

The Messiah Who Provides

Matthew 14:13b-21

28 January 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How does Jesus provide for our needs?

Big Idea: Jesus is the Messiah who provides for his people physically and spiritually.

Introduction

Australians love bananas.

They're one of our favourite fruits.

In fact, we eat more than five million of them every, single, day.

The humble banana was the star of one of the most iconic TV ads from the '90s.

Some of you are going to have that in your head for the rest of the day now.

That's why we were so shocked when banana prices skyrocketed to a whopping \$16/kilo in 2011.

There was crying in the streets and widespread disbelief that bananas – loved, adored and advertised into the hearts and minds of Australians – might not be available.

The humble banana achieved cult status.

The haves were clearly separated from the have-nots by their ability to afford bananas.

How could this possibly be?

All it took was one cyclone.

When Cyclone Yasi hit the coast near Mission Beach in Far North Queensland, eighty to ninety percent of our banana supplies were wiped out.

Five years later, we take it for granted that if we go to the shops, bananas will be available.

Except even this week, there are reports of a resurgence of Panama disease which kills Cavendish banana plants.

In the US, the survival food industry has been going ****ahem**** bananas in the last couple of years because people are worried not just about bananas, but about food supplies in general.

Survival foods are freeze-dried, vacuum-packed, all-in-one meals that can sit on your shelf for anywhere up to 25 years.

One company's production has doubled in the last four years.¹

Unlike the packaging, apparently they look like an awful brown bowl of mush, but taste alright.

You too can protect your family by buying a year's supply for a family of four for just US\$7,999.

Regardless of whether you're someone who'd be shocked by not being able to buy bananas or a full-on doomsday prepper, the feeding of the 5,000 – which we're looking at this morning – has something to say to you.

This account reminds us that God is the one who provides for his people.

He's the one who generously supplies all our physical and spiritual needs.

Outline

We're back in the book of Matthew today.

Matthew's gospel is very carefully and deliberately organised into chunks of story and speech.

Over the next couple of weeks, we're going to be looking at the section of story that goes from the end of chapter 13 through to the end of chapter 17.²

Matthew makes a different point in each section.

At the beginning of the book, Matthew introduces Jesus as the Messiah.

Then he condenses what the Messiah taught into the Sermon on the Mount.

Then there's stories showing the authority of the Messiah and followed by descriptions of how people responded to him.

In this section of story we're in, Matthew presents a number of events that show what Jesus the Messiah is like.

Many of the people living at the time of Jesus were blown away by him.

Jesus' ministry doesn't fit neatly into the normal categories and expectations.

He's a prophet, but according to John the Baptist he's more than a prophet.

He's a rabbi, but more than that, he's the one who teaches God's law with absolute authority.

Jesus the Messiah is different because he's like a prophet, priest and king on steroids and all rolled into one.

This morning's passage is significant.

It's the only miracle that's found in all four gospels.

Jesus even does this miracle twice.

In a few weeks (when we get to chapter 15) we'll see Jesus do a very similar miracle when he feeds 4,000.

This miracle shows us that **Jesus is the Messiah who provides for his people physically and spiritually.**

The outline for the talk is going to come in four parts:

- A Hunger for Jesus
 - A Hunger for Food
 - Satisfied Tummies
- Satisfied Hearts

A Hunger for Jesus

When Jesus hears Herod Antipas' response to the rumours about him, he avoids Antipas by retreating.

Matthew tells us that he heads for somewhere quiet, where he can be alone, verse 13.

Who can blame the man for wanting a bit of peace and quiet after a busy time of ministry?

It sounds like me on a Sunday afternoon!

So, Jesus gets in a boat and heads across the lake.

Luke tells us that he was heading to a place near Bethsaida, outside of Herod Antipas' territory.³

Meanwhile, the crowds find out that he's the one that got away.

So, they decide to follow him on foot.

That means going the long way around – including crossing over the Jordan River at a ford a few kilometres north of the lake.

This was a big effort.

By the time Jesus gets there, the crowd's already arrived.

He lands and the crowd are waiting for him to arrive like a mega-star on the red carpet.

They were keen.

This crowd weren't going to miss out.

They were hungry for Jesus.

Let's pause there for a second.

I'd like you to take a few moments to take a quick spiritual health check.

How much are you hungering for Jesus at the moment, really?

Would you have been amongst the crowd, willing to run around the lake to get to him?

