

**Mark 6: 34-44; “Feeding the Five Thousand”, Sermon # 36 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
On October 11th, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

As we began to see in the last sermon that I preached to you, the Lord Jesus and His disciples needed rest. But we find here in these verses that they did not get a long rest. Multitudes of people saw them when they set off in the boat, and they ran from there on foot, around the lake, probably still able to see the little craft out on the water. And I suppose they continued following them, bringing other people from the cities that they passed through, with them. The text says that they actually got to the other side before Jesus did. They were waiting there as Jesus and the disciples got out of the boat. Jesus’ response to these crowds was not irritation, but compassion. He saw these masses in a way that you and I who are Christians ought to see them today. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are very helpless and dependent creatures. They very much needed a shepherd. Jesus knew that there were many things which He needed to teach them. And this is what He did. But when He was finished teaching them, the hour was late and the day was far spent. And he knew that they were going to need food. The disciples came to Him saying, “Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread.” Jesus said to them: “You give them something to eat.” But when He said this, He Himself knew what He was about to do. He was going to feed them all. And so He did. But in doing so, He had a great lesson that He was teaching all of these people, and it is the same lesson that He would teach us today.

How does Christ spiritually feed His followers and disciples today? I believe that the text is telling us just how He does this. Christ who is the Feeder of His people would teach them how they might eat spiritually and be satisfied, having eaten this physical bread which He had provided. Christ who is the Good Shepherd also feeds wandering sheep and would bring them into His fold by this means. He would teach the unbeliever how to come to Him and to find the bread of life. So I want you to see that there are 4 truths which are found in this text which will help us to understand how Christ spiritually feeds His people, and all those who will come to Him. He does it 1st of all – Through His Apostles and ministers of His word. He does it 2nd – By multiplying what is brought to Him. 3rd – He does this great work in an orderly fashion. And 4th – He expects what is not eaten now to be saved and used later on. I think that if you will listen carefully this morning, that you will discover the best way that you can grow spiritually. It is by being fed by Christ Himself.

1st of all – Our Lord Jesus Christ feeds His followers through His Apostles and ministers of His word. (Verses 35-37)

“When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late.’ ‘Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.’ ‘But He answered them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ Christ’s Apostles and disciples knew that they had a predicament on their hands. Jesus had been teaching the multitudes many things and had held them there by His teaching until an hour which is described for us as being late. I am sure that the Apostles probably at times considered themselves their Lord’s managers since so many people came to listen to Him and to be healed by Him. He was the celebrity who they knew as Lord and Master. He was the One who was doing all the teaching and the healing, and they were the ones whom He had called to stand by Him, and learn from Him, and help Him in His ministry. But His saying to them, that they should give the crowd something to eat, must have seemed to them like a request which would be impossible for them to fulfill. Luke’s gospel records them saying, ‘Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns

and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.” They didn’t see how they could possibly provide for 10,000 people. John’s gospel records Jesus as saying to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?”, as though He was expecting Philip to figure it out, and solve their predicament. He is recorded as saying, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” Philip was a great calculator. He knew what it would take and he knew that they did not have that kind of money or that kind of resources. In John 6: 6, however, it says, “But this Jesus said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.”

Jesus was planning on enlisting the help of the Apostles and his other disciples around Him, so that He could feed this multitude. In asking Philip this question, He was wondering if the Apostles were only going to look at their own natural abilities to do this, or whether they would look for Him to be the One who would give them that ability that they needed, to feed the multitudes. He knew that they could not feed this multitude. But He also knew that He could. He was going to feed them, and He wished to have them to help. This is also the way that it is with the spiritual feeding of God’s people as well. Christ intends to feed multitudes of people all over the world spiritually. He knows very certainly that you do not have the means to do it without Him. Christ has called some men; He has ordained them to preach the gospel and to open up His word, so that His people and others who are interested, will be fed. He would say to them later on, after He had fulfilled His own ministry and had accomplished redemption, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” But He had to teach them very practically at this point in His ministry that He alone had the power to feed the multitudes, both physically and spiritually. He would use the tangible physical feeding of the multitudes to teach His Apostles the way that the multitudes would be fed by the preaching of the Word later on.

