

Matthew 14.1-21 | a satisfying inconvenience

INTRO | Matthew Book 3

This week we are returning to our series in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector. The Jews considered tax collectors *the* example of a “sinner” and the Romans viewed them as no better than brothel keepers. Matthew would have been despised by everyone—he was the 1% that actually did rob his own people of life to make a life for himself. He possessed the ambition to abuse, the authority to extort, and the power to imprison. **This man was hated and Jesus chose Him. After Jesus called him to follow, Matthew immediately abandoned everything about his old life. He left behind wealth. He left behind position. He left behind power. He left behind security.** Much like Paul who went from Murderer to Martyr, Matthew went from being moneymaker to Martyr—run through with a sword serving in Ethiopia.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

As a tax collector, in addition to very greedy, Matthew would have been very well-educated and highly organized. These “kingly” gifting made him well suited to write the early churches’ first theological textbook containing all that Jesus taught. Apart from the lists of disciples in the different gospels, we hear very little about what Matthew does. **That can only mean that writing this gospel was Matthew’s ministry.** Scripture says that, when Jesus saves us, He also gives us a ministry. **2Corinthians 5.17-20**
¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. The word for ministry means ‘to serve’. I would add that **ministry is service by, with, and for Jesus.**

THE TROUBLE W/ MINISTRY

The ministry of the Christian is, therefore, to represent Christ to the world through service. This kind of involves the head, the heart, and the hands. What that service looks like, and when, may look different for all of us. Not all of us are Moses’, Matthews’, or Pauls’. Not all of us will lead a rebellion, write a gospel, or plant a church. **But we are all called to serve—to minister.** This is the kind of King Jesus reveals Himself to be. And this is the King of people Jesus calls us to be. One might think that sacrificial service would make you popular and well-liked. On the contrary, it killed Jesus. And if perfect service to the Lord resulted in the death of Jesus, why would we expect our experience to be different. **Genuine service will tire you out, disrupt your plans, and reveal your weaknesses; SERVICE WILL SATISFY YOUR SOUL.**

V. 1-12 | Ministry is Costly

Chapter 14 begins with the report of John the Baptist’s death. The fame of Jesus’ ministry in and around Galilee has reached Herod Antipas, Herod the Great’s son. Herod ruled Galilee as a tetrarch—one of four rulers in a given country. Herod Antipas had been married to the daughter of an Arab King for 20 years. He later fell in love with the wife of His half-brother, his niece named Herodias. Still married, Herod proposed marriage. Herodias accepted as long as he divorced his aging princess-wife. The princess caught wind of the plan and, before he could marry, she fled to a palace-fortress in her father’s territory. With the princess out of the way, Herodias came to live with Antipas as his wife—though her husband was probably still alive. This offended the Jewish culture for several reasons none less than he was already married, and so was she. His marriage was unlawful, immoral, and illegitimate.

John spent his whole life preaching a baptism of repentance. In other words, his ministry was devoted to telling people to turn from their sin. Like the last of the O.T. prophets, without mincing words, John condemned false teachers, false leaders, and false truth. He called out sin where he saw it, especially in religious and political leaders. **This did not make him popular.** He publicly attacked Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who had taken his niece as a wife. John's railing against this married landed him in prison—a fortress on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. At this point, John has probably been imprisoned for a year; it will be another year before he is brought out to be beheaded.

SERVING LIKE JESUS

Serving like Jesus is choosing to suffer like Jesus. The world will hate you, for serving it, or loving it enough to tell it the truth. This is what it means to share in the ministry of Jesus. John did everything he was called to do—and suffered because of it. **Ministry did not make him popular. Ministry did not make him prosperous. Ministry did not make him powerful. Ministry made him dead. Ministry is costly.**

V. 13-14 | Ministry is Hard Work

When Jesus heard the report of the death of John the Baptist he got in a boat and sailed to a desolate place. **He wanted to be alone with his disciples.** According to the parallel passages in Mark 6.30-44 and Luke 9.10-17, Jesus withdrew after the disciples returned from performing ministry among the villages. The gospel of Mark states: **The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. (v.30-31).** Jesus' intention was to get away FROM ministry for a while. There is a humanity of Jesus that we must never forget. He experienced a fully human life. In other words, occasionally, Jesus needed a nap and a sandwich.

THE NEED TO REST

Jesus and his disciples need to rest because ministry, service by, with, and for Jesus, is tiring work. A man can only have so much energy go out of him—at some point he will feel empty. Paul often describes his ministry as toil, striving, and work. **Ministry is hard work and those who serve are tired. This is not just the experience of pastors—all Christians should be spent for Jesus. If Jesus lost everything for me; surely, I can lose something for Him. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3.8.** There are many things that can make us tired. Work, parenting, house maintenance, kids sports, even vacations turn into trips. **When was the last time you were wiped out from serving? When was the last time you just over-extended yourself for Jesus? When was the last time you sacrificed so much your head hit the pillow hard?** Christ-like ministry is a constant sacrifice of time, energy, and resources. There is an emotional, mental, and physical toll that it takes. And those who are TRULY ministering need rest. **I never wanted to be tired OF ministry, but I want to always be tired IN ministry.**

THE WAY TO REST

If you are tired in ministry, it is good and right to take time and make space to rest. Some people need to rest, but are tired because they've gotten too much rest. **Ministry is hard work.** Never forget that REST from ministry is accomplished by going to **away from the crowds; NEVER away from Jesus.**