Is he the reason that you get out of bed in the morning?

It's great if that's where you're at.

Or could you really take him or leave him?

Is Jesus a nice, but unnecessary extra in your life?

As we get to the end of January and the enthusiasm that comes with the start of a new year begins to fade, are you happy with where you're at with the Lord?

Maybe you're just fine, maybe you're not.

The sheer enthusiasm of this crowd makes it worth pondering why they were so hungry for Jesus.

Because Jesus was different, unique, special.

He's not like the other teachers doing the rounds.

He's wise, powerful and full of authority.

He's God's chosen one and that's why he's worth following.

How do you think Jesus felt, though?

He might've been able to escape Antipas, but it doesn't look like he's successful in escaping them!

His plan for a bit of a recharge has been foiled by this crowd of people.

Surely he deserves some rest?

Many of us would probably be a little frustrated by having a mob charging in on our serenity.

We'd probably be grumbling, if not on the outside at least on the inside.

Not Jesus.

Without complaint, he opens the Messianic Healing Centre for the day and ministers to the hurting and broken.

God has wired each and every one of us differently.

Some of us thrive on spending time with other people.

For others of us, spending time with other people tires us out – that's me.

Jesus' example throughout his ministry shows us that it's wise to take a break from people when we need to so that we can recharge the batteries.

That's really important.

We can't serve others well when we're completely flogged.

At the same time, Jesus' example shows us that we're not the only ones who are important.

Loving other people by ministering to them is important as well.

As important as it is to rest, isn't it also true that we need to recognise that sometimes we use our own limitations as an excuse for simply being selfish?

There's an inconsistency, a problem, if you're a Christian who says "I don't do people."

It's impossible to imagine Jesus ever thinking that.

Ministry is about people.

He makes time for people, even when he seems not to want to.

In an effort to understand my own strengths and weaknesses better, I've been doing some reading about my personality type recently.

One of the traits of people like me is that we can't stand small-talk.

However small-talk is a necessary part of loving others well because it's an important first step to getting to know them better.

So, I small-talk for Jesus.

These people had a hunger for Jesus.

And rather than looking after his own interests by turning them away, Jesus responded to them by loving and serving them.

A Hunger for Food

Sometimes we read the Bible – especially the gospels – and it feels like we're reading stories.

However, being real, live people, these people also had a hunger for food.

Jesus has been ministering to the people throughout the afternoon.

You know, regular stuff for the Messiah like healing blindness and curing people from diseases they've had all their life.

It's getting late when the disciples come to him and say, "Jesus, we have a problem."

Even if they'd brought food with them, it's going to be used up by now.

The people are going to be getting hungry.

Verse 15:

Matthew 14:15 (NIV11) ¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

This was a remote place.

There wasn't a 24/7 Maccas down the road.

They were in such a hurry to follow Jesus that it's likely that no one had time to bring supplies with them – they were trying to get there quickly.

How were they going to get food for all these people?

They had a major incident on their hands.

There was a report this week of a family who were flying home to the UK for Christmas with their toddler.

Their plane was forced to divert because of fog.

Then the plane had a mechanical problem, so they had to wait for parts and an engineer.

Qantas wouldn't let the passengers off the plane and so they were stuck on-board for over twelve hours without any food.

I wouldn't want to be locked in here for twelve hours without food.

What a nightmare with kids!

Can you imagine the meltdowns that would've been happening late that day beside the lake?

The disciples suggest that Jesus sends them away to the local villages to get food.

They're likely to be able to rustle up something to eat there.

There's no doubt this was for the people's own good.

Though perhaps they're also trying to protect Jesus after he'd had such a busy time.

These people were hungry for Jesus, but by the end of the day they're also hungry for food.

Satisfied Tummies

Jesus is the one who provides for their physical needs.

He's the one who will satisfy their tummies.

Rather than ending his ministry to them like the disciples suggest, Jesus is going to continue it.

I reckon you could've knocked the disciples over with a feather when Jesus replied.

Matthew 14:16 (NIV11) ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

Really? How on earth are they possibly going to do that?

Has Jesus booked a catering company who're going to rock up with their van, unload all their gear and produce a spit roast with vegies onsite?

And who's going to pay for it all, anyway?

We're told in verse 21 that it was a very large crowd – five thousand blokes.

Or thereabouts... they didn't take an exact head-count here.

