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Sermon Notes

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Supernatural Power and Compassion Meet Overwhelming Need

Matthew 14:13-21

One of the ancient questions of philosophy: What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? Some liken the battle between the sea and a rocky coastline as an example of the endless struggle. Football fans are always interested in times when the high flying, record-setting offense meets the top-rated defense. So what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object. One humorous answer is: “an inconceivable event.”

Perhaps better for our text today, what happens when supernatural power and compassion meet the overwhelming needs of people? Can an endless supply of landfill fill up a huge sinkhole?

I. The Astounding Compassion of Jesus

A. Jesus’ Overwhelming Grief and Pressing Needs

1. Jesus was fully human, and therefore had a fully human personality, yet without sin
2. The most common emotion He displayed was compassion... as a matter of fact He displays it in this account
3. Compassion means to feel what others are feeling, to react emotionally and appropriately to heart-wrenching situations
4. Context: Jesus has just heard of John the Baptist’s execution

Matthew 14:12-13 John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. ¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

5. Note Jesus’ reaction... His desire was to be alone
 - a. Jesus derived great strength from solitary communion with His Father
 - b. Again and again we see Jesus withdrawing into remote places for prayer
 - c. The reason here is Jesus’ extreme sorrow over the martyrdom of John the Baptist

- d. Jesus is genuinely grieved, sorrowful, saddened
- e. Therefore, He desires to get away and be alone for a while to pray... strong emphasis on the solitary nature of the retreat...

Vs. 13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

f. Notice also the end of this whole account... after the feeding of the 5000

Matthew 14:22-23 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone

Summary: Jesus was deeply saddened and hurt by John's death and wanted to be alone to console Himself in prayer, to retreat from the crowd and be alone with His heavenly Father

His desire was so strong He never forgot it... He even sent His disciples away so He could be completely alone on the mountain in prayer

B. Surprise! There's the Crowd!

Matthew 14:13-14 Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd

1. The very people He was trying to escape followed him on foot
2. What a picture of the way things go so often in our private lives... we have deep desires for rest and relaxation, even legitimate ones after a particularly strenuous stretch of life; and the world comes crashing in
3. It wasn't a handful of people... it was a large crowd brimming with needs

C. Jesus' Selfless Compassion

Matthew 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them

Greek: His heart, His deepest emotions and yearnings went out to them

He didn't roll His eyes, sigh, get frustrated, say "How much more do you people want from me? Can't you see I want to be left alone?"

1. Here we see evidence of Jesus' astonishing servant heart, of His selfless love
2. A servant meets the other's needs first, then cares for His own needs later

3. He turns away from what He wanted, what He needed, what every fiber of His being was crying out for... time alone to pray and grieve over John's death
4. Instead, He immerses Himself in the overwhelming needs of a huge pressing crowd

D. Question: What Would You Have Done?

1. Let's say you just found out your spouse has been diagnosed with cancer, and the prognosis is not so good
 - a. You have been crying most of the afternoon
 - b. You feel like a worn-out dishrag emotionally
 - c. You get home and suddenly the phone rings
 - d. Someone from the church is calling with a flat tire and asked if you could come help him change it in the rain
 - e. Or someone is asking you women if you would be willing to cook a covered dish meal for Sunday lunch
 - f. Be honest... what would you say?
2. Our tendency is, when we feel immense pain, to shut off from the outside world
3. To wave our suffering like credentials entitling us to ignore anyone else's needs
4. We live in an overwhelmingly selfish and self-centered age... an age of entitlement, an age in which we don't know much about servanthood
5. Jesus' reaction here has transforming power if we will just take it to heart
6. And Jesus did this all the way to the cross... selfless right to the end
 - a. While carrying His cross up to Calvary, women were weeping and wailing for Him; He said "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."
 - b. After being nailed to the cross, He says "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing"
 - c. While hanging from the cross and seeing His mother, Mary, Jesus entrusts her care to the Apostle John

d. Speaking to the thief on the cross, He says “Today you will be with me in Paradise”

