

Mark 6:30-48

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. 33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. 35 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. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." 37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?" 38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. 41 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. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men. 45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. 46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. 47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. 48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.

We have reached a miracle that is told to us in all four gospels. It is safe to assume that it is an important story. The disciples had just gone preaching into all Israel. They undoubtedly did amazing things and taught what they were sent to preach. They had a lot to tell their Master. They all would have had stories they wanted to tell. And that is where our narrative starts.

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming

and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

A minister, and we are all ministers, is always in the best position when he can tell his Master exactly what he has *done and said* **without embarrassment**. That is the position these men were in. They were excited to have done their mission and were eagerly waiting to tell Christ what they had done. So they finally got their chance to tell their stories, at least some of them.

But there is another lesson to learn in the school of Jesus. Christ had to know how this rest period was going to work out. So I think we can assume that his actions were deliberate.

When we have worked hard, how do we often reward ourselves? We take a break from work. Even God **intends** that we do that. The Sabbath was designed partly for that purpose. So it isn't a bad thing, in and of itself.

And look here where they are going for a rest. They were going into isolation. They weren't going to where there were lots of people and affluence. They were going into the wilderness where there might be great beauty but few people. Why? Well people are the problem. Every place where there are people, there are needs. And needs require being met. So there will be little rest for ministers in those places.

They are headed to the wilderness for, essentially, a camping trip. You can just imagine the disciples perking up and looking forward to this. So they hop in the boat and they are ready to go. Boat was the easiest transportation to get where they were going.

33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.

Evidently too many people could see enough to guess where the disciples were headed in their boats. And since you can run faster than you can row, they were able to beat the disciples to the destination.

Now, just imagine that you were one of the disciples. What would you have thought and felt? I know myself well enough to know that I would have really been bummed out. I would have thought, oh no. More people. Can't they just leave us alone? Wouldn't that be a perfectly normal reaction? Wouldn't that be acceptable? Well look what happens.

34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

Here is our example for ministry. Here is our example for selflessness. How did Jesus see this crowd, this nuisance, these intruders into "I" time and recreation time and rest time? Look how He thought about it. He saw these people, who went miles and hours out of their way, some because they were just so desperate

to hear the truth. And he thought, these are sheep that are displaying their need for a shepherd. They are people who hunger for real food and long for real direction. And Christ is referred to in scripture as both the **good shepherd** and **the only way**.

So what does Christ do? He begins to preach.

Now what did the disciples think? Well, if they were anything like us we can easily guess what they think. Especially given how the rest of the story goes. They were probably thinking, Oh No. He is preaching. There goes the rest time. There goes the fellowship time. I hope He quits soon. I hope He sends them away.

And knowing ourselves, we can guess it didn't end there. We can't seem to help but allow self to make this kind of thing into all kinds of issues. Wouldn't we think- look at this. We are the people busting our butts for Christ. We are the ones sacrificing. We are doing the work. But look how he treats us. He drops our plans for fellowship for these perfect strangers. He doesn't honor what He says. We can't depend on him to take care of our needs. Anyone who comes up to Him with a request changes everything.

Really, isn't that just like us? Isn't that what we so often do? We take decisions that other people make and we quickly turn them into some kind of reflection upon our value. The other person prioritizes a need, and we use it as evidence that they do not love us enough. It is so difficult to weed out our own selfishness. And we think we are being very smart when we think this way. But we refuse to see how unfair that kind of thinking can be.

We would do well to look at what the other person is doing, and be glad they are a giving person, even if they may not always prioritize perfectly, even if they do not always make great decisions.

In this case, the disciples were with the Son of God. He **did** prioritize perfectly. The best thing these disciples could have done would have been to watch and learn. Christ, too, was tired. Christ, too, wanted time alone with these guys. So if Christ prioritized ministering to these people, it must be pretty important. The best thing they could have done would have been to follow Christ's lead and get with the program.

Did they? It doesn't look like it.

35 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. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

Notice the details here. Christ must have preached most of the day. It is getting toward evening. So the disciples approach Christ. Here comes the steering committee. And look how they posture their advice.

They tell Christ:

1. We are in a deserted place. Do we think that would have been news to Christ?
2. The hour is late. Could Christ not tell time?
3. Send them away so **they** can eat.

Oh, isn't this us? What the disciples really want is for Christ to send the people away. Why? Because the disciples want what they want. But they can't say that. They can't say, Christ, we really want that recreation time you promised us. So get rid of this riff raff. So what **do** they say?

