

Broken in His Hands - Matthew 14:15-21 ^[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Set Up

1. Jesus had just received news of John the Baptist's execution by Herod.
 - a. Jesus & John were cousins, born just 6 months apart & had known each other growing up.
 - b. John knew it was his special calling to prepare the people of Israel for Jesus' coming as the Messiah.
 - c. and Jesus loved John for his radical faithfulness to that mission.
2. The news of John's death was a serious blow, and Jesus withdrew from the busy areas where He'd been working to a deserted place for some time alone.
3. He needed a break, a time to process His grief and deal with all the emotions that come with the death of a loved one.
4. While He sought solitude, the crowds still sought Him & followed Him to the deserted place He'd retreated to.
5. When He saw them still coming with their sick & needy, instead of being bugged and angry, He was again moved with compassion and healed them.

B. V. 15

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

1. When the people who'd followed them had set out, they had no idea where they were going or how long they'd be there, so they'd brought no food.
2. As it's now late and there were no fast-food joints nearby, the disciples realized that the people would get hungry & the nearest villages were quite a distance off.
3. Jesus needed to wrap things up now so they could dismiss the people & send them home.
4. But Jesus had other plans . . .

C. V. 16

16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

1. This marks a subtle shift in the focus of Jesus; ministry.
2. Up till now, Jesus had made the focus of His ministry the multitudes, while the disciples kind of tagged along and watched.
3. But from now on, Jesus would focus on *them*, spending far more private time with them, and teaching them things He didn't share with the crowds.
4. The turning point was the growing opposition to Him on the part of the religious and national leaders.
 - a. His enemies were organizing and strategizing now in how to do away with Him.

- b. it wouldn't be too much longer before they arrested Him and He went to the cross.
 - c. already, word was being sent out by the rabbis that those who followed Jesus were in danger of being barred from the synagogue, which was the center of Jewish social life.
5. Jesus had come, taught about the Kingdom of God, proven His authority through the miracles, and modeled for the disciples how His ministry was to be carried on.
 6. Now He would turn it over to them; they would carry on His work.
 7. But it was **HIS work** they would be carrying on, and this miracle of the loaves and fishes was a powerful way to teach them this truth.
 8. They had come to Him with the need of the people; Jesus said, "**You** meet it!"

D. V. 17

17 And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

1. The disciples were in a quandary over *how* they would meet the need of so many with so little.
2. In v. 21 we read that there were some 5000 men, besides the women and children, which means this crowd could be anywhere between 7 and 10,000!
3. And their resources are a ridiculous 5 loaves and 2 fish.
 - a. the loaves were nothing more than whole-grain buns,
 - b. and the fish were slated and smoked – so we're talking about a really meager meal here.
 - c. this would hardly have been enough to provide a snack for just the disciples!
4. By giving the inventory of their supplies, the disciples were not *suggesting* anything – they were giving an excuse on why they *couldn't* feed the crowd.
5. It was this admission of their *inability* Jesus was waiting for . . .

E. Vs. 18-21

18 He said, "Bring them here to Me." ¹⁹ Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. ²⁰ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. ²¹ Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

1. They brought the little they had, despised in their eyes as measured against the need, and gave it to Jesus as He asked.
2. He took it, prayed over it, asking the Father to bless & use it, broke it, then handed it to the disciples.
3. They then turned & gave it to the people until everyone ate and were filled.
4. When they collected the leftovers, there were 12 baskets full.

5. It's those 12 baskets that reveal the *main lesson* of this story and we'll take a look at it on Wednesday evening.
6. But there's *another truth*, another grand lesson to be gleaned from this story that is unlocked by *one word* in v. 19.
7. Between blessing & giving the food to the disciples, Jesus *broke* it.
 - a. Matthew could have simply said He blessed and gave it to the disciples & we would have understood,
 - b. but the Holy Spirit moved Matthew to add that Jesus *broke* the bread because there's a profound spiritual lesson to be learned here –
 - c. that *brokenness* is a *necessary part* of the Christian life.
8. God wants to use *us* as His disciples; it's His plan to do His work *through us*.
9. But first He must do His work *in* us – and this work comes by *breaking* us.

