

## Matthew 15:29 – 16:12

<sup>15:29</sup> Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, he was sitting there. <sup>30</sup> And large crowds came to him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at his feet; and he healed them. <sup>31</sup> So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. <sup>32</sup> And Jesus called his disciples to him, and said, 'I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.' <sup>33</sup> The disciples said to him, 'Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?' <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves do you have?' And they said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' <sup>35</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the ground; <sup>36</sup> and he took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, he broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. <sup>38</sup> And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan. <sup>16:1</sup> The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> But he replied to them, 'When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? <sup>4</sup> An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.' And he left them and went away. <sup>5</sup> And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' <sup>7</sup> They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, 'He said that because we did not bring any bread.' <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, 'You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

## Theme of Bread in Matthew 14 – 16

Mt.14:13 – 33	Mt.14:34 – 15:20	Mt.15:21 – 28	Mt.15:29 – 39	Mt.16:1 – 12
From the towns (Mt.14:13)	Gennesaret (Mt.14:34), likely the Gentile side	Tyre and Sidon (Mt.15:21), Gentile lands	Along the Sea of Galilee (Mt.15:29, called 'Galilee of the Gentiles' in Mt.4:15; the Decapolis in Mk.7:31)	The region of Magadan (Mt.15:39), which is unknown but along the Galilee
Jesus feeds the 5,000	Jesus disputes with Pharisees	The Canaanite woman asks for miraculous healing	Jesus feeds the 4,000	The Pharisees come to ask Jesus for a sign
Jews 5 loaves of bread 12 baskets full leftover	Jews Defiling comes from the heart, not from eating unkosher food, and is therefore universal – both Jew and Gentile are defiled	Gentiles The 'children's bread' is thrown to 'the dogs.'	Gentiles 7 loaves of bread 7 <i>large baskets</i> full leftover	Jews Jesus reminds his disciples to beware the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees

### Cultural Background

- Recall Jesus had just included the Canaanite woman in the family of God, despite the disciples' initial reluctance to serve her (Mt.15:21 – 28)
- King and Temple: Judas Maccabeus in 163 BC had defeated the Greeks, liberated Jerusalem, and cleansed the Temple. But now the Romans ruled, and the Jews wanted the Messiah to duplicate that feat. The Sadducees were the exception; they controlled Jerusalem, and accommodated the Roman presence because they retained power under the Romans. The Pharisees, like all other Jews, wanted to liberate Jerusalem and expected the Messiah to cleanse the Temple and set it free from Roman occupation. They wanted the Messiah to reign over the Gentiles
  - In John's Gospel, the Jewish crowd sees a 'Davidic king' motif right away: 'So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.' (Jn.6:15)
- Bread (five, seven, and twelve loaves/baskets): Bread was provided by God to Israel in the wilderness (Ex.16), and God's ultimate victory would involve a feast with bread (Isa.25:6; 55:1 – 2). Also, Jesus is retelling King David's story. In 1 Sam.21, David was being hunted in the wilderness by King Saul and his men. He went into the Tabernacle and took five of the twelve loaves of the holy bread (twelve loaves were set out according to Lev.24:5), and fed himself and his men with the bread.
 

David's story:    12 loaves                    – 5 loaves David took                    → 7 loaves left in the presence of God

Jesus' story:                                    5 loaves Jesus took                    → 12 baskets of bread  
                                                           7 loaves Jesus took                    → 7 *large baskets* of bread

  - Jesus referred to this story of David taking bread in Mt.12:1 – 6 when he said about himself, 'Something greater than the Temple is here' (Mt.12:6).

