

The Feeding of The Five Thousand

Mark 6:30-44

Introduction: 1) Fyodor Dostoevsky said, “The most pressing question on the problem of faith is whether a man as a civilized being can believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for therein rests the whole of our faith.”

2) Perhaps no story in the Bible, other than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, confronts us with this reality of our Lord’s deity more directly than the feeding of the 5,000. Only God could do what occurred on that remarkable day in Israel. This story, so popular and captivating for children and, yes, adults, is so important in the life and ministry of Jesus that it is the only miracle, outside of the resurrection, that is recorded in all 4 gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). Mark also will record a 2nd feeding miracle in 8:1-10, the feeding of the 4,000 on that occasion.

3) John 6:15 informs us that this miracle made such an impact on the crowd that they attempted to take Jesus “by force to make him king.” Our Lord would refuse their advance, withdraw by himself to pray (Mark 6:46), and stay the course to the cross as was His divine destiny.

4) So many lessons are contained in this story one hardly knows where to begin. We will structure our study in 3 parts, and allow each section to raise the wonderful theological truths God would have us see.

I. We should find rest from ministry like Jesus.

6:30-32

1) Mark returns to the account of the evangelistic mission of the 12 (6:7-13), which was interrupted by his account of the execution of John the Baptist (6:14-29). The apostles (Gr. *apostoloi*; only twice in Mark; cf. 3:14), here describing their assignment as “missionaries,” returned and rehearsed “all that they had done and taught” (v. 30). Jesus

had sent them out; as He sends us out, with a job to do. They had experienced great success in their assignment. When Jesus authorizes us and empowers us, we can anticipate God's blessings in what we do. We must simply believe and go.

2) They now return to debrief, evaluate their successes as well as their failures. This was how our Lord mentored His men. Teach them → Send them out → Have them return → Report and evaluate. I doubt we can improve on this model of discipleship and training.

1) Rejoice in God's blessings on your ministry. 6:30

- They shared with the Lord "all they had done and taught." Mark 6:12-13 informs us of the specifics. They had cast out many demons, healed many who were sick, and preached the gospel of repentance just like John the Baptist (1:4) and Jesus (1:15).
- One can imagine their excitement as they shared with Jesus what they had been able to do in His Name and with His delegated authority (6:7). We can also imagine they had worked hard, putting in many long hours. Still, the blessings and joys of ministry were evident. They "told him all they had done and taught."

2) Get away for some rest and relaxation from your ministry. 6:31-32

- Some people "rust out" in ministry because they are lazy. Others "burn out" because they never rest or take a break.
- The wonderful Baptist preacher Vance Havner says, "If we don't come apart; we will come apart."

- Jesus tells his apostles, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place, an isolated place, (cf. v. 31, 32, 35) and rest awhile.” Why? So many were coming and going they could not even eat (cf. 3:20!)
- The phrase “desolate place” means a “remote place” (*HCSB*). They need a “quiet place” (*NIV*); “selected place” (*NASV*).
- They need some “down time,” a “break in the action,” much needed R&R. If there is not time even to eat, there was no time to relax, rest, and recuperate. It was not a sin for them to take a brief sabbatical. It would have been a sin for them not to. The same is true for us! In fact, the greater the demands, the greater “our need to find time alone with Jesus.”
- Jesus gives a command: “rest awhile” (v. 31). So they leave, and “went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves” (v. 32).
- Several practical insights can be gleaned from just these few verses. 1) There is a time to work (cf. John 9:4). Laziness has no place in the Christian life. 2) We should have periods of rest because Jesus tells us to. Being a workaholic is not spiritual and can be sinful. Some make ministry an idol. 3) Rest is best when accompanied both by solitude and companionship. 4) Rest is for a specific period of time. It is not permanent. 5) Even while resting, be prepared for ministry if necessary. A devoted follower of Jesus is never off duty.

II. We should have compassion for others like Jesus.

6:33-37

- Often the Bible pictures our Lord as a Shepherd and us as sheep.
 - Jesus is the “Lord who is my Shepherd” of Psalm 23.

