

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

Mark 6:30-56

Key Verse: 6:41

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”

Jesus' feeding the five thousand is the only miracle repeated in all four gospels. Moreover, in every gospel except Luke this event is immediately followed by Jesus walking on the water. Through these two events, Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah, the Son of God. Though Jesus had revealed himself in many ways prior to this, the disciples had not really grasped who he was. Whenever Jesus performed a miracle, they were completely amazed. But as the situation changed, they forgot about it, and they thought and acted as if they did not know Jesus at all. Then they became powerless, fearful and fatalistic. We understand the disciples. Whenever we experience Jesus' power, it is new and we are completely amazed. In reality our understanding of Jesus is very limited. We unconsciously try to fit Jesus into our box of understanding. But Jesus is much bigger than our box, and he explodes our boxes so that we may know who he truly is. Then we can live powerful, dynamic lives, breaking through barriers and limits. We need to grow in knowing Jesus throughout our lifetimes. Let's focus on who Jesus is and grow in understanding him.

First, Jesus reveals his compassion by feeding five thousand (30-44).

Today's passage starts with the mission report of the twelve apostles. Verse 30 says, **“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”** The Twelve had been learners of Jesus. But now they became apostles, who were sent out as ambassadors of Christ. When they began their mission journey they might have been nervous. But when they simply obeyed what Jesus told them, they experienced the power of faith to win people over to Christ. They returned to Jesus with great joy and a sense of victory. Their mission reports were very exciting. Peter shared that when he spoke in Jesus' name, his words pierced people's hearts. They repented of their despair and accepted living hope in the kingdom of God. Though the disciples sounded energetic and strong during the report meeting, Jesus knew that they were really exhausted. Moreover, many people who had tasted

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God's grace through them were now coming and going, demanding many things. The disciples were so busy that they did not even have time to eat. So Jesus invited them, saying, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”** (31). Sometimes we feel that Jesus only worked all the time and drove his disciples without allowing any time to rest. If we try to take rest, we may feel a sense of guilt. But Jesus is our shepherd who leads us to green pastures and quiet waters and gives us rest (Ps 23:2). After working hard, rest is very sweet. The Twelve must have been extremely happy to be Jesus' disciples in this moment. They got into the boat and began to row across the lake, planning how to use their precious leisure time—perhaps a six on six football game with Jesus as referee, followed by a delicious barbecue. But when they landed, their dream came crashing down.

Many people who saw them leaving recognized them. Like sheep following their shepherd, they figured out where Jesus and the Twelve would go. Then they ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them, and welcomed Jesus and the Twelve. Why did they persist in following Jesus and the Twelve? It is because they tasted the love of God through them. They found their good shepherd Jesus and wanted to stay with him. We can guess that to the weary disciples, this crowd seemed rude and intrusive, like paparazzi. But how did Jesus view them? Let's read verse 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.”** When someone interrupts our important plans, it is easy to become upset with them. But Jesus was not upset at all. Rather, he had compassion on them. Compassion literally means to have the same feeling. It means Jesus put himself in their places and understood their pains and sorrows and frustrations. He wanted to comfort, encourage and strengthen them, like a mother with her children.

Why did Jesus have compassion on them? Was it because they were poor, or oppressed by Rome? No. It was because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Here “sheep without a shepherd” poetically describes that their relationship with God was broken. The Bible often compares God to a shepherd and his people to sheep. Just as sheep without a shepherd are helpless, lost, directionless and vulnerable, so are human beings without God. When God sees human beings suffering under the terrible burden of sin and death, he does not delight. He is not judgmental, critical or condemning,

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thinking, “You wicked sinners deserve this!” Rather, his heart is broken and filled with compassion for the lost. When God found David, who had a shepherd’s heart for his people, God was pleased with him, saying, **“I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do”** (Ac 13:22b). Out of this compassion God sent his one and only Son Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”** (Jn 10:11). Through his death on the cross for our sins, Jesus solved our sin problem. He took away our shame and guilt and carried all of our sorrows. He restored our identity as God’s holy children who have eternal life and inherit the kingdom of God. As a good shepherd, Jesus’ motive in helping needy people was always God’s compassion for the lost. This is what Jesus really wants his disciples to learn. We need to see students on our campuses with a compassionate heart as a shepherd. If we don’t have a compassionate heart, they look like strangers. But when we have God’s compassionate heart we can see them as sheep without a shepherd—as lost souls in desperate need of salvation. They don’t know the Creator God, the purpose of their lives, or their eternal destiny. God wants to shepherd them through his people. When we know God’s heart, we can help them willingly and sacrificially. As we do, we can grow even more by knowing God’s compassionate heart.

