

The only miracle that is in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. That is, besides the resurrection, which is also in all four Gospels.

**Christ is our Good Shepherd who cares for all of our needs.**

**1. In wisdom, Christ provided rest for His apostles. (v.30-32)**

In verse 30, the report that the apostles brought back to Jesus must have been exciting. They told Jesus what they had taught – which was the same as what Jesus had taught them, “*that the people should repent*” (v.12). The apostles also told Jesus what they had done. They told what we read back in verse 13, that “*they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.*” It must have been an exciting time. And exhausting.

Jesus responded with wise care for the apostles. Jesus knew that they needed rest. This was their next lesson to learn from Jesus – their need for rest, and the wisdom of balancing the work for Jesus and the rest with Jesus.

There had been a flurry of activity. Time had passed. It was approaching the time of the Passover in the Springtime of the year. John the Baptist had been cruelly murdered and the disciples of John had buried the body of John without the head. Jesus had been informed about this. Herod had become disturbed when he heard about the miracles of Jesus. There were rumors circulating about the identity of Jesus. The king had adopted the belief that Jesus was actually a resurrection of the previously beheaded John the Baptist. And Jesus had sent the apostles on their mission tour two by two without bread, bag, or money, and the apostles had preached for people to repent, the apostles had worked miracles, and now the apostles had returned to Jesus.

To have missionary activity and ministry activity without rest, relaxation, calm discussion, time for prayer and mediation, is not the Christian way. Even Christ Jesus Himself, because of his human nature, and the great burden of His calling as the Anointed One of God, needed times to withdraw. Consider what Mark told us back in chapter 1:35, about one of the times that Jesus withdrew by Himself to rest and to pray, “*Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed.*”

Jesus was wise through His own acquaintance with the schedule and demands of the Apostles. Jesus invited them to join Him on a retreat to a secluded spot, where they would be able to rest up, to take it easy, to relax and get refreshed.

Verse 31, “*and [Jesus] said to [the apostles], ‘Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.’*....(and then Mark acts as narrator and provides

us a view of the scene with these words...) *For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.*" Our wise Lord Jesus discerned the need because the crowd had been so demanding with so many coming with a sick person to be healed, and then leaving, followed by the next person coming with a demon possessed person, and then leaving, and such a boisterous group of people, that even eating was impossible for the apostles.

The wise plan was for Jesus and the 12 Apostles, but NO ONE ELSE, to get away to a quiet place for some rest.

So, in verse 32 we hear that the plan for rest was being implemented.

## **2. In compassion, Christ cared for the shepherd-less. (v.33-34)**

Then, in verse 33, we hear how Jesus' plan for rest for His apostles would be cut short by the crowds. The crowds had seen Jesus and the Apostles get into the boat, and the crowd recognized them, and knew who was in the boat. The crowd responded by running along the shore, and informing all the towns along the way, of the whereabouts of Jesus and the Apostles. The crowd was so eager to receive more healings from Jesus and the Apostles after they disembarked the boat, that the crowd arrived at the destination by foot, following an arc around the North part of the lake a distance of approximately ten miles, before Jesus and the Apostles could get to the destination by boat, approximately 4 miles across the water. Ordinarily, the boat would arrive first. There were women and children in the crowd, and presumably, some people who still needed healing. Once the crowds arrived, all that was left for the crowds to do was to wait for the boat to arrive, with Jesus and the apostles on board.

What would happen when Jesus arrived by boat? How would Jesus respond to this crowd? The crowd that had worn down His team, His apostles. Would Jesus chastise them? Would Jesus give a little lesson on the importance of rest for those in ministry? Verse 34 tells us of the compassion of our Savior, revealed by this situation.

When the rest and relaxation that Jesus and His apostles were seeking was largely denied them, what would be the Christ-like reaction? We only know because we see the reaction of Christ Himself.

Here is something that we might have expected Jesus to say, "We came here for rest, relaxation, and refreshment; so please go home, for we are tired; see us some other time?"

Verse 34, "*when [Jesus] went ashore, [Jesus] saw a great crowd, and [Jesus] had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And [Jesus] began to teach them many things.*"

No animal is so dependent as a sheep is. Without someone to guide a sheep, the sheep wanders, the sheep gets lost, the sheep becomes easy food for wandering

wolves. Without someone to provide safety while the sheep graze, the sheep starve. Jesus knows that people are like that.

If people have leaders who fail to give them reliable guidance, they do not supply their souls with nourishing food. Think about these crowds of people standing before Jesus. What guidance had they received? The would-be guides were too occupied with the tassels on their clothes, the restrictions on movement on the Sabbath day, and the rules, to provide them trustworthy guidance for their souls.

