

## **A Miraculous Meal -- Mark 6:30-44**

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Today we are continuing our journey through the book of Mark. As we begin, I invite you to bow your heads with me for prayer:

"Lord, we come expecting great things. Your Word satisfies like nothing else does. And so we pray that we might be filled today. May we all receive the nourishment that our spirits so crave. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. Amen.

Some of you may remember that last month I flew out to Washington State for my friend, Sean's, wedding. I remember a conversation I had with him on the phone while we were planning for the event. He said he was really looking forward to all his friends being together in one place. He has friends from all over the country, and this was one time when they would be with him all at the same time. He also was anticipating the opportunity for all his friends to get to know each other. The wedding went really well. It was a special time and a blessing to be a part of. A few days after the wedding I was again talking to Sean on the phone. He said something that stood out to me and that I could relate to from my wedding. He shared how he appreciated me being a part of his wedding and then said, "But it all seems like a dream now." It was such a special time and it happened so quickly. Now that it was all over, it hardly seemed real. This wedding event was a climactic time in Sean's life.

Our story today is also a climax. The event recorded in our Scripture today was without parallel in Jesus' ministry. It is the first story and the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospel accounts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all wrote down this climactic event in their records.

Let's now read together a summary of today's story:

*Jesus took His apostles to a remote area in order to talk with them about their recent missionary tour. A large crowd, however, followed them. Jesus had compassion on the multitude and spent nearly an entire day teaching them. Around sunset Jesus had everyone sit down on the grass. Using five loaves and two fish He provided enough food for everyone to be filled. Afterwards, twelve baskets of leftovers were collected.*

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in our story today. First of all He experienced debriefing with His apostles (Mark 6:30-32). Why did Jesus do this? Why did He do this now? First of all, John the Baptist had recently died. That was the last story we covered in the book of Mark (Mark 6:14-29). For this reason some time for reflection and seclusion was needed. At this time the apostles had just completed their missionary tour throughout Galilee. They had come back to Jesus telling Him everything that had happened. Some time to reflect on this experience was needed. And so it was an appropriate time for Jesus and His apostles to leave in a boat to a deserted place. It is most likely that they left from Capernaum. And according to Luke's account of this story (Luke 9:10) the place they went to was near the town of Bethsaida. This was located on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. By boat this trip would have been about four miles.

While Jesus and His apostles are in this remote area, they discuss the successes and failures of the apostles' recent missionary tour. Their first time preaching and healing on their own had been a bitter-sweet experience. They had performed many miracles. They had seen people healed. And yet they also had experienced defeat and rejection. This time alone with Jesus greatly encouraged them. It gave them new

energy and life. It was an inspiring retreat for them all. And yet while they were thus engaged, something else was going on not too far away.

When Jesus left Capernaum to a deserted place near Bethsaida, he was followed (Mark 6:33). Mark records that the crowds of people who had been following Jesus saw Him leave. And they ran after Him on foot. For them, traveling by land, the journey would have been about three miles instead of four. And so Mark records that "they arrived before them". They got to Bethsaida before Jesus and His apostles. So, Jesus had to be a little sneaky in order to find a remote place unnoticed. While they were spending this time alone, the crowds were looking for them. It says in Mark 6:33 that these people came "from all the cities". John mentions in his account of this story (John 6:4) that the Passover was near. So all the Jews from the surrounding regions were coming to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover. As these people are traveling, they join the growing crowd that is looking for Jesus.

Third, Jesus experienced responding with compassion. Mark 6:34 mentions that after spending some time with His apostles in seclusion, "He came out". In other words, he came out of hiding in response to all these crowds of people who were looking for him. As He saw them wondering around, He had compassion on them. This growing crowd appeared like sheep that were without a shepherd. This should not have been so. But they had been neglected by the priests and scribes. The religious leaders of their day had not shepherded them like they should have. And so Jesus chose to provide the care that they did not. He decided to fulfill the role of shepherd Himself by educating them in the things of God. And so He spent nearly the entire day teaching them.

Fourth, Jesus experienced an urgent situation. The sun was getting low on the horizon. And the apostles were worried. According to Mark 6:44 there were about 5,000 men besides women and children gathered listening to Jesus teach. Knowing that these people had no food to eat and that they would soon be quite hungry, the apostles concluded that they needed to send these people on their way before there's trouble. Thousands of hungry people could be disastrous. Jesus didn't seem to be doing anything about this urgent situation, so the apostles come to Him with an idea. Mark 6:35, 36 records the apostles' attempt to bring the day to a close: "Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." Jesus didn't seem to think that their idea was a very good one. Instead He told them in Mark 6:37 to give the people something to eat. Well that certainly was humanly impossible, but Jesus was calling them to have a part in yet another miracle. They had just gotten back from working many miracles in Jesus' name, so such a statement should not have seemed strange. But the apostles were not in "ministry mode". They were in "worry & desperation mode". And so they were offended by Jesus' instructions. In Mark 6:37 they replied, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?" Their response shows their irritation. It is very unlikely that they even had that kind of money. A denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer. So for the apostles to have two hundred of them would have been quite a bit of money, perhaps the equivalent of \$1,000 today. Jesus did not argue with them. Instead He extended another invitation for them to get involved in the upcoming miracle. In Mark 6:38 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." This time at least one or more of the apostles follow Jesus' instructions. And they come back with five loaves and two fish.

