

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL RERUN (Matthew 15:29-38)

9.19.21

INTRODUCTION

The message today is about the feeding of the 4,000. I told a friend recently that this message was coming up. Their response? “Didn’t you just do that sermon,” followed by, “Why are you doing that message again?” In other words, isn’t this a rerun?

Now I’ve mentioned before that I love watching scenes from movies or TV shows over and over again because, for me, there is always something I missed, a moment I can “tuck in my memory bank” to use as some kind of illustration at some point in time. My family hates this; my daughters have told me that they almost hate some of the TV episodes or movies I love they’ve seen some of those scenes so many times.

But that got me thinking about all the times the Bible tells us that, basically, God did a rerun — either of words or commands or actions. Why did He feel the need to do that? Hold that thought, as the idea of “reruns” is going to play a major role in our story today. But first, let’s begin with **a word of prayer.**

TEXT (Matthew 15:29-38)

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up on a mountainside and sat down — Matthew 15:29.

Following the healing that Christ so graciously performed on behalf of the Syrophenician woman (a Gentile woman from a Gentile area in modern-day Lebanon, which we talked about last week), Jesus and His disciples came to a particular region known as the “Decapolis,” a territory southeast of the Sea of Galilee (modern-day Jordan). This was a confederation of 10 cities, first established by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC upon his conquest of Judea. They were allowed by the Roman Empire to create and maintain their own treasury, judiciary, and military. Now while this area would have originally been within the ruled territories of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon, by the time of Jesus, this was a population largely influenced by Gentile culture.

Great crowds came to Him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and He healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel — Matthew 15:30-31.

While Mark focused on one specific miracle of Jesus — the man who was “deaf and could hardly talk” — Matthew painted a much broader stroke to tell us that all kinds of broken people were brought to Jesus — those unable to walk, unable to see, those whose bodies have been injured or maimed, those unable to speak, among others. Basically, all these broken, injured people were deposited at the feet of Christ, and He healed them - basically meaning that Jesus relieved them of whatever physical issue with which they were dealing. For three days Jesus was bringing this kind of relief. And when this largely Gentile crowd saw what Christ was accomplishing with their friends and loved ones, they marveled at what they were seeing with their own eyes and, as their eyes bore witness, the crowds

glorified the God of Israel. How cool is that — they were connecting this Nazarene with the God who had sent Him there. They were understanding the Father through the evidence of the Son.

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” — Matthew 15:32.

Now, as always, Jesus was acutely aware of the condition of this massive crowd. They had stayed with Him in this remote area for three days. In fact, His ministry had had such a profound effect on them that even their appetites seemed to have taken a back seat to the wonders they were witnessing. And Jesus felt this deeply. If they didn't get some nutritional help, they may collapse, or faint, while on the journey from leaving Him. There must be something they can do — and here's where we get into our “rerun”:

His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?” “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven (probably barley),” 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 four thousand men, besides women and children — Matthew 15:33-38.

This miracle has all the earmarks of a “rerun” — a hungry crowd out in the middle of nowhere, very little food actually available. Haven't we seen this somewhere before? And the greatest common denominator of course is Jesus Himself. He is there - which makes all other limitations meaningless. And once again, this gracious miracle is performed — Jesus making an abundance from nothing, the disciples collecting the leftovers and, best of all, a crowd of many thousands (remember only adult males were counted in crowd estimates) leaving having been “satisfied.” Another great day provided by this “Radical Rabbi.”

APPLICATION

Now, on the face of it, this miracle does seem to be a complete rerun. In fact, some biblical critics have used this as an example of the gospel writers adapting one miracle to make it look like another in order to inflate the number of miracles that Jesus actually performed. However, there are some meaningful differences:

- 1) While the feeding of the 5,000 was done to a predominately Jewish audience, the feeding of the 4,000 was done to a largely Gentile crowd.
- 2) While the feeding of the 5,000 took place in Galilean territory, the feeding of the 4,000 took place in The Decapolis.
- 3) While the feeding of the 5,000 involved an original supply of five loaves and two fish, the feeding of the 4,000 involved an original supply of seven loaves and “a few fish.”
- 4) While the feeding of the 5,000 resulted in twelve baskets of leftovers (the Greek suggesting a typical Jewish lunch pack), the feeding of the 4,000 resulted in seven

baskets filled with leftovers (involving a totally different Greek word to describe the Gentile baskets, more “hampers” than baskets).

