

The Extravagant Provision of Jesus

Mark 8:1-9

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Well, it's a joy to return to our study tonight of Mark's gospel, and I invite you to turn with me to Mark 8, as we forge our way ahead. I've entitled tonight's message "The Extravagant Provision of Jesus," and there's a bit of double meaning in that expression because in one sense He is the one who extravagantly provides for us, and in the other sense He is God's extravagant provision to us; so, He both provides, and He is the provision Himself. I think you'll see that in this wonderful account that we come to tonight as we begin the eighth chapter of Mark's gospel. You follow along as I read beginning in verse 1:

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance." And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to *find enough* bread here in *this* desolate place to satisfy these people?" And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were *there*; and He sent them away.

If this story sounds familiar, it's because it is very similar to the feeding of the 5,000 back in chapter 6, just two brief chapters ago. In fact, the two accounts are so similar that those who attack the credibility and integrity of the Bible, we call them liberals, they have concluded that there must not in fact have been two accounts, there really must have been only one event, and

the gospel writers either got confused and got their facts wrong, or they simply embellished that single account into two, in order to make some point they wanted to make.

Well obviously, we reject that, but why? Well, although the two stories have much in common, there are some very real and important differences. When you look at the feeding of the 5,000, obviously it's in Mark 6, it's recorded in all four gospels, it happened in a community called Bethsaida, which is on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, not too far from Capernaum. It was a predominately Jewish crowd. There was food that was available in the surrounding towns and villages and fields, but the disciples lacked both the financial resources and the time to go and purchase those resources before dark and to get back and feed the people. They found five loaves, two fish, and when Jesus was done there were 12 baskets of leftovers. This event happened on a single day, and you'll remember, the next day Jesus rebukes the crowd for merely seeking physical bread from Him; that's the feeding of the 5,000, in chapter 6.

The feeding of the 4,000 that I have just read to you here in Mark 8 is recorded only in two gospels, Matthew, in Matthew 15, and in Mark. It's in a different area, the Decapolis, which we'll talk about in a moment where that is, and I'll remind you of that; in this case there were not adequate food supplies, they simply weren't available, and there was a predominately Gentile audience. They had seven loaves and a few small fish, and when they were done there were seven large baskets of leftovers.

The timeframe of this particular miracle actually was over a three-day period, and Jesus doesn't rebuke the crowd in any way. So, you can see that while there are obvious similarities, and I won't go through the similarities because they are so patently obvious, you can see there are many distinctions. There are a number of very important differences in these two accounts.

Now, it's clear from the New Testament evidence that these two chapters describe two distinct events. They were at different times; they were under different circumstances, that is in different places, and Matthew and Mark record both of these. In other words, Matthew and Mark record both the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000; that obviously assumes that they were two different events.

In addition to that you have clear, unequivocal statements of Christ making these two different accounts, and these statements of Christ appear in both of the books. Let me just point one out to you; look at Mark 8:19, Mark 8:19,

Jesus ... [says to His disciples] ... “when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When *I broke* the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Obviously, Jesus affirms the reality of these two events. Now that invites a very important question, a key question really. Why? Why did Jesus perform these two miracles that are so similar, within just a few months’ time of each other? Well, the answer to that will become clear as we work our way through Mark’s account, Mark’s record here, taken obviously from Peter’s eyewitness account of what transpired. This divinely recorded and inspired record of the feeding of the 4,000 plays a very important role in Mark’s gospel and in why he wrote it, and I think we can uncover it together as we walk our way through it.

