

## Matthew 15:29-39 - “The Feeding of the Four Thousand” – Jan. 7, 2024

1. Last week we saw a Canaanite woman who was desperate to receive mercy from the Lord Jesus
  - a. After getting pushed quite hard by Christ, this woman presses through by faith and passes the test Christ has put on her
  - b. She was brought low enough to see herself as a dog content to eat the crumbs that fall from the children’s table
  - c. This was Christ’s own language that described her state of affairs since she was a gentile coming to ask for help from Israel’s Messiah
    - i. Technically speaking, this event still happened in the old covenant era; before Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost
      1. It was not yet obvious that the gospel was for all nations
    - ii. But this woman understood the meaning of the miracles that Matthew has recorded
    - iii. The miracle of feeding the 5000 is in the same vein as the miracles of Elijah and Elisha, in which the supply never runs out
    - iv. This woman knew that the mercy of Christ has no end, and so she was happy to take even the crumbs off the table
    - v. Christ healed her daughter and then moves on
2. VV.29-31 – “29 *Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, 31 so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute*

*speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”*

- a. Jesus heads back to the Sea of Galilee, and in Mark’s parallel passage (7:31-37), we are told that it was in the region of the Decapolis, a gentile region
- b. So Christ goes from Tyre and Sidon, a gentile region, to another gentile region up against the Sea of Galilee
- c. He goes up on a mountain and sat down
  - i. This is the pattern we’ve also seen repeatedly
  - ii. Mountains are where people go to ascend to God, where God cuts covenants and deals with His people
    1. Adam starts in Eden, which is on a mountain
    2. Noah restarts creation from a mountain
    3. Moses receives law on a mountain
    4. The temple is on a mountain
    5. Christ delivers His sermons on mountains
    6. He is ultimately crucified on a mountain
- d. He ministered to a single gentile woman and now he is ministering to a large group of gentiles
  - i. One hint in this text itself that shows this is a heavily gentile group is that in v.31 it says “*they glorified the God of Israel*”, suggesting they were not glorifying their own domestic gods
  - ii. This is a further hint at the abundant supply of Christ – giving Himself to one group of people doesn’t mean He has less for the next group

- e. These people are coming with all kinds of ailments and they are left at His feet
  - i. So this isn't Jesus walking through and finding these people
  - ii. This is more like a large crowd surrounding Him and asking for mercy the same way the Canaanite woman had
  - iii. The healing described here comes easier than it did for this woman
  - iv. This account just has Jesus healing these people as fast as they come and there is no record that He testing them
- f. Just as the Canaanite woman calls Christ "Lord" and the "Son of David", these people glorify the God of Israel
  - i. In both of these confessions is a recognition of Christ as He truly is
  - ii. Notice this carefully
    - 1. We have Israel rejecting the kingdom because the king is different than they were expecting
    - 2. So Jesus leaves and a gentile woman acknowledges Him correctly
    - 3. Now we have a large group who glorifies the God of Israel because of what Jesus is doing
      - a. These gentile people are correctly connecting Jesus and His actions to the God of Israel
      - b. They are getting their advanced Trinitarian theology correct while the Pharisees and scribes are still failing the Law of Moses for beginners class

3. V.32 – *“Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”*

- a. Jesus has been healing for three days, and these people are so committed to being ministered to by Him that they are willing to go without food
- b. Imagine making Christ such a priority that you’re willing to go without food to be in fellowship with Him
- c. We’re one week in to the new year, so it’s maybe a good time for me to ask all of you if you have made Christ such a priority that you’re willing to find 15 minutes a day to read your Bible
- d. Do we see the supreme value of Jesus Christ that we are willing to set our concerns aside and follow Him?
- e. Christ doesn’t want to send them away after a 3 day fast for fear that they will faint
  - i. Jesus is setting up another cliffhanger here
  - ii. Just like He resisted the Canaanite woman until it was time to rescue her, He has taken these people to the brink of hunger
  - iii. Christ’s lessons often get driven in deeply because He is so intentional to first show the need
    - 1. He leads people right to the brink so they don’t take their deliverance lightly

