The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 September 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Give Ye Them to Eat!

Matthew 14:15-21

In the spring of 2006, my wife and I migrated from the U.S. to Ireland; and during our first year here in Ireland, we worked at River Valley Baptist Church, under the leadership of **Pastor Bob Zemeski**. During that year at RVBC, I helped with preaching and teaching, and evangelism; and Katie played the piano for services, helped to prepare for conferences and banquets, and did administrative work. In reality, though, we were *learning* far more from Pastor and Mrs. Zemeski than we were helping them. Pastor Zemeski poured his heart and soul, and countless hours, into every lesson and sermon that he wrote, and into every one-on-one discipleship that he did with his church members; and that, in itself, was an invaluable lesson to learn. I determined, by God's grace, to pour myself tirelessly into teaching God's Word to others, just as Pastor Zemeski did. Sometimes, he would sit down with me in his kitchen and ask me for my thoughts on what to do in a given situation; but I was always hesitant to give my input, because I knew that he had far more wisdom than I had! I knew that by asking me these questions, he was getting me to think these things through, and come up with scriptural answers. He was a very busy man; yet, no matter how busy or tired he was, he was always ready to drop what he was doing, and listen to me whenever I came to him with a theological question, or a practical ministry question. Oftentimes, he would mull over a question for days, and finally send a lengthy email, in which he shared his thoughts.

Another man who has taught me much over the years is **Dr. Strouse.** Every year, he comes here to Ireland to teach two seminary courses. At nearly eighty years of age, Dr. Strouse still stands up and teaches 50 hours of classes over a period of five days; and he does so with a boundless passion for God's Word. Yet, even during lunch or tea break, he doesn't shove people away. When someone comes to him with a question, he always takes time to answer it. I remember a time, a few years ago, when I came to him after the last session of the evening, and asked him for counsel on a matter that was pressing on my heart; but as I looked into his tired face, I regretted having picked his weary brain at 10:15 at night! Yet, he never says, "Sorry, I can't talk right now." He always goes the extra mile.

The giving spirit of these men (and of many other brothers and sisters in Christ that I know) is a sign that they have spent much time with the Lord Jesus! Jesus never turned people away. He always took time with them, and fed them the words of life: and He is our Example to follow. This morning, we will learn about the selfless service of our Lord; and we will also see how we who know Him as Saviour are His co-labourers, working together with Him. The title of this message is ***Give Ye Them to Eat.***

Read Matthew 14:13-21.

I. Healing the hurting (vv. 13-14)

Last week we saw, in **verses 1-12,** that John the Baptist had just been beheaded by King Herod; and after his death, John's disciples buried his body, and brought the news to Jesus. And what was Jesus' reaction when He heard this news? He departed by ship with His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and went into a desert area. Though the Scripture doesn't specifically state it, it is obvious that Jesus needed some time to process and grieve the death of His cousin, and to spend some time in prayer with His heavenly Father. In **Mark,** we are told that when Jesus received the news about John, there were ***"many coming and going"*** in the place where they were, so that ***"they had no leisure so much as to eat."*** In light of this fact, it's not hard to see why Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds.

Now, this may seem a little strange to us. Why would Christ grieve, when He, as the all-knowing God, has a perfect perspective on everything? Well, first of all, we need to realise that God actually cares deeply for us, even though we are infinitesimal specks in His creation! God *does* have emotions; and He created *us* with emotions, too (albeit our emotions have been warped by our sinful, selfish nature). He created us with emotions like His, so that we can fellowship with Him, and so that *He* can fellowship with us. Throughout the Bible, we are told that God "grieves." He *grieves with us* as we go through problems and heartaches in this life (even when our problems are the result of our own sinful, rebellious choices). In **Judges 10,** we are told that when Israel was under the oppression of the Ammonites, the LORD's ***"soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."*** God *does* grieve; and this means that Christ, the second Person of the Godhead, grieves. However, not only does Christ grieve in His *divine* nature; He grieves in His *human* nature. In fact, He is *especially* able to grieve with us in His human nature, since He, as a Man, has felt our pain and grief firsthand. In **Isaiah 53,** Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be ***"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."*** In **Hebrews 4,** Paul says that ***"We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."***

