

“Jesus Feeds 4000”

June 12, 2016

Mark 8:1-10

I. Introduction

As you may remember, it was shortly after Jesus had fed the 5000 and He had had a discussion with the Pharisees and then His disciples about “*clean and unclean*” that Jesus had left Galilee for a time of private training with the 12 Apostles. To get away from distractions, Jesus had led them north 40 miles to Tyre in Gentile country. It was here that Jesus met the Syrophenician woman “**whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit**” (Mark 7:25). After healing the little girl, they had traveled north another 20 miles through Sidon, and then east and south to the region of Decapolis on the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. It would seem that Jesus and His disciples spent several months in Gentile territory while the Apostles received personal instruction from their Lord.

The Jews of Jesus’ day despised the Gentiles and had no desire for their salvation. As Jews, the disciples would have been brought up with the same prejudice and animosity towards Gentiles and they would have been more than a little uncomfortable following Jesus into the land of the Gentiles. Part of Jesus’ training in their travels was to prepare them for the Great Commission—to “**go into all the world and preach the gospel to people of every nation.**” Jesus had come to die for the world and it was very important for the 12 Apostles to understand that the gospel was a message for the whole world.

Jesus’ educational tour into Gentile territory ended in the Gentile region called the Decapolis. From here, Jesus and the Apostles would return to Jewish territory. But first, Jesus had one more miracle for them to contemplate—the feeding of 4000 *men*. Matthew also wrote of this miracle—**turn to Matthew 15:29-39**. “**The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.**”

II. A Comparison

Those that are critical of the Bible try to say that the feeding of the 4000 is just a retelling of the feeding of the 5000, but there are several distinct differences: The 1st miracle—the feeding of the 5000—took place in Galilee, near Bethsaida and involved mainly Jews; the 2nd miracle—the feeding of the 4000—took place in the Decapolis and involved mainly Gentiles. In the first miracle the people sat down on grass and in the 2nd they sat down on ground. In the first miracle the question of food came up only after a full day of teaching when the disciples saw the need and wanted to send the people away; in the 2nd miracle Jesus deeply felt the people’s physical hunger after 3 days of teaching. Food

supplies were gone and weakness from hunger would cause some to collapse on the way home. Obviously, the amount of food with which Jesus started was different in the two miracles as was the number of men. There are other differences but these suffice to show that the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000 were two similar but different miracles. Now let's consider the feeding of 4000—it began with Jesus' Compassion.

III. Jesus Feeds 4000

A. Jesus' Compassion Mark wrote that, **"During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him."** The large crowd had been drawn to Jesus by His miracles. They may have been pagan Gentiles, but as we read in Matthew **"they praised the God of Israel"** (Matthew 15:31). Mark wrote that **"another large crowd gathered"** to indicate that this large crowd with nothing to eat was not the same crowd that Jesus fed near Bethsaida.

So **"Jesus said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.'"** Psalm 103:8 says, **"The LORD is compassionate and gracious"** and as God, Jesus felt deep sympathy and kindness toward those who were hurting. He cared for people's spiritual needs and for their physical needs as well. On this occasion, Jesus felt compassion because they had been with Him for 3 days with nothing to eat. In their eagerness to hear Jesus' teachings and witness His miracles, the people refused to go home—even if it meant sleeping outside and missing some meals. They were so amazed that they may not even have noticed that they were hungry.

Speaking to the disciples, Jesus said, **"If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."** Knowing that the people had not eaten for 3 days, and that some of them would be traveling long distances to return home, Jesus responded with compassion. Then we see . . .

B. The disciples' solution The disciples answered Jesus, **"But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"** Some people theorize that the disciples thought that the feeding of the 5000 was a onetime miracle or a miracle only for Jews and they were blind to Jesus' ability. But perhaps they weren't quite as blind as some think and their reply was a tongue-in-check answer. They DID remember the earlier miracle and they were admitting that once again things were beyond their resources and abilities; in other words, they were implying that since this crowd was large and in a remote location, the only solution was another creation of food by their Lord.

There may have been another issue that had been going through their minds, too. The crowd consisted of Gentiles, people whom the Jews considered to be unclean. It was one thing for Jesus to heal them, but the creation and eating of a meal together may have been going too far for them—for

Jewish people to eat with Gentiles was forbidden by rabbinic regulations. In this miracle, Jesus was teaching the disciples one more lesson about how far the gospel was to go. This miracle served as Jesus' concluding lesson that they were to be His **“witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”** (Acts 1:8).

In order to remind the disciples of what He had done before and to emphasize the size of this miracle, Jesus asked them, **“How many loaves do you have?” ‘Seven,’ they replied.”** Mark added that they also **“had a few small fish.”** Obviously, by itself such a small amount of food was useless in feeding this large crowd. But the disciples knew the power of their Lord so they waited for Jesus' miracle.

C. Jesus' miracle As He did before, Jesus **“told the crowd to sit down on the ground,”** perhaps in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the loaves—probably a form of flatbread—and gave thanks. By giving thanks to the Father, He modeled what it means to depend on God for **“our daily bread”** (Matthew 6:11) and He signified to the crowd that the power behind the miracle was from God. As with the feeding of the 5000, there was no explanation for the continuous creation of bread and fish. And as before, Jesus utilized the disciples in sharing God's compassion with the crowd.

Mark wrote, **“The people ate and were satisfied.”** After 3 days without eating, they feasted until they were all totally filled or satiated. Mark writes that after the meal was over, **“the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”** These baskets were different from the small baskets that the disciples had used following the feeding of the 5000, these were large baskets—baskets big enough for a man to climb in to. Mark finished by writing that **“about 4000 men were present.”** That would seem to imply that the crowd could have numbered around 15,000. Neither Matthew nor Mark record the response of the people—undoubtedly they were amazed—perhaps some even wanted to make Jesus king. But, as on the last miracle, after the meal, Jesus ended by sending the disciples away—but this time He went with them. And then . . .

D. They returned to Galilee. After the 3 days of intense ministry, filled with miraculous healings and finishing with a supernatural meal, Jesus and His disciples returned to Galilee for a short time. Jesus' return to Galilee brought the journey into Gentile territory full circle—from Galilee to Tyre to Sidon to Decapolis and back to Galilee. The Cross was now less than a year away and it wouldn't be long before Jesus would move His center of activity to Judea and Jerusalem.

IV. Objectives

Jesus' trip with His disciples into Gentile lands provided a time for personal training and instruction for the 12. There were at least four objectives. **First**, they experienced Jesus' deity as they

witnessed His authority over demons, His power over disease, and His ability to create food basically out of nothing. As they watched Jesus heal incurable diseases and physical disabilities, they understood that only God could be the source of such power. It was soon after this, in [Mark 8:29](#) that Peter would say for the group, “**You are the Christ.**” **Second**, they saw that worship wasn’t about following a collection of traditions and rules, but like the Syrophonecian woman, it was having faith in God; it was like the Gentile crowds who witnessed Jesus’ miracles and “**praised the God of Israel**” without being inhibited by tradition and rