

When Little Becomes Much

Mark 6:30-44

Apart from Christ's resurrection, the miracle Jesus performs in Mark 6:30-44 is the most emphasized of all His miracles. One of the reasons I say that is because this miracle is recorded in all four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. On the other hand, the miracle of Christ calming the storm in Mark 4, which was extremely impressive, does not appear in John's Gospel. Christ's walking on the sea, which Pastor Jeff will preach on next week, is not in Luke. And Christ raising Lazarus to life after he had been dead four days – is **only** recorded by John. But Christ's miracle of feeding five thousand men – besides women and children – with only five small loaves and two fish – is recorded in all the Gospels, and is also mentioned two more times in Mark. In addition to all that, Jesus basically does this miracle again in Mark 8:1-9. And so this morning I hope we will grow in our understanding of why this miracle is so important for us today.

Our Scripture reading has reminded us that back in Mark 6:7-13, Jesus had sent His twelve disciples, by groups of two, into numerous villages and towns throughout Galilee. They took no food or money because the people they ministered to were to provide for their material needs. Jesus said the workman deserves his wages. The job of the disciples was to preach to the people about the need for repentance – as they cast out demons and healed the sick in Jesus' name. This assignment probably took many weeks to fulfill. When we come to Mark 6:30 we learn that the disciples had finally finished their task, "The apostles gathered around

Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”

Did you notice that the disciples are now referred to as “apostles” – which means “sent ones.” They had been commissioned by Jesus with the specific task – to preach, to heal and to cast out demons in His name. If any of the people in those towns had rejected the ministry of the apostles – it was the same as rejecting Christ. To show the seriousness of a village rejecting their message, the disciples were told to shake the dust off their feet when they left that town. What is that all about? In Matthew 10:15, Jesus stated that God’s judgement upon those towns would be more severe than His judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

To all followers of Christ, let me say that we too have been commissioned by the resurrected – and now ascended Lord Jesus. Our task is to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing all those who repent and embrace Christ – and teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded us. If people reject the good news of the gospel, they are not just rejecting us, they are rejecting Christ, the Son of the living God.

What we learn in Mark 6:31-32, is that many people were responding positively to the ministry of Christ’s disciples. Let’s read these verses,

“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place [the Greek word is desert] and get some rest.’³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary [desert] place.”

What are we to learn from this? It is thrilling to see lives changed by the truths of God Word. However, it is important after busy times of ministry to draw aside and recharge our batteries by being quiet before

God. Our need for rest is one of the reasons God established a Sabbath day. The disciples needed to pause and refocus their attention upon Christ and His greatness. We will see how badly they needed to do that in just a moment. But first, let's see what happened to the vacation plans in verses 32-33,

“So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place [a desert].³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.”

I am pretty sure that not all the people from all the towns got to the solitary place – ahead of Jesus and the twelve. After all, there were five thousand men and at least that many women and children. What most likely happened is that some of the men got to the solitary place before the boat arrived, and then marked out the spot and waited for the others to join them. It is likely that Jesus and His disciples had some time alone before the elderly, the sick and the women with children arrived [this is indicated in John 6:1-5]. But their time of rest was not as long as the disciples hoped; which is why they didn't display the same attitude as Jesus displayed in verse 34,

“When Jesus landed and [eventually] saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things” [Matthew and Luke also add that Jesus healed the sick].

In case you don't know, sheep without a shepherd don't do well at all. They are prone to wander off, get lost and become tasty meals for wolves. Sadly, there are a number of times in the Old Testament when we are told that the people of Israel were like sheep without a shepherd. This doesn't

mean that Israel had no leaders, it meant they had bad leaders, who lacked integrity because they did not fear God. At the time of Christ, Herod Antipas was a lousy king over Galilee, but the more harmful shepherds Jesus was concerned about were the religious leaders of Israel. They did not feed the souls of the people with nourishing, Biblical truths. Rather they had become preoccupied with legalistic rules about Sabbath restrictions and washing rituals.

In contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who spoke to the people wonderful truths about Himself and God's Kingdom. Let me give you three examples. In Matthew 6:25-33, Jesus declared that everything people need in life will be added to them if they seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness. Instead of trying to grab all the gusto we can from life and then try to squeeze God in too, we need to seek God first and then let Him give us what we need. In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus taught that love for God and love for people is the only true and authentic motive for honoring God's Law. The Apostle Paul said that if a person has faith to move mountains, but does not have love, he has nothing at all. And who can forget Christ's conversation with Pilate in **John 18:37**,

“‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me’” [If we are not passionate about truth, then we do not yet know Jesus as well as we should].

How bad were the shepherds of Israel in Christ's day? When Jesus was busy ministering to the needs of the people, **Matthew 26:3-4** records what

Israel's shepherds were up to,

“. . . the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,⁴ and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.”

God the Son was in their midst casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, and speaking the words of life, and the religious leaders were plotting His death. It reminds me of some of the paradoxical commandments penned by Kent Keith. Let me share four of them, “People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway.”

“If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway.”

“People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.”

“Give the world the best you have and you may get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.”

