## ****JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND****

Mark 6:30-56 Key Verse 6:41

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”

Today we come to one of the central miracles in all the gospels, the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. This event is so important because it is virtually a complete picture of gospel ministry. It symbolically shows us what Jesus does, how he does it, and how his disciples participate. It shows us how we can take part in something greater than what we can do by ourselves.

We’re also covering in today’s passage the miracle of Jesus’ walking on the water. This shows us the all-overcoming power of Jesus’ lordship. Mark’s gospel is unique in how it draws a spiritual connection between these two events and the disciples’ response. It can show us what we, as Jesus’ disciples, really need to learn from these miraculous signs. Let’s each pray for new insight into how we can live victoriously by faith.

1. Like sheep without a shepherd (30-34)

In last week’s passage, we saw how Jesus chose twelve of his disciples, designated them apostles, and sent them on their first training mission. He sent them out two by two to preach that people should repent and heal and drive out demons. It’s like how the Holy Spirit sent Nek and Danny two-by-two to Thailand. These disciples’ work brought glory to Jesus, as people all over Galilee and Judea began to talk about who he was. Jesus’ ministry was gaining attention and growing in influence.

Today’s passage starts with these twelve returning from their mission. Verse 30 says, *“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”* These disciples are now apostles indeed, because the word “apostle” means “messenger” and they had now served as messengers of Jesus.

After Jesus heard about all the apostles had done, he wanted to do something for them. Verse 31 says, *“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’”* As a result of the growing popularity of his ministry, there was now a continual swarm of activity around Jesus and his disciples, so much that there was no time to even eat. I heard that when M. Paul and Mary Kim were serving the transportation for our international Bible conference, there were some days where they were so busy they also were not able to have a meal. That’s necessary sometimes, but of course it can’t be a permanent state of existence. So Jesus suggested a private retreat for just these disciples and himself, so they could get some rest. I imagine the disciples were very happy with this suggestion. Jesus and the twelve got into a boat and went to a remote, uninhabited place.

However, they did not succeed at this time in having their retreat. The crowds of people who were seeking help from Jesus were quite tenacious. Verse 33 says, *“But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.”* People spotted Jesus and the disciples leaving on the boat from a distance, deduced from their course where they were headed to, and ran on foot to intercept them. That’s pretty impressive. As a result, when Jesus and the disciples landed at their destination, it was no longer an uninhabited place. It was crowded with people waiting for Jesus to arrive so they could get some help from him.

How would you feel if you were in the disciples’ position, landing at what you thought was a place for a quiet retreat and seeing yet another thronging crowd of people? How burdensome it could feel to have no break from serving such shamelessly demanding people! I bet the disciples felt a strong urge to turn around and go right back to the boat to try to get away to somewhere else.

But this is where we see what is so special about Jesus. Look at verse 34. *“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”* What was really different about Jesus was how he saw people, how he understood their human condition. In our selfish nature, we often see people based only on what benefit they can provide us or how much trouble we fear they will cause us. But when Jesus saw this teeming crowd of people, he felt compassion. He felt compassion because he could see the real reason they were so shameless in coming to him. They were like this because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Sheep (literal sheep, the animals) without a shepherd are in a very vulnerable situation because of their lack of individual defenses. Jesus saw that in the same way, these people lived lives full of difficulty and sorrow and pain without knowing why and without knowing how to help themselves. The people were so urgently coming to Jesus because, even subconsciously, they were looking for a shepherd.

Jesus could see the people as sheep without a shepherd because he was a shepherd. When we grow in Jesus, we can be shepherds as well. We will never be as good a shepherd as Jesus, but Jesus calls us to see and respond to others’ needs, material and spiritual. We have all needed guidance at some points in our lives. When people are without real shepherds, they will follow wolves in sheep’s clothing, people who only want to exploit them for gain. When more people live as shepherds for lost sheep, the world will become like the kingdom of God.

When Jesus felt compassion on this crowd of people, what did he to do shepherd them? Verse 34 ends by saying, *“So he began teaching them many things.”* The number one way that Jesus took care of God’s sheep was by teaching them the Word of God. The Word of God gives that light and direction that people need in their lives. One of the best ways we can be shepherds who resemble Jesus is by being Bible teachers. Notice that it says Jesus began teaching them many things—not just a few things. Though the gospel itself is simple, Jesus knew that the people actually had a lot to learn about living by faith. That’s why it’s important to keep studying and teaching the Bible, continually working to dig out the meaning and application of the word. If we live as Bible teachers in the long term, we can really help people deeply to solve many issues in their lives and also grow ourselves.

