

Matthew 14:15-21 The Principles of Problem Solving

We are in Matthew 14:15-21. Matthew chapters 5 through 25 is the third section in Matthew, and in those chapters, 5 through 25, there are five messages that Matthew highlights. In between those five messages are supportive chapters to bring the message to life and to light. In Matthew chapter 13 was the third message in this section, The Parables of the Kingdom, where Jesus gave eight parables. But in chapter 14 we are studying The Ministry of the Principles of the Parables. The ministry of the principles of the parables as the parables are lived out in front of us, especially The Parable of the Sower, where you have four different responses, four different reactions to the Word of God.

Last week we opened up Matthew chapter 14 as we studied about how John the baptizer was put to death because Herod Antipas, the son to Herod the Great, was angry over the message that John was bringing and he put him into prison. And Herodias, Herod Antipas' wife, detested him because he was saying that the two of them were living in adultery. And so, she had, through her conniving, had John the Baptist beheaded. And so, we have a response and rejection to the truth of God's Word, to the message of the Gospel going out. We have people angry. We have people committing murder. We have all the various responses in a negative way, in a rejection way, to the things of the Lord.

But then, we had in verses 13 and 14 that we ended up with last week, The Provision for the People that Followed. When Jesus heard that John the baptizer was put to death, He left that area. And when the crowds heard that He left, they followed Him. And those that followed Him, Jesus turned, and He had compassion on them, and He healed their sicknesses. We ended off last week by emphasizing the term, *to follow*. They followed Jesus. ἀκολουθέω (akoloutheo) is the Greek word for *follow*, and it is an action word, it is not a passive word. In other words, they didn't follow Jesus over the TV, or in the newspaper, or over the Internet. They literally, physically, followed Jesus. And, *to follow* is a very important word.

Lately, I've come across people that have been using the term *believer*. "Are you a believer?" And they will ask me, "Are you a believer?" Or they will tell me, "I'm with a group of people who are believers." But it's more than just being a believer when you belong to Christ. As we saw last week, in James 2:19, even the demons believe and tremble. So, just being a believer, just believing what the Bible says about Jesus and saying, "I believe that," that's not enough to belong to Jesus Christ.

And the real question is, "Are you a *follower*?" And by that I don't mean, follow Him by studying your Bible, that's all part of it. It doesn't mean follow Him by following a church program. It has nothing to do with following church. It really has nothing to do with following the Bible. It is following the person of Jesus Christ Himself. And some people will tell me, "Well, I am following the Lord by giving my all to my church." No, that's the church, that's not Jesus. Or, "I'm following Jesus by studying the Bible as best I can." Well, that's good, that's good that you're studying and learning about the Lord, but that's not following Jesus. Following Jesus is taking what the Book teaches you, what you've learned from others, and what you learn

from the fellowship of believers that you're with, and literally following Jesus Christ, wherever He goes.

We saw last week that Jesus made following Him a requirement, not just believing but following. In Matthew 16:24, we saw last week that Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after me," and the word *after* means *follow behind*. "If anyone desires to come behind Me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me." Jesus called for followers, not believers, but followers. A saved person is a believer, but not all believers are saved. That's what it boils down to. And by following Jesus, we mean literally following behind Him. On all the important issues of life, it is looking for Him and seeking to follow Him in them.

And as I ended off last week, by talking about open doors. Some Christians look for open doors. Not all open doors have been created by the Lord. Satan is the god of this world, he has access to all the material things of the world. He can open doors, especially access to the things of the world. The Lord can also open doors, but He doesn't open doors for us to go through. He opens doors for Him to go through, and we follow. He doesn't give us information. "Well, I'm seeking the Lord as to what He wants me to do." He is not going to drop a note down from heaven and then I just be on my way in my human effort and go and do it. "Lord, what do you want me to do?" He's going to show me what He wants me to do by going before me. This is a relationship. This is not a religion. So, the real question is, "Are you a *follower* of Jesus?" And when people come up to me and they say, "Well, I really don't know what to do."

