

Mark 6:30ff  
Feeding the Multitude

This is a very famous miracle of Jesus, perhaps because it is such a big miracle done on behalf of so many people.

It gets more ink in the NT than the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

It is easy to hear this series on Mark and think, "So how do these narratives apply to my life? Where is the teaching that will feed my soul? Where is the teaching that will instruct me and help me be a better person, a better wife, husband, parent, child, etc? Where is the 'gospel' in the Gospel?"

Here's what you might consider...All of those 'how does it apply to me' questions are meaningless if we don't really know who Jesus is, and it is through the gospel narratives that we encounter Jesus the Christ of God. As we see how Jesus interacts with and trains his followers, we can learn how he may also deal with us in our lives. The four gospels along with the rest of scripture teach us that it's not about US, it's about Jesus.

The human heart is such that we don't want NEWS, we tend to want a TO DO LIST that we can accomplish. Other religions will give you that. Christianity is all about The Good News, i.e. the Gospel is NEWS of a Saving Shepherd King who has come. Listen to this News, receive it and let it sink into your hearts and it will transform you.

This is a section where Jesus is prepping and pushing this disciples. They just had their short-term mission trip, they got the news about John the Baptizer, and were going to rest but got interrupted.

At this point they may be feeling, "What is he doing to us? He keeps pushing us out into things we can't handle."

That is the way Jesus functions with us. He doesn't want us to settle for some level of spiritual success in the past. He is looking and working to move us toward active dependence on him.

Honestly, we may well be tempted to say, "Jesus, stop it. I get it. I'm dependent on you. Do I have to show it all the time?"

Have you had situations that were hopeless unless Jesus shows up? Are you in one right now?

Some of you may feel that way right now, others, not so much.

When those times come, it is important to remember that God is NOT punishing you. He is refining you. He is pursuing you and your heart.

30 The apostles \*gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. 31 And He \*said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) 32 They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.

33 The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

35 When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they \*said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" 38 And He \*said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they \*said, "Five, and two fish."

39 And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. 40 They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41 And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food* and broke the loaves and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. 44 There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.

There is more here than providing food. Through his teaching and miracles Jesus is providing spiritual nourishment for his people. His Word does the same thing for us.

Now let's see what God says in this well known passage.

#### v. 30-32 Joy and fatigue of ministry

Rest is not ungodly. The disciples needed a break and they needed to regroup after hearing about the brutal death of John.

#### v. 33 -The Compassion of Jesus

The word used for compassion is ONLY USED in reference to Jesus in the NT.

#### The ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEM

**Sheep without a Shepherd – that is shorthand for spiritual and cultural decline.** It describes a population in spiritual freefall. It is a dangerous situation because sheep are dumb animals and are prone to hurting themselves or being hurt without a shepherd.

Several passages in the OT refer to this condition.

It's first used in the Scriptures in **Numbers 27:17**. It's found on the lips of Moses who is praying for the Lord to appoint Joshua as his successor to lead the people, for otherwise the people of Israel would "be like sheep without a shepherd."

Then it's used later in **1 Kings 22:17** and **2 Chronicles 18:16**, the same story told two slightly different ways, where God tells Ahab through the prophet Micaiah, that "the people will be scattered like sheep without a shepherd" because of his wickedness as a king.

And then later still, the prophet Ezekiel, **Ezekiel 34:5**, God explained that His people were "scattered in the exile like sheep who have no shepherd." And yet, 34:23, "The time will come, God says, when I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd."

So, we see what Mark is telling us when he uses this expression to describe the heart of the Lord Jesus, that they're "like sheep without a shepherd," and then He feeds them. The shepherd of the sheep is technical language for Israel's great king, without whom the people are scattered. The priests of Jesus' day ought to have shepherded the people. Instead, they placed a dreadful burden of needless legalism upon them.

In a parallel passage of Matthew describing this same phase of the ministry of Christ, we read, **Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.**

**36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Matt 9**

It is because of His compassion for the wandering sheep that Jesus says,

**Matt 11:28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**

Jesus is pulling back the curtain on his identity so that the disciples will believe in him and live for him. Knowing him will reshape our lives.

He has compassion for people who are captured by sin, rebellion, their own bad habits, their own bad theology or worldview. He sees people who are victims of this broken sinful world who may be following him for the wrong reasons, and he has compassion on them.

EX: As believers, God's grace enables us to look at those who disagree with us in terms of Biblical truth and have compassion for them rather than despising them. **Our theology is built around the God Man who saw our sin and had compassion on us. In turn, we share that compassion with others who are lost.**

The consistent NON-Christians would look at those who disagree with them and resent or despise them. Their worldview has no DNA of compassion. A consistent non-Christian secular worldview is built on the survival of the fittest. It is the philosophy of 'nature is red in tooth and claw.' It has no inherent DNA of compassion. The secularist who promotes or speaks of compassion is borrowing that value from OUR worldview. He or she is guilty of worldview appropriation.

Jesus is training the disciples to live as if He mattered, not just that he exists.

It is one thing to say or even believe that "God exists". It is something different to live as if He mattered in real life, i.e. where you look for meaning, provision, and direction. We will either live as if those must come from within ourselves or the world OR they come from God.

If we say, "They come from God", then our understanding of what God is like will shape our trajectory in life.

The disciples are learning that ...

**The Christian life means active dependence on Christ.**

#### **v. 34 The Remedy for Shepherd less Sheep**

He taught them. That was the first act of compassion.

