

Focus Text

“Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” **(Matthew 14:13–21, ESV)**

1. Out to Grieve

“Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.” **(Matthew 14:13, ESV)**

Jesus, after hearing about the death of His cousin John, moves from Nazareth to a desolate place. Luke tells us this is Bethsadia. While the other writers leave the location vague. It's clear that Jesus intended to be alone for a moment to observe grief and mourning over John's execution. Secondly, we know that Herod Antipas knew Jesus's whereabouts and was looking to arrest Him. So Jesus may also have been leaving Antipas's territory in anticipation of retaliation.

We'll talk about the crowds later, but first, it's important to note that Jesus grieved. He grieved Lazarus, and now he is grieving John's death. Jesus is the master of eternal life and knows that John is alive and well. However, Jesus grieves because John's death isn't due to old age, but sin. John was murdered, and Jesus is rightly saddened by the state of the world and the loss of His faithful cousin.

3.29.26 Palm Sunday Blessed 2026 “Nourished” Matt. 14:13-21

Please know that it’s okay for Christians to grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, or to be saddened by the sins of themselves or others. Sometimes modern portraits of Christians portray them as always happy and upbeat people who never have an off day. Even Jesus, the master of all creation, took time to grieve the loss of John; we are permitted the blessing of grief as well.

“Matthew’s account indicates only that Jesus withdrew by boat to “a desolate place by himself,” ([Matt 14:13](#)) without naming the specific location. However, the search results offer some helpful geographical context.

The location remains unnamed in Matthew, Mark, and John’s accounts,^[1] but Luke specifies that Jesus retreated to Bethsaida in Gaulanitis^[1]—a territory ruled by Herod Philip rather than Herod Antipas. This Bethsaida Julias was situated on the northeastern extremity of the Sea of Galilee in Gaulonitis, in the tetrarchy of Philip.^[2]

Matthew’s deliberate vagueness about the destination may be intentional. A traditional site scholars have proposed is a ridge of hills northwest of Capernaum overlooking the Sea of Galilee—a location where Jesus went “to a desolate place” (14:13) and where he later went “up on the mountain” (14:23).^[3] This ridge would have provided the solitude Jesus sought after hearing news of John the Baptist’s fate, which prompted his withdrawal to the desert privately.^[4]

The broader pattern of Jesus’s movements suggests he deliberately chose isolated locations for prayer and rest. He sought retirement from crowds and time for rest and communion with the Father.^[2] While Matthew leaves the specific destination ambiguous—perhaps emphasizing the spiritual significance of withdrawal rather than geographical precision—Luke’s identification of Bethsaida and the traditional site near Capernaum provide plausible anchors for understanding where this solitary retreat occurred.”¹

¹ [1] Cyndi Parker, [“Crossing to ‘The Other Side’ of the Sea of Galilee.”](#) in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), [161](#).

[2] H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [St. John](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), [247](#).

[3] J. I. Packer, Wayne Grudem, and Ajith Fernando, eds., [ESV Global Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), [1326](#).

[4] A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933). [See [here](#).]

2. Kingdom Compassion

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”

(Matthew 14:14–16, ESV)

Jesus, intending to be alone, saw that the crowds had followed Him on foot and He had “compassion” on them. This word means affection or empathy. Jesus sees their needs and troubles and decides to offer them care. After all, Jesus’ mission to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven and the primary ways this plays out is through His gracious works matched with His powerful preaching. So we are told that He heals the sick. Then, as the day comes to a close, as the crowds have been walking feverishly to keep up with the disciples in a boat, it’s now time for dinner. The disciples are ready to dismiss the crowds and enjoy a private moment alone. Yet, tonight, Jesus is going to teach them more about who He is.

Jesus is mimicking the prophet Elisha, who had a heart for the poor. In 2 Kings, Elisha is caring for people during a great famine in Gial, and while this happens, the people make a stew that is poisonous because of unknown herbs, and Elisha uses flour to heal the stew, a wild story, right? Then a man showed up with barley bread, a commoner’s ration, and Elisha asked the man to give the sons of the prophets, the men who traveled with him, bread to eat, and the baker replied that this wasn’t enough. Elisha prophesied that there would be more than enough to go around, and everyone ate and had bread left over.

Jesus’ compassion for the crowds prompted Him to perform this miracle. The fish and loaves alongside the healings marked that Jesus had come to bring good news to the poor and needy, and that Jesus was a prophet in the lineage of Elisha.

How’s your compassion meter doing? One of the characteristics of a Christ Follower is helping others. Jesus looked at this battered crowd and didn’t say, “I’m sad because of John’s passing, but instead He saw them, and despite His own grief, He was moved with compassion for them!

“A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, “Give to the men, that they may eat.” But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” So he repeated, “Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’ ” So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.” **(2 Kings 4:42–44, ESV)**

3. Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

“They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” **(Matthew 14:17–19, ESV)**

Jesus began the mealtime with the expected blessing. “We give thanks to you, O Lord God, King of the world, who makes bread out of the earth.” Jesus is reminding the people of something they know well: that God is the source of all blessings and provisions. Barley flour was the most prevalent substance they ground into small fist-sized loaves of bread. In offering this common blessing, Jesus and the crowd were giving thanks to God.

Praying before meals may seem like a simple task, but it’s a tradition that runs throughout scripture and a daily practice that reminds our families that God does provide.

“The traditional Jewish blessing before a meal began with praise of God using the formula: “Praise unto thee, O Lord our God, King of the world, who makes bread to come forth from the earth.”^[1] This was the standard invocation that preceded eating.

Among Jewish practice, a blessing at meals was essential—it was a stringent rule that one should eat nothing before a blessing was pronounced.^[2] Both men and women, slaves and children recited grace before and after meals, though regulations became highly detailed, specifying different forms for various foods like fruits of trees, wine, bread, vegetables, and other items.^[3]

[Psalm 145](#) also held significance in Jewish mealtime practice—words from this psalm continued to be used as a prayer before meals, and this use was not new even by the time of the Reformation, as it was already a traditional Jewish table blessing.^[4] Specifically, verses 15–16 were recited: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.”^[4]

The core purpose remained consistent: it was considered forbidden for a person to enjoy anything from the world without a blessing, and to consume food without one constituted a violation of religious obligation.^[2] These blessings transformed mealtime into an act of worship, acknowledging God’s providential care.”²

4. They Ate!

“And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” (Matthew 14:20–21, ESV)

Returning to Elisha’s story, we see that they ate their fill and left bread over. Matthew notes the men, but also that there was bread left over. However, unlike Elisha’s 100 men, Jesus feeds 5,000 men along with the women and children. With bread left to spare. Jesus’ mission was to proclaim the coming of God’s Kingdom, and that includes provisions for the needy. Jesus, in taking up the spirit of Elisha, is caring for the needs of His people. They ate plenty of very little.

This reminds us that it’s a mustard seed of faith that blooms the Kingdom of God into a tree where all the nations can find rest, shelter, and provision.

² [1] Richard C. Blight, [An Exegetical Summary of Mark 1–8](#) (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2012), 326.

[2] Rudolf Bultmann and Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “[Εὐλογέω, Εὐλογητός, Εὐλογία, Ἐνευλογέω,](#)” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 760.

[3] Merrill Frederick Unger et al., in [The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary](#) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988). [See [here](#).]

[4] James Limburg, [Psalms](#), ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 489–490.

Application

So the Application this Morning is two-fold.

First, if you have some extra bread to give, to whom can you give it?

Or, if you need some bread, ask the Lord to provide it!

We model Jesus' Generosity, and we accept God's provision! Amen.