II. BROKENNESS

A. What God Is Looking For

1. Now, lest you think I'm making too much of one word and just using it as a springboard to launch into some private interpretation or pet doctrine,
2. Let me ask you to listen to the words of Psalm 34:18
The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.
3. Isaiah 57:15
For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite [broken] and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite [broken] ones."
4. Brokenness is contrary to the whole spirit of the world's way of thinking.
 - a. it defies the main tenets of conventional wisdom,
 - b. which above all else values self-confidence, assertiveness, & self-esteem
5. The world *despises* brokenness!
 - a. if something is broken, we consider it *worthless*.
 - 1) broken dishes, we throw away
 - 2) a broken mirror, we scrap
 - 3) marred furniture, we replace
 - 4) torn cloth, we toss into the dumpster
 - b. when something is broken, its value is diminished –
 - c. but *not* in the spiritual realm.
6. God puts a premium on broken things; He delights in what is broken, especially broken people.
7. Listen to Isaiah 66:1-2
¹ Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? ² For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD.
 - a. God asks what we think we can do that would impress Him?
 - b. bring a huge sacrifice – build a magnificent temple to Him?

- c. such gifts could never impress Him – He’s the Creator and it all belongs to Him!

“But on this one will I look:

- d. here’s how God is impressed; here’s what He’s looking for and what He delights to find,

On *him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.*

- 8. God delights in the broken! He who owns all things, finds His greatest treasure in those who realize their own spiritual poverty and are in anguish over it.
- 9. They know that the remedy for their brokenness is found in the Word of grace from His lips and tremble with hunger and longing for Him.

B. An Example of Brokenness – Psalm 51

- 1. Psalm 51 is David’s cry of repentance after being confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

- 2. Look at vs.16 & 17 -

16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

- 3. What is God looking for – what pleases Him? What can He use?
 - a. our sufficiency, our wisdom, our strength?
 - b. no – it’s our *humility*, our coming to Him as we in fact *really* are; a broken & needy people.
 - c. it’s the recognition that we bring to God *nothing but* our insufficiency and littleness that allows Him to use us!
 - d. just as the disciples brought their pitifully meager supply of bread and seafood and admitted it was totally insufficient to meet the need.
 - e. it was this admission, this consciousness of their own inability that freed them to be used by the Lord to be a blessing!

- 4. David’s sin with Bathsheba came at a time when everything was going really well in the kingdom.
 - a. he was firmly on the throne and nearly everyone loved him; his approval rating was in the 90% range!
 - b. he’d been victorious over all of Israel’s enemies and there was now peace on almost every front.
 - c. the kingdom was prosperous, business was booming all ‘round.
 - d. the taxes were a bit high, but he was doing so many public improvement projects, no one really complained.
 - e. David had settled nicely into his role as king; he had succeeded in his calling to rule.
- 5. But the humble dependence on God that had marked his earlier days was a thing of the past.
- 6. He no longer walked in the brokenness that had been so evident in his dealings with Saul and his first years of ruling the nation.
- 7. And forsaking that place of brokenness before the Lord, David became a

danger to the people.

- a. when we are not broken before God, we *are* a danger to others.
 - b. leaders are especially dangerous for they end up using their *own* power *ruthlessly* rather than God's power *humbly*.
8. David did – he took another man's wife, then when she turned up pregnant, had him killed!
9. Unbroken David was a dangerous man – and so are all the unbroken!
10. So God sent Nathan to rebuke David, and David repented; he returned to the place of brokenness and stayed there.
- a. when his son Absalom led a revolt and attempted to usurp the throne,
 - b. David humbly & quietly withdrew from the palace and left Jerusalem, leaving the matter of the throne in God's hands.
 - c. God had given him the throne, God could take it away if that was his choice.
 - d. if not, then Absalom's revolt would be short lived and the throne would once again be his.
 - e. but broken David would not be a danger to his supporters by making them stay and defend him – best to depart and leave the matter in God's hands.
 - f. as David was leaving Jerusalem in shame, one of his long-time enemies threw stones at him and hurled terrible insults at him.
 - g. when his bodyguard made moves to kill the guy, David called them back and told them to leave the guy alone.
 - h. a man who is broken before God is not really hurt by the insults of the ungodly because he knows he's actually much worse than the insults make him out to be!
11. It is for this brokenness and humility before the Lord that David is called by God a man after His own heart!

