

Needy Disciples

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[0 : 00] So this passage, we're actually going to focus in on the two prominent stories in the passage on Jesus feeding the 5,000 and on Jesus and the storm and walking on the water.

And these two stories actually show us how to have all our deepest needs met. Of course, others look to us to address their needs and we see that in the story of the feeding, this huge hungry crowd.

And we have a lot of needs around us, especially in this particular season of life. The global need, the local need can be overwhelming. Jesus is going to show us how to begin to address the needs around us.

But we also have needs inside of us. And those needs will be met as well. So let me just talk about those two kinds of needs for a minute. So first of all, we all know what it's like to feel helpless in the face of overwhelming need around us.

Now, I barely have to mention this. We're in the middle of a pandemic. And it feels like, you know, sure, I can wear a mask and wash my hands, but I'm just one person.

[1 : 10] What can I do to really turn the tide of such a great need? We're facing issues of bigotry and racism and injustice.

And we can change laws and we can vote and we can do our duties. But it's just, you know, it's just me. It's just you. What can we do? It's like a drop in the bucket. Well, our families and our friends also bring needs to us as well.

That's part of being in relationship is actually being in a position of, in relation to somebody's need, especially parents. Your children, you know, someone told us when we had our first kid, the babies are just a bundle of need and swaddling cloth.

And it's so true. Children are God's picture to us of what we look like to him, in a sense. And children come to us as parents with their needs. Now at a certain stage of life, now your parents, as they age, may come to you with needs as well.

So we're surrounded by a lot of different types of needs. And as disciples of Jesus, you know, we're taught to not ignore the needs around us. We don't get to just turn a blind eye.

[2 : 22] The Old Testament particularly is full of God indicting his people and saying, look, I want you to do justice. I want you to love mercy. Don't look away.

Have compassion on the lowly and on the oppressed. Jesus says, if someone begs from you, give to them. Don't ignore the need. So we have to deal with that.

Now the Bible's metaphor, it's predominant metaphor through the entirety of the Bible. It's picture to talk about that kind of need, the needs around us, is food.

That's the quintessential model the Bible uses to speak of those needs, is lack of food. So when God wants to show us that he meets our physical needs, our deep needs in that way and the needs around us, he talks about Joseph storing up food in Egypt.

He talks about manna in the wilderness. He talks about feeding the 5,000. He talks about the Lord's Supper. And the wedding feast of the Lamb in the book of Revelation.

[3 : 25] Now the other aspect of need is the needs that are within us and we all know what it's like to be helpless in the face of our own needs as well.

So when catastrophe strikes, you lose your job. A loved one dies. Expectedly or unexpectedly, it's still a catastrophe.

And you feel that there's no foothold. There's nowhere to put your feet down. And you can kind of thrash about and try to solve the problems, but all it does is exhaust you and wear you out.

And then, so you know, there's catastrophes, but then there's sin and we need to be rescued from this sin. And when we fall into sin, it's like we can't get our heads above water and again, thrashing

around just wears us out and spends our energy.

And now the Bible's metaphor to talk about that kind of need is predominantly drowning. So the sea, we've talked about this a little bit before.

[4 : 26] In the ancient mind, the concept of the sea represented chaos and disorder and evil and everything that will terrify and overwhelm you. And so the Bible uses this imagery, especially in poetry, of drowning because you can't get your head above water.

You get entangled. And the point is, no matter what kind of need, whether it's kind of the catastrophic needs in us or the massive overwhelming needs around us, ultimately we find that we're helpless.

And often, I think to myself, what can I do? It's just me. So in chapter 13, well, in this section of Matthew, Jesus has been meeting a tremendous number of needs.

He's been doing all these mighty works and healing people and casting out demons and calming storms. He's meeting the needs of the people around him. And in chapter 13, just before this passage, he goes back to his hometown and the people in the hometown, they're like, isn't this Joseph's son, the carpenter's boy?

Where does he get the power to meet these needs? That's their burning question. Where does he get this power? But then we read at the beginning this little aside about Herod and John the Baptist.

[5 : 46] Matthew mentions that bit about the death of John because Herod's question is also, where does Jesus get the power to do these things? He must be John the Baptist raised from the dead.

And of course, at the end of Matthew 14, we actually get the answer given to us very plainly. He's not merely the carpenter's son, and he's certainly not John the Baptist come back from the dead. He's the son of God.

That's where Jesus gets the power to meet the needs around him. But Jesus actually looks his disciples in the eye and he changes the question.

We say, where does he get the power? Jesus looks at us and says, where will you get the power to meet the needs around you and the needs in you? So let's talk about the needs around us.

