

More than Enough

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Mark 6:30-44

Mark follows the lavish banquet at Herod's palace with the story of a very different banquet. The story in front of us this morning provides a striking contrast to the royal festivities we looked at last week in verses 14-29. Herod presided over his banquet, but Jesus presides over the meal supplied to the multitudes. Herod's banquet took place in a regal fortress, but Jesus' banquet takes place in the desolate, rolling hills of the Galilean countryside. The guests at Herod's banquet were the nobles, military commanders, and leading men of Galilee, but the guests at Jesus' banquet are the ordinary folks of small lakeshore towns and villages. The purpose of Herod's banquet was to set a stage for his "glory", the purpose of Jesus' banquet was to teach His disciples, minister to the needs of others, and illustrate His Messianic, redemptive grace. While Herod's banquet came and went, the miracle that Jesus performed outside of Galilee in Mark 6:30-44 will be forever etched in the hearts and minds of the Church. Jesus feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle that is recorded in each of the four gospel accounts. Like a diamond, our text for this morning flashes with radiant glimpses of our wonderful, merciful Savior. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit pens these words:

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Mark 6:30-44

There are four overarching lessons that we can glean from the text this morning.

1. JESUS TAUGHT THE DISCIPLES TO REST IN HIS PRESENCE. (v.30-32)

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Mark 6:30–32

If you can remember back to verses 7-13 Jesus sent out His disciples two by two to teach, preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick. During that time Mark gave us insight into the death of John the Baptist, whose death was a foreshadowing of Jesus' death. It's very possible that John's death took place while the disciples were out preaching, precipitating their return to Jesus. Now the Apostles (only used in 6:30 in Mark's gospel) have returned, probably to Capernaum, after their ministry tour and are debriefing Jesus on all that they had done and taught. You can imagine that they were probably pretty excited as they were given abilities on this mission trip that they didn't previously possess (cast out demons and heal the sick).

This mission activity of the disciples, as you can imagine, had caught the attention of large numbers of people who pursued them, just as they had pursued Jesus earlier. Even as the Twelve came back for a brief furlough, Mark adds the detail that many followed them, coming and going, so that they had no leisure to eat. In other words, the disciples were neck deep in ministry! Jesus, knowing that his men were running on spiritually, emotionally, and physically low tanks, encouraged His disciples to retire for a moment from the hustle and bustle of ministry and rest - to be with Him. We can't forget that the first prerequisite of discipleship is being with Jesus. Jesus said, "Come follow me..." Mark 1:17.

I wonder if the disciples would have even stopped if Jesus hadn't known their need and encouraged them to rest. Ministry, if we are not careful can become consuming – it can become the main thing. While Jesus has enlisted each truly converted believer to His service (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), we must be careful that we don't miss the forest for the trees. Being with Jesus is the main thing! The life of the disciples was not only to be mission *for* Jesus, but mission *with* Jesus – and so it is with us today.

There are two dangers that we need to be mindful of as we seek to be ministers of the gospel - the danger of constant activity and the danger of persistent withdrawal. Constant activity in ministry, apart from pulling away to recharge your spiritual batteries, will cause a person shrivel up in their labors. Vance Havner once said, "If you don't come apart and rest, you will come apart." Jesus knew that His men needed to attend to their own souls as well as the souls of others and so he encouraged them to momentarily pull away and be with Him. Likewise, devotion that does not end in action is really not devotion at all. We don't seek intimacy with Christ as a means of avoiding ministry to men, we seek intimacy with Christ to better fit us for that privileged task!

It's interesting to note that the desolate place (ἔρημος) that Jesus took His disciples to can actually be translated "wilderness". We'll see as we work our way through the passage that there are many illusions to Moses and the exodus in this text. You see, Israel's Exodus from Egyptian captivity and the rest promised to the wilderness generation led by Moses and Joshua serves as a type that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ – who is the greater Moses and the greater Joshua. Jesus, the Great Shepherd, will lead His people out of the tyranny of sin and to a final, heavenly rest. Jesus is setting Himself up in this story not just as the bread which fell from heaven and satisfied the temporal hunger of Israel in the wilderness, but the greater Bread of life – that gives life and eternally satisfies our souls!

2. JESUS TAUGHT THE DISCIPLES TO REFLECT HIS COMPASSION. (v.33-34)

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. Mark 6:33–34

Luke tells us that Jesus and His disciples were headed to Bethsaida (9:10), about four miles Northeast of Capernaum by boat and 8-10 miles by foot. As they sailed toward their solitary resting place, people recognized them from lakeshore villages and began to run along the shoreline following them. I can imagine the disciples thinking, if not saying, "Are you serious?" Earlier in Mark 1:35-37 the disciples interrupted Jesus' need for prayer and fellowship with God and now, ironically, the crowd interrupts the disciples' need for rest. As you can image, the commotion drew incredible attention and the number of people grew quickly. As Jesus and his disciples disembarked their small vessel they were greeted with a mass of enthralled people. This wasn't the plan – or was it!

