

Mark 6:30-44
New Covenant Manna
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This is the first Sunday in the month, and so we will today be preaching from the gospel according to Mark. Let me remind you that earlier in this chapter, Jesus had sent out His twelve disciples on their first preaching tour. In our passage for today, the disciples have completed their preaching tours, and they have come back to Jesus to report. We will look at our passage for today under three headings: the report, the retreat and the rethink, or the reconsideration. In our passage for today, we are going to get a better understanding of exactly who Jesus is and how important Jesus is. We are going to learn that Jesus was the prophesied Prophet like unto Moses. We are also going to learn that Jesus is our sympathetic high priest. He really does understand the difficulties and uncertainties of this life because He Himself has experienced them. He has been tempted and tested and tried in every way that we are, yet without sin.

We will begin with the report that the twelve disciples gave to Jesus when they returned from their preaching tours. The twelve disciples tell Jesus all that they taught and all that they did on their preaching tours. The twelve disciples had helped a lot of people on their preaching tours, but do you know who received more from their ministry than anyone else? The people who received the most from the disciples' ministry were the disciples themselves. The disciples returned from their preaching tours, and they couldn't wait to tell Jesus about what they had taught

people and what they had done for people in His name. That is the way these things work. We get a lot from coming to church and learning about Jesus from the Word of God. But when we really get excited about Jesus is when we are living out what we have learned about Jesus on Sunday. There is something spiritually invigorating about publicly identifying with Christ and reaching out to others in the name of Christ. Short-term mission trips can be special opportunities to witness and do good works along with other Christians. The paradox is that in order for these opportunities for witness and service to help us, our true motivation needs to be our love for God and our love for our neighbor. We are helped the most ourselves when our motivation is to help others in the name of Christ.

The disciples return, and they are bursting at the seams to tell Jesus about their experience. Telling Jesus about their experiences strengthens their faith even further and builds up their enthusiasm even more. But then people begin interrupting. People have begun to hear about the ministry of Jesus and the twelve, and now people are so interested that they are streaming in and streaming out, that they are coming and going at such a hectic pace that Jesus and the disciples don't even have time to stop and eat.

We all pray for what we call a revival, and so we should. Yet when one does come, we have to manage our resources well. A revival is a spiritual harvest time, and a harvest requires a lot of work. I remember once reading about a minister whose church had a genuine revival. For a time, he worked so hard that he ruined his health and never fully recovered.

Richard Baxter is one of the more famous English Puritans from the seventeenth century. He was known as an unusually faithful and effective pastor, but he did give one piece of bad advice on pastoring. He told pastors that it is better to burn out than to rust out. There is some truth to that, but he really goes too far in his advice. He thought that the work of the ministry is so important and so urgent that pastors ought to be working themselves to death in their effort to take advantage of every possible opportunity. His mistake in this advice about pastors' burning themselves out through work is that the work of the church is not a fifty yard dash, a race in which the runner goes as fast as he possibly can knowing that he will soon reach the finish line. The work of the church is not like that. The work of the church is more like a marathon, an athletic event that requires endurance. And to finish a marathon, the participants have to pace themselves. That is the way the work of the ministry is.

And that brings us to the next point, and that is the retreat. All these people were coming and going. These people represented opportunities for ministry, opportunities for service, opportunities for building up the kingdom and strengthening the movement. Yet there were also the needs of the twelve disciples and the limitations of the twelve the disciples, and the creaturely limitations of Jesus Himself in His humanity. Jesus had to make a value judgment. Jesus had to make a ministry decision. What was the truly wise course for Him to take in those circumstances? Did Jesus and the twelve need to go all out in their efforts to take advantage of all these possible opportunities represented by all these people who were coming and going? Or did Jesus need to pace Himself and the twelve in order to avoid

burning out? Based on the information He then had, Jesus decided that the responsible course of action was to take His disciples on a retreat. The twelve needed some time away from the crowds, some time to recover physically from their preaching tours, some time to get some rest and to recharge their batteries, some time to share with each other about their recent experiences and thus to encourage each other and to learn from each other.

Jesus planned a retreat, and so we should be open to our needing one on occasion as well. There is a time to work hard and there is a time to relax and recuperate, and wisdom is the ability to know when to do which. We need to take into account that we are limited creatures who get tired and who need rest. God even built that insight into His moral law. The fourth commandment says that people are to labor six days and rest on the seventh. Because we are mere creatures, maintaining the proper balance between work and rest is the way to get the most done with our lives and to use our time most wisely.

