

## **Disciplined to Party**

Matthew 14:12-23, 15:29-38

April 28, 2002

Peter Hiatt

In Matthew 14 Herod beheads John the Baptist and serves his head on a platter. Verse 13 . . .

*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart.*

John was Jesus' cousin. Jesus said no one was greater than John, and John understood Him, at least a bit. Jesus loved John greatly, and in His humanity Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

In response to the incredible pain and evil of this world, we're all tempted to retreat, curl up in a ball, and guard our wounded hearts.

Jesus heard about John and withdrew to a lonely place.

I hope that every one of you takes some time every day to withdraw to a lonely place and commune with your Heavenly Father in prayer. We used to call it "having a Quiet Time." But God does not only commune with us in Quiet Times. In fact, there may be times when *demanding* a Quiet Time is a sin.

Jesus heard about John and withdrew to a lonely place.

*But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. As he went ashore he saw a great throng . . . and He cried out, "You people are violating my boundaries! I'm having a Quiet Time! Now scam!"*

Actually, He didn't say that. Scripture says in verse 14, *and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick*, or as one scholar translates it, "His heart went out to them, and He healed their wretched."

He gave His heart, although I imagine He was tempted by Satan to curl up in a ball, conserve His resources, and guard His wounded heart. He wanted to be alone, but He realized His Father had sent another prescription. So He *gave* His wounded heart, healed the wretched, and served a great banquet.

That night late, after the party, He had His Quiet Time.

*As he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."*

*Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.*

*And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children [5,000 families]. Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.*

So He partied in the valley and prayed on the mountain. (I usually do it the other way. In the valley I retreat, guard my heart, and hang on to my things.)

This whole world is like a lonely valley, and Satan whispers, "Retreat . . . guard your heart . . . hang on to your things."

Well, that afternoon the disciples were hurting too. They loved John the Baptist as well. The crowd was wearing on them, and it was a lonely valley, so in verse 15 they guard their hearts and hang on to their things. They say, "Jesus, send the crowd away." He says, "You feed them." They say, "We only have five loaves and two fish." Jesus says, "Give them to me."

When they give them, Jesus takes what they give and turns it into a great banquet. It's the only miracle, outside the resurrection, recorded in all four gospels. So the disciples must have remembered it as a great lesson:

The night they could have eaten five loaves and two little fish, sad and alone, divided among the twelve, but instead, because they gave to Jesus and then gave *through* Jesus, they had a banquet. They had a great banquet — 5,000 families laughing and feasting in the Valley of the Wretched.

The night they wanted to guard their hearts but gave.

The night they wanted to consume their bread but gave their bread and ate their fill and ended up with a basket each of broken bread left over.

Twelve baskets — twelve disciples.

And Jesus said, "I have food of which you do not know: to do the will of Him who sent me." His therapy—His nourishment—His food—was loving and giving Himself away.

Are you ever so sad or sick that you don't feel like eating? But you make yourself eat, because it's good for you? That's a discipline. It's also a discipline to eat the food of Jesus when you don't feel like it.

It's a discipline to give.

It's a discipline to party in the valley when you're tempted to guard your treasure and hold on to the ball.

Every now and then my kids and I play ball in the basement (four square, basketball, catch football . . .). When Coleman was a toddler he would watch us throw the ball — laughing, running . . . like a great dance. He was a sad, little toddler, and he wanted in on the fun.

So I would throw him the ball. He would grab it like he had just received the greatest treasure in the world. Then he would run away to a lonely place, holding the ball, and he wouldn't throw it back.

We would all say, "C'mon, Coleman, pass the ball!" But he wouldn't give it up. And if we took it away from him, he would cry. Yet the longer he held the ball, the more boring the ball got . . . because now the game had stopped, and apart from the game the ball was just a piece of inflated plastic.

Joy wasn't in the ball. Joy was in playing the game: the relationship between people. The ball was only a means for playing the game and dancing the dance.

What if everything we own—houses, cars, food, cash—is all like that ball . . . and the game is love . . . and we were born into this world to learn the game? Then the point wouldn't be *holding* the ball but *passing* the ball. Then people who held the ball, locked away in mansions by themselves while other children yelled, "Pass the ball!" would turn out to be lonely, bored, miserable people. The ones who passed the ball would be surprised by joy.