Now the story begins with physical needs, physical needs in verses 1-4. Notice verse 1, “In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them...” Now clearly the expression “in those days” refers back to the end of chapter 7; Jesus had traveled into the Decapolis, a predominately Gentile region. There He had encountered very large crowds, been surrounded by them, in fact, go back to Matthew 15 and just to remind yourself of what that looked like, what Jesus was encountering in this Gentile region. Matthew 15:30; go back to 29,

Departing from there, Jesus went along [side] by the Sea of Galilee...” [this would have been on the eastern side, toward the desert,] “... and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them *those who were* lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. So the crowd marveled as they

saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored ... the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Now here you have this Gentile crowd attached to Jesus. He is in this Gentile region called the Decapolis and probably the events of chapter 8 occur near the same time and in the same area as the end of chapter 7, the area of the Decapolis. Decapolis, two Greek words, “deca” meaning ten, “polis” or “polis” meaning city, it was an area of ten, an allegiance, an alliance of ten cities on the east of the Jordan and east of the Sea of Galilee.

You’ve seen this map before, but just to remind you, He started in Tyre, in the Gentile region up in Phoenicia, and then He went north and took a circuitous route down on the other side of the Sea of Galilee to this yellow region called the Decapolis. That’s where Jesus was at the end of chapter 7. That’s where He obviously is at the beginning of chapter 8; “in those days,” when He was involved in the ministry that chapter 7 ends with.

Now chapter 8 says a large crowd had gathered, in fact verse 9, I read to you a moment ago, tells us that it was 4,000; that wasn’t just 4,000 total; according to Matthew’s account there were 4,000 men plus women and children. This was a huge crowd of people, of Gentiles. This is a totally different crowd than the crowd back in chapter 6. That was a mostly Jewish crowd. Many of those Jewish people had followed Jesus from Capernaum, from the other side of the Sea of Galilee where His headquarters were and had come to Bethsaida where He fed them. This however is mostly a Gentile crowd, and they have come to see Jesus. They were hungry. Mark tells us they had nothing to eat.

It’s interesting to me that Jesus here is not simply concerned about their spiritual condition, although that’s the primary thing, He was equally concerned about the basic issues of life as well. You know I’m struck as I read the pages of the New Testament and the gospels with how practical and wise Jesus was, always thinking about all aspects of life. You remember when He healed Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter, when He raised her from the dead? You remember that when He raised her, He immediately ordered that she be given something to eat; always thinking about the practical issues of life with that sort of real wisdom that knows what’s really important,

the spiritual, and yet also knows the physical is a reality that has to be dealt with because we are both spiritual beings and physical beings.

Here He notices that this massive crowd has nothing left to eat. So, He calls His disciples to Him, verse 1 says. Jesus is going to meet the need of the crowd, but He's always looking for a chance to teach His disciples. Now there's every reason to believe that Jesus already knew what He was going to do. You remember back in the feeding of the 5,000, John tells us Jesus asked [them] His disciples a question, and He knew what He was going to do, John 6:6, "This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do."

So, here for Jesus is another teaching moment. He calls the disciples over, and verse 2 tells us what He said, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat."

That is a very important verse in this account. This marks a huge difference between the feeding of the 5,000 back in chapter 6, and the feeding of the 4,000 here. Because if we were to go back to chapter 6, you'll remember that Jesus saw the crowd coming, and He felt compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and so He began to teach them; that's what they needed.

About five or six hours later, on that same day, Jesus' disciples come to Him, and they raise the question, "What are we going to do to feed this crowd? It's getting dark, we don't have enough food to buy nearby, we don't have enough money to buy it." And so, Jesus felt compassion, and met their needs; but the teaching of Jesus, the arrival of the crowd, the teaching of Jesus and the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 all happen in about a half a day's time, maybe a little more.

But here, in Mark's account of this feeding of the 4,000, Jesus calls the disciples and He expresses genuine concern for the physical well-being of these people who have nothing to eat, and the problem is not that they've just been listening to Jesus and had nothing to eat since breakfast, like the other crowd. The problem is they'd been there in the wilderness with Jesus for three days. The Jewish crowd at the feeding of the 5,000 had very short attention spans when

it came to Jesus' teaching; they wanted Him to feed them, to meet their needs. Remember they came back the next day and wanted bread, and Jesus rebuked them, "That's all you're after," He said. "You don't want the spiritual food I have to offer, all you want is the miracle of the bread, you want more food to eat."

