
What is True Food?

Mark 8:1-13

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Introduction “What we hunger for most, we worship (Piper, *Hunger for God*, 10).” Oh, that John Piper can certainly craft some good sentences. This truth came to me afresh last Saturday at Kroger’s as as Lisa and I were grocery shopping. Nothing was particularly out of the ordinary for this shopping day. Lisa was out front spying the shelves over what we might need. I was in the rear pushing my cart and collecting the goods. Up isle one, down isle two and so on, we moved systematically through the grocery store. Everything was going mindlessly for me until Lisa asked me to pick up some white bread. “Hmm. I now need to make a decision,” I thought. So I did – Sunbeam white to be specific. As I came back to my cart, I glanced at my chosen bread (seeing that I just reached into the pile and pulled out a loaf) and I noticed on the wrapper a little girl praying. I’m intrigued now. I looked closer. And in small font I saw two bible verses written under the little girl praying – Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3. “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”.

My mind primed now, I began to look around. I saw people just like me. Eyes darting, feet shuffling, we were all after the yummy, temporal, physical food to sustain our temporal, physical life for a couple of hrs. And then back at it again. Buying and selling, eating and digesting, hungry and buying some more. Nothing wrong with this, I thought. It’s normal. It’s natural. It’s the way we live. And we truly thank God for our daily bread.

And yet, in the midst of temporal tidbits the Word of God was hidden to be read by those who have eyes to see. I pondered the passages as we continued to shop . . . up isle ten, down isle eleven and so forth. What is true food? What did Jesus mean when he said, “man shall not live on bread alone”. What are we supposed to live on? If it is not temporal bread, does he mean that there exists somewhere eternal bread? And that this eternal bread might be found in the most ordinary places in life – you know, right under our noses. And how this eternal bread is infinitely more desirable and delightful and sustaining for all of eternity than anything I could see, touch, smell or taste in Kroger’s.

My mind was not done with me yet. It took me to Job. Remember him? Here was a man who was destitute. Here was a man whose delightful gifts from God vanished from him. He lost most of what he loved most. So many good and desirable gifts from God left him in excruciating suffering. And yet, this hunger ushered him into something we all need to taste and see today. In the midst of his starvation one hears satiation. He prayed, “I have not departed from the command of your lips. I’ve treasured the words of your mouth more than my necessary food” (23:12). What did he know that we need to know today? Turn in your bibles please to Mark 8.

The Lesson

Jesus is the servant king.

He starts his mission from very small, apparently insignificant beginnings.

Yet from this beginning, he delivers himself as the true bread to the entire world.

Do you have ears to hear this? Do you have eyes to see this? Do you understand this?

Here's the lesson for today (unpack identity, mission and call). This is the message Mark communicates for readers of 8:1-13. Let's take a listen to this lesson as I read for us Mark 8:1-13

In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." 4 And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" 5 And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.

10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. 11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

The Lesson Taught

v1-10

To notice the lesson taught in v1-10, we need to pay attention to three things—the setting of the miracle, the characters within the miracle and the action of the miracle.

The Scene

v1

In verse one the scene is set.

A desolate place

"In those days" according to 7:31, we find Jesus and his disciples in the region of the Decapolis. The region of Decapolis is found on the east side of the Jordan River. This is a place generally speaking where Jews did not go. Think of it as "the south side of the tracks" where the unclean live. Jews were not to associate with the "un-

clean” Gentiles. And this is the region of the Gentiles. The region of pagans is where we find Jesus and his 12 disciples in those days. They have left Israel and have gone into Gentile territory. What could possibly happen out there?

The slide on the screen is to help you visualize where this miracle happened (orient briefly).

The significance of this scene is to suggest that Jesus takes his mission not merely to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. We pick up the story in verse one. Jesus and his disciples are in a desolate place (see v4) outside the land of Israel with needy, ethnically different-than-themselves kind of people.

So that’s the scene. Let’s look at the characters now.

The Characters

The story introduces three groups of people – the Gentile crowd, the 12 disciples and then lastly the Pharisees. First, take a look at the Gentile crowd.

