Matthew 14:13-21

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[0:00] Yes, I think what we're supposed to get from this morning's scripture is a huge challenge to us, particularly how we approach the impossible, catastrophic situations that present ourselves in life.

! But more of that later. Father, God, please move on our hearts and minds as we open our hearts and minds.
Open your word. In Jesus' name, Amen. Before we read it, if you remember, what we've done is we've seen Jesus visit his hometown of Nazareth and come to a fairly calamitous end of that in that they tried to throw him off a cliff.
Such was their revulsion at what he was saying and such was their rejection of his claim to be Messiah. And we looked at the fact that he definitely made messianic claims.
If you read, I think it was Luke's account of that event, that it shows that he was definitely claiming to be Messiah. He read about himself from the scriptures and said, today this scripture has been fulfilled.
[1:16] So there was a messianic claim and the Jews rejected him again because, if you remember, they'd already done so in Matthew 12. And Matthew 12, we said, was a turning point in Jesus' ministry where he actually turned away from the Jews as the harbingers of the gospel to the world.

And he began to establish the church age, which didn't come in properly until Pentecost. But nevertheless, we see preparations for that in Jesus' teaching.
And he wasn't going to give them any more signs apart from the sign of the resurrection, the sign of Jonah. And what we're now reading or what we read last week was that we read this account of John, John the Baptist, who had been imprisoned probably a year or two before this time and was now put to death for the most ridiculous of reasons.
That Herod was simply wanting to save face in front of his mates. And so there was this hideous scenario where Herod brought his teenage niece to dance erotically in front of his drunken mates. And then after that, he said she could have anything she wanted up to half his kingdom. And she requested the head of John the Baptist. And the reason that that happened was because John had been trying to tell both Herod and Herodias, you must repent.
[2:44] You must get this sin out of your life. And every time he spoke to them, that's what he said. And so this Herodias in particular took the view that he didn't deserve to live.

When you read through the scriptures, you kind of conclude that the only reason John was locked up was because Herodias had had enough. And Herodias. And then the only reason he was eventually killed was because Herodias had had enough.
And Herod wanted to save face. And so this account of John the Baptist's death had been carried to Jesus.
And that's where we pick it up in Matthew chapter 14. So, we'll read it first.
And then I'll probably get lost in my notes trying to discuss it. We want verse 13. Now, when Jesus heard about John, he withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by himself.
[3:47] And when the people heard of this, they followed him on foot from the cities. When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd and he felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, This place is desolate and the hour is already late. So send the crowd 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. And they said to him, But we have here only five loaves and two fish. And he said, Bring them here to me.

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Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fish. And looking up towards heaven, he blessed the food. And breaking the loaves, he gave them to the disciples. And the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And I'll return to this point. But the word satisfied, if you look it up, it means gorged. They were absolutely stuffed.
[4:50] Becomes important later. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces. Twelve full baskets. There were about 5,000 men who ate besides women and children.

So the feeding of the 5,000, in case you're in doubt, was probably the feeding of the 15,000. Or it could have been 20. We don't know. But if you think that most of the men would have been married and they probably had children, 15,000 is a conservative estimate.
The story is not being embellished by using that figure. But it could have been more. We just don't know. So where do we start with this? Well, this is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels.
And it's also, in some respects, the biggest miracle Jesus ever did. Now, by that I mean it's the biggest to us.
Because, actually, if you're Almighty God and you hold the universe in the palm of your hand, what I'm trying to say is, it's a mere frippery to God.
[6:05] It's not a big thing to Him. But to us, it's the biggest miracle of all because it affected the most people and involved the most creative work supernaturally.

