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The Compassion, Power, and Provision of the Lord

Mark 6:30-44

This morning, we consider Jesus' amazing "Feeding of the Five Thousand"

This is a very significant miracle among the many that flowed like a river from the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. Its significance is seen most readily in that it is one of only two miracles recorded for us in all four Gospels... the other one is his own awesome resurrection! So that the Holy Spirit saw fit to give us four different accounts of this one miracle shows its importance.

As with all these accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the most important question we need to ask it, "What does it teach us about the Lord? What can we learn here of his nature, his character, his heart... also of his capabilities?" How does this account glorify Christ, so that we may believe in him and worship him and follow him for the rest of our lives.

The answer will be plain as we walk through it... this account puts some vital attributes of the Lord on display... first, his compassion, for throughout the account it is openly stated and displayed how compassionate Jesus is for the needs of people. Their needs move him to the deepest level. He FEELS their weariness, their hunger, their desires. It was compassion that moved Jesus to leave his perfectly comfortable and radiantly glorious throne in heaven, entering our poverty-stricken earth – first in a smelly stable with barnyard animals, to be wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger; then to pursue a lowly life of service in dusty Palestine, meeting need

after need. Compassion. Compassion for the weak, the poor, the suffering.

We will also see the clear priority Jesus put over the ministry of the word... his immediate response to the needs of this crowd was to TEACH THEM MANY THINGS... the ministry of the WORD was always his top priority.

We will also see Christ's wisdom in training the twelve, the Apostles, to carry on his ministry in his name, the continuation of his strategy for winning a kingdom of people from every nation on earth through his sent-ones, people who will carry his powerful name to the distant coastlands and islands, beyond the farthest mountain ranges and within the densest jungles, to the ends of the earth and to the end of time. Jesus wisely involved his Apostles in this miraculous feeding and worked through them to achieve it.

We also see, of course, his astonishing power. There is literally nothing he cannot do. And here on plain display is his power to create matter, molecules, out of nothing. Well, not exactly out of nothing... for in some way he used the original five loaves and two fish as a pattern. But the actual molecules came from the power of his word. Therefore it gives us a display of his powerful original creation of ALL THINGS...

John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Finally, then, we see his desire to PROVIDE... to MEET the needs of his people, to be for them their Good Shepherd; for they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he wants to open his hand and satisfy the desire of all his sheep... to feed them, to provide for them, all they would need.

This account will give us all of that if we read it by faith under the direct influence of the same Holy Spirit who inspired Mark to record it almost twenty centuries ago.

I. Jesus' Compassion Toward the Apostles

Mark 6:30-32 *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.* ³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* ³² *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

A. Context: The Apostles Initial Mission... and John's Death

1. Mark's account calls them "apostles"... literally "sent-ones"
2. Later, the account will call them "disciples" (vs. 35, 41, 43), which means "learners"; so, all the apostles were disciples, but not all disciples were learners
3. The "apostles" had been designated by Jesus in Mark 3 to be with him, to learn from him, and to be sent out by him to preach and do miracles in his name
4. At the beginning of this chapter, their initial mission was described

Mark 6:7-11 *Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.* ⁸ *These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff-- no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.* ⁹ *Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.* ¹⁰ *Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.* ¹¹ *And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."*

5. Now these men have returned to report to Jesus how things went
 - a. Vs. 30: Mark tells us that they reported "**all they had done and taught**"
 - b. What did that entail? Mark tells us

Mark 6:12-13 *They went out and preached that people should repent.* ¹³ *They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*

- c. In Luke's gospel, the kingdom messengers were coming back with this report

Luke 10:17-20 "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." ¹⁸ He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

- d. BUT the mission by the Apostles must have been exhausting! And all it did was stir up even more fervor among the relentlessly needy crowd; their needs would never be fully met
- e. And their relentless needs were so urgent that the Apostles did not have even a moment in which to eat or meet even the most basic physical needs
- f. So, Jesus had compassion on them

Mark 6:31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

- g. He knew that the body, mind, and soul cannot go on endlessly without refreshment;

B. Beyond this, the News of John's Death

1. This account, like the one in Matthew's Gospel, comes immediately after the news about the death of the godly prophet, John the Baptist
2. This news must have been incredibly emotional for all of them; some of them had been disciples of John and had known him personally very well
3. Jesus had much more reason to grieve, for he was connected with John in a way that none of them were
4. So, he very much felt the need to get away from the maddening crowd and find some rest, a time to grieve, to pray, to be refreshed in their hearts, minds, bodies

C. We MUST Rest

1. The soul is housed in a body

2 Corinthians 4:7 we have this treasure in jars of clay

2. Jesus' compassion for them is strong... COME AWAY WITH ME BY YOURSELVES... be with me, get alone, away from people, and be renewed

Psalm 23:1-3 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul.

