



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Over 5000 People Served (Mark 6:30-44)

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Paul Meinsen / (573) 418-2077 / www.capitolcom.org / paul.meinsen@capitolcom.org

The Apostle John wrote, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30 ESV). It seems best to understand that each gospel writer picked certain events, works and words of Jesus that best fit the purpose for which they wrote. Especially since, according to John, "Were every one of them (Jesus' works) to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25, ESV).

In our discussions through the gospel of Mark, we have already been introduced to specific miracles that Jesus performed; along with, a number of general statements concerning other acts. As we continue in Mark, Jesus' miracles seem to be getting more and more incredible. The miracles in next couple of passages are no exception. In this study, we plan to examine Jesus' miraculous feeding of over 5000 men; which is the only miraculous act, besides Jesus' resurrection, recorded by all four gospel writers (Matthew 14, Luke 9, John 6). In the next study, we will discuss the incredible event of Jesus walking on water.

Mark 6:30-44 *And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. And when it was already quite late, His disciples came up to Him and began saying, "The place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five and two fish." And He commanded them all to recline by groups on the green grass. And they reclined in companies of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. And there were five thousand men who ate the loaves.*

The stage is set...the disciples have returned from their first adventure in preaching and miracle-working (Mark 6:7-13). Jesus wanted to get away with them for some "R-n-R", but the people beat them to the spot. This place is out in the middle of nowhere. It is a desolate place, just east of the Sea of Galilee.

The question for today's passage that we want to answer is "why." Why did Jesus perform such incredible miracles over sicknesses, demons, and nature? What was it that He wanted to show people in these acts? What was His purpose?

We are going to look at one answer to those questions today as we look at the feeding of the 5000. Next week, we will cover other reasons for the exhibition of His great power.

JESUS KNEW THE TRUE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE WHO PURSUED HIM

Scripture points out a severe problem throughout the history of the nation of Israel--the lack of proper leadership by those who were called to be leaders. (cf. 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:1-23; Isaiah 56:10-12; Zechariah 10:1-3; 11:14-17.). And when the leaders did not lead, the people suffered.

Jeremiah 50:6 *My people have become lost sheep; Their shepherds have led them astray. They have made them turn aside on the mountains; They have gone along from mountain to hill And have forgotten their resting place.*

Jeremiah 23:1-2 *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD.*

Those who were called and appointed to lead God's people in His ways were derelict in their duties. They were called to teach the ways of God, provide an example and take care of those in need. Instead, they were leading the people in the wrong direction--away from God. Thus, the other needs were also being neglected.

Scripture refers to people, as noted in the passages above and in Jesus' words, as sheep. Why the analogy of "sheep"? First of all, sheep were an

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animal which the people in Palestine were very familiar. Therefore, they knew the characteristics. Sheep are defenseless, stupid and must be carefully lead in the right direction and not driven (like cattle).

Sheep without shepherds will self-destruct. They have no place to go; they will aimlessly wonder; they will be ravaged by predators. And if any survive the predators, they will eventually kill themselves off because they do not know how to find water and food. They are fully dependent upon the shepherd to provide them what they truly need.

When Jesus looked around at the masses that constantly surrounded Him, this is exactly what He saw--sheep without shepherds.

In Jesus' day, 95% people were known as the *amhaartež*—"the people of the land." They were very poor farmers and laborers who struggled for their daily bread. All it took was the weather not to cooperate or armies to start fighting and the people would be in desperate trouble. Survival was the name of the game.

These same people who struggled to make ends meet also were oppressed spiritually. One set of leaders, the Pharisees, were the leaders of the local synagogue; known for their legalistic piety and zeal for the law and traditions. Another set of leaders, the Sadducees, were among the wealthiest of land owners. They were quite liberal in their theology and very much in collaboration with the Romans; whom the *amhaartež* despised for their oppressions. The Sadducees saw the Pharisees as religious nuts and the Pharisees saw the Sadducees as political and religious sell-out. In spite of these, they tolerated each other.

MATTHEW 12:20 A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT...

Both groups look down upon the *amhaartež*, especially the Pharisees. They were unlearned in the law and their "spiritual" leaders viewed them as "unclean" and therefore, hopeless. In the midst of the common person's quest for survival, their religious leaders laid upon them a very heavy legalistic burden of "worshipping" God. The laws and regulations were many and restricting. To be right before God, the people had to fully obey the Torah (Old Testament law) and the oral traditions—which was totally impossible. The Pharisees paraded around like they kept the laws, and thus, they threw more contempt and guilt upon the common person. Therefore, many did not even try and gave up hope.

