

Introduction: What sets Christ apart in His miracles is not simply the power displayed in them, but the deep-seated compassion which motivates them. In the case of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Christ's compassion is literally as deep as his inner organs – He has “bowels of compassion” (Matthew 14:14) for the hungry multitudes. But such compassion is not a sporadic motivation in Christ. As we will see in this week's notes, it is this compassion which reveals to us the very *heart* of our Savior – in *all* His good deeds, powerful teaching and mighty miracles which He accomplished.

**Monday: read Matthew 14:14, Matthew 8:2-3, Matthew 9:2 & John 6:32-33.** Whether Scripture expresses Christ's heart of compassion in terms of His *willingness to touch the leper and make him clean* (Mt. 8:2-3) or in terms of His *piercing insight into the deepest needs of the human soul* – especially forgiveness (Mt. 9:2) – it is clear that every word, deed and miracle which Christ accomplished was a *revelation* of His compassionate heart attitude towards suffering, guilty sinners.

Moreover, Christ Jesus reveals the heart of God the Father when He exercises His compassion! We see this in John 6:32 where He corrects the misguided Jews who thought Moses was to be exalted in the giving of manna. No, Jesus says, it was my Father's compassion which sent you manna in the desert, and it is *His* compassion which sent His Son as the “bread of God to give life to the world” (John 6:33).

Meditate and Pray: *“Oh God, please forgive us for viewing you as a parsimonious Father. Cause us to see that our root sin and the source of our distrust is that we treat you as a capricious God who cannot be depended upon to always have compassion on us in our guilty weakness and sin. We are like Joseph's brothers, who when Jacob died, brought tears to the eyes of Joseph because they feared that their younger brother would wreak his vengeance now that dad was gone (Gen. 50:15). Instead, please enable us to see that our fundamental privilege of approach to you, Father, is that we can **always cry out “Abba”, help! Amen.**”*

**Tuesday: read Matthew 14:13-14; 14:22 & John 6:15.** Today we focus on the love and concern which prompted Jesus to force the Twelve into a boat to get them away from the crowds who had just been fed in Matthew 14:22 & John 6:15.

Yes, Jesus still is concerned for the crowds and will teach them more things. But the hands which push the disciples to embark once again on the Sea of Galilee (though a storm was coming!) represent Jesus' concern that His own followers not be corrupted by the lust for an earthly kingdom which drove the recently fed crowds to try and bend Jesus to their lust for earthly power (John 6:15)! He knows that such lust for the good things of an earthly kingdom *now*, instead of the *spiritual blessings* of God's unseen Heavenly Kingdom, is a temptation too great for the young faith of His apostles. So He hurries them into a boat and handles the crowds by Himself. He does not want the 12's view of His true Kingdom to be corrupted by the crowd's false view of a carnal kingdom.

But what of the storm? Didn't Jesus know that, in sending the 12 away in the boat, He was sending them into a storm? Undoubtedly. But Jesus knew that the carnal atmosphere of John 6:15 was a far more dangerous way to die than to face death by drowning on the lake.

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks that our Lord Jesus knows how to protect the faith of His people, and is mighty to restrain us when sinful ideas and false doctrines threaten to undo the good work which has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). Let us give thanks for Christ's prayers that our faith won't fail when we are sifted by the Devil (Luke 22:32), and also rejoice *in our Lord Jesus' power to take action* when we get too close to the flames of false teaching which would consume our growing faith. Christ is mighty to force us out of harm's way – even if it means sending us into a storm as He did the 12!

