

Matthew 14:13-33

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Date: 27 September 2026

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[0:00] Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the people.

They all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up the twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men besides women and children.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side where he dismissed the crowd. After he dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night he was there alone and the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake.

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It is a ghost, they said, and they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, Take courage, it is I, don't be afraid.

[1:07] Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water. Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink. He cried out, Lord, save me. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

You of little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? And then they climbed into the boat and the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly you are the Son of God. Amen. Amen. If you're just joining us, then, as I say each week, we're kind of working our way through Matthew's gospel. Last week we noted the sort of big question that Matthew is trying to address to his primarily, in the first instance, Jewish readership.

And we saw that question really articulated through the voice, the words of John the Baptist in chapter 11, verse 3, where he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, Are you the one to come, or should we expect someone else?

[2:22] Now, Matthew's not afraid of that question. In fact, he welcomes it gladly and packs it and answers it thoroughly, fully, and beautifully over in these verses that we're looking at and in the chapters to come.

So, in sort of beginning to answer that question off the lips of the back of John the Baptist, but the question that he knows that his Jewish audience are also asking, How can this man be the Messiah?

He opens up the scene in his own home town where he's rejected because of a mistaken identity. That you're not going to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

You see him merely as a man from your own midst, maybe a prophet, but certainly not the Messiah. And then he took us to the royal palace, where the Messiah and his messenger, John the Baptist, are also rejected.

John pays the ultimate cost of faithfulness. And so, you know, he's understanding the question, Can this be the one? But he wants to powerfully and wonderfully say, No, no, no, he is. Bear with me.

[3:30] Let me show you just wonderfully how. And then it's almost as if he pulls out the big guns, as it were, in terms of significant stories that would speak loud and clear to his Jewish audience with their Jewish background and understanding of the Old Testament.

Now, to help us this morning, especially if we're new, I don't assume that everyone who comes to Cornerstone on a Sunday morning is a Christian or even has really read the Bible or explored it for themselves before.

So, you know, I'll do a wee sidebar every now and again just to say, Look, if you're new to all this, here's something you need to know. So, one of the things that's crucial for this passage this morning is to know that the things that Matthew is writing about are a massive allusion to the redemption story, the big story in the Old Testament that was called the Exodus. You may have seen it in some of the films about it, where the people of God are delivered powerfully by God from the hands of the Egyptians and out into the Promised Land. In summary, God's people ended up in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. They cried out to the Lord. The Lord heard their cry and he powerfully delivered them, like I said, not only from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, but his heavy hand of inescapable slavery and his many legions. [4:56] They were freed by God himself to go on together under his lead to the Promised Land that he had prepared for them. In particular, in that story, in the midst of it all, God himself again delivered them from the ten judgments that he was bringing on Egypt for its oppression.

And especially, as the whole story climaxes, the final one. They were instructed in that final scenes of that deliverance that God was preparing, they were instructed to paint the door frames of their houses with the blood of the Lamb that they had just eaten as their sort of meal that they were going to eat before they were needing to leave. And that, as the angel of death, it was bringing the judgment on the nation. As it came, it would pass over their houses, sparing them from the judgment when it saw the blood of the Lamb. God then delivered them from the armies of Pharaoh, defeating them. As the people of God looked like they were cornered, God opens up, divides the red sea so that they are unable to pass through and then closes over the sea, over Pharaoh's forces. The Lord himself, again, giving them the victory. And it's the Lord that's the center of it, always. The Lord is the one who is providing for them, leading them, guiding them, instructing them, delivering them, giving them the victory.

[6:25] And then the story goes on. When they're out in the wilderness with nothing to kind of provide for them, God himself, again, provides for them the daily manna, a bread-like substance to sustain them.

So these mighty acts that were recorded early on in the Old Testament, the Passover, the parting of the seas, are referred to again and again. Look back to it.

And remember how the Lord saved us, delivered us, see his character, see the wonder of his care, and so on. So you see it often in the Psalms. Psalm 78, Psalm 106, verses 7 and 9.