So, it was massive and it's recorded in all four Gospels. And that, the fact that it's in all four Gospels goes to several things.
Number one, if God says something four times in the Scripture, you've got to take notice. Number two, it speaks of the sheer number of eyewitnesses eyewitnesses.
Because, you see, there are those who say, you shouldn't believe that. That's just a fairy tale. But there were 5,000 men, plus their wives, plus their kids, plus all of the apostles that witnessed this. It's an eyewitness account and you can't find any writings of those days that disparage the account. It is treated as fact by all who come across it.
[7:13] So, in a strange way, this miracle, it confirms the historicity of Jesus' miracles.

Because it had so many eyewitnesses. To this day, we rely on eyewitness accounts in court cases. You very rarely get a court case where you've got 15,000 eyewitnesses, plus.
And I think the fact that it's in all four Gospels also indicates, as I think we'll see in a minute, that there was a special witness involved in this.
I mean, all of Jesus' witnesses were referred to as attesting miracles. They confirmed the fact that he was Messiah. They confirmed the fact that he was divine.
They confirmed the fact that he was omnipotent or all-powerful. But there's something, there's an extra ingredient in this, I believe, and we'll come to that in a minute.
[8:18] So, just a little aside, really. According to Luke's account, they withdrew to Bethsaida.

So this area was adjacent to Bethsaida. Bethsaida was the home of Andrew and James. And we note that Jesus asks James, this is in John's account, because this is in all four Gospels, so John 6 is where you find John's account, he asked James, where could they get food?
Well, he asked the local boy. And then it was Andrew, the other local boy, that said, well, this lad's got a few loaves and a few fish.
So, he had the knowledge of the locality, and he used that to draw them into this situation. You know, how are we going to feed these people?
Lord, you need to send them home, because they haven't eaten all day. Well, what do you have? You know, where can we get food?
[9:30] And if you read all four accounts, it gives you an interesting mixture of statements. like, one of them says, to feed this lot, we could spend 200 denario, that's 200 days wages, and only give everybody a little bit.

But we just read that they didn't get a little bit, they were gorged. And I came across one so-called teaching on this, that said, what we have here is not a miracle of multiplication, but what we have is a miracle of sharing.
Because they all shared their, there is this, there is this attempt always, to reduce the miracles of God to nothingness, to an everyday occurrence.
We have to explain them away. The only way you explain away this miracle is God decided to move. And when God decides to move, nothing is impossible for him.

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More of that to come. But let's think about how the event came together, because this is important. So Jesus has just heard about the death of John the Baptist, and he seeks, I would put it like this, this is not expressly said in the scripture, but he seeks a place to grieve, to think and to deal with the death of John, who was related to him.
[11:10] He was someone who Jesus heralded as the greatest human being, apart from himself, that walked on the planet. met the greatest prophet who ever lived. He was a relative and a close friend.

So, when he heard about the death, now, again, you get into the fact that Jesus probably already knew about the death, because he knows about everything. But nevertheless, as we discussed in previous weeks, the fact that he has full knowledge doesn't protect him from the visceral, gut-wrenching response response to things that hurt him.
He was fully God and fully human, and he went through, probably magnified many times, the exact same emotions that we go through when we lose a loved one. But in addition to that, this account says he went to a place by himself, in verse 13.
He went from there in a boat to a secluded place by himself. But when you read into that, because the other Gospels say he invited John's disciples to go with him, and he also took some of his own disciples with him, so he wasn't alone, and it simply means a deserted place.
The word means a desert place, or a deserted place, which is what comes out in other parts of the description, isn't it? This is a desolate place. He was trying to get away from the hubbub of the crowd to get some rest and to get some time to pray and some time to deal with the information that he had received.
[12:56] And the crowd saw what he was up to and followed him on foot. Now, an old pastor of mine, he was so besieged by people from the church all day, every day, and he had a full-time job as well, so in the end, he said, look, can you please, and he said it to the whole congregation because he didn't want to single anyone out, he said, could you please, if you need to see me, first of all, could you make an appointment because I do have a full-time job and I do have to work, and secondly, could you try and make it evenings and weekends so that I can work during the day?

