



Speaker:  
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## Jesus, Bread of Heaven

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 20 of 20

9/27/2020 (SUN) | Bible: Mark 6:30-44

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Today, we're in the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel. Let's read together from verse 30.

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If you were to ask a member of the public to name some of Jesus' miracles, I'm sure the feeding of the five thousand would be among them. This is one that's found in all four gospels, too.

When preparing messages, my aim is always the same: to find any excuse to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. So today I plan to use this incident to show Jesus as a teacher, shepherd and as the living bread himself.

To summarise: the apostles had been busy. Jesus tells them they need a break. *Get into the boat, and sail to a place along the coast.* The crowds were so determined to be in the company of Jesus and hear him speak that they note which way the boat's going and start walking fast in order to catch them up! I mean, it was a lot further for them on foot than it was for the disciples in the boat.

Soon after the boat party disembarks and settles down, the crowds appear. Jesus takes the opportunity to do some preaching. Of course he does! The disciples are concerned the people haven't eaten, and there was no place around where they could buy food. They offer to go and buy food while Jesus continues to preach, although they're doubtful they can afford it. After all, the figure of 5000 was for adult males only. There may have been 10000 people there. Their estimate was it would cost thousands of pounds to feed such a large crowd.

What follows is a great and mysterious miracle. Our curiosity might make us wonder how the miracle was performed; that is, what we'd have seen had we been there. Was Jesus continually breaking chunks off each piece of bread, or did he throw it in the baskets and cause it to multiply? We don't know. and it doesn't matter really, does it? The miracle took place, and *thousands* participated in it.

Let's see, firstly, how this account shows:

## JESUS CHRIST AS SHEPHERD

When it says Jesus saw the crowds “as sheep without a shepherd”, the phrase isn't an invention of the author. You might think the simile isn't surprising, considering they lived in a world dominated by agriculture. The phrase deliberately alludes to imagery seen in the Old Testament. Read if you will (1 Kings 22:17) “And he said, ‘I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd...’”

The people were *lost*. They knew where they lived, and they knew how to get home at the end of the day. But in their *lives* they were lost. They had Judaism as a background influence, just like people in Britain describe us as a Christian nation. But like the people in our country today, they didn't have the absolute truth that's found in Jesus. I expect they were wondering what life was really all about.

If people begin to think their existence is pointless, they'd be right! Many try to create a sense of purpose in their life through careers. They might find meaning through having a family. Now I'm glad God raises up a people to enable society to function, and we've only survived as a human race because God has gifted people with children. But neither these nor anything else can create purpose.

In his Wisdom writings, Solomon lays out for us the pointlessness of life. He shows how people who spend their lives trying to get more money end up dying and leaving it to others. All their clothes donated to a charity shop. Their belongings given away. They might be remembered, but only for a few short years. Solomon tells the man or woman who has no interest in Christ they may as well enjoy their food and drink while they can. Soon they'll be dead, and there's nothing for them in the grave. And at the appointed time in the future, they face judgement.

But Solomon **does** recognise there's purpose for the servants of God. They're described in the scriptures as *sheep*. And sheep are notoriously stupid! They need a shepherd. Look at John 10:11-15 “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.” I love the comfort in those verses.

We talked a few weeks ago about the discrimination of God. We used the example of sermons, made in such a way as to be understood by some and not others. As God, Jesus was at the centre of electing his people back before the world began. So in what way, we have to ask, can it be said that Jesus has compassion on a multitude of people, some of whom he's determined not to have saving mercy on?

We've come across this problem in previous weeks. Sometimes Jesus seems to think like us, while at other times he expresses his divinity. And I said to you that the problem comes from the incarnation itself. It's a mystery, remember. I'm being as honest with this text as I can be, and I can only conclude that it means what it looks like: Jesus felt compassion towards all of them. And I see clearly that the Bible shows God as loving some and hating others. It's a paradox, from our perspective. I can't explain it. But I caution Christians from reading too much into this compassion of Jesus and thinking God loves everyone.

It's interesting to see that when the disciples bring up the subject of food, Jesus says, *You feed them then!* Now it's Jesus who performed the miracle. He reproduced food. When you think about it, this was an act of direct creation just like at the beginning of the world. Even in the humble form of a man, Jesus was able to create matter out of nothing. But anyway, it was the disciples who distributed the food.

We can see in this an image of how God uses his “under shepherds”. These are the preachers of righteousness, those who God has raised up to take care of his sheep. Acts 20:28 says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

- They feed the flock with the word of God
- They lead the flock in their Christian endeavours
- And they guard the flock from those who would do them harm

But where did these disciples get the food from? Why **Jesus Christ**, of course. And in the same way, **those in the ministry who give of themselves for the spiritual benefit of others get their resources from God himself.** How else can they feed the people with the word unless they themselves are students of it? How can they effect their well-being unless they spend time pleading at the throne of God?

But if these shepherds neglect prayer and the word, the people will suffer. Now they may not be aware they're suffering. Their church life will continue as normal. **But if they're not being fed and prayed for, they cannot have truly blessed relationship with God.** They're like sheep that are wandering about, emaciated.

I love that Mark includes this tiny detail in verse 39. He says Jesus told them all to sit on the *green grass*. It's not there just to tell us what time of year it was. Neither is it only there to help us to form a more colourful picture in our minds of the scene. I think it's to fill out the picture so our minds might be taken to that wonderful description of Jesus Christ in the Psalms. (Psalms 23:1-2) “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...”