7. Jesus’ supernatural compassion and selfless love rebukes the coddling and self-protection we do when we’re suffering and hurting

II. The Overwhelming Needs of the People

A. Why Did They Trek So Far on Foot?

1. They walked all the way round the Sea of Galilee to meet Jesus in a desolate place
2. Their dedication to be with Jesus was astonishing
3. Jesus was the most appealing, the most magnetic, the most attractive personality in the history of the human race
 - a. His teachings were unlike any that anyone had ever heard in their lives
 - b. His healings were instantly effective and supernaturally powerful
 - c. His demeanor was perfect and godlike
4. The crowds couldn’t get enough of being with Jesus

B. Felt Needs vs. Real Needs

1. What motivated them? Certainly their own sense of need
2. Many of them were sick... suffering from illness or other bodily problems; or were caring for loved ones in that condition
3. Others were fascinated by His teaching... others simply wanted to see Him do a miracle and break up the tedious and painful routine of their lives
4. These were their felt needs
5. In John’s gospel, Jesus is going to rebuke them for their inability to rise above the most basic felt need of food

John 6:26-27 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

6. Behind it all was the sovereign hand of Almighty God drawing them in His net of love so Jesus could meet their real need: salvation from sin

Jeremiah 31:3 "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

The huge crowd is simply drawn to be near Jesus... little knowing they are about to see one of His most spectacular miracles

C. Jesus' Priority Structure

Like the crowd, we might put healing the sick and feeding the hungry above anything else; people say "They can't listen to the gospel if they are thinking about their stomachs"

Not so with Jesus... Mark's gospel links Jesus' compassion with His TEACHING ministry

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Jesus' ways are not our ways... what they needed most was the gospel, and that came by His teaching ministry, not His signs and wonders

So also with the healing of the paralyzed man in Matthew 9... his friends thought his greatest need was to be able to walk again

Jesus had different ideas:

Matthew 9:2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

So, what was Jesus' priority structure for this large crowd?

1. Teaching many things
2. Healing the sick
3. Feeding the hungry
4. Sending them home

D. Jesus Abundantly Satisfies Every Need

III. The Insufficient Resources of the Disciples

Matthew 14:15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

A. Disciples Clearly Had Some Compassion...Just Not Enough

1. The teaching has gone on for quite some time

2. The healings took even more time... though Jesus could have healed everyone in the crowd instantly without uttering a single word, He generally preferred to deal with each case one at a time, to draw each person into a love relationship with the Father by faith
3. They are out in a remote area... no village, little vegetation, certainly no fast food, supermarkets, restaurants, hotels or malls
4. The disciples began to be concerned for the crowd... and perhaps thought that Jesus was too absorbed in dealing with the thousands of needy people that He'd failed to notice how late it was getting
5. They had some compassion on the crowd... just not enough

B. Disciples Clearly Had a Little Food... Just Not Enough

1. They weren't against sharing with the poor occasionally
2. But a crowd this size... it almost certainly never entered their minds to meet this overwhelming need
3. Maybe they had each brought some food for themselves, but the Scripture speaks not a single word about that
4. Perhaps this was their true motive in sending the crowd away... so they themselves could go into the villages for some food
5. A boy shows up in a moment with five loaves and two fish, but that was for him to eat
6. The disciples have a little compassion, a little food, not much imagination, and their faith isn't even mentioned
7. They had very little to offer this situation

C. Jesus Clearly Wants to Involve them... and Us

1. Jesus presents them with perhaps the greatest challenge of their lives to that point

Matthew 14:16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

2. What is Jesus' motive? It is central to His strategy for the entire history of the world from that point forward for His disciples to do this work... for the Kingdom of God to advance through the frail, weak, insufficient people that He has reclaimed from Satan's empire

3. He commits to US the ministry of reconciliation... He turns to US to challenge us with overwhelming needs in the world
4. Jesus STRONGLY involves His disciples in this feeding
 - a. His command: "You give them something to eat"
 - b. His command: "Bring me the five loaves and two fish"
 - c. His command (Luke's gospel): "Have them sit down on the grass in groups of fifty each"
 - d. His command to distribute the food as He is supernaturally creating it