And he said the upshot of what he did was that all the people who were truly caring Christian brothers and sisters did exactly what he'd asked, and all the people who'd been deluging his house with calls and phone calls and visits and everything else carried on doing it anyway, so it only, it didn't have the desired effect of releasing him to work, and this is a bit like that, isn't it?
Jesus says, look, I want some rest, come with me guys and let's together have some rest, and then all the people, he's off, he's in that boat, he's going, quick, let's run round and meet him the other side, and Jesus could have said, you lot, I've been trying to get away from you lot, but he doesn't, he views them with compassion, and for me that's lesson number one, is that when people get in the way of our agendas, perhaps we ought to put people first, we have a little saying in our house when the telly's on and you're in the middle of watching something and people knock on the door, we say, people first, and we turn the telly off or put aside whatever we were doing, but Jesus' model was he put them first, he had compassion for them.
Why would he need compassion for a crowd like that? And this is where I want to try to make this study today real in our hearts, because you will all empathise with what I'm about to say.
I was moved and heartbroken when a relative of Jesus who we went to see, we tried to see, but we couldn't because he was too poorly. He's very, very ill.
[15:29] He's 50 years old, but he's very, very ill. I've tried to share the gospel with him and he's always changed the subject. He won't talk about Jesus.

Now, I know he's been to see mediums. I know he goes to the graveside of his granddad to talk to his granddad. And he not only is very ill, but he's locked himself into a place where the only answer he cannot find.
He's looking for the answer in all the wrong places, and the one place where there is an answer, he can't find it because he won't go there. And that wrecks me inside.
Jesus, facing this multitude who are sick, who the religious leaders have dragged away from believing in the truth.
They've taught them wrong things. Jesus spends the day correcting their thinking because he spends the day teaching them. And he, in his heart, must be, this is the same God who in Ezekiel 33, I think it's verse 11, says, O Israel, why will you not repent?

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[16:58] Why will you not be saved? He says, the death of the wicked gives me no pleasure whatsoever. And he arrives on this beach, and the crowd have followed him, and he shows them compassion because he knows their plight.

Now, sometimes, when I should be having compassion for people who are in an irrevocable predicament, my compassion is not there, sufficient to drive me to my knees and pray.
I'm somewhat convicted by the fact that the Apostle James was known as old camel knees because he spent so long on his knees that he had massive calluses on his knees.
And I've got too much else to do. And please don't think by what I'm saying that I'm trying to send everybody on a condemnation trip.
I'm not. You have lives to lead, children to raise, you've got all sorts of stuff to do. What I am saying, though, is are we moved in the way that we should be moved when we see people like our relative who can't access God because they're not looking there for the answers, often until it's too late.
[18:27] We have intractable situations in this church. I'm sure he won't mind me mentioning it, but we have health. Now, I pray for us and we all pray for us, but when we come to Jesus' involvement of his disciples in this event, which is where we can make a parallel between ourselves and this event because Jesus is at work and he's trying to involve us in his work.

When we look at what happened there, we don't even read in this passage what he taught them. What we read is that after he'd finished teaching them, the disciples, who were looking only at what they could do, thought, goodness me, we haven't got any food and there's 15,000 of these people and how on earth are we going to feed them and the sun's going down and the shops will all be shut and how are they going to get grub?
And so they start nagging Jesus. Send them all home, they need to get food. And what Jesus said was, you feed them.
To what extent is God saying to us, you feed them. Now sometimes you want to feed somebody and they won't take it. That's the case that I'm dealing with with our relative.
But sometimes people need to be force fed. Sometimes, sometimes you just need to nag. You just need to keep on until they go, all right, I'll listen.
[20:14] But he said, you feed them and they kind of said, but we've only got five loaves. Now when you look at, I think it's Mark's account, I might have that wrong, it might be Luke's, these were five barley loaves.