Despite the current need to "get away", Jesus is drawn to the crowds. Look at verse 34; Mark writes, "Jesus has compassion on them" (Cf. Matthew 9:36). This particular verb literally means to be moved in the bowels with sympathy or tender mercy and it is only used of Jesus in the New Testament. And what did He do? He began to teach them many things. Matthew 14:14 includes that He healed their sick and Luke 9:11 says, "He spoke to them of the Kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing." Are we as tenderly concerned about the souls of the lost? Do we have a sense of deep compassion for those sheep around us without a shepherd? Or are we content to live nice and tidy lives, being as careful as we can to not let the needs of others splash on us?

What did Jesus see as He gazed out over the masses? He saw people who were hopeless and helpless, "Like sheep without a shepherd." This is an interesting metaphor. The shepherd of sheep was both a common picture and a common figure of speech in Israel. As a figure of speech in the Bible it depicted a leader of Israel such as Moses and David. It was also used to refer to a Joshua-like military hero who would mobilize Israel's forces for war. The shepherd of the sheep has the idea military leadership and victory. As Jesus looks out over the mass of people what does He see? He

sees people with no direction, no purpose, and no leaders.¹ Here again we see incredible contrast. Moses led Israel through the wilderness and God gave them manna from heaven to eat. Here Jesus sets himself up as the leader of the people and feeds the masses. Joshua led Israel into battle, and Jesus has already shown himself to be the Messiah who has come to forever vanquish the powers of hell. Later, David ruled over Israel, but Jesus will sit on David's throne and rule the redeemed forever.

A sheep without a shepherd can't find its way, can't feed itself, and can't keep itself safe. It is only when Jesus leads and we follow that we can find the way. We can gain strength in life only from Him who is the living bread. Only in the company of Jesus can we walk in the world and keep our garments unspotted from it.²

3. JESUS TAUGHT THE DISCIPLES TO RELY ON HIS RESOURCES. (v.35-42)

And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. Mark 6:35-42

As evening falls on the Galilean hill country, the disciples observe a need and make it known to Jesus – as if he wasn't aware! The *observation* is that it's late, people are 8-10 miles away from their homes, and they have nothing to eat. In their haste to follow Jesus and the disciples, the crowd had left home without making any provision for an evening meal. The *recommendation* is that Jesus send them home so that they can find something to eat. This seems reasonable, right? Yes, but Jesus has other plans. John account of this narrative (6:6) says that Jesus is going to use these circumstances to test His disciples. The test: Do you trust that I am able to provide..?

Look at Jesus' response in verse 37. Mark writes, "He answered them, "You give them something to eat." "You" is emphatic and imperative – this was a command! Jesus' response, "You give them something to eat", must have furrowed the eyebrows of every one of the disciples. Fully aware of their limited resources, the disciples were utterly baffled. Look at their reply. They ask (smart alec tone), "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" Matthew 20:2 mentions that a denarius is equivalent to about a day's wage. Two hundred denarii then would equate to roughly a year's pay. Philip, the finance manager of the disciples, said in John 6:7, "Two

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 191.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1975), 156.

hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Interpretation, "We don't have enough money to feed all of these people." In their minds Jesus' command seems impossible. Principle: As Jesus' disciples we are to do whatever he asks, even if we can't imagine how.

The disciples were dumbfounded as they stared at a situation they didn't know how to handle. You've never been there have you? You see, the disciples didn't see 5,000 people; they saw 5,000 problems. I wonder how much ministry we miss because we see *problems* instead of *opportunities*. The disciples' response to Jesus reflects Moses response to God when he was confronted with Israel's grumbling for meat. Turn over briefly to Numbers 11:10-14.

Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.

So God appoints Elders to help Moses bear the responsibility of the people. He then tells Moses to have the people consecrate themselves for beginning the following day, God would feed them meat not for one, two, five, ten, or twenty days, but for a whole month. God was going to give the people so much meat that they would, after 30 days, wish they had had never asked for it. Moses replies to God in verse 21 and the following saying, "The people among whom I am number about six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month!' Shall the flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?" Interpretation, "God, maybe you didn't understand me when I presented the problem... There are six hundred thousand people here. Surely the people outnumber the resources."

Look at God's response in verse 23. And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not." That is the lesson that Jesus, the greater Moses, who will free His people from not just Pharaoh's bondage, but rather from the tyranny of sin and death, wants His disciples to learn as they stare at 5,000 needy faces. You may not have the resources, but the Omnipotent Lord possesses them all and His arm is not too short. Do you trust me? The disciples only considered what they could do in their own power and not what Jesus could do. You would think by this time things would be starting to click in the minds of the disciples. They had seen Jesus cleanse a leper, heal a paralytic, calm a storm, cast out demons, and resurrect the dead. But for some reason they couldn't imagine how the multitude would be fed? Well, before we fault the disciples, we too often look at our circumstances and see impossibilities without remembering that we serve a God with whom all things are possible.

