

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 15:29-39

“He Had Compassion on Them”

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Matthew 15:29-39

Verse 29

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

- After a brief visit to the non-Jewish region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus returned to the area around the Sea of Galilee.
- Jesus sat down on a hillside near the sea. Sitting was the position that a rabbi would assume when he was prepared to teach.

Verse 30

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet.

- Jesus' reputation in the region caused people to come to Him. They knew that He had the power to heal the sick, and so they brought them to Him in hopes of healing.
- There is no indication that anyone told Jesus what they wanted. They just laid the sick on the ground before Him, apparently in the front row(s) of the crowd

Verse 31

The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

- Jesus healed those who were brought to Him.
- Even though the crowd came hoping for healing, they were amazed by what they saw.
- Their reaction to the miracle of healing which they witnessed was praise to God, not to Jesus. This is appropriate.

Verse 32

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people, they have already been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

- Jesus is concerned about the well being of the people in the crowd. This is the meaning of “compassion.” They simply concern Him.
- In this case, His compassion is aroused by their hunger. They have been with Him three days, and whatever they may have brought with them is exhausted. They now have nothing left to eat.
- Jesus is aware that they need to get food, but concerned that if He dismisses them without feeding them, some of them will not be able to withstand the journey home or to a place where they can get food.
- That He brings this concern to the attention of His disciples indicates that
 1. He wants them to be aware of the condition of the people.
 2. That He wants them to know of His concern for the people.
 3. That He expects them to share His concern and do something about the situation.
- Compassion that does not lead to action is shallow and not real. It is something less than compassion.

Verse 33

His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

- The disciples know that Jesus expects them to act. However, they cannot see a solution to the problem. The circumstances they face make it impossible to address the need they see.
- It is important to remember what the disciples have witnessed in their journey with Jesus. They have seen him calm the storm, walk on water, heal the sick, and raise the dead. They have witnessed him feed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21). But somehow they have still not gotten the point. They think that the solution rests in them, their abilities, their resources, instead of in Jesus. Perhaps that is why this story is so like the events described in Matthew 14. Jesus wants to repeat the event hoping that those closest to Him will get the point, at last. They cannot meet the needs of the crowd, but He can!

Verse 34

“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

- Is it possible that Jesus sighed because of their unbelief when he asked this question?
- Their answer is very like that given in Matthew 14:17, “We have ONLY five loaves of bread and two fish.” However, the answer also tells us plainly that the event in Matthew 14 differs from this one. There, they had only five loaves of bread, now they have seven. Then they had only two fish, now they have several fish even if they are all small.
- What is amazing is that the disciples seem to have forgotten what happened just a little while before. Or could it be that they recognize their own limitation and so are afraid to act in faith for fear that Jesus will leave them on their own? Could it be that they are not sure they can depend upon the faithfulness of God?

Verse 35

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.

- Jesus, himself, takes charge. He tells the people in the crowd what to do Himself without the aid of His disciples.

Verse 36

Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.

- Though the seven loaves and the few fish were woefully inadequate to the task, Jesus gave thanks for them before doing anything else with them. Gratitude for the gifts we have received from the hand of God is always the place where miracles begin.
- Jesus then involved His disciples in the task. He gave to them and they gave to the crowd. Despite their reluctance and their lack of faith, Jesus uses them in His plan to bless others.

Verse 37

They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

- All of the people not only ate, but ate until they had enough, and there were seven basketfuls of leftovers.

Verse 38

The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.

- The actual number of people fed was in the 8,000 range.

Verse 39

After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

- Jesus left the place and went to the region from which Mary Magdalene came.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *He Had Compassion on Them*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)