And a barley loaf, firstly, it was the cheapest, the worst, the worst grade of bread. And a small barley loaf would fit in the palm of your hand.
So they had five barley loaves and two fish that this boy had probably brought for his packed lunch. So we've got 15,000 people and a packed lunch.
What are we going to do with that? And the answer is, there's nothing we can do with that, but there's not that limitation with God.
So how much does Jesus say to us, bring me what you've got? Now what have we got? What have we got, for example, that can help situation, or help get saved, or help with ongoing care and the great burden that's under doing that, or that we pray for regularly, that we desperately want to see saved.
[21:37] What have we got? Well, we can pray, and that shouldn't be considered insignificant. Prayer, you know, the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, it says in the book of James.

So prayer shouldn't be underrated, but is that all we've got? And I would suggest no. And I'm not suggesting here we should develop a ministry of works. What I am saying is, if you know someone needs a sit-down and a cup of coffee, if you know someone's sitting there in a house that needs decorating and they can't do it, or a garden that needs digging over and they can't do it, or whatever, these are things we can bring, not to them, but to Jesus.
For Jesus to multiply that into their lives. And so they are on the receiving end of, let's say, as an example, kindness. And God takes that kindness, especially when you say, you know, we've been praying for you and I've come to dig your garden.
That's God's provision to them, not yours. And God can multiply those acts into a thought process that goes something like, these people really believe in this God that they're after and I don't, but maybe I should.
Because something's driving them to do what no one else will do. So I really just want to encourage us to have that sense of, well, bring me what you've got.

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[23:14] And when you're praying for someone, to actually say, Lord, what else can I bring apart from this prayer that will glorify you?

And one of the difficulties about situations like this is you can finish up with people being glorified for the works they've done rather than the Lord getting glory for the works people have done in his name.
And that's to be avoided. So it's always part of our task to glorify God for whatever we do. So I think as saved individuals we should have some empathy with Jesus' compassion that when he sees them instead of just seeing oh, they're sick it's oh no, I love these people and they're sick.
And there's a subtle difference in those two things. And they've been led astray. No, I don't want my people to be led astray. Everything in my heart cries out to lead them back to the truth.
And I want us to pray at the end of this talk that God will soften our hearts and will equip us to deal with the intractable problems that are in some people's lives.
[24:42] Our friend who we are praying for has never been taught that if you go to mediums I mean, if you want to if anybody in here has any doubt about what going to mediums and consulting the dead brings read Isaiah 47 and I would read it now but I actually want to have time at the end of this talk to pray.

widowhood and childlessness will come upon you in one day. These are not things to mess with.
Oh but Ray, it works.
Of course it works. Satan would have no truck with it if it didn't work. It works to keep you from going to Jesus. Jesus. And so in following something he believes works, he's missing out on the only thing that does work.
And if he turns to Jesus he may or may not get a temporary reprieve from his illness but he will certainly get eternally reprieved from all problems rather than being in the fires of hell.
Enough of that. So if we can be moved like this how much more would the heart of Jesus be moved by the predicament of these people that are in front of him?
[26:21] I can contain in my heart a certain amount of love for everyone in this room. He loves the entire world and all those who've gone before us and will come after us.