Five or six thousand people are how many turn up at the Forest Lake Christmas carols each year.

For the carols, they include women and children in the count.

So, this would've been bigger - a massive crowd.

In the parallel passages, both Mark and John say that it would've cost more than 6 months' wages to feed all the people.⁴

And they've got pretty slim pickings.

All they have is five little bread rolls and two fish.

This was a typical meal, quite common in Galilee, especially if you were poor.

We live in a carb-free world, but bread was essential for people in Jesus' day.

The "loaves" would've been quite small – like the dinner rolls you bake at home.

The fish was probably dried or pickled so they would've still been okay even after standing out in the sun all day.

5,000 men and their families with a tummy upset in the middle of nowhere isn't a very pretty thought.

That's all that's on offer.

And it's still two fish too many, in my opinion.⁵

Jesus is expecting them to feed everyone with that?

It's only just enough to feed a few kids, not a whole crowd.

This's meant to be impossible, if not absurd.

There's absolutely no way this could be done on your own.

There's simply far too little to work with here.

Only someone who's super-human could possibly do that.

Yet Jesus tells them to come to him and sit on the grass.

The word that's used for 'sitting down' in verse 19 is the word that's usually used when you sit down to a banquet.

He's anticipating what's about to happen.

Like the head of the family, Jesus leads them by modelling giving thanks to his father for the food.

Then the disciples start handing it out.

Something amazing happens, although we're not told how.

I don't know if they just kept breaking bits off and there was still more left or what.

But everyone – the five thousand blokes and the women and kids with them – were able to eat though.

When you add it all up, it's reasonable to assume that there's probably something like 24,000 people there.

That's a lot of bread and holy mackerel.⁶

They ate until their tummies were satisfied.

One person I read suggested the best translation is that they ate until they were "stuffed".

Twelve basketfuls are left over – one for each of the disciples.

Not just doggy bags – doggy baskets.

This is more like a visit to Mum's than a restaurant – where you always leave with more than you came with in the first place.

Twelve baskets of excess pieces, one for each of the disciples.

This was epic, provision on a massive scale.

Have you noticed the theme of eating that's running through here?

First there was the party in the house where Herod didn't want a bar of Jesus.

That ended in John the Baptist losing his head.

Now, we've got the people following Jesus and getting miraculously fed by God.

There's echoes here of Elisha multiplying the loaves in 2 Kings 4:38-44.

Elisha was able to feed one hundred men with only 20 loaves.

For those no good at maths, that's a multiplication factor of 5.

This was a multiplication of thousands.

And it has the feel of God giving the Israelites Manna in the wilderness – Exodus 16.

There though, they were only able to collect enough for the day, unless it was the day before the Sabbath.

Here, there's twelve baskets left over.

What are we meant to take away from this?

Firstly, we're meant to see that Jesus is the powerful Messiah who has the ability to miraculously multiply food.

Obviously, we're meant to be blown away by the miracle, but it's more than that.

It shows us that Messiah is the one who provides for his people physically.

He's how we don't apply it though.

We're going to be having lunch together under the trees after church.

I hope you've all brought something along to share because our expectation shouldn't be that you won't bother bringing something because God's going to miraculously provide it all.

That's not how the world that God's made works.

This was a miracle – something that breaks the usual pattern of life.

Nor are we meant to conclude like the atheist that this couldn't have happened because this kind of thing doesn't happen.

People have said that what really happened was that the generosity of the boy was mimicked by others.

They actually had food with them and when they heard about him sharing, they did too.

Kind of like what'll happen at lunch.

If you're visiting with us this morning, please don't feel like you can't stay because you haven't brought anything.

Many of us have brought extra so that you can stay and share with us.

But that's not the point of this – it was miraculous.

Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus where our food comes from and they'll probably look at you with a funny look.

They'll probably patiently explain that the sun shines and causes things to grow.

The rain falls and waters the crops.

But how did that happen?

The Bible makes the claim that the God of the Bible is the one who created the world.

He's also the one who sustains the world.

He's the one who makes the sun shine and sends the rain.

He is the source of life.

The problem is that even as Christians, as modern people who mostly live in cities, we're pretty far removed from where our food is produced.

We're honestly not all that interested in whether old mate got a good yield on the top 40 this year.

Or how well conditioned the sheep were that end up on our Australia Day barbecue.

This is how we think: I go to work and I earn money.

With that money, I buy food for myself and my family.

