

## A SENSE OF GOD'S HISTORY

Mark 8:1-21

Key Verse: 8:20

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?' They answered, 'Seven.'"

In Mark's Gospel there are two stories about Jesus' feeding the crowd of people. The one is Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 in 6:30-44. The other is Jesus' feeding the 4,000 in this passage. The former event, Jesus' feeding the 5,000, teaches us that God can do mighty work when we give five loaves and two fish to Jesus with faith. It emphasizes faith in God in doing God's work. The latter event, Jesus' feeding the 4,000, emphasizes a sense of history in doing God's work. Not to forget is the most difficult thing to ever-forgetting mankind. Those who do not forget what God has done are blessed. They can live in the grace of God. They can experience the peace of God. May God bless us to realize how God works in history and why we should have a sense of history in God.

### I. Jesus' compassion (1-9)

**First,** Jesus saw them with compassion (1-2). During the time of his Galilean ministry, another large crowd of 4,000 gathered. This incident occurred on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. Viewed in light of 7:31, perhaps it was in the Gentile district of the Decapolis. Jesus, had revealed that he was a compassionate shepherd. So after Jesus' feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, another large crowd of 4,000 people gathered around him for help. Suppose some social workers or philanthropists had met this situation, how would they have thought of this crowd? Perhaps they would have thought that their demand was endless and absolutely impossible.

In this situation, what did Jesus think? Look at verse 2. "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat." Here we learn several things about Jesus' compassion.

God has endowed man with his compassion. And man's happiness largely depends on the degree of compassion he has toward other people. So, many people want to be missionaries in the African jungles. Some people want to be world-famous philanthropists. A crippled woman gave \$8,000 to an orphanage home. But the workers at the orphanage home asked her for more money again and again. She despaired. She also lost

her compassion for the orphans.

But Jesus did not despair because of the crowd of people when they came back again and again. Jesus saw the people with God's mercy. Therefore compassion is to see people with God's mercy. When we study Mark's Gospel, we learn that a large crowd of people followed Jesus so closely that his disciples had no time to eat or rest. This crowd of people had enjoyed Jesus' feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Through his feeding of the 5,000 they should have learned a spiritual lesson. But they did not. This time they came back to Jesus with a bigger expectation. They wanted to make Jesus a king of bread (Jn 6:15). Once someone said, "I have a kind of government job." Later everyone came to know that he was not a government official, but a man living on public aid. There are innumerable people who live on public aid. But they have no sense of shame. Those who came to Jesus were just like those living on public aid. They were shameless. But Jesus did not see them as shameless people. Jesus saw them with God's mercy. Jesus was not burdened with their beggar's mentality. Jesus did not look into their wretchedness. Jesus only saw them with God's mercy. Jesus' compassion is higher than the mountain, deeper than the ocean.

This part reminds us of God's compassion on his people Israel. God liberated them from the iron hand of Pharaoh and chose them out of all nations. God had a great hope to raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But his people repeatedly sinned against God. So God was completely discouraged. Still God had compassion on them. But there was no one who could comfort God Almighty. So God comforted himself in Exodus 34:6: "And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...'" May God give us the compassion of Jesus!

**Second**, Jesus' shepherd heart (3). Look at verse 3a. "If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way." This verse explains Jesus' shepherd heart excellently. They say that those who did not eat the bread of sweat and tears never know what human life is. They also say that of all sorrowful people, hungry people are the most sorrowful. Nobody understands others' hungry feelings. But Jesus knew how hungry they were and how sorrowful they were because he is our good shepherd (Jn 10:11).

**Third**, Jesus gave them spiritual food (2-4). Many people are compassionate toward poor people. But at best, they only give them several Big Macs and several aspirin tablets. When their patience runs out they gradually keep a distance from the needy people. But Jesus did not keep them away from him; the damaged and enervated people. Jesus did not give them material things as a solution to their fundamental life problem; instead, he gave them the word of life. Jesus believed that the word of life could heal them and make them useful. Here we learn that we should not despair at situations, but help people with the word of life. Jesus was so eager to help them out with the word of life that he did not know that three days and nights had already passed by since he had begun teaching them.

What was the disciples' response? Last time, when Jesus fed the 5,000 and it was getting dark, they became impatient and requested that he dismiss the desert assembly. This time they waited until Jesus made a request. In response to his request, they said in verse 4, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" They pointed out the practical impossibility of providing food for such a crowd in that desert place. They only grumbled with the idea, "Where did these perpetual peasants come from? When is this circle of poverty and hunger going to disappear?" The disciples had not yet known the word of God gives life to them.