It's a massive I want to use the words burden of love because love isn't a burden when everything's going well but when the whole earth is going to hell in a handbasket that's a burden.
Ephesians 5 and verse 1 tells us we should expect to be moved by the misfortune of those he puts across our lives because we're supposed to be imitators of God and what we've just read is that God Jesus was moved to compassion by what he saw so if we're going to be imitators of God then people's predicament should impact our hearts and these disciples are looking at what they've got and saying Lord this is impossible and then Jesus does something which if you think about it like this they were in a situation that was hopeless 15,000 people and one packed lunch hopeless situation but according to Romans 15 verse 13 we serve the God of hope there is no such thing as hopelessness in God so he says bring whatever you have and they said they've got five loaves and according to John 6 verse 9 these were barley loaves which kind of tells you how big they were the cheapest and the nastiest and then he ordered them to sit down on the grass and in
Mark's account they're ordered to sit down on the green grass why am I bringing that up because it adds to the veracity of this story we read in John's account that this took place at or near the time of Passover the grass in this region isn't green it's brown apart from Passover or springtime so in an offhand way the various accounts confirm the truth of this event and he sits them down and he takes the bread and he breaks it and he takes five small barley loaves and breaks them into umpteen baskets of food with twelve left over at the end which I think is interesting because there were twelve probably twelve disciples distributing this stuff so they had a basket full each left over at the end so God's provision is not even just and just but it's generous and so when we are praying for people we should have an expectation that his provision for them will be generous but he might ask us to hand it out especially if they're incapable of receiving it themselves so this hopeless situation which would have remained hopeless unless he had intervened and he did intervene and he will intervene when we pray or when we act on his behalf a very very brief aside there was a friend of mine lived locally
I think some of you have heard this before where God just showed me and it wasn't I didn't hear voices I just had this impression he's having an affair or seriously thinking about having an affair and I thought Lord why me but I went and knocked on his door and I said look if I'm wrong please forgive me but there's no easy way to put this I believe God has shown me that you're either about

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to have an affair I've been seriously considering it or you're already having one he went white he said how did you know the affair never took place because God intervened I'm not arrogant enough to think I was the only one who was listening that day to use somebody else if he hadn't used me but what a privilege to be used so you have to take a chance
[31:10] I can imagine the disciples on this day a packed lunch okay we could look very silly here but he multiplied what was given to him Lord I so much want this man to be saved and I'll give my prayers to it and what else would you have me give a packed lunch or something similar and he will multiply and he will take action and it may not always be the action you want because that's his prerogative Malcolm has spoken to us several times and said I can't save people I can only present the Lord to them it's not us that does the miracle there's a lot of teaching out there that will deny what I've just said that will say oh you know you're a man of God you should be doing miracles if I do miracles who gets the glory me

God does not share his glory with another we read in scripture so it was going to take a massive amount of food to feed these people and God did it with a packed lunch I want to try to finish with I'm hoping I've still got a bit of time it's going to be tight if you go to John's gospel chapter 6 the reason I want to do this is because there is there is a point in asking why this miracle what was Jesus trying to show through this miracle and I think John chapter 6 gives us a clear answer as to exactly what Jesus was trying to put across them and it's vitally important and in
John chapter 6 they were if you read verse 14 when the people saw the sign which he had performed they said this is truly the prophet who has come into the world the prophet they said this is the prophet quickly turned to Deuteronomy 18 verses 18 and 19 and interestingly this comes straight after a passage that forbids spiritism consulting the dead and all of that but he says this to the people of Israel I will raise up a prophet from among you their country sorry I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you he says to Moses and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him it shall come about that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in my name
I myself will require it of him so the Jews were always expecting the prophet that was spoken of in that scripture to come forward and they all believed that when that prophet came forward that would be Messiah so this crowd has deduced because of this miracle that this is Messiah the other while we're in Deuteronomy turn to Deuteronomy 16 and verse 4 this is the other scripture that impacts here because Jesus turns up and provides bread and bread is considered it's associated with life it's considered bread is essential for life the verse I was looking for was the one that says Jesus where God said I am the living bread that comes down from heaven so I've got the wrong chapter and verse there
I will correct it if anybody quickly looks it up that's fine by me but the point is that Jesus provided bread from heaven manna from heaven and I really apologise for not getting that reference right because it's vitally important that by doing what he did with the bread he was aligning himself with the Old Testament scriptures where Jesus provided bread from heaven I am the living bread bread that comes down out of heaven so we go back to John 6 and then look read on a little bit in Jesus leaves that place and they follow him yet again and in verse 26 he says to them truly I say to you you seek me you seek me not because you saw signs but because you went of the loaves and were filled do not work for food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life which the son of man will give you for on him the father has set his seal so in verse 26 we've got this promise that you've had that bread and your stomachs are full but that's not the bread you really need what you really need is the bread of heaven he goes on in verse 32 and says truly
[37:02] I say to you it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven but it is my father who gives you the true bread out of heaven for the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to all the and then if we go down to verse 40 he says for this is the will of my father that everyone who beholds the son and believes in him will have eternal life and I myself will raise him up on the last day so the reason Jesus did this with bread was to write very large in their minds that he was that bread that manna but from heaven that would save them and because it was allied with bread what he was saying is Jesus is vital for life and so