Jesus was living by these commands. His disciples were still in the process of learning how to do that – as we see in verses 35-44,

“By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. ‘This is a remote place [a desert], they said, ‘and it’s already very late [they had been ready to call it a day hours earlier].³⁶ Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’³⁷ But [Jesus] answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’ [I can’t even imagine the look on the disciples’ faces when Jesus told them to do that] They said to him, ‘That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’ [first of all, they did not have that much money, and even if they did, by the time they hiked to the closest towns and bought that much bread, it would have been midnight before they got back. In their minds,

this was a really stupid idea] ³⁸ ‘How many loaves do you have?’ Jesus asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five – and two fish.’ [See, we told You this is a dumb idea] ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass [let me say something here that the Gospel of Mark is not saying, but it is something I have practiced for many years. Here is the principle: there is always some green grass wherever we are; we just have to go out and find it. Another way of saying this is that in the most difficult of circumstances – Christians always have blessings for which we can thank God and enjoy]. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 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 set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They **all ate** and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.”

The intent of the exhausted disciples was to send the people away. After all, these people got themselves into that predicament. Here are some more of the thoughts that may have been running around in their heads. When the disciples had ministered in the various towns, it was the responsibility of the people they ministered to provide food for them. Jesus and the disciples had been ministering to these people. They shouldn’t have to feed them too. And besides, that crowd of people deserved to suffer for messing up their vacation.

When you stop and think about it, Jesus put up with a lot of attitude from His disciples. Do you remember in Mark 4, when Jesus and the disciples were in a boat and that horrible storm hit? Jesus was sleeping in the stern and the disciples gruffly shook him awake and asked, “**Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?**” Jesus was going to die for these men, and they accused Him of not caring about them. And what about in Mark 5,

when Jesus and the disciples were in the middle of a huge crowd pressing against them, and a sick, desperate woman believed that if she touched Jesus – her illness would be cured. And she was right. When Jesus felt Divine power leave His body, He stopped and asked, “Who touched Me?” His disciples were incredulous. They were all being jostled about by the crowd and Jesus wanted to know who touched Him!

Aren't you glad we are not like those disciples? We are always grateful and always trust in the Lord. Nah! Let's ask ourselves a few questions. If we get seriously sick or are facing extremely difficult circumstances of another sort, do we entertain thoughts that Jesus really doesn't care about us? Or perhaps we fail God and others by yielding to a temptation – do we find ourselves thinking that Jesus just doesn't understand how hard our trials and temptations are? Friends, if we coddle and nurse those kind of thoughts – then it demonstrates that we have a **very small Jesus** – which was exactly the problem of the disciples at this time.

In case you haven't noticed, the Christ of the Bible is BIG!! He is God the Son – who along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit created the universe out of nothing. Our job as Christians is to get to know the Christ of the Bible and stop believing in a small, anemic Jesus.

Let's spend some more time thinking about why this miracle is so important for Christians today. First of all, it is a great snapshot of our task to make disciples of all the nations. When Christ first gave that assignment, Christians were just a speck in the midst of the world's population. How could so few people be commanded to accomplish such

an enormous task? What we learn from this morning's passage is that even though the exhausted and perplexed disciples did not have enough food to feed the multitude – they had Jesus with them – and by giving their little to Jesus – He was able to feed the multitude. Their part was to humbly serve.

Do you remember when Moses was commanded by God to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, who was the mightiest king on earth, to release the Israelites from their slavery? Moses felt completely inadequate and I am pretty sure he thought it was a dumb idea for God to send him. God confronts the anxiety of Moses by asking a simple question, “What is that in your hand?” And Moses replied, “A staff.” And so God used that wooden staff to help deliver the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. The staff of Moses was not the key to success. The key is what the God of the universe can do with a simple staff of wood.

I want you to notice something else about this passage. There is no record of how the multitude responded to Christ's miracle. All we know is that everyone ate and was satisfied and there were twelve baskets of food left over. This is curious because in Mark 1, when Jesus cast a demon out of a man in a synagogue, the people were amazed. When Jesus calmed the storm in Mark 4, the disciples were terrified and asked, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.” In Mark 5, when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus back to life, we are told the disciples and her parents were completely astonished. And so why don't we read about the amazement of the multitude when they were fed with five loaves and two

fish? Probably because they didn't know that was all Jesus had to work with. After all, they were sitting in clusters of fifties and hundreds on grassy areas away from Jesus. The ones who were close enough to see what was going on were the twelve disciples.

There is an important application here for Christians today. As followers of Christ, our job is to help others learn of Christ, so they too can enter into eternal life. Anytime someone becomes a new creation in Christ, it is a supernatural work of God. But most people aren't even aware that these kind of miracles are taking place all the time. Even though we do not see it on the news, there are presently hundreds of millions of miracles walking around on earth. And wherever Christianity grows, starvation and disease diminish.

This brings me to my last point. Where did this miracle take place? Three times in this text we are told – it happened in the desert. What Jesus accomplished in the desert, by ministering to people spiritually and physically, was a beginning in helping to fulfill what God promised to do in **Isaiah 35:1-6**,

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom . . . they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God . . . ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped . . . ⁶ Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”

God has sovereignly promised to bless all the nations of the earth. And He has chosen to work through people whom the world considers weak and foolish. This is good – because that way God gets all the credit and not

us – which is exactly how it should be. Let's pray.