God asks us to do the impossible and then he gives whatever we need to obey His command. Think for moment about the some of the impossible things that Jesus told people to do. To a paralyzed man he said, "Rise, pick up your bed, and walk." To a dead man, he cried out, "Lazarus, come forth." There is a sense in which every command of God is impossible for us to obey. We always lack what we need to obey God's commands in and of ourselves. But God is faithful to give us whatever we need when we ask Him. What God demands, He supplies!

Notice in verse 36 that the disciples wanted to send the people away to fend for themselves. There are always those who are quick to see a need and are equally quick to relegate the responsibility of doing something about it to others. Jesus was teaching his disciples something about taking personal responsibility – and trusting Him to provide in the process. What areas of life and ministry do you need to start taking personal responsibility for while trusting Jesus to provide?

We see Jesus' miraculous provision beginning in verse 38. Mark writes, "And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." The disciples weren't stupid – as they looked at what they had and how many people were in need, the math didn't add up. They must have thought, "If Philip doesn't think we can give everyone even a little bit if we bought 200 denarii worth of bread, we surely aren't going to get far with our five loaves and two fish."

It's good to be aware of our limitations, because then there can be no mistake as to where the power comes from. When we look at ourselves and see deficiencies, we should immediately look to Jesus and his sufficiencies! Five loaves and two fish wasn't much, but in the hands of Jesus little is always much. If you are anything like me you are probably tempted at times to think that God couldn't use you in all of your weaknesses, inadequacies, and failures. We can be tempted to think that our giftings, talents and abilities don't amount to much in the Kingdom. Well, God says otherwise! He says, "My power is made perfect in weakness" 2 Corinthians 12:9). He says, "I put my glory in clay pots so that when I use you, you will know that the power didn't come from you but from Me" 2 Corinthians 4:7. Christian, if you don't think you have much to offer others, therefore it's not worth your trying... Put yourself in the hands of Jesus and see what He doesn't do with you! God can multiply the smallest gifts if they are surrendered to Him.

Look at verses 39-42. Mark writes, "Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. There is a neat picture of Psalm 23:2 here, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." Mark continues, "So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied."

Jesus presides over the multitude like a Jewish father over the family meal. He sits everyone down in an orderly fashion in smaller groups. And then he takes the disciples' meager provisions, prays for the meal, and begins to hand loaf after loaf and fish after fish to His disciples to give to the hungry masses. "Gave" is in the imperfect tense. Literally, Jesus gave and kept giving the disciples bread and fish to distribute to the people. Here we see the creative power of Jesus. As He multiplied the bread and fish, He brought into existence something that wasn't there. Such is the creative power that the Lord Jesus brings into our lives. He has the power to take a spiritually dead man and give him what didn't previously exist – new birth! I can't help but think about Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Notice also that in previous miracles Jesus' disciples played a passive role - they were present, but not involved. But this evening, Jesus involves his disciples completely! We have to keep in mind that the miracle took place in Jesus' hands - we are not the manufacturers; only the distributors (Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7), but God wants to use you and me to bring the Bread of Life to the world we live in. He doesn't need us and could accomplish His purposes in unfathomable ways without us, but the God of the universe delights to include us in His redemption plan!

Look at verse 42. Mark writes that the people ate and were satisfied. The verb Satisfied (χορτάζω chortazo) literally means to be gorged. This temporal but complete filling of the people's bellies is a picture of what Jesus does eternally in a man's soul when he turns to Him in humble faith and repentance. Jesus satisfies every thirst and every longing! David, in Psalm 145:16 writes, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing."

4. JESUS TAUGHT THE DISCIPLES TO RECEIVE HIS BLESSING. (v.43-44)

And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Mark 6:43-44

Notice the abundance of grace! After everyone had eaten until they were full, there were twelve baskets left over – one for each disciple.

The bread that Jesus is giving is a symbol of a much greater picture. Jesus used this miracle as a living sermon. The purpose wasn't ultimately to just feed the people, but rather to reveal Himself to them as the One who can satisfy their souls. Turn briefly over to John's account of this story (Cf. John 6:26-35). John tells us that the very next day the crowd, many of whom apparently stayed there all night, awoke, seeking Jesus and His disciples they got into boats and set off to Capernaum looking for them. When they found Jesus, He said:

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. John 6:26–35

Unfortunately, many people are more interested in the gift than the giver. John 6:41 tells us that some people grumbled because Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life.

Just as John the Baptist's death foreshadowed the death of Christ, so the feeding of the 5000 foreshadows a final banquet – the Last Supper. Mark writes, "And as they were eating, He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" Mark 14:22–25. Are you ready for that day? Do you know Christ? Has he come in and satisfied your hunger and thirst with Himself? Have you trusted Him in humble faith and repentance? Let's close in prayer.