Matthew 14:19 he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

- e. His command to collect the broken pieces in baskets so that nothing would be wasted
5. From the text He is calling out directly to you as well: Be involved in the advance of the Gospel
 - a. Care about the needs of the poor
 - b. Do your spiritual gift ministry
 - c. Share the gospel with lost people you meet, whomever God puts in your path or lays on your heart

BUT... at the point of involving them, He brings them to desperation

Matthew 14:16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

IV. The Supernatural Power of Jesus Satisfies Every Need

A. Using the Five Loaves and Two Fish

1. Why did Jesus use the little boy's lunch?
2. Sunday school lesson: "To teach us to share"!!!!!!!
3. I'd like to go a little deeper than that, though I'm certainly not against Christians sharing their lunch
4. Jesus clearly wants to use whatever we have to offer... to strengthen the connection between us and the people He wants us to love and to reach for the gospel

5. If we hand Him five loaves and two fish, and He says, "I don't need that... get it out of here!" Then does what He alone can do... create enough food for five thousand men out of thin air, we are one more step removed from this ministry
6. Jesus wants us closer and closer and closer to the needs of the lost... not further away
7. Clearly also there is a strong continuity between what they offered Him and what He gave the people
 - a. He didn't change the loaves and fish into steak and watermelon
 - b. The little boy, and Philip who first gave Jesus the loaves and fish could see a direct connection between their presentation to Jesus and the full bellies of the people
 - c. So also God can use your testimony to bring someone to Christ; or your personality; or your love of college basketball; or your knowledge of the Spanish language
 - d. So it was with Moses

Exodus 4:1-4 Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"² Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied.³ The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it.⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

- e. As we face the overwhelming needs around us... millions of lost people who have never heard the name of Christ in the 10-40 window of Africa and Asia... hundreds of thousands suffering from starvation or AIDS or extreme poverty, God is going to ask in effect

What's that in your hand? Watch what I can do with what you present to me!!

B. Thanking God, Breaking the Bread

Matthew 14:19 Taking the five loaves and the 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.

1. It's amazing to me how consistently Jesus thanks His heavenly Father for the food

2. In Mark's account of the feeding of the Four Thousand, He gave thanks first for the bread; then He took the fish and gave thanks for them
3. At the Last Supper, He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it; then took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to His disciples
4. After His resurrection, with the two disciples He met on the Road to Emmaus, it was when Jesus took bread and gave thanks that their eyes were opened and they recognized who He was
5. Jesus never lost sight of the fact that

James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father"

Also, Jesus posture of facing the impossible by looking upward to God, for whom NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE is the central lesson of the text for us in our ministries

C. Creation of Many Things Out of Nothing

1. How did He do it?
2. How did five thousand men, plus women and children, have their stomachs filled with five little loaves and two little fish
3. Naturalistic accounts of the miracle:

Dr. William Barclay, a brilliant Scottish Greek Scholar, believed that the boy's willingness to share his meal inspired the others to dig into their own lunch buckets and share their meals with those who had not brought any food. Jesus and his disciples also brought forth their meals and shared them with those who were present. It was not a miracle of multiplying loaves and fish, but a miracle of generosity

4. Utterly false!! Mark 6:36 clearly said the people had nothing to eat!
5. God created the heavens and the earth out of absolutely NOTHING!!!
6. The molecules of loaves and fish came from the creative power of God

D. Evidence of Total Satisfaction

1. Note that they all ate and were SATISFIED... that means they had eaten plenty, their stomachs were completely full
2. God KNOWS how to satisfy us
3. Notice also the great magnitude of the miracle: 5000 men PLUS women and children