"Well, follow the Lord."

"Well, what does the Scripture say?"

"Well, I can give you some Scriptures, but in reality, follow what the Lord wants you to do. Is He leading you to do that? Is He going before you and are you following behind Him? Are you following Him?"

This continues in our study for today. In Matthew 14:15-21, The Provision for the Five Thousand. And in this, not only are we going to give you the textual information, the technical points about the text, but also, I'm going to present to you The Principles of Problem Solving. By that, I don't mean give you things to practice. That is not what I mean. The Lord creates problems. He has a solution to those problems. And He has a way to reach the solution to those problems that we have to learn, so that spiritually we can recognize and approach life and solve those problems the Lord's way as we are following Him. We all have problems. We all have difficulties. We all have circumstances. This is one of the great sections in the Bible about the principles of problem solving, as the Lord reveals what's behind all of the difficulties and situations that we are in.

In verse 15, we have the circumstance presented to us. **And when it became evening,** (Remember Jesus has the crowds following Him, He's having compassion on them and healing them.) **His disciples came to Him saying, "The place is a desert,** (that's it's literal translation) **and the hour is already passed. Dismiss the crowds, in order that when they go into the villages they might purchase for themselves victuals.** (Or more literally *food*.) So, right away the situation and circumstance is presented to us. The crowds have been following Jesus, the disciples are looking at the crowds - we will see here in verse 21, that the total number of people in the crowd is around twenty to twenty-one thousand people - who are following Jesus. So, it's

evening time, the disciples are looking around saying, "There's no stores out here. There's no food. There's no place to buy food." So, they're coming to Jesus and they're asking Him to dismiss the crowds so that they can go back into the villages and find food for themselves.

I find it interesting, as we progress through here, the number one principle is that the Lord designs all circumstances and situations. The Lord designs them, especially for His people. Now, let me say this, all circumstances - as we'll see in a moment - are designed to cause growth, spiritual growth, to cause us to spiritually come to know the Lord better. But not all believers have the same severity of difficulty and circumstances. If a person is a young believer and a young follower of Christ, they will not experience as difficult of circumstances as a more mature believer. In fact, the more you mature in Christ, the more He leads you into circumstances where the circumstances and situations are literally impossible to solve. Absolutely impossible to solve. In other words, it's for Him to solve. Realizing that the Lord creates all circumstances and situations for Him to solve. It's all for Him, not for us. But of course, we jump the gun, we respond and react naturally in our human senses to the situations. But all circumstances are designed for the Lord to cause growth.

In James 1:1-3, James says that he is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is writing to the twelve tribes of the **διασπορά** (Diaspora), the twelve tribes of Israel, the believers who have been scattered outside of Israel and Jerusalem because of the persecution. He says, **"My brethren, count it all joy whenever you should fall into various testings."** Wow, what a tough thing to do. And it makes it sound like He's asking us to psychologically practice a principle of rejoicing over my circumstances, like positive thinking. That is not what He is saying. "Count it all joy." The word *count* is the Greek word that means *the leading thought of your mind*. You have all kinds of thoughts going on in your mind but let the leading thought of your mind be with all joy when you fall into various testings. **"Knowing this,"** you see, I'm supposed to rejoice over things because of what I know, not because of the positive thoughts that I practice. **"Knowing this, that the proving of your faith is working out patience,"** or *endurance*, literally. So, every situation that comes along, all the various testings that come along, we are to rejoice over because this is the Lord's doing; and He's doing it in order to build up and put to test our faith, so that we have to live by faith in those circumstances, and by living by faith we are enduring. Notice the end result of faith is endurance, not leaving and running, but endurance. And so, as I've said before from our other studies in James there are two reasons, two things, we are to get out of and understand about our hardships and difficulties.

(1) In every difficult situation we get to experience the person of Christ Himself. Who He is. His sustaining power. His blessing on a personal basis.

And secondly, (2) other people get to see us trusting the Lord and to see Him work in our circumstances. So, they get to see Him ministering to us and providing for us.

