

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT

Matthew 14:1-21

Key Verse: 14:16

“Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’”

In this passage Matthew tells us of the martyrdom of John the Baptist. It reveals the darkness of the times and the power of one righteous man’s life of faith. In that context, Jesus called his disciples to himself and trained them to be shepherds for the people of their times. In any dark time, Jesus wants to call and train his disciples to be shepherds of people living darkness. May God bless us to hear Jesus’ voice today.

First, Jesus’ resurrection power penetrates the darkness (1-2).

In the previous passage, Jesus had been in his hometown. Jesus delivered a powerful message that revealed his spiritual authority. They should have regarded Jesus as a prophet. They should acknowledge God in Jesus. Instead they looked at Jesus’ human background and took offense. They saw Jesus as a presumptuous upstart who did not keep social order. These were people whom Jesus had known throughout his lifetime: neighbors, friends, teachers, and coaches. Humanly speaking, it could have been painful. But Jesus did not fall into human sentiment. Jesus focused on the spiritual reality. Jesus said, “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” Jesus rebuked them for not honoring God’s prophet. This was not a small matter. It kept them from experiencing the power of God in their community. When they did not experience the power of God they became destitute spiritually. We must learn to honor the work of God instead of

focusing on human elements. The evangelist D.L. Moody had the human background of a shoe salesman. He delivered the word of God with spiritual power, but sometimes his English was not really well-polished. Some people delighted in counting his English grammar mistakes and laughing at him. Sometimes they even told him how many mistakes he made in his message. In doing so they neglected the word of God that could bring salvation to their souls. We must overcome human prejudices and honor spiritual truth.

We can learn a good lesson from Jesus here. When Jesus was rejected in one place, he did not assume that the whole world had rejected him. He knew that he was honored by God and by people of faith in other regions. Rejection has a way of piercing the heart and sickening the soul and planting great discouragement. But we must overcome it by keeping it in perspective. When we are inviting students to Bible study we face a lot of rejections. We may be rejected three times consecutively. However, we must not assume that the fourth person will also reject the invitation. We must shake off rejection and continue to preach the gospel. The Risen Christ is working and his power will open the hearts of some.

Indeed, the spiritual power of Jesus' ministry was spreading. Look at verses 1-2. "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'" Herod was sitting in his palace, trying to enjoy indulgence in luxury. If he was a modern man he would have had all the latest action movies and the finest entertainment system money could buy. Perhaps he tried to watch seven consecutive movies, eating foreign delicacies, attended by palace girls. But something interrupted him. He heard the reports about Jesus. Jesus was healing the sick and driving out evil spirits. Jesus had even raised a dead

girl to life. Herod had to confront the truth that death is not the end and that there is God's judgment for evil deeds. This news pierced Herod's conscience and exposed his inner spiritual condition. In fact, Herod was full of guilt and fear. He had executed John the Baptist by cutting off his head. But now he thought that John had risen from the dead and was coming after him. He might have seen the headless figure of John in his dream. He might have felt like Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," who was terrified of a headless horseman. Though Herod was a tetrarch, he was mentally ill and most miserable. On the other hand, Jesus is God who raises the dead. Jesus is the Truth who exposes all lies and evil. When Jesus' works are told, even by unbelieving people, the Holy Spirit convicts people of guilt in regard to sin.

Second, Herod beheads John the Baptist (3-11).

In verses 3-12, Matthew tells the story of how Herod the tetrarch killed John the Baptist. Look at verses 3-4. "Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" According to history, Herodias had lived with Philip in Rome. But Herod, on a visit to his brother Philip's house, seduced Herodias. Herod lost his heart to Herodias who appeared beautiful and charming. Herodias liked power. She desired Herod for he was a ruler, a king. They both divorced their spouses and married one another. Perhaps Herod thought that as a king, he could do such a thing and no one could say anything to him. But even a king is not above the law of God. Adultery is a grave sin against God and a violation of God's everlasting and unchanging truth. King David was a man after God's own heart. God made him the shepherd of Israel. But when David committed the sin of adultery, God rebuked him through the prophet

Nathan and punished him severely. David repented at Nathan's rebuke. But Herod did not repent. Herod wanted to kill John. He was restrained only by fear that he might lose control of the people. So he imprisoned John.