This is the first point. There's only two, thankfully. So Jesus gets the news of his cousin's death and he's grieved and he goes off to a desolate place to grieve and to pray to his father.

[6 : 46] But this massive crowd, thousands of people, 5,000 just men, so probably 7,000, 8,000, 9,000 or more, huge crowd follows him out.

And of course, Jesus looks at them and he has compassion because it's Jesus. And he sets aside his own needs and wants at that moment and he ministers to them and he has them sit down and he teaches them all day, gets to be evening and they're famished.

So the disciples want Jesus to send the crowds home for them to feed themselves because thousands of hungry people and 12 disciples with just a little bit of bread and fish, they felt helpless to meet that need and they were, they were helpless.

And Jesus looks them in the eye and says, you feed them. Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt when Jesus said that? Like, there's 12 of us and you're the miracle worker and there's thousands of them.

What could we possibly do? I mean, don't you feel that way when you read the news sometimes or when you think of politics, social injustices?

[8 : 01] We know that feeling of what difference could I possibly make? And that must have been what the disciples were feeling in this moment. And Jesus looks at just this little meager offering they have of bread and fish and he says, bring it to me.

Now, it could have just said bring it here but actually says bring it here to me. He's emphatically talking about himself and saying, bring it to me. There's your solution. He gave thanks.

He gives it back to the disciples. He puts it back in their hands and the disciples feed the crowd. I wonder if you've noticed that before. You know, we talk about it that Jesus feeds the 5,000 and that's true in as much as the crowds ate from the hands of the disciples and so from the hands of Christ himself.

Isn't that fascinating? Jesus gives it back to them. So I told you at the beginning that these two stories show us how to have all of our deepest needs met and here's the first part of the answer. Jesus takes what we bring him and he multiplies it and he gives it back to us so that we can serve and feed others.

[9 : 13] And so we'll only be able to really minister to the needs of the people around us if we go to Jesus first. That's crucial.

When Becca and I were preparing to move here we had about four months left to go and I was in the marketing industry and my contract came to a sudden end then my client ran out of funding and it was over too soon.

And we found ourselves with pretty steep financial need you know, prior to getting here with visa costs and all that. But also we had about one month's worth of mortgage money set aside but we had four months of mortgage left to pay.

That was actually a very, as you can imagine, you know, you can't really job hunt when you're leaving the country in a few months. It was a very difficult time. It was a very sweet time and I wouldn't trade it for anything because the Lord was with us and was very near in that season. And by His grace as we looked to Him as really the thing we needed all of our needs were met. And then some 12 baskets left over.

[10 : 24] When God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna it was just enough for that day and they'd go back out the next day and there'd be just enough. And that's kind of how those sorts of miracles worked in the Old Testament.

But in the age of the Messiah, King Jesus is on the throne. It's an age of abundance. And now I'm not talking about just material blessing. This is no prosperity gospel.

This isn't about getting more stuff. Beck and I didn't come out of that season with a thicker bank account and a bigger wallet. We came out of that hard season with a bigger view of God.

A greater sense of Jesus and who He is. Jesus is our provider and our provision. So how do we practically do that?

It's all well and good in theory. But how do we actually take the needs of those around us? You know, how am I going to feed my kids without a job? How do we take that kind of need to Jesus and put it in His hands so He can help us?

[11 : 29] Well, the gospel of Matthew is a journey to the cross and a journey through the cross. And all of His miracles are signs. They're not just for their own sake. The miracles are signs that point to who He is ultimately and what He ultimately came to do.

Because we don't ultimately need a wonder worker. We need a Savior. So we see in Matthew 26 at the end of the book, Jesus sits down for his final meal with his disciples before he's executed.

And he picks up a loaf of bread and he breaks it. He blesses it and he passes it around. He says, take, eat. This is my body broken for you.

The disciples feeding the 5,000 in Matthew 14 only make sense in light of Christ feeding the disciples in Matthew 26. We have to go to the one who himself is our bread if we are going to feed others.

Jesus actually bore all of our deepest needs on the cross, his body broken like bread for us. And it's when we look to him as provider and provision that we can start meeting the needs around us.

[12 : 46] So we have to really take hold of this fact that our deepest need is actually Jesus, not the stuff that comes with it. We need Christ.

Now there's two dangers as disciples that we face here. One is to over-spiritualize and one is to under-spiritualize this. What I mean is if we say, okay, great, our deepest need is Jesus.

So I can just tell the gospel to people and not do anything about their physical needs. That would be over-spiritualizing it. The under-spiritualize would say, you know, really we just need to get their needs met.

That's what Jesus would do and that's that. You know, we'll become philanthropists who feed a lot of people, but we'll leave a lot of hungry souls. Jesus did both.

