

Matthew 14:13-21: “Bring Your Nothing” (Feeding the 5,000)

[paralleled with John 6]

INTRO:

Good morning!

So excited to be here studying God’s Word with you this morning. We’ll be studying from Matthew 14, with a little bit of a parallel from the book of John.

If you need a Bible, please just motion to one of our ushers as they come around and we’ll make sure you get one this morning.

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One Sunday, a Sunday-School teacher (in an effort to teach her class on the importance of giving) asked her 8-year old class if they would be willing to give a million dollars to their church for God to use.

In an eager agreeance, they all shouted, “Yes, of course!”

The teacher asked, “Would you give \$1,000?”

“Oh, yes – if we had \$1,000, we would definitely give it to God!”

“How about \$100,” she asked?

They all agreed they would give \$100 if they had it.

She then asked, “How about giving just ONE dollar to God?”

Everyone agreed, except for little Timmy.

“Timmy,” she said, as she noticed him clutching his pocket tightly... “Why didn’t you agree this time?”

Timmy stammered, “Well... because I actually HAVE a dollar.”

Although, little Timmy wanted to hang on to all he had – even such a small amount – I believe many of us have the same reaction when it comes to allowing God to do something big.

Money aside, think about all that you have to offer God this morning.

When we inventory what WE have to offer, we quickly come up in short supply! But inventory what GOD can do – even in our lack – the possibilities become endless.

Timmy had a little – but he wanted to hang on to what little bit he had!

Today’s passage reveals just what God can do with even the smallest amount we think we may have to offer.

Today’s message is titled, “**Bring Your Nothing.**”

It’s a familiar passage. But, in Matthew chapter 14, we read an account of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with the loaves and the fish.

Other than the resurrection of Jesus, this is the only miracle mentioned in **ALL FOUR** gospels. This must have been a pretty important event, don’t you think?

Let’s dig into it this morning and open in prayer.

PRAYER

Matthew 14:13:

¹³ When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself.

When Jesus heard *what?* Just before verse 13, He learns of the death of His beloved cousin, John the Baptist. Herod, in an effort to please the daughter of his wife that he stole from his brother, hastily agrees to behead John the Baptist. In verse 12, his disciples “came and took away” John’s body and buried it. They then went and told Jesus of the news.

And, in verse 13, **“When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself.”**

John was very beloved by Jesus, and it’s no surprise that we see Jesus trying to get alone to mourn and grieve the great loss of His friend.

John was the first prophet that God had called in the land in 400 years (dating all the way back to Malachi). John’s birth was miraculous, in that he was born of parents who were past child-bearing years, and yet his birth was foretold over 700 years prior.

In Isaiah 40:3: **“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God...’”**

His father, Zacharias, prophesied of John: **“‘And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’”** (Luke 1:76-79).

What an honor to have this prophesied over and said of you, I would imagine. John the Baptist paved the way for the coming Messiah – Jesus – Who has been promised to God’s people for many years.

My point is – John played a huge role in turning hearts back to God – and he even baptized Jesus.

Jesus had this to say of John in Luke 7:28: **“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.”**

Jesus tells us that there was no greater prophet than His beloved cousin and friend.

John spent his life pointing people to Jesus, and – finally – Jesus was here! John stood up to Herod and it cost him his life.

When Jesus heard of the tragic death of John, you can see why He would be inclined to get alone and spend some time by Himself.

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Verse 13 continues:

But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

We're also told in another gospel that Jesus spent the day teaching them, along with healing their sick and ministering to them.

A very good friend of mine recently said – and I'm paraphrasing – *“Our heart is a vital part of our body... yet – nothing but a muscle, until someone you cherish is taken away from you, or something you do deprives you of something very dear to you. It then becomes a sensory overload and is directly attached to guilt, love, hate, sorrow, as if it were a thinking part of your body.”*

When Jesus looked upon His children, He was **MOVED** with **COMPASSION** for them. He saw a great need, and He decided to meet that need.

Jesus was fully God, yet fully human. And in a time where Jesus, as a human, would have liked to be alone to process His thoughts... to pray, to cry, to mourn.... His heart was moved toward those who were also in need.

