

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY TWO

Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

God's at work whether you or I realize it. His hand is on us whether or not we feel it. And though we are surrounded by enumerable impossibilities, God has yet to meet His first one. He is the God of impossibilities. By trusting this truth, we're able to think vertically, which is correctly.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's *impossible!* This all-too-common thought often hits us when we crawl into bed late at night. We drift into the darkness of doubt wondering if we'll get out of a seemingly hopeless situation—whether it be financial, medical, relational, legal, or some other worry. What do we do? Where should we turn?

In Matthew 14:13–21, the disciples found themselves in a situation that we would consider impossible. Despite having been with Jesus for some time, they still had a limited perspective of Jesus' identity and power. *You want us to feed thousands of people with a snack lunch? . . . HOW RIDICULOUS!*

Then Jesus used the ridiculous to do the miraculous. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll learn about the inadequacy of our horizontal, human-centered solutions to impossible situations, and we'll see how we can shift our perspective by looking upward to the God of impossibilities.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to pray and prepare your heart for what God wants to teach you through His Word today. Never forget the privilege and priority of prayer.

My Father in heaven, thank You for all the ways You have provided for me and have carried me through the most difficult times of my life. As I open Your holy Word today, please guide me and reveal to me just how awesome are Your grace, power, and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before we turn to today's passage, let's quickly review its context. In [Matthew 13:53–58](#), we read how Jesus' hometown, Nazareth, rejected Him. Even His own siblings scoffed at Him. Then, [Matthew 14:1–12](#) showed us the coldblooded murder of John the Baptizer by the corrupt Herod family because of John's boldness to confront their sin.

These parallel rejections reveal the dangers that face the citizens of the kingdom of heaven—especially its messengers. The loss of John and the encroaching threat of those who opposed Jesus' mission led Jesus and the disciples to retreat in solitude.

Even in these solitary moments—when all Jesus wanted was to be still and alone—we can see how He proved to be the great King sent to serve.



Observation: Two Responses to the Crowd

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck wrote, “Observation is carefully reading and thinking about what the Bible actually says.”¹ Let's do that now.

Read [Matthew 14:13–21](#) several times. Compare the difference between Jesus' and the disciples' reaction to the crowd.



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

When Jesus saw the crowd in *verse 14*, He felt compassion for them. The Greek verb used to show this feeling conveys an active idea, and it relates to a term that describes organs like the heart, the lungs, and the stomach. In other words, Jesus felt a desire *in His guts* to meet the people's needs! What two ways did Jesus respond based on that feeling deep-down inside Him?

What excuses did the disciples give for wanting to turn the crowd away?

How laughable for Him to hear the word, impossible, as if He's out of control.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

List the sequence of events in *verse 19*, and note especially the action that stands out to you.

First: _____

Second: _____

Third: _____

Fourth: _____

Fifth: _____



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

Sixth: _____

Seventh: _____

Did you notice how Jesus fed 5,000 *men*? With the inclusion of women and children, scholars estimate that Jesus served up to 20,000 people that day, and all these people ate more than just a few bites. They ate until they were full! The word Matthew used to show how much they ate is the same word the Greeks would use to describe a fattened calf.² ***Talk about a feast!***

These events truly were miraculous, and Jesus truly did the impossible. So, what theological principles can we learn from this awesome account?



Interpretation: Heartfelt versus Fabricated Compassion

Now that we've compiled our observations, let's ask deeper questions about what the passage means to develop an accurate and relevant interpretation.³

Read *Matthew 14:13* in several Bible translations, and note the verb used to describe Jesus' departure. How do these different translations help us understand why Jesus and the disciples likely wanted to leave after hearing about John's execution?

While Jesus showed heartfelt concern for the crowd, the disciples fabricated an illusion of compassion. What *real* motivation do you think the disciples had for wanting to turn the crowd away? (Use your observations from the last section to answer your question.)



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

Read [verses 16](#) and [19](#). Who gave the food to the crowd? What vital lesson do you think Jesus taught here? What significance does that lesson have for us today? For help, read pages 306–308 in Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.

Put yourself in the sandals of someone in the crowd that day. Rivers of sweat flow down your face from the heat of the sun. You hear your empty stomach grumble. Anxiety grows as a chorus of complaints resonates around you. But you don't want to leave and miss your chance to see Jesus.

Suddenly, a stranger passes you a tiny fish. Then, you find some flatbread in your hand. Within moments, you share food and laughter with new friends as you talk about the day's miraculous events. How would you feel walking away that evening? What would it make you think about Jesus?

As the sun set, the disciples left with full bellies and full baskets of provisions that would feed them for days. How do you think the disciples' perspective about God shifted over the course of the day? How is that shift in perspective instructive for us today?



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

As long as you operate your life from the horizontal point of view, the only thing you will see through your life is impossibilities. As long as you exist in the horizontal level, looking only at the human side of things, you will come up against it over and over and over again. And your life will be marked by the negative, by what cannot be done.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

These lessons we learn from Jesus and the disciples teach us challenging lessons about compassion, faith, selflessness, and the power of God. What other biblical passages connect with these themes?



Correlation: The Bread of Life

Through the process of correlation, we can make connections that Matthew's original readers naturally would have noticed. For example, this story echoes the lovely music of *Exodus 16*, which tells the story of God providing bread for the Israelites every day while He led them through the wilderness.

How does this miracle in Matthew connect with the miracle God performed for Israel in the wilderness (see especially Exodus 16:12)? Reference *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org for some helpful insights.

Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle we find in all four gospels. Of the four accounts, John's telling includes the most detail. Read *John 6:35–40*. What did Jesus teach us about Himself by using the bread imagery?



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

Most people probably haven't experienced a miraculous event quite like the one Jesus performed that day. Even still, how can we apply to our lives right now these truths we learned from this biblical account?



Application: Facing Today's Impossibilities

How have you attempted to use human-based, horizontal solutions to face impossible situations in the past? What was the outcome of this approach?

Facing an impossible circumstance feels like clambering up a mountain with its summit hidden in the clouds. Take a moment to stop and reflect on your life. What impossible mountain do you see before you today?

What steps can you take to shift to a vertical perspective and to trust that our God of impossibilities wants to help you conquer that mountain?



Eating a Miracle for Dinner

Matthew 14:13–21

Why would there be any question regarding His ability to turn this meal into a feast, in light of what they experienced? Well, the same could be asked of us. How much does God need to do again to remind you of what He's able to do? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How quickly we forget the power of the God we serve! May we watch in wonder as He makes possible the impossible and turns the ridiculous into the miraculous. Not even filling tens of thousands of empty stomachs posed a challenge to God. That is why He is the God of impossibilities.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the God of impossibilities. I confess I have not always believed this truth, and I repent of those times that I have looked to myself for human solutions. Thank You for the grace You have shown me, and I ask that You would shift my horizontal perspective so that I constantly look up to You to do the impossible in my life. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 71.
2. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1087.
3. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

