



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Matthew 15:29–39

December 22, 2013  
English Standard Version

### *“The Glory of the Kingdom”*

The 54<sup>th</sup> Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled  
*“The King and His Kingdom!”*

#### **Matthew 15:29-39**

*“Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And He went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.*

*<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to Him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> He took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, He got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.”*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about Jesus. He does something here He’s already done. And yet it’s so different. Help us to understand the difference, help us to*

*understand the Gospel, help us to understand how we should respond to His healing touch. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *A Man and His Sea Gull(s)*<sup>1</sup>**

Let me describe a scene to you. I want you to imagine a scene of a retiree, alone in this world, who does something odd every week. He's an old man now, and every week he takes a walk down a Florida beach. The sun sets like an orange ball on the horizon. The waves slap the sand. The smell of saltwater stings the air. The beach is vacant. No sun to entice the sunbathers. Not enough light for the fishermen. So, aside from a few joggers and strollers, the gentleman is alone.

He carries a bucket in his bony hand. A bucket of shrimp. It's not for him. And it's not for the fish. It's for the sea gulls. He walks to an isolated pier cast in gold by the setting sun. He steps out to the end of the pier. The time has come for the weekly ritual. He stands and waits.

Soon the sky becomes a mass of dancing dots. The evening silence gives way to the screeching of birds. They fill the sky and then cover the moorings. They are on a pilgrimage to meet the old man. For a half hour or so, the bushy-browed, shoulder-bent gentleman will stand on the pier, surrounded by the birds of the sea, until his bucket is empty. But even after the food is gone, his feathered friends still linger. They linger as if they're attracted to more than just food. They perch on his hat. They walk on the pier. And they all share a moment together.

The old man on the pier couldn't go a week without saying "thank you."

You see, the old man was Eddie Rickenbacker. And if you were alive in October 1942, you probably remember the day that he was reported missing at sea. Everyone I know who lived through World War II remembers this. I can remember my grandfather, a Lieutenant Colonel during World War II, serving in the Army Air Force [as it was known then], telling me his story. Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was a larger than life hero to Americans at that time. He was an American fighter ace in World War I and a Medal of Honor recipient. There are at least a dozen books written about his life: *Ace of Aces* and *A Great American War Hero*, to name just two.

Eddie Rickenbacker had been sent on a secret mission to deliver a message to Gen. Douglas MacArthur. With a handpicked crew in a B-17 "Flying Fortress," he set off across the South Pacific. Somewhere the crew became lost, the fuel ran out, and the plane went down. All eight crewmembers escaped into the life rafts. They battled the weather, the water, the sharks, and the sun. But most of all, they battled the hunger. After eight days, their rations were gone.

Unknown to them, the search for survivors was called off ... twice. Only the pleas of his family and the outcry from the American people kept sending the search planes back out. But the crew, lost at sea, didn't know any of that. One crewman, Alexander Kaczmarczyk, died and was buried at sea. The life raft was small, the ocean was huge, and they ran out of options.

It would take a miracle for them to survive.

And a miracle occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> The introduction and conclusion are adapted from *In The Eye Of The Storm* by Max Lucado, pages 219–226. This true story is based upon the books, *Seven Came Through* and *Rickenbacker: An Autobiography*, both by Captain Eddie Rickenbacker; and *We Thought We Heard The Angels Sing* by his lifelong friend and crewmate, Lieutenant James Whittaker. I highly recommend the Whittaker book!

After an afternoon devotional service in the life raft, the men said a prayer and tried to rest. As Rickenbacker was dozing with his hat over his eyes, something landed on his head. He would later say that he knew it was a sea gull. He didn't know how he knew ... he just knew. That gull meant food ... if he could catch it. And he did. The flesh was eaten. The intestines were used as fish bait. And the crew survived ... **for twenty-four days.**

What was a sea gull doing hundreds of miles from land?

God only knows. But whatever the reason, Rickenbacker was thankful. As a result, every Friday evening the old captain walked to the pier, his bucket full of shrimp, and his heart full of thanks.

We'd be wise to do the same. We've much in common with Rickenbacker. We, too, were saved by a sacrificial visitor. We, too, were rescued by One who journeyed far from where God only knows. And we're not alone. A long time ago, in the story we find here in Matthew 15, a man came to people who were hurting and hungry, people who were out of options. People who had no hope. People who were in desperate need of a miracle.