When lawless passion was smoldering under the surface, unrepented even though rebuked by God's servant, it was just a matter of time and opportunity before it erupted in disaster. The occasion was Herod's birthday party. Herod had a great feast in honor of himself. There was much eating and drinking. The daughter of Herodias, a voluptuous young woman in her late teens, danced in a very lascivious manner like Britney Spears. The dinner guests, including Herod, were transfixed on the girl. She had pushed the button that opened Herod's corrupted heart and made him cry out helplessly that he would give her anything, up to half of his kingdom. He may have expected her to ask for diamonds or rubies. Instead, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This shocked everyone. The mood of the party changed. It was no longer a king's birthday party, but Satan's carnival. A righteous man's life hung in the balance, and a corrupted king was intoxicated by lust and revelry. Herod knew it was a grave mistake to kill John. But he was helpless under the power of sin. So he had John beheaded and then had his head brought in on a platter and presented to Herodias' daughter. Herod had become a murderer of a righteous man. His conspirators were Herodias and a teenage girl. As the wages of sin is death, these three persons would forfeit their souls and go to everlasting punishment in hell.

Adultery is sin and the consequences are tragedy in this life, and death—both physical and spiritual. However, many take the sin of adultery lightly. Television shows like “Desperate Housewives” justify marital unfaithfulness and yet are so popular. Adultery is a sugared poison of the devil. It traps its victims in the power

of darkness and makes them the devil's tools. Moreover, homes are broken and children's hearts are broken. We must pray for our nation America to fear God and hate the sin of adultery.

Jesus referred to his generation as sinful and adulterous. People were wicked and unfaithful. Yet in that dark time, there was one man, John the Baptist, who was willing to stand on the side of God at the cost of his life. It was because he loved God and lived for the truth. Let's learn the spirit of John the Baptist to be Bible teachers for the people of our time.

Third, "You give them something to eat" (12-21).

Look at verses 12-13a. "John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." Jesus knew that John had entered into glory in heaven through martyrdom. Still, the event of John's death cast a shadow over the landscape. The power of sin and death were strong. Ultimately, Jesus would have to give his life on the cross to solve man's sin problem. The reality of his upcoming suffering and death must have struck Jesus with fresh meaning. Jesus needed time to seek God in prayer very personally. Jesus needed time to grieve for his coworker John. So he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Look at verses 13b-14. "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." The crowds of people did not care that Jesus needed personal time with God. They did not think about Jesus' condition or needs at all. They

were only interested in finding a solution to their own problems. Even though Jesus left by boat, they went around the lake by foot and arrived where Jesus was going ahead of him. By the time Jesus landed, there was a large crowd waiting for him.

How did Jesus see them? Jesus had compassion on them. To have compassion means to share their suffering. Jesus did not think about himself. Jesus thought about them. Jesus felt their pain and was moved to do something to help them. He began to heal their diseases and sicknesses one by one. Jesus must have placed his hand on a man with leprosy and healed him. Jesus must have given sight to a blind man. Jesus drove out an evil spirit and restored a man to his right mind. Each time Jesus touched a sinsick person there was a life-giving work of God and one person's life problem was healed completely. Jesus met people as they came without turning anyone away. Jesus seemed to lose track of time and threw himself completely into the task of healing the sick. We see in Jesus the compassionate heart of the true shepherd of his people. We see in Jesus the spiritual victory of the love of God and the resurrection over the power of sin and death. Even if the world was under the darkness of sin, Jesus did not shrink back. Jesus was all the more determined to heal all the sick and to plant the love of God in people.

For a while, Jesus' disciples patiently watched Jesus' healing ministry. But as evening approached, they came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowd away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food" (15). The disciples' grasp of the situation was correct. It was a remote place and it was late. They had a big crowd of hungry people on their hands and something had to be done. They believed it was time to send the crowd

away. They felt burdened by the crowd. They thought Jesus had done enough for the crowd and it was unreasonable to expect more.

