

Jesus is Life (Matthew 15:32-16:12)

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Date: 28 January 2024

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[0 : 00] So let's now turn to the Bible verse, which will be preached today by Pastor Michael. So 1523, there is no heading beforehand, but 1523, follow along NIV, and it's going to be a bit long, so please follow ahead.

32, 1532, okay, 1532, 1532. Cool. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people.

They have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry or they may collapse on the way. His disciples answered, where can we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?

How many loaves do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied, and a few small fish. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.

They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was 4,000 men besides women and children.

[1 : 18] After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

He replied, Jesus then left them and went away.

When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. Be careful, Jesus said to them. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

They discussed this among themselves and said, It is because we didn't bring any bread. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, You have little faith. Why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?

Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves of the 5,000 and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the 4,000 and how many basketfuls you gathered?

[2 : 32] How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Pastor Michael? Thank you. T■n■ k■itu. T■n■ k■itu katao. It's great to be here again with you guys.

And it really is just a privilege to join you for worship. I wonder how many of you know what an aha moment is. No?

Some of you do. An aha moment. You're sitting perhaps in a small group or in a tutorial or class at uni or maybe around a coffee table at a home.

Kids, you might be spying on your parents as they talk to some adults and trying to work out what they're talking about. And you have no idea. And if you're an adult, you're part of that group and they want you to join in.

[3 : 48] And they turn to you and say, what do you think? Oh, well, um... Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's some good points there. Do you think Mary's got a good answer for that?

Just two simple rules. Look for repetition and look for contrast. There's contrast here, you see.

There's movement backwards, forwards across the sea. Have you wondered why on earth?

They're going backwards and forwards. They've spent half their time on the sea. And last week you saw they took a little trip up to the northwest beyond Galilee. Why? Well, there's contrast in each

movement.

On the western bank, they're meeting the Jewish people, but not with a lot of faith. On the eastern bank, they're meeting the Gentiles. And what did you learn last week?

They believed in the God of Israel. Isn't that marvellous? So they head off across the... Matthew doesn't actually tell us what the response is to the feeding of the 5,000.

[4 : 52] We're just left blank. But when we get across the sea to the pagans, to the unbelievers, they believe in the God of Israel.

And then they head back and who do they meet? The Pharisees are saying, who's this guy? Do you see why there's that movement? There's contrast. And the Pharisees, of course, well, they stand out as the bad guys, don't they?

And they really are. In a literary sense, if you're studying literature, you'll know what a foil is. The foil is the bad guy in the story to show up the good guys.

Right, kids, there's always a bad guy in a story, isn't there? There's always somebody who doesn't meet the values of the hero. If I knew my stuff, I'd know.

Who's the bad guy in the Superman stories? Yeah, yeah, I heard somebody whispering it. What's his name?

[5 : 52] Call it out, please. Oh, yeah, okay, that'll do. Right. He's a foil. He's put there in the story to show you how good the good guys are.

The Pharisees are there as a foil in contrast to those who believe. So there's these contrasts there. Repetition and contrast.

So let's look at this first section. Matthew 15, 32 to 39. Jesus acts with compassion. Okay, I'll get there.

Yeah, I got there. Jesus acts with compassion. Once again, an episode is introduced with the words, I have compassion for these people.

That's how he began with the 5,000. Now he begins with the 4,000. Why? Why does Matthew include this? Well, Mark says of the 5,000 that Jesus had compassion on, he had compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

[6 : 56] This is a very important Old Testament theme. You'll all know Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. Got it? All the way through the Old Testament, God has been talking about Israel as the sheep.

And the pastors, the leaders, are supposed to be the shepherds. And they fail. And by the time you get to Ezekiel 34, God has condemned the shepherds of Israel.

They're supposed to be spiritual leaders. And he says, all you're doing is feeding yourself. We don't have to go all the way back in history, do we, to see people who are in roles of leadership, who look after themselves, and do not feed the people.

