

## Mark 6:30–44 — Feeding The Five Thousand

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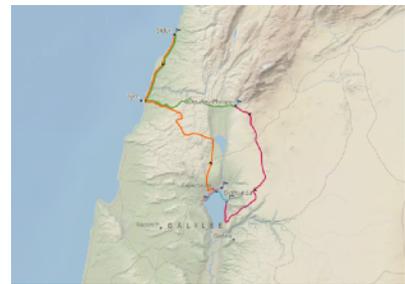
We are studying our way through the Gospel of Mark. Today we pick up our study at Mark 6:30. We are going to look at one of the most familiar miracles in the life of Jesus. If you have been to Sunday school or have spent time around church in the past, you have heard this story. It is the feeding of the 5,000.

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Mark 6:30–44 (ESV)

This story is another display of Jesus’ power. In previous weeks, we have seen Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and even calm a storm. Two week ago, we saw Jesus delegate his healing powers to his disciples. He sent them out on a short-term mission trip around the region of Galilee. While they were gone, John the Baptist was killed by King Herod Antipas. We studied that last week. Today, the apostles return from their mission trip.

Their mission trip was to Galilee. Galilee is small geographically. It is roughly 50 miles by 25 miles. Much of that is not land but is the Sea of Galilee itself. Nevertheless, Galilee was densely populated. There were more than 200 small villages dotted around the lake. Jesus initially shared the gospel in Galilee. Then the apostles also shared the gospel in this area. The area was super saturated with the good news of Jesus. There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of miracles done in this area. Now that the apostles have returned, Jesus would perform his greatest miracles in Galilee, that is the feeding of the five thousand that we are studying this morning.

Before we study the miracle, let me give you a preview of the rest of Jesus' life from this point forward. After this, Jesus will travel north to Tyre and Sidon. These were Gentile sea coast cities. He would then come back to Galilee and begin a



journey to the east of the Sea of Galilee, reaching Gentiles and traveling through the Decapolis. He finished that trip and returned to Capernaum. From there he



traveled south to Judea, which was the rural countryside around Jerusalem. Finally, he would travel to Jerusalem itself, where he died on the cross for our sins and rose from the grave. From this point, we can geographically picture the final path of Jesus.

The feeding of the 5,000 was probably Jesus' greatest miracle in the region of Galilee. It was massive in scale. The Gospels of Mark and Luke us

5,000 men were present. When Matthew told of this miracle, he added this information.

And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.  
Matthew 14:21 (ESV)

This was not a male-only crowd. If there was one woman for every man plus children, this crowd could have been 20,000 people. All of them were fed by the hand of Jesus. To create food in this quantity was a miracle boarding on creation. In this miracle, while Jesus began with a little boy's lunch, he created huge quantities of food out of nothing, just like Jesus did when he made the world in Genesis and created everything out of nothing.

The year this took place was 29 AD. The timeframe was March or April of that year. We know that because when the Gospel of John describes this miracle, it says the miracle took place near Passover. That was in the spring. In addition, Mark tells us the people sat down on green grass. Grass is only green in this part of the world in the spring. This miracle took place in the time of year we are enjoying.

How important was this miracle compared to other miracles? There were only two miracles that were recorded in all four gospels. One is the resurrection. The other is the feeding of the 5,000. This miracles was so overwhelming that when the Gospel of John describes it in John 6:14-15, it tells us the people wanted to make Jesus king after experiencing it. In addition, even though Jesus traveled to the other side of the Sea of Galilee during the night, the people who experienced this miracle tracked him down the next morning on the other side of

the lake, hoping he would supernaturally make them breakfast, just like Jesus supernaturally made them dinner the night before.

These people wanted to be on the Jesus welfare system. Jesus provided free healthcare. He cured everybody instantly and completely. There was no premium or deductible. If you couldn't make it to Jesus on time, and your relative died, that wasn't a problem. He raised people from the dead. In addition to free healthcare, he provided free food. What could be better than free healthcare and food?

All of the passages about Jesus in the Gospel of Mark are there to teach us something about Jesus. In this passage, it teaches us about Jesus being the good shepherd who loves to take care of his people's needs. As we work our way through this passage, we will look at what it teaches us about Jesus as our good shepherd.