But here, two chapters later, is a crowd of Gentiles, and without any complaint they have remained with Jesus. They have been eager to hear His teaching, to see the healings. As one commentator writes, "In their hunger to know and do God's will, they have scarcely been conscious of their own physical hunger up to this moment."

I'm sure you, if have been in Christ any time at all, have had any opportunity as I have, to be so lost in study, or lost in some responsibility, or hearing the Word taught in some conference, in some event that you sort of forget, "Oh yeah, I probably should eat."

Probably most of these people would have arrived at the place where Jesus was with a typical first-century traveler's basket. They would have had a small basket much like our backpack except it would have been more of a wicker type thing. In it there would have been some dried fish; there would have been a couple loaves of bread, and there would have been some wine or water sealed in an animal skin. But they had stayed beyond their provisions; for at least two nights, they had slept on the hard ground away from their homes, and now they have nothing left to eat. And Jesus is concerned about them, He felt compassion. The Greek word that's translated "felt compassion," has to do with feeling something so deeply that it affects your innards, your bowels; it moves you.

Jesus is concerned, verse 3, "If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance." "Hungry" here is a Greek word that means the state of being very hungry, as one lexicon says, "presumably for a considerable period of time, and as a result of necessity rather than choice." This isn't fasting, they weren't having a religious experience; this is, they have run out of food, but they care more about listening to Jesus than they do about food. Jesus says, "If I send them away like that, some will faint on the way." That is, they'll become so tired that they'll collapse. They won't have the physical

strength to make it home, and some, He says, have traveled a long way, probably from a number of miles. You can see the Decapolis was a fairly large area. They would have traveled significant distance to get there. Jesus looks on them with compassion.

I don't know about your circumstance. Perhaps you find yourself tonight in the middle of a physical trial. I hope it encourages you to know that Jesus knows, and He cares. His heart is moved not only with our spiritual struggle, but with our physical needs as well. He felt deeply compassionate for these people.

I love the disciples' response to Jesus. I love it because I have to admit, it sounds like me, and it probably sounds like you; verse 4, "And His disciples answered Him, 'Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?'"

Now again, in this story there's a difference between Mark 6 and Mark 8. In the Decapolis, here where we are now in Mark 8, there were far fewer peoples and cities than there were before, so resources including food were scarcer. Before the problem was money and time; now the problem is, there's no food.

Also in Mark 8, the season of the year has changed. In Mark 6, if you were to go back there, you would notice that they sat down on green grass, because it was spring. If you've lived in an area, if you've ever lived in Southern California or you've ever traveled there for any period of time, the climate there is so much like the land of Israel. When it's spring, the rains come, and the rains bring green grass, and it's beautiful. When we lived in Southern California, we always called it the "sucker time of year" because tourists would come in the spring and say, "Oh it's so beautiful." And then you come back three months later after the desert winds have started, and everything is brown and dry.

That's how it is in Israel; the desert winds begin to blow as the summer comes, and the vegetation begins to dry up, so there are no crops still growing at this point. And so, the disciples say, "There's no adequate food." It's not like there are any fields they can go buy from,

it's not like in the Decapolis, there are a lot of towns where they can go. So, even if we had money there's no way, there's nothing to do here.

Now again, if you're familiar with the story back in chapter 6, as you read this you might at first glance say, You know I don't think the disciples were honor students. Because it's only been a few months since the feeding of the 5,000. So why don't they just say to Jesus something like this: Jesus, You've done this before. Why don't You just make some food for these people? After all there are a thousand men less here than there were just a few months ago over in Bethsaida.

Now understand that the disciples were a little slow, but they weren't stupid. So, why did they not bring that up? Probably because of how Jesus had responded after the last feeding of the 5,000. You remember His response after the feeding of the 5,000? He rebuked the crowd the next day; He said, "You are just after the miracle and the food. You better learn to embrace spiritual things, to prize the things that are eternal." And then He had quickly hurried the disciples away from there. So, the disciples probably assumed that that was a miracle He would never repeat, or at least none of them were willing to bring it up.

So, here is this large crowd of 4,000 plus who have remained with Jesus, listening to His teaching for three days in a dry and desolate place. I want to give you a picture of what this was like. I'm going to show you a couple of "before and after" pictures, spring and summer, from the area on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, and I think you'll see why it was so difficult.

This is spring; it's that lovely? Green grass, they sat down, it was like a picnic in Mark 6. This is summer, same area. I'll show you another contrast. Here's a little bit further down the Sea of Galilee on the eastern side; spring, see lots of green grass? In fact, that doesn't show up quite as well on the overhead there, the sort of purple hills are a green on my screen as well. So, all of that's green, in contrast to the Sea of Galilee. Here's the same area in the summer.

So, you begin to see the problem. So, they're there with Jesus, three days without food. Jesus feels genuine compassion for them, there was genuine physical need. That brings us to

supernatural supply, verses 5-7; look at verse 5, “And He was asking them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ And they said, ‘Seven.’”

Now in the feeding of the 5,000 you remember, they found a boy, a boy with his lunch, five loaves and two fishes, two flat, sort of pancake like loaves of bread. That’s how they would have done it in the ancient times, don’t picture, you know, Wonder Bread. Here’s it’s likely that these seven loaves were not from someone in the crowd; there’s no mention of anyone in the crowd, Jesus asks them, “How many loaves do you have?” Instead, these loaves, these seven loaves, probably represent all that was left from the disciples own food supply. They don’t even have enough bread left for them; they certainly don’t have enough bread left for this huge crowd.

Now why does our Lord ask them this question, “How many loaves do you have?” Because He’s teaching them. Don’t miss what our Lord is doing here because He often does exactly the same thing with us. He shows us, as He showed them, that our meager resources won’t even touch the problem. He brings us to the end of our own wisdom, our own skill, our own resources, so that all we can do is look up; that’s what He does.

The Lord wants them to see that this situation is beyond their own solving. There are twelve apostles, and only seven loaves of bread left: not enough for them. Somebody’s going without supper in the disciples that night, not to mention 4,000 men plus women and children. They don’t have the means to fix this; because you see if they understand, and if we understand our meager resources, then it serves to highlight God’s provision when He does provide.

And by the way, the disciples had learned something between Mark 6 and Mark 8; because last time, you remember when they found the boy with the five loaves and the two fish, they had said, “Huh, but what’s that for so many?” This time they at least don’t say that. So, they learn something; to their credit they don’t ask that this time. They at least have some measure of confidence once we get here, and Jesus had said, “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus can probably handle it from there.

So, verse 6, "... He directed the people to sit down on the ground;" Possibly in ordered groups like in the feeding of the 5,000, but we aren't told that. Notice this time they don't sit down as 6:39 tells us "on green grass," as I showed you, instead it's on the ground, the dry, barren ground. Verse 6, "... and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve them, and they served them to the people."

Now, the *New American Standard* here tries to capture the different Greek verb tenses in this verse. Here's basically how it reads, "Having taken the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He broke them and kept giving them to His disciples." Very interesting how Mark writes it. It definitely has the feel of an eyewitness, which, of course, Peter was, and Peter has told him this story undoubtedly countless times. The tenses of the verb here implies that the miracle happened in Jesus' hands. He has these loaves, and He begins to break them; and it's as if as He continues to pass out into their baskets the pieces of bread, the bread just keeps multiplying in His own hands. He just kept giving pieces to the disciples, and they kept distributing what He gave to them, to the crowd. And so, Jesus works a miracle.