3. The text presents Jesus as our Good Shepherd, because it will use that language—he saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd
4. Jesus knows the needs of his sheep
5. What about you?? Do you get enough rest? Enough sleep? Enough quiet time in the word? Do you feel Jesus, your Good Shepherd, making you lie down in green pastures, leading you by quiet waters, restoring your soul?
6. So, that is what his disciples did

Mark 6:32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Some translations may imply it was a desert. Not at all! In the account of the feeding, they will sit down on green grass, which would never grow in a desert. No, the Greek asserts merely that it was a SOLITARY place, a place not populated by throngs... deserted of human beings; that was the whole point... to get away from PEOPLE.

BUT... much to their surprise, they couldn't get away!!

II. Jesus' Compassion Toward the Crowd

Mark 6:33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

A. Jesus' Amazingly SELFLESS Compassion on the Crowd

1. The crowd runs there on foot, perhaps never letting the boat get out of sight
2. They were in the northernmost portion of the Sea of Galilee, and the journey on land may have been only eight miles. The young, athletic ones could easily do that run much faster than those in a boat
3. And Jesus, when he landed, did not show the SLIGHTEST annoyance with their relentlessness
4. Not at all! On the contrary, his heart was MOVED with compassion for them!
5. Keep in mind, Jesus was undoubtedly grieving over the death of his friend, his prophet John the Baptist. As soon as all their needs were met, he will make them ALL go away from him so he can get alone with his Father and pray
6. But his reaction is nothing but love and compassion... a deep desire to meet all their needs

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

B. "Like Sheep without a Shepherd"

1. Matthew adds these words

Matthew 9:36 harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

2. Harassed by demons, invisible powers and rulers and authorities in the spiritual realm who assault them constantly; harassed by afflictions—pain, disease, sorrows; harassed by poverty; harassed by political oppression by the Herods and the Romans; harassed by religious oppression—the “blind guides” who were the scribes and Pharisees
3. Harassed mostly by their own sinfulness... their own lusts and temptations and guilty consciences

4. AND they were HELPLESS, powerless against these harassments
5. The text “like sheep without a shepherd” doesn’t mean much to us
6. But sheep are notoriously helpless, unable to find food or water for themselves; needing their woolly coats to be constantly tended
7. Jesus is the FULFILLMENT of many Old Testament prophecies concerning a Son of David who would rise up to shepherd God’s people

Ezekiel 34:23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.

Micah 5:2, 4 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."....⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

Jesus yearns to be that GOOD SHEPHERD, as he says in John 10:

John 10:14-15 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep.

C. Jesus’ TOP PRIORITY: The Ministry of the Word

1. When all is said and done, Jesus will meet many needs of this crowd
2. He will heal their sick bodies as Matthew tells us

Matthew 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

3. And, of course, he will fill their empty bellies... that’s what this whole account is about
4. BUT there is nothing more important than the ministry of the Word of God

5. His teaching ministry was his way of expressing his compassion for their true needs

Mark 6:34 *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

6. Their souls were hungry for the TRUTH of the Word of God; their salvation depended on hearing the Word of the gospel and believing it
7. And it says he began teaching them MANY things! He might have done the whole Sermon on the Mount or many other teachings about the nature of the Kingdom of God, calling them to repentance and faith
8. In John's account, John chapter 6, we see Jesus' top priority again; they come back the next day, and what do they want?
BREAKFAST!!