Jesus fed the crowds and he died for the crowds and we as disciples do not have an easy out to just choose one ditch or the other. We stay on the road in the middle.

[13 : 45] We really minister to people's whole need by giving them Christ and by God's grace and ability, helping us to minister to them physically as well.

So the hungry crowds, they eat from the hands of the disciples and so from the hand of Christ. The disciples could do it because Jesus ultimately was meeting their needs.

They could feed the crowds because they would feed on Christ. So point number two is the needs in us and we're going to shift to the next chunk of the story about the storm.

So let me just reread a few verses here starting in 22. Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds and after he dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray, which by the way is what we all must do.

Jesus also had to be nourished and fed and sustained and we all need to follow this example to us so much to go to our Father with all of our need and all of our weariness for refreshment and new strength.

[14:58] If Jesus did it, we certainly need to do it. When evening came, he was there alone, this is verse 24, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night, that's between three and six a.m., he came to them walking on the sea. All right, let me just pause there. So this storm sweeps in, it batters and beats the disciples down in this boat and they're at great risk of drowning.

They fought against the wind all night. Again, the fourth watch of the night is very early in the morning. So they very likely have been out on the water fighting this storm for hours and hours, surely wondering where on earth Jesus is.

And isn't that just what Jesus always does? He waited until those crowds were famished in the late night before feeding them.

He waited until the disciples had just exhausted themselves fighting against this wind before going out to them. God in his wisdom and kindness allows us to come to the end of ourselves before swooping in to rescue us.

[16:14] How kind of him to allow that hunger? How kind of him to allow that storm? Otherwise, we wouldn't see the glory of Jesus in this passage. An old pastor told me once that when he was a kid, there was an older man in the church.

And every time the church came to face some huge crossroads where they didn't have the means to do what needed to be done, this old fatherly figure would say, well, now we have the opportunity to see what only God can do.

That's what the storms and the hunger in our life brings us is opportunities to see what only God can do. And that's where that's the good stuff. That's where we see Jesus's glory shine brightly. Jesus is actually drawn to us in our need. He is not repulsed by our need. I tend to be that way. I think a lot of us tend to be that way. Neediness kind of keeps us at a distance. It's exactly the opposite for Jesus. Neediness draws him toward you. Isn't that comforting?

[17:22] So don't ever tell yourself yet your need pushes Jesus away. And don't ever tell yourself Jesus helps those who help themselves. Nonsense. Jesus's ministry was not to the Pharisees and the scribes, but to the blind, the lame, the sick, the deaf, and the oppressed.

Jesus helps those who are helpless in themselves. That's you and me, and that's good news. So anyway, Jesus comes out walking on the sea.

How weird is that? I think if you and I saw that, we would think, oh, that's a stunt, or that's cool.

For the first century mind, that came loaded with meaning. Now, of course, they first thought ghost, so that was incorrect. But by the time Matthew wrote his gospel, he'd molded over and he realized what's going on, certainly.

So again, we talked about... Well, I'll get back to that. So the Old Testament paints a picture of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God who introduced himself to Moses as, I am.

[18:31] The Old Testament calls Yahweh basically the wave-treader. Isn't that cool? The wave-treader. Job chapter 9, verse 8.

Job says that Yahweh alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea. So you remember that to the ancient mind, the sea represented everything terrifying and overwhelming and disorderly and chaotic.

Those waves that surge up and just push your head down under and make you panic, Yahweh tramples those waves. That's how mighty God is.

That's how Job talks about God. Again, in Psalm 77, and this is verses 17 to 19, Asaph is talking about how Yahweh rescued the people from Egypt.

That great picture of the gospel itself, how we are rescued from the slavery to sin that we have all been in. And he says this, the clouds, this is a picture of a storm.

[19 : 31] The clouds poured out water. The skies gave forth thunder. Your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind. Your lightnings lighted up the world.

The earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea. Your path through the great waters. Yet your footprints were unseen.

Jesus is not just performing a stunt. He's coming to them as the wave teacher, their Savior, God Almighty.

Of course, the disciples respond in fear. They're terrified now of the wind and of the wave teacher. And what does Jesus say to their fears? Look at verse 27.

He says, take heart, it is I. I love that. Very literally in the original language, it says courage, I am.

[20 : 29] It reminds me of this scene from C.S. Lewis' voyage of the Don Treader in the Chronicles of Narnia series. And I don't remember a whole lot about that, about this scene.