- Jesus is the “Rejoicing Shepherd” of Luke 15:1-7 who goes after the one lost sheep.
- Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” of John 10:11 who lays down his life for His sheep.
- Jesus is the “Chief Shepherd” of 1 Peter 5:4 who honors his servants.
- Jesus is the “Great Shepherd” of Hebrews 13:20.
- Jesus is the “Shepherd Lamb” of Rev 7:17 who guides us to springs of living water.
- We on the other hand, are weak, foolish, helpless sheep. We are stupid sheep who cannot take care of themselves and cannot save themselves. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understands the desperate situation “human sheep” face without a shepherd, “There were questions but no answers, distress but no relief, anguish of conscience but no deliverance, tears but no consolation, sin but no forgiveness” (Garland, NIVAC, 258). We desperately need a shepherd, one who is compassionate and able to provide for us and protect us. We need a Shepherd Savior.

1) People have spiritual needs we should address.

6:33-34

- Jesus and the disciples have tried to get away for a little rest and time alone. Unfortunately, the people who were coming and going (v. 31): 1) saw them going [in the boat], 2) recognized them and 3) ran there [to where they were headed in the boat] from all the towns and got there ahead of them (v. 33).
- When they land their boat and go ashore, already “he saw a great crowd” (v. 34). What was His response? Anger? Frustration? Depression? No. What

Mark records are some of the most precious and tender words found in all the Bible:

- 1) “He had compassion on them.” He was moved from the depth of his being and his heart went out to them.
- 2) He saw them “like sheep without a shepherd.” The spiritual leaders of Israel had become hirelings (cf. John 10:12-13; cf. Ezek 34:1-24!). The nation of Israel was lost, helpless, without direction and guidance, malnourished and lacking protection.
- 3) “He began to teach them many things” (cf. 1 Pet 5:2). In the wilderness Moses plead with the Lord to raise up a leader, a Shepherd, “that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd” (Num 27:17). God raised up Joshua in anticipation of the greater Joshua named Jesus. In Ezekiel 34 the Lord rails against the evil shepherds of Israel who have neglected and abused the people. Then in v. 23-24, he promises, “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.” That Davidic Shepherd-King has now appeared in Jesus. Once again lost in the wilderness, “a desolate place,” the Good Shepherd Jesus has arrived to spiritually guide them and feed them by His Word. His compassion moved Him to teach them. His

compassion moves Him to meet their greatest needs, their spiritual needs. It also moves Him to meet other needs as well.

2) People have physical needs we should address.

6:35-37

- Jesus cares for our souls and spiritual needs. After all it is our Lord who said, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). However, He also cares for our body and physical needs too. In Matthew 25:31-46, He tells us to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, give rest to the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit prisoners.
- There is no social gospel, but there are social ministries, mercy ministries, that are the (super) natural outgrowth of the gospel. As Jesus had compassion for spiritual and physical needs, so should we.
- Vs. 35 informs us the hour is now late. The disciple bring this to Jesus’ attention and in vs. 36 they actually command Him to “send away” (aor. imp) the people to “the surrounding countryside and village and buy themselves something to eat.” The tone of their request may be a bit harsh, but we can certainly understand the logic of it. The hour is late, the people are famished, they need something to eat, so send them on their way. They are becoming something of a nuisance.
- Vs. 44 informs us of the number of men present was 5,000. Add women and children and the number must have been at least 20,000! This makes Jesus’ response in v. 37 all the more amazing and outlandish: “You give them something to eat.” “Give” is an imperative, a word of command. The 12 said “send them away” and Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

- Question: If the 12 had sufficient faith, could they? (cf. 6:52). Having been given His authority to preach, heal, and cast out demons, could they have worked the miracle of feeding the 5,000? This much we do know! God wants us to have compassion on those in need, and He wants us involved in their lives meeting both spiritual and physical needs. We indeed minister to the whole person. That's what Jesus did.