I believe that his heartache for this crowd was that he wanted them all to get this hence when they all followed him a second time he said you haven't followed me for the right reasons you haven't followed me you followed me because I filled your bellies and you're looking for a repeat performance of that but what you really need is the bread from heaven which is salvation you need

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to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and I want to stop there and it kind of feels like I've left it hanging a bit but I want us to do some of it I really want us to pray and I want anyone to pray because it's all very well for me to stand up here and pray but I'm sure that you can think of people in the church or among your relatives or among your friends who need a touch from Jesus and this should be a process that starts today but doesn't finish today one of the reasons we have the prayer chain is that we all hold each other in prayer all the time and
I have to admit sometimes I struggle to fit it in but between all of us we can fit it in can we not and we can certainly fit in those that have particularly impacted our own hearts and so father we come to you in prayer as the beginning of a process of bringing to you that which we have understanding that it's inadequate and the situation remains hopeless to the human eye but nothing is hopeless for you father I pray for that you will distract him from all the rubbish that he's looked at in the past which appears to work and actually only takes him further away from you and I pray that you will draw him to you and that he will find peace in his current situation because he knows you and that he will find eternal peace because he will trust in you and gain eternal salvation and that father you will forgive him for doing things that your word says not to do like going to mediums and speaking to the dead
I pray lord that you will do something supernatural in his life we tried to go and see him and he was too ill to see us and I do pray that we may have an opportunity to see him and talk about you with him and father as I invite other people to pray I pray that you will hear our prayers corporately that together your word tells us that one can put a thousand to flight but two can put ten thousand to flight and I do pray that corporately you will hear us and that you will encourage this fellowship by being glorified out there in other people's lives and I just invite anyone else who wants to pray to pray amen amen amen amen and lord we have people on the periphery of this fellowship who aren't saved one of whom is
I pray that you would throw every throw everything across his path to make him aware of your presence lord he's blessed because he's got saved kids and he's blessed because he's got a saved wife and I am sure that that witness won't pass him by but whatever it takes lord we would pray that he could be included with us as a brother soon lord that he will fall over stuff that has no other explanation than the fact that you are on the move lord send angels to visit him if necessary do whatever it takes lord to break down whatever the barrier is and cause his heart to be softened towards you lord I pray for an opportunity I intend to go and visit the family at some point soon and I pray for an opportunity to do that while he's there and that he will have questions and that I may have answers that you've provided but lord he's already been told by his family that he is a gift from god to them and that is beautiful lord let us reach this man
[42:56] I ask it in jesus name and also who comes to church faithfully and is here so often and yet admits she's not really found you yet but lord your word says that if we seek you with a whole heart you will let us find you and I pray that you'll allow her to find you lord it it must be intensely frustrating to sit on the outside of great fellowship and only be able to partially enter into it and I pray that you'd release her so that she can be our full-blooded sister in christ oh lord lord we scratched the surface this morning and we for reasons I wish didn't exist we have to draw things to a close but lord please respond to our hearts to see change and to see you glorified we don't want titles and we don't want recognitions we want you to be recognised and lifted up on high and when these changes happen we will shout it from the rooftops we will we will use it as a witness father we ask you to move on our hearts of prayer in jesus name amen

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