

Blessing Before the Breakthrough

Matthew 14:13–21 (also Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11)

Introduction – Thanking Before the Harvest

In autumn, there is excitement in the air. It's harvest season. Farmers are busy bringing in what they have grown, and gardeners pull up vegetables from the ground.

In England, they don't have Thanksgiving, but do have an annual "Harvest Festival" around this time of year. While in rural areas, it would have a lot to do with giving thanks for their harvest; in the city, it is mostly defined by collecting canned food and dry goods to donate to people in need, totally disconnected from the idea of harvesting anything. But in rural Canada, it feels much more tangible to most of us.

Here, you quickly learn a farmer's thanksgiving does not start when the barns are full or the root cellar is stocked. It starts when the seeds are planted—when the farmer puts them into the cold, hard ground, long before the rain comes or the plants grow. That's when the prayers begin—prayers of hope and gratitude even before they see results.

In the same way, Christians are called to thank God before the harvest. Not only after we see blessings, but before we do—because our thankfulness is not just for what God gives us, but for who He is.

Jesus shows this clearly in the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Before there was enough food, before anyone knew what would happen, Jesus gave thanks. This story teaches us that true gratitude begins not when we have plenty, but when we trust God in the middle of our need.

1. The Scene of Need (*Matthew 14:13–15*)

Jesus had just heard terrible news: John the Baptist, His cousin and friend, had been killed. Tired and grieving, Jesus went away to a quiet place to rest and pray.

But when He arrived, a large crowd had already followed Him. Even though He was hurting, He looked at them with compassion—deep love and care. Instead of sending them away, He healed their sick.

As evening came, the disciples started to worry. They were in a lonely place, far from any village. "Send the people away so they can buy food," they said. It seemed like a practical idea.

But Jesus saw things differently. Where they saw a problem, He saw an opportunity for God to work. That's how thanksgiving often begins—in the place where our strength ends. When we face need, Jesus reminds us that God is still good and still able.

2. The Test of Faith (*Matthew 14:16–17*)

Then Jesus said something surprising: “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

The disciples must have been shocked. Thousands of people sat before them—like a whole arena full of people—and they had almost nothing to feed them with. They replied, “We have only five loaves and two fish.”

John’s Gospel adds that it came from a boy’s small lunch—just enough for one person.

Notice that word: only. “We have only...” That’s how we talk when we’ve already decided God can’t do much with what we have.

“I only have a little time.” “I only have a small income.” “I only have a few skills.” But Jesus sees what we call *only* as *enough*. Gratitude and faith begin when we stop focusing on what we lack and start trusting the One who provides.

The disciples saw scarcity. Jesus saw the seed of a miracle. Like planting a seed in the ground, they had to trust that something small could grow into something great.

3. The Act of Thanksgiving (*Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11*)

All four Gospels tell what happens next. Jesus takes the loaves and fish, looks up to heaven, blesses them, breaks them, and gives them to the disciples to share.

He did five things: **He took, looked up, blessed, broke, and gave.** This rhythm of grace is repeated again later at the Last Supper, and after His resurrection in Emmaus.

Jesus accepted the small offering as it was. He didn’t mock it or complain about how little it was. The miracle began when something small was placed in His hands. Instead of looking at the problem, Jesus looked to the Father. This is the heart of thanksgiving: to lift our eyes away from the need and focus on God’s goodness.

Jesus blessed God, not the food. He gave thanks before the miracle, not after it. This is the difference between *positive thinking* and *true faith*. Our ultimate hope is in the provider, not the bounty itself.

Even here, Jesus was pointing ahead to something greater. Just as He gave thanks before feeding the crowd, He would later give thanks before the cross—when He broke the bread and said, “This is my body, given for you.” Thanksgiving before the miracle, thanksgiving before redemption—this is the heart of the Gospel. As Jesus broke the bread, He kept giving, and the supply never ran out. God multiplies what we release, not what we keep. Gratitude leads to generosity.

4. The Miracle and Its Meaning (*Matthew 14:20–21*)

Then the miracle happens: *“They all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers.”*

Scripture tells us this was a supernatural act of God. The food multiplied in Jesus’ hands. Twelve baskets of leftovers remind us that God’s provision is always more than enough. Each disciple, who started with doubt, ended up holding a basket of proof that God provides abundantly.

This miracle shows us the pattern of God’s Kingdom: when something small is surrendered, God multiplies it. When we give thanks before seeing results, He turns our gratitude into grace. And when we act in faith, others are blessed through our obedience.

This miracle was not only about food; it was about the heart of the Giver. Jesus wanted the people to see God’s goodness, not just His power.

5. Gratitude in the Wilderness

It’s easy to give thanks when life is good—when there’s plenty on the table, when things are going our way.

But Jesus gave thanks in a *desolate place*. There was no food, no comfort, and Jesus Himself was grieving.

The feeding of the five thousand happened not in abundance, but in barrenness. Gratitude was born in the wilderness.

Sometimes life feels empty, not full. Maybe you’ve come into this season tired, grieving, or uncertain about the future. But thanksgiving is not based on our situation—it’s based on God’s character. His goodness does not change when our circumstances do.

When we thank God in the wilderness, we declare our faith that He will still provide. Just like the disciples, when we place our little into His hands, He makes it enough.

True thanksgiving is contagious—it inspires others to trust and hope. The same Jesus who gave thanks over five loaves still reigns today. His hands are not empty, and His compassion has not ended.

6. Conclusion – Blessing Before the Breakthrough

When a farmer plants seeds, they don’t know what the weather will bring. They plant with faith, not certainty. They pray and thank God even before they see the crop grow.

That’s what Jesus did. He thanked His Father before the miracle. He blessed before the breaking. He trusted before He saw. He gave thanks before the victory.

Later, He would again take bread, give thanks, and break it, saying, “This is my body, given for you.”

Thanksgiving is not only about food or harvest—it’s about grace. We give thanks because Jesus, the Bread of Life, was broken for us, so that we could be made whole.

So whatever season you’re in—whether full or empty—thank God now. Lift your eyes to Him. Bless His name even before the harvest comes. True thanksgiving begins with faith that God will bring the increase, in His time and in His way.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What does this story teach us about giving thanks before we see God’s provision?
2. Why do you think Jesus gave thanks before the miracle happened?
3. How can you show gratitude when you feel like you have ‘only’ a little?
4. What does it mean to trust God in your own wilderness or difficult season?
5. How does Jesus’ example of thanksgiving point us to His work on the cross?

Take a few minutes to thank God for something you can’t yet see the result of — to bless Him before the breakthrough.