### **The good shepherd provides rest.**

**The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Mark 6:30 (ESV)**

The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to him what took place on their short-term mission trips. Last week, while we were studying the death of John the Baptist, Jesus' apostles were on their mission trips. They were preaching the gospel, healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out demons. Just as Jesus experienced opposition in Nazareth, they also experienced opposition. Then, it was time to debrief with Jesus, to share their lessons and experiences. Their mission trips may have lasted weeks. They may

have lasted months. Maybe they came back because they heard about the death of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas. I don't know.

They most likely returned to the city of Capernaum, which was Jesus' base of operations in this area. They went out two by two, so there were six teams giving reports. They came back tired and weary because just like the crowds crushed Jesus to touch him because of his healing power, the crowds no-doubt also crushed the apostles because they also possessed Jesus' healing power.

And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Mark 6:31-32 (ESV)

We have some weary disciples. They were trying to get some much needed rest but people wouldn't stop talking to them and wanting help from them, even though the apostles were exhausted and hungry. They were so busy with people's demands, they couldn't even fit in a meal. Not only do we have weary apostles, but we have skinny apostles. This is called the apostle weight loss plan.

What I love about this is Jesus knew his apostles were tired so he took the initiative to get away with them for a break. Mark says Jesus took them away to a desolate place. It was a secluded place. Jesus was taking them to a place where they could be away from people. To get there, they were going to take a boat. Even the little bit of time on the boat away from people would have been a welcomed rest.

Mark doesn't tell us where Jesus took them but the parallel passage in Luke tells us Jesus took them to a city called Bethsaida Julias.

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. Luke 9:10 (ESV)

This town was not far away. It was across from Capernaum on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. As we will learn next week, Jesus didn't go to the small village of Bethsaida Julias. He actually went just to the east of it to a rural area. That is important to realize or you will become confused next week when we continue our study.



The town of Bethsaida Julias was usually simply called Bethsaida, which means house of fish in Hebrew. It was a small fishing village. The area around the city, particularly to the east, was uninhabited. That is where Jesus was heading. It was officially called Bethsaida Julias because it was in the territory of Herod Phillip. Last week, we learned about Herod the Great. When he died, he divided the territory he ruled into four pieces and left them to be ruled by four of his sons. Last week we met one of those sons. His name was Herod Antipas. He is the one who martyred John the Baptist. Another of Herod's sons was Herod Phillip. He ruled this territory. One of the ways Herod Phillip tried to gain favor with Rome was by renaming this small fishing village after Caesar's daughter. Her name was Julias. Herod Phillip named this small village Bethsaida Julias.

Obviously he was looking for money from Rome. For the average Jew, it was just Bethsaida, which simply meant fishing house.

Bethsaida was also the hometown of Peter, Andrew, Phillip and Nathaniel. Bethsaida was likely one of the villages the apostles visited on their short-term preaching and healing mission trips. It was a Jewish town with great exposure to Jesus, his miracles, and the gospel. Unfortunately, when all was said and done, the people of this village completely rejected Jesus.

**Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. Luke 10:13–15 (ESV)**

Jesus and the apostles did incredible miracles in Bethsaida. Probably the most incredible miracle was the feeding of the 5,000, that took place just outside of town. The people of Bethsaida ate the supernatural food Jesus provided. Unfortunately, they rejected Jesus even though they experienced this miracle. Tyre and Sidon were wicked pagan cities. They were seaport cities. You know what happens in seaport cities when sailors finally get off a boat. Jesus said if those pagan cities had experienced all the miracles Jesus did at Capernaum and Bethsaida, they would have repented.

This is a reminder that on the Day of Judgment, those whose names are not written in the Book of Life because they have trusted Jesus to pay for their sin, will face judgment based on how they lived and what they did with the revelation God gave to them. Those whose hell will be hotter for eternity will not just be those who were greater sinners, but those who were given greater revelation of Jesus and rejected it all. Since hell is a just punishment for sin, it is

more hideous for greater sins. What matters is not just the greatness of the sin one commits but the greatness of the light that is rejected. This is why it will be better on the Day of Judgment to have lived in the Las Vegas cities of the ancient world and not have great light than in the good Jewish cities of Capernaum and Bethsaida and rejected the light of Jesus.

This is a reminder to each of us. We have the Word of God. We have the truth of Jesus. We must keep our hearts soft and attentive and not become hard-hearted against Jesus like Bethsaida. We are responsible to respond to the light of Jesus we have and the revelation of Jesus we have.