14.15 | Ministry is Inconvenient

As a TIRED JESUS travels on boat along the coast of the Sea, **the crowds follow on foot.** We can imagine what the disciples are thinking as they watch the crowds walk along the shore...this is NOT going to be the

vacation get-away we imagined. **What they expected to be REST has quickly turned into WORK. Ministry is not only tiring, it is very inconvenient.** The needs of people don't every fit perfectly into our calendar. Ministry rarely happens when you ready and most opportunities to serve disrupt our "normal" rhythms or expectations. **I would argue that if your service to Jesus does not force you to make lifestyle sacrifices, it isn't Christian ministry.**

JESUS RESPONSE | OPPORTUNITY

The question is not whether or not ministry will be inconvenient, but how we will response—opportunity or interruption. Jesus and the disciples deal with it very differently. And though we often read these stories as if we are sinless Jesus, the truth is, we are most like the sinful disciples. **Jesus loves us for who we are. Not who we should be. None of us are who we should be, but Jesus gives us a picture of what it would like if we were. Jesus embraces interruptions. Jesus views inconvenient needs as opportunities to serve.** When Jesus comes ashore the crowd was there to meet Him. Jesus SEES sheep without a shepherd. Jesus FEELS compassion. Jesus ACTS to heal the sick and help the broken. Jesus desires to serve.

DISCIPLES RESPONSE | INTERRUPTION

Unlike, the disciples only SEE a crowd of problems. The disciples feel threatened. The disciples act to avoid HELPING. As the sun begins to go down, the hungry and tired disciples tell Jesus to SEND the crowds away to buy food. In the report in Mark is that **the disciples had already counted the cost. They knew they didn't have enough food or money to provide food.** Perhaps they feared the crowds would not get enough. Perhaps they fear they themselves would not get enough. This was not an opportunity, but an interruption so overwhelming they forgot who they were with.

OUR RESPONSE | EXCUSE

What is my first response to the needs of others—opportunity or interruption? And if it is interruption, what are the reasons I typically use to justify my refusal to serve? I'D LIKE TO HELP BUT...I don't have enough for you. What I have will not help. I don't have enough for me. It will hurt me. I can't love. I can't serve. I can't help. We must realize that our need, though it was not his responsibility, Jesus never (and still never) viewed it as an interruption—and he spared no expense to meet it.

14.16-19 | Ministry is Humbling

Jesus disagrees with their solution and commanded them to give the crowds something to eat. The disciples state that they only have five loaves and two fish. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle in Jesus' ministry present in all four gospels. But in Matthew's account is the only one that records Jesus' command to: **"BRING THEM HERE TO ME."**

BRINGING WHAT WE HAVE TO JESUS

Jesus wants us desperate for him. When we throw ourselves headfirst into genuine service, it doesn't take us long to realize how little power we really have to help. In other words, Christ-like ministry will make us more DEPENDENT on GOD. Many of us have positioned our lives in such a way to never have to depend on Jesus. **We don't need Jesus to show up to be successful. Our lives have been made so secure, our giving to measured, our service to comfortable, that we don't need faith.** Have we positioned our lives in such a way as to never have to depend on Jesus? Have we made sure WE always have enough so that we don't really need to ask Jesus for help? We have refused to follow Jesus into desolate places because we assume we won't have enough _____ if we do. The truth is you won't...and that is where he wants you.

TRUSTING JESUS TO DO SOMETHING

Desolate places of great need is where Jesus does his best work. It is often where Jesus does his only work. After Jesus takes the loaves He BLESSES and BREAKS the bread. It is uncertain exactly where the miracle takes place, but it is certain that one does. **He gives the bread to his disciples who serve the crowds. Everyone has something to give. And Jesus uses and increased the power of whatever it is, no matter how small it may appear.** Perhaps another reason that the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle in Jesus' ministry present in all four gospels is that it shows Jesus is committed to meeting both our spiritual and our physical needs. Jesus is Lord and His ministry extends beyond the spiritual to reach the physical—as should ours. *James 2.15-16 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things need for the body, what good is that?*

Imagine a church of people trusting that who they are RIGHT NOW, and what they have RIGHT NOW, can be used for God RIGHT NOW. Imagine a church full of servants who never wait for someone else to step up, who don't make excuses about what they don't have, and who refuse to dwell on what they won't accomplish. They are always asking WHY NOT....WHERE NOW...WHAT'S POSSIBLE. And when it seems ridiculous, they just take what they have and trust God will supply what whatever is missing. **Everyone has something to GIVE.**

CONCLUSION | 14.20-21 | Ministry is Doubly-Satisfying

Jesus is ministering to the physical needs of the people, but he is ministering to the spiritual needs of his disciples. 12 disciples serve more than 5,000 people. They were hungry and tired when they got off of the boat! But Matthew records, **“And they all ate and were satisfied.”** The crowds were satisfied by the food and the disciples were satisfied through their serving. There were 12 baskets of bread left over – one for each disciple. The hope that there will be baskets leftover were not the motivation to serve. On the contrary, they are the proof that serving will more than satisfy. **Jesus always has MORE than enough.** WE ALWAYS COUNT THE COSTS AND NEVER CONSIDER THE BLESSINGS.

Our flesh doesn't believe that satisfaction can come from sacrificial service. But Jesus proved it was true. Jesus found satisfaction in service. *Isaiah 53.11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* I believe that Jesus life, death, and resurrection prove not that service will be satisfying, but that ONLY service satisfies the deep longings of our soul. **Suffering in service is how we identify with Jesus most closely. Only when we give of ourselves for Christ will we find ourselves in Christ.** Genuine service will cost you much, tire you out, disrupt your plans, and reveal your weaknesses; but ONLY SERVICE WILL SATISFY YOUR SOUL. **Service by, with, and for Jesus satisfies.**