Think of that, brethren! Jesus experienced sorrow and pain, just as we do. He actually *wept* when He came to Lazarus' tomb! Why did He weep, when He knew very well that He was about to raise Lazarus back to life within a few minutes? And why did He grieve for John, when He knew that very soon *He Himself* would die, and rise again, and ascend back to Heaven, and be with John forever in the glories of Heaven? Well, we might ask the same question about ourselves. Why do *we* cry when our brothers and sisters in Christ die, and go to be with the Lord? As believers, we understand perfectly well that it will only be a short while before we go to be with our loved one forever, in the presence of the Lord; and yet, we weep. Why? Because we are human! We miss our loved ones, and their comforting presence. Well, so it was with Jesus. In His *human* nature, He limited Himself, and was subject to

human frailty. Much of the time He chose *not* to use His divine omniscience—and was thus able to experience human shock and grief (such as when the news came that John had died). As a Man, Jesus actually craved and needed human comfort. This is why He asked Peter, James, and John to pray with Him in Gethsemane. The Bible says that ***"in the days of his flesh,"*** He ***"offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears"*** to His Father.

And so, we see that Jesus wanted to take a little time to get away and grieve. However, that luxury was denied Him! The people knew that Jesus had sailed off toward the other side of the lake; and so, they set off on foot, and hoofed it around the lake, in the hope of finding Him wherever He landed. As it turns out, they not only found Him, but they were *already there on shore* as He and the disciples were pulling up to land! In **Mark 6:33,** Mark says that ***"the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him."*** There was no "down time" for the Lord!

Yet, how did Jesus respond when He saw the multitudes? Did He say, "Sorry, but I can't talk to anyone today. It's 'me time' now"? No! Matthew says that Jesus was ***"moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick."*** Of course, as Jesus looked out on the crowd, He knew that there were many insincere curiosity-seekers, who were only there to be wowed by His miracles. He knew that there were many people who would *never* believe on Him, no matter *how many* miracles they witnessed. He also knew that there were probably some spies from the scribes and Pharisees, who were watching for any opportunity to accuse Him. Yet, He also saw the faces of desperate and hurting people, who had crushing problems. Even more importantly, He saw people who were pondering His words, and who were trying to decide whether to place their faith in Him for salvation, or not. And so, as He looked into these desperate, hurting, and perplexed faces, He chose to put His own needs, and His own griefs, aside. For hours, he healed those who were in need of healing. He also launched into a long day of preaching. Mark says that He ***"began to teach them many things"***; and Luke says that He ***"spake unto them of the kingdom of God."*** Even though He was weary and grieving, He preached on late into the afternoon, and into the evening.

Folks, *that* is the character of our Saviour; and *that* is the character we should be imitating! **Philippians 2:4** says, ***"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*** If you are saved, you have a perfect pattern to follow in Christ. He has left us an example, that we should follow His steps. He was never too weary to reach out to people. He was *always* "on call"; and we should always be "on call," too! We should not allow our fatigue, or our "business," to keep us from telling lost souls about Christ. We should also be available to encourage, comfort, pray with, and give godly counsel to our brothers and sisters in Christ. **Second Timothy 4:2** says, ***"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season"*** (in other words, when it's convenient, and when it's not so convenient). Though this command was given to Timothy, who was a pastor, the command to be ***"instant in season, out of season"*** applies to *every* child of God!

Christian, do you have problems? Of course you do. We all do! Yet, are our problems so great, that we cannot take time to be a blessing to others? No! The same heavenly Father who strengthened His Son in His moments of grief and weariness can also strengthen *us,* and enable *us* to be channels of blessing to others. Let's see what Paul said about this.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-10.

