

# JESUS: THE MIRACULOUS PROVIDER

From Matthew 14:13-21

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Pastor Nick Wilson

## INTRODUCTION

1. Illustration: “The Hatchet,” “Into Thin Air,” “Cast Away,” “Man vs. Wild,” [Your pick of post-apocalyptic zombie thrillers]. There’s something about the human condition that makes us unsettled, intrigued, and hopeful when considering how to survive in various inhospitable environments.
2. Transition: How do Kingdom-minded people navigate their inhospitable surroundings? Who will lead them through it? This isn’t the first time God’s people have been in this spot, asking these same questions.

If you recall Israel’s exodus, you probably remember that they were delivered from slavery in Egypt but they weren’t exactly brought into abundant fields and easy living. Instead the people of Israel were lead into the wilderness: desolate, inhospitable, nothingness. Here, they faced another crisis: how would they live in such a desolate environment? Who would lead them through it?

God provided. He gave them water from rocks, bread from heaven (even some quail from time to time), and leadership from Moses. Unfortunately Israel’s disobedience and ingratitude prolonged their stay in this wilderness wasteland for forty years. Even so, God provided.

God has made miraculous provision for His people in the Old Covenant; and He has made miraculous provision for His people in the New.

Fast-forward to the events described in Matthew 14. Last week we learned that the beheading of John the Baptist was a real-life outworking of the kingdom truths that Jesus had preached in the previous chapter.

In verses 1-12 we see what happens when the kingdom of this world collides with the kingdom of heaven. Heads are served on platters. It isn’t pretty. Not much has changed today. Each day 11 Christians are killed for their faith (2019 Open Doors’ World Watch List). And yet, the Christian has hope, knowing that there will be a day of reckoning.

But what do we do in the mean time? How do Kingdom-minded people navigate our inhospitable surroundings? Who will lead us through it?

These questions are addressed and answered in the following narrative scenes, in part by what Jesus says, but more by what Jesus does and *where* he does it. As a result, our passage this morning invites us to consider how Jesus is portrayed as our provider and a greater Moses.

**Proposition: Since Jesus is our miraculous provider, come to, obey, and find yourself satisfied by Him.**

## 4 PORTRAITS OF JESUS in Matthew 14:13-21

### 1. Jesus: the Man on Mission (v. 13)

- a. What happens in this scene comes as a direct consequence of what happened in 1-12
- b. Jesus’ withdraw was owing, not to fear, but to missional purpose. If Herod Antipas and his cronies were under the impression that Jesus was the risen John, it’s safe to say Jesus wouldn’t be welcome in Antipas’ territory. Why is this a problem? It’s not time yet.
- c. Jesus is a man on mission and that mission meant (at least in this case) that he would need to relocate to a new territory in Herod Phillip’s domain. In this case: the north east side of Galilee.

### 2. Jesus: the Compassionate Healer (v. 14)

- a. His relocation didn’t deter the crowds, however. They were there to meet him as Jesus went ashore.
- b. Jesus wasn’t surprised. He didn’t roll his eyes. “Do you people have to follow me everywhere?”
- c. No, Jesus knew. He knew their need. He knew that if the crowds were to be turned away, where else would they go? Irrespective of their motive for seeking Jesus out, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

### 3. Jesus: the Wilderness Banquet Host (vv. 15-18)

After a long day of ministry, the hour was getting late and there was a problem: we may have escaped potential political entanglements, but we’re kind of in the middle of nowhere. How will food be provided?

The disciple's solution: let's take a brake so folks can go and get their own food. We've done enough for today; let's call it quits.

Jesus had a different idea. "Disciples, don't send them away; you give them something to eat." By asking them to supply the food, he heightens the tension and adds to the crisis. How could the disciples be responsible for providing food? Even if they wanted to feed them, it's not like they could. There was only enough food for 2-3 people. "What do we do, Jesus?"

"Don't worry, I've got this covered. What the crowds need is not found somewhere else – somewhere less desolate. We don't need to go anywhere else to get more of what we need. All that's needed we already have."

"Bring the fish and bread here to me," is his reply.

We know this desolate place had grass (cf. 19), but the wilderness wasteland picture is still in full view. In fact the word translated 'desolate' is the same one used in the OT for the place of Israel's "wilderness" or 'desert' wandering. And Matthew uses it in much the same way. It was the origin of John the Baptist's ministry (3:1; 11:7) and the setting of Jesus' temptation (4:1).

Geography is important because it brings to mind the Exodus and wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel. Like Israel of old, like the crowds in Jesus' day, every Christian today lives in an inhospitable wilderness (spiritually speaking). We are wilderness wanderers: redeemed from our spiritual bondage but awaiting the eternal promise land.

This scene not only invites us to look back; it also invites us to look forward. Indeed Jesus' instruction to his disciples to "bring them here to me" for the blessing and breaking of bread foreshadows the ordinance of communion.

In this way Jesus stands, not just as someone on mission or as a compassionate healer, but as a wilderness banquet host.

- a. What good is a host without food? This isn't your ordinary banquet host. Jesus, in submission and with gratitude, looks to his heavenly father before blessing and distributing the food.
- b. The miracle of the provision is not described in great detail except that (1) all 5,000+ ate and were satisfied and (2) there were 12 baskets of food left over! Clearly there was more food at the end of the meal than what was available in the beginning.
- c. There's no real way of explaining this except in terms of supernatural provision.
- d. What a banquet feast! The host not only invites thousands of people to partake, he multiplies a meager meal into enough to feed the multitudes.
- e. But there is a danger to witnessing such miraculous provision. Back then, as it is today, we can emphasize the provision at the expense of the provider. Throughout Jesus' ministry you had folks who followed him *just* to see healings (or to be healed), *just* to witness the miraculous rather than contemplate what the miracle meant.
- f. Don't fall into the same trap. The point of the story isn't what was provided, but *through whom* the provision was made.
- g. An over-abundance of bread (and fish) was a wonderful miracle, but the point of this passage isn't the bread; it's Jesus. Jesus: the miraculous provider.

Moses may have lead Israel in the wilderness for forty years. He may have asked God on behalf of the people for bread that would be scattered and collected among the Israel's twelve tribes.

Jesus is a better leader for us in our wilderness wanderings. Unlike Moses, Jesus brings us into the Father's rest. He is there as we endure pain, suffering, and hardship. And he will be there as we enter the presence of the Almighty. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus is better than Moses because the bread that is given comes from *him*. And the bread he gives is given in abundance and is all-satisfying. It doesn't just last for the day! His provision is distributed freely, not collected. It is not scattered about. We need not search for it. It's right in front of us; and it's found in the blessing of Jesus.

#### 4. Jesus: the miraculous provider (vv. 19-21)

#### APPLICATION

1. Finding ourselves satisfied in Jesus' provision *means* being satisfied in Him since he, himself, is both our Great Provider *and* our Great Provision.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (John 6:35).

2. Miraculous provision requires trust and obedience
  - a. The obedience of Jesus
    - i. He withdrew to a desolate place
    - ii. He looked up toward heaven
    - iii. He went to the cross willingly
  - b. The obedience of Jesus' disciples: they brought what they had and trusted Jesus with the rest. Like them, we are not given a pass for obedience due to an unusual circumstance. Whether we obey or not should not be dependent upon our current situation.
  - c. Do you see the wilderness around you for what it is? How do you endure it? Where do you go when your soul is hungry?

**CONCLUSION:** In a world of Herods, Herodias, and desolate, wilderness wastelands, Jesus is our compassionate banquet host who invites us to come and be satisfied in his miraculous, abundant, all-satisfying provision.