Irreligious crowd famished yet focused on Jesus v1a

The first of these groups we will call the *irreligious crowd famished yet focused on Jesus*. This crowd presumably heard that Jesus was in the region and they came from many towns and villages; even from faraway places to listen to Jesus. The descriptions we get from Mark tell us that these people were hungry—hungry for Jesus.

These people are not Jews. They likely heard stories about Jesus from the neighboring nation Israel. And they liked what they heard. So they longed to get close to Jesus; to actually be with him. And in v2, Jesus said something about the crowd. “...they have been with me now for three days”. They got what they wanted. They got to be with Jesus and with him uninterruptedly for three days.

From Mark’s description over this first group, the least we can conclude is that this group was comprised of pagans who were with Jesus for three days without food seemingly hanging on every word as he taught them. They were famished and yet utterly focused on Jesus. This group desired to be nourished by Jesus and his word more than their necessary food. (what we hunger for most, we worship)

Summoned disciples puzzled yet following Jesus v1b-5

Well, as we move through the story, we don’t leave this first group behind. They stay with us throughout the entire story. Yet, the focus shifts from them to our second group. In v1-5 we notice Jesus’ disciples. He calls them to himself in order to involve them in the feeding of the multitude. Perhaps, light of 8:21, it is safe to say that for the disciples to understand Jesus’ identity and mission, they need to understand Jesus’ actions. They need to be involved in what he is involved in. They needed to understand that this miracle is not merely about satisfying physical hunger. Oh, it definitely and compassionately achieved this. But there is more here than meets the eye. Jesus feeding the multitude and satisfying them from small, ordinary means stands for something bigger and better than a single meal. And those who have eyes to see will see this. Jesus will make sure that eventually his disciples will understand his teaching and will see his glory.

Notice the disciples question found in v4. Their question is noticeably more humble and less sarcastic than their question surrounding the feeding of the 5,000 back in chapter 6:37. They point to their own insufficiencies to meet the massive needs. They are more aware of the limitations of their own knowledge and abilities. It seems like it is starting to start dawn on them that Jesus alone is the one who can do something about what they are facing.

Well, the stage is set for the extravagant compassion of Jesus Christ. Here, in v6-9, dialogue stops and Jesus steps onto front stage and the spotlight turns on. At this point, our attention fastens on Jesus. We find ourselves strangely drawn to what is about to happen. We move up in our seats and lean into the action of v6-9.

The Action

v6-9

The action starts in v.6-7. We have Jesus taking charge and feeding the multitudes by first directing the crowd to sit down. Once they are situated he takes 7 loaves of bread and gives thanks for them, breaks them and delivers them to his disciples to set before about 4,000 people.

So far, Jesus' miracle looks quite similar to that of chapter 6. But here's a change. Jesus takes a few small fish and blesses them to be delivered to the multitude. A second "giving of thanks" before they eat? That's not a Jewish tradition. In a Jewish family the head of the household would give a blessing and thank God for the food before people ate. (Similar to many of you and your custom – gathering family together, praying before eating and then dig in with thankfulness). Jesus, in this scene breaks the pattern and gives thanks for the meal a second time. Could it be that he breaks tradition and blesses the food a second time because his pagan guests are not familiar with Jewish tradition? Does he want to highlight that the One true God is the generous provider of his people? Perhaps. But one thing is for sure. In v.8-9 we find the results of the meal. Two things are highlighted in the summary of this miracle – 1) The gentile guests, every one of them were satisfied, and 2) the leftovers were plentiful.

In this scene we see Jesus offering praise and thanksgiving to God. He knows and we are to know that the compassion and generosity of the miracle points to God's heart and God's mission. In the land of the Decapolis; in the region of pagans, we notice Jesus' interest in moving forward God's plan of the apostolic mission to the Gentiles. By reading this scene in light of chapter 7, the reader is to pick up on the idea of God's mission to give true food to those who truly believe. And these types of people will be found even in the far away places—to the ends of the earth.

True food from Jesus delivered to the faraway by his Jewish disciples resulting in both Jews and Gentiles sitting down together for a satisfying meal resulting in praise and thanksgiving to God. Amazing! Does this theme remind you of anything?