Paul's life was one of constant suffering for Christ. Everywhere he travelled, he was accosted by people who wanted to imprison, beat, and kill him; and every church he started was hounded by ***"grievous wolves,"*** who undermined his authority, and tried to turn his precious converts against him. The spiritual and emotional burden that God put upon Paul's shoulders was tremendous; and Paul didn't put on a phony "positive" front, and act as though he had no problems. He admitted that he was often saddened, troubled, and perplexed. Yet, through his troubles, *God sustained him.*

Now, in these verses, Paul uses several interesting words to make his point. First, he acknowledges that he and his missionary companions were ***"troubled."*** The Greek word for ***"troubled"*** is an agricultural term, meaning to "crowd against" or "squeeze," like a grape. By extension, it means to be troubled, or to undergo tribulation. So, Paul acknowledged that he was "squeezed"; yet, he was not "squashed." (The Greek verb behind ***"distressed"*** literally means "to spread out," or to "squash.") Paul also acknowledged that He and his co-workers were ***"perplexed"***; yet, he said, they were not ***"in despair."*** In other words, they were not utterly at a loss, or wanting to give up on life. He also acknowledges that they were ***"cast down, but not destroyed."*** These are athletic terms, referring to wrestling matches. In today's parlance, we might say that they were "body-slammed, but not pinned down." When Paul was downcast in his spirit, he was able to get up, in the strength of the Lord, and serve God and others yet again.

Paul knew what it was to be persecuted. Yet, despite all the persecution he endured, he knew that he was ***"not forsaken."*** The Lord was with him everywhere he went; and this knowledge comforted and sustained him. Brethren, if the Lord could uphold a man like Paul through all *his* tribulations, He surely can uphold us. Trust the Lord to sustain you through your trials and problems; and as you do so, be available to minister to others!

II. Feeding the famished (vv. 15-21)

(Read Matthew 14:15-21 again.) Of all the miracles that Jesus did during His earthly ministry, the feeding of the 5,000 is one of the most famous. Apart from Christ's own resurrection from the dead, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and **John** each tell this story with a slightly different emphasis, and with at least one detail that the other three don't mention: but the Gospel that gives the fullest account of this story is the **Gospel of John**. Before we go any further, I would like to read John's account, and get the full picture of what happened.

Read John 6:1-17.

For two years, the people of Galilee had seen Jesus do all kinds of miracles, including raising people from the dead. Yet, for some reason, they seem to have considered *this* miracle to be the crowning jewel of His works—the work which proved that He was, indeed, the Messiah. Why? Probably because there was an ancient Jewish tradition (*not Scripture,* but tradition) which stated that when the Messiah would come, He would feed people with bread from heaven, just as Moses had done for the children of Israel. Now, Jesus didn't physically bring this bread down from the sky; but He may as well have done so. He had produced this bread from a mere five loaves, and had fed at least 15,000 people with it. (There were 5,000 men; thus, with women and children included, there were probably at least 15,000 people, if not more!) Thus, in the people's estimation, Jesus "fit the bill" for the Messiah. That is why they were ready to crown Jesus *King* right then and there. No doubt, the Apostles were elated to see this. Finally it was Jesus' moment to be crowned King of Israel!

However, there was just one problem: it *wasn't* the time! Jesus refused to allow the people to crown Him King; and He whisked His disciples away to Peter's boat, and sent them across the lake to Capernaum, so that *they* wouldn't get caught up in trying to make Him King. Now, why did Jesus do this? After all, He was *already* the King of Israel; so why not let the people *crown* Him as their King? Because it wasn't time to sit down on the throne of David! Jesus came to earth in humiliation, to *die for our sins*; and when He comes to earth for the second time, He will *then* He will sit upon His throne of David. However, that day will not come until Israel turns their hearts to Him. Tragically, the people's hearts were *not* ready to receive Him at this point. Most of them *still* didn't really believe on Him, even though they had just witnessed this great miracle; and the next day, their unbelief became painfully obvious.