## Questions

1. If you were among the disciples, how would you have felt helping Jesus serve this group of people?
  - a. Amazed to watch the healing
  - b. Passive? What are they doing while Jesus is doing all this healing and teaching? They were probably not passive. They were probably repeating Jesus' teaching which they had heard before, answering lots of questions about who Jesus is and who they are, and explaining the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.
2. How would the disciples have felt, doing a second miracle of feeding a multitude?
  - a. What is similar? Jesus' compassion; his desire to reach others; his willingness to go far to serve people; his desire to involve the disciples; the disciples' initial confusion about how they are going to serve the crowd some food; the manner in which the miracle unfolded and the disciples seeing the bread multiply in Jesus' hands
  - b. What is different?
    - i. Who are these people? Why does Matthew say that these people praise 'the God of Israel' (Mt.15:31)? It's a remark which seems to stress their origin as outside Israel.
      1. This is Galilee 'of the Gentiles' according to Matthew 4:15.
      2. It follows right after the Canaanite woman who was in the region of Tyre and Sidon (15:21 – 28), which is north and northwest of Galilee.
      3. Note Mark 7:31, 'the region of the Decapolis,' which is on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.
    - ii. Four thousand vs. five thousand
    - iii. Seven 'large baskets' leftover, vs. twelve regular sized baskets
3. Why would Jesus have his disciples repeat a miracle like this?
  - a. To reach a different audience
  - b. To teach the disciples again – perhaps they missed something or can be further developed
    - i. It's a bit too simplistic to say that the lesson is to learn how Jesus 'provides.' It's true that Jesus provides us resources for his mission. But the two miraculous feedings are rather unique and don't seem to happen again in Acts. There is something special about these two incidents. It signifies Jesus' identity as the Messiah who provides bread like God provided bread.
    - ii. Emphasizing the equal value Jesus places on the Gentiles as on the Jews. Most Jews would have expected the Messiah to conquer the Gentiles, and bring them under his reign. Jesus is serving them, healing and teaching them as he feeds them.
    - iii. Jesus is restating the value of service, especially *anticipating* the peoples' need; the people didn't request it; Jesus initiates it; *the disciples could have anticipated it*
    - iv. What is it like to serve with Jesus a second time after you've done that with him before? Does it get boring?
      1. I think it's still exciting. They were active; they saw compassion and power keep coming out from Jesus.
      2. Especially if they thought of God feeding the Israelites manna in the wilderness (Ex.16), and Isaiah's prophecy of God feeding His people again (Isa.25:6; 55:1 – 2) . But if these people are Gentiles, and if Jesus does this not in Jerusalem (Isa.24:23 and 25:6 refer to 'this mountain' as Jerusalem) but on another mountain (Mt.15:29), then the whole symbolism is expanding to include the whole world! This is a precursor of something much bigger.
      3. Illus: When I was in Uganda in the summer of 2012, we teamed up with Ugandan students and college minister staff and visited people in the slums of Kampala, the capital, and the remote villages of Gulu in the north, which was affected by Joseph Kony and the civil war. Especially in the north, what struck me was the love of Jesus for people in these remote areas. We would be trekking through African bush taller than us, down dirt paths that you could only go down on foot. Then it would open up into a clearing with a hut or two on a small farm. They would be curious about us and glad to talk. We got into conversations about Jesus, and then prayed for people to bless them. We saw 77 people come to faith in Jesus, many of them through these routine visits. It was a great lesson to me every time that God loved each of these people.

