



BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 14:13-21

Feeding the Five Thousand

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. **15** When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” **16** Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” **17** They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” **18** And he said, “Bring them here to me.” **19** Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. **20** And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. **21** And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The gospel of Matthew is the first gospel in the canon and is the one that most heavily relies on the Hebrew Scriptures.

Matthew is reliant on Mark being written first, as well as using other sources such as “Q” and “M” and therefore the authorship of this gospel is not definitive.

The text indicates a familiarity with the first Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE) and must then have been written after that time, but it is equally familiar with the story from the early period so it is believed to have been written likely in the final decade of the first century, most likely in the 80’s CE.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The original readers/hearers of Matthew’s gospel are predominantly Jewish, and the author uses familiar texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to point to the messiahship of Jesus.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

In the story immediately before our study, John the Baptist (Jesus’ cousin) has been beheaded by Herod. The disciples bury John and then come to share the news of his death with Jesus. Jesus withdraws to the water to be alone. By this time in Jesus’ ministry, crowds are following him regularly and when he comes back to shore there is a crowd waiting.

STUDY

Read Matthew 14:13-21

How do you think Jesus is feeling upon hearing the news of John's death?

- Sad
- Overwhelmed

When Jesus returns to shore, there is a crowd waiting for him. How would you feel seeing the crowd as you came to shore?

- Overwhelmed
- Angry
- Frustrated

What do you think the people in the crowd were thinking?

- They are selfish – they want healing
- They are grieving with Jesus and the disciples
 - Behaving the way we do when someone we care about suffers loss

What does Jesus do first?

- V.14

Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd are all gathered on the shore for presumably a long while as evening is coming. What is the disciples' response/advice to Jesus?

- Send them home for food

Why might this be the solution offered by the disciples?

- They don't have anything to offer
 - They feel inadequate to the task
- It's not their problem/responsibility
- They are tired and grieving

Read Matthew 14:13,15

How far away do you suspect home is for these people? Is it close or far?

Consider if a crowd this size would be able to source food for themselves easily?

- The crowd is large
- They have travelled from a number of villages
- They are in a deserted place
- It is getting late

In this story, Jesus does not send the crowd away hungry. Instead, he calls on the disciples to respond with compassion and courage—even when they feel like they don't have enough. The disciples bring what little they have, and it becomes more than enough when it is shared and blessed. How can we, like the disciples, offer what we have to care for others—especially in places like the Lake Chad region, where climate change makes it harder to grow food?