**Fourth**, how we can do the great work of God (5-9). In this part we learn how we can do the great work of God. "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. What did Jesus do with the seven loaves? Look at verse 6. "He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so." When they brought their seven loaves to Jesus, he blessed them, and the 4,000 people were satisfied. They had a few fish as well. When they brought a few fish Jesus blessed them and told the disciples to distribute them. People ate and were satisfied. Still, seven basketfuls of broken pieces were left over. About 4,000 men witnessed God's mighty work through seven loaves. Many people want to do the mighty work of God. But they cannot do the mighty work of God because they want to do it with their own

strength. Those kinds of people cannot even take care of themselves, not to mention do the mighty work of God. Those who know that they are weak but Jesus is strong can do the mighty work of God.

## II. Miracle-seeking Jews (10-13)

After Jesus had fed 4,000 Jesus went to the region of Dalmanutha. The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus to test him. They asked him for a sign from heaven. Actually, innumerable signs had been given to them, both in history and at the present through his miraculous signs. Feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, and feeding the 4,000 with seven loaves were more than enough signs for the Pharisees. Still they asked for a sign.

Their motive was twofold. The first was to solve their bread problem miraculously. The Pharisees remembered that God had fed his people for forty years free of charge (Ex 16:4). God gave their forefathers daily bread training. God trained them to live a disciplined life by gathering a daily portion of bread. God trained them not to depend on bread, but on God through daily bread training. But the Pharisees wanted to solve their bread problem through Jesus' miracles. The second motive was their political ambition. Through a miracle they wanted to overthrow the Roman Empire and establish the earthly messianic kingdom by the chosen people. In the earthly messianic kingdom they wished to rule the world with great power and glory. They had political ambition. They were political, not at all spiritual. They had no faith in God. It is hard to understand why the Pharisees, who should be shepherds for his people and prayer servants for all nations, were more wicked toward Jesus than were secular people.

## III. Jesus teaches a sense of history (14-21)

The disciples were so amazed at Jesus' feeding the 4,000 out of his compassion. In the midst of their amazement, when they saw that Jesus fed the 4,000 people, they forgot to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat (14). So a few hours after the feeding of the 4,000, they worried about bread to eat. Jesus saw that his disciples were vulnerable to the devil's scheme. Jesus warned them that they would be influenced by the Pharisees' miracle-seeking faith. So he warned them,

"Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (15). Yeast referred to the bad influence of the Pharisees and that of Herod (1Co 5:8). But the disciples didn't understand what Jesus told them. When we are going to have a sense of God's history, we must watch out for the bad influence of the world or bad pressure of peers.

Jesus rebuked them because they did not remember the great work of God, feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish and feeding the 4,000 with seven loaves. In short, they forgot God and became very fearful (17,18).

After rebuking them, Jesus asked them a question in order to teach them a sense of history. Look at verse 19. "When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve sir," all of them replied correctly. At the moment, they all remembered the mighty work of God from their hearts. Jesus asked them again, "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Seven, sir," all of them answered correctly (20). Jesus asked them the same question repeatedly. Presumably Jesus asked the question to them again and again until they repeated the phrase, even in their dreams. It was like a grammar school class. But the disciples had to learn a sense of God's history. When they made the great exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel praised God. But when they had a small difficulty with water supplies, they forgot God's mighty work and became fearful. The disciples were like the people of Israel. Fallen men are ever forgetting, especially of the grace of God. Therefore we Christians, forgiven sinners, must do our best to hold on to the grace of God.

How can we have a sense of history in God? Most importantly, we must remember what God has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. There was a man born blind. Because of his blindness he suffered from prejudice and was misunderstood. Jesus had no medical instrument. So he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then the man washed in the pool of Siloam. In this way, Jesus opened his blind eyes. The Pharisees intimidated him to deny Jesus' work. But the man clearly testified, "...One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (Jn 9:25). When the Pharisees pressed him hard to deny God's good work, the man born blind answered, "Do you want to become his disciples,

too?" (Jn 9:27) St. Paul is St. Paul because he remembered what God had done for him. 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." Polycarp, the early father, was 84 years old. Anti-Christians demanded that he deny the name of Jesus. Then he said to the executioners, "Our Lord Jesus Christ has never betrayed me. How can I betray my Lord?" He remembered God's grace upon him though he burned to death. But he lives forever with Jesus.

How can we have a sense of history in God? We must remember that Jesus is the Son of God who fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. We must remember that God made the heavens and the earth. We must remember that God is the Sovereign Ruler of history. In the fourth century people thought that the corrupted Christian churches would perish together with the corrupted Roman Empire. But Augustine remembered that God is the Ruler of history. He wrote the City of God in which he made a clear apology that the Roman Empire crumbles but the church of God lives forever. We must remember that God gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. We must remember that Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. We must remember that the kingdom of Jesus is forever. We must remember Jesus wants to bring us back to his kingdom when he comes again. But the kingdoms of the world rise and fall.

Today we learn that we must have a sense of history in God. May God grant us a sense of history so that his peace may dwell in our hearts.