This kind of feeding would bring salvation and saving strength to the souls of men. This is the way that He would illustrate it. And this is what you and I need to understand and to believe in our day as well. Jesus is expecting that each one of His ministers of His word would understand that they cannot feed the multitudes simply by the exercise of their own natural abilities. But He is expecting them to realize that He is right there with them to perform the miracle, so that they are indeed fed and strengthened, and given the bread of life of His ministry working through them. Think of the words of this hymn: “Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord to me, as thou didst break the loaves beside the sea; beyond the sacred page I seek thee Lord, my spirit pants for thee, O living Word.” This is what Jesus wanted to illustrate so powerfully in the feeding of the five thousand. He wanted to illustrate His power and His ability to feed people’s souls as well as their bodies. Let me ask you if you see this, this morning? Do you see the Lord Jesus working in and through the ministration of the preaching of His word? Do you realize that this is means that the Lord has ordained for you to be fed spiritually? This is how He feeds your soul. Listening the preaching of the Word of God is very aptly compared to the eating of a meal in the scriptures. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.” Man lives by receiving the bread of the Word to his soul.

Let us understand that the preacher is not a great man. Christ is a great Savior; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and His bounty is limitless. Let no one here think that the feeding which is done through the preaching of the word by a man called to the ministry is the only way that Christ feeds the multitudes. It may be the primary means, but there are many other helpers. There are mothers and fathers who share the word with their children. There are friends and co-workers who try to do the same. Sometimes you will find, in a family, that the father of the household is good at preparing food; perhaps even better at it than the mother. Let

him go ahead and feed the children and others. Let no one stop him. But the same is the case with the feeding of the word of God. The minister is the one whom God has chosen to prepare the food that the church will eat. Jesus in speaking about a minister being faithful to his calling to preach the word, in light of the judgment that is coming, says in Luke 12: 42, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?” “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.” A minister is a steward of the mysteries of God. He is the servant who has been appointed to feed the other servants of the Lord. But in verse 41 Peter asks the Lord, “Lord do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?” And then the Lord says, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward.’ Whoever would feed others spiritually must himself first be fed. But whoever has the knowledge of the word and shares it with others is feeding them. He is not called to office of the ministry, but nevertheless he is feeding others. Women, according to the Scriptures, are not called to the public ministry of the Word, but there is no reason that a woman cannot teach other women or the children under her care. She feeds her children like little birds, and she can do so spiritually with bread from the Word of God. These words of our Lord, “You give them something to eat”, are really very significant. This is how the knowledge of the Lord will someday cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It will be by the Church rising up to her fulfill her holy calling of feeding the multitudes; not only those multitudes who have physical hunger, but the starving perishing millions who are perishing spiritually for lack of knowledge.

Now 2ndly – Christ feeds His people and all those who will come to Him, by multiplying what is brought to Him. (Verses 37 and 38)

“And they said to Him, ‘Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?’ “But He said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ “Go and see.” “And when they found they said, ‘Five and two fish.’” In John’s gospel it is related that one of Christ’s disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what they among so many?” You see, they didn’t yet realize what the Lord could do with such a small amount of food which was brought to Him. There is a principle here, which is first seen physically, with the bread and the fish brought to Jesus. He multiplied these small portions of food in order that men’s physical hunger would be ministered to. But the principle is seen spiritually as well, in the teaching and preaching of Jesus, as to those who would be saved by Him, and strengthened to do His will. Both the bread and fish were something brought to Jesus so that He could multiply it. Both the teaching of the word to build up believers, and their efforts to catch men by the preaching of the word. In the casting of the gospel net, these are represented for us here.