I remember they're on a boat and the sailors are afraid. And there's this albatross flying around the mast. And as it gets lower, I remember Lucy. Here's the albatross say to her, courage, dear heart. And she recognizes the voice of Aslan. And then a sweet smell fills the air and she's comforted. And I think of that here, courage, dear heart.

In our storms, as in theirs, God usually seems far off. They must have spent hours in this boat thinking, where is Jesus?

He calmed a storm for us before. Why is he not even with us this time? Remember what we said about the Bible's metaphor for catastrophe and sin being drowning?

[21 : 34] It's very poignant here. The wave Teacher, God, Jesus, the Son of God, comes out to us in our storms, drowning in our own sins, overwhelmed with life's catastrophes.

And he says, courage, dear heart. In the moment of their greatest need and exhaustion, just trying not to drown, Jesus gives them himself.

That is his gift to meet their need. He does not say, take heart, the storm will pass. Or he doesn't say, take heart, it's not that bad.

Or take heart, here's a bigger boat. He says, it is I. Jesus himself is the answer to their needs and their fears.

So there it is. That's the payoff to the promise I made earlier at the beginning, that we'd learn from these two stories how to get all of our deepest needs met.

[22 : 37] The answer to them all is Jesus himself. Now, Jesus, the good moral teacher, never met anyone's needs.

Jesus, the philosopher, the sage, the guru. That Jesus never comforted anybody with his presence. We need the real Jesus, the wave teacher, God himself.

And if Jesus will be our savior amid the catastrophes and the sin that we are drowning in, we have to see that the mighty one who treads on the waves was cast into the depths and was overwhelmed by those waters for you.

He was beaten by the storm so that we could be saved from the storm. He experienced the greatest catastrophe in history as the Son of God hung executed like a criminal in your place and in my place so that he could save us from catastrophe.

Jesus drowned in our sins to save us from drowning in our sins. And he came out the other side, a resurrected savior.

[23 : 56] So if we are to be saved from drowning, we have to look to him as the one who doesn't just calm the waters but was drowned in them in our place.

Because for all of those needs, Jesus gives us himself. He gives us himself as bread and strength so we can feed and nourish others.

He gives us his presence in our storms. He leaves hungry people satisfied. He always leaves hungry people satisfied. And he gets right into the boat with us.

Do you see that in the story? He gets into the boat with them. Isn't that comforting? So you do not have then one need that Jesus is not the answer for.

Now I know you don't believe that because I barely believe that. But it's absolutely true. If we need strength for today, Jesus says I'm your strength.

[24 : 51] If we need something better than our temptations, something stronger to come to us in our storms, look to the one who was drowned for you.

If you need the wells of emotion and compassion for people around you that you don't have, drink from those waters. Go to Christ and feed on him.

I was just reading this morning in the book *Gentle and Lowly*, which I need and is really helpful for me because I tend to be harsh and proud. So it's a good counterpoint to show the heart of Christ. And the author was recounting a story talking about the emotion of Jesus. He was recounting a story in India where he was walking down the street and saw a man sitting in a cardboard box missing all these fingers and realized he was suffering from leprosy.

And the author shares his emotional response to that. And he says it was compassion, but compassion restrained.

[25 : 53] Restrained by sin because we feel bad for the man, but we don't want to get too involved. And it seems messy, you know, and we just don't want to, we don't know what we could really do. And so it's compassion restrained by our sinful unwillingness to give ourselves.

And he makes this point that Jesus, as the perfect human, experienced true compassion without the restraint of sin.

Can you imagine the depth of compassion of Jesus for us? So how do you drum up compassion for that man?

How do you drum up emotional energy for the kids at six in the morning? You have to start by looking to Jesus who has in himself these wells of emotional compassion and energy for us in our need.

I said earlier that Jesus changed the question. People were asking, where does he get all these, the power to do all these things and meet all these needs? And Jesus changes the question to the disciples and say, where will you get the power?

[27 : 03] So, you know, the disciples fed the crowds when they looked to Jesus. Peter, remember, got out of the boat and walked on the water when he looked to Jesus.

So I ask you, where will you get the power to meet the needs around you and the needs in you? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we confess that we barely believe this. We barely believe that you are sufficient to fill us up and actually meet our needs. Please help our unbelief in that.

Minister this good news to our hearts and show us something more of the fullness of Christ for our every need. We come to you now in the face of great need, many without jobs in this country and all around the world as the economic crisis begins to swell.

We come to you with our grief of looking around at all the suffering, all the sickness, all the pain and the loss that many of us have experienced in our own families and friends as well.

[28 : 17] We come to you with our sin that just easily entangles us and would drown us. And for it all, Jesus, we look to you.

Please be our sustainer, our provider and our provision, Lord, for the glory of Christ. Amen.