

NCBC Youth Group  
November 10, 2019 | Communion Sunday

THE AMAZING POWER AND COMPASSION OF JESUS  
MARK 6:30-44

PARALLEL PASSAGES: MATTHEW 14:13-21; LUKE 9:10-17; JOHN 6:1-14

**Introduction**

Of all the miracles Jesus performed, only a handful were recorded in the New Testament (John 20:30). John exclaimed at the end of his gospel account: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (Jn. 21:25).

So far in our studies in Mark, we have seen many miracles—some recorded in detail, and some are brief. We come across yet another miracle in our passage today: The Feeding of the Five Thousand. This should be a familiar one to us, and Mark records this one in detail. Aside from the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, this is the only other miracle that is recorded by all four gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and we find great detail in all four accounts.

Now, the title is a bit of a misnomer. Jesus didn’t just feed five thousand. The crowd was much larger than that, as we will discover as we begin the exposition of the text. But before we do that, let’s review the context.

Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in Mark 6:7-13. They preached the gospel, they were given power to heal the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons (Matthew 10:8). Mark 6:14-29 shifts the focus to John the Baptist and recalls the murder of John the Baptist, which we studied last week. Our text today shifts back to Jesus and His disciples. In verse 30 we read, “The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.” Jesus sent them out in verse 7, and now they are coming back and debriefing Him on what they had done and taught. We’re not sure how much time elapsed between verse 7 and verse 30, but it could very well be weeks, if not months.

**Compassion for the Disciples**

Undoubtedly, they were exhausted from their short-term mission trips. On top of that, they were probably exhausted by the constant flow of people that were coming and going (31). In

fact, verse 31 tells us that they didn't even have time to eat.<sup>1</sup> Jesus shows them compassion and tells them to go to a secluded place to rest for a while (31).

Jesus understood their need to rest. Even though He is God, He understands our temptations and weaknesses. Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Remember the miracle of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee in Mark 4:35-41? What was Jesus doing in the midst of the raging storm? He was sleeping. He was exhausted from a full day of ministry (Mark 4:1-34). He knew what it was like to be exhausted, and He had compassion on His disciples. He will take them away from the crowd to get some rest.

Verse 32, "They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves."<sup>2</sup> But, they wouldn't get away from the crowd for too long, because in verse 33, the people saw and recognized Jesus. They began following Him and ran to the destination ahead of Jesus and the disciples. Luke 9:10 tells us that they went to Bethsaida. We're not really sure where this is, but John 6:1 mentions, "opposite Tiberias." It is very likely that Bethsaida was on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Some maps refer to it as "Bethsaida-Julias." In John 1:44 we're told that Peter and Andrew (brothers) were from Bethsaida, but they lived in Capernaum when Jesus began His public ministry. Philip was also from Bethsaida.

The journey to Bethsaida was likely a short one, both by boat and on foot. We're not told where they departed, but again, it is very likely that they departed from Capernaum. Now, most of these people followed Jesus so eagerly because they were intrigued by Him. Their interest in Jesus was only superficial. John 6:2 tells us that "a large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick."

They made it ashore in verse 34, and the large crowd was there. The crowd was very large: verse 33 tells us that people ran there from "all the cities." Their plans of resting in a secluded place has been interrupted by the crowd. The only rest they had was probably the time spent in the boat. If we were in that situation, we would probably be slightly irritated, but Jesus did not turn them away. Instead of being irritated by the crowd, He had compassion on them, verse 34. Luke 9:11 adds that Jesus welcomed them. Most people

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark 3:20

<sup>2</sup> This boat might be the same one as the one mentioned in Mark 5:21, which might also be same as the one in Mark 4:36; 5:2, 18. This boat is referred to as "the" boat. The definite article is used multiple times in reference to this boat. This boat might belong to one of the fishermen—Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

would be “hangry” under the same conditions, and it’s a sin to act out in irritation. But our Lord is perfect, and instead of focusing on His own hunger or exhaustion, He had compassion for the crowd.

### **Compassion for the Crowd**

He shows compassion on the crowd in two ways: spiritually and physically. Verse 34 says, “They were like sheep without a shepherd.” That’s a spiritual concern. Sheep without a shepherd faces serious dangers. Sheep cannot clean themselves, they got lost easily, and they are defenseless. This is a spiritual danger face by people who do not repent and believe in the gospel. They will never receive eternal life. So, Jesus began teaching them. Luke 9:11 tells us that He was speaking to them about the kingdom of God. This is the salvation message, the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus, however, was also compassionate to them by showing physical concern. Of course, the physical is always secondary to the spiritual. What good is a healthy person on earth who spends eternity in hell? Luke 9:11 and Matthew 14:14 adds that not only was Jesus teaching them, He also cured the sick. I mentioned this last week, but I think we often overlook the compassion of Jesus. He performed these signs and miracles to validate His message. He could have used any miracles to validate His message, but He chose to be compassionate in His miracles.

### **Feeding the Five Thousand**

As time went on, verse 35 tells us that it is now mid to late afternoon. They were in a fairly remote and unpopulated place,<sup>4</sup> so they said to Jesus in verse 36, “Send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” That’s a completely reasonable request. It is getting late, and there is nothing to eat. They didn’t prepare food ahead of time for this many people, so the only option in their minds was to send them away.

Back in Jesus’ time, you can’t just go to a drive-through. You had to work to prepare your food daily. They didn’t have refrigeration, so food that is not preserved (by drying or salting) goes bad if you try to store it for more than a day.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This is a common theme of Jesus’ teaching, *cf.* Mark 1:15, 4:11, 26-43.

<sup>4</sup> The word is “desolate,” but it doesn’t refer to desert-like conditions. We read later that it is probably springtime because the grass is green.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 42.

