

JESUS SATISIFES!
MATTHEW 14:13-21

It's late; the crowd is listening to Him teach, and watching Him heal the sick; but its getting late and now they have another need, for food. Jesus had tried to escape from the crowds for a time; John the Baptist had been executed by Herod, Jesus' second cousin, and Jesus wanted to find some time and space on His own and with God to mourn His cousin, to grieve for His friend; Jesus is like rest of us, really human, reacting to bad news as we react. He was not to get that time and space because the crowd followed Him – what would He do: chase them away - 'I want to be alone'? Be angry with them for invading His private space? No; Jesus had compassion on them, His heart went out to them as He saw their need; they came looking for healing, looking for teaching, for spiritual food and insight and something that would help them live life by faith, something that no-one else was giving them; so they came looking for Jesus, that He would meet their spiritual need.

Then it was late; 'these people need food; send them away; let them go home, or let them go to the villages to buy their teal!' The disciples are anxious, in case people become faint with lack of food. Jesus said: "*You give...*" (v16) Was there a burst of laughter from the disciples. 'Us! What can we do! Have you seen the size of the crowd? Don't be silly!' When they looked again, all that they had were five loaves and two fish, but Jesus took that small amount of food and thanked God for providing it and then started to share it around. Matthew tells us that "*they all...*" (vv20f) Jesus provided for the crowd in this other way, by feeding them when they were hungry. He had healed their sick; He had been teaching them about God and faith and Jesus and the kingdom; now He fed them bread and fish to satisfy them, hungry in another way.

How should we understand this? Well, there are people in our world who tell us that these are just made-up stories and who laugh at miracles. People like Richard Dawkins believe that everything in the world must have a scientific explanation and so miracles are just not possible. If you don't believe that miracles can happen, then you won't believe that miracles do happen! Other people explain this story in a different way: they say that when Jesus brought out the five loaves and two fishes, those others in the crowd who had them, opened their lunch boxes and began to share the lunch they had brought with their neighbours in the crowd. So Wm Barclay, for example, describes this as a miracle of changing people's hearts from being selfish, and keeping lunch to themselves, to being generous and sharing, with Jesus taking the lead. Neither of these is in the spirit of the Bible text.

This is the only miracle story in all four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell this story of feeding the five thousand and in fact there is also another story of feeding four thousand as well. They must have seen this story as such an important part of the picture of Jesus they wanted to paint, that they all wanted people to know what Jesus did. It is a very simple picture; a very simple story. Jesus took these five loaves and two fishes and fed five thousand people and more. That's the story that all four gospels tell; there might be minor differences in some parts, but the story is the same in all four. Jesus fed thousands of people with very little food. There was a need; people were hungry; Jesus and His disciples had the means with which to feed them and so Jesus did; he gave the food to the disciples and they shared it with the people sitting on the grass and as if to emphasise the scale of what Jesus had done, each disciple has a basket full of leftovers. Matthew wants to tell us what Jesus did and wants us to be amazed at what Jesus did. The crowd wouldn't have known about the miracle, perhaps; only disciples saw what happened and they were amazed.

Miracles are seen in three ways in the Bible: as distinctive, wonderful events; as mighty, powerful events; and as meaningful and significant events. The feeding of five thousand people is certainly distinctive and wonderful – only God could do such things. He had done this before twice in the Old Testament and here again is Jesus doing something wonderful and distinctive; no-one else was doing miracles like these. It is also a powerful, mighty event – again here is the power of God at work; only Jesus had the power to do things like this and it left the disciples in awe of Jesus, that He had power they didn't have; that He could do things that they couldn't do. We should read these stories and they should have same impact on us: perhaps this is the first time you've heard this story or read it; perhaps you've heard it many times before; each time, it should have the same impact on us – wow! Jesus can do this! How special, distinctive, and powerful is Jesus!

There is also something meaningful and significant about this story. It doesn't just tell us that Jesus can make bread and fish stretch to feed a lot of people. If that is all this means, then it could be called a magic trick! The clue is in the way Matthew describes the people afterwards: "*They all...*" (v20a) Matthew paints a picture of Jesus as the One who satisfies people's needs. Jesus is the One who is able to meet every need; Jesus is the One who gives life a new meaning and purpose; Jesus is the One who heals people when they're sick, who cares for people in need and who is able to bring the grace, love, peace and power of God to bear on every life. That's what this picture means; that's why this picture is so significant; the people went away satisfied; that's what Jesus does!