- a. Maybe as many as 20,000 people or more
 - b. That's about how much the RBC Center in Raleigh holds for a hockey game; the RBC center has 18 concession stands that crank out huge quantities of hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, popcorn and all other kinds of foods for their 20,000
 - c. Jesus kept it simple... but it may have been one of the most satisfying feasts in human history
4. Christ thought of everything
- a. Consider the fish
 - b. They came completely cooked, ready to eat
 - c. How could God create a pre-cooked fish out of thin air??
 - d. The same way that Jesus, at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, created fine, perfectly aged wine, ready for the guests to partake
5. There was also tangible EVIDENCE of the miracle and of their full and complete satisfaction

Matthew 14:20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

- 6. This was evidence of the miracle like the stones the Jews carried from the Jordan river after they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land
 - a. So also these twelve baskets filled with broken pieces of their supernatural meal was tangible and visible evidence of the great miracle
 - b. NO they didn't share their lunch... God did a miracle!

E. Indication of Perfect and Eternal Satisfaction

- 1. The food they ate was just for a day... it tasted delicious, was fresh and high quality... but as soon as they chewed and swallowed it, their stomachs began to digest it... soon, it was gone entirely
- 2. The next day, John's gospel tells us, they found him again... Jesus exposed their true motive

John 6:26-27 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

3. God wants to give us more than a series of good meals and earthly pleasure... delicious tastes in our mouths, beautiful scenery filling our eyes, soft clothes caressing our flesh... His real motive is our eternal happiness in His presence

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

V. Central Lesson: Looking Upward, Not Outward or Inward

A. Jesus Gives Impossible Commands

1. Matthew 9: To a man completely paralyzed, ***“Rise and walk”***
2. John 3: To Nicodemus, ***“You must be born again.”***
3. Matthew 5:48: To all His disciples, in the Sermon on the Mount, ***“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”***
4. Revelation 4:2: To John on the Island of Patmos, after showing John a door standing open in heaven, ***“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this”***
5. Matthew 14:29: To Peter later in this chapter, while Jesus Himself was walking on the water, ***“Come (walk on water)”***
6. HERE: Matthew 14: ***“They don’t need to go away... you give them something to eat.”***
7. Matthew 28:19 ***“Make disciples of ALL NATIONS...”*** (not just preach to them... be successful! Make disciples!!)

B. Jesus Gives Power to Obey His Commands

1. In each one of these cases, it was only by the power of Jesus Christ alone that His disciples could fulfill His impossible command
2. Jesus commanded the paralyzed man, “Rise and walk” then gave him the supernatural power to obey
3. Jesus commanded Nicodemus “You must be born again” then He alone gives the power for precisely that
4. Jesus commands us “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”, then He by His power and by the Spirit of God will make it so when we die
5. In Revelation 4, Jesus commanded John, “Come up here (to heaven) and at once John was in the Spirit and passed through the doorway into heaven itself, and saw God sitting on a throne

6. Jesus commanded Peter to come out of the boat to Him, walking on the water, and then gave him supernatural miracle working power
7. Jesus said to the disciples, "They don't need to go away, you give them something to eat," then gave them the power to pass out food to 5000 men plus women and children
8. AND Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He has commanded us... then sends the power by the Holy Spirit for us to accomplish that infinite task

C. Jesus' Motive: To Test Us and to Train Us

1. Jesus' impossible commands put us in a totally dependent position
2. We are in a box, with no windows and no doors, but a clear view upward to heaven
3. He has purposely put us in an impossible position to test us and to train us
4. This is precisely what it says in John's account of this miracle:

John 6:5-7 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

5. Why does Jesus want to test us? To strip us of our constant habit of looking to ourselves for the resources to meet the needs that face us

D. Looking Upward, Not Outward or Inward

1. Temptation is always to look first OUTWARD at the trials and adverse circumstances (like Peter walking on the water, looking at the wind and the waves), and keep staring at those outward obstacles until they saturate your mind
2. Second, to look INWARD and see if we have the resources to meet the trials and adverse circumstances
 - a. If we DO HAVE the resources to meet the trials and adverse circumstances, we tend to be prideful and boast in ourselves
 - b. If we DO NOT HAVE the resources to meet the trials, we tend to DESPAIR, become depressed, despondent

c. AMAZINGLY both reactions are two sides of the exact same coin: self-reliance

Prime example of this is the Jews about to enter the Promised Land: spies came back and frightened the people with reports about the military power of the Canaanites and the huge walled cities they would have to conquer...