Moved with compassion: “splanchnizomai” = **“to have the bowels yearn.”** The bowels (at this time) were believed to be the origins of the feelings of love and pity. It's like saying today, “His heart was moved with compassion, with love, with pity – for these people.” You could also say, “His heart **YEARNED**” for these people. He longed for them. He desired to be near them and with them. He was moved with compassion for the needs of His children.

I've got to admit. If this were me, I think I would have responded differently. Human nature usually compels me to look inward, rather than outward, in times of grief. And there's no feeling like trying to get alone to process something so tragic and heavy, only to be bombarded by those around you who are

carrying on with their own demands. I think, one of the hardest parts about grief, is that, although your life has come to a crippling halt, life is still going on for others around you. Others are happy. Others are carrying on. Others are still in need, too.

There's an old saying that says, "Having kids is like being pecked to death by chickens." Any mother knows this feeling all too well. Sometimes, you just need that "alone time" to process.

I often have to remind myself to have compassion on those around me. Because others have needs, too!

Yes, I'm a pastor, but I'm also a man. I have tendencies to be impatient with people, rather than be compassionate towards them. I find myself praying often, "Lord, help me to love this person the way that YOU love them." "Not that way that "I" want to love them... but the way that YOU love them."

I have been learning this lesson with my own children. Each of my kids need love in different ways.

And, likewise, different PEOPLE need to be loved differently.

Some people are just EASIER to love than others. And some people are VERY hard to love. But loving them should never be *optional*. Loving others is my commandment from God.

Jesus commanded in **John 13:34-35, "...that you LOVE one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Others will know My love for *Jesus* by seeing my love for *THEM*.

Again, love should never be *optional*. God has given us a commandment that we should love one another, and let our love be known. Love is a fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5, and Jesus tells us that people will see our fruit – and that they will know that we are His disciples by our love.

Maybe you find it hard to love others. Maybe your spouse could use a little reassurance today. Maybe your children need to know that you love them. Or, maybe those around you in your everyday life aren't too sure that you're a loving person. Loving others is hard for some people.

But I would encourage you to pray about that. Pray that God will give you the love for others that HE has for them. Pray for compassion on others. Pray that God will soften your heart towards those He has placed in your life.

Jesus could have "shooed" the crowd away. He could have claimed that He needed some personal "alone" time. He could have said, "Not now."

Yet, He was **MOVED** with compassion for them. His heart was so stirred that He yearned to be with them.

Jesus has never once shooed me away in my time of need, and I am so thankful.

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Verse 15:

¹⁵ When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

One of the great things I love about this passage is the way Jesus handled this miracle.

We know that God can do whatever He wants. If our God is a God who can raise His Son from the dead, we know there is nothing impossible for Him.

We know and believe He can multiply a small amount of food to feed thousands of people. He could waive His mighty hand, snap a finger, speak it into existence, think it into motion... whatever He wanted to do. But, notice how Jesus chose to set the scene to perform this miracle: it was through the work of His disciples.

Jesus wanted His followers to partake in the act of the work of His hand. He wanted them to **SHARE** in the experience of what He was doing. Jesus challenged both the compassion and the faith of His followers. And, likewise, I believe God wants to challenge our faith, but also allow us to partake in the work of His mighty hand.

God can do anything He wants – at any point! But, how powerful for our faith when we can share in the awesome work of Jesus Christ – both in our own lives, **AND** in the life of others.

¹⁷ And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

This is one of my favorite words in the Bible: “**ONLY**”.

We’re told in John’s account (6:9) that Andrew asks, **“What are five loaves and two fish among so many?”** Yet, Andrew is also the one who finds the young lad with this small amount of food and he brings this boy to Jesus. Andrew is always bringing people to Jesus.

In John’s account, we also see Jesus asking Philip where they should get bread to eat. We read in John 1 that Philip was from Bethsaida, which is where they were (John 1:44), so it’s possible Jesus may have asked Philip where to buy bread because Philip might know of a good place. We’re also told that Jesus knew what He would do already before asking Philip this question, but He asked him to test him.

Philip’s response?