The report, the retreat, and our last point is the rethink. Jesus decided on the place where He would go with His disciples. There was a solitary, deserted place near where the southward flow of the Jordan River empties into the northern depths of the Sea of Galilee. It was only about four miles away from Capernaum on a direct course by boat. So Jesus and the twelve disciples got in their boat and sailed away. Their intention was a retreat, a time of rest, a time away from the crowds. But things do not always work out as planned. Some people saw Jesus and the disciples leaving. They could tell from the direction of the

boat where they were headed. The news spread quickly, and people begin going on foot to the destination where Jesus was going by boat. The trip by sea was about four miles, and the trip by land was about eight miles. Travel in a sailboat can be fast or slow, depending on the conditions, and the conditions on this day must have resulted in slower sailing. By the time Jesus and the disciples got to their destination, there was already a crowd there numbering in the thousands and waiting for them. So much for their effort to get away from the crowd for a rest.

What is going on here? Did Jesus make a mistake? No, he didn't, not in the sense of doing something sinful. Jesus did what was right, and He gives us here an example of how we should live our lives as limited creatures. Jesus took the information that He had at the time, and then made a morally right decision based on that information. Because Jesus only had limited information, He had to trust the outcome of His decision with His heavenly Father. That is how we have to live also. We have to make decisions in life based on our moral principles and based on the information that God allows us to have at the time and then trust God with the results.

It may puzzle you that Jesus also had to live this way during His earthly ministry. Jesus was and is God, and God know all things. So how could Jesus be blindsided by some unexpected turn of events? Doesn't Jesus know all things? The answer is yes, He does, and no, He doesn't. This is the answer we come to when we understand the implications of the incarnation. This is the answer we come to when we understand what it means that God the Son became flesh and dwelt among us. This is the

answer we come to when we understand that Jesus was both fully God and fully man.

From eternity past, God the Son has been and continues to be a divine person. He is a divine subject, a divine actor, a divine free agent who is responsible for what He does. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all three divine persons, and they all three act through their one divine nature. That is how they are one God and not three Gods. So from eternity, God the Son has been thinking using the one divine mind that is part of the one divine nature. And this one divine mind knows everything. There is nothing hidden from it.

At the time of the incarnation, God the Son did not stop living a divine life through the one divine nature. At the time of the incarnation, God the Son did not stop thinking through this one divine mind that knows everything. The incarnation is not an act of subtracting, not an act of taking something away. The incarnation is an act of addition, an act of adding something new without subtracting anything. In the womb of the Virgin Mary, the person of God the Son took to Himself a second nature, a human nature that came from the humanity of His mother Mary. Through this human nature, the person of God the Son began having a second experience, a genuinely human experience.

For example, in His human experience, the person of God the Son began thinking human thoughts using a human mind. So in His divine experience using the divine mind, Jesus knows everything. And in His human experience, using His new human mind, Jesus is ignorant of some things and has to learn things. In

His human experience, Jesus did know more than other people. That is because He was a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit beyond measure. In His human experience, Jesus did not know all things but He did have supernatural knowledge. He knew some things that others did not know because God revealed these things to Him through the Holy Spirit. That is sometimes one of the powers of a prophet. In the Old Testament, the King of Syria was making war plans against the King of Israel in secret councils. Yet the prophet Elisha knew about these plans and was warning the king of Israel about them. A prophet is not omniscient but a prophet can have supernatural knowledge about some things. Thus, Jesus in His human experience didn't know everything, but he knew, for example, from the beginning that Judas was a devil.

We can give other examples of the contrast between Jesus' human experience as one who is fully man and Jesus' divine experience as one who is fully God. In His divine experience, Jesus continues to uphold the universe. In His human experience, Jesus lived in the universe which God is upholding. In His divine experience, Jesus is enjoying fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in the mysterious oneness of the triune Godhead. In His human experience, Jesus communes with His heavenly Father through prayer.

You may say, "That just boggles my mind! I can't understand how one person can have two such different experiences at the same time." We are not supposed to understand how this is possible. We simply accept that the Bible teaches that Jesus is both fully God and fully man at the same time. It took the

church about five hundred years to figure out the full implications of that, but we will never understand how it is possible or what it would be like to experience a human life and a divine life at the same time. That is something that we will never experience ourselves.

The point is that Jesus understands human life through His own experience as a man. He knows what it is like to live with the uncertainties that come from not being omniscient, from not knowing everything that there is to know. He knows what it is like to be blindsided by the unanticipated. Jesus had supernatural knowledge when it was His heavenly Father's will for Him to know something. And this was God's will whenever Jesus needed to know something. It wasn't His Father's will for Jesus to know ahead of time about this crowd that was waiting for Him. God had His reasons for allowing Jesus to come to this particular place at this particular time.

