one who does the initial breaking of the bread. That's the Lord Jesus, that's the Holy Spirit, that's God the Father, that is the Trinity working together to provide the manna from heaven that sustains our souls.

I am a carrier of bread. The disciples didn't multiply the bread, did they? They received what was supernaturally blessed and provided by the Lord Jesus and conveyed it to these groups who are seated on the ground ready to receive. That's how Bible class works, that's how church works.

That's what parents do for their children. That's what we can do, speaking the truth to one another in love. There are some people that just have a special gift.

You sit in Bible class, the pastor talks, come away scratching your head, and somebody that heard it says, this is how I understand it, and light bulb goes off, and that's a wonderful ministry that all of us can have. The Holy Spirit can give all of us a gift of understanding and of explanation and of speaking the truth in love. So there is a single breaking by the Lord Jesus and then there's this constant distribution to the multitudes, the imperfect.

They all ate and were filled. How can we fill them? They were filled. Very same word that was used at the feeding of the 5,000.

They took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Well, the baskets and the fragments, this is a whole subject unto itself, which we're going to look at immediately after the break, after we have our ministry in music and our time of refreshment, we will return, and we're going to take a close look at these baskets. We've looked at them before, but we're going to look at them afresh.

It's just a wonderful thing, and it is something the Lord Jesus is going to draw the attention of the disciples to in an upcoming episode just a bit later on. So we'll pause here and take our break, but just remember, look at the compassion of the Lord Jesus and the provision of God in and through the Lord Jesus. It begins with healing every different kind of problem.

Nobody brought a problem to the Lord Jesus that he did not resolve. It is a 100% cure rate, instantaneous, direct from the creator God, zero failures, 100% success. Not only does he meet these physical malady needs, but the daily need, we get hungry every day.

So there are the extraordinary situations, and then there are the daily needs. The Lord

Jesus meets them both. The extraordinary, he does directly.

The routine, he uses his team of disciples to enable and to fulfill that. But you can classify any challenge, any hurt, any shortfall, any test, any extreme situation under one of these two categories, it's either extraordinary and unusual, or it is daily and usual. The Lord Jesus is the all sufficient savior, not just to deliver us from the lake of fire and into eternal life, but to deliver us in this present evil age.

Nothing he cannot handle, nothing he has not foreseen, nothing that he will not work together for our benefit and his glory. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're gonna figure out these baskets.