Whilst they were still rebelling, the verses say, yet he saved you because of his covenant faithfulness. Psalm 114, Psalm 136, you know that Psalm repeats the phrase, his love endures forever.

Well, in verses 10 to 15, it records how the Lord delivered them from the might of Egypt and his mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, dividing the seas and bringing them through.

[7:24] And as in Psalm 78, verse 24, it says that he rained down manna, grain from heaven, the bread of angels, verse 25 in that Psalm, giving them all the food they could eat satisfied and with abundance of good things.

And as you kind of hear these things repeated again and again, as the people of God rejoice in the great redemption story, hopefully you're thinking, okay, there's things going to come up in these passages that we're looking at this morning.

So with all that great history of the mighty acts of the great God of heaven, the question is focused on Jesus.

The Jewish audience that Matthew is writing to is, is Jesus really, truly the great God's anointed one, the long-promised one now sent from God to save us?

Is he really the one? Is he really the great I am at work amongst them? Is he worthy of worship, worthy of following, worthy of giving our lives to?

[8:31] Is he the one who is the mighty hand of God, able to deliver his people with an outstretched arm? Is this Galilean carpenter's son? Is he, is he, can he, can he really do it?

Can he be the deliverer of the nations, the savior of all the generations? These are the questions that are being asked of Jesus. And then this is the, the, the stories that Matthew is rallying to help them to kind of see, yes, he is.

But maybe you've come along this morning and you have some of those same questions. Is Jesus more than a mere man, more than a prophet? Is he able, is he truly the son of God, able to save?

Maybe to, able to save me, able to transform my life.

Maybe you're coming along, as I said earlier, you're investigating Jesus. You've come along this morning for the first time. Well, this is a great morning to come because Matthew is in no doubt about the answer to these questions and is itching to tell you why you should trust him, how he can save you.

And he's going to do this, first of all, this week, as we've seen in this passage, by drawing together two incidents in the life of Jesus. And again, a spoiler alert, what we're going to see is an allusion to a miraculous feeding, a providing of manna, if you like, in the wilderness, in the desert, and a miraculous mastery of crossing the sea.

[9:56] Again, allusions to, to what we were talking about in the Old Testament. So we're going to see the compassion of Christ, the echoes of the eternal one. We're going to see the provision of Christ, manna in the wilderness.

And we're going to see the power of Christ, his mastery over the sea. So first of all, what Matthew wants to draw our attention to is the compassion of Christ. Verse 13, Jesus hears what happened to John the Baptist and his beheading, his close relative.

And so he seeks to withdraw to a solitary place, to be alone with his father in heaven, to grieve.

Now, extrovert preachers like to point out that Jesus has always had time for people.

And we will see that. But here we are told that he made time to withdraw. Here, maybe as the waves sort of lapped against the boat, crossing the sea, he made time to grieve.

Feel the temporary loss of John because he will see him again. You know, as we've been praying, as we've mentioned over the last few weeks, a good number in the fellowship, this is a season of grief.

[11:06] And for the close family, maybe this is a time to withdraw a little and to grieve for the one that they know that they too will one day see again because of our gospel, glorious gospel hope.

We come to the one, the Lord Jesus Christ, the worthy Lamb of God. We come and we worship him knowing that we are known by the one who, well, the King James puts it this way in Isaiah 55, who is acquainted with grief.

And Hebrews 4, 11 is able to empathize with us, feel deeply our pain and our grief and our sorrow.

And so is more than able to be the wonderful counselor that the scriptures call him to be, to be the comforter, to be the bringer of the balm of Gilead to our souls.

Is that the aspect of Christ that you need to know today? Then let him speak to your soul. As he says, come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.

He is the one who is able to bring balm, healing, verse 14, to our souls. But see him also in action, verse 13, that the crowds follow, and they're no doubt following him for all sorts of reasons.

[12:33] But as verse 14, he lands, what does he say? What does he do? What is his heart? Of course he's grieving, but it says he had compassion on them. As he saw them, he had compassion on them, and he healed their sick.