How did Jesus answer them? Look at verse 16. “Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’” Jesus rejected the disciples’ suggestion that the crowd needed to go away. Jesus was not burdened by the crowd. Jesus saw each person there as his own precious son or daughter. He did not want to send them away any more than a parent wants to send his child away. Jesus wanted to be with them always. Here we see the difference between Jesus’ genuine compassion and his disciples’ best effort to be faithful with their human effort. One young lady began to pray for God to send her a Bible student. Almost immediately, one young girl student began to follow her around and wanted to come to Sunday worship service. But then the young lady was afraid, thinking that she would have to take care of the young girl forever. So she did not welcome her to the Sunday worship service. We weak human beings are easily burdened like the disciples. But Jesus is different. Jesus’ compassion is endless.

Verse 16b says, “You give them something eat.” With these words Jesus challenged his disciples to be responsible for feeding the hungry crowd. Of course, Jesus knew they could not solve the problem in their own strength. But Jesus did not expect them to. Jesus wanted to teach them a sense of responsibility for the crowd. We live in an age steeped in individualistic thought. Matthew was once like that. If he could make money and enjoy comfort and prosperity he was ready to abandon his suffering people. But Jesus does not allow his disciples to remain in such thinking. Jesus demands his disciples to have a sense of responsibility for the people of their times. If we are Jesus’ disciples, we must be concerned about the problems and needs of young college students and teenagers.

When Jesus said, “You give them something to eat,” he taught his disciples a giving life. In any situation, they must be ready to give. Jesus had set the example. Jesus had given of himself to the crowd of people by spending all his time and energy to heal their sicknesses. Jesus wanted his disciples to learn a giving life, overcoming their selfishness.

The disciples answered, “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.” Jesus’ words shocked his disciples. They never imagined that they should be responsible to give the people something to eat. But Jesus was very serious about it. So they began to look around for what they had. They saw something. It was very small. It was five loaves of bread and two fish. Before the huge crowd it seemed like nothing. But it was what they had. To give this to Jesus was to sacrifice everything they had for the sake of serving the crowd. Here we learn that we must not overlook what we have in doing the work of God. We must see with the eyes of faith that what we have is precious and it is the sacrifice we can make for the work of God.

When Mother Barry was a young woman, she accepted the call of God to go as a missionary to Korea. She studied the language until she could speak like a native. She learned to cowork with Dr. Samuel Lee with a spirit of self-denial. She gave of her time until she lost the chance to marry. She gave whatever she had, whenever the opportunity came, to serve the work of God among young Korean students. Then God used her precious to raise up many missionaries to the nations of the world. When Dr. Lee was caring for Korean students, he wanted to teach the world mission command. But there seemed precious little that Korean students could offer. One day Dr. Lee received a scholarship to go to America to study for a Ph.D.

It was his human dream. But he decided to give this opportunity to another in order to persuade her to be a missionary. His offer was accepted and the first missionary was sent. With this seemingly small beginning, a wave of missionaries was raised that has gone out to the nations of the world. When we are selfish, there is nothing to do and nothing to give. But when we listen to Jesus' words and repent of our selfishness, we can find something to sacrifice for Christ.

Look at verses 18-21. “‘Bring them here to me,’ he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and 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.” When the disciples brought what they had to Jesus, Jesus accepted it. Then Jesus gave thanks to God. Jesus wanted his disciples to learn to thank God in all circumstances. Jesus also wanted them to learn to look up to heaven in prayer when they had a dire need. Jesus wanted them to learn to depend on God and on his mighty power to do what was impossible for them. Then Jesus began to bless the loaves and the fish. They began to multiply. When the disciples took out one slice of bread, another slice appeared. When the disciples took out one fish, another fish appeared in its place. The supply was constant as long as there was need. In this way, the five loaves and two fish became enough to feed five thousand people.

After the people were all satisfied, the disciples picked up the broken pieces that were left over. It was enough for twelve baskets, one for each disciple. When they

sacrificed for Jesus' sheep, they did not lose. They gained even more than they had given.

In this passage we learn that opposition to the gospel is fierce, The battle for God's truth is a bloody one. We must learn to stand on the side of truth against all the powers and authorities of darkness. What Jesus really wants from us is to learn his compassion and to learn to sacrifice what we have for the welfare of God's sheep. There are many sick and needy young people on our campuses. Let's offer what we have and pray for the healing of our nation to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.