Perhaps you're trying to make sense of life: as a young person growing up, trying to understand the world and its ways, trying to create for yourself a set of values by which to live life, trying to understand what is important about life. There are big questions with which you are wrestling, questions about money, a job, relationships, sex and you are not sure where to find the answers to these questions. You are trying to find your sense of identity, who you are, what you want to be. I believe that Jesus is One who gives life its focus, its meaning and purpose, that it is in Christ that we find ourselves, that Jesus is the One whose wisdom and insight into life, His teaching, forms the most solid foundation for all that we can be and do in life. Jesus satisfies these needs and longings.

Or life has gone pear-shaped. Everything was sorted; you had everything you needed and then something went wrong; the wheels fell off! There is bad news; an illness; someone dies; all the things that seemed to be sorted, all of a sudden were not there anymore; the solid foundation was shifting and sinking and we're sinking with it. We try to talk to our friends, but they have enough worries of their own, they really don't want to listen and anyway they can't really do anything to sort anyone else's life! Jesus is full of compassion; God knows our needs and God's love is round about us all of the time, day after day. Jesus who was prepared to give time to needy people, Jesus who was prepared to die on cross for our sake – His love is round about us every day and He is able to meet our deepest need for peace, being loved, cared for, being listened to when we pray. He satisfies our need.

Jesus satisfies these needs and many, many others. Indeed, whatever we need in life and for the living of life, Jesus is able to satisfy that need in some way or another. Whether we have a need for hope, peace, forgiveness, understanding, answers – whatever it is that we are looking for, Jesus is able to satisfy our need. It is Jesus who satisfies these need: it is not religion and 'saying our prayers' that meets our deepest need; it is not the Church and coming here Sunday by Sunday that meets

our deepest need; it is Jesus who satisfies us and we come to Jesus to find answers to our prayers, to find peace and grace.

This is for sharing with others. Several people, writing about this story, make the point that Jesus gave food to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowd; that what Jesus gave to the disciples was for sharing with others around about them. You might be thinking 'I don't need anything, but I have a good friend who does, who is struggling with life because it is hard, or who is looking for answers, or who needs a sense of hope and peace'. Well, this Jesus who satisfies our needs, is for sharing with others, and will satisfy the needs of others too; this is not for keeping to ourselves and is for our needs only, but is for others, is for us to share with others. Find the right moment, the right words, then tell this story of Jesus feeding the five thousand and why the story is meaningful and significant – Jesus satisfies our deepest needs. Of course, to tell the story convincingly, you need to believe it first!

There were people wandering in the desert; they didn't know which way to go; there were no landmarks, no road signs, no way-markers; they were lost and wandering. They became hungry and thirsty and their very life was in danger. They cried out to God for help: *"He led..." (Ps 107:7)* Psalm 107 paints three other pictures, little parables of life: people in darkness, others who rebelled against God, some who went out to sea in ships and their life was in danger and in each of them, the Psalmist says that God heard their cries and answered them. God met their deepest needs. These are meant as little parables – people whose lives are like being in desert, hungry, thirsty for life, love, peace, hope, who are lost and wandering and not sure where to turn next. How well does that describe life for so many people in our world today; they don't know to cry out to the Lord; they don't know that Jesus will satisfy their deepest needs; they won't know unless we tell them.

It is Jesus who does this: the wonderfully distinctive Jesus; the mighty powerful Jesus. Jesus who does miracles does this, He meets us in our deepest need and satisfies us. Perhaps life is sweet, you have no questions, no problems – that's great, so make sure Jesus is the foundation. Perhaps you feel lost, or struggling to find out what life is all about – Jesus can satisfy. Perhaps you feel hurt, vulnerable, suffering – Jesus is full of compassion for us and our needs; He loves us more than we will ever understand; Jesus can satisfy. There is someone else you know for whom this describes their life – tell them about Jesus and how Jesus can satisfy their deepest needs. Matthew watched Jesus feed five thousand people and more with only five loaves and two fish; it was wonderful, powerful – wow! It was also significant – everyone was satisfied! This is what Jesus can do!