Numbers 13:32-33 The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.

through unbelief they immediately looked OUTWARD at the obstacles and then INWARD at their own resources; they came up short and immediately despaired

Numbers 14:1-4 That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

God responded in anger, saying that not one of them would enter the Promised Land because they had refused to trust the Lord after all He'd done for them

Then they switched their minds, looked inward again, and this time became arrogant, thinking they now DID have the resources to conquer the Promised Land:

Deuteronomy 1:41-44 So every one of you put on his weapons, thinking it easy to go up into the hill country. ⁴² But the LORD said to me, "Tell them, 'Do not go up and fight, because I will not be with you. You will be defeated by your enemies.'" ⁴³ So I told you, but you would not listen. You rebelled against the LORD's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country. ⁴⁴ The Amorites who lived in those hills came out against you; they chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Hormah.

The Israelites looked OUTWARD at the obstacles, looked INWARD assessing their abilities to meet the obstacles, then alternated between DESPAIR and ARROGANCE

3. God wants us to IMITATE CHRIST, who took the loaves and fishes and looked UPWARD to God in thanks for what we have and trust for what we need

Matthew 14:19 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.

VI. Application

A. Meditate on the Greatness of Jesus' Compassion

1. Understand that He deeply cares for each one of your needs
2. Understand that He feels whatever pain and suffering you are going through
3. As you're going through a great trial, or a small one, know that Christ is moved deeply within yourself for your situation

B. Imitate Christ's Compassion

1. Christ had great personal needs after the death of John the Baptist
2. BUT he put the needs of other above His own
3. He didn't get selfish as though His personal suffering trumped everyone else's
4. Let's not be selfish, self-focused, self-centered: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen"
5. It's easy for us to give ourselves permission to close off from the needs of the world around us because we're hurting
6. Sometimes it's our own suffering that can make us even more compassionate to the needs

C. Trust God to Meet Your Needs

1. Jesus can do this kind of thing ANYTIME HE CHOOSES
2. John said

Matthew 3:9 I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

3. If God can make children out of stones, He can feed, clothe, and care for our needs
4. So, FIGHT ANXIETY... fight against worrying about your needs

D. Trust God to Display Supernatural Power

1. God has given us two impossible commands
2. They relate to the two infinite journeys

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations

3. We can do NEITHER without His supernatural assistance
4. What are you trusting God for that only HE can do??
5. Let's talk about feeding the hungry today... meeting the needs of the poor

Mark 14:7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.

Isaiah 58:6-8 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

There are many Christian organizations who are ministering to the poor, needy of the world in very Biblical ways... like Jesus, keeping the priority structure in place: 1) teaching them the gospel, 2) Healing the sick; 3) Feeding the hungry. Agencies like Samaritan's Purse, Compassion International, World Vision and others have creative ways to minister

Closer to home, there are overwhelming needs right near our church in North East Central Durham. Perhaps there is not starvation, but there are spiritual, relational and material needs that will quickly overwhelm us and make us feel our inadequacy. **THAT'S A GOOD THING!!** It'll cause us to look upward to Christ and ask for help

We need to feel the weight of Christ's statement still: **They don't need to go away; you give them something to eat!!**

It'll quickly cause us to cry to Him to do something supernatural through us... to the poor right nearby us in Durham, to the AIDS orphans in Africa, to disaster victims wherever the next disaster strikes.

E. Learn to Look UPWARD in Prayer Not Outward at Circumstances and Inward at Your resources

1. That leads to arrogance or despair
2. Trials should lead us to God

F. Stand in Awe of Christ

1. This miracle was designed to beguile us with the greatness of Christ's power
2. Trust Him more