

**THE TASTE TEST**  
By Terry Jones, February 3, 2008  
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**Matthew 14:13-21**

**CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Jesus performed the miracle of the bread and fish to reveal His love for people and God's power.**

**INTRO.** - Two men met on the dikes that surround the city of New Orleans some years ago, at which time the city seemed doomed. The water from the Mississippi on the one side and water from the gulf on the other side, seemed almost certain to overflow the city. One man said to the other, "What would you do for this city if you had the strength and money?" The question surprised the man and turning to his questioner, said, "What would you do; as you seem to have been thinking about the matter?" "Oh," said the first man, "I would, if I had the power and the money, build these dikes so wide and so high that no flood could endanger this city." "But," said the second man, "I would not do that; if I had the strength I would get my arms beneath this city and lift it above the dikes so that no flood could ever endanger it." When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans our whole nation wished the dikes had been higher or the city was higher. We are still overcoming the Katrina tragedy. This tragedy brought out the best in the people of New Orleans and our nation. Millions of dollars and hours have been donated to help the victims of Katrina.

One of Jesus' greatest acts on earth started with a tragedy. He received news that a horrifying tragedy had taken place in Jerusalem. His cousin and prophet, John the Baptist, had repeatedly warned King Herod about his adultery with his brother's wife. Instead of repenting of this wrong deed, King Herod threw John into jail.

On Herod's birthday the king threw a wild and expensive party for his family and closest officials. His stepdaughter, Herodias, entertained the king and his audience with a sensuous dance. Her dancing pleased him to the extent he promised her up to half his kingdom. She consulted her wicked mother who immediately prompted her to ask for the head of the prophet John on a platter. The king sent his men to behead John to please this girl and her mother. Some of the king's men followed through on His request. These men brought John's head to his wife and her daughter during the party. What a tragedy!

John's disciples reported the sad news to Jesus. In response Jesus withdrew to a secluded place near Galilee for rest. A large crowd ran ahead of him to the place where Jesus sought privacy and rest. Instead of sending them back to their homes Jesus felt deep compassion for this crowd who were as sheep without a shepherd. He healed a number of sick people. During the day Jesus taught them about the kingdom He will establish. The day passed by quickly leaving the people with nothing to eat. Their hunger caused the disciples to ask Jesus to dismiss them to find food to eat. Jesus told the disciples, "They do not need to go away; you feed them."

One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, finds a boy with five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish. He willingly gives his food to Jesus. Jesus holds the food in His hands, looks up to the sky, and blesses the food. After the blessing He breaks the bread and fish into pieces. He gives the pieces to his disciples who feed the 5,000 men besides women and children. As Jesus broke the bread and fish it multiplied. As the disciples broke and distributed the food it multiplied until everyone's hunger was satisfied. When they could eat no more they gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

Jesus fed them to satisfy their hunger and to lead them to faith. Is your faith ever weak? An insurance company has this slogan, "Life comes at you hard." Do you need your faith repaired? Do you want God to show you how He works? I wish I could have eaten some of the bread and fish Jesus created. If we could have tasted the bread and fish, we would be stronger. Let's do a taste test. What do we taste in this narrative?

## **I. WE TASTE GOD'S SORROW.**

- A. Jesus received the news that King Herod beheaded John the Baptist.
  - 1. Jesus is deeply grieved over the heartless murder of God's prophet.
  - 2. To deal with His grief, Jesus found a solitary place to rest and pray.
  
- B. Jesus had three reasons to seek this remote place.
  - 1. Having human limitations Jesus needed rest.
    - a. Jesus has been teaching throughout the area of Galilee.
    - b. He walked numerous miles from one village to the other.
    - c. The news of John's death added to His fatigue.
  - 2. Jesus is avoiding dangerous situations.
    - a. If John was not safe, Jesus was also in danger.
    - b. Jesus often avoided danger.
    - c. Jesus had to carefully plan His time to die.
  - 3. John's death reminds Jesus of His own death.

- a. Jesus knows He will die from a violent death.
- b. No one wants to die.

C. Applic. - Jesus experiences sorrow over John's death.

1. Jesus' sorrow results from His great love for us.
2. Quote - Jesus is human so He can understand US and He is divine so we can understand GOD.
3. Heb. 4:15, 16 - For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
4. Ex. - We have a connection between God and our sorrows and pain. Our sorrows introduce us to Jesus Christ. Our taste of God's sorrows reminds us of God's compassion.

## **II. WE TASTE GOD'S COMPASSION.**

A. The crowds followed Jesus to find His resting place.

1. When Jesus saw them He felt compassion for them.
2. Compassion is deeper than sympathy and feelings.
3. His love for people was so deep He hurt in His soul for others.
4. Mark 6 - They were like sheep without a shepherd.