2. Calvin – *“Men will never worship Go with a sincere heart, nor be roused to fear and obey Him with sufficient zeal, until they properly understand how much they are indebted to His mercy.”*
3. When Christ is holding you over the edge and it feels like it’s going on too long, He is doing it for our own good; that we would not presume on ourselves or feed a self-sufficient mindset
  - iv. Christ has let three days pass without feeding this crowd and now it is time to send them home, but He is unwilling to let them go in this state
4. V.33 – *“And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?””*
  - a. This is a curious statement
  - b. Not long ago, Jesus fed an even bigger crowd with five loaves and two fish, and the disciples should remember this, that they not doubt His ability, so the question is odd
  - c. But the fact that it is a question is an improvement over last time
    - i. Last time they didn’t ask what to do, but told Jesus to send the crowd away so they could go buy food
  - d. So there seems to be mixed progress here
5. VV.34-39 – *“34 And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” 35 And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, 36 he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 37 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 38 Those*

*who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.”*

- a. This all sounds very familiar
- b. The crowd is told to sit which settles them and puts everyone in a receptive posture
- c. Christ gives thanks to God for the food, which establishes and encourages our own custom of praying at mealtime
  - i. This is a prayer of thanksgiving, which we ought to do to
  - ii. But sitting down as a family for meals, taking our needs to God in prayer, and doing family devotions are all customs which fathers especially need to lead in
  - iii. When we are seated together and receiving the gift of food from God, we are in the ideal position to pray together, to discuss the things of the Lord together, and to draw closer as a family
  - iv. This is repetitive from a month ago, but perhaps that is helpful in terms of showing us this pattern in Scripture itself
- d. Once again, Christ gets the food to the people through the disciples
  - i. Children get fed through mom and dad
  - ii. As we partake in the Lord’s Supper as a church, the body is fed through the elders
  - iii. This pattern too can teach us
    1. It is obvious that God is the ultimate source of all good things, and yet He uses means

2. God does not just zap outcomes
3. His normal way of working is to use means to bring about His ends
  - a. He puts a pattern of reaping and sowing into much of His action
- iv. Here the disciples serve the crowd as God's agents
  1. The elders of this church are going to similarly serve the body as God's agents
- e. In the feeding of the 5000 there are five loaves and two fish
  - i. Here we have seven loaves and a few fish
- f. There are several possibilities as to the significance of some of the numbers
- g. In the feeding of the 5000 there are twelve baskets left over; one for each disciple
  - i. *When God established the nation of Israel, He used twelve men under the headship of Jacob (Israel)*
  - ii. *Now when God is establishing His kingdom on earth; the new covenant Christians church, He likewise uses twelve men under the headship of Jesus (true Israel)*
    1. This kingdom is much more expansive and is not defined by ethnicity but by faith; it is a new humanity made up of every tongue, tribe, and nation
- h. Here we have 7 baskets left over, which is a number of fulness, completion, and perfection in Scripture
- i. It may also be of significance that the first miracle starts with five fish and this one with seven, which gives us another instance of twelve

- j. But these stories are so close together and so similar that we may wonder what the purpose is of doing it twice?
  - i. The first miracle of the 5000 is performed for a Jewish crowd
  - ii. This miracle of the 4000 is performed for a heavily gentile crowd
  - iii. It is noteworthy that this mass feeding happens on the heels of the Canaanite woman receiving her crumbs from Jesus
  - iv. She is commended for understanding what all these miracles mean
    - 1. She understood that these miracles have been teaching abundant mercy and abundant provision
    - 2. When God feeds His children, there is surplus that falls to the ground that others can receive as well
  - v. *The Canaanite woman was a single gentile, this crowd is predominantly gentile, so what we're seeing here is progress from a single woman receiving crumbs to a small city receiving just as full a meal as the children got earlier*
  - vi. There is actually far more than crumbs that come to the gentiles, there is full inclusion and full inheritance for non-Jews as well in this new Israel that Christ is establishing
  - vii. The gentiles are receiving bread from heaven alongside the Jews
    - 1. This miracle is teaching gentile equality in the kingdom of God
  - viii. This move from one woman to a large crowd has application for us as well
    - 1. I think almost every young man that starts in ministry would love it if he could just preach to a large crowd and fix everything like that