So, **"Count it all joy when you fall into various circumstances and testings, because they are from God."** They are from the Lord. It is supposed to help us to endure, to remain under, whatever circumstances we are involved in.

Secondly, look in verse 16, look at the challenge. I love this verse. **But Jesus said to them, "They need not depart."** But literally, let me smooth that out for you, **"They have no need to go away."** Then He gives them a command, **"You yourselves,"** in the Greek text there is an emphasis there, *nobody else*, just you yourselves, you disciples, **"give to them food to eat."** What a situation for twelve guys, impossible to solve, but they try. See, that's the whole point here. In case you don't get it for today, let me just give you the one summary before I move on. "They have no need to leave." Problems and difficulties have no need to go away, if we understand that it is there for Christ Himself to take care of, and for us to experience Him, and for others to see our testimony of us trusting Christ in our weakness. They see the Lord taking care of our situations and circumstances.

So, the second principle now, we see in verse 16, is that there is no need for the difficulties and problems to go away. We are always praying, "Lord, here is the difficulty. Pray for it to go away. Solve the problem so I don't have any." And every time I have the problems, I just pile them up and put them on a list and say, "Lord, you've got to get rid of these for me because it is causing me difficulties." Why do I not need to have my difficulties and situations and circumstances removed? Why do they do not need to go away? In Philippians 4:13 Paul says - and this is the way the verse reads that we are all familiar with, **"I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."** Literally, "I am strong for all things in Christ who empowers me." *In-powers me*. What that is saying is that I can do anything, it doesn't matter what the situation is, it doesn't matter what the circumstances is. In Christ, His in-powering gives me the strength to endure, to remain under, like James says.

And secondly, why do our difficulties and circumstances need not go away? I Corinthians 10:13. Here is what it says, **There has no testing or temptation taken you but such as is common to man.** That which is: *belongs to the human*, is literally how it's translated. So, even though you and I carry around an attitude and even expression to other people is that, "I'm going through difficulties and nobody knows the trouble that I've seen. I mean you might have problems, but I've got problems. Your problems are not as bad as mine, and my difficulties." But Paul says, **No testing has taken you but except what belongs to the human.** It's common. **But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what you're able.** The word *able* is the word *capacity*. **But will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to (listen to this) bear up under it.** People read the word *escape* and they say, "Well, ask God and He'll give you an escape." The escape is that He gives you Himself and you bear up under it. You don't leave it. You don't go anywhere. You don't run away. It doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't need to, because I can always compare myself with my difficulties and see my own weakness and know that it has to go away. But, on the other hand, when I see the same difficulty in light of who Jesus Christ is, who lives inside of me, it doesn't need to go away. He'll handle it. He will take care of it. I'm a follower. I'm not a problem solver. I am a follower of the One who solves all the problems because He's the answer to every problem and the solution to every problem.

Thirdly, the third principle that we see in verse 16, is we understand (or learn) the learning process. There is a learning process that the Lord has actively involved in everybody's life that knows Him. We know that in Jeremiah 31:31-34 God gave to Israel the teaching about the New Covenant called the New Testament in our Bibles. The New Covenant that He is going

to make with His people is that He's going to send His Spirit to dwell inside of His people and that His Spirit will cause obedience to the statutes and judgments that God gives. People won't do it. God's Spirit is sent, and it is God's Spirit who obeys through the believer. It's the Spirit of God that responds to Christ that is within us. And yet, we have yet to learn as Paul said in Romans 7:18, he learned that as he tried to do what God wanted him to do and couldn't, he says, "I've learned that in my flesh dwells no good thing." I don't have the ability and capacity to do spiritual things. You see me this morning standing in front of you as a human being. That's me. I'm not spiritual. I'm human. But I have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within me. He's spiritual. His Spirit is the only one that can produce the spiritual things of God. That is a summary statement of all the teaching of the New Testament is that His Spirit is the one who fulfills God's Word and command. We have yet to learn the lesson.