Verse 7, He's not done; "They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them He ordered these to be served as well." A few, that is more than two, so we at least have a little more resource than last time; these were probably sardines, the typical staple of the locals when they traveled was to have a couple of dried, small little sardines and some flat bread. There were no McDonald's; of course, this might have been better than McDonald's honestly.

But there's something else unusual in this verse. Before the bread, Jesus prays and gives thanks; that was the typical Jewish prayer of thanks that always came at the beginning of the meal. But here, Jesus also prays for the second course. I can't prove this to you, but I think it's interesting, I think He is probably modeling for these pagan Gentiles, the importance of, and how to thank God for one's daily provision; ultimately, everything we have comes from God, and He is teaching them how critical this is.

After He had pronounced a blessing on the fish, He ordered the disciples to distribute these as well, and again the implication is, that as He breaks off pieces of these fish, these few fish,

there's plenty to go around; a supernatural supply of food to meet the physical needs of these people.

That brings us to "typical extravagance." By that I mean, Jesus always did everything more than enough. He never does anything half-hearted; and here He responds to their need, not by merely giving them just enough to hold them over until they get home, but there on that barren ground, the middle of a hot summer where they have stayed with Him three days, slept on the hard ground for two nights, to hear Jesus, to hear Him teach, to see His miracles, there, He created an all-you-can-eat sardine and bread buffet. Verse 8 says, "And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces."

Everybody ate until they were completely satiated. You know that feeling you have after you get up from Thanksgiving dinner? That's the word that's used here; they were completely satiated; they were satisfied. And then the disciples picked up the leftovers. Literally, the text says, "They picked up an abundance of pieces, seven baskets." These are probably the pieces that Jesus had broken but have not been touched, because everyone has eaten their full.

These two accounts are interesting because they use (the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000), consistently use two different Greek words for "baskets". You say, "Why is that interesting?" Well, in the feeding of the 5,000, the Greek word for "basket" refers to a small basket, the kind like a traveler would use (as I said before), to carry a day or two's provisions of food and water; just enough so that if he found himself unable to get to a town, unable to find a place to stay, it would tide him over to the next stop.

The Greek word for "basket" in both accounts of the feeding of the 4,000 is different; it's a larger basket; in fact, in the papyri, which (I can tell you a lot about papyri; I spent six months of my life translating papyri in Seminary); papyri are ancient documents, a writing surface, initially they came up with in Egypt, made from the papyrus reed. They would take a reed, they would split it, and they would cross leave the various strips of that reed, press it down together and as it dried it formed a fairly decent writing surface. Well people use that all the time, much as we use a legal pad or some sort of note pad.

In the ancient world they would throw those away, and in the trash heaps of the ancient world they found these papyri, and because of the dry arid conditions over in the Middle East they've been preserved. And so, we can see how some of the words of our New Testament were used in different contexts, and this particular word for "basket", is used in some of the papyri, for a basket that will hold up to 50 loaves of bread.

In fact, apart from the feeding of the 4,000, this Greek word for basket is used only one other place in the New Testament; it's used in Acts 9. Listen to how it's used in Acts 9:25, "But Paul's disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a ..." [here's our Greek word,] "... large basket." It's one Greek word that's translated "large basket." So, in that case, this basket was very large, it was large enough to hold Paul. The point that I want you to see here, is that there was probably more food left over on this occasion than when He fed the 5,000, because there are seven large baskets, perhaps large enough to hold a man.

Since the next passage in the flow of Mark's gospel here makes it clear that the disciples didn't take any of this bread with them, you'll see that, it's likely that Jesus has created enough bread, not only to provide for these people at this point, but even to provide enough for them to take home with them on their journey. Just reflects the generosity of God; it's a little detail in the text that reflects the amazing generosity of Jesus Christ, of God's great heart.

Listen, we all go through lean times in life, and there are people in God's providence who endure entire lives of leanness, but God is always generous and lavish, with all of us, if not as much as we like of the stuff in this life, that in grace and stuff of eternity. He's just generous by nature, and you see that here.