**Wednesday: read Matthew 14:14 & Isaiah 40:10-11.** Christ's compassion for His sheep means He is determined to shepherd us through deadly temptations in this world. When He sees us in danger of false teaching, He takes action! What a contrast to, and rebuke of, false shepherds: who let the wolves in among the sheep! Hear John Owen:

*The personal attributes which describe Jesus in Isaiah 40:11 are that of the greatest tenderness, compassion and condescension that can be imagined. His people are set forth under many infirmities; some are lambs, some great with young, some very tender, some burdened with temptations – nothing in any of them strong or comely. To them Christ is a shepherd that feeds His own sheep and drives them out to pleasant pasture; where, if He sees a poor, weak lamb, He doth not thrust him on, but takes him into His bosom, where He both eases and refreshes him: He leads him gently and tenderly. As did Jacob them that were burdened with young, so doth our dear Lord Jesus with His flock, in the several ways and paths wherein He leads them.*

*When He sees a poor soul, weak, tender, halting, ready to sink and perish, He takes him into His arms, by some gracious promise administered to him, carries him, bears him up when he is not able to go one step forward. Hence also is His great quarrel with false shepherds, Ezek. 34:4, “Woe be to you shepherds! The diseased have you not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost.” Compassionate care is that which our careful, tender Shepherd would have done to His sheep. (Vol. 2, pg. 142)*

**Thursday: read Matthew 14:13; John 6:11-15 & John 6:53-59.** There is another reason why Jesus removes Himself into the desert besides His compassion for the lost and His concern to give His disciples rest. It is to take up the prophetic mantle of John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet. Now that John is gone, (having been executed by Herod the tetrarch), Jesus Himself will go out to the desert as the prophetic leader of God's people – just like Moses in the book of Exodus. And as Moses suffered abuse at the hands of Israel, even though God sent them manna in accordance with Moses' word, so Jesus is abused after providing the miraculous meal of bread and fish – even though that meal was so plentiful that all who ate were “satisfied”! What ungrateful abuse - after such a generous, gracious, compassionate feeding of the multitudes.

What exactly did Jesus suffer from the multitudes? The crowds sought to bend Jesus to their lust for power in John 6:15, coercing Him to take up an earthly throne to do their bidding against the Romans! They tried to make Him king by force, while disregarding both His word and the real reason why He had come – which was to give His flesh and blood for the salvation of sinners (John 6:53-59). In the same way they rejected all the prophets who went before Jesus as well (Matthew 23:37)!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, give us grace to be willing to be rejected for your sake. When we are scorned, minimized, ignored and even abused by those who would bend our spiritual words to their own carnal uses, give us grace to live out the words of hymn # 584. Amen.

*Go, labor on: spend, and be spent,  
Thy joy to do the Father's will:  
It is the way the Master went;  
Should not the servant tread it still?*

*Go, labor on! 'tis not for naught  
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises: what are men?*

*Go, labor on! enough, while here,  
If He shall praise thee, if He deign  
The willing heart to mark and cheer:  
No toil for Him shall be in vain.*

*Go, labor on! Your hands are weak,  
Your knees are faint, your soul cast down;  
Yet falter not; the prize you seek  
Is near—a kingdom and a crown*

**Friday: read Acts 10:37-39.** The ultimate fruit of Christ's compassionate, shepherding heart, coupled with His almighty power, is that He was *entirely, one hundred percent effective* in every word, deed and miracle in His ministry of mercy and salvation. Everyone who *should have* been healed; everyone who *should have* been taught; everyone who (in the perfect, sovereign plan of God the Father) *should have* been delivered from Satan's bondage – was! Christ's deeds were not merely mighty – they were exhaustive and complete!

For example, the Apostles often celebrate the infinite number of good works which Jesus Christ accomplished while on earth, as He went about “doing good and healing *all* who were under the power of the Devil” (Acts 10:38). What an expansive statement from Peter: “Healing ALL who were under the power of the Devil.” Such is the apostolic testimony to the complete and utter devastation of the kingdom of evil which Christ accomplished. John puts it another way in his first letter: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8). And how did He destroy these evil works? By His good works: infinite in number and variety – perfectly designed to meet and defeat every work of evil in our lives. As John puts it in John 21:25: “*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*”

Perhaps this will be the theme in Heaven on ‘movie nights’: replaying the numberless miracles and good works which John couldn't fit in His Gospel and which all the books of the world couldn't contain!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank the Lord Jesus for the immensity and the infinity of His saving work. We will need an eternity to begin to appreciate all that He has done to make us His. As one anonymous poet put it:

“Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.”