Out of his great compassion, what did Jesus do practically for the people? **First of all, he began teaching them many things (34b).** To Jesus, their main problem was their spiritual ignorance. Though they were made by God, they did not really know God. They had their own concept of God, based on human ideas and cultural influences. But in truth, they made many idols of their own fashioning in the place of God in their hearts. These idols only disappointed and wounded them. They needed to know the true God as he revealed himself in the Bible. Jesus must have taught them Genesis and helped them to acknowledge the one true God, the Creator. Jesus also taught them why they live and how to live fruitfully. Jesus taught them how to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and to put their hope in the kingdom of God. Only the words of God give life to our souls and true meaning and hope and vision. Many students on our college campuses seem to be okay on the outside. But inwardly they are suffering in many ways. Their souls are searching for the true life but they are not finding it in social media, romantic involvements, sports and entertainment, or academic achievement. They are thirsty for the words of God. But these days there

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seems to be a famine of hearing the word of God, as Amos prophesied: **“People will stagger from sea to sea, and wander from north to east, searching for the words of the Lord, but they will not find it. In that day the lovely young women and the strong young men will faint because of thirst”** (Am 8:11-13). Let us teach the words of God to thirsty young students with a compassionate heart.

Secondly, Jesus fed the people out of his compassion (35-44). Jesus taught the people with great zeal and joy, going on and on. Soon the sun was setting on the western horizon and the sky turned a purplish pink. Still, Jesus’ teaching was going on. Every time Jesus seemed to be coming to his conclusion, he would take a fresh breath and start again. The disciples began to wonder if Jesus had lost touch with reality. So they had a conference about Jesus and agreed to remind him of reality, saying, **“This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat”** (35-36). Their suggestion seems reasonable. They thought each person should be responsible for himself and take care of himself. We Americans, with our individualistic mentality, can understand this way of thinking. But Jesus did not agree with them. To their surprise, he said, **“You give them something to eat”** (37a). What was Jesus trying to teach them? Jesus wanted them to think and act with faith, rather than just human reason. Jesus wanted them to have a compassionate heart for the needy and to be responsible for them. Jesus wanted them to be shepherds for the needy by faith. Jesus wanted them to not only teach the Bible, but to care for the whole person as a shepherd. That is why Jesus said in the Lord’s Prayer, **“Give us this day our daily bread”** (Mt 6:11). Here “daily bread” means one’s practical needs, such as food and shelter, a proper job, what is needed to study well in school, to build up proper relationships with others, to establish godly families and raise godly children, and so on.

How did the disciples respond? They said to him, **“That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”** (37b) The disciples thought that without having a lot of money, it was impossible for them to do it. Once we think something is impossible, it is impossible. The disciples’ way of thinking was based on what they did not have and justified doing nothing. They were negative and uncooperative and began to complain and became rebellious.

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But Jesus did not rescind his command. Rather, he began to help them obey his words practically. So he said, **“How many loaves do you have? Go and see”** (38). Upon hearing this, they began to understand what Jesus meant. They repented of their rebellious attitude and began to obey Jesus’ word to go and see. When they did so, they found five loaves. And although Jesus did not ask them for fish, they brought two fish as a bonus. When we hear Jesus’ command, **“You give them something to eat,”** we may feel overwhelmed. But when we obey Jesus’ words **“go and see,”** we can find some practical way to carry out Jesus’ command. Jesus does not want us to calculate and do nothing, but to go and see and do something by faith.

