

March 11, 2018

“The Love of Christ Is More”
Matthew 15:29-39

FCF: The struggle in loving “the other”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) There is more to the love of Christ than we know.
(magnet) And we must let that reality expand our own love.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

In his book, The Mission of God, Christopher Wright says ([READ quote](#)), “To love your neighbor as yourself is not just the second great commandment in the law; it is the essential implication of our common createdness.” But who is my neighbor? That’s the question put to Jesus that led to the telling of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In a culture marked by deep divisions, Jesus made clear that our neighbor is the person in need - no matter who they are.

Or how hard they are to love. Love is the issue. How can we best love our neighbor? The Left says by big government and social reform. The Right says by big business and economic growth. Both of these fall short. But the Gospel brings another and far better answer.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 15:29-39](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

When there’s more to be seen, it’s good to be able to see it. Think of hidden enemies. Or better yet, of exploration and scientific discovery. The Hubble Telescope, the best known of the telescopes in orbit, was deployed by the Space Shuttle *Discovery* in 1990. Once needed repairs and adjustments were made, Hubble began to capture remarkable images - moons, planets, stars, other systems and whole galaxies we didn’t know were there. This had an enormous impact on astronomy and astrophysics. Again, when there’s more to be seen, it’s good to be able to see it.

The same is true of Jesus - His nature, character, and, most importantly, His love. There is so much that obscures, hides, distorts, and shrinks our view of Him and His love. There is so much more to the love of Christ than we know. So much more. And we must let that reality expand our own love. And Jesus’ great love burns bright in this series of miracles. To begin to understand that, we’re going to consider three things together. First, the fact of such miracles. Second, the repetition of such miracles. And then, third, the lesson of these particular miracles.

I. THE FACT OF SUCH MIRACLES

We need to begin by clearing the ground so as to dispel any unnecessary confusion. So we’ll start by looking at just the mere fact of such miracles. That is, the possibility and purpose.

A) The Possibility

Are miracles even reasonable? Can we trust accounts of such things?

1. The assumptions brought to the text

The assumptions we bring to the text drive how we hear it. Some, because of a naturalistic view of the universe, say such things cannot happen. Therefore, these things did not happen. And, if a book says such things did happen, then its authors were at best deluded and perhaps even lying.

2. An assessment of the assumptions

Here's a fair assessment of such assumptions by J. I. Packer in Concise Theology ([READ quote](#)):

The rejection of miracles by yesterday's scientists sprang not from science but from the dogma of a universe of absolute uniformity that scientists brought to their scientific work. There is nothing irrational about believing that God who made the world can still intrude creatively into it. Christians should recognize that it is not faith in the biblical miracles, and in God's ability to work miracles today should he so wish, but doubt about these things, that is unreasonable.

We should not rule such things out. That's simply too precarious a position to take.

B) Their Purpose

So that's the possibility of miracles. But what of their purpose? What are they for?

1. An extraordinary event

The Bible speaks of miracles as extraordinary events. As wonders - heightening an awareness of God's presence and power. As mighty works - things that cannot be simply explained away.

2. A significant event

Miracles are extraordinary events. And significant events. That is, they are signs. They point to something and bear a message - the authority and credibility of the messenger, a demonstration of God's power and His concern for His people. And, especially in the case of Jesus' miracles, a breaking in of His kingdom and reign with something of a foretaste of what is yet to come.

That's the fact of the miracles - their possibility and purpose. We need to keep it in mind.

II. THE REPETITION OF SUCH MIRACLES

Which then brings us to the repetition of such miracles - especially here in Matthew 15.

A) Not Pointless

There's a temptation to read this text and wonder if it's somewhat pointless.

1. Reasonable question

Let me explain. ([READ Matthew 15:29-31](#)) Now, given what we've already said about the fact of miracles, this is not terribly surprising. It's obviously unusual but not out of place. It fits the pattern of what we've seen so far. Where Jesus goes, the people and their needs tend to follow.

But then we keep reading ([READ Matthew 15:32-39](#)). This can raise some questions. "Didn't we just see this in chapter 14? Yes, it was 5,000 there and 4,000 here. But what's the point? Not to sound jaded or cynical, but this seems somewhat anticlimactic." It's a reasonable question.

2. Unreasonable answer

Sadly, that reasonable question often receives an unreasonable answer. "There is no point. Matthew was confused. There were two different accounts of the same event. Matthew heard two versions and spliced them in. It's proof the Gospels are unreliable and can't be trusted."

B) But Purposeful

Wrong answer. This account is anything but pointless. It is sharply purposeful.

1. Better answer

The better answer is that this is not two accounts of the same event but two separate accounts of two separate but similar events. And each has their own distinct, notable, and vital differences.

2. Larger lesson

Comparing the details, we see key differences in crowd sizes, the number of loaves, the amounts leftover. Earlier, mention is made of grass on the ground, implying springtime. Here, it's just the ground, implying summer. Then there's the location. Before, it was in Jewish territory. Now it's in Gentile territory - the Decapolis, an area on the SE shore of the Sea of Galilee. Which actually comes out in the response (**READ Matthew 15:31b**). This was in the land of Gentiles.