And the miracles occurred.

So let's turn to our text for this morning, **Matthew 15:29–39**, where we see ...  
**v. 29–31: THE HURTING COME TO JESUS** <sup>2</sup>

*“Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And He went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”*

This is not the day that Jesus fed the five thousand; it is the day He fed the **four** thousand. Although the events have much in common, they are different in several respects: When Jesus fed the five thousand, He was with **Jews**. When He fed the four thousand (plus women and children), He was with Gentiles. When Jesus fed the five thousand, He **taught** and healed them. When He was with the four thousand, there's no record He taught — only that He healed. When Jesus was with the five thousand, He was with them for **one** afternoon. When he was with the four thousand, He was with them for three days. And for three days He did a most remarkable thing — He healed them, verse 30, *“And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, **and He healed them.**”*

Many times, I wish that the New Testament writers had been a bit more descriptive. This is one of those times. *“**And He healed them**”* is too short a phrase to describe what must have been an astonishing sight.

Let your imagination go. Close your eyes. Picture it in your mind. Jesus is sitting on a hillside, a great crowd spread out before Him. Can you see the scene?

Can you see the blind husband seeing his wife for the first time? His eyes gazing into her tear-filled ones like she was the queen of the morning?

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**2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 2* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 46-56; *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. James Montgomery Boice, pages 287–293; *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* by Dr. Michael Green, pages 172–176; *Preaching the Word – Matthew* by Rev. Douglas Sean O'Connell, pages 427–436; and *In The Eye Of The Storm* by Max Lucado, pages 219–226.**

Envision the man who had never walked ... walking! You know he didn't want to sit down! I imagine that he ran and jumped and danced with his daughters!

And what about the mute who could speak? Can you picture him sitting by the fire late into the night and talking? Saying and singing everything and anything that he had ever wanted to say and sing.

And the deaf woman who could now hear. What was it like when, for the first time, she heard her child call her "Ema" [Ee-mah], which is Hebrew and Aramaic for "Mom"?

**For three days** ... it went on and on and on. Person after person. Mat after mat. Crutch after crutch. Smile after smile. No record is given of Jesus preaching or teaching or instructing or challenging or anything else. He just **healed**.

And it was amazing. And there's some lessons for us here:

**First, Faith may be found in unlikely places.** Bishop Ryle once said, "It's **grace**, not place, which makes people believers." That's true. One would have expected to find strong faith among the people of Israel, who had the Old Testament and all the other benefits that went with being Jews. The last place one would have expected faith was in Gentile territory. But it is the Canaanite woman and the Gentile people who believed and it was the people of Galilee who didn't.

We should be very careful about saying things like, "That person will never come to faith" or "That one is too far gone to believe." You don't know that, and it's often the most unlikely persons who do come. After all, **God reached you!** He can reach **anybody!** Who would have expected Saul, that first great persecutor of the Christians, to be converted? Yet he became the great missionary... to the Gentiles. John Newton, the converted slave trader, said on one occasion, "I have never despaired of any man since God saved me."

**Second, Be encouraged to come to Jesus.** You may think you are too sinful to come to Jesus or that Jesus could never care for you. But this text teaches us that's completely wrong. If Gentile "dogs" can come, you can come too. If you've never turned from sin to trust Jesus as your Savior, do it now. Jesus Himself said, **Matthew 11:28**, "*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" And in **John 6:37** He says, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.*"

**Third, Come to Jesus especially if you're hurting.** Jesus cares for people whatever their problems might be. The multitudes were hungry. Many were sick. The Canaanite woman had an afflicted daughter. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, cured the girl's demon possession, and soothed a mother's heart. Do you really think He'd do less for you?

**Fourth, [and this one's hard] Needy people will often find more compassion in Jesus than in Jesus' people.** The disciples weren't much help either with the woman or with the crowds, either one-on-one or with the masses. But that was only to be expected. They were just poor sinful people themselves. They weren't the answer to these problems. It's the same today. Today's disciples aren't always more helpful than those first followers. But what of it? If you have been disappointed by Christ's people, don't give up. They're probably trying; it's just that they're sinners too. **Come to Jesus** — it's what they'd tell you to do anyway. The hurting come to Jesus.