John 6:26-27 *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*

Don't be constantly living for your STOMACHS! Work for the food that endures to eternal life... the food that can bring you to heaven

And what is that? Jesus and his word is the food for the soul

9. BUT, as we go back to the account in Mark, we see that Jesus DOES care for physical needs as well

D. The Compassion of Jesus for their Growling Stomachs

It begins with the disciples showing some basic compassion, at a low level

Mark 6:35-36 *By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late.*

³⁶ Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

1. In the next feeding, in Mark 8, Jesus will openly declare his compassion on the hungry crowd

Mark 8:2-3 "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

2. So, both the disciples and the Lord Jesus have compassion for their hungry stomachs
3. But Jesus has a better plan than sending them all away
4. The apostles don't seem to understand how much Jesus wants to be their Good Shepherd and meet all their needs!
5. They're about to find out! And Jesus, in his wisdom, will involve his disciples directly in the miracle!

III. Jesus' Training of the Apostles

Mark 6:37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

A. The Apostles Faith is About to Get Stretched

1. They have already seen the power of Jesus in more ways than they could have possibly imagined
2. And they themselves have done amazing miracles, driving out demons and healing the sick
3. But he wants to involve them in a NEW WORK, something Jesus has not done up till this time
4. He directly commands them to feed the multitude
5. He wants his people involved in his kingdom work
6. In John's Gospel, he actually asks them this question

John 6:5-6 *When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

So, the overwhelming problem of poverty and lostness, he tests us so that we will learn to look to him and his power; but he doesn't want us acting like it has nothing to do with us!

B. The Disciples' Faithless Answer

Mark 6:37 *They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"*

1. Honestly what else could they say?
2. The crowd was huge... it wasn't just five thousand men but Matthew tells us there were women and children in addition to that count... the Greek says five thousand MALES; so there may have been as many as 20,000 mouths to feed
3. And if they did spend eight months of a man's wages, each person would get only a small amount
4. When you look to your own resources, it leads to despair or arrogance

C. Jesus Trains the Apostles to LOOK TO HIM, not to themselves

1. This is the essential lesson of the mission
2. The problems of poverty, hunger, disease, and especially spiritual LOSTNESS are far greater than what we can deal with by our own resources

IV. Jesus' Power to Provide for the Crowd

A. Jesus Takes Over

B. First Step... What Do You Have to Work With?

Mark 6:38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five-- and two fish."

1. This reminds me of the Lord saying to Moses at the burning bush, "What do you have in your hand?" Moses: "A staff"
2. So also here, they are able to find a boy whose mother has provided him with a basic small boy's lunch
3. This is not what we think of as "loaves"... these would be more like small biscuits and some broiled or pickled fish...enough for a small boy and no more
4. Why does Jesus use these loaves? Again, I think it is to draw us in and involve us; he clearly doesn't need loaves as a starter kit, since he created the universe out of nothing at all

C. Second Step... Organizing the Crowd

Mark 6:39-40 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

This was for the simple logistics of distributing the food

They must have wondered why on earth he was doing this? They knew very well he didn't have enough food

But he knew very well what he was doing

And Jesus is the most practical-minded religious leader in history; he knew administrative aspects had to be addressed as well as the spiritual

D. Third Step... Looking to God and Giving Thanks

Mark 6:41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks

This is vital. All things come from God. God alone can meet the need. God should be thanked.

Also note the standard looking UPWARD... consistently, heaven is portrayed as UP, and God as ABOVE; this is a sense of his overwhelming authority and power

E. Fourth Step... Dividing and Distributing the Food

Mark 6:41 he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

1. Somewhere in here is the overwhelming miracle
2. Though we cannot understand the connection between the new loaves and fish and the existing, yet he means for there to be one
3. Yet, we know he has created MATTER, MASS, MOLECULES out of nothing
4. And the amount is stunning... 20,000 people eating their fill

Mark 6:42 They all ate and were satisfied

5. The Greek said they effectively gorged themselves on the food; that might mean between a liter and two liter of volume per head. Think of a two-liter bottle of soft drink; then picture 10,000-15,000 of them

F. The Miracle of Creation

1. These are made of barley that never grew, and fish that never swam
2. They are rolls that were never baked in an oven and fish that never experienced the roasting fire or the boiling water; they were INSTANTLY READY to eat
3. When Jesus changed the water into wine in John 2, the master of the banquet said the wine was the best of all the wine... the highest quality; so also these loaves and fish must have been the best ever
4. So... astonishing QUANTITY and QUALITY