Just like with the Jews, the Jewish people and the Hebrew people. When Jesus came they rejected Him as Messiah because they were keeping the law and they didn't need a Savior, especially Him. And so, they thought that by keeping the law they would be saved that way. We make the same mistake. We think that by keeping the commands of the New Testament in the human, with human effort, that we are working out our salvation, that we are being Christians, and we are being saved by obeying God's command. The problem is you can't obey it. You try it and you fail.

It is the same lesson as the Hebrew and Jewish people from the Old Testament. "Why did God give me the command?" Listen to this because this is learning the proper learning lesson. God gives me a command so that I can find out that I can't do it, that I must trust Him, I must rely on Him. And that time gap in the responses is what really makes it for the believer's life. When you hear the command and it takes you weeks and months and years to come to the end of yourself to realize you can't do it, that you have to turn to Christ. When that response time gets shortened - in other words, when the Lord gives the command and right away you say, "Okay Lord, you commanded it, but in Jeremiah 31 You said You would send Your Spirit in order to fulfill that command. So, I'm following. I will follow Your Spirit as Your Spirit fulfills that command." It is not for people. People fail. The churches are filled with hundreds, if not thousands, of people who are being told even today, "Here are God's commands for you to do, and you're not doing it, and you're failing." They are being told they are failures. Well, that's the message of Scripture, we are failures, we are sinners.

So, learning the learning lesson. He gave the command. It was an impossible task. He puts our circumstances in such a way so that in the human it's impossible to do. You have to turn to Christ.

Verse 17, **But they say to Him**, because remember He said, "You yourselves give them food to eat." What should have been the response? Had they understood how the Lord works in problems and situations and circumstances, they would have said, "Well, this is impossible for us to do, so Lord you tell us what to do, and we will do it." But instead they came back, and **they said to Him, "We do not have here except five loaves of bread and two fish."** All we have is a little boy's lunch. Now I want to give you more details.

First of all, in John chapter 6 we have more details of the same circumstance, but it helps us to understand these principles of problem-solving. In John 6:5-7, **When Jesus lifted up his eyes, and He saw this great company**, same group that we are studying here in Matthew 14, **He says to Philip**, we don't have this information in our text, **He says to Philip, "From where shall we buy bread, in order that these may eat?" And this He was saying**, and the Greek text shows continuously: *He was saying in order to prove him* (or test him) **for Jesus Himself knew what He was about to do**. The Lord puts us in circumstances, He already knows what He's going to do. He already knows and has His will for every situation, but He's testing us. The person who created the circumstance, the person who is the answer to the circumstance, is asking you to solve it. That's John 6:6, very important verse. **And Philip answered him, "Two hundred denari of bread is not sufficient for them, in order that each one should take a little bit**. And he says, "If we had 200 days wages worth of food out here and could go and buy food, these people, it still would not be enough!" See he is still thinking human resources. Jesus put it right in his lap. "Philip, what are we going to do?" So, we see the next principle here is principle number four. We try to fix our circumstances through human resources. That's our problem. Because the situation and circumstance is human and it's circumstantial, so we look for human resources to solve the problem, when the Lord is the answer to the problem. He might use human resources to solve it but not on the basis of our efforts.

But then in John 6:8-9, we have an accompanying statement along with what's in our text right here, specifically to Andrew. John 6:8-9, **One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, says to him, "There's a young boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fish: but what are they among so many?"** Again impossible. Just a little boy's lunch, there is 20,000 people here. So, it's impossible. We learn again, the next principle, that the proper response to the Lord is this next statement that he makes in verse 18. **And Jesus said, "Bring them here to Me."** That's the proper response, bring them to Jesus. Whatever you have, whatever the situation is, there is a proper order. Remember, we are following Jesus. We are not the problem solvers. He is the problem solver because He has created the problem, so that He can fix it and be the solution, so that we can learn that basic principle: I can't do it, only He can do it. And I'm following Him.