When ministers and others prepare their teaching, they are preparing spiritual bread for the Church and bread for the masses. When they deliver their teaching they are fishing for men to be brought to saving faith in Christ. The beauty of the miracle that we are looking at now is that Christ is able to take the food brought by a little lad and to multiply it to feed thousands. The principle is this. You as a Christian must never underestimate what the Lord can do with the little that you bring to Him. He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that you can ask or think. This is especially true in terms of the words that we speak. The Scripture says that “we believe, therefore we speak.” (2 Corinthians 4: 13) Therefore it does not necessarily take long and extensive speeches to see souls won to the Lord Jesus. It may only take a word. Somewhere in Spurgeon’s Auto-biography there is related a time when Spurgeon was to speak in a great hall. And he came there early on purpose so that he could test the acoustics of the place. He stood up on the platform and behind the lectern and he cried out, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1: 29) And there happened to be a janitor way in the back who was working there at that hour, and he heard that one phrase and the Lord opened his heart to his need of Christ and was saved. Our witness and our preaching may only be a few words and

yet very it will be very powerful if the Lord is in it. But we must learn to bring our words and all of our own resources to the Lord Jesus, so that He might multiply the effects of them with His powerful grace.

Let us all remember it. When Christ broke those five loaves, He broke and He kept breaking. He was making more of the substance of bread as He broke it. As His hands touched the fish, other fish were added to them. Truly He could have made bread from the stones, but it was His choice to make bread from a little bread and more fish from a few fish. So He will use all that we bring to Him and multiply the effects of it to the life and strength of those whom we minister to. Let us not despise our own lack of talent or ability. Let us “go and see” what it is that we have, as individuals and as a church. Let us not “hide it under a napkin” but let us make use everything that he has given to us. Let us put it into service to further His kingdom, and His cause of truth and righteousness. And having given it to Him, let us pray for Him to use what we have given Him. Lord, use our words, use our giving of our time and strength. Use our giving of our money, and our doing our good deeds. Let us sow to the Spirit and righteousness. And let us not spare anything of what we are able to do for Christ and for the good of His people.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 9: 6 – “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work.” The principle is greater than just the giving of money; it extends also to our having the grace to do every good work, and that in our giving of ourselves in terms of what little we may have to offer, that God will multiply the effects of it. Listen to verse 10 – “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness.” Only the Lord is able to do this; but you should know and understand that in terms of your faith and your obedience to bring to him what resources you do have; that He will bless and multiply it just as He did these loaves and fish.

Then 3rdly – Christ feeds His people, and all those who will come to Him, in an orderly fashion. (Verses 30-41)

“Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass.” “So they sat down in groups on the green grass.” “So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.” “And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.” I find that this detail is very significant and relevant to the point that I have been trying to make this morning. Christ is the One who fed the multitude that day. The Apostles and disciples were helping, by bringing him what they gathered. They also helped in the distribution of the food. But before Jesus did the miracle He had them sit down in an orderly fashion. It was after they had done what He commanded them to do, in sitting down on the grass in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties, that He did the miracle. He looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and the fish, and then gave them to the disciples to distribute.

I believe that Jesus gave this command because God is a God of order. What would it have been like that day if everyone, perceiving the miracle that was being done, had all pressed forward to get a portion of food? With no sitting down in an orderly fashion to receive it; they might have simply rushed forward to get it, and there might have been pandemonium. Not only would many not have been fed, but they might have been crushed, or hurt in the rush to get at the food. The other reason that order was needed was so that the miracle which Jesus was doing could be truly seen and appreciated. He didn’t do the miracle first and then have the people sit down in ranks. He commanded them to sit down in ranks first and then did the miracle. This was glorifying to God. And I think that if we can see this miracle in terms of the preaching and

teaching of God's people and the feeding souls; we should also be able to see the need for order in the worship services of the church that we attend. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul." The way that people's souls are best fed is through an orderly worship where the people sit down and listen, and then they will be able to know the miracle of God's word feeding their souls and see and understand that others are being fed also. It is good to be able to graze in the green pastures of the word of God.