But this compassion, I think, is significant to Matthew's cause, as he seeks to demonstrate who Jesus really is. Not merely a man, not merely a prophet, but truly the Son of God, come to save. Because this compassion of which he speaks of is truly divine, because this compassion that he demonstrates demonstrates is part of the very essential nature of the triumph God revealed in the Old Testament.

What does God say to Moses as he reveals himself to him in the book of the Exodus, chapter 34, verse 6? He describes, this is how he describes himself, that he is the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious one, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness and forgiveness while still a boring sin.

And here, as the Lord Jesus steps out of the boat, as he sees the cry, he has compassion on them. They are like sheep without a shepherd. And his heart goes out to them, for he is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep.

[13:53] So the question in the reader's mind is, is this the God of the Exodus come to save? Well, yes, it is Matthew. It most certainly is. And he'll go on to further demonstrate that.

As we see the provision of Christ, there's manna in the wilderness. Verse 15, evening is approaching. The disciples are thinking, you know, practically, you know, we should send them off before they can no longer, you know, make it to the co-op to get a meal deal or if they're really lucky to get the wee stickered ones that are reduced price or whatever.

But the thing that we need to know, and sometimes in the translation, you can, we miss some of the important details. The NIV translates the place as a remote place, but the word in Greek is literally wilderness.

It's a desert place. Wilderness is that word that is used in the Old Testament and the Psalms as they describe the place where God provided manna for 40 years.

as Jesus comes and as Matthew speaks of him and gives witness to who and testimony to who he is, will the great God of heaven be able to provide again if it's truly him?

[15:10] Well, let's see. Verse 16, Jesus, you know, the disciples are trying to send them off. Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, they don't need to go. You can provide for them. I cannot wonder if Jesus did not suppress a smile just like, because he knows what's going to happen.

This is a teachable moment. He's going to kind of blow their minds. He's going to help them and instruct them in faith and in understanding who he is and what he is calling them to.

And so you might expect verse 17, you know, he's suppressing a smile. They're thinking, are you joking? You know, we only have like five loaves and two fishes, barely enough to feed ourselves, let alone that great crowd.

Verse 18, look at what he says. Bring the loaves, the fish, bring them here to me. Now, there's a whole sermon in itself on these words and great Czechs preachers from the past will have just brought us beautifully to understand what they mean in all their fullness.

But hear him say, bring them here to me. Bring what you have. that I might multiply it. The great God of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, he says the same to his children today.

[16:28] Bring what you have and I am able to multiply it. That's what he says. That's what he taught in the parable of the sower, chapter 13. I'm able to multiply it 30, 60, a hundredfold.

You know, in our old age and infirmity, we might wonder what can we bring to the Lord in his service? We can pray and God will honor it.

We can give and God will multiply it. And we can encourage and God will bless it. We're never done in the Lord's service. Whatever our situation, whatever it is that we have, bring it to him and he can multiply it.

In whatever circumstances we find ourselves, an offering made in his will and his way can be multiplied by him who is more than able to do it. The daily ordinary work of praying and learning about the Lord together with our children or our grandchildren, if that is our situation in life, give it to him and let him multiply it in their hearts.

Maybe offering up our present single status to the Lord, if that is our present situation. Offering the day at the beginning of the first thing in the morning to him. Bringing it to him and letting him do what he will through it.

[17:47] Offering our lives to him, whether that is lives that are called into secular work or called to some form of paid Christian ministry. Offering our free evenings to him.

As we draw this morning, do you hear the Lord by his Holy Spirit just saying, come bring it all to me, all that you have. Don't hold anything back.

Bring your lives to me and let me do great and wonderful things in and through them. Bring it all to him. Now we can expect that as with the disciples here, at times he may well push us well out of our comfort zones.

But if he says do it and we do it, yes there may be trials but we can be sure that we will have blessings also that will follow. And then verse 19.

He tells them all as the food is gathered to sit down. Now again, we're looking for specific details and things that will speak to a Jewish audience. Where does he ask them to sit?