Just so you get an order of magnitude of what Jesus has done, Mark wants you to see it. Look at verse 9, "And about 4,000 were there ..." Matthew adds, in Matthew 15:38, "And those who ate were 4,000 men, besides women and children." Obviously, you could be talking of a crowd

in excess of 10,000 very easily, and perhaps much more than that. Verse 9 ends, "... and He sent them away."

After Jesus had met their spiritual needs for three days, and their physical needs with a meal and enough food to carry with them, He sends them home. You see the extravagant provision of Jesus.

What are the lessons that you and I can learn from this story? What are the spiritual lessons? First of all, and this is something Mark keeps driving home to us: Jesus again here proves His nature by showing us His power. We see His unlimited power over creation; He makes a lot of bread from a little bread; He makes a lot of fish from a few small fish; and that is truly amazing. This is a miracle. But understand that Jesus Christ does this every day. Every day of our lives our Lord does this. You say, "How?"

Well, the New Testament is very clear that Jesus rules our planet, that all things "hold together" as Colossians says, because of Him, consist in Him, and as Hebrews 1 says, "He upholds all things by the word of His power." He is in charge of our planet. He rules over everything that happens here, and what happens day in and day out. He causes a single grain of wheat to fall into the ground, and add time and water, and that single grain of wheat becomes a stalk of wheat with a head of grain; He has multiplied that wheat.

He does the same thing with fish. Through the process of the miracle of conception and birth and growth, Jesus every day causes fish to multiply. I like what C. S. Lewis says about this, how he describes it.

He says, You know when God does these things every day, when Christ does this every day, when you walk by a pond, and you see those fish swimming, when you pick up a piece of bread that has been multiplied from a little grain, it's like you're seeing God at work, but His hand is in a glove. You can't really see it; it's shielded. God's doing it but you don't see Him doing it. All that happens in a miracle [Lewis said], is God takes His hand out of the glove. He's still doing

what He always does but He acts directly, obviously, without anyone's denying. When Christ performed a miracle, He just took His hand out of the glove where everyone could see what He does every day.

Why did Jesus want His disciples to see this? What was the lesson for Jesus' disciples as they saw His unlimited power over the creation? It was supposed to build their faith in Him. In fact, notice what He says in 8:19; we'll get here, but notice He says to them later,

“When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” ... He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Jesus reminds His disciples of the numbers; five loaves, 5,000 men, 12 baskets of leftovers; seven loaves, 4,000 men, seven large baskets of leftovers. Why is He reiterating that to them? Because that was supposed to strengthen their faith. As they saw His power, their faith in Him and His ability to provide was supposed to grow.

And so, it is for us. When we look at what our Lord has done, it's supposed to strengthen our faith that He can handle our problems. He has unlimited power in the created world; He can do whatever needs to be done. Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that Jesus Christ is alive today and has the power to do whatever needs to be done in this world and in your life? That's what Mark wanted his readers to understand; that's what Jesus wanted His disciples to understand from these two encounters. There's nothing He cannot do.

A second lesson that comes from this text: (and I love this one), Jesus feels compassion toward our physical needs. Jesus is not cold-hearted toward what you're going through physically, whether you find yourself in some sickness, long term battle with cancer, perhaps you find yourself without a job, maybe you find yourself in some other physical difficulty. Listen, God is not oblivious to that. Jesus showed us the heart of God when He was here. And when He saw

this crowd, who loved Him and wanted to hear His teaching and were there for this spiritual instruction He was giving them, and He saw that they didn't have food, He felt deeply concerned compassion for them. And the same thing is true for us.

And by the way, this is true impartially; it was true for the Jews in chapter 6, Jesus felt it for them in chapter 6, and here He feels it for the Gentiles in chapter 8. Now, this is especially important to Mark's Gentile Roman readers. In fact, there's an interesting play through this passage as Jesus serves and ministers to the Gentiles on bread.

