

No.26 Matthew 15.36 (35-39) Jesus teaches the importance of thanksgiving.

Crowd control

Today our authorities invest in mounted police and loud hailers and water cannon. Our Lord dealt single-handed with a multitude of men and not a few women and children. Does this not illustrate His unique power of command and His special grace in handling human need and human nature?

Jesus ordered the crowd to sit down. The word "ordered" **κελευω** (Greek original) has about it a politeness and a use of motion together with speech. The idea of sitting down need not trouble us much-we do it so often. But the word chosen **αναπιπτω** is applied generally to *men rowing a boat*. The people were being asked to relax-sit down and be ready to receive bread and fish.

He gave thanks

Jesus took the fish and the seven loaves in His hands he gave thanks. The mass crowd now seated were watching one of the most routine acts of our Lord. He never failed to give thanks to the Father and He taught us never to fail to ask for our "daily bread." Four thousand men-many of them heads of families re-learned that day their role in leading their families in prayer at the table.

He broke the loaves and fish

The action of the verb here is aorist. It suggests breaking the loaves and fish just once. Now it would appear needful for Him to break them into a thousand pieces for the use of such a crowd. Just as with His body given for us-which body was once broken at the cross -so the loaves were broken. The order of Christ's action was first "to take bread and fish" from His disciples who had only 7 loaves and a few fish to offer and to give thanks to the Father as creator and giver of the seed of the ground and the fish of the sea. It is apparent when one takes time to appreciate the nature of the Jewish grace that we are not thanking God only for what we have in view or for what portion we have on the table but for what extravagant provision and abundance He has made. We should adapt to this grander view of God.

From the point of view of the crowd

If we might obtrude the idea of a reporter taking statements on the occasion, he might ask, "How many of you ate?" The answer came back to him over and over again "All of us" "Everybody" "Aye and our wives enjoyed it too-they didn't have to cook it" "And the kids asked for more till they stuffed themselves". The headline might be "Desert miracle-thousands ate like calves in the stall (**χορταζω**) and never had a better meal in their lives!" We don't know if any said "thank you" to the Lord and there certainly was no "vote of thanks" but the crowd had joined in the grace and that was just what the Master required. It was ever the pleasure of the Son of God to see His Father honoured.

Clearing up

Seven baskets **σφυριδες** full of fragments **κλασματα** were gathered up afterward. So the round plaited fish-baskets came in handy to collect a considerable amount of uneaten pieces which had been broken from the original loaves and fishes. We are not just told this to convince us the disciples were tidy in habit of life. The truth that is underpinned by this collection is that Christ is creator and the miracle of extravagance we see in the cornfields He can as easily introduce in multiplying the wedding wine or the loaves and fish in the desert.

The eaters **εσθιοντες** literally devourers -the word is used of "mouths" "flames" "sores" were 4000 with additional women and children. Seven baskets were needed. They speak to us of the sufficiency of Christ to meet the need of mankind. Each basket might hold 70 loaves or seventy fish. The fact that the pieces remaining were far greater in size than the original loaves and fishes demands that the bread was multiplied even as it was divided. Thousands might have missed the wonder of it all had not this act taken place. Even this glorified the Father and impressed on the crowds that God was truly the creator of bread which is the staff of life and doubtless never a grace was said again by any without recalling the lesson Christ taught -and many must have mused on who He was besides..

Leave taking

Jesus who had lingered with them three days loosed them-"set them free on a ransom" so to speak-for He it was who would give his body for them as the bread of life. He left immediate charge of them and he let them pass from fellowship with Him. The verb is an aorist. The sad reality is that many a throng listens to the message of Christ and passes from the scene without entering into the deeper reality -understanding that wonderful Father-Son relationship; knowing the Bread of Life; experiencing the forgiveness that would come from the broken body of the Christ. There can be little doubt that He was willing along with the Father to feed their souls and meet their eternal need. He Himself would go to Magdala where he was to be asked for a sign from heaven. Every communion or Eucharist (thanksgiving) affords opportunity for this

continuous thanksgiving and renewal of fellowship. The desert experience waned-the experience of the atoning lamb extends to eternity-Praise the Lord and "Be thankful"



Working at it

Did the crowd join in any gesture of thanks?

What example of thanksgiving did the Lord Jesus give us here?

What about applications in the family setting beyond saying grace at table?

Why has the Lord's Supper been called "the Eucharist"? What do we thank God for in this ordinance?