They come to Christ as if they are sincerely gravely concerned for the people's welfare. You can just hear them saying, Christ, we are worried about the health of these people.

Why can't we just tell the truth to each other? Why do we have to pretend to have motives we really don't have? It is so much better to just tell the truth. Had they done that, they may have received their own teaching. Their selfishness would have been addressed. But it would have been teaching that would have addressed the real need. They could have just said, Christ, will you tell these people to leave because we really want that rest you were talking about. And that is **more important to us** than these people and their needs. That would have shown their selfish motives. But it isn't like they were going to hide selfish motives from Christ anyway. And the truth is, even **most of us** can see right through this kind of posturing. Even we, as flawed humans, can often spot duplicity. So why work so hard to posture that we care about things we really never move a finger to change? The things we care about, we do something about. The things we don't care about, we talk about. Why do we so naturally try to look better than we are? It never does us any real good. If people **believe us**, it will not improve our fellowship because they don't know the real us. If they **don't believe us**, now they need to call us a liar in order to minister to us. It never accomplishes anything of value in the body of Christ. It is always destructive. Now, Christ, in our text and in our lives, is not going to buy this nonsense.

37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat."

Well, if you care about these people so much, give them something to eat. You do it.

Now their bluff is called. So what do they do?

Do they ask Christ to provide? No. Do they ask Christ how they should go about this task? No. They propose something that is in their power to do in their natural world. Now keep in mind that these guys had just come back from a miracle filled ministry. But when confronted with this need, they revert back to their own natures.

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

We need to understand that Christ, in the John account, said to Phillip, "where are we to buy bread so that these may eat." He was saying this to test Phillip. And Philip responds with the question we just read.

And isn't he just like us? The only answers to the problems we face are natural solutions. If it can't be done by us, it can't be done. If we have tried to change our spouses and it hasn't worked, it can't be done. If money can buy it, and we don't have enough money, it can't be done. Isn't our God the God of the impossible? I am not saying that everything we suggest to God that God will do. But doesn't it at least make sense to go to Him first? Especially before we begin to despair and give up. The disciples were given an impossible task here. Why not just appeal to the God of the impossible? Why not take the need to the Maker? I suspect there are lots of problems in our lives that God is just waiting for us to get tired of exhausting our own resources. He is waiting for us to bring our need to Him so He can glorify Himself by meeting it. Which is exactly what He does in our story.

Why do they suggest two hundred denarii worth of bread? That is probably the money they had in their coffers. That would be about 8 months wages for one man in that day. And even that would not buy enough food for these people. And even if it could have, the logistics would be such that they could not get the food to the people in time.

There was no human solution to this problem. And the more they focused on the problem, the further they would be from a solution. Some situations in our lives are designed for one thing. To get us to call out to our God. That is what this situation was for.

Now, once the disciples were done with their figuring that this thing could not be done, Christ asks a question.

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."

At least they appear to go out and find out. At least Andrew does. He is the one who reports the tally. Probably 25,000 people. Five loaves and two fish. So each person gets a crumb of bread and a molecule of fish. Still not much of a solution to the disciples. The loaves are probably breadcakes like a flatbread biscuit and the small fish were likely pickled and usually eaten with the bread. So what they have is a small fish sandwich intended to feed a child.

This is what Charles Spurgeon says about Christ in light of this situation.

He it was who thought of the way of feeding them, it was a design invented and originated by himself. His followers had looked at their little store of bread and fish and given up the task as hopeless; but Jesus, altogether unembarrassed,

and in no perplexity, had already considered how he would banquet the thousands and make the fainting sing for joy. The Lord of Hosts needed no entreaty to become the host of hosts of hungry men. (Charles Spurgeon, "The Miracle of the Loaves," sermon no. 1218)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Mark 1-8.

So now Christ commands the disciples again:

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

This was extremely practical. It made these people very easy to serve and very easy to count. And on a side note, they sat down on green grass. When the Bible talks about the wilderness, it isn't always a barren wilderness.

41 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.

Jesus removes all doubt as to where this miracle originated from. He prays for the food while looking up to heaven. And then he begins to divide the food. We are not given a description of how the miracle happened. Did the bread and the fish grow back miraculously after ripped off? We don't know. But we do know that Christ was making something out of nothing. He is displaying the same thing He did at creation. He is showing Himself to be God.

42 So they all ate and were filled. The word for satisfied means that they ate until they were full. They were no longer hungry after this meal. They didn't just get a snack or an appetizer. They had enough fish sandwiches to make a full meal.