Jesus gets off the boat and sees this large crowd. There probably wasn't anybody there in immediate need of healing. These were people strong enough to have left their homes on very short notice and to have walked eight miles and to have arrived before Jesus and the disciples could sail four miles. They might not have needed healing physically, but they were people with genuine needs. Spiritually they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus immediately recognized this. This was information that Jesus needed to have, and God through the Holy Spirit gave it to Him.

Jesus saw their needs and He was filled with compassion. This word translated "compassion" means an emotion that is so strong that you can feel it in your gut. Jesus was so moved by these people's needs that He changed His plans. Jesus was not like those people who live life with blinders on and who have what we call tunnel vision and who are too stubborn ever to change their plans once they have made them. Jesus had come there to give His disciples an opportunity to rest, but Jesus now sensed that these people needed ministry even more than Jesus and the twelve needed some rest. These were people who had a severe spiritual hunger and a severe spiritual thirst. They had just dropped everything and walked eight miles in order to be with Jesus. The effort these people had to expend in order to be there had acted like a filter that filtered out those who wanted to see Jesus only out of curiosity or some other trivial reason. These were people seeking spiritual help. So Jesus didn't tell the disciples to stay in the boat and shove off from the shore and look for another solitary place so that they could have their planned retreat. Jesus got out of the boat and began teaching these people who were eager to learn from Him.

There are also lessons to be learned here. We need to be flexible with our plans in life as situations change and as we get new information. We also need to pray for God to sanctify in holiness not only our minds but also our hearts so that we will be people of mercy as well as people of truth.

Jesus had made plans based on the information that He had at the time, and He trusted God with the results. God used Jesus' plans for a retreat to give Jesus an unusual teaching opportunity

and also an unusual opportunity for a miracle. This is the setting for the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. A measure of the significance of this miracle is that it is the only miracle during Jesus' earthly ministry, other than His resurrection from the dead, that is included in all four gospels.

Jesus taught the people until evening was drawing near. People had left their homes so quickly that most had not had time to prepare any food to take with them. The disciples asked Jesus to send the people away so that they could find places where they could buy some food for themselves. Jesus then commanded the disciples to feed the people. The disciples immediately objected because they were thinking in terms of their having to buy food for all these people. Even if they could find a place to buy that much food, the food would cost far more than they could afford to pay. A denarius was about a day's wages, and the disciples estimated that they would need 200 denarii in order to buy enough food to feed all these people. Had they already forgotten the power that Jesus had given them when they had gone on their preaching tours, the power to heal diseases and to cast out demons? Instead of thinking of buying food, they should have thought about asking Jesus to enable them to provide the food that was needed to feed all these people, just as Jesus had enabled them to heal people and to cast out their demons. The disciples needed another lesson in faith.

Jesus told the disciples to see what food was available, and the disciples found a boy who had five barley loaves and two small fish. The boy entrusted his meal to Jesus. Jesus then had the people to sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then He

asked for God to bless the food. And then He began breaking the food and giving it to the twelve to distribute to the people. Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit beyond measure, empowered more than any prophet before Him, multiplied the food so that the crowd ate until they were filled. Jesus told the disciples to gather the food that was left over, and there were twelve baskets full. Jesus had commanded the disciples to feed the people and then Jesus had enabled them to do it. By this miracle, Jesus was demonstrating that He was the Moses of the new covenant. At the time of Moses, God had fed Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven. Now Jesus, the man from heaven, miraculously fed the multitude in the wilderness and demonstrated Himself to be the Prophet like unto Moses that was prophesied in Deuteronomy 18.

Jesus gave the people bread to feed their physical hunger, but the message was that Jesus is not only the Moses of the new covenant but also the manna of the new covenant. Just as the bread sustained and nourished their physical bodies, Jesus is the bread from heaven that sustains and nourishes us spiritually. Our salvation is based on our spiritual union with Him, and we experience that union through our faith in Him. Eating the bread and thus incorporating it into the physical body symbolizes this spiritual union with Christ that provides God's people with spiritual nourishment.

This is the same message that we are taught when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Just as the bread nourishes our bodies and just as the wine refreshes our bodies, so Jesus nourishes and refreshes our souls. Let us pray that God will bless our partaking

next week and that God will use our partaking to strengthen and confirm our faith in Jesus.