Jesus saw the people on the green grass, and they looked like sheep to Jesus. They may have even been dressed in white, across the hillside. Jesus saw their sorrows, and understood their burdens of the crowds. In Jesus' love for the people, He gave them the best thing possible. Not healing for the sick bodies, but teaching for their sick souls. Jesus did not just feel sad for them, but transformed his heart's concern into helpful action. The compassion of Jesus was no just an emotion, but a deed. And it continued in a series of deeds. Jesus taught them. Jesus healed them. Jesus fed them, and eventually, Jesus would die for them. Is it really a surprise that Jesus would curtail his time of refreshment for them? It is not a surprise to us, because we know that Jesus would go on to give up His life for them. In John 10:14-15, Jesus said, "*I am the good Shepherd...I lay down my life for the sheep.*"

The loving shepherd teaches. Jesus teachers. Elders and pastors teach. It is what loving shepherding ministry looks like. Those who have compassion for believers are people who disciple, counsel, teach, admonish, remind, exhort and advise people. Loving religious guidance from elders and ministers is to give people the words of life and beauty. Reliable guides tell people about the marvelous Kingdom of God. Faithful spiritual leadership points people to the truth. Insists on the truth. To care for people is to teach the truth.

### **3. In power, Christ fed His sheep. (v.35-44)**

How long did Jesus teach the truth to the sheep without a shepherd, to the people without reliable spiritual leaders? Verse 35 has the answer. Jesus taught them until it was late in the day! Jesus taught them until it actually became a logistical nightmare to consider how the people would eat. Listen to verse 35, when the disciples of Jesus came and tried to move Jesus from feeding His people truth, over to feeding his people a meal of actual food. Verse 35, "*And when it grew late, His disciples came to Him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.'*"

Jesus had spent time, a long time, teaching the people with spiritual food. The people now needed physical food.

The disciples were struggling with the problem of how to feed them physical food.

It is interesting that in a miracle story, the focus is not on the miracle of Jesus, but rather on the teaching of Jesus. And it is further interesting that in a miracle of feeding people, the focus is not on miraculous feeding them with physical food, but on the un-miraculous teaching them with spiritual food.

Think of the disciples. In spite of all the miracles that they had witnessed, it does not seem to occur to them that Jesus could solve this problem. The disciples were at a loss what to do. To state that it was “a desolate place” was to draw attention to the fact that it was not a city with all kinds of places within easy reach where food may be purchased. None of that would be near their location. To travel to the surrounding villages in search of food would take time – time which they did not have, because the day was already drawing to a close.

In verse 35, the disciples made two points to their teacher - the loneliness of the place and the lateness of the hour. Based on those two points, the disciples gave a concluding recommendation to Jesus in verse 36 – send the people away. If the people were released into family units, they could fan out to the surrounding villages and farms to buy food for themselves.

In verse 37, Jesus responded to the disciples by saying – you give them something to eat. Why did Jesus say this shocking thing – you give them something to eat?

1) The disciples needed to take more responsibility than simply – send them away.

2) Jesus wanted the disciples to ask Jesus for help to fulfill their responsibility to feed the sheep. Wasn't Jesus teaching that He supplies all of their needs? When they were short of wine, didn't Jesus supply wine? When they are short of bread, wouldn't Jesus supply bread?

3) wasn't Jesus trying to teach His disciples then, what Mark certainly understood by the time he wrote these verses? Namely, that Jesus was inviting the disciples into the good work of feeding His sheep by TEACHING them.

The disciples attempt to interact with this surprising instruction. Seems that the disciples were double-checking – let me get this straight. Clearly the disciples were still stuck on the idea of providing physical food to eat.

Verse 38, Jesus asked how much food they had, and the answer was 5 loaves, and 2 fish.

Verse 39, they are to sit down in groups.

Verse 40, they sit in groups of hundreds or 50s.

Verse 41, Jesus took the food, looked to heaven and literally blessed it, with a miraculous blessing of multiplying. Verse 42, all of the people ate to the point of satisfaction. Verse 43, 12 baskets of leftover pieces of bread and fish were

gathered. Verse 44, the number of people fed was 5,000, and that was just the men, any women and children would be in addition to the 5,000.

How did it really happen? We don't know. Exactly when were the bread and fish multiplied? We don't know. The story is beautiful in the simplicity of words. We might even say that the miracle was implied, rather than expressed. All that we know is all that we need to know – namely, that there was plenty of bread and fish, and even plenty to spare. It must have been miraculous, because there were more leftovers of bread and fish than there was an amount of bread and fish at the start. At some point in the breaking the bread, the dividing the portions, the passing out of the portions by the people, the miracle must have occurred.

The abundance is evident.

Jesus provided abundant teaching for the soul, and abundant food for the body.

Jesus is the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament!