C. Brokenness A Part Of God's Plan

1. Brokenness has always been a part of God's plan.
2. In Judges 6-8 we find the story of Gideon.
 - a. he attacked thousands of Midianites with just a few hundred, and his battle plan was an interesting one.
 - b. they put lit torches up inside clay vessels and snuck around the camp of Midian.
 - c. once in place, surrounding the camp, they broke those jars of clay, revealing the light of the torches.
 - d. the sudden appearance of all that light in the middle of the night terrified and confused the Midianites so that they drew their swords and went to work killing one another until the entire host was dead.
3. You and I are like those jars of clay, our bodies made of the dust of the earth.
4. It is only as we are broken that the light of God can shine from us to confuse & defeat the councils of hell.
5. In Mark 14 we find the story of Mary who brought a costly alabaster flask of perfumed oil.
 - a. the flask was made in such a way that it could only be opened by breaking

- it.
 - b. this was Mary's life savings; her dowry, purchased and given her by her father and meant to be given to whoever would marry her.
 - c. but Mary brought it to Jesus and broke it over His head and feet.
 - d. the fragrance of the perfumed oil filled the house and refreshed all who smelled it.
 - e. while some there considered her lavish offering a terrible waste, Jesus commended her.
 - f. He knew that in Mary's thoughts, that flask represented her heart, her self, which she was willing to gladly break upon for Him.
6. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 the Apostle Paul writes . . .

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me,

- a. then he says it again -
lest I be exalted above measure.
- b. Paul knew he stood in danger of an overbearing pride that would destroy his ability to be used by the Lord.
- c. he'd been shown such fantastic visions & truths there was no one alive who could match him.
- d. so God had sent him a special gift, a thorn in the flesh to keep him abiding in the place of brokenness.
- e. when this trial began, he didn't realize what it's cause or purpose was; look at v. 8

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

- f. at first, Paul saw his suffering, this ailment, whatever it was, as just a nasty trial to be delivered from, and he pleaded with God on 3 separate occasions to take it away.
- g. but healing of the thorn in the flesh is not what God had in mind; there was a far more important healing that needed to be done in Paul's life, and the thorn was there to affect it. V. 9 -

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- h. Paul came to see that his tendency to pride was just beneath the surface.
 - i. that thorn in his flesh was much like the Dutch boy's finger in the hole in the dike – it kept the flood waters of arrogance out of Paul's heart!
7. Paul had come to the place of realizing that staying broken and humble, abiding in a sense of the desperate need of God is absolutely crucial if we are to be a blessing to Him and others.
8. Anything that reminded Paul of his brokenness he'd come to the place of delighting in and rejoicing over!

- a. it's interesting to me that Paul once identified himself as the least of the Apostles.
 - b. but some time later, he called himself the least of all the saints.
 - c. and then, toward the end of his life, he said he was the chief of sinners!!!
 - d. think of it, as his spiritual maturity deepened, so did his sense of brokenness!
9. Note carefully that Paul's trial did not come as a result of some *wrongdoing*, but to keep him from it!
 10. As we look back over the last year, for many of us, there was a tremendous amount of fruitfulness.
 - a. some of us grew in Christ a lot.
 - b. some of us led several others to faith.
 - c. many have seen some dramatic changes for the better in our personal lives, in our marriages and relationships.
 11. But there have been some massive trials as well – 2003 seems to be rather *bittersweet* because of all this.
 12. What we don't realize is that the fruitfulness of the year, its spiritual victories, are the *result* of the trials.
 - a. being broken by the Lord, we were enabled to be a blessing and to be blessed,
 - b. because the blessing was *safe* with us.

D. What Is Brokenness?

1. What is brokenness? It is simply my will being broken to God's will, my ways to His ways, my own life being given over to His life in & through me.
2. A seed remains alone, a tiny thing and not able to do much in the way of satisfying the hunger or need of others.
3. But plant that seed in the ground and something amazing happens –
 - a. it dies and it's shell breaks open to give rise to a new life.
 - c. that new life comes forth and grows into a tree that produces enough fruit to feed thousands.
4. That seed is you and I – a tiny thing that is only useful when it dies to itself and breaks open to bring forth the life of Christ.
5. We began the Christian life in brokenness.
 - a. in Matthew 21:44 Jesus said of Himself –
“Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”
 - b. we came to Christ because the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin; He showed us that we were broken and in need of forgiveness.
 - c. what we may not realize is that just as we *begin* by being broken to self, we also *progress* in the life of faith through brokenness.
6. So listen to the Nathan's God sends you just as He did to David!
 - a. your Nathan may be a friend who comes with a rebuke.
 - b. it may be a critic or a letter in the mail – (signed)
 - c. friends, we cannot choose the means or agent of our breaking; that is all the Lord's work.