- 5) While the feeding of the 5,000 occurred with a crowd that had been with Jesus for one day, the feeding of the 4,000 occurred with a crowd that had remained with Christ for three days.
- 6) While the feeding of the 5,000 occurred in the spring of the year (noted by the “green grass” mentioned in Mark’s gospel as well as John noting that the Jewish Passover Festival was near), the feeding of the 4,000 occurred during the summer season, and lastly —
- 7) While the feeding of the 5,000 resulted in that crowd trying to make Jesus king “by force,” the feeding of the 4,000 resulted in no recorded popular response.

But all of that said, let’s look at the idea of “reruns.” First of all, what are some examples in the Bible of God showing a “rerun?” Well, on a national scale:

- 1) God miraculously saving Israel from Egypt at the Red Sea (Exodus 14)
- 2) God miraculously saving Judah from Assyria (II Kings 19, Isaiah 37)

Then we have God’s miraculously saving on a personal level:

- 1) God saving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3)
- 2) God saving Daniel from a den filled with half-starved lions following his refusal to obey a law that dictated lawful prayer as being only to the king (Daniel 6)
- 3) In the NT, Peter being saved from imprisonment at the hands of King Herod (Acts 12) and, in a bit of a rerun, Paul and Silas being saved from imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16).

Then of course, during the ministry of Jesus, we have multiple episodes of, as Jesus described it to followers of John the Baptist: ***“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:5***. The same things seen, the same message proclaimed — over and over and over again. But we’re still left with the question: Why does God do that?

One reason: a very specific outcome to lives surrendered to God through Jesus Christ, detailed by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church: ***[I]f anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*** — ***Paul, II Corinthians 5:17***. The phrase “in Christ” that Paul uses suggests, according to the Greek, a place of abiding, of living and spend all of our time in a home. Being in Christ literally means taking up residence in Christ!

Christianity is about so much more than mere religion, or any kind of adherence to a set of beliefs. Christianity means to literally become like Christ, being imprinted by His character by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives. That’s the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit — to mold us and make us to reflect Jesus Christ to the world around us. That means change — from what we were before Christ to what we are becoming after

Christ came into our lives. The purpose of that change is obvious — that those around us begin to see something different about us: not the way we've always been, but somebody new, being made new to be able to imitate Jesus.

Change should be something we notice in ourselves. We should notice that somebody's questions about our lives move us to quickly pray for wisdom to be able to answer their questions. Somebody being rude or difficult should create in us a desire to pray for that person, to treat them as a person broken and trapped in sin instead of as some kind of opposition figure or enemy. And, most amazingly, we should notice a new sensitivity in ourselves, a desire to be more like Jesus that overwhelms us in every area of our lives. And when we fail — which we will — we should notice a far quicker response of falling to our knees, begging for forgiveness, deeply aware of misrepresenting our Savior and Redeemer, and not wanting to be in that situation again.

That verse begs the question (which is a rerun): How has your life changed with your surrender to God through Jesus Christ? And just for the record, know that, for every time you hear a question like this from me, God has directed that question to me - over and over again. How are our lives different this month from last month, this year from last year? If God is truly at work in us, if we are truly being made yielded to Him, the differences should be noticeable - and sources of incredible joy - to be shared and celebrated!

CONCLUSION

I was once in a play in which my character was a very mean person. After the play was done, a couple people from the audience came up to me and said: "Loved the play. Hated you." But, of course, I assured them that it was just a play; I was acting in a role. As soon as the play was completed, my role was over.

We can never let church become a place where we play our roles. God has designed us for work that He has for us to do. And He has gifted us with a church in which we can celebrate how we've seen Him at work in us and come alongside each other when times are difficult. Those are all great blessings.

But they take place in the context of lives constantly being changed by Him and for Him. We don't want people to see our lives and think: "Wow, what a great church they must attend." We want them to see our lives and think: "Wow, what a great God they must know." We want them to think that because they see the evidence of that great God, His incredible Son and His wonderful Holy Spirit in our lives. There is no guessing about the God we serve. The evidence of our lives makes God obvious.

That's the goal we have — as individuals and as a family of believers. We live lives of complete surrender to our Father, that our lives, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, would reflect the presence of His amazing Son in our lives. Living like that will change the world. Let's go out and have the world begin to change — through the Savior who is changing us. Let's pray!