

# UNEXPECTED TRANSCENDENCE

## Lesson 5

### Matthew 15:29–39

#### RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week's "Spiritual Practice" and "On Mission" sections.

#### BIG IDEA

Have you ever been so interested or entranced by something that you neglected your physical needs? The crowds following Jesus were hungry to hear His teaching and see His power. Their desire for something transcendent<sup>1</sup> was stronger than their desire for food, comfort, or security. They longed for that which was beyond or above the normal—something more than the ordinary physical human experience.

#### CONTEXT

Jesus' teachings and miracles were pointing to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. He was the promised Messiah who came to rescue His people. The religious leaders, and the Jewish people as a whole, struggled to accept Him and His message. In this chapter, Jesus had moved from the Jewish region of Galilee to Tyre and Sidon, two infamous Gentile cities. There, He intentionally commended the faith of a Gentile woman and healed her daughter (**Matthew 15:21–28**). Though Jesus made His way back to Galilee, His ministry focus had shifted from the Jews to include the Gentiles. At this point in the narrative, the crowd that was following Him was largely comprised of Gentiles eager for healing, truth, and transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Dictionary defines transcendent as "beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience. Surpassing the ordinary; exceptional." We can experience transcendence in more than just the big moments. It can affect ordinary moments and our day-to-day lives as well.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkins, Michael J. *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus

## READ MATTHEW 15:32–39<sup>3</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Jesus returned to the Sea of Galilee and climbed a hill and sat down. <sup>30</sup> A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn't speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all.

<sup>31</sup> The crowd was amazed! Those who hadn't been able to speak were talking, the crippled were made well, the lame were walking, and the blind could see again! And they praised the God of Israel.

<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called his disciples and told them, "I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, or they will faint along the way."

<sup>33</sup> The disciples replied, "Where would we get enough food here in the wilderness for such a huge crowd?"

<sup>34</sup> Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?"

They replied, "Seven loaves, and a few small fish."

<sup>35</sup> So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground.

<sup>36</sup> Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to the disciples, who distributed the food to the crowd.

<sup>37</sup> They all ate as much as they wanted. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftover food.

<sup>38</sup> There were 4,000 men who were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children. <sup>39</sup> Then Jesus sent the people home, and he got into a boat and crossed over to the region of Magadan.

## QUESTIONS

1. From **Matthew 15:29–31**, what had the people following Jesus experienced and seen?

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<sup>3</sup> "Differences in details distinguish this [miracle] from the feeding of the five thousand described in [Matthew] 14. At that time, those fed were mostly Jews. At this second feeding, Jesus ministered to a mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles in the predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis. Also, Jesus began with different quantities of bread and fish, and he did not require his disciples to admit their own inability to solve the problem." Barton, Bruce B. *Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew*. Tyndale House Publishers, 1996. 313



3. The disciples responded to Jesus' compassion with a practical question, "Where would they get that much food?" (15:33). This seems like a reasonable question; however they had already experienced Jesus feeding more than 5,000 people in a similar situation (**Matthew 14:13–21**). Why do you think they questioned when they had already experienced a similar miracle?<sup>5</sup>

a. Like the disciples, we can often forget how God has provided in the past when faced with difficult or overwhelming situations. What are some of the benefits of remembering God's past provision?

b. How could the practice of remembering help us experience something transcendent, beyond ordinary limitations?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Certainly the disciples consider the need as beyond their own capacity. ... But we probably need to avoid thinking that in the face of hunger Jesus regularly produced food in a miraculous manner... ." Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. W.B. Eerdmans, 2005. 643.

<sup>6</sup> **Psalm 107:43** "Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the LORD."

4. Why do you think the people stayed with Jesus even though they were running low on food?

a. The people following Jesus were experiencing God through Jesus' teaching and miracles. God can be experienced in ways beyond that which are merely human—both big and small. What does the word “transcendent” mean to you?

b. Are you experiencing the transcendent in your walk with Jesus? What does that look like for you? What else would you like to experience?

5. How did Jesus fulfill the crowd's physical needs? (15:35–37)

- a. The themes of bread and being filled are seen throughout the Bible. From the Israelites receiving manna each morning in the wilderness (**Exodus 16**), to the prophecy about Jesus in **Isaiah 55:1–3**, to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1–4**), and even the last supper (**Matthew 26:26–30**). As you look at those passages, what do you notice about the symbolism of bread and being filled?

- b. In **John 6:35–40**, Jesus explained that He is the bread of life.

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. <sup>37</sup> However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."*

- i. How have you experienced or known Jesus as the bread of life?



## **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

Jesus taught us that when we break bread together we can remember who He is, His sacrifice, and what He has done for us (**Matthew 26:26–30**; **1 Corinthians 11:23–26**). This doesn't just have to be on the weekends when we take communion at church. Every time we sit down to eat we have an opportunity to remember.

Consider using part of your mealtimes to remember what God has done for you through Jesus. Thank Him for being the bread of life and for filling you.

This act of eating and remembering connects us not only to the past and present but also to the future when we are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb (**Revelation 19:6–9**).

When you break bread, whether formally or informally, remember the past, be thankful in the present, and hope for the future.

## **ON MISSION**

Oftentimes God makes Himself known to people through a transcendent experience. And sometimes He uses His followers to help facilitate that experience.

Have you ever been used by God in an extraordinary or exceptional way—big or small? What was that experience like?

Pray, along with your group, that you will be willing and open to being used by God in this way.

Come back to this request often in order to notice how God is answering your prayers.

# PRAYER REQUESTS

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# SERMON NOTES

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