Back to our story: Jesus was taking his apostles just outside of town in the wilderness for a little rest and relaxation.

They didn't get much rest on the boat ride. It was a 4-mile sail across that little section of the lake and an 8-mile walk around the lakeshore. They were trying to get away from people, but people simply chased them to the other side of the lake. At least the disciples had a little rest and food in the boat.

### **The good shepherd provides truth.**

**Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. Mark 6:33 (ESV)**

Some boats have unique sails or a unique look to them so you can recognize them on the lake. In the book of Mark, when the disciples use a boat, it always called "the boat," not "a boat." Apparently the disciples, many of whom were former fishermen, had a particular boat they used on the Sea of Galilee that was large enough to hold all of them. In addition, it was recognizable from the shore. Maybe it had a unique design woven into the sail. When the apostles got

into the boat, the people on land recognized the boat on the lake and followed it to its destination. They probably didn't have a strong wind. If they did, the boat would have outdistanced the crowds, but the crowds outdistanced them.

Why did the crowds chase the apostles to the other side? The Gospel of John tells us why the crowd followed.

And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. John 6:2 (ESV)

Most of the crowd followed Jesus not because they needed healing but because they wanted to see Jesus perform a miraculous healing. They were following Jesus for entertainment value. This was before television. This was before YouTube. Most of these people wanted to see Jesus and the apostles heal people for entertainment. They were not in desperately need of Jesus. Their interest in Jesus was superficial. This was a Jesus' fan club. These were the groupies that hassle you and won't leave you alone. These are the people the apostles wanted to get away from!

Even though the disciples were desperate for a break, when Jesus landed the boat and saw the crowd, he was filled with compassion for them.

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. Mark 6:34 (ESV)

In Luke 9:11, it says Jesus welcomed them when he landed. I love Jesus' heart toward people. It is so encouraging to see his love for people even when everyone else was tired of people.

The word compassion is the Greek word *splagizomai*. Sometimes it is translated with the phrase tender mercies. It means to feel something in your gut.

Have you ever seen a situation that filled you with compassion to such a degree that you physically felt sick in your stomach? That is the response Jesus had to these crowds. Jesus saw the great crowd that has come 8 miles around the lake into the middle of no place for superficial reasons, and he genuinely cared about these people. He felt compassion in the pit of his stomach, even though the people were just there for entertainment, even though the disciples were exhausted. Jesus saw these people and genuinely loved them. (See John 4:34)

Incidentally, Jesus feels the same way about you and me. He loves us. He cares about us. He has tender mercy and compassion for us too, even if we follow him for the wrong reason, even when we are superficial in our love for him. He genuinely loves and cares about you and me.

What particularly moved his heart was the people were like sheep without a shepherd. That doesn't mean much to us, but in this culture it communicated a lot. Sheep are helpless animals. They can't feed themselves. They can't protect themselves. If they get on their backs, they can't get off their backs. Sheep can't clean themselves. Unless the water is put right in front of them, they can't search and find a place to drink. Sheep are helpless without a shepherd to care for them. Sheep will die without a shepherd to care for them. Sheep without a shepherd was the description God used in the Old Testament to describe the people of Israel when they were without a leader.

Like Old Testament Israel, these people were desperately looking for a leader to guide them and to care for them. When Jesus saw this, he instantly felt compassion for them and began to teach them.

I always find this amazing. When we see people lost in life, people who have no purpose, we don't think the most important thing they need is good teaching. We don't think they need a good sermon. Jesus sees it differently. He knows the most important thing that people need is spiritual truth. That is why he begins teaching, so he can give them spiritual truth.

...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:32 (ESV)

The truth is that all our problems in this world come from sin. The truth is that Jesus is always the answer to those problems. It is spiritual truth like that which sets us free.

Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 both remind us man does not live by bread alone but by every words that comes from the mouth of God. Just as important as physical food is regularly taking in spiritual truth from the Word of God. That is what Jesus gives them. What I find interesting is the importance Jesus places on knowing and learning the truth about God. Many people think knowing the truth about God and Jesus are optional for life. Jesus sees it as essential for life.

This week, at the men's breakfast on Thursday morning at 6 a.m., some of the men were talking about the movie "Unplanned" that is showing in movie theaters. I think it is still showing Okoboji. It is the story of a woman who left working for Planned Parenthood. Some of us were saying, "As Christians, why do we value life yet other people see a child as nothing more than a choice?" The answer is that when we trust in Jesus as our savior, we are born again. The Holy Spirit comes in our hearts. From that point, the more time we spend learning God's truth from his Word, the more we begin to think like God and hold the

same values as God. God uses the truth of his Word to rewire our brains to change the way we think about life.