2. Preparing a sermon for 4000 is no more work than preparing a sermon for 40, so mass ministry seems efficient
3. But in the real world, discipleship doesn't work that way
4. We can't just have the glory of getting up to a microphone and fixing everything with a sermon, even a sound biblical sermon
  - a. This kind of ministry is obviously very important but it's only one aspect
5. Before Christ went up to this audience of 15 or 20,000 and started mass ministry, He also went out of the way to minister to one woman in an obscure place
  - a. One on one discipleship is critical for the health of the church
6. This is a reminder for all of us to engage in one-on-one friendship, mentorship, and encouragement
  - a. God sends people to serve you and people to be served by you
  - b. Don't waste these opportunities
  - c. Yes we'll keep preaching and teaching at a church wide level, but intergenerational, intentional discipleship is a key element to any healthy church
  - d. In my own ministry I'm also learning that one on one time may seem less efficient than a sermon or a Sunday school class but it often bears fruit in much more obvious ways

*ix.* People can rush to extremes when discussing the nature of the new covenant people of God

*1.* They may still treat the gentiles as lesser in the kingdom because they came in later, but we see that everything Christ offers to the Jewish people are also offered to Gentiles here

*a.* Galatians, Acts, and Hebrews are all written to make it crystal clear that we are equals in the kingdom. There is no Jewish priority.

*b.* The Canaanite woman and the feeding of the 4000 are early signs of what those books make explicit

*2.* Others may treat the Jewish believers as lesser in the kingdom because the Jews rejected Christ at the beginning

*a.* Romans 9-11 helps prevent this thinking

*b.* True Israel is believing Israel, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and Paul expects that as part of God's global mission of putting all His enemies under His feet and advancing the Great Commission, that there will be a mass conversion of ethnic Jews into the people of God

*i.* So Israel is used in two senses here

*1.* an ethnic group which is headed genetically by the man Israel/Jacob

*2.* a believing group which is headed covenantally by the true Israel/Jesus



1. Maybe you have been struggling with various challenges that just won't go away, and it feels like God has been holding you over a cliff for too long
  2. This is the way God tells stories – He loves cliffhangers
  3. Regardless of what has been happening in your life, Christ has invited you here this morning, and He is ready to feed you now
- b. If He can turn seven loaves and a few small fish into food that feeds a crowd of 4000 men, plus women and children, then He can take care of your needs as well. No matter how difficult or unlikely a situation seems, we serve a sovereign God whose providential care reaches down to the tiniest details; He will not withhold His grace from you for the situations you are facing
  - c. He gave thanks, as we need to do at all times as well
  - d. He sat the crowd down, so that even their bodily posture is a reminder that we are unable to supply our own needs. We first receive so we can go out and work; we don't work in order to receive.
  - e. He puts other people in our lives to minister to us as well – the Christian life is not meant to be a solo affair
    - i. God has put people in your life to serve you, and He has also put people in your life for you to serve
  - f. Lastly, there is more than enough. If we have learned nothing else from Matthew 14 & 15 it's that God's supply never runs out. More blessing for one does not mean less blessing for another. God is not redistributing a fixed amount of

blessing that exists in the universe, but is creating fresh blessings wherever He goes.

## 7. CHARGE

- a. *Christ is the head of a new humanity. He is knitting together a kingdom of priests from all the corners of the earth. When the scribes and Pharisees reject what Christ is offering, He goes to the obscure corners to bring outsiders in. What started as a single Canaanite woman happy like a dog for crumbs has become a small city being fed a full meal, equal to that of the children. Christ starts with the lost sheep of Israel, but now He is bringing in outsiders as well. There is no end to Christ's mercy, so the charge is this – whether you are ministering to one or to many, God's grace is sufficient. He will supply your every need. As God's people in the world, may we be known for our humility, our gratitude, our peacefulness, and most importantly our reliance on the bread of heaven that only He can supply.*

## 8. BENEDICTION

- a. Ephesians 3:20, 21 – *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*