Last of all, Jesus experienced feeding the hungry. In Mark 6:39 Jesus had everyone "sit down". This actually means to "recline". They didn't have tables and chairs, so the common position for eating was to recline. Mark's inserted detail about the people sitting "on the green grass" is significant. Some of you may know that Southern California is only green part of the year. The rainy season is in the winter, so for a few months in the spring, there is some greenery. The climate in the land of Israel is similar. So for the grass to be green at the

time of this story meant that it took place after the winter rains, which makes sense since Passover was near and this festival took place in the spring at the time of barley harvest. This green grass, though, was not like what we have in our yards. The word for "grass" actually means "food for animals", so it would have been more like a hay field. Mark 6:39 records that Jesus had the people sit "in groups". These would have been u-shaped groups for easy access and some were in groups of 50 and others of 100. Mark also mentions in verse 40 that the people sat "in ranks" or more literally, "row by row". So, Jesus was directing a very orderly arrangement. There was order among the groups as well as within the groups. So, Jesus had the food and the people were seated in order. But before the meal began, Jesus paused. Verse 41 says Jesus "looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves. He acknowledged that God was the source of this food as well as of the miracle about to take place. Throughout the gospels it is clear that this practice before a meal was a well-engrained habit in the life of Jesus.

Jesus then gave the bread and fish to the apostles. Once again, He got them involved in the miracle. To everyone's amazement the food never ran out. Jesus kept reaching in the basket and bringing out more food. The supply didn't run out until everyone was full. This story is like that of the widow in Zarephath mentioned in 1 Kings 17. She only had enough flour and oil for one more meal during a famine in Israel. But because she believed the word of Elijah the prophet, every day thereafter, when she reached in her barrel of flour and of oil, there was always enough for another meal. Mark 6:43 mentions that not only was everyone filled, but there were lots of leftovers. In fact, there were "twelve baskets" of leftovers. These baskets would have been used for carrying food. Apparently other people had brought some food, but had already eaten it, unlike the boy (mentioned in John 6:9) who gave his lunch of five loaves and two fish to Andrew. In providing leftovers Jesus gave the people an opportunity to share the blessings they had received with others. These leftovers would give them a chance to tell far and wide of the miracle that Jesus had performed.

This is an amazing story, indeed. But it has not been recorded for this reason alone. It has been written down so that we might experience the same miracle-working power in our own lives. When Jesus worked this miracle, He did so as our Example. There are two ways I would like to consider with you in which Jesus is revealed in this story as our Example. First of all, He is our Example in that He initiated time for reflection. The apostles had been busily doing the Lord's work. There was still much more work to be done. They had experienced a lot of success. And yet Jesus, instead of sending them back out, calls them aside for some quiet time of reflection. He realized they the apostles needed counsel. Their bodies and spirits needed to be restored. And He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who rests in order to be more effective. It's someone who takes time to be alone and commune with Christ and nature, as well as their own hearts.

I helped organize a "bachelor party" for Sean's wedding. Most of the time this is used to as an opportunity for the groom to live it up and to do all those things that he won't be able to do once he's married. But knowing Sean, I knew this would not only be a waste of our time, but also not something Sean would enjoy. So, instead, we took some time to reminisce. Those of us who were close friends with Sean got together and talked about the most memorable times we had had with Sean. Those of us who were married also shared some advice on married life. And Sean was very appreciative. It was a very meaningful and enjoyable time. And that is the experience of a healthy and dangerous Christian. It's someone who takes time for meaningful reflection. When we see all that has to be done before the Lord returns, the solution is not working harder and longer. Instead it's praying the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers.

Second, Jesus is revealed as our Example in this story in that His provision was simple and abundant. Jesus did not provide an extravagant meal. He used a boy's lunch. John records that the bread was made from

barley. Barley was cheap, cheaper than wheat. So, this boy was most likely poor. And this is what Jesus used to feed all these people. He provided enough of this simple food to satisfy everyone. No one left hungry. In fact, they had food to take home with them in their empty lunch baskets.

And so Jesus reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who eats simply because their spirit is full. The menu that Jesus provided was simple. And that was all the people desired, because their spirits had just taken part in a spiritual feast through Jesus' teaching. Our culture has this flipped around. We eat in excess and hoard food because we have starved spirits. Now I like Golden Corral as much as anybody. But you go in there and there's all this food and so many different options. It overwhelms the senses and often leads to gorging oneself. But Jesus reveals in our story that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who eats simply because their spirit is full. When we have a real and living experience with Jesus, we will eat more simply. Food will not have such a central part in our lives.

Like the apostles, many of us here have answered the call to ministry, to be a part of God's miracle-working power. But we may also feel insufficient. Our five loaves and two fish may not seem near enough to feed such a large crowd. Our abilities and talents may seem insufficient in comparison with the need. But God still works miracles today. Be like the boy who gave his lunch. Bring what you have. I would like to close the service today by dedicating you to the ministry God has called you to. We will sing for our closing song, "Side by Side". I invite you to stand and hold hands with the people next to you. As we move ahead in this new year, let's move ahead together. Let's stand side by side and see God do what is humanly impossible.

"Side by side we stand, awaiting God's command,  
Worshiping the saving King,  
Living by His grace and moving on in faith,  
Jesus Himself will see us through.

(Chorus)  
Why don't you meet me in heaven?  
We'll join hands together.  
Meet me at the Savior's side.  
I'll meet you in heaven.  
We'll sing songs together.  
Brothers and sisters I'll be there.

Soldiers all are we, to go where Jesus leads;  
We'll fight in faith and we will overcome!  
Heaven is our goal and saving every soul.  
Pray that we all will be there.

Praise the Lord, we all will be there!

"Lord, we can't help but notice the vast number of people who need fed. The needs all around us are often intimidating. All we have are five barley loaves and two small fish. And yet when brought to you they are capable of feeding thousands. Help us to wait on You. Help us to not forget to spend time alone with You so that our spirits may be filled to overflowing and we can share Your love with those around us. Lord, each person here today who has answered the call to ministry, I dedicate to You. Bless them. Feed them. Counsel them. Use them to work miracles in this year of 2011. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.