Let’s see what Jesus did with the five loaves and two fish. Jesus directed his disciples to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass (39). He wanted his disciples to participate in what he was doing. To follow his direction would arouse expectation on the part of the crowd. But the disciples did not worry about disappointing the crowd. They simply trusted Jesus and made a good environment by seating the people in groups of hundreds and fifties (40). Let’s read verse 41. **“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”** Looking up to heaven drew attention to God the Father. It was God the Father who would do a miracle through Jesus. In this way Jesus revealed himself as God incarnate. For God, who created all things out of nothing, feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish was no problem. Everything is possible with God. When the people of Israel were crying out in the wilderness for meat to eat, God promised to give the whole community a one-month supply of meat. To Moses this was inconceivable. But God said, **“Is the Lord’s arm too short?”** (Num 11: 23a). Then God used the wind to drive quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to three feet deep all around the camp, as far as a day’s walk in any direction (Num 11:31). With man this is impossible. But with God all things are possible. Jesus wanted his disciples, in any situation, to have faith in God who is the provider of all human needs.

What happened? All five thousand men, plus the women and children, ate as much as they wanted and were satisfied. Moreover, the disciples went and picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers (42-44). Jesus is God who can fully satisfy the desires and needs of all mankind. Yet he did so by working

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together with his disciples. In the same way, God wants to save and raise many young people as Jesus' disciples, working with and through us. Of course, by ourselves we can do nothing. But when we hear Jesus' word, "**You give them something to eat...go and see,**" and bring what we have to Jesus by faith, he will bless us and work mightily through us.

Second, Jesus reveals his divine presence by walking on the water (45-56). After feeding the five thousand, immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd (45). After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray (46). After experiencing a great event, it is easy for us to become complacent and relax and fall into temptation. But Jesus went to the Father in prayer. Through prayer Jesus found new strength and wisdom from above. Even though he was not able to enjoy a vacation with the disciples, he was fully energized by having fellowship with God.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake (47). The exhausted disciples were straining at the oars, but not making any progress, because the wind was against them. When Jesus was not there with them, they had a very hard time. Jesus saw them and understood their situation and went out to them, walking on the lake. Though we may forget Jesus, Jesus never forgets us. He sees us and understands us and comes to help us in the times of trial. But strangely, he was about to pass by them (48b). Why? I believe that he wanted them to call out to him for help. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and cried out and were terrified (49-50a). When they cried out, immediately he spoke to them and said, "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid**" (50b). Jesus wanted his disciples to be aware of his presence with them. When Jesus was with them, they did not need to be afraid of anything. Rather, they could take courage to fight against the wind: the winds of adversity, doubt, fear and uncertainty. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, the wind died down (51a). Everything was okay. When we have hard times, it is easy to feel that Jesus is not with us. We become fearful and lose strength to fight against adversity. But Jesus promised us, "**I am with you always, to the very end of the age**" (Mt 28:20). Jesus is with us always through the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus entered the boat and the wind died down, the disciples were completely amazed (51b). Why? The author Mark comments, "**...for they**

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had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened” (52). Through the feeding of the five thousand Jesus wanted to reveal to his disciples that he was God. They should have understood the meaning of the miracle and trusted Jesus and applied faith in Jesus in any situation. But when Jesus came to them walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost because their hearts were hardened. Jesus did not rebuke them, but revealed that he is God in a different way. Jesus patiently helps his disciples until they come to know who he really is. Jesus wants us to believe in him as the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. Jesus is always with us to save us, protect us, and provide for us in any situation. Jesus says to us, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** Let’s lift up our heads and cry out to Jesus. Jesus will surely come and help us.

Verses 53-56 tell how Jesus concluded his Galilean ministry at Gennesaret. People from the whole region ran after him, carrying their sick on mats and reaching out their hands to just touch the edge of his cloak by faith. And all who touched him were healed. In this passage we have learned that Jesus is almighty God. But he did not exercise his authority over people like a worldly king. Rather, out of his great compassion, he humbled himself and served all kinds of needy people. Let us learn his compassion and serve many needy young people with the word of God and take care of them as shepherds.