The way that people find salvation and grow in relation to that salvation is by an orderly presentation of truth. It is when people can sit still for an hour and partake of all that Christ has for them. In a library, it is the better part of wisdom to be quiet. In a church it is the better part of wisdom to listen and receive the word with all meekness. Certainly there is a place for praise and congregational singing. Certainly there is a place for prayer. But let all things be done decently and in order. It is always best when order prevails in the teaching of the church. Some people may like to argue with having order in the worship of God. But God commands it. Christ even commanded it here before He did this great miracle. I believe that order in the worship of God contributes to people being better able to see and partake of the spiritual miracles which Christ does in the services of worship. If all the people are in a state of expectation and appreciation of being fed the word of God, shall there not be miracles? I think that there will.

And then finally – When Christ is feeding His people spiritually He expects what is not eaten now to be saved and used later on. (Verses 42 and 43)

"So they all ate and were filled." "And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish." Sometimes when we are busy serving others; distributing food to others, we wonder if we will be able to eat ourselves? We wonder if there will be enough for us too. There was nothing lacking there that day when Jesus did his miracle. He saw to that. There were 12 baskets left over; a basket for each apostle. There was food enough to feed them many times over; and anyone who would have asked. This is a good picture of the redemption which our Christ has accomplished. It is a particular redemption only designed for those who partake; only for those who will come to Him; only for those who are chosen. And yet; wonder of wonders, there is much more of the bread of life there, had there be others who had come, or if there was an even greater need. You needn't ever question the ability of the Lord to meet the needs of sinful or hungry people. He will always have a greater supply than they have a demand. Oh that more people would come to Jesus for this bread!

Oh that people would see that the atonement that Jesus rendered to God is not lacking in provisions. There were 12 baskets full of bread and fish left over that day. Nothing was in short supply; nor was there a lack of good will in the Master, our Lord Jesus, to have limited it that day. He fed them all and they were all filled. The atonement which some people accuse the Calvinist of limiting, is full of rich provisions for all who will come and dine. It is only limited by the rejection of the person who believes that they have free will to refuse and reject Christ. Actually their free will is a slave of darkness and sin. Their appetite is such that they do not care for the spiritual food that Christ is serving. They will not come to Christ that they might have life. I like the words of Spurgeon in his defense of Calvinism. "I know that there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: if my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds." "I cannot, I dare not allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind, it seems so near akin to blasphemy." "In Christ's finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet no bottom, my eye discovers no shore." "There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed their Maker's law." "Once admit infinity in the matter, then limit is out of the question." "Having a Divine Person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms

inapplicable to the Divine sacrifice.” “The intent of the Divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but it does not change it into a finite work.”

And in his sermon on the parallel passage to the one we are studying, Spurgeon says, “Here, too, we have a wonder.” “Things had been multiplied by division, and been added to by subtraction.” “More was left than there had been at the first.” “No doubt that was done to disarm doubt and the defeat skepticism.” “In after days, some of those men might say, “True, we did eat and were satisfied, or it seemed as if we did, but it might have been in a kind of dream.” “That bread which was left, the twelve baskets full, furnished something solid for them to look at, so that they might not think it an illusion.” “They gathered up twelve baskets full.” “This seems to be the crowning part of the miracle.” (end of quote) And so it is. How I hope that you will see how it is that Christ feeds His people and all who will come to Him. He feeds them through His ministers, and He feeds them by the means of Christians who will share what they have received. He multiplies the effects of what they bring to Him. He shows them the value of order, in the way that they partake of spiritual food. And all that is left over, all that is not eaten, He commands to be gathered up to be used at a later time. There is plenty of spiritual food for any who will gather it from Christ’s word spoken through Christ’s servants. The question is really: Do you have a good appetite?