

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY SIX

Touches of Compassion on Tons of Needs

Matthew 15:29–39

Compassion for others begins with a love for others. Compassion reminds you you're not alone in this journey from earth to heaven and that someone cares enough to demonstrate the love of Christ.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE great Christian thinker A. W. Tozer once said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹ What ideas fill *your* mind when you hear God’s name? His holiness? His sovereignty? His love? His grace?

If we could ask Jesus’ disciple Matthew this question, he likely would say *compassion*. Matthew’s gospel shows us example after example of Jesus’ caring heart moving Him to meet the needs of others.

He gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He freed those oppressed by demons and dined with social outcasts. He gave ample opportunities to those who rejected Him as well as to those who misunderstood Him.

Indeed, we find no better portrait of compassion in the gallery of human history than Jesus Christ. He alleviated countless needs wherever He went, and each miracle gives a fresh glimpse of the very character of God. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll explore the overflowing bounty of God’s kingdom amid our world’s tooth-and-claw selfishness and scarcity.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 15:29–39



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God’s Word, offer Him your thanksgiving for the ways He’s met your physical needs and make your requests known to Him—especially that He would nourish your soul at this time.

Heavenly Father, thank You for all those times You’ve shown me compassion, even when I deserved none. Thank You for sending Your Spirit and giving me new life in Christ. Please, teach me today. Give me a fresh understanding of Your compassion that I may savor it and reflect it to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Wait . . . didn’t Jesus already miraculously feed thousands? **Yes!** In [Matthew 14:13–21](#), during a moment of solitude, Jesus faced a massive crowd seeking His help. Now, in [Matthew 15:29–39](#), an almost identical situation confronted Jesus. In both instances, He had *compassion* on the crowd, healing their ailments and multiplying a small meal to fill everyone.

You may recall from our study of the first feeding the significance of the Greek word translated “compassion.” It comes from a word used to describe organs: stomach, heart, lungs, liver. When Jesus felt compassion, He suffered with that person in need. *He felt it in His guts!*

But the account of the second feeding miracle is not just a retelling of the first—as though Matthew had a memory mishap. Take a look at some of the differences in the chart below. For a more comprehensive list of differences, check out [Constable’s Notes](#) at netbible.org.

	First Miraculous Feeding Matthew 14:13–21	Second Miraculous Feeding Matthew 15:32–39
Location	By the water	On a hill
Days with Jesus	1	3
Loaves Multiplied	5	7
Fish Multiplied	2	A few
Leftovers	12 baskets (Greek: <i>kophinos</i>)	7 baskets (Greek: <i>spuris</i>)
Number Fed	5,000 men	4,000 men



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Jesus clearly had reason to perform this miracle twice . . . and Matthew clearly had reason to preserve both accounts for us. Let's turn to the second feeding to see what new lessons Jesus wants to teach us.



Observation: Self-Sacrificial Compassion

This story may feel familiar, but Pastor Chuck encourages us to try to observe every passage by starting with a blank slate. In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, he writes, “Focus on one word at a time and read it as if for the first time.”² Let's do this as we make our observations.

Observe [Matthew 15:29–39](#) in Pastor Chuck's two favorite Bible translations, the New American Standard Bible and the New Living Translation. Even peruse it using a few others if you have time. While you read, stand in the sandals of the disciples. Describe the crowd. Describe Jesus. Describe the relationship each had with the other.

Matthew used a vivid Greek verb in [verse 30](#) to describe the crowd's attitude. They didn't simply lay sick people at Jesus' feet. They *threw* them in haste! The crowd unloaded these ill people onto Jesus to relieve themselves of the “burden” of care. It's as if they said, “I've tried everything, and *nothing* has worked. I'm at my wits' end. They're *your* problem now, Jesus.”

They didn't care. But Jesus did.