Almost all in Palestine felt the political oppression laid on them by Rome. The Romans were in charge of most of the known world, including Palestine and the Jews hated it. The Romans brought in their military, and installed their own governors and "kings." The Roman soldiers were a constant reminder of the occupation. They were known for making the Jews do menial tasks for them, and extortion, and for blackmailing money from the populace to supplement their pay.

The Roman government also laid a heavy tax burden on the people. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the day, noted that the typical peasant in Palestine paid 40% of their income in taxes. The taxes were then used to build temples and shrines to their "gods" and for other purposes the Jews believed were immoral.

The situation in Palestine was a powder keg. Jewish Zealots were constantly on the prowl looking for any opportunity to attack the Romans; hoping to kick them out of the land. And Rome was ready to move in at any sign of civil disturbance to forcefully restore the peace.

Needless to say, the people were not chasing Jesus around the Sea of Galilee and following Him into remote places because they were "fat and happy." These were desperate people. Some were following just to see the big show, some had selfish desires, and others knew Jesus was their only hope for healing. But some were true believers and followers. Nevertheless, Jesus saw their condition, "as sheep without a shepherd", and this drew out the compassion from within.

JESUS SHOWED GREAT COMPASSION UPON THE PEOPLE WHO PURSUED HIM

Jesus could have been upset, but rather He was moved with compassion. He had desired to get away with His disciples who had just returned from their first "mission" trip to give them rest (31). And he could have told all the others, "Hey, I've been with you a long time. I need some time with my men. I will see you tomorrow after lunch."

But He didn't; when He saw them, "He felt compassion." Taken from the Greek, "felt compassion" means "literally to be moved in one's bowels, where the ancients considered the emotions and feelings to reside."¹ In other words, it was not a cold or reluctant, emotion-less duty to help, nor was it merely an emotion without any help. Rather Jesus was deeply moved by the suffering, confusion, despair, and spiritual lostness of those around Him.

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Other things drew out the compassion of Jesus Christ

- A widow woman whose only son had died (Luke 7:13)
- an urgent request of a leper (Mark 6:34)
- Two blind men who cried out to Him for their sight (Matthew 20:34)
- People distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36) which caused Jesus to say, "The harvest is plentiful..."
- People's hunger (Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:2)

Jesus showed His compassion in two ways. First of all, He taught them (Mark 6:34). This may seem like an unusual way to show care to someone, but "in His compassion, Jesus sees a whole people without direction, without purpose, without a leader. Jesus utilizes this opportunity to teach the people..."²²

Luke fleshed this out and explained that Jesus taught about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). Why the Kingdom of God? Because it is only under the rule of God (thus "His Kingdom") that a person finds true direction, true purpose and a true shepherd. Anything else will be found fruitless and lead toward a purposeless dead-end.

Please note, friend: If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, you are truly without real hope, purpose, direction, and salvation—regardless of what you may think. Even if you are a "driven" person, having a direction and purpose in life, what about death and the next life? Without Christ, you have nothing; except, an eternal future in the punishment God has in store for those who reject His Son. But, Jesus is compassionate. If you repent of your sins and trust His sacrifice (not your own works), you will find Him full of compassion—supplying that which you really need: forgiveness of sins (Colossians 2:11-15). Through His death and resurrection, He has supplied that which will remove your sins.

Secondly, Jesus showed His compassion by taking care of their physical needs. He talked with His disciples about the lack of food and supplies for the crowd who had been listening to Him all day. The disciples responded by recommending the people go find some dinner on their own. He then commanded His disciples to give the people something to eat, but they did not have the money and they only found a few loaves and fish. And then Jesus took over and responded to the people's physical needs by supplying that which was needed.

The compassion of Jesus took on many forms. It meant that He taught truth, for truth is what gives real hope to hopeless people. It also meant that He fed some, healed many, raised a few from the dead and delivered a number from demonic possession. And to others, compassion meant a

rebuke and a challenge to the ways they were living. In his gospel, Matthew reminded the readers of what was prophesied about the Messiah, *A battered reed He will not break off, And a smoldering wick He will not put out...* (Matthew 12:20; cf. Isaiah 42:3).