This is not just true for big issues, like abortion. Once we come to God through Jesus and put our fingers in the truth of God's Word, it convicts and directs us how to love our neighbors, how to spend our money, and what to do for entertainment. It changes the way we think about sexuality and marriage. The most important thing we need in our lives is time with Jesus, learning the truth of God from his Word. These people didn't have truth, which is why Jesus was filled with compassion for them and desperately wanted to give them truth.

### **The good shepherd provides food.**

*And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Mark 6:35 (ESV)*

The disciples discussed among themselves and agreed Jesus was teaching a long time. It was getting late. The people needed something to eat. The apostles thought Jesus should send the crowd home. Underlying this was the fact that the disciples were hungry themselves. One meal on the boat while sailing 4 miles across the northern part of a lake didn't do much to satisfy their hunger after weeks of under-eating.

Remember they didn't have fast food in this part of the world. There was no Subway, McDonald's or Jimmy John's. People had to buy, prepare, and cook food. This was a massive crowd of 20,000 people. People needed to leave while it was still light so they could travel to villages to buy and prepare food. The entire crowd couldn't go to Bethsaida. That was a small town of less than 2,000, at

most. This crowd was 20,000 in size. The crowd would have overrun the small town.

On the surface, the disciple's suggestion seems reasonable. The people were hungry. The people needed something to eat. I think the real reason the disciples wanted to send the people away is because they were tired and wanted to be alone. Then Jesus surprised them with an answer they didn't expect.

Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" Mark 6:36–37 (ESV)

Jesus had different plans. He told them, "You give them something to eat." In the Greek, the "You" is in the emphatic and imperative tense. It is as if Jesus put his finger on their chests and told them it was their responsibility to feed 20,000 people.

According to the parallel account in John 6:5-7, Philip was the bean counter who was good at math. He said 200 denari would not be enough to buy them enough bread to eat. That wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface of their need. A denari was the day wage of a common worker. Two hundred denari was about two-thirds of a year's salary, maybe \$30,000 or more dollars today. That couldn't purchase enough food for this crowd, not to mention they had no idea where they could purchase that much food in the wilderness.

Prior to this, when they went on their short-term mission trips, Jesus told them he would supply their needs so they could live off the generosity of others. Jesus also told them not to take money with them on those short-term mission

trips. The apostles had no money and no food, but they were told to feed 20,000 people. How could they do that?

All the disciples could see were obstacles. They were just like Moses in the wilderness with the Old Testament people of God when he said in Numbers 11:13, 22, “Where can I find enough meat to feed this people? If flocks and herds were slaughtered for them it wouldn’t be enough. If all the fish in the sea were caught for them, it wouldn’t be enough.”

What the apostles forgot was the lesson Jesus wanted them to learn on their recent mission trips. On those trips, they were not allowed to bring money, food, a knapsack or even an extra jacket. Jesus promised he would provide everything they needed, and he did. In this story, they learned Jesus could provide far more than just their needs. He could provide for the needs of 20,000 people.

And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Mark 6:38 (ESV)

Mark doesn’t tell us where these five loaves and two fish come from. In the Gospel of John, we learn that Andrew, Peter’s brother, said there was a boy who gave his lunch to the apostles.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” John 6:8–9 (ESV)

The apostles appreciated this child who offered his lunch, but that wasn’t enough to feed the apostles, and it certainly wouldn’t have been enough to feed a crowd of 20,000.

Incidentally, I always thought this was a little weird. This child's mother was wise enough to pack a lunch for her son, but she overpacked. Why did she pack five loaves of bread? That sounds like a lot. One loaf of bread feeds our family for a week. If this boy had five loaves of bread, he could feed the neighborhood! Why was this boy carrying so much food?

The word for loaves in the Greek describes small loaves of bread. These were pita breads. The fish also would not have been large. They would have been packed fish, a little larger than sardines. This was an ancient version of a Lunchable. Nobody had food, so a child, with a loving and compassionate heart, gave his Lunchable to the apostles so they wouldn't be so hungry. It was a kind gesture, but it wasn't even close to meeting their needs.