He taught them MANY THINGS. This was not a 10 minute homily.

The OT Messiah was to be a Shepherd King who would lead the people into the truth about God. it is an act of compassion to lead people out of a spiritual desert to a place of spiritual nourishment.

#### **Ps 23 - the Lord is my shepherd...makes me lie down in green pastures; He restores my soul.**

NOTE; Mark references Jesus having the people sit in the green grass so that he can restore their souls with the good news of the kingdom.

The priority for the office of pastor/shepherd in the church is to feed the sheep with the Word of God.

Here is a proclamation that is used each week in a large church. Honestly, it's not bad...

***This is my Bible: I am what it says I am; I have what it says I have; I can do what it says I can do. Today, I will be taught the Word of God. I will boldly confess. My mind is alert; my heart is receptive; I will never be the same., in Jesus' Name.***

I don't really have a problem with what is expressed there. MY PROBLEM is that once it is said, there is almost ZERO reference to the Bible. What church says this...? Joel Osteen

"If you love yourself, you tell people what they want to hear. If you love others, you'll tell them what they NEED to hear." Jesus spoke the truth that the people needed to hear.

Jesus sees the crowd, feels compassion, and teaches them what they need to hear.

If you were one of the twelve how would you have felt when you saw the crowd?

<< Jesus, I didn't sign up for being on call 24/7 365 days a year.>>

I can imagine the disciples huddling over to the side trying to figure out which of them would go and interrupt Jesus so the crowd could go get something to eat. They decided to go as a group - partnership!

As we follow Christ, we will have opportunities to learn about compassion. Our culture seems to be more about self-care and boundaries than compassion. Jesus will push us out of our comfort zone into a zone of faith, i.e. the unknown.

TRUE CONFESSION – I don't really like the unknown. I DON'T like the unexpected intrusions on my life or my agenda. GUESS WHAT? That won't stop God from intruding so that He can meet us at the edge of our comfort zone and lead us to a place of dependence on Him.

#### v. 35-37 The challenge to the Disciples – Think outside the box

They were perplexed about the situation. They had laid out a plan to Jesus, and it seemed logical and showed concern for the people. It must have been a shock when Jesus seems to ignore their concern and puts the ball back in their court – “You give them something to eat.”

#### v. 38-44 The Miraculous Provision

We can't exhaust God's supply.  
Sibbes – “There is more grace in Christ than need in us.”

Sadly, voices of unbelief under the guise of historical scholarship have tried to find a natural explanation for this event. There are two leading theories:

One is **Jesus the con man** – This approach at getting rid of any supernatural aspect of the life of Christ offers the view that Jesus set up the whole event. According to skeptics, Jesus prepared for this event by filling a cave near the Sea of Galilee with foodstuffs. Jesus had a flowing robe with loose sleeves, much as you might see with the attire of a magician. He had His disciples hidden in the cave behind Him, and they formed a food line, passing loaves and fishes up through the back of His robe, which He then distributed to the mass of humanity gathered there. So, there was no miraculous intervention by God, but rather a hoax perpetrated by a fraudulent preacher. Such is the level of unbelief among some “theologians and scholars.”

The other theory is **Jesus the moral influencer** – Jesus asked the disciples to go find food that had been brought by those in the crowd. He then spoke to the people and urged them to “Share what you brought with others”, and the people responded. It was an “ethical miracle” that Jesus sparked by asking the people to share.

What does scripture say?

Jesus, the divine Son of the Most High God, the Good Shepherd graciously and supernaturally provides for the crowd of hungry sheep. Jesus acts like the good shepherd of Ps 23.

The real focus of the miracle is not the bread and fish, but is Jesus Himself. The miracle validates the teachings and claims of Christ.

The scene is similar to that of Moses: “Where will I find bread for all these people.?”

It was a legitimate question for Moses and for the disciples. It was reasonable and normal, but God shows that He can transcend the reasonable and normal.

They were pushed out of their comfort zone. That's where we see God's sufficiency 2 Cor 3:4  
They were focused on what they didn't have, but Jesus shows them to make use of what they do have. With Jesus, 5 loaves and 2 fish is enough for 5000+ people.

In John 6 we see how this miracle sets up the famous discourse in which Jesus proclaims, “I am the Bread of Life he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

**The point of the narratives and the miracles is so that we would see Jesus as the Shepherd King who cares for and rules on behalf of His people.**

When we see Him as he is we are motivated to go to his THRONE – VOV P. 273

Thy throne of grace  
is the pleasure ground of my soul.  
Here I obtain mercy in time of need,  
here I see the smile of thy reconciled face,  
here joy pleads the name of Jesus,  
here I sharpen the sword of the Spirit,  
anoint the shield of faith,  
put on the helmet of salvation,  
gather manna from thy Word,  
am strengthened for each conflict,  
nerved for the upward race,  
empowered to conquer every foe;

Jesus who fed the multitude feeds us daily at His throne of Grace.  
Do you meet Him there?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What are the benefits of studying the Gospel narratives as opposed to the epistles?

Does it seem harder to 'make application' from the gospel narratives? Why or why not?

How do sheep without a shepherd behave?

Why is that condition so risky?

What does it mean in spiritual terms?

Why is teaching the main solution to the problem?

What does this miracle show us about the person of Jesus?

What does John 6 teach us about the multitude?