And if we *held* the ball (cars, houses, bank accounts) . . . the more we held on to it the more we would sense, "Why, it's just a piece of inflated plastic!" And in desperation, the more we would try to convince ourselves otherwise, the more obsessed, lonely, miserable, and insane we would get.

Do you remember January 25, 1998? The Big Dance . . . Super Bowl 32 . . . two minutes remaining . . . the Broncos were on the Packers' one-yard-line . . . Terrel Davis had already scored two touchdowns. He lined up in the back field. They hiked the ball to John Elway. Elway turned to hand off to Davis, but he didn't hand off. Elway ran to a lonely place at midfield and fell down clutching the ball, yelling, "It's mine! It's mine! I've got the ball!" He began stroking the ball . . . "Oh, Wilson, you're not plastic; your 100% genuine leather!"

Do you remember that? *No* . . . because it *didn't happen*. If it *did* happen, the papers would have said, "Elway went insane."

Clutching the ball he thought it was all about himself and the ball—the treasure—when he was supposed to be all about the game. Ironically, when he's all about the game, the game is all about him. When he loses himself in the game, he finds himself in the game . . . in glory.

Glorious quarterback!  
An All Star!  
Famous for passing the ball away!

Often the ball ends up on his mantel, *not* because it's genuine leather, but because it's been sanctified by the game.

Maybe the angels look at us and how we hang on to our stuff, and think we're insane.

We could win the Super Bowl . . . but we hold on to the ball.

We could join the Great Dance . . . but we sit in the corner clutching mud pies.

We could feast at the Great Banquet . . . but we won't let go of five loaves and two little fish.

"It's our father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom," Jesus said. "So sell your possessions." But we'd rather have a new car.

"All things are yours," says Paul in Scripture. But we don't believe it. So we guard our hearts, and won't let go, and won't dance.

Jesus said, "To what can I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace calling to one another, 'We piped and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn.'"

To join a dance or to weep with a friend you have to let go. But we're all trapped in our own, little, insane, lonely worlds, blind in mind, body, soul, and strength to the kingdom of God that is at hand (when we love).

Satan's temptation is always isolation . . . trapping you in yourself. It's always insanity in your mind: you think all reality is your reality.

- A Paranoid thinks everyone is out to get him. What good news to find that *other* people are paranoid! So they can't *all* be out to get him.
- A Hypochondriac thinks he suffers with *every disease*. What good news to find that *other* people suffer too!
- A Neurotic thinks it's all his fault. What good news to find there are *other* sinners in this world!
- A Megalomaniac thinks everything belongs to him . . . or *should*. What a burden that is!—Survival of the Fittest . . . I must compete, consume, and acquire . . . trying to validate my existence with things . . . the rat race.

But the problem with the rat race, according to theologian Lily Tomlin, is that even if you win, you're still a rat. A rat . . . alone and left holding nothing but an inflated piece of plastic.

You held the ball but never played the game.  
You went to the dance and never heard the music.  
You got all A's and flunked life.  
You gained the whole world and forfeited your soul.  
You saved your reality (your life) and lost it (dead).

Life is like the energy that passes between dead particles and makes them living. A life is a great dance, a body, a city, a team. Competition doesn't explain life. Competition explains death. Cooperation, surrender, sacrifice, and love explains life.

Love *is* life.  
God *is* love.  
Jesus *is* life.

Finding life is being lost in Him—His body—His city—His kingdom.

So Jesus says in the Valley of the Wretched, “Guys, give me your five loaves and two little fish.” Give me your treasure.

The loaves and the fish were all the disciples had, so it was their treasure. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” “Lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven.” Jesus takes your treasure and puts it in heaven—the Great Dance—the Great Banquet. Then your treasure *is* the Great Banquet, and your heart is as large as Heaven.

Give all your treasure to Jesus, and He'll bless it, break it, and multiply it.

He takes loaves and fish and turns it into a banquet of love.

He takes a pot of flowers and turns it into a gift of life for your bride.

He takes a ten-speed bike and turns it into a sacrament, as your son says one day, “Maybe God is like my daddy.”

He takes cash in the offering plate and turns it into Gospel preached and kingdom come.

He takes our gifts and infuses them with love and life—Himself.

So Jesus turns five loaves and two fish into the Great Banquet. Then the twelve disciples (like the twelve tribes of Israel picking up manna) pick up twelve baskets (“kophinos” in Greek . . . they were like knapsacks).