[18:54] Is it on stony ground? Is it on sand? Is it among the thorns? No, no. See where he has them sitting. It's in the grass. It's in the green pastures.

Of course, to his Jewish audience, that is significant because who is it that needs grass or green pastures? It's sheep, isn't it? And who is it that leads them there? It's a shepherd. So here Matthew is saying, look, here is the Lord who is our shepherd whom a thousand years ago David spoke in Psalm 23, doing what God does, leading by still waters and whereby green pastures.

Matthew is in no doubt and he was there as to the identity of the one who was among them. You wonder for Matthew if as he reflected on it, this was not spine tingling as he wrote to think about all that he saw, that what he experienced and what he learned and who he learned from.

But Matthew wants to say to us and the scriptures are going to teach us that that was such a privilege for him. But Jesus says, you know what's better? It is better that I go to heaven and send the wonderful counselor, the Holy Spirit, so that all of us, all around the world, can experience his near and loving presence.

God with us, leading us to green pastures to restore our soul. This should be and is. It's spine tinglingly good for us as we think on it, isn't it?

[20:28] To know that he is the Lord and he is the Lord as we sung this morning. And let his Spirit lead us and take us to those green pastures, maybe even this morning, in our hearts, that he might minister to us and that he might restore us.

And as he gathers them and they all sit down in the grass, verse 19, he gives thanks for the food. Thank you, Lord, for this food. You know, he gives thanks to God for a meal. And actually, if that's not something that we do regularly in our own practice, in our own homes, then actually it's a great thing to do.

The word of these other pastors is giving grace at the beginning of a meal. More, Anne and I use it these days as an opportunity to bring things to the Lord, to use that as a prayer time together, holding hands as we gather.

The caveat is that the prayer is not to go on too long so that the food doesn't go cold. They use the natural contours of the day to pray as an individual, as a couple, or as a family, or in your flat, as a household.

And again, verse 20, every phrase here deserves a sermon in itself. They all ate and were still a bit hungry. No, no, they were satisfied. Christ's provision here is not meager.

[21:51] It is utterly satisfying. All of Christ's miracles, they're not just miracles in isolation. They are there to teach us. They're there to teach us that what He brings, the salvation that He procures for us on the cross, satisfies the Father, paid the price in full for the debt we owed and cannot pay.

That how in Christ as we receive Him and taste and see that the Lord is good, that we will find satisfaction in our souls as we receive the salvation that He offers.

That we will receive the peace that passes understanding. But also eternally, we cannot now comprehend how our souls will be satisfied and complete in Him on that day that we see Him and begin that eternity with Him.

What He provides satisfies. Now Satan will want to rob us of all of that, but we must resist Him.

And the Bible says that we do, He will flee. That even in adversity and hardship, there is grace from the one who is Emmanuel God with us, the one who is God, our shepherd, that is sufficient.

[23:06] We can trust Him for that. So they were filled and there was food to spare and abundance. Verse 20, there were 12 baskets left over and 12, of course, was the number of tribes of Israel delivered in the Exodus.

and it is by no mistake, is it, that the number of the disciples Jesus chose was 12 as He was leading out what? The new Exodus of the people of God established in, a new covenant established in His blood.

Because this is, in no doubt, in Matthew's mind. The new Exodus of the new people of God with a new covenant head, Jesus, established in His blood, not a physical Exodus to a physical land, but a spiritual one to the promised land prepared in heaven where we will know our resurrection realities and the new creation prepared for us.

Delivery, not from physical slavery as it was in Egypt or from Pharaoh, but slavery to sin, to death, and to Satan's dominion over our lives. You and I, this morning, we feel very ordinary, but you and I are caught up not in the great Exodus of three and a half thousand years ago, but the great Exodus of all the ages to which it pointed, where in every generation and from every nation, tribe, and tongue, people will be delivered by the same great I am who came to save.

You know, the great prophet Elisha, you remember the story in 2 Kings 4, was enabled to fill the Shunammite woman's jars. But in that same chapter, he also fed a hundred men with twenty loaves, such that there was enough and plenty left over, it says.