Notice that to start, man's resources were not even enough to give everyone a crumb. When Christ is done with it, He has turned it into a feast with food left over. Are you afraid your resources aren't enough to accomplish what Christ has given you to do? You might be right except for the power of Christ. Maybe you cannot do what you must do, in and of yourself. But keep trusting Christ. Keep calling out to Him. You may not be sufficient for the need, but Christ is.

43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.

The word for baskets is for a basket that people would normally carry their lunch in. Now, how many baskets are there? 12 How many disciples are there? 12. That is no coincidence. Christ would not have had to clean up after this feeding. The birds would have done a fine job. But it looks like He wanted to drive a point home. Each disciple was going to carry a basket from there reminding them of Christ's sufficiency to meet a need that the disciples had determined was impossible. Each basket was an impossibility made into reality. It was a reminder that Christ could do all things well.

Keep in mind, too, that this happened on a day that they were expecting a rest. I believe this encounter was designed to teach the disciples several very important lessons. One of the lessons they are most likely to remember is the need to prioritize **meeting needs over personal comfort or pleasure**. I believe Christ **arranged** for these men, he **intended** for these men, to have an expectation of having their own pleasure and comfort. They were then most ready to see themselves as they really are. If they were told they were going to be working, they could have prepared their minds for the task. But as it was, they were expecting recreation. And then they were thrown into a ministry opportunity. That is how much of life is. You don't always get a warning that you are going to have a ministry opportunity. So you need to always be prepared. These disciples weren't. So they had to go through the school of Christ. Christ did one of his most notable ministries on a day that was supposed to be a vacation day. He did a full days work of teaching, and then a miracle of feeding the crowd, on His day off. The apostles were to get that point. In a sense, there is no professional ministry. All true ministry is a lifestyle, not an hourly job. People cannot be neatly regulated into our schedule. Needs are not like that. I am sure the disciples got that point. They were being trained to take on the mind and heart of Christ. They needed his compassion. The compassion that will sacrifice self in order to meet a human's need.

How do we view our time, our desire for comfort and leisure and pleasure? What will we allow to interrupt our plans? And what do we think of those who will not prioritize our pleasure as highly as we do?

44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

What this tells us is that there were probably 20-25,000 people in this crowd. Christ probably fed about 25,000 people with several crackers and a couple of sardines.

45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.

Christ **made** His disciples get into the boat. The word for made is a strong one. This appears a bit forceful. It could be that He wanted them to get out of there and think about what had just happened. It could be he was doing to the disciples what we do to our children when we tell them to go into their room and think about what they did wrong. It is likely He did not think much of their response to the need of the crowd and their duplicitous pretending to care about the people. For whatever reason, He wanted them gone. He had plans for how He was going to spend His time.

Christ also sent the multitude home. Which would have likely been difficult since they are already so well fed. But Christ sent them away.

46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.

I can't grasp this. Jesus had just finished a long day working in the hot sun. He had all kinds of things going on all day that would have been physically and emotionally taxing. If I were doing this I would be thinking, drive home, sit in a chair, and relax. Come down from the day. Take it easy.

But that isn't what Christ did. He went alone to a secluded spot to pray. How did He not fall asleep while praying? Clearly Christ's concern for the people was more than an act. He was driven to talk to God about men and talk to men about God. And He prioritized that above everything else in His life.

What a good example for us to follow. But it is a lot like feeding 25,000 people. It is impossible for us to do this unless God is in it. He has to do a miracle in our hearts for us to minister anything like He did. But this is the kind of miracle **God will do.**

47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land.

By now it had to be pretty late. Christ had discussed what He needed to discuss with His Father. It is then that Christ directs His attention back to the disciples that He loves. The boat was way out there in the lake. And Christ was all by himself on shore watching them.

Isn't it good to know that we are always being watched by our God? He cares for us. Even when He is disciplining us, He cares for us. If you are a child of His, He cares for you. And He is determining exactly what you need in your situation. And He will bring it to you.

Now, what was the effect of this wonderful ministry of Christ's? We learn about it in the book of John. This is the very next day:

John 6:60-69

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" ⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples (*as a whole, not just the twelve*) complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?" ⁶² *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." ⁶⁶ From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. ⁶⁷ Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" ⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall

we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Here are many of the same people who had a miraculous fish sandwich. They could see that Christ was doing a miraculous work. But He challenged them to believe in Christ. And they didn't like it. It was the truth that would save them if they had a heart to be saved. But they didn't. And he lost many disciples that day. That just goes to show you. God can do the most amazing things. But the biggest miracle is a changed heart.