- c. To work with the David story a little more deeply, and more broadly. We'll look at that shortly.
4. In fact, what phrases are repeated from earlier in Matthew's Gospel? What hints do those repeated phrases give about what Jesus was doing?
- 'Having gone up on the mountain, he was sitting there' (15:29) echoes the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: 'And when he saw the multitudes, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And opening his mouth he began to teach them, saying...' (5:1 – 2). Jesus was almost certainly teaching them the same material.
  - The healings (15:30 – 31) echo earlier healings done in Israel (8:16 – 17; 9:35).
  - 'I feel compassion for the people' (15:32) echoes 'he felt compassion for them' (9:36) as well as the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, 'he saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick' (14:14). Jesus' compassion for these Gentiles is the same as for the Jews.
  - 'They have remained with me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way' echoes the more terse exchange between Jesus and the disciples with the five thousand, 'When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!'' (14:15 – 16)
5. The Pharisees and Sadducees don't agree on much. Why would they come to challenge Jesus together in 16:1?
- To catch him in a political crossfire. Make him pick a side.
  - To taunt him to perform a miracle for their entertainment and at their demand; notice that they are not in need like the crowd
6. What does Jesus think is dangerous about them to the disciples? What is the leaven/teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees?
- Leaven (yeast) is something very small, but makes bread puff up. It is mostly a negative image, because it physically represents sinfulness. It corrupts by puffing up, just as pride, arrogance, prejudice, etc. This fits with Jesus' motif that what is hidden will be revealed.
  - Both Pharisees and Sadducees disbelieved Jesus, and focused on the wrong things
    - The Pharisees hated the Gentiles for occupying Israel, and especially Jerusalem and the Temple. They wanted the Jews to be a separate, strident minority fighting against the majority Roman world. They were militants, as they upheld bodily resurrection as hope in God for jihad-like guerilla warfare resistance against Rome. *The Pharisees said that the Temple building in Jerusalem was the key component of worshiping God, and that the Messiah had to liberate and cleanse the Temple. Jesus wanted to liberate and cleanse human hearts from sin (Mt.15:18 – 20).*
    - The Sadducees wanted Israel to get used to Roman occupation and be a separate, content minority society within a majority Roman world. They were fatalists, as they denied the bodily resurrection. But they said that Jews had to keep worshiping in Jerusalem and at the Temple, even though it wasn't ideal, wasn't cleansed, and wasn't liberated.
    - For how Jesus read the Torah as a criticism of the Temple (and its predecessor the Tabernacle), not an endorsement of it, please see my article *Literary Analysis of the Torah*, <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-pentateuch-chiasm.pdf>.
  - What do you make of Jesus' question to his disciples about the number of baskets from the two times?
    - Jesus is retelling King David's story. David took five loaves of bread out of twelve and left seven baskets of bread. Jesus takes five and produces twelve, showing that he is greater than David. He then takes seven and produces seven really large baskets! Jesus is the heir of David who is greater than David. Hence, the twelve normal sized baskets for Israel and the seven large baskets for the Gentiles. Jesus is king not only of Israel but the whole Gentile world. Jesus was challenging, replacing, and rejecting the Temple. He was saying that the presence of God can be experienced only as people serve with him.
    - How had he done that before?
      - He is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells (Mt.1:18 – 25)
      - He is where the Gentiles come to meet God and bring gifts (Mt.2:1 – 11)

3. He called his disciples a 'city on a hill' referring to them as the new dwelling place of God (Mt.5:13 – 16)
  4. He offered cleansing and forgiveness, which especially was offered only at the Temple (Mt.9:1 – 8)
  5. He said that he, as the Son, revealed the Father, as God was previously revealed at the Temple (Mt.11:25 – 27)
  6. He referred to himself as 'something greater than the Temple' (Mt.12:6)
  7. He will speak against the Temple as fruitless and soon to be destroyed (Mt.21:12 – 22:14)
  8. He predicts the Temple's fall, citing Daniel's prediction of the Temple's fall (Mt.24:1 – 16; Dan.9:26)
- iii. How was he doing that now?
    1. By multiplying the bread – the holy numbers 5, 7, 12. He is saying that his physical body houses the presence of God; the Temple had not housed the presence of God since the Babylonian Exile of 586 BC, and will not ever again. Rather, Jesus himself does.
    2. By going *out* to serve the Gentiles, not waiting for them to come to Jerusalem. Jesus nourishes them and draws them to himself
  - iv. He was undoing David's mistake of building the Temple (2 Sam.7)
- d. Is there any 'teaching' like that today?
    - i. Defend a holy place: Nationalism, parochial views, 'stick to your own kind', American exceptionalism, privilege God's people in a 'holy huddle', etc.
    - ii. Downplay the holy mission: to go out, reach others, serve others, nourish others
7. What is the sign of Jonah (16:4)?
    - a. What was the role of Jonah? To reach Nineveh, a Gentile city.
    - b. Illus: Christian artwork in the catacombs under city of Rome referred to Jonah a lot. It was an effective motif. They apparently wanted to remind themselves that they were called to rise up out of the catacombs and preach to Rome, just as Jonah was called to rise up out of the sea and preach to Nineveh. Here are two examples, below:



Jonah Thrown Overboard, Roman catacomb



Jonah Vomited from the Whale, 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Rome, Catacomb of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter.

- c. How does this connect with Jesus? He is reaching Gentiles also, like Jonah was reaching Gentiles.