Note the two ways the crowd responded in [verse 31](#) when they saw Jesus heal all the ailments:

1. _____
2. _____



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In *Matthew 15:32*, Jesus said He spent *three days* with this crowd—meeting the people, healing the ill, showing them His love. Why did Jesus say He spent so much time with them?

He loved them all. He had compassion for them all. Though they may have never met Him, they were worthy of His time, as He saw them through the eyes of the Father's love.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Did you notice that the disciples spoke only once in this passage? Summarize in your own words what they said in *verse 33*. What does this statement reveal about their attitude?

The crowd wanted to abandon their sick while the disciples couldn't fathom how to feed so many people. Jesus, however, had compassion and the power to enter their suffering, walk with them through it, and bring them out of it—doing all in the physical realm to point to His spiritual purpose . . . rescuing souls.



Interpretation: A Lesson for the Disciples

We're beginning to see the unique emphasis Matthew placed on this telling of the second miraculous feeding. But what theological truths can we learn through this account?



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Mark 7:31–8:10 tells of this same miracle with additional details. For example, *Mark 7:31* notes that this miracle occurred in the Decapolis—a collection of ten Gentile cities. If the first feeding occurred in Galilee, why would Jesus want to perform a second feeding miracle here? (Hint: remember the previous passage in which Jesus marveled at the faith of a Gentile woman.)

What lessons was Jesus trying to teach the disciples through this miracle? How are these lessons helpful for us today? For some guidance, see pages 335–336 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.

Had the disciples forgotten *everything* they had watched Jesus do over the past few weeks? The healings. The exorcisms. The feeding of 5,000. The disciples were so familiar with Jesus' power that they had become jaded toward the needy. They likely thought, *Here we go again!* when Jesus pointed them to the hungry masses.

The hearts of the disciples might have been hardened, but luckily for us, the heart of Jesus breaks for those in need.



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Correlation: Compassion and Love

In *Exodus 34:6*, God described Himself to His people Israel using a few characteristics—one being compassion. Read *Exodus 34:7* and summarize how these characteristics shape His actions.

Read *1 John 3:17*. According to John, how do we show compassion? Why is compassion a vital element of the Christian life?

Compassion is so essential for Christ's followers because it reflects the essence of Christ's person. Now let's turn to application where we see this heavenly truth put into action on earth.



Application: The Dangers of Familiarity

Pastor Chuck developed four keen insights to guide our application of the feeding of the 4,000:

1. *There is no need too great for God to hear.* Because of God's compassion, He cares and listens. Express your needs to Him repeatedly, passionately, boldly.
2. *There is no reason for us ever to forget when God heard us.* Thanking God for His past graces reminds us He is powerful enough to do the unthinkable again.



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3. *There is no limit to what God can provide.* “God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches” (Philippians 4:19).
4. *There is no danger more subtle than familiarity.* The disciples had witnessed Jesus perform dozens of miracles, and they lost the wonder of it all.

What trials or challenges have you faced in the past few years of your life? How did you feel during the struggle? How did God show you compassion and help you stand?

What steps can you take today to suffer together with those in need around you and show them Christlike compassion?

In what ways do you feel the foe of familiarity creeping into your life today? How can you move toward seeing the majestic wonder of Jesus Christ again?



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How great it is to live with a huge heart of compassion! How powerful that action is! You might think it's strange that I call compassion an action, but it's not truly compassion until it becomes action. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus cares. These past few chapters of Matthew's gospel have made this truth undeniably clear. His compassion pushed Him to care not only for the physical needs of others but also for their desperate spiritual need . . . their need for a deliverer to liberate them from the shackles of sin, death, and Satan. And God offers this same extravagant compassion to each of us today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You are a compassionate God. Thank You for meeting my needs. Thank You especially for the sacrifice of Your Son Jesus Christ and for the freedom You've given me in Him. I ask that the Holy Spirit would work in my life to show those in need the kind of compassion that characterized Jesus' life. It's in His gracious name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 1.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 84.