JESUS PERFORMED AN AMAZING MIRACLE ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE WHO PURSUED HIM

In light of what has just been written, discussing the actual miracle seems almost anti-climatic. This miracle, though, in all four gospels, is highlighted as the pinnacle of Jesus' ministry and popularity. Here are a few notes:

#1 Mark doesn't tell us how the miracle actually happened. Did food appear after each trip the disciples made? Or after the prayer, was there just a big pile of bread and fish where the five loaves and two fish had been placed? The imperfect verb in verse 41 "He kept giving" showed an action that started in the past and was continuing through the current event. Mark Moore notes: "It is curious to note that none of the four Gospel writers even give a hint as to how this miracle took place."²³

It seems best to understand that Jesus is demonstrating His creative powers; reproducing fish and bread out of "nothing". He has shown His authority and power over sickness, nature, the demonic realm and even death. In this instance, He shows His that He can create by simply saying a word--giving thanks to God and blessing (Mark 6:41).

#2 Mark notes that everyone was full (42). This was not a "tide-you-over-till-you-get-to-town" snack, or a small bag of peanuts and a third of a can of Coke. There was enough for all to have a meal; a complete, satisfying meal. As with all of Jesus miracles, this miracle was immediate, complete and irrefutable. There were even 12 baskets left over; where once there were only five loaves and two fish.

#3 All the gospel authors note that there were 5000 MEN. Most scholars agree that when probable women & children were added, there could have easily been 15-20,000 people in attendance.

#4 In his gospel, John writes that the people wanted to make Jesus king right there and then (John 6:5). And why not? Remember the desperate condition of the people. Their daily living was mere survival. They were politically and religiously oppressed by the Romans and their "spiritual" leaders. They had no real hope.

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Then, all of a sudden, here comes a miracle worker from Galilee. He teaches in a way that is filled with authority. He shows mercy to great numbers of people in need. He does not show preference nor cowers to anyone. He has shown His ability to heal all kinds of physical ailments and even raise people from the dead. Now, He has shown He can provide the daily sustenance for a huge crowd.

Why not make Him king? If He could not remove the Romans by Himself, who would not go to fight for Him? If one is hurt or killed, Jesus can restore. No one will ever grow hungry, for He can provide much from very little. This was exactly what the nation of Israel was looking for in their coming Messiah.

But Jesus again showed compassion, even if it does not look like it. He knew what they wanted to do (John 6:15), so He simply dismissed them, sent the disciples away on a boat and escaped to the mountains. His compassion to them was to fulfill His mission on earth. He was to be their sacrifice, not their king; their redemption, not their ruler (at least, not at this time). He got away from the temporal good to provide their eternal need—salvation and forgiveness of sins (Colossians 2:11-15; Romans 5:6-21). He came not “to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

CONCLUSION

As we examine the reasons why Jesus did the miracles that He did, one major reason was because of His heartfelt, emotion-filled compassionate care that He had on people. He saw them, and He still does, as sheep without a shepherd—defenseless, without direction, without wisdom, hopeless, and wallowing in their sin without a clue of their desperate condition.

He provided for them—by teaching them of God’s great kingdom and by miraculously providing the nourishment they needed.

If one comes turns to Christ today, he or she will also find Him full of compassion and grace. He will not turn away a soul prompted to seek Him. In His death and resurrection, He has already accomplished that which we all need—forgiveness, salvation, hope, love. Close with Him today. Repent of your sins by praying for His forgiveness—desiring no longer to pursue those sinful pleasures but instead seeking to please Him who has saved you.

If one is already a follower of Jesus Christ, he or she will continue to find Him full of grace and compassion. That person should live to be a

reflection of Jesus Christ to others by showing much compassion, and by proclaiming a message of grace to a world that has no direction, purpose, hope and dead in sins. Instead of looking at others with an impatient attitude, they should be viewed as “sheep without a shepherd.” Thus, let those who follow after Jesus, who have been shown much grace and compassion already, be eager to lead others to the Great Shepherd. May people see in God’s people, the love and compassion of God.

¹ John MacArthur, *Matthew 8-15* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 427.

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 2002), 191.

³ Mark Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ, Vol. 1: From Glory to Galilee* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1996), 289.