You remember back in chapter 7, the encounter with the Syrophenician woman? Go back to 7:27. You remember she came, she had a daughter, she said, "Would You please heal my demon-possessed daughter?" And Jesus said this to her, verse 27, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take ..." [watch this], "... the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Now we talked about this, that is not nearly as harsh as it sounds, and I'm not going to go through that again, but just take that issue of bread, now watch verse 28, ... she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." We can have crumbs of bread; what's ironic, is when you come to chapter 8, the Gentiles literally get bread from Jesus. There's a point here. Jesus' compassion, His concern for people, is not restricted to their ethnicity. Jesus obviously wants us to understand His concern and compassion for Gentiles as well as for Jews.

Also, Jesus wanted His disciples to understand His own heart, His thinking, as He felt true compassion for this people. One reason had to be to teach them to have a similar compassion as well. Jesus wanted His disciples to feel the compassion He felt, and so He explained to them what He felt for the people.

This is an important lesson for us. Let me put it like this: You cannot be a true follower of Jesus Christ and lack compassion for people in need. It's just that simple. Jesus Himself said it; you remember in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:7, one of the Beatitudes, He said, "Blessed are the merciful ..." those who show mercy, for what? They'll receive mercy. When you and I manifest mercy, we demonstrate that we are sons and daughters of the Kingdom, that we really

belong to Christ, because He Himself is merciful and compassionate and gracious, and you see it in these encounters. Jesus feels genuine compassion, even toward our physical needs.

There's a third lesson here: God actually provides for the physical needs of His people. He didn't just feel compassion. He didn't just say, "Oh, that's so terrible, I'm so sorry you're so hungry. Be warmed and be filled and have a nice trip home." He acted, and God does the same. God takes care of us. God can provide a job; He can provide financial resources; He can provide a place to live; He can provide clothes; He can provide food; He has the power to meet every legitimate physical need you have. Philippians 4:19, Paul says to the Philippians, "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Look over in Matthew 6, because Jesus teaches us this lesson very clearly and directly in Matthew 6:25. Jesus said,

"For this reason I say to you ..." Because you can't serve God and money, you can't serve God and wealth, because of that, "... [don't] be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

And obviously Jesus isn't saying you don't work, He's commanded us to work; Paul said in Thessalonians that if a man didn't work, he shouldn't eat. That's not what He's talking about. He's talking about being anxious, being worried, taking thought about it in a worried anxiety. Verse 26, He gives an illustration: Let me tell you how God can take care of you;

"Look at the birds of the air, ... they don't sow, ... [they don't] reap, [they don't] ... gather into barns. [They do work, however; and in their work your heavenly Father feeds them.] Are you not worth much more than they?"

And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ... why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that - not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ... if God so clothes the grass of the field,

which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more clothe you? You of little faith!]Don't] ... worry then ... "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things.

[That's what pagans live for! Don't live for that.] ... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. [He knows and He can provide.] "... seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added..." or provided, "... for you.

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." [Take one day at a time, and God will provide.]

God does provide, and you see that in the life of Jesus as He cares for these people and their needs. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. What you need will come. It may be one day at a time, it may be one meal at a time, but He will provide.

Number four, and this really is at the heart of what this passage is teaching: Jesus not only provides spiritual food for our souls, in fact let me back up and put it differently; Jesus not only provides physical food for our bodies, as He did for that crowd; and He not only provides spiritual food for our souls, as He did for that crowd, He IS the food for our souls. These Gentiles, they understood that the spiritual food Jesus had been providing them through His teaching for those three days was far more important than missing a few meals. They seemed to have understood what Jesus was trying to teach the 5,000 a few months before.