The Lesson Rejected

v10-13

After sending the satisfied crowd back to their respective towns with a 3-day teaching in their hearts and a 1-day feast in their bellies, Jesus and the disciples get into the boat and travel back to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. This side is known as the land of Israel. And in the land of Israel – a land populated by Jews and their religious leaders the Phari-

sees – how will this lesson we just heard be received? Will they view Jesus as the Gentiles did who were intrigued and attracted to and gather around him? Will they desire to hang on every word that proceeds from his mouth? Will they treasure the words of his mouth more than their necessary food? How will the religiously observant leaders respond to Jesus who receives people not pious and proper in their upbringing?

The Scene

v10

The setting has changed. Jesus and the disciples left the Decapolis and went over to the other side of the lake. They are back in Israel. They are back in the land. And immediately Jesus is encountered by the religious leaders who are known for their unbelief and hostility toward Jesus. And this is exactly what we find in v11-13.

The Characters

v11

In v11 we come to the last of the three groups in our text for this morning. We have noticed the Gentiles who are put forward as those hungry for Jesus. We have seen the disciples called to Jesus who still are a bit confused but continue to follow Jesus. And now we see the Pharisees who hate Jesus. They demand a sign from him. This request is Mark's way of emphasizing the disgust the Pharisees have for Jesus. They want him to fail. They want him to be exposed as a fraud. They want him dead. And how does Jesus respond to them?

The Action

v12-13

Jesus responds in v12-13 to this type of enemy in a decisive way. He rebukes them. And then leaves them. He goes away separating himself from them. They now are Christless; just the way they like it. This is such a chilling scene.

We've noticed from previous verses that people with Jesus are satisfied longing to stay with him. We've seen Jesus call people to himself and send them compassionately (and strategically) out to a desolate world with good news of him. Now we simply see him depart from people (eph.2:12 – separated from Christ . . . without God and without hope in this world).

Jesus abrupt departure from the religious leaders of the Jews provides a visual for the reader. He is indignant over their unbelief. He will not stay with them. He, in effect, takes the gospel away from their unbelieving hearts.

Well, we are now at the end of the message.

Conclusion

We will soon close our bibles. We will pack our bags. We will turn off our devices. And we will leave. And then likely we will say, "I'm so hungry. What's for lunch". You see, we go back into the real world where we experience real hunger and real desires. We will go to the China Buffet or to DLM loft; we will go home and rummage the fridge. We may even go to Kroger's and push a shopping cart down isle 1,2,3 and so on looking for that which will satisfy the need of the day.

Please note: All of this desire for our daily bread is normal. This message is not about how God's temporal and earthly gifts of food and drink are bad. Hardly. But, perhaps, God has opened your eyes to something else this morning. Perhaps, you now think, "maybe food is not simply about satisfying my hunger for 4-6 hrs. Maybe God uses times I'm hungry and my burger with fries to remind me of something I saw today.

Maybe temporal food is to remind us of the true food who is Jesus and his Word.

(PREACH THE PASSOVER LAMB: The next time we see Jesus taking bread, thanking God for it, breaking it and sharing it with his disciples is in 14:22 at the Last Supper. Here the act of giving bread means that Jesus gives himself up on behalf of others. The Son of God is revealed as a sacrificial offering for our sins)

Last Sunday, Pastor Tim employing Eph.1:15-23, confronted us with the fact that Jesus' blessings for his people are not experienced by so many of them. What did he mean by suggesting that we can have informed minds without heart enjoyment? Perhaps Nixon and Calvin were saying similar things. Calvin says that, "enjoyment" of the Christ and his benefits can happen only through "communion with Christ" and the secret energy of the Holy Spirit, by which we come to enjoy all his benefits". (Calvin: Institutes, 3.1.1.) Calvin went on to say, "for the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart..." (Calvin: Institutes, 3.2.36)

Have you received by faith the Bread of Life this morning? Have you welcomed the Word of God into your affections this morning? Do you recognize Jesus as the servant king? Do you believe that he continues to move his mission forward starting from very small, apparently insignificant beginnings? And yet, from this beginning, he delivers himself as the true bread to the entire world. Are you responsive to his call on your life? Are you taking him as true food and delivering him to your family and neighbors and colleagues and even enemies? Do you believe that some of them will come to the bread of Life and hunger no more? Are you aware that still others will reject Jesus and want him around no more?

Do you have ears to hear this?

Do you have eyes to see this?

Do you understand?