John 6:7 records Philip reply as, **“Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”**

***Paraphrase:** “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.”*

Look at what Philip does: Philip calculated the cost. He did the math.

He figured out what it would take to feed all these people by HUMAN-effort, and then quickly worked up the monetary value required to make it happen.

Philip approached the situation much like we might approach our everyday problems; he saw the problem as if the solution depended on his own work.

It’s in these times that we ask ourselves, “What can ‘I’ do to make this work? How can ‘I’ solve this problem?” With God, the answer should always be, “Nothing.”

You will never have enough, which is a scary thing. But that’s the beauty of it.

God says, **“My GRACE is sufficient for you. MY strength is made perfect in [your] weakness.” (2 Corinthians 2:9)**

If Philip would have REALLY counted the cost, he would have said, “We HAVE nothing and there IS nothing we can do – OUTSIDE of God’s help.”

John’s gospel also records that the loaves were barley loaves.

According to 2 Kings 7:1 and Revelation 6:6, barley was valued very low, much lower than wheat – and mostly used to feed animals.

Therefore, barley loaves were typically the loaves of the poor. It was a staple in their daily diet. Seeing the “young lad” present the barley loaves tells us not only how poor the young boy was, but also of what little he had to spare. These five loaves and two fish would have gone a long way in feeding his poor family.

We often think of the two, small fish (or, I do, at least) as being medium-sized, probably at best.

3 of the 4 gospels describe them simply as “fish,” but John uses a different word to describe them. He describes them as, “opsarion,” meaning, “a relish to other food,” “salted and dried as a condiment.” In other words – these “small fish” were merely a garnish to dip the bread in!

Get the picture here: the loaves and fish were just an embellished appetizer from Provino’s.

I can imagine the look on the disciples’ faces when they handed the food to Jesus: “*Boy, Jesus... You’ve sure got Your work cut out for you!*”

This was an impossible task by most standards! And Jesus was about to surprise them all ☺.

Here’s a top 10 list for you this morning – of tasks that are nearly impossible:

Top 10 List of Nearly Impossible Tasks:

- 10) Putting a dollar in the vending machine.
- 9) Reducing your speed to an acceptable speed limit BEFORE the blue lights turn on.
- 8) Untangling a pair of headphones.
- 7) Getting the price tag sticker off without residue.
- 6) A husband remembering his anniversary.
- 5) A husband remembering to get his wife an anniversary gift.
- 4) Inserting a USB stick properly on the first attempt.
- 3) Canceling your gym membership.
- 2) Winning Super Bowl 51 on February 5, 2017, in the first Super Bowl to ever have a winner declared after overtime in what would become known as the “largest comeback in Super Bowl history.” (No, I’m not bitter. I’m ANGRY ☺.)

And the number 1 nearly impossible task:

- 1) Feeding thousands of people with a glorified appetizer from Provino’s.

But with God, nothing is impossible. In the times of what seems impossible, we need to learn to rely on God, and trust Him to do great, big things.

So, if the boy didn't have much to give, what DID he give?

Everything.

May the heart of this young boy's sacrifice be the heart of us today. NEVER believe that you have "nothing" to give to Jesus.

What do I have to bring? NOTHING.

But, what have I to give?? EVERYTHING.

**Jesus can do more with my "nothing" than I could ever do with a lifetime of my "everything"!
(MH)**

Our "nothingness" is just that – NOTHING! Until we hand it over to God, and let God use it.

We cannot let our insecurities stop us from believing that we can be used by God. Likewise, we should never let them drive us into a legalistic lifestyle of constantly trying to earn the feeling that we have importance. God shows no partiality among His children. We don't need to try to become the favorite. We need to take the pressure off of ourselves... and allow God to use our circumstances for something greater than we can ever imagine.

With what little money I have, I will use it for God!

With the time I have been given, I will use it for God!

With the influence I have with those around me, I will use it for God!

With WHATEVER it is that God has given me and allowed me to be a steward of... I – will – use – it – to the glory of God, my Father, who is my Sustainer and the Bread of LIFE.

If God can use the ordinary things in my life to do extraordinary things, certainly He can use ordinary people like you and me to do extraordinary things for His kingdom.