Give your treasure, and there is more than enough for the Church (the twelve, the people of God). Give all your treasure to Jesus and give some to the Church. It's a therapeutic discipline for your sad, lonely hearts.

That's why we're throwing a party here next week (for our therapy). It's why you should give to the Church. Yet as I speak, I stand compromised . . . because I represent the institutional Church. And just as our hearts can be so congested, constipated, and dead, so can the Church. "Israel was blessed to be a blessing." But they hoarded the blessing and lost the blessing—missed the Blessing in the flesh, and He danced out of His tomb and off to the Gentiles.

We're blessed to be a blessing, Church.

It's fascinating that in the very next chapter of Matthew the very same thing happens again: crowd, hunger, compassion, a few fish and loaves . . . but this time they are in the Decapolis—an area populated with Gentiles. And when it's over the twelve disciples pick up *seven* baskets of broken bread (not "kophinos"—personal baskets, but "spuris"—big picnic baskets). Matthew makes a big deal of seven . . . seven is the number of all creation.

When we give, not only is there more than enough for the Church (12), there is more than enough for all creation (7).

As individuals we're to discipline ourselves to give to the Church.

As the Church we're to discipline ourselves to give to the world.

We went to the church Session and said, "We already do this with our operating budget, but what if we do it with our building budget? What if we discipline ourselves to give 10% away to people who can never repay us in kind?" They said, "No, it sounds like a gimmick." I said, "Yes, but it's a discipline." Giving is a discipline to heal our hearts . . . not just for individuals but for churches.

Then Session voted unanimously that we give *at least* 10% away, and we sent Duncan looking for some place to give it. Isaias didn't come to us, we went to Isaias and asked, "Can we join the dance and sing your song?"

[Video announcing a three-year project to coincide with the *Serving the Banquet* campaign: to build the Leadership Training Center and Bible College in Mozambique with 10% of the money given to this campaign.]

Isaias Uaene preached here a few years ago, so some of you might have recognized him on the video clip. Isaias is here today. He is graduating May 4 from Dallas Seminary, and then he and his family will be going back to Mozambique by way of Brazil. His wife Quezia is here with him, and she just gave birth to twins three and a half months ago: Samuel and Anne Beatrice.

We've asked Isaias to share with us a bit about the project in Mozambique.

[Isaias]

Thank you, Pastor Peter and church, for coming to join us in our dance in Mozambique and in our singing.

I come from a country that for nearly five centuries was under Portugal . . . under dominion of another country . . . people suffering under that. In 1995 we became an independent country, but we fell into a communistic government. People suffered because they did not have freedom of religion or freedom of speech.

Three years later civil war broke in, and people suffered from war and lack of food and material things. But above all they suffered spiritually.

As we go out in Mozambique, we go and preach the Gospel. We show the “JESUS” film and go out in open markets, door-to-door evangelism . . . we see people in the hundreds coming and accepting Christ. We see new churches being started—built—planted.

Yet I see all that and my heart is broken, because I know that these newly-planted churches, these new-born believers, will go to their village in that area and be orphans because they won’t have a leader.

I’ve seen one of our evangelists going to one village. In eleven months he had that congregation up to 104 people. Guess who was left behind to lead that congregation — one of the young people was there. He was very interested to read the Scriptures, wanting to know more about Christ, and he showed some leadership skills, and he was left behind to lead a newly-planted church.

I can’t stay and look, watch, and be merry. No . . . that is the reality all over Mozambique. The Lord put in our hearts the burden to provide the Church with trained leadership. That’s why CDL (in English, The Center for Leadership Development) was born . . . not to be *the answer*, but to be *part* of the answer to help the Church.

When I look at all that, I realize one thing: For many, many years we invested our time in growing the Church. Consequently, we have so many being planted, but we have done very little in investing in the health of the Church. These two things cannot be divorced. I refuse to see a divorce between church planting and leadership training.

That’s why we have committed to train leaders who will help in nurturing the Church. CDL has two target audiences: First, those leaders who are already in the Church, working in the Church and serving in some capacities yet without any leadership training. We bring them over for training seminars, and they will go back to their own villages and serve the Lord among their own people.

Realize that Mozambique is a country with about 40 different languages and dialects. When these people come, we train these few key leaders to go back to their own people, speaking in their own mother tongue the things of God—the God of the Bible.