Notice that Jesus never used his miraculous powers to destroy or hurt, but always to help people. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught the misguided.

Why would people not love Jesus back?

The loving Shepherd asks to be loved in return.

### **Concluding Application:**

1) Learn to rest. Consider the creation example. God created the world in six days, and then God Himself rested. Jesus taught His disciples to embrace their humanity. We all need rest. It is part of the created order, and therefore part of our lives to rest. That is why we call it recreation, the word is re-creation! In addition, rest is a part of redemption, and therefore part of our Christian lives to rest. We rest in Jesus. Jesus our Good Shepherd understands the hustle and bustle of our busy, busy lives. Jesus knows the importance of quiet times with Him, and quiet times with our life partners, and quiet times with our ministry teams. When Jesus ended his earthly ministry, there were still lepers who had not been healed, and there were still people who had not heard the gospel. That tells you there is a limit to the number of people that God wants you to reach. You cannot reach them all. There is a limited number of tasks that God wants you to accomplish. You cannot accomplish everything. Christ will not allow us to be workaholics, and say that we are doing it for the Lord. No way. We need to rest. We need a work and rest balance. Long before a work/life balance became popular, it was in the Bible as the best way to live. If your life is out of balance, the first place to get back into balance is your use of Sunday. Hebrews 4:9, “...*there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of*

*disobedience.*” To be a workaholic is to disobey God. Works based people work too much, and when they get burned out, they become lazy. It is only grace-based people, who have learned at the school of Jesus, who have a balance between work and rest. Learn to rest.

2) Have more compassion for people. Christ Jesus cared for the crowds of people, who did not have access to good spiritual teaching. He really cared. His heart really went out to them. Does your heart go out to people who do not have good spiritual leaders – that do not have access to good spiritual teaching? Does your heart go out to people who are racing around and looking for all the wrong things, lacking order and discipline in their lives? People are supposed to have leaders who look out for them. In this case of this crowd, there were supposed to be priests and teachers of the law. And there were things that Herod was supposed to do for the people. But all of those layers of leaders had failed the crowds. The contrast between Herod and Jesus is one of the reasons that Mark puts this story right after the story of Herod killing John the Baptist. The heart of Herod for the people was very different from the heart of Jesus toward the people. King Herod would kill the finest citizen. King Jesus would die for the worst citizen. Herod threw a banquet for the rich and famous, and during that banquet killed the 2<sup>nd</sup> finest Shepherd in the land. Jesus threw a n impromptu banquet for the poor, and fed them spiritually and physically, and eventually died for them. Jesus stands out as Our Good Shepherd, and the best part about Him, is His compassion for us. *The compassion of Jesus for the people without leadership, is the hinge on which this whole passage turns.* Where would we be without the compassion of Jesus for us? Nine times in the New Testament, we read about Jesus having this keep compassion. Where would the church be without the Christ-like compassion of pastors, elders, deacons and church members? If all we had was the command to rest, then what about Jesus ending his rest time early, because of the need of the crowds? That time of rest did not turn out as Jesus had planned. My times of rest do not turn out as I planned. Sometimes we have to break up our times of rest, because love gives us the grace of flexibility. Love and compassion enable us to make adjustments when there are new developments. It is because we are not able to control what happens to us and what happens around us, that we follow God’s providence, and we watch for opportunities to have more compassion for people.

3) Invest in the feeding of God’s people through teaching. True teaching is more of a focus than the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. And the Feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle in all four Gospels, besides the resurrection of Jesus Himself. Teaching. Invest in teaching. You are to feed the 5,000! Yes, in the strength of Christ, you are to feed the 5,000. As people are here in the spiritual wilderness, you can bring them manna – bread from heaven! We live in a time that is in desperate need of true spiritual teaching. People don’t even know what marriage is,

or what is a man or a woman, or their right hand from their left. You could teach them! The first step is to get good teaching yourself. Soak it in. Listen to good teaching. Read good books. Make good use of the incredible resources that God has provided us. I myself am taking a class this Fall, put on by the OPC, about preaching in the book of Jeremiah! I am so excited! I encourage you to get good teaching. I also encourage you to teach. Could you teach in your home? Lead in family worship. Could you teach by discipling someone? Meet with your children and grandchildren. Meet with friends and anyone who will meet with you. Teach them what the Bible says. Counseling is really teaching, and the classroom is one person, and the curriculum is unspecified until you listen first. Or, could you teach somewhere more formally in our church? We need people to teach in the home groups, in the Christian education classes, in the adult class, in the women's group, in the men's group, in the youth group. We are investing in the feeding of God's people through teaching, because it is what Jesus taught us to do. Where are you learning. Where are you teaching? Invest in the feeding of God's people through teaching.