B. Jesus expressed His compassion in two ways.

1. He healed their sick through His power and love.
  - a. I believe God does all healing either through the prayers of His people and allows the medical world to help Him.
  - b. Jesus touched lepers, cured blindness, cast out demons, and healed all types of illness.
  - c. Every miracle of Jesus is a combination of God's power directed by compassion.
2. He fed this crowd when they were hungry.
  - a. Andrew finds a young boy with five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish.
  - b. Jesus prayed as the head of a household would pray - "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."
  - c. Jesus breaks the bread and fish into twelve pieces for each of the disciples - first half of the miracle.

- d. The disciples break their bread and fish for the crowds - second half of the miracle.
- e. The pieces the disciples distribute are not depleted but they continue to grow as they are broken.

C. Illus. - A young woman worked in the largest umbrella factory in the world. She said one day, in a discouraged moment, "I'll have to hunt another job." "What's the matter?" someone asked her, "have they discharged you?" "No, they haven't discharged me." "Well, hasn't your factory enough orders to keep going all the time?" "No, not that at all. They have more orders than they can fill; but they haven't enough electricity to keep all the machines going at once, and my machine has to lie idle part of the week. The trouble with the factory is, they have more machinery than power." --L. B. Bauman

D. Applic. - The church of today has its machinery; organization, computers, equipment, etc. We need the power to run the system.

### **III. WE TASTE GOD'S POWER.**

A. This multiplication of the loaves and fish reminds us of some OT miracles.

1. A severe drought struck the land of Israel. God sent the prophet Elijah to a widow living in Zarephath. Elijah needed something to eat but the widow had only enough flour and oil to make one meal before they starved to death. She made the meal but the flour and oil did not run out. God provided with a special miracle.
2. In 2 Kings 4:1ff - a widow of a deceased prophet is so poor she cannot provide for her family. She told Elisha that her creditors were about to sell her sons to pay off her debt. The prophet told her to borrow every clay pot in her neighborhood. She obeyed the prophet. He told her to start pouring the little oil she had into the pots. She poured and poured until all the pots were full. God multiplied the oil. She sold some of the oil to pay her debts. She and her sons lived on the rest of the oil. God performed a miracle like the feeding of the 5,000.
4. God's power caused these miracles to happen.

B. Jesus shows His creative power.

1. Once I believe the miracle of creation I am okay with the rest of the biblical miracles.
2. John 1 - All things came into being through Him (Jesus) and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
3. Col. 1:15 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth ... all things have been created through Him and for Him.
4. The feeding of the 5,000 men reveals Jesus' creative power.

C. God holds all power.

1. Ex. - We fear rogue nations possessing nuclear weapons that would either give the ability to control the world or destroy the world. My generation grew up with the threat of a nuclear holocaust.
2. The Bible teaches us to fear God more than humans.
  - a. 2 Kings 19 - Hezekiah feared the Assyrians would invade Judah and Jerusalem. King Hezekiah prayed, "Now, O Lord our God, I pray, deliver us from his (King Sennacherib) hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God." The Assyrian soldiers camped outside Judah ready to attack. God sent an angel one night who killed 185,000 enemies of Israel. One angel killed them. Fear God!
  - b. God resurrected Jesus from the dead with great power.
  - c. Fear God's power and guard yourself against those who do not fear God.

C. Applic. - The power of God saves us and transforms us.

#### **IV. WE TASTE GOD'S PRESENCE.**

A. Illus. - A teacher was drilling his young students on the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." One youngster seemed quite sure of himself as he anxiously waved his hand for recognition. When the teacher called his name he proudly blurted out "The chief end of man is to glorify God and annoy Him forever!" Applic. - God can take our feeble efforts which may annoy Him and add His power to His glory.

B. The disciples misunderstood though they had already witnessed Jesus' miracles.

1. John 6:14 - When the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."
2. After this miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 men, the people searched for Jesus the next day.
3. The people wanted more food.
  - a. They wanted to force Jesus to become their king.
  - b. The people rejected Him but they did not realize He is the Bread of Life who satisfies the soul.

**C. Applic.**

1. These people did not know they had tasted the presence of God.
2. The humble man sorrowing over John the Baptist's death, speaking about God's kingdom, and feeding a large crowd is God in the flesh.
3. Ex. - When great people die, the first response is, "We did not know how great they were." Jesus ascended to Heaven almost 2,000 years ago. His presence was great.

**CONCLUSION** - The New York City Mayor LaGuardia on a bitterly cold night in January of 1935, turned up at a night court in the poorest section of the city. After dismissing the judge, LaGuardia took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a feeble old woman came before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving.

But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, Your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson." LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." As he pronounced the sentence, the mayor reached into his pocket. He removed the ten dollars saying, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit. Furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. The grocery store owner, who had pressed the charges, also gave fifty cents of that amount. Seventy petty criminals,

people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, also paid fifty cents. They gave the mayor a standing ovation.

"Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.'" We want to help you believe in Jesus Christ in order to have eternal life. Jesus invites us now to Him.