Now that Jesus has this Lunchable in hand, he did something nobody expected.

Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. Mark 6:39–40 (ESV)

Jesus begins to create order in the crowd. Everybody was to sit down in groups of 50 or 100. That way there would be aisles and people would not be milling around creating chaos and traffic. The apostles were going to become waiters and serve people.

And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. Mark 6:41–42a (ESV)

This was a weird moment. Jesus had everyone sitting down, as if they were going to eat at a banquet. Jesus prayed over the contents of a child's lunch box. When he was done praying. He started breaking the five small pita breads

into pieces. He gave those pieces to the apostles to give to the people. As he tore them in half, they kept multiplying. As he tore bread and fish apart in his hands, he created new bread and fish. I don't know how long the process took or if the apostles filled baskets or simply folds in their clothing, but right in front of the apostles' eyes, Jesus took that small lunch and multiplied it again and again, creating more bread and fish. All the apostles needed to do was carry the food to the crowds.

As soon as Jesus broke off a piece of bread or fish, it was replaced and he broke it off again. This is God's creation power on display. He did this thousands of times over many hours.

Just as God supplied manna in the wilderness to feed Israel, Jesus the new and better Moses supplied bread and fish in the wilderness to feed God's people in their time of need.

Mark tells us everyone ate and was satisfied. The word satisfied means eating to the point of being full. It was originally used to describe what happened when you put a bag of oats over the nose of a horse. The horse would eat until it couldn't eat any more. That is how much food Jesus created to serve 20,000 people. They couldn't put any more in their stomachs. They were stuffed! That is a lot of food! Remember, this miracle was so impressive, the people wanted to make Jesus king by force afterward, and the next day they tracked Jesus down on the other side of the lake and asked him to make them breakfast.

My guess is the people really liked Jesus' version of fish and chips. He was a great cook.

And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Mark 6:42b–44 (ESV)

The apostles picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. Why did they pick up the leftovers? It was not because Jesus was against littering. It was not because this was part of Jesus' attempt to save the planet or his version of the Green New Deal. No. Jesus was providing a little extra blessing for his apostles.

At this point everyone ate and was satisfied. That included the apostles. Nobody went home hungry. They picked up exactly 12 baskets of broken pieces. I always pictured these as huge baskets, like trash barrels. The Greek word for basket here is specific. It is a small basket. It was a basket the size of a knapsack that people in that day used as a day pack to carry their lunches. Jesus created enough food for 20,000 people so there was only a few leftovers. There was just enough leftovers for the apostles to have a doggy bag of bread and fish for lunch the next day.

### **What does this teach us?**

**Jesus does his greatest work through us and our inadequacies.**

This is one of Jesus' greatest miracles. As we learned, it is the only one mentioned in all four Gospels other than the resurrection.

What is the point Mark is telling us about Jesus? Obviously, it shows us his compassion for people. It shows us that he can provide for our needs. It also shows us the importance of spiritual truth being our greatest need, but notice the contrasts Mark weaves together.

It begins with the apostles tired of people and without food. When they landed on the other side of the lake, the one thing they wanted to get away from

was what chased them down — more people and more problems. Jesus cared for those people and taught those people. Then he challenged his disciples not to meet their spiritual need but their practical need, to give them food. The apostles didn't have the money to purchase the food. The apostles only had meager rations from a little boy's lunch, which wasn't even enough to feed them.

When they gave what they had to Jesus, he multiplied it and everyone had more than enough to eat. In fact, the apostles that began without enough food all went home with a knapsack full of food.

Jesus was giving them, and us, a pattern for ministry. Jesus loves to work through his people even when they are weak and when they are inadequate. What Jesus does is he multiplies what you have and makes it enough for other people and for ourselves.

Jesus could have met the needs of this crowd without the disciples. He could have dropped bread from heaven with pink parachutes. He could have provided manna on the ground or quail blown in from the sea. Instead, he did his greatest miracle by working through the apostles when they were inadequate and what they had was not nearly enough to meet the need. When they gave it, Jesus blessed it, and multiplied it to make it more than enough.

Jesus is still doing the same thing today through us. When we offer what little we have to Jesus in our weakness and inadequacy, he loves to bless and multiply that, and meet the needs of other people as well as ourselves.

Paul reminded us of this in 2 Corinthians 12 when he said that when he was at his weakest, the power of Christ was working through him its strongest. The same is true for you and me today.



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