But we don't just see hurting people in this passage. We also see hungry people. Maybe these used to be the hurting people, but now they've been healed. Maybe these are the folks who brought the hurting people. Maybe it's both. Either way, we see that ...

**v. 31–39: THE HUNGRY STAY WITH JESUS**

<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to Him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> He took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, He got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.”

Since the crowd of 4,000 had been with Him three days, they had used up all their own food. Our Lord's compassionate heart wouldn't allow Him to send them on their, verse 32, “***And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.***” The first motive for this miracle was simply the meeting of human needs. The people had already seen His miracles and glorified God, so the miracle was not for the purpose of preaching a sermon or authenticating His ministry.

It's as if Matthew has a deep desire to gather together a number of incidents in the life of Jesus, which point forward to the primarily Gentile church that He knows and serves. Even though Matthew was written to the Jewish believers, there's a strong Gentile flavor present throughout the Gospel.

First, the Jewish food laws are annulled. Then Jesus journeys up to Gentile country and heals a Gentile girl. Gentile crowds are taught and cared for, healed and shown the signs of the Messiah's presence as prophesied long ago by Isaiah, just as the Jews had been. And now Gentiles are fed with the same heavenly bread that Jesus had made available to the Jewish ‘children of the kingdom’.

Once again, it's hard not to detect an allusion to the Lord's Supper, the bread of heaven by which Matthew and his church were nourished. They will have seen communion as a continuation of these miraculous feedings of tired and careworn followers, which Jesus had generously provided for during His ministry, and as a foretaste of the messianic banquet in heaven.

However, this miracle did have a special purpose for His disciples. We're amazed that they'd forgotten the miracle of the feeding of the Five Thousand. The Twelve were perplexed, verse 33, “*And the disciples said to Him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?”*” Don't you think they should have been saying, “No problem, Jesus is able to multiply loaves and fish, no need to worry”? Of course, it may be that they thought that He wouldn't perform that kind of a miracle **in Gentile territory**.

As in the Feeding of the Five Thousand, this miracle took place in His hands. As Jesus broke the bread and gave it to His disciples, the bread multiplied. Everybody ate and everybody was satisfied. Again, Jesus ordered the fragments to be collected so that nothing is wasted. The ability to perform miracles does not grant the authority to waste God's gifts.

Jesus didn't preach a sermon to this crowd on “the bread of life” as He did to the Jews in Capernaum, following the Feeding of the Five Thousand [which you can read about in John 6]. The facts about the Old Testament manna and the “bread of God” would have been foreign to these Gentiles. Jesus always adapted His teaching to the needs and to the understanding of the people to whom He ministered.

But the healing and feeding miracles weren't the most important things about the story. What was **most amazing** was that these weren't even Jesus' people. Didn't He just tell the Canaanite woman a few verses earlier that, **Matthew 15:24**, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*"?

The important thing is this — Matthew includes this story of the Feeding of the Four Thousand because these people were Gentiles, which actually makes it a sequel to the story of the Canaanite woman. But in spite of their being Gentiles:

**One**, these people were healed **just as the Jews** had been,

**Two**, they were fed **just as the Jews** had been, and

**Three**, the disciples were used to serve them **just as the Jews** had been served during the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

In the Feeding of the **Five Thousand Jews**, there were twelve baskets of food left over, signifying the inclusion of the twelve tribes of Israel, and one for each of the twelve disciples, whose names would be inscribed on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem. Here, in the Feeding of the **Four Thousand Gentiles**, there were seven baskets of food left over. As we learned in our study of the Book of Revelation, seven is the number of completeness, signifying the completion and fullness of Christ's mission, the overabundance of God's love and mercy in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which still extends today throughout the world to every tribe and tongue and nation. What better way to teach that Gentiles are just as important to God as the Jews are? What better way to teach, both then and now, that Christianity is a worldwide religion? And so we read that the people praised the "**God of Israel**." That was a natural thing for Gentiles to say but not for Jews. But it does reveal another important point for us, and that's

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#### v. 30–31: THE GLORY OF BEING WITH JESUS

*"And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He **healed** them,"<sup>31</sup> so that the crowd **wondered**, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they **glorified** the God of Israel."*