Obviously, they were concerned with the physical impossibility of feeding upwards of 20,000-30,000 people (more on the number later). However, they might have also been a little selfish. They were probably hungry (*cf.* Mark 6:31).

We know Jesus doesn't send them away. Jesus answers them in verse 37: "You give them something to eat!" Jesus did this to test His disciples. John 6:6 says, "This He was saying to test them, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do."<sup>6</sup> Jesus is never without an answer, and as the sovereign God, He already knew what He was going to do.

In other words, Jesus was not asking them for a solution—He had the solution. He was asking them to test their faith. They have seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and calm the storm. Do they believe that He can create enough food for the massive crowd? I want you to also remember that the disciples themselves were given power to heal, cast out demons, and raise the dead as they were sent out just earlier in this chapter (*cf.* Matthew 10:8). Supernatural healing, raising the dead, and casting out demons are not human solutions to human problems. They are supernatural solutions. Do the disciples believe?

How much food was available? Verse 38, "Five loaves and two fish." In John 6:8-9, we're told that Andrew found "a lad here who has five barley loaves<sup>7</sup> and two fish." That's a meal for one person, for one small child.<sup>8</sup> Just so you're not confused, we're not talking about five loaves of bread that we're accustomed to. A loaf of bread is literally a bread-cake, like a biscuit or a cracker.<sup>9</sup> The little boy had five crackers and two fish, enough for one meal, not for tens of thousands of people.

At this point, Luke 9:14 and John 6:10 tell us that there were 5,000 people. However, there were more than 5,000 people there. Matthew 14:21 tells us that there were 5,000 men "besides women and children." It is estimated that there was probably a total of 20,000 people there.

In order to feed that massive crowd, there had to be some order, so in verse 39, Jesus commanded them to sit down, and they did: "[40] They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties." The Greek word, *prasia*, indicates that they sat down in rows.<sup>10</sup> This also made it

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<sup>6</sup> In John 6:5-7, Jesus was speaking to Philip.

<sup>7</sup> Bread could be made from barley or wheat. Barley was less favored but cheaper (Ralph Gower, 2005, 47-48)

<sup>8</sup> "Lad" in Greek is a double diminutive, signifying a small child.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph Gower, 2005, 43-44

<sup>10</sup> Cleon Rodgers Jr. and Cleon Rodgers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 80. The word literally means to a "garden bed," but it became an idiom for ranks and divisions (Thayer's Lexicon, G4237).

easier for them to distribute the food. I'm not sure if you noticed, but when Jesus commanded them to sit down, they did. Whenever Jesus commands anything, it was done. This attests to the fact that Jesus is sovereign, and He is a sovereign God. By the way, verse 39 gives us the detail that they were sitting on green grass. This is a reference to springtime.<sup>11</sup>

After they sat down, Jesus took what He had—five loaves and two fish—and He blessed the food. I don't want you to be mistaken here. People think that blessing the food was imparting something special to the food. That's not true. If we go back to the original Greek, we find that the word "bless" is *eulogeo*, which in this context means "in the giving of thanks."<sup>12</sup> In fact, if we look at the parallel passage of John 6:11, we see the words "having given thanks."<sup>13</sup> Giving thanks before eating should be something that we practice. It is an acknowledgement and showing gratitude to God who provides for us, including our food. Some people pray before a meal, and they do so ritualistically. That's not good. We don't just utter some words before a meal—that's meaningless. Some people don't pray before a meal—that's not good either. We should be motivated to pray because of our genuine gratitude for God's provisions.

After giving thanks, verse 41 continues: He "broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all." Jesus just created the food. This is fish that never swam, and ingredients in the bread that were never planted.

Verse 42, "They all ate and were satisfied." They weren't each just given a bite. They were filled.<sup>14</sup> What's amazing is Jesus created the perfect number of bread and fish, because when everyone ate and were satisfied, His disciples picked up 12 full baskets of the bread and fish (43). Why 12 baskets? Because there were 12 disciples. After the crowd ate, they also picked up just enough food for them to eat.<sup>15</sup>

Verse 44 tells us that there were 5,000 men who ate the loaves. Out of all these people, the Lord made just enough food for everyone plus 12. Only God can perfectly create just enough food for everyone.

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<sup>11</sup> John 6:4 tells us the Passover was near.

<sup>12</sup> Thayer's Lexicon.

<sup>13</sup> See also 1 Tim. 4:3-5

<sup>14</sup> Cleon Rodgers Jr. & Cleon Rodgers III, 1998, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Basket refers to a wicker basket that they used to carry food.

### **Conclusion**

Well, after seeing this, what did the people think? Did they believe that He is God? Perhaps some did, but most did not. Mark doesn't record it for us, but John 6 records the aftermath. Their intrigue of Jesus is still superficial. John 6:15 tells us that the crowd wanted to make Jesus king. Why not? They wanted to usher in the ultimate welfare state. A king who could heal them, relieve all physical suffering, and feed them. If they made him king, they probably wanted to march into Tiberias, overthrow Herod Antipas—the man who murdered John the Baptist (Mark 6:16)—and eventually overthrow Roman rule.

Jesus would not allow them to make Him king. In fact, the next morning, they showed up again. They wanted free breakfast. John 6:26, “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’” Sadly, many who followed Him would stop following Him. John 6:66 says, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” People who are in it for superficial reasons never have true conversion. John later writes in 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.”

No matter how great the miracle or how many miracles Jesus performed, many still did not believe. It's a matter of the heart. It's not a matter of seeing more signs and miracles, and that is still true today. Let us have a genuine love for our Lord, and may we not have a superficial interest in Christ.