[24:52] But come amongst these people on that day as they sat in that wilderness, as they sat on the green pastures, the one who was multiplying the food before them, it's not simply the prophet of God, but he's the God of the prophet, able to feed five thousand men and more.

That's how they counted it, things back in those days, but it could have meant there were between 10 and 20,000 men, women, and children. And what he provides as he gives himself as the bread

of life, is how he described himself, to death on a cross will be multiplied to provide salvation that satisfies for a great multitude that cannot be numbered.

And brothers and sisters, in Christ, you and I, you know, we will be there one day numbered amongst those safely delivered to the promised land to which we say, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

so there is manna in the desert, but also can he show mastery over the sea like he did before in the great Exodus story.

So we see then the power of Christ. Verse 22, the crowd is dismissed, disciples are shipped off, literally, and Jesus heads for the mountain, verse 23, to get those moments that he was probably looking for before, you know, as he landed the first time with his heavenly father, spending time in his presence and prayer, speaking with him.

[26:24] But even though, see here, even though he is not with his disciples, he's still able to see them as he intercedes to the father. Here's a glimpse of the one who is at the right hand of the father now interceding for us, the one who is with us, who sees us, who knows our struggles, our storms, and is praying to the father for us and at their behest as far as the son commissioning the spirit to help us in the particular ways in that particular moment that we need it.

I wonder if you believe it. I wonder if you believe that is the specific nature of the care of our God for us. Know this morning that this great God whom we worship has a particular interest in you and your situation.

And as we see in verse 24, they have been sailing through the night, buffeted by the wind. And verse 25, Jesus comes to them like Job says in Job chapter 9 verse 8 as the great God of heaven who not only stretches out the heavens but treads on the waves by the seas.

I wonder if you've seen those videos of those ships in the middle of that. I assume it's the Atlantic. The waves are just absolutely enormous and you're sort of thinking how on earth is that boatness not sunk and how if it isn't sunk how on earth are the sailors not just out down in the box just throwing up because it is unbelievable.

Now of course the storm on that day is not like that but this storm even though it is a storm it's nothing to Jesus to walk and to walk on the water in the midst of it.

[28:03] And as he walks through the storm he comes with power. Power to save. As we'll see verse 26, I think it is hilarious. You know, the disciples are sort of rowing through the storm they're absolutely knackered because they've been doing it all night against the wind and then suddenly somebody's always looking in the distance going what's going on here?

Oh! It's a ghost! Absolutely, you know, just fantastic. Well, the Bible is brilliant because it is warts and all, isn't it?

real people, real situations, real struggles, real faith. But verse 27 is the clincher. Take courage. The NIV says it is I but again the Greek helps us here.

It uses the key phrase *ego eme*. It's a double emphatic I, I am. It's a very particular phrase used of the Lord in the Old Testament.

The Greek translation of that passage of the burning bush when God reveals the name to be used by his people his covenant name by which he has bound himself to his people.

[29:13] When he says I am who I am it is using that phrase *ego eme* because he assures them you are mine and I am yours. I am who I am.

And Matthew is telling us that the great I am who revealed himself at the burning bush is here to seek and to save binding himself to his people in covenant love and faithfulness as he did before. So verse 27 in covenant love he says don't be afraid. You've heard me say before that there are 365 do not be afraid in the Bible one for every day of the year.

How often do we need to hear it every day? Whether you're a first year student and you're just sort of feeling apprehensive because of these first weeks at university or whether you're taking considering taking on a new role or a job stepping out in faith stepping into a leadership role or for us as a church as we consider what it means to multiply to reach this city.

Whatever situation we are in in life hear the Lord's words to you today. Take courage. Do not be afraid. Because I am he who bind myself to you in covenanted love who is more than able to strengthen to reassure to meet you in your fears.

[30:46] But as we see the power of Christ I think specifically in these latter verses we see the power of Christ to save. You've got to love Peter and his enthusiasm.