This crowd of needy people is a kind of picture of all the people in the world. When we think about all the suffering in the world, we can feel overwhelmed because there seems to be nothing we can do in the face of such huge need. But there is something we can do. We just have to start with opening our spiritual eyes to see them as sheep without a shepherd. Now we’ll see what the next step after that is.

1. “Go and see” (35-44)

Because Jesus had many things to teach the people, he kept talking for a long time, until the day began to fade into evening. The disciples began to wonder when Jesus would wrap it up. Finally they came to Jesus with a suggestion. Look at verses 35b and 36. *“‘This is a remote place,’ they said, ‘and it’s already very late. 36Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’”*

Are the disciples being shepherds here? Yes, kind of. At least they were aware that the people in the crowd needed to eat. Maybe they came to realize this because they themselves were hungry. But that’s fine; knowing our own needs can also help us be conscious that others have the same needs. The disciples also realized that it could be difficult for this many people to find dinner in the remote place they had followed Jesus to. In my own experience, it can be difficult to find a place to feed even 15 or 20 people when you’re out and about, much less thousands.

So what was the solution the disciples proposed? It was to send the people away so they could find food for themselves. Since there was no single restaurant that could handle this many people, they would need to scatter to many different places. The disciples’ suggestion is very reasonable. There’s nothing intrinsically wrong with their idea. In many circumstances, this might be a totally fine solution. But on this day, Jesus had something else in mind. Jesus agreed with the disciples that the people needed to eat, but he had a different idea about how dinner would be provided. And so, Jesus answered the disciples in verse 37, saying, “You give them something to eat.”

I can just see in my mind the disciples’ jaws dropping open when Jesus told them to feed a crowd of some five thousand people. In response, the disciples expressed in precise numbers why they were not able to do such a thing. They said to him, *“That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”* In the original Greek, the disciples literally said it would take two hundred denarii, where one denarius was one day’s wage for a laborer. Is Jesus asking them to go and empty their entire savings accounts just to give one meal? Why would Jesus even suggest something that was not within the realm of possibility?

Here, Jesus is purposely suggesting something that is impossible without faith. The disciples are reasoning without faith, but Jesus is challenging them to rise to another level, to show them that with faith in him we can exceed the bounds of what is humanly possible. He is teaching them to do God’s work, which can only be done by faith.

Well then, how does one feed a crowd of five thousand people by faith? In verse 38, to get the disciples started, Jesus gave them a more specific direction. He said, *“How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”* Actually, this command also doesn’t make much sense, because the disciples already know they don’t have nearly enough food to feed this whole crowd, not even 1%. Is there even any point in counting? But the disciples obey this simpler command and come back with the report: they have five loaves of bread, and two fish.

The disciples could not feed a crowd of 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. But who can? Jesus can. The five loaves and two fish were given to Jesus, and then, everything was possible. In doing this miracle, Jesus continued to involve his disciples. He had them act as managers, having the people sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then he took the loaves and fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks. Then he gave the food back to his disciples to distribute, and the bread and fish were multiplied until all 5000 people were fed. And when it was all done, the leftover pieces were more than enough to feed the disciples as well.

What good training the disciples received to do God’s work with both faith and action. To do God’s work in our time, we need “go and see” faith. It means that when we see a need that’s beyond our ability to meet, we may think it’s impossible, we may think we have nothing to give, but the one action we can always take is to look for something to give. If we don’t go and see, we never find anything. But if we do, even if what we find seems so tiny, like five loaves and two fish, it will be the starting point for Jesus to do something great. God’s work is done with faith and what we have, not with what we don’t have. When we examine our gifts, abilities, and the resources we have been entrusted with, there is always something there to bring. It may be something we have forgotten about. That’s why it’s so important to just “go and see.” May God bless us to go and see what we have to give to Jesus to feed a spiritually hungry world.