I go to the shops and there it is.

And when the shelves are empty, our world falls apart.

It's so easy to effectively leave God out of the picture.

We can fall into having a godless view of God's provision.

This miracle of people being fed by Jesus points us to the miracle that happens around us every day.

Every day, God is providing for the physical needs of his people.

Nothing would grow if it wasn't for the sun which God keeps shining.

If he didn't send the rain, we'd miss out on our bananas.

God is the one who provides for his people.

We can't survive without him.

That's why it's the usual custom for us as Christians to give thanks to God whenever we eat.

Jesus the Messiah show us that God is the one who provides for his people.

Satisfied Hearts

This miracle is also meant to point us beyond itself.

Even though they were fed that day, the people who were there still didn't have their greatest hunger fixed, even though they had full tummies.

As Messiah, Jesus won't just provide for his people physically, but spiritually as well, so that we will have satisfied hearts.

In feeding the five thousand, Jesus is pointing to another event that's yet to come.

The people in Jesus' day had the expectation that one day God would provide a banquet.

A banquet which all his people would be invited to.

This was based on Isaiah 25:6:

Isaiah 25:6 (NIV11) ⁶ On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines.

It's not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament, but we know from other Jewish writings outside the Bible that this was at the forefront of people's minds.

Jesus picks up on this image a number of times – for example in Luke 14:15 and Matthew 8:11.

He ties this banquet from God to his own ministry.

Perhaps the clearest example is in Luke 22:30 where he applies it to himself.

Luke 22:28–30 (NIV11) ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may

eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Just reading Isaiah, you'd be forgiven for thinking that one day God's going to put on a big spread for his people.

But the point of this banquet isn't that people will be fed physically.

It's that our relationship with God will be restored.

Jesus is the Messiah who will restore people spiritually back to God.

We see this banquet again in John's Revelation.

And we find out that it's not just a banquet, but a wedding banquet.

It's the wedding supper of the lamb and his bride, when Jesus and the church will be joined to the Messiah forever.

Revelation 19:7–9 (NIV11) ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) ⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

What's the fine linen that his people will be given to wear?

It's the righteous acts of God's holy people.

Yet the Bible tells us that all have sinned.

Isaiah 64:6 (NIV11) ⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

So, how's that possible?

How can sinful people get a seat at that banquet?

Not by what we do, but because of what Jesus has done.

He's provided for his people spiritually by stepping in as a substitute for us on the cross.

Dying to pay for our sins and rising so that we can rise too and sit at his banquet table with him.

Jesus has provided for our greatest spiritual need.

Only once he satisfies that need will our hearts truly be at peace.

What can we do then?

As we'll see next week: trust and believe in Jesus.

To borrow the words of Scar from the Lion King, changing them slightly – Stick with Jesus and you'll never go hungry again.

Only unlike Scar, King Jesus can truly be trusted because he's the one who's already proved himself.

This physical miracle is evidence of that.

It points to Jesus being the one who not only provides for his people's physical needs, but also spiritually so that we can share with him forever.

Conclusion

We often have "default" categories for Jesus.

Some people have in the main category of good moral teacher or life coach.

For others, the main category is as judge

There's a softer side to Jesus too, where we see him as healer.

This incident helps us to see him in a category that we don't often think about: Jesus is provider.

Messiah is the one who provides for his people.

He provides for our physical needs every day.

And he's provided for our greatest spiritual need.

In light of this miracle, trust him today.

¹ 'Business Is Booming for America's Survival Food King', *Bloomberg.com*, 22 November 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-11-22/business-is-booming-for-america-s-survival-food-king>.

² Matthew 13:54-17:27

³ Luke 9:10

⁴ Mark 6:37; John 6:7

⁵ I'm allergic

⁶ Thanks to Douglas O'Donnell for this one.

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Big Question: How does Jesus provide for our needs?

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Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways you've seen Jesus provide for your needs?
2. What makes this miracle different to all the other miracles we read about in the Bible?
3. Why do you think the crowd was hungry for Jesus? Do you think Christians should have the same intensity of hunger for Jesus all the time?
4. What do we learn from the way Jesus responds to the crowd when he lands?
5. Is it reasonable to think that this miracle actually happened?
6. What are some ways not to apply this passage?
7. Do you think you're a 'functional atheist' regarding where your food comes from?
8. How do you get a seat at the 'Messianic Banquet'?