Which is really important for us to see. We have two different events and two different lessons. The lesson of the feeding of the 5,000 was our absolute dependency upon the Lord. And the 4,000? His compassion for peoples of all nations, beyond just Israel (**READ Matthew 15:32a**).

As we read this text, we need to keep in mind both the fact of such miracles and their repetition. Now, with that, with the clearing of the ground, we can dive into the implications.

III. THE LESSON OF THESE MIRACLES

As I said earlier, there is more to the love of Christ than we know. And we need to let that reality expand our own love. That is, we need to let His love of "the other" shape our own love of the other. Think with me about what we see - how wide, how free, and how costly this is.

A) His Love Is Wide

His love is wide - broader and far beyond the confines of our expectations or experience.

1. Our love - narrow

Our love is narrow. It's restricted to people who are like us and who like us. It's confined to kinship, what we have in common - color, culture, class, heritage, history. Our love is narrow.

2. His love - wide

But Christ's love is wide. The invitation goes out to all. It is not bound by the barriers to which we are accustomed and for which we settle. That's the point of Psalm 87 and Revelation 7.

Illustration:

Think back with me to the Winter Olympics. Did you know that the first such winter games were in Paris in 1924? Sixteen nations participated. Just sixteen. Now in 2018, there were ninety-two. That's a picture of the church, representing all nations, all races and peoples.

B) His Love Is Free

His love is wide, wider than we think. And it is free, freer than we dare to imagine.

1. Our love - conditional

Our love is so conditional. We demand others think, speak, act, vote in a set way. "Don't drink, smoke, chew, or go with girls who do." That's part of the legalism issue from a few weeks ago.

2. His love - unconditional

Our love is so conditional. But His is unconditional. Yes, there is an exclusiveness to it. There is no other way to be saved but through Christ. We have to come to Him as king. But there is a glorious inclusiveness too. Unlike any other religion, it matters not what we do. Any can come.

C) *His Love Is Costly*

His love is wide. It is free. And it is costly. It is free to us but never to Him.

1. Our love - cheap

Our love is cheap. We are unwilling to put ourselves out, to yield our rights, to give up our claims to what we think we own. C. S. Lewis hit this in The Screwtape Letters ([READ quote](#)):

We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun - the finely graded differences that run from "my boots" through "my dog", "my servant", "my wife", "my father", "my master" and "my country", to "my God". They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of "my boots," the "my" of ownership.

Even in the nursery a child can be taught to mean by "my Teddy-bear" not the old imagined recipient of affection to whom it stands in a special relation (for that is what the Enemy will teach them to mean if we are not careful) but "the bear I can pull to pieces if I like." And at the other end of the scale, we have taught men to say "My God" in a sense not really very different from "My boots", meaning "The God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services and whom I exploit from the pulpit - the God I have done a corner in." And all the time the joke is that the word "Mine" in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human being about anything. In the long run either Our Father or the Enemy will say "Mine" of each thing that exists, and especially of each man. They will find out in the end, never fear, to whom their time, their souls, and their bodies really belong - certainly not to them, whatever happens.

2. His love - costly

Our love is cheap. But the love of Christ is costly. We say, "How? He just touched and healed. He just spoke and provided." True. But remember that those were signs of His kingdom. And in order to bring us into that kingdom, He had to lay everything down. Including Himself.

([READ 2 Corinthians 8:9](#)) My friends, if you are a Christian, you are not a beggar on the street. You are a child of the king with all the resources of His realm. We have no need to hold back. Think with me. Given what He has done, how could we? Given what is ours, why would we?

There is more to the love of Christ than we know. We must let that expand our own.

CONCLUSION:

What would this look like? Examples are helpful. You know the words ([READ stanza](#)):

Amazing Grace (How sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see.

John Newton was born in 1725. He was nurtured by his mother until her death when he was seven. By age eleven, he was sailing with his father, a merchant marine captain. Newton's career was marked by un-discipline and desertion. He entered the slave trade and became the captain of a slave ship. But in 1747, in the midst of a terrible storm, he gave his life to Christ. Or began to. It took time for him to see the evils of his trade. He left it in 1755, began to wrestle with his calling and purpose, yielded his gifts to the Lord, and became a pastor in 1764. It was like a second life. Newton gave himself to the care of the people in his parish; to preaching, counseling, writing, composing hymns; and to mentoring younger pastors and key figures in the abolitionist movement - including a certain William Wilberforce. This truly was a conversion.

At age 82, Newton said ([READ quote](#)), "Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." To experience the love of Christ is to give your life to expressing it. The shape it takes will be different. We will each serve at our own posts. But that love will have the same effect - wide, free, and costly. There is more to the love of Christ than we know. So much more. We must let that expand our own love.

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