The second group of people we have is people whom God is calling. They have both time and also academic qualifications for higher education, so we want to provide them with a diploma and B.A. in Theology. Many Christians are coming to church, but they want the leadership that can help them to talk in their language. So we are committed to train leaders who can respond to that need.

CDL cannot do it alone, and I'm glad that you as a church yielded to the Spirit's leadership to come and join us in dancing together, as we seek to help our people and to establish a Church that not only is getting fatter and fatter, but a Church that is healthy because it's being grounded in salt and truth—the Bible. A Bible that talks about the Christian God.

I want to thank you, the Church, because CDL today is operating in Mozambique because *you* have faithfully committed yourself to giving. Because of your giving, CDL is operating. You have been doing that on a monthly basis. I know God can provide in many other ways, but He has chosen to bless us through you as you chose to come and dance with us. Come . . . continue coming to partner with us and dance together.

[Peter]

Let's pray for Isaias and Quezia.

“Father, I thank you so much for Isaias and Quezia. I thank you, Lord, for the visions and dreams you have placed in their hearts. I thank you for Mozambique, Lord, and how hungry the people are for your Gospel . . . so eager they are to respond to your grace.

“Lord Jesus, I pray that you would help us as your Church, both in Mozambique and here, to be faithful. Father, it's hard for us to believe, because in America the situation seems so different: it's so hard to get people to come to Christ, and there are so many pastors, yet in Mozambique there are so few pastors and so many people hungry for the Gospel.

“Lord, we pray that you would continue to use us. Thank you for how you've used us in the past. Lord, I ask that you would use us even more, so as we pay for *this* building we would have the privilege of paying for a building in Mozambique to train your Church in Mozambique.

“Thank you for my brother Isaias. Thank you that *you* have grafted us together in one body with your very own blood. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that we all belong to you. And it's in your name we pray, amen.”

God willing, we'll give to Mozambique, and we'll receive far more in return: baskets and baskets of broken bread. In John's gospel he points out that the bread was barley, the bread of the very poor; that the fish were very small fish, and they came from a little boy. What the little boy gave was his poverty.

I think the greatest and hardest gift to give is your poverty. The greatest gift God gives is His broken heart—Jesus. He didn't hide His sorrow over John the Baptist. He shared it. The greatest gift God gives is His broken heart—Jesus hanging on a cross—His poverty of spirit over you.

The greatest gift *you* give is your brokenness, your hunger, your poverty of spirit. We rich Americans have such a hard time giving that, for we are blinded by our riches and false gods.

I was in Mozambique a few years ago preaching with Isaias and Andrew. I've never seen such hunger for the Great Banquet! Thousands received the bread of life, and *I* was filled with manna . . . broken bread . . . Jesus.

So I hope you realize Jesus *is* the banquet; He *is* the bread broken. Right after this story in John, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life come down to give life to the world." He is how God feeds the earth. He gives *His* life, heart of God, broken and dying for us. "We love because He first loved us." We *give* because He gave.

- He gets the party started
- He's the ultimate economic stimulus package
- He's the Lord of the dance
- He's the life breathed into the body of death

So I hope you see that giving bread without Jesus is utter futility. It merely postpones the agony of death on a condemned planet. But giving bread *with* Jesus—with love—with life, that's the Great Banquet in the making. We give Jesus and we receive even more of Jesus, until we're lost in Him and found.

One afternoon in Mozambique, after I had preached, a very hungry looking young man approached me. He smiled and made a motion that he had received Jesus in his heart. As we were leaving, I ran back and gave him a bag of old apples and said, "I have to go."

He started arguing with me in a language I didn't understand . . . yelling after me as I walked away. I thought, "What does he want now?" I went back. He reached into the bag, grabbed an apple, held it out to me, and looked me in the eye.

He wanted to eat with me.

For a moment I saw him, and it scared me. I said, "No, they're for *you*!" I ran back to the van and hid. I tried to tell Andrew what had just happened, but I choked on the words.

I know it sounds corny, but *Jesus* wanted to dine with me on the streets of Mozambique . . . and it scared me. He was dancing, and I didn't want to be swept away. I wanted to give some apples—give some bread as a discipline and have it over with. Jesus wanted to multiply it and change it from a discipline into a life.

