

Study Notes: Matthew 14:13-21
November 9, 2025: “Jesus Provides”
Prepared by Reverend Robert W. Rice
Pastor, Muncy Baptist Church

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

- “What had happened” refers to the death of John the Baptist. After hearing of John’s death, Jesus withdrew from public ministry. He likely did this because of the threat of rising persecution and a desire to spend some time alone with His disciples to grieve the loss of His friend and forerunner in ministry.
- Although Jesus withdrew to a solitary and remote place, the crowds who were following His ministry still followed Him on foot. They actually arrived ahead of Jesus.
- When Jesus encountered the crowd, His compassion for them led Him to heal the sick and care for them. The Greek word for compassion is *splagchnizomai*. It is the same word used earlier in Matthew to describe Jesus’ attitude towards the crowds of people He encountered.
 - Strong’s Concordance defines this word as, “to be moved as to one’s bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity).” This reveals the depth of Jesus’ love and care for those who came to Him. The New American Commentary explains, “Jesus’ human emotions reflect a deep, *gut-level* ‘compassion’ (a reasonable, idiomatic English equivalent for a term that could refer to bowels and kidneys) for this sea of humanity.”

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

- The disciples approached Jesus as they realized it was getting late and the place was remote. They were concerned for the crowds, and their concern led them to ask Jesus to send the crowds away so they could find places to eat.
- The New American Commentary explains, “The disciples are understandably concerned about the crowd’s need to eat. We are not told how far from the villages everyone is, but they could easily be several miles away. Jesus replies as if the disciples have a large store of food available (v. 16).”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

- Jesus challenged the disciples to feed the crowds and allow their concern to take the form of action. The disciples saw only their meager provisions. The other Gospel accounts tell us that the five loaves and two fish are a young boy’s lunch. What they had was only enough for one person.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. 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 twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

- Jesus asked the disciples to bring Him what they had. He then organized the people and gave thanks for the food. As the disciples passed out the food, it was supernaturally multiplied, so much that there were 12 baskets left over.
 - The Faithlife Study Bible explains that Jesus’ blessing over the fish and loaves is repeated later in Matthew’s Gospel, “Jesus thanks God for providing the food (compare Luke 24:30; 1 Cor 14:16). The sequence of verbs eulogeō, klaō, didōmi (‘give thanks, break, give’) occurs again in Matt 26:26, which may hint that it represented a traditional blessing.”
 - The New American Commentary adds, “Jesus may well have pronounced the common Jewish benediction, ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.’”
- Matthew notes that about 5,000 men were present, not counting women and children. Jesus provided in abundance for every person who was present.
- The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle (apart from the resurrection) that appears in all four Gospels. The other accounts are found in Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:5-15.
 - The New American Commentary explains why this miracle is important, “This miracle is sometimes seen as simply an illustration of Jesus’ compassion for human need, but the lack of urgency in the setting hardly merited such a wonder. The disciples’ suggestion of v. 15 offered a realistic alternative. Rather, feeding the five thousand — providing bread for Israel in the wilderness — almost certainly was meant to call to people’s minds God’s supernatural feeding of the Israelites with manna in their wilderness wanderings in Moses’ day. Jewish tradition had come to believe that the Messiah would repeat this miracle of abundant provision of food on an even grander scale.”