Read John 6:25-69.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 had many purposes; and one of the most important purposes was to illustrate that Jesus is the **Bread of Life--**the one who gives us *spiritual and eternal life*, when we simply believe His words, and trust in Him as Saviour. Sadly, though, most of the people did *not* believe on Him—and, in fact, walked away from Him, never to follow Him again. It *looked,* at first, as though this miracle would be the turning point of Jesus' ministry—the point at which Israel would finally believe on Jesus, and receive Him as

their King. Yet, it turned out to be just the opposite. When the dust cleared, the only people who remained with Jesus were Jesus' twelve disciples. (And even one of *them* was not a true believer!) Herod had just recently murdered Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist; and now, the tide of opinion was turning sharply against Jesus Himself. Should we be surprised, though? To this day, Jesus still offers Himself as the Bread of Life—the one who can reconcile us to God, fill the emptiness of our starving souls, and give us eternal peace and joy. Yet, most people still walk away from Him, because they are not interested in *believing* on Him, and surrendering their *hearts* to Him, and receiving *spiritual* life from Him. All they want is "free bread" (*physical* and *material* things, and "fixes" to their temporal problems); and when these things are not forthcoming, they are offended, and walk away. My friend, I would ask *you* the question: "Will *you* also go away?" Will you forfeit eternal life, because you are interested only in things of *this* life? Or will you, like Peter, say, ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"***?

The feeding of the 5,000 is a living illustration of salvation; and it is a call to the lost to believe on Jesus. However, is there anything that we, as believers, can learn from the account of the feeding of the 5,000? Yes, there is plenty! For one thing, there is much that this miracle teaches us about the importance of *faith* in our daily Christian lives. Let's read **John 6:5-10** again. **(Read John 6:5-10.)**

Can you imagine if *you* had been one of the disciples, and if Jesus had commissioned *you* not to send the multitudes away, but to *feed* them? The disciples were stunned! Was Jesus serious? At first, they probably all looked around at each other in astonishment; but finally, Philip spoke up, and pointed out that even 200 pennyworth of bread wouldn't be enough to feed all these people! (A "penny" was a Roman *dinarius,* which was a full day's wages. Thus, "200 pennyworth" was two hundred days' wages!) The disciples were used to seeing Jesus do incredible miracles; but they had not yet seen Him produce food from out of nowhere. Furthermore, Jesus had commissioned *them* to feed the people (which *they,* obviously, were not capable of doing). What was Jesus up to? Well, John gives us the answer in **verse 6**: **Jesus was proving them. He was testing their faith.** If they had thought about it, they might have remembered that God had once used the prophet Elisha to feed 100 men with a mere 20 loaves of barley bread. Could He not do something like this again—especially since *Jesus* was there?

Read 2 Kings 4:42-44.

Did Elisha produce the bread for those hundred men? Of course not. It was *God* who produced the bread; and Elisha was His instrument. Why, then, couldn't God do this sort of thing again, using *the disciples* as His instruments? In fact, why couldn't *Jesus* produce the

bread, and use *the disciples* as His instruments to distribute it to the people? In light of all that the disciples had seen Jesus do already, these possibilities *should* have occurred to them; but they didn't. Philip looked at the situation with human reasoning, and concluded that it couldn't be done. **Andrew's** faith wasn't much better, either. Now, granted, Andrew did have a little more faith than Philip had. Andrew went so far as to suggest that they use a lad's lunch of five barley loaves and two fishes. However, he was quick to add, ***"but what are these among so many?"***

Such was the level of faith of these men, who had walked personally with Jesus for two years. Yet, before we get too hard on the disciples, maybe we'd better consider ourselves. Christian, how would *your* faith have fared if you had been in this situation? How well do you trust Christ in *your own* daily life? Christ isn't here in the flesh to do miracles anymore; but He *has* promised to work all things together for good to them that love God. Do you believe that?

Read Romans 8:28-30.

The promise that ***"all things work together for good"*** is a promise that every called, justified, glorified child of God can claim. Yet, *do* we believe this promise? Or do we forget it the moment that a crisis arises in our lives? Has not God met our needs in the past? And can He not meet our needs again *now*? We *say* we believe this; but oftentimes, we doubt God: and when we doubt God, we sin. **Romans 14:23** says**, *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."***

The disciples failed the test of faith. Yet, did Jesus cast them off because they failed to trust Him in this situation? No. Jesus said, ***"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."*** There was a day when Andrew and Philip trusted Jesus as their personal Saviour; and Jesus remained faithful to His promise. They were God's children by faith; and nothing could change that. Furthermore, despite their small faith, Jesus still gave them the privilege to work for Him! After He had prayed over the bread and fish, and blessed it, He began to break it, and increase it: and then, he commissioned the disciples to seat the people by fifties and hundreds, and to distribute the bread to them. Think of that! Jesus gave them the privilege of being part of what He was doing!