See, it's not that Jesus just wants some of your stuff; He wants you to set it down so He can dance with you . . . forever. To dance with Jesus is to lose your life and find it. I believe we were born to lose our lives.

The meaning of life is learning to die . . . so we can live; learning to pass the ball and enjoy the game. Heaven is an acquired taste. Yes, it's scary, it's a process, and it can hurt, so yes, it's a discipline. But it's a discipline to party, discipline to live, discipline to love.

“Coleman, buddy, pass the ball and join the fun!”

In the movie Rat Race, twelve people are suckered into competing for 2 million dollars. As they race to get the money, they turn into ugly, desperate, lonely, obsessed, crazy people consumed with themselves, thinking the money will heal their wounded hearts.

They unknowingly chase the prize money (hanging from a balloon) onto the stage of a “Feed the Earth” charity concert. The crowd thinks they've come to *give*; the twelve think that at last they've come to *got*.

This is the way the movie ends; this is the way your old life ends; this is a taste of dying and going to heaven:

[Movie Clip: Much to their chagrin the twelve realize everyone thinks they came to give. A poor child says they are “just like the twelve disciples.” One by one each of the twelve chooses, after deliberation, to put his or her cash in the donation bag. When they do, they dance for joy.]

The movie is a fairy tale. It's a dream of the Great Banquet; it's a rumor of heaven. The world doesn't know Jesus is the only good man, so any goodness in people is Him. They don't know He Himself is the bread of life for the world, but they dream of Him . . . and they can taste the salt. Even the world can see that giving is a discipline to joy, a discipline to party.

In the movie

they give their treasure, and their hearts are released;  
they give their treasure, and their hearts grow large;  
they give 2 million away and inherit a  
family—5,000 families—a great banquet.

At the very end of the movie, having let go of the money, they let go of their lives. They dive headlong from the stage into the party. The multitude catches them as they sing, “Hey now, you're an all-star . . .”

On May 17 we're going to have a party at the Adam's Mark Hotel. Give all your money to Jesus, but give part of it to the Church—the Great Banquet.

Because of Jesus, may you pass the ball and dive headlong into the Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

### Further Reading

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

-Genesis 3:6-8

If I created my own reality, then—on some level and dimension I didn't understand—I had created everything I saw, heard, touched, smelled, tasted; everything I loved, hated, revered, abhorred; everything I responded to or that responded to me. Then, I created everything I knew. I was therefore responsible for all there was in my reality. If that was true, then I *was* everything, as the ancient texts had taught. I was my own universe. Did that also mean I had created God and I had created life and death? Was that why I was all there was? A chilling wave of loneliness rippled through me. . . . Was this what was meant by the statement I AM THAT I AM?

-Shirley MacLaine, *It's All in the Playing*

"Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Supermen. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." . . . If we said what we felt, we should say, "So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God; and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvellous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!"

-G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

-Mark 10:21-22

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . . And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

-Matthew 6:19-21, 10:7

"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations."

-Luke 16:9

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'"

-Matthew 11:16-17

"All is gift. . . . Through many hands, enriched with many different kinds of love and labour, the gift comes to me. It is the law. The best fruits are plucked for each by some hand that is not his own." . . .

"In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock, and each movement becomes in its season the breaking into flower of the whole design to which all else had been directed. Thus each is equally at the center and none are there by being equals, but some by giving place and some by receiving it, the small things by their smallness and the great by their greatness, and all the patterns linked and looped together by the unions of a kneeling with a sceptred love. Blessed be He!"

"He has immeasurable use for each thing that is made, that His love and splendour may flow forth like a strong river which has need of a great watercourse and fills alike the deep pools and the little crannies, that are filled

equally and remain equal; and when it has filled them brim full it flows over and makes new channels. We also have need beyond measure of all that He has made. Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely necessary to you and for your delight I was made. Blessed be He!"

"He has no need at all of anything that is made. An eldil [angel] is not more needful to Him than a grain of the Dust: a peopled world no more needful than a world that is empty: but all needless alike, and what all add to Him is nothing. We also have no need of anything that is made. Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely superfluous, and your love shall be like His, born neither of your need nor of my deserving, but a plain bounty. Blessed be He!"

"All things are by Him and for Him. He utters Himself also for His own delight and sees that He is good. He is His own begotten and what proceeds from Him is Himself. Blessed be He!"

-C. S. Lewis, Perelandra

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

-Galatians 5:14-16