Don't buy into the lie that your resources are too little, or that you are too insignificant, to serve God.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 says, ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

If God can use a fool like me, you don't have anything to worry about. ☺

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Our problems are never too big for God. I think we KNOW that, as believers... but sometimes I think we DOUBT that God will *want* to meet our need.

We feel our need is too small, or our problem is too big. But, let me remind you of something: God cares. God cares about your worries; He cares about your time; He cares about your finances; because He – cares – about – YOU!

And God wants to meet your need!

What does Philippians 4:19 tell us? **“And my God shall supply ALL your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”**

There's nothing WE can do, but that's what I love about it.

My “nothingness” leaves so much room for God.

Verse 18:

¹⁸ He said, “Bring them here to Me.”

Look at the response of Jesus to the disciples' problem: “Give it to Me.” God's response to you and I is the same:

- When you say, “My marriage is failing.” God says, “Give it to Me.”
- I can't take this anymore. “Give it to Me.”

- I am drowning in debt; I can't keep up. "Give it to Me."
- My job is overwhelming. "Give it to Me."
- This sin is crippling me. "Give it to Me."

Jesus's response to our problems? **"Bring them here – to ME."**

God wants your successes, He wants your failures --- He wants your "everything" – AND He wants your "nothing".

Bring these things – to Jesus.

What can I give to God? What change can I make? What good can I do?

Whatever you have that seems insignificant, God is saying to you this morning, "Give that to Me."

Who knows what He might do, and what He might accomplish if we live by these words?

¹⁹ Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.

"When He had given thanks..." - Even with practically nothing to work with, Jesus still taught us the importance of giving thanks to God for what we DO have.

- When you don't have enough money to pay your next bill: Give God thanks for the opportunity to trust Him even more for the ways He wants to supply.
- The next time you feel like your job isn't going anywhere: Give God thanks that you even have a job.
- When there's tension within a family (a spouse, parent, or child, whoever), give God thanks for the family He's given you... and hit your knees in prayer for your loved ones.

Jesus didn't seize this opportunity to complain about the circumstance. He seized it to be an EXAMPLE, when things seemed impossible.

When Jesus blessed and broke the bread for His disciples, I think He was giving us a foreshadowing picture of the work He would do on the Cross. As He hung there, thinking of us, His body was broken. He was grieved beyond measure, and – yet – He was still moved with compassion for us, His children, even until the point of death. He was broken so that we would be made whole.

That’s what the compassion of Jesus did – it saved my soul!

No one likes to be broken. But it’s in the brokenness – that the light shines through.

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Looking back on verse 19, it says that He broke the loaves and gave them to His disciples... then, they – in turn – gave to the multitudes.

Here’s a question for you: At what point in this miracle do you think the bread was multiplied?

The Scripture doesn’t say, so it’s not a trick question. But, the question is: Did the bread multiply as Jesus broke it and distributed it to His disciples? Or was it multiplied as the disciples handed it out?

I find this very interesting to think about.

We gather from the four accounts that Jesus told His disciples to seat the masses in groups of 50 and 100.

Jesus then distributed to a group of twelve; the twelve distributed to groups of 50 or 100, and in the end, a multitude of thousands were reached and blessed.

We all know God is very capable of doing this work all by Himself. But it’s as if He says to us, even today, “I want YOU to partake in My work among the nations. In your own household. With your neighbors. With your friends. With complete strangers.”

When God created in Genesis 1, He told His creation to “be fruitful and MULTIPLY.” As Christians, we are to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit – and multiply the work of Jesus to those around us.

The idea here is we should never sit back in the backseat ordering God around like our chauffer. God is not an “Uber” kind of God. God may put us to be in the driver’s seat, but He also becomes our GPS. Our Christian walk should never be a spectator’s sport.

And, no doubt, the disciples had to trust Jesus every step of the way as they distributed the food to the people. At any point, they must have known they could be reaching into an empty basket. But the FAITH of the disciples was enough to keep the miracle coming.

They could only *give* what they first had *received*.

And I believe God still uses people today in the same manner. The miracle in this passage was more than just multiplying food; it was about multiplying their FAITH.