In verse 19, The Commission. Gives us the proper order. **And when He commanded the crowds**, Jesus said, **to recline upon the grass, and having taken the five loaves and the two fish, when He looked up into heaven He blessed them**. I'll give you a little technical point about blessing food. The word *blessing* - **εὐλογέω** (eulogeo) does not mean *you pronounce a blessing on food*. It literally means *to speak well of something*. So, when Jesus blessed the food He was looking up into heaven, giving thanks. He was speaking well of the food, acknowledging the One who gave it. So, **When He looked up to heaven, He blessed, and after having broken**, (that would be the bread) **He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the crowds**. Proper order. You bring it to Jesus. He is the one that directs the action. He is the one that directs the situation. We are the servants. We are not the problem solvers. And this is something hard for us to grasp, is that I am a servant in my own situations. I can serve the Lord in your situation, but since I'm directly involved it is my situation, right? "It's

mine, so I have to solve it, and I have to find an answer." I am just as much a servant in my own situation as I am in anybody else's situation. The proper order is to bring it Christ, whatever the situation. The proper order is to follow Him as He moves and directs and provides the answer for the situation, however long it might take.

Then lastly, the last principle in verses 20 and 21. The Lord's will was done in this situation because the Lord did it. The Lord's will was successfully done in this situation because the Lord did it. It will always be 100% perfect the way the Lord has it planned. **And they all ate and were satisfied.** The word *filled* in the English text is literally the word *satisfied*. So, they just didn't have a bite and then pass it on to somebody else and then leave a little bit hungry. Everybody was satisfied with food. **And they took up the leftover fragments, twelve baskets full.** One for each of the 12 disciples. **And the ones eating were about five thousand men, separate from women and children.** Five thousand men, approximately four people per family, there's about twenty to twenty-one thousand people all totaled, that were fed by this miracle. And everybody was satisfied. Not one person went hungry. The situation was totally taken care of because the Lord did it. And the disciples were in proper order, they were the servants looking to Jesus to provide.

So, I summarize by making mention again to John 6:6 that we just read a few moments ago. When the Lord told Philip, and the Lord told Andrew, when He told Philip specifically, "Here's a problem here. Here's a situation. Here's a circumstance. These people need to be fed, what are we going to do?" As a matter fact, not, "What are we going to do?" but, "You feed them? You take care the problem." So, they did. They tried. They tried with all of their human resources, because the Lord commanded them to solve the problem. "Feed them. You feed them."

"Okay. Well, He commanded me, so here I go."

But only when they ran out of human resources did they come back to Jesus and say, "It's impossible." Our human resources don't work, it is not enough. And yet John 6:6 tells us that Jesus knew all the time what He was going to do, but He was doing it to test them, to prove them, to put them through the testing process that James talked about in James 1:1-3. Learn how to live by faith, means to follow Christ as a servant, even in my own situations and circumstances. Acknowledging and knowing that He created the circumstances to begin with, and that He is the answer to those circumstances, but He's testing me. Do I know that the circumstances came from Him? Do I know that He's the answer to those circumstances? That's the lesson that He is teaching us. He is not teaching us to solve it ourselves. We are not the problem solvers, we are the servants. Jesus is the solution to every situation that He creates.

And we need to learn this lesson. As Jesus was teaching them here, this is not a psychological lesson that I gave you, it is taken right out of the text. This is the lesson that Jesus was teaching the disciples here in this incident. It's the same Jesus that He asked us to follow Him. This is teaching us how to follow Him. Bring it to Him knowing that He knows everything anyway. Not only does He have the situation designed and planned but He has the solution. He already has it. It might take a long time before it's revealed, but then that's all in God's plan too. We have short-term trial memory and we don't have too much trouble trusting the Lord for one hour, or one day, maybe even a week. Well, once it gets past one week then it is, "Well, wait a minute now. This has gone on for a week and something has got to change."

Long-term. We have trouble with long-term. We don't have trouble short-term as much as we do with long-term. And sometimes the Lord will stretch out those circumstances and situations to where we have to trust Him, not a day, or a week, or a month, or a year, maybe several years, but it's all to know Him and to experience Him and to serve Him. Let's close with prayer.