1. “It is I; don’t be afraid” (45-56)

After the people were fed, in verse 45 it says, “Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.” Why was Jesus so urgent to send his disciples away at this time? If we read the other gospels, we can see that it’s because, as a result of the feeding miracle, people were talking about making Jesus king by force. This was not what Jesus came to the world to do, and so he had to disperse the people before they took action on that idea. This was the danger of doing a miracle that provides for people’s physical needs—people become too easily fixated on their material security, thinking only about how Jesus could solve their “bread problem.” Jesus hoped that at least his disciples would take the right lesson from what he had done. After sending them away, Jesus went up on a mountainside for another time of private prayer.

From where Jesus was up on the mountainside, he could see the disciples’ boat out on the lake. He could see, as it says in verse 48, that the disciples were straining against the oars, because the wind was against them. The disciples were again having trouble because of bad weather on the Sea of Galilee. In Chapter 4 we saw how Jesus and the disciples were in danger from a furious storm on the lake. At that time Jesus had been sleeping peacefully in the boat, but when the disciples woke him, Jesus calmed the storm with his voice. Now the disciples were in a similar difficulty, but this time Jesus was not with them. We know the disciples were already tired, but now they had to use all their strength just to keep the boat upright and moving forward. We’ve all experienced times like this in our lives, when troubles and hardships just seem to keep coming, one after the other.

When Jesus saw his disciples struggling in the boat, he decided to help them. What did he do? He went out to the disciples…by walking on the water. What does it mean that Jesus could do this? As when Jesus previously commanded a storm to be still, walking on the water shows Jesus’ lordship through his dominance over nature. Today, when we say someone is a “water walker”, it means they are so good at something that they make difficult things seem easy. Jesus’ walking on the water shows that no force in the world is too powerful for him, and so when we have faith in Jesus, there is nothing in this world that we have to fear.

Verse 48 says that as Jesus neared the disciples’ boat, he was about to pass by them. It seems Jesus purposely didn’t call out or announce his presence to the disciples; rather, he waited for them to recognize him. It’s because Jesus wanted the disciples in the storm to see him and remember that their friend and teacher was indeed Lord of all nature. At this, however, they failed. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake, they just plain freaked out, being totally terrified, thinking Jesus was a ghost, maybe some sort of omen-of-doom water spirit or something. And so, Jesus had to speak to calm them down. In verse 50 he says to them, *“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”* Jesus’ desire for all his disciples is to teach them to overcome fear and be courageous. When the disciples heard their teacher’s voice, they recognized him and let him into the boat. When they did, the wind instantly died down.

Look carefully at what Mark, the author, says about the disciples’ response in verses 51b-52. He writes, *“They were completely amazed, 52for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.”* Mark is saying they reacted this way because they hadn’t learned what they should have learned from the miracle of five loaves and two fish. When they saw such a great miracle, they should have taken it into their hearts and meditated on it and turned it into strong personal faith in Jesus. But instead, its meaning just kind of bounced off them in the busyness of their lives. As a result, their struggle against the waves made their hearts turn dark, and they once again fell victim to fear—so much that they couldn’t even recognize Jesus himself when he came to them in the storm.

This shows us how important it is to believe Jesus’ lordship and overcome fear personally. While we are still living under the power of fear, we cannot be the shepherds we were called to be. When we face trouble after trouble and difficulty after difficulty in our life, what do we have to do? We have to recognize the presence of Jesus in our storm. What does Jesus say to his disciples in the storm when they are freaking out? “It is I”. It means Jesus is behind everything. He was there all along. Jesus is in the storm, it’s not bothering him, he can walk right on top of it, and so we should not be so dismayed. Jesus is working everywhere in our lives, if we have spiritual eyes to see it. We have to hear him say, “It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

After crossing the lake with his disciples, Jesus arrived in the place named Gennesaret. Jesus’ ministry had now reached a kind of peak of its power and influence. This is what Mark summarizes for us in verses 53-56. Everywhere Jesus went, healing power came out of him. Jesus’ healing power is a sign that he is the Messiah who can heal us of all our life’s agonies.

Today we saw a lot about who Jesus is and what he does. Let’s pray that we may learn to co-work with Jesus, sharing his compassion and bringing our five loaves and two fish. Most of all, let’s pray that we may take the miracles Jesus shows us into our hearts and overcome fear through faith in his absolute lordship.