Look at John 6, John 6, here was the lesson Jesus tried to get across to the 5,000; you remember who sought Him the next day? Notice what He says to them, John 6:26:

"Jesus answered ... and said [to them] ..." [this is the day after He had fed them,]

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs ..." [Not

because you were after something spiritual, a sign that pointed to a spiritual reality,] “... but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him, the Father, God, has set His seal. Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do ... that we may work the works of God?’” How do we get that? “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’” [That’s all you can do. You can’t work at all, all you can do is exercise faith in Me, Jesus said.

And then Jesus gets to the point; they mention manna], verse 31,

Jesus said to them ... [verse 32,] “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who ... [has given] you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

We’re not talking about manna anymore, Jesus said; we’re not talking about physical food, we’re talking about spiritual food; God has given you spiritual food to feed your souls, and it’ll give you life.

Verse 34, they want that; ... they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” [Again, they’re thinking on a material, physical level, Jesus is talking on a spiritual level.] Verse 35,

“Jesus said to them ...” [No, you missed it;] “I am the bread ... [that gives] life.” I am the bread that gives and sustains spiritual life. “... he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

You see, behind these stories of the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000, is a powerful lesson about the real bread you and I need. It’s not physical bread, it’s not just what we need to keep our physical lives sustained; it is the bread that comes down from God out of heaven, that

doesn't sustain our physical life, but gives us spiritual life, that gives us spiritual sustenance, that makes us fit for heaven; and how do we get that bread? The bread is Jesus.

Verse 35, "He who comes to Me ..." Here's how you get the sustenance from this bread, you come to Him. That is a description in biblical terms of exercising biblical faith. To come to Jesus is to come to Him seeking Him for who He is, and for what He can give and what He's promised. "Exercising biblical faith in Me. The one who comes to Me, exercising biblical faith in Me, will not spiritually hunger, and he who believes in Me will never spiritually thirst."

There's the real point of the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000. You can eat bread, you can eat at Babe's Chicken Dinner House, you can eat a nice steak, and it'll only carry you for a few hours, and then you'll need another meal; and you can sustain your physical life through this life, but eventually you and I will all die, our physical life will be gone. What we desperately need is spiritual life, and the only way to get that spiritual life is through the bread sent down to us from heaven, the bread that gives and sustains eternal life, and that bread is Jesus; and you only can get that bread, as He says here, by coming to Him, and then you will never spiritually hunger.

My question to you as we end our time tonight is this: Have you ever, really, come to Jesus like that? Have you ever come to Him wanting what He provides, wanting the spiritual life that He gives, wanting the bread that comes down to us from heaven, that sustains not our physical lives, but initiates and sustains our spiritual life?

If not, let me challenge you tonight. He'll feel compassion on your spiritual need, if you'll come to Him, He'll respond to you spiritually just as He responded to these people and their physical needs. Find time tonight, get alone with God, pour out your heart, let Him know that there's a hunger you've tried to fill that you can't fill, there's a thirst you've tried to slake that you can't slake, and you realize now that you were made for God, and your soul will be restless until you find your rest in Him, through His Son; and ask Him to give you the bread that provides eternal life, which is Christ Himself. "I am the bread of life."

Let's pray together:

Our Father, we thank You for our study tonight. We thank You for the reality that our lives are sustained every moment physically by Your care, by Your provision; but Father we thank You even more that You have provided the spiritual bread for our souls that gives us eternal life and sustains that life.

Father, I pray that those of us who have come to embrace Christ, who have come to Him as He said in John 6, that You would teach us that not only do we get life initially from Him, but He is the One who sustains our lives.

And Father, I pray for the one here tonight who's tried to satisfy their hunger, the hunger of their souls in other ways, and has come up empty. Lord, may this be the night when they get alone with You in the dark of their room, and pour out their heart to You, and ask You to give them the bread which gives and sustains the life of their soul, which is Jesus Himself. Father, I pray that You would work by Your Spirit, through this magnificent revelation of Jesus Christ and His extravagant provision.

We pray it in Jesus' name, and for His glory, Amen.