G. The Leftovers

Mark 6:43 the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

1. One scholar said these were the small type of baskets, like such as could be used to carry a light lunch, enough for one man
2. And the number twelve lines up with the twelve apostles; so their needs would be met beyond this one meal
3. Remember the entire reason for coming here was that they hadn't been able to eat
4. So there is amazing precision in the quantity... God and Christ knew exactly how much to make for each person to be fully satisfied, and then enough for each of the apostles to have their next meal
5. Also the fragments were clear evidence of the miracle... collecting up the fragments proved the creation of the material beyond any shadow of a doubt
6. Furthermore, in John's Gospel, this command is given:

John 6:12 "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

7. I have often thought of those words: LET NOTHING BE WASTED
8. If Christ doesn't want extra bread or fish wasted, how much less will he waste anything that happens in our lives... no experience, no matter how seemingly trivial, is useless to God

V. Lessons

A. Come to Christ!

1. All the accounts in every gospel come to this one final end...
TRUST IN THIS JESUS FOR THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOUL
2. Remember what he said in John's Gospel

John 6:27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

John 6:29 "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

B. Christians... Worship Jesus for these Attributes

1. His compassion
2. His wisdom
3. His power
4. His provision

C. Let Jesus Meet Your Needs

1. In the hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus" it says "Jesus knows your every weakness... take it to the Lord in prayer."
2. Jesus is as compassionate now as he was then
3. He is your Good Shepherd... bring to him your sorrows, lacks, losses, pains, hurts, illnesses, hungers... let him meet them all

D. The Training of the Twelve

1. Jesus involved his disciples in the problem of poverty
2. He tested them and asked them what to do
3. Though the disciples brought the hungry masses to Jesus as a problem, in Mark 8, he will ask them what to do; and in John 6 he tests them
4. The problems of hunger and poverty worldwide will never be fully solved
5. But Jesus wants us to face them and bring them to him in prayer, saying what shall we do?
6. Beyond that, the Training of the Twelve shows us how much Jesus wants us involved in all the work he is doing; Henry Blackaby said "Find out where God is at work, and join him in it."

E. Common Grace

1. This feeding of the huge crowd is an example of common grace, of God's providing good things for all people without any conditions they need to meet
2. He generally does this through nature

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Acts 14:17 he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

3. God is very generous to people who never acknowledge him

F. YET... Judgment Day is Coming

Romans 1:21 although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him

Matthew 11:21-22 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

Bethsaida is right near where they are... it is the next place they will go

Mark 6:45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

This crowd should have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ after such an amazing display of his power...

Instead John 6 says most of them rejected him the next day and no longer followed him

But they will be held accountable for what they saw

G. An Apparently Old Creation

1. One final word
2. One of the things that evolutionists and old-earth creationists assume is the age of the universe
3. Some put it at 15 billion years; and they put the earth at 4.5 billion years
4. However, these scientific calculations are based on unproveable assumptions... all based on what we can observe right now on planet earth and in the cosmos
5. Isn't it possible that God could have created an APPARENTLY old universe for his own purposes... not to deceive us, but because it was best for everything to be like that—ready for human life and history
6. These miraculous loaves SEEMED to have a backstory they really didn't have; they SEEMED to have been at one time barley that grew from a barley seed in a field, was harvested, ground into flour, mixed with other ingredients, shaped into round biscuits, baked in an oven for a certain amount of time, and then ready. NONE OF THAT HAPPENED. They appeared in Jesus' hands fully formed with no such backstory at all
7. So also the fish SEEMED to have a backstory they really didn't have; they seemed to have spawned from fish eggs in the water, grew as fish embryos, developed all the appropriate fish anatomy, grew to the right size, caught by a fisherman, scaled and gutted and broiled or boiled or pickled. None of that ever happened. They appeared in Jesus' hands with such backstory at all
8. The same happened with Adam and Eve's bodies, fully-formed as adult bodies; or Malchus's ear that Peter hacked off with a sword; Jesus made him a new one out of thin air, of the exact same size, shape, color... genetic family marking, for ears are distinctive; but that ear had no real backstory; and the same with the wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee... apparently fermented for years, because fine wine is aged over years. Not that wine... instantly formed to seem very old.

9. I'm not saying for sure that's what has happened with our seemingly ancient planet in this seemingly ancient cosmos... but it might have; and there's no scientific way to disprove it.