²⁰ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. ²¹ Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, *besides* women and children.

John says they ate as much as they wanted. Here, we read, ALL of them ate... and ALL of them were FILLED.

When this crowd ate, they ate like kings and queens. They ate so much their bellies were hanging over their thick belts as they loosened them to get more air into their restricted lungs!

Eating and drinking in the Old Testament was a sign of prosperity.

And, with Jesus, the poor are now made rich. Not by food, or by money, or by possessions... but by the work of Jesus in their life.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, **“... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more ABUNDANTLY.”**

Can you imagine what this must have felt like for the young boy? He gave all he had (a great value to him, nonetheless), and the outcome was more than what he started with! He donated his lunch pail of Subway and ended up with a big ole BUFFET. And here's the kicker: with NO expectations in return. He just gave.

Like the parable of the talents, I believe God will bless us when we give to Him, even what we feel may be inadequate.

You don't have to feel like YOU'RE enough. You just have to know that HE is enough. (MH)

Matthew notes that the disciples took up TWELVE baskets full of fragments that remained.

Notice that – *twelve* disciples – take up – *twelve* baskets of leftovers.

John's version records Jesus TELLING the disciples to **"Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."** (John 6:12)

What a wonderful thing to hear Jesus say. Gather all that remains. Lose nothing.

Right before Jenny and I were expecting Lucas, our firstborn, my mom came over and cooked up her world-famous spaghetti! She makes it from scratch, spends hours letting it simmer, and she even makes some wonderful toasted bread to go along with it. It is the treasured meal among our family gatherings.

Well, on this particular Saturday night, we sat down to enjoy this scrumptious meal after smelling it all afternoon. Right towards the end of the meal, I had about half a piece of bread left to finish eating.

And, I've got to tell you – I – LOVE – BREAD! Oprah thinks SHE loves bread... you guys remember that commercial from a few years ago? Oprah – LOVES – BREAD... But not more than me, Oprah!

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And, in the middle of a story I was telling, Jenny RUDELY interrupted me to announce that her water just broke. After realizing what she had just said, I knew it was time! I don't even think we had packed our bags yet, or even had a solid plan because he wasn't even due for another few days.

So? What do I do? I panicked! But, never fear – I am a soon-to-be-Dad, I collect myself – I pull it together – I've got a plan...

So, I JUMP up, and I knew right then and there what I needed to do.

First things first... I HAD to finish my bread.

I shoved that bread in my mouth and started chewing as fast as I could, but to no avail. Because after about a minute, I realized I was too excited and nervous, so I spat the bread out and moved on.

I assure you – I was determined not to waste any part of that meal.

But - at the end of this particular scene, we see the disciples gathering up the fragments from the masses. Notice the words, there were “5,000 men - *besides* women and children.” Some believe this could have been possibly 15,000-20,000 people who were fed with a measly sardine sandwich. An impossible task, nonetheless.

I love the fact that Jesus instructed His disciples to “gather up the fragments that remained... so that nothing was lost.”

You know what this tells me? Jesus cares for what has been lost!

In the beginning of this passage, we see just how much God cares for His people!

Jesus yearned within His heart to be close to His people.

God so yearned to be with His children that He came down as a Man just to BE with us – and to gather what was lost!

He came FOR the lost. He came for you and me.

Luke 19:10 tells us, “...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

On the night before His death, Jesus (once again) broke bread with His disciples and told them, “This is My body, which is broken for YOU.”

Jesus gathers up what we have deemed as “lost”. He is there in the breaking, just as He is there in the restoration.

And, I believe – in our times of brokenness – Jesus is there to gather the pieces. He is there – to collect the loss.

It goes to show that it doesn't matter how insignificant we may feel, how little we think we have to offer, or how broken we may become... when we give all we are – and all we have – to Jesus, there is no limit to what He can do!

God is a God who creates out of nothing – He's been doing it since the beginning of creation!

Taking the emptiness and filling it up.

Taking the “nothing,” and making it “everything.”

There is no lack He cannot supply. There is no hole He cannot fill. There is no work He cannot do – when we give our “all” to Jesus.

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CLOSING PRAYER

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PRAYER COUNSELORS →

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