Let's move on and look at how this account shows:

## JESUS CHRIST AS TEACHER

You'll note the only thing on Jesus's mind was teaching the multitude. For him, the best expression of compassion is the preaching of the kingdom of God. Yes, he did see to the bodily needs afterwards. But we can see where his priority lay, and by this we learn something too. There are two extremes which the church should avoid. Firstly, they shouldn't think that godly speech or conferring blessings on people is enough if your brother has a bodily need also. If your brother is hungry, feed him. Don't just wish him well! Secondly, the church shouldn't neglect the word for the sake of ministering to people's bodily needs. And as you and I know, some Christians have forsaken the clear preaching of the word in order to focus on social work. Jesus shows us the balance. We only need to copy him.

Jesus Christ, the Great Teacher, describes his teaching role through the prophet in Isaiah 61:1-3 which says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified."

His ministers also do likewise:

- They proclaim the good news of the gospel to those who have become meek through a humbling work of the Holy Spirit
- They apply the healing balm of scripture to the hearts of men broken by knowledge of their sin
- They point the way to the door of salvation where there'll be no more crying because of despair over sin
- And with the promises of God on their lips, they escort captive sinners from the dungeon of sin and bring them out into the bright liberty found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus *taught* the crowd. In doing this, he teaches his disciples and us the importance of preaching. We can also see he's been teaching the disciples in other ways, principles that apply today too. Encouraging the disciples to rest properly, he's also so given us an example of pastoral care. I say again: **if the leaders in the churches are to have a pastoral heart for the people, they must themselves receive pastoral care from God.**

You may have missed it, but in the first verse of our reading today, we see the apostles reporting back to Jesus. He's the one not only to send the disciples out in the first place, but also the one to whom they had to report. They understood they were *accountable*. No doubt they took some pleasure in relaying stories of their missionary activity, but they were

clearly in submission to Jesus. Sometimes, they'd report back full of excitement, only for Jesus to straighten them out with a kind word of guidance.

Hebrews 13:17 – “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” This isn't a matter to be taken lightly. If the man who has the “cure of souls” as it's called is sincere, he'll understand the gravity of his situation. I mean, imagine if I said to any one of you, let me introduce John. Now I want you to take care over his soul's well-being. And he's your responsibility now till the end of your lives. That's quite weighty, isn't it? What a responsibility! So think kindly and pray often for those who have a responsibility before God not for just one person but for numerous people.

Finally, let's think about how this event shows:

### JESUS CHRIST AS THE LIVING BREAD

This great charitable event shows us a number of things. Jesus fed a multitude of hungry people. And this being recorded, we have yet another example of his mighty power. And we shouldn't overlook how he first gave thanks to God for the bread. These details were included for our learning.

But if we're to let the passage remind us of one thing, it should be that *Jesus Christ himself is described as bread*. Read with me from John 6:29-33 – “Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.’ They said therefore unto him, ‘What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said unto them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.’”

Moses had promised the people that the Lord would provide bread for them. And he did. But in this picture, with Jesus **himself** creating and distributing bread, **he declares his identity as God in the flesh**. Moses didn't feed the people by his own hand; he was a mediator who secured food for the people from heaven. But Jesus fed the people himself. And he broadcasts this truth: HE is the bread from heaven. He compares himself to bread because he gives life. But whereas food can only keep a man alive for so long, Jesus Christ can feed a man with eternal life.

Jesus, the bread of God from heaven, came to give life to this world. Through him, this world has been shown that immortality is a real possibility. He subjected himself to violence and death. And in that he was manhandled, beaten and left to die a slow death, he was broken. Yet even the breaking of his body was limited. An ancient prophecy said the Messiah would die without a bone being broken, and this limitation by God not only fulfilled

the prophecy but shows even the chaos of Golgotha was not outside the Lordship of God. They went this far and no further.

And Jesus continues this picture of himself as bread. In order to receive the internal benefits of this bread of heaven, a man must eat of it. Jesus said anyone who feeds on him will never hunger. Now we have enough wisdom to understand this is all symbolic. We don't believe, as the Romanists do, that we literally eat the flesh, muscles and sinews of Jesus Christ. That's the sort of belief you arrive at if you take a childish, literal view of everything in scripture.

No, my friends, we eat of Jesus Christ *when we exercise faith* in him. This is what we act out in our Lord's table meeting. The literal eating of literal bread represents the spiritual consumption of Christ through faith in him.

Whether you've taken part in the Lord's table meeting or not, have you really put your faith in Jesus? I have to ask. If you suddenly appeared at the bar of God right now, what would be your plea? It's no good giving God a list of the things you've done. It's no good appealing to the Christian company you keep. It's no good pointing to a decision you made years ago. All that'll get you thrown out of God's Court! It's about **now**. WHERE DO YOU STAND NOW? WHAT IS YOUR PLEA?

The only acceptable position to have is to be joined with Christ. If he is all your plea; if you are resting on him right now, having abandoned all claims to merit of your own, *you are one of God's*. You who have eaten of this bread of heaven, Christ himself: YOU WILL NEVER AGAIN HUNGER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. You have been filled!

The bread of Heaven, broken for you. Gadsby's famous hymn goes like this:

*Immortal honours rest on Jesus head  
My god, my portion, and my living bread  
In Him I live, upon Him cast my care;  
He saves from death, destruction, and despair.*

**Amen.**