Christian, God wants *you* to be part of what He is doing, too. Despite your frequent unbelief, Jesus says, "Are you ready to trust me yet? Are you going to believe me this time? I want to use you; but if you want to be used of me more than you are now being used now, *you've got to trust me*." Really, the wonder of this story is *not* that Jesus multiplied the bread. He is God Almighty; and there is no limit to His power. The wonder of this story is that Christ chose to use the disciples! He used a little boy who had enough faith to offer Him his lunch; and He used the disciples (weak though their faith was) to distribute the bread and fish to the

multitudes. Folks, this is what our Saviour does! In His love and mercy, He chooses to use small (and unworthy) people like us! As Paul put it, "***Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."***

How was it that a group of about twenty men were able to confound the world, and turn it upside down? Was it because they had connections with the movers and shakers of their day? Was it because they had loads of money, and high education? Absolutely not! They were weak, and despised, and poor; and with the exception of Paul, they were not highly educated. How did *these* men turn the world upside down? The answer is: *it was not they who did it*! Just as Jesus multiplied the bread, it is *God* who has taken upon Himself the task of multiplying His own Word. We, His servants, are simply the ones who *distribute* the bread. Let's go back to Matthew's account, and read it again. **(Read Matthew 14:16-19 again.)**

Matthew didn't give nearly as many details in his account of the feeding of the 5,000 as John did. He didn't mention the 200 *denari* that it would have cost to feed the people. He didn't mention the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus. He didn't mention the conversation that Andrew and Philip had with Jesus. He didn't mention the ranks of fifties and hundreds into which the disciples divided the people. However, there *is* one statement of Jesus that Matthew focused on—and that was the command to ***"Give ye them to eat."*** Think of that! Jesus was choosing to make the disciples *co-labourers* with Him; and he was preparing them for future ministry. By dividing *physical* bread, and giving it to them to distribute to the people, He was showing them that *He* is the one who increases His Word, and gives spiritual life through it: and it is *our* job simply to give it out to others!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:9.

Now, before we close, there is one more truth that I would like to point out. Let's read **Matthew 14:20** again. **(Read Matthew 14:20.)** Folks, do you realise that *all four* Gospels mention the fact that there were twelve baskets of bread left over? Why is this so important? Well, for one thing, it shows that the Lord does not want us to waste our food, or any resources that He gives us. However, I believe there is something significant about the *number* of baskets. Why were there *twelve* baskets of bread remaining? Because the Lord *rewarded* the disciples for their labour that day, by sending each of them home with a basket of bread!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

Brethren, God never promised to make us rich. Serving God is not a "spiritual stock market," in which we sow our "seed" of service, and get back huge monetary and financial profits in in return. Jesus and the Apostles did *not* teach a "health, wealth, and prosperity gospel." However, God *does* promise to *provide our needs—**if*** we will serve Him faithfully. This is true not only for pastors and missionaries, but for all believers. We who are saved are labourers together with Christ; and God says that the labourer *is* worthy of his hire! The one who broke the bread by the sea, and fed 5,00 hungry people, will provide *your* bread, and *your* earthly needs, if you will only love Him, trust Him, and serve Him with all your heart!

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, "Have *you* eaten the living Bread?" Do you have a personal relationship with the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ? If you can't say that you have ever repented of your sin, and placed your personal faith in Jesus Christ, please do so today! If you are saved already, **I would urge you to serve God with all your heart!** Don't try to make deals with God. Don't say, "God, I'll serve you *if* you give me this thing that I want or need *first."* Seek *Him,* and *His* Kingdom first; and *then* all these things will be added unto you. Serve Christ with all your heart; and serve *others* with all your heart. Even when you're weary and hurting, allow God to move your heart with compassion toward others. Be ready to serve God, and others, at a moment's notice. Be instant in season, and out of season!