III. We should seek to meet the needs of others like Jesus. 6:37-44

- It is one thing to recognize a legitimate need. It is something else to do something about it (cf. James 2:14-17).
- At first blush Jesus' command, "You give them something to eat" seems unreasonable. It actually sounds insane if you think about it. Still, the disciples give it their best shot. Full of unbelief, they at least obey the instructions of their Master, and they will actually participate in and enjoy one of the Lord's greatest miracles.

1) Do what only you can do. 6:37-40

- Given a command to feed the people, the apostles do a quick inventory and cost assessment. They calculate it would take 200 denari, 8 months wages, to feed the crowd. Problem: they do not have that kind of money. Strike one!
- Jesus then asks them what do they have (v. 38). In fact, He gives a double command, "Go and see." They quickly survey the crowd and return with their take: 5 loaves and 2 fish. It is John 6:9 that teaches us these crackers and sardines were given by a young boy. Basically, the amount of food was

enough to meet the needs of a boy, just what we would expect from a loving and caring mother. This is strike two!

- The disciples obeyed and this is all they were able to do. Their problem was now clearly beyond their resources. If Jesus does not intervene and do something, then nothing is going to happen, at least nothing good. But, it does. In vs. 39, He commands them to get organized and sit down on the “green grass.” In vs. 40, they sit down by groups of 50’s and 100’s (cf. Ex 18:21).
- In obedience the people do as He says. Now, let the party begin.

2) Trust Jesus to do what only He can do.

6:41-42

- God loves to demonstrate His power and sufficiency in our lives. Often He allows problems to invade our lives that are far beyond our abilities or resources to handle. Why? He wants us to look to Him. He wants us to come to the end of us and find Him right there. Warren Wiersbe is exactly right, “Jesus looked at the situation, not as a problem, but as an opportunity to trust the Father and glorify His name” (p. 65).
- Jesus now serves as the Host of a Messianic banquet far different than the one hosted by Herod Antipas in 6:14-29. The desolate place is about to become a place of plenty. As Moses led Israel thru the wilderness and met their physical needs with manna and quail, a greater Moses, who is not only the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11) but also the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35) will now feed His people with an abundant feast unlike any they have ever known.
- Vs. 41 He took the 5 loaves and 2 fish and then did 5 things: 1) He looked up to heaven; 2) He blesses the food; 3) He broke the loaves; 4) He gave them to

the disciples to distribute to the people; 5) He divided up the fish and gave to all. Perhaps He prayed the common table prayer of the Hebrews, “Praise be to you, O Lord our God, King of the world, who makes bread to come forth from the earth, and who provides for all that you have created.” (Edwards, 192)

- Vs. 42 simply states, “And they all ate and were satisfied.” Note the word “all.” None left hungry. None went without. His compassion is overflowing. His provision is satisfying.

3) Recognize that a little can become a lot with Jesus. 6:43-44

- Following the banquet in the wilderness, the feast of the 5,000, the leftovers were gathered. It was 12 “small wicker type” baskets full, one for each of the disciples (v. 43).
- Vs. 44 informs us 5,000 men plus women and children shared in this Messianic miracle. 5 small loaves and 2 small fish multiplied beyond measure in the hands of Jesus. Where we see a lack He sees an abundance. Where we see human problems He sees and accomplishes divine possibilities. A little can become a lot with Jesus!

Conclusion: 1) Sally Lloyd-Jones writes, “The Bible is not a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story...you see, the best thing about this story is—it’s true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling the one big story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.” (*The Jesus Storybook Bible*, Zondervan, 2007, 17).

2) Jesus showed His love and came to the rescue in a desolate place to feed the 5,000. He showed His love and came to the rescue in a lonely place on a hill called Calvary. There is a

great hero in the Bible. He is our God. He is our rescuer. He is our Shepherd. He is our Savior.
He is Jesus.

3) Spurgeon said, “Come, then, weary hungry sinner. You have nothing to do but to take Christ...Open your mouth and receive the food! Faith to receive what Christ provides is all that is needed.” (Spurgeon, “The Miracle of the Loaves,” #1218).

4) Isaiah 40:11 says, “[The Lord] will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom...” Let him gather you. Let him carry you.