*"The crowd,"* Matthew wrote, "wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing." **Four thousand amazed people**, each telling a story grander than the other. In the midst of them all is Jesus. Not complaining. Not postponing. Not demanding. Just enjoying every minute. Then Matthew gave us another phrase I wish he would have elaborated on, verse 31, "*And they **glorified** the God of Israel.*"

I wonder how they did that? I feel more certain of what they *didn't* do than of what they did do. I feel confident that they didn't wait for the worship team to lead them. I feel confident that they didn't wait for the elders to tell them to repent and believe. I feel confident that they didn't sit in these rows and stare at the back of each other's heads. I seriously doubt if they wrote a plan on how they were going to praise this God ... whom they had never before worshiped. I can't picture them getting into an argument over psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs. And they may not even have known what the Sabbath was.

In all probability, they just did it. Each one — in his or her own way, with his or her own heart — just **praised** the name of Jesus and **glorified** the God of Israel. Perhaps some people came and fell at Jesus' feet. Perhaps some shouted His name over and over again. Maybe a few just went up on the hillside, looked up into the sky, and smiled.

I can picture a mom and dad standing speechless before the Healer as they hold their newly healed baby. I now know a little bit more about little babies who need healing. I can envision a leper staring at lost limbs that have been replaced, staring in awe at the One who took away his terror. I now know a little bit more about people with lost limbs who need healing. I can imagine throngs of people pressing forward, wanting to get close. Not to request anything, not to demand anything, just to say, “**Thank You.**”

Perhaps some tried to pay Jesus, but what payment would have been sufficient? Perhaps some tried to return His gift with another gift, but what could a person give that would express the gratitude for being able to see, to speak, to walk? All the people could do was exactly what Matthew said they did, “***They glorified the God of Israel.***”

However they did it, they did it. And Jesus was touched, so touched that He insisted they stay for a meal before they left. Without using the word ‘**worship**,’ this passage defines it. Worship is when you’re aware **that what you’ve been given** is far greater than what you can give. Worship is the awareness that were it not for His touch, you’d still be **hobbling, hurting, and hungry**. Worship is the half-glazed expression on the parched face of a desert pilgrim as he discovers that the oasis ... is not a mirage. Worship is the “thank you” that refuses to be silenced.

We’ve tried to make a science out of worship. We can’t do that. Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered **by the saved to the Savior, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer**. And if you and I can go days without feeling an urge to say “thank you” to the One who saved us, healed us, and delivered us, then we’d do well to remember what He did.

Remember the disciples of John the Baptist? They came to Jesus, **Matthew 11:3**, “*and said to Him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*” How did Jesus answer them? **Matthew 11:4-6**, “*Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.*”

Do you think those who could now **see** were offended? Do you think those who were **cleansed** were offended? Those who could now **walk, hear, and speak**? **Probably not!** So we have to ask ... What miracle do you need? You can probably think of a number of things. But let me suggest something. Perhaps ... you’ve already received your miracle. I say that because the greatest miracle of all was Jesus’ death and resurrection that redeemed you from the guilt and power of sin. Perhaps this morning, Jesus is saying to you, **Isaiah 1:18**, “*Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, **they shall be as white as snow**; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*”

You know, this month we finally got some snow. They say we’ll get a lot this winter, certainly more than last year. I wasn’t ready. I still had fall leaves in my yard. I hadn’t gotten out there to clean up after the dog. I hadn’t gotten the grill cover out yet in order to cover and protect the grill. The snow doesn’t care what I have or haven’t gotten done — it just comes. And you know something, whatever you left out on the lawn gets covered up. It doesn’t matter if it’s fine china or dirty diapers ... **if it snows four inches ... all you see is white.**

*“though your sins are like scarlet, **they shall be as white as snow**”*

And this Christmas, despite your hurts, despite your hungers, despite your problems, despite your baggage, despite **your sins being like scarlet** ... when Jesus' looks at you, one of His redeemed children ... *all He sees is white*.

How will you respond?

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. Thank You that You have given us a Savior, a Healer, a Deliverer. Thank You that though our sins be like scarlet, all You see is white. This Christmas, remind us that the best response to the work of Christ is simply to stop what we're doing and worship Him. Help us to sing ... "Joy to the World! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King." And all God's children said, Amen.*

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#### **Matthew 12:18-21**

*"Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved with whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings justice to victory; **and in His name the Gentiles will hope.**"*