- 1) sometimes God's Nathan to us is a *difficult* person.
 - 2) you know, everyone else is difficult but not me.
 - 3) sometimes we think, "I don't mind being broken, but I really mind *that* person being part of the process?"
 - 4) someone has said, "God can never make us wine if we object to the fingers He uses to crush us."
 - 5) if God would only use His own fingers to make us broken bread and poured out wine in a special way,
 - 6) but when He uses someone we dislike or some set of circumstances to which we said we would never submit, then we struggle and resist His breaking.
 - 7) Oswald Chambers said, "We must never choose the scene of our own martyrdom."
 - 8) the circumstances and people God sends into our lives are crucial to the way in which we must be broken if are to come to the healing God intends for us.
- d. listen to the Nathan God sends you, however he comes.
7. The Nathan God sends us may simply be the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. it often happens that the Spirit speaks to us again and again about some thing the Lord wants to deal with –
 - b. and we respond with a kind of, "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!"
 8. We "Yeah-Yeah" the Lord so long He stops talking and sends a trial instead!
 - a. if we will not be broken by the gentle voice of the Spirit, then He'll send a sterner messenger.
 - b. and we will come to the place where we are desperate to hear the Lord's voice once again!
 9. You see, the measure of our brokenness is the length of time between being convicted and repenting!
 10. Listen to David again in Psalm 51, v. 3

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

- a. brokenness brings a *humility* so that we can *admit* our wrongdoing.
- b. it also produces a deep & healthy *regret* for sin; look at v. 4

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight

- c. David was filled with remorse at how he'd fallen from the place of intimacy he'd once enjoyed with God.
- d. these are words of profound regret at having strayed so far, and not even realizing it until it was too late.

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- e. when we're broken, we have no problem seeing sin for what it is and admitting its evil. Look at v. 4 again

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight.

- f. when we're broken, *sin is sin*, but the unbroken rationalize and justify their sin; they give it a different label.
 - 1) the sin of drunkenness is called the "disease of alcoholism."

- 2) the sin of adultery becomes an “affair.”
 - 3) the sin of rebellion is excused as “just a phase.”
 - 4) the sin of lying is labeled as “an over-active imagination.”
 - 5) and so the list goes
 - g. the broken, because they *are* broken, don’t excuse, rationalize, justify, or redefine their sin.
 - h. they confess it, loath it, repent of it, and cast themselves on God to forgive and deliver them.
11. What does God do with such broken ones? **HE DELIGHTS IN THEM.**
12. These are the very ones whom He uses to such great effect!

III. CONCLUSION

A. *The Joy Brokenness Brings*

1. It’s easy to get the impression that when we’re broken, we’ll be all sorrowful and depressed.
2. But that is not at all what true brokenness yields.
3. David wrote Psalm 51 *after* Nathan had rebuked him and he’d been broken & renewed.
4. What happened is that David’s *joy* was restored!
5. Listen - v. 7

7 Purge me . . . and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice. ⁹ Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.

B. *The Disciples*

1. Back in Matthew 14, that evening, in that deserted place, as Jesus stood there with those disciples, holding up the meager offering they’d brought Him, He knew what He was about to do was a crucial moment in their training.
2. He blessed, broke, and then gave to them, and they gave to the people.
3. Thousands were fed to the full because Jesus blessed, broke and gave.
4. You and I are Jesus’ disciples to this age – and the people of this world are still hungry.
5. They are trying to find their fill at all the wrong places.
6. What they need is Jesus, and what He has given them, is you and I, His people.
7. Our ability to fulfill our calling is realized in bringing to Him the little we have, the little we are, so inadequate, so unable, so insufficient to meet the need, and simply, humbly, in brokenness, give it to Him.
8. He then blesses, and multiplies His power in us so that it can be safely poured out on others.

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