I'm not going to go there. There are too many illustrations. Too many close to our own lives, aren't there? Ezekiel 34, God says, no, you have starved and scattered the people to feed yourselves.

So God will come in judgment of the leaders, but he'll come as a rescuer of the people. But here in Matthew, he's among the Gentiles, not Israel.

[8 : 09] Even though God was never their shepherd, the Gentiles have the same need of a shepherd as Israel. Which is pretty cool, isn't it? Because I figure most of us are Gentiles. Now there may be some real Jews amongst you.

We're not going to ask you to put your hand up. But the reality, if you're like me, you're a Gentile. And Jesus has come as a shepherd of us too. Yay. You're a bit inanimate.

Yay. Okay, thank you. Yet Matthew leaves that out completely. Did you notice that as we're reading? He doesn't mention the fact that they're shepherds.

Instead, he stresses that they're hungry. Now make no mistake, Jesus really does have compassion on those in need. And in fact, in Ezekiel, he says that when God comes as a shepherd, he will feed.

He will bind up the wounds. He will care for the struggling. Yes, Jesus is a shepherd. But, there's something more basic.

[9 : 14] There's something more basic than healing and comfort and jobs and wealth and safety. Now here's the hint. We're going to see it as it unfolds. Jesus has more to offer than bread.

He is in fact, the bread of life. So once again, the disciples asked Jesus, what to do? Now come on. The last episode, we saw them passing out seven loaves, sorry, five loaves, and a couple of fish to

5,000 people.

And now, they're confronted with only 4,000. And they've got seven loaves and some fish. And they don't know what to do. Eh? Why?

Why? Well, in fact, if you skip down a little bit to verses 6, to chapter 16, and verses 8, and 9, and 11, you'll see Matthew is including this to tell us they have little faith.

Listen. Jesus, aware of their lack of understanding, said, you of little faith. Why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not understand?

[10:33] How is it that you don't understand? And we're going to find out why in a minute. But you see what Jesus is saying. You see what Matthew is putting before us with this little episode.

He's saying, faith and understanding go together. Now there are people who tell you, you've got to have faith. Faith is a belief in something that you don't understand and you have no idea. You've got to have faith.

Right? If you're playing cricket, you've got to have faith. Well, having faith doesn't block the ball in front of the wickets, does it? No matter how strong your faith, that doesn't work. And here Jesus is saying, no, faith and understanding go together.

Faith is not understanding how Jesus does it. They still don't, I still don't know. I mean, 2,000 years after it happened, I have no idea. He gives thanks and he passes the food out. How did that work? I don't know. A little bit like Genesis 1, isn't it? God said, let there be light and there was light. How did that work? Well, it's God at work.

[11:33] He just says, let there be light and there is. Do you need thousands of years for that to sort of unfold? No. He says, let there be light and there was light. Oh, let there be a firmament and there was.

Let there be plants and animals and there were. He even says, let there be man and he was. And then he does a little trick with Adam's rib, doesn't he? But, you see, God can do these things.

So it's not believing or understanding what Jesus does, but it's understanding who Jesus is. And that's what the disciples were missing. It's not believing, excuse me, what Jesus will do is if I sit down and tell, oh, give me a new job.

I'm going to believe heart. No, no, no. It's believing that Jesus will do what he says he will do and he will do what he wants to do and trusting him for it.

Jesus has promised he will do some things. We've got a list of them, haven't we? He will save us. He will come again. Those are the two big ones. It will happen. He also says he will never desert us or leave us.

[12:45] You may not be able to see him, but he is never far from us. Never. So there are certain things he's promised he will do, but there's other things we don't know. All right? Starting a new university course.

Oh, there's all the things I want to fall into place. Going back to school, the stuff you kids want to do. Or if you're homeschooling, are you starting this week or is mum giving you a week off?

I don't know. But what would you like God to do for you? No, that's not what faith is about. Faith is saying, I can trust him to do what's good for me.

And then once again, Jesus feeds the thousands. Why? He's just done it and he does it again. And Matthew gives us almost the identical account, just as Mark and Luke do, actually.

Here's a hint. It's not about the bread. Although he does feed them bread when they're hungry, but Jesus is the shepherd who has compassion and he lives out this metaphor of being the bread of life.

[13:54] Jesus acts with compassion because he is the shepherd who is the bread of life. And I think that is there. That's it.

That's the first little section summed up. Jesus is the shepherd and the bread of life. So let's move on and look at verses 16, chapter 16, verses 1 to 4.

Wow. Wow. Once again, Jesus meets this brood of vipers. Now I'm picking up here on what he calls them back in chapter 3 of Matthew.

In chapter 3, verse 7, the Pharisees come to him and test him. I want you to notice the order here. This is even before Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. They come to him and say, give us a sign.

You see how that's picked up by Matthew here in today's passage? Give us a sign, they say. And Jesus says to them, you brood of vipers? Now, I'm not quite sure how this would go down with your

fellow students or workmates or family.

[15:07] If you were to suddenly look at them and say, you brood of vipers. And yet, Jesus is saying something really critical about the way the Pharisees approach things.

Because what happens in the very next section of Matthew as Jesus goes out into the wilderness to be tempted, who's he tempted by?

The chief viper. Satan himself. Right? And what we're being taught here is that to test God is to be a viper.

And can I suggest to you that you think carefully about yourself today? Because if you're an unbeliever, you're saying to God, I've heard the gospel, I've heard about Jesus, but I am not sure yet.

You're not sure? God has shown you who Jesus is? God has given his son for you? Oh, yeah, but I'm not sure.

[16:13] Kids, is that you? Do you sometimes say, oh, does God really love me? Has God said he loved you? Did Jesus really die for sinners? Did God say that he did?

Are you belonging to the group of vipers? Because in chapter 8 and verse 44 of John's gospel, John calls those who will not believe children of the devil.

In Paul's sermon in Antioch, back in Acts 13, or on in Acts 13, he quotes from Habakkuk 1.5. And Habakkuk is actually referencing Moses. Look, says Habakkuk, or the Lord through Habakkuk, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I'm going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.

And what happens? He promises that he will judge the vipers, the unbelievers, the opposers, that he will save his people.

There is no middle ground when you come to confront Jesus Christ. More to the point. Why is Matthew describing this part of the story?

[17:29] What happens straight after Jesus calls them a brood of vipers? Straight away he goes and he's tested by Satan and we read this in Matthew 4 and verse 1. Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by that old serpent, I quote Revelation 12.9, the devil.

And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry and the tempter came to him and said, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Do you think possibly that when Matthew wrote that and then he wrote chapter 16, he knew that they were tied together? Do you think Matthew's cottoned on to the fact that Jesus is talking about bread because he is the bread of life and that there is actually more to life than having full stomachs?

And once again, Jesus rejects the Pharisees' demand for a sign. In Matthew 16, verse 4, he says, an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.

It's clear to them who Jesus is, isn't it? But they test Jesus. Prove yourself. Do you do that? Do you put God to the test?

[18:54] Do you say, ah, if you could only convince me, I would believe. If you would only show me, I would follow you. Children, I'm quite sure when dad tells you to do something, you don't question what dad really wants.

You might try and avoid it, but you don't say, prove to me that you're dad. That would not be a, and yet, don't we do that with God? Oh, prove to me that you're God.

Prove to me that your word is something I can trust. Prove who are you. Who are you to demand that God prove himself to you? But then God does in fact promise a different sign.

An adulterous and evil generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to you except the sign of Jonah. And he goes on to explain that this is the resurrection.

Three days he was in the grave, and just like Jonah was ejected from that tomb of a whale, believe me if you'd been with Jonah inside the whale, that was a tomb.

[20:09] That was a no hope place. And he's belched out onto the beach, willing, far, far greater demonstration of God's power. Jesus is raised from the dead. Jesus declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

You know, this has been my comfort for years. I spend a lot of time reading and teaching theology in the Bible and writing about it, and sometimes you know when I've been a couple of hours at the computer working through some theological point, especially if it's somebody who doesn't believe

the Bible and is having influence and I'm trying to work out how to deal with it, you sit back and think, oh, is this for real?

And then I remember the resurrection. He is risen. Yes! He is risen from the dead, no doubts. And what about you?

Do you test God or do you trust in this? Jesus, whoops, Jesus' resurrection is the sign and the reality.

Not just a sign like the bread being fed to others as a miracle, but Jesus himself, the risen saviour, still today with the risen body seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

[21 : 32] He is not only the sign but the reality of his gracious work. Moving on then to the third section. Contrast is also a key, isn't it, to Matthew's way of telling the story.

And why does Jesus warn them, beware of the leaven? If you don't know what leaven is, it's that stuff mum puts into the bread to make it rise.

And if you've ever been around in the kitchen when mum's forgotten, maybe dad does the baking. I'm sure it's the dads who forget the leaven more than the mums. If you're in the kitchen and someone has forgotten to put the leaven in and when the bread is flat, they know that it's a fail. Right? Leaven is just a little bit of baking powder, is it? Right? You can use baking powder, leaven is that yesty stuff that goes in and lets the dough rise as it's...

Priscilla's looking at me. Okay. I should have checked this out first. But, you know, you put the dough aside and it rises because a little bit of yeast bubbles away.

[22 : 47] It ferments. Right? He's saying that the evil teaching, the false teaching, swapping backwards and forwards, evil, false, same thing, is something that gets in.

It's a little bit like COVID. You know, I doubt very much whether any of you saw somebody with COVID and ran up to them and said, breathe on me.

You don't go to the false teachers and say, lead me astray. But it got you, didn't it? Is there anyone here who hasn't had COVID? Whoa, yay, isn't God amazing?

But most of us have had it, some of us twice, right? Even three times I hear it. You don't, it gets you, doesn't it? And one day you wake up and you I've got a cold, love.

Well, mum, no you haven't. Get the test kit out. It's got you. That's what false teaching is like. It seeps in and suddenly you wake up and it's there and it's having its influence.

[23 : 53] Jesus contrasted a lack of understanding too. Not just the Pharisees, he contrasts their lack of understanding with faith. Why? Because he saw the moment, as we saw a moment earlier, a lack of understanding as to who Jesus is, is not a matter of intellectual understanding, it is a matter of faith, of submitting yourself to God.

The disciples you see had this aha moment in verse 12. Ah, they understand. they understood that Jesus wasn't talking about leaving bread behind on the other side of the lake.

He was talking about the evil influence of the Pharisees. But even as they understood that, they still were missing the point. It was still an aha fail. They had seen that Jesus was talking not about bread, but about teaching, but they missed the point that he is the bread of life.

Jesus calls us to understand the truth about who he is and believe. I want to tie this all together by getting a different perspective on it.

Because when we go to John's Gospel, we see he comments on the same things. First of all in John 10 and 11, he says Jesus is the good shepherd.

[25 : 26] He points that out to us. In fact, he's referring back to Ezekiel 34. Let me read some of it. For thus says the Lord God, behold, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among the sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek I, Jesus, God, will seek out my sheep.

I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost. I will bring them back.

I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak. I will shepherd the flock with justice. So Jesus did indeed say, I am the good shepherd, the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Sorry, I pressed the wrong button. And then in John 6, 35, Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger.

[26 : 28] Whoever believes in me will never thirst. And then finally, in John 14, 6, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. will you come to Jesus? Will you trust Jesus? Will you walk with him? He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for a saviour who gave his life, that we might be free from sin, free from guilt, and freed from the bonds of death to live with you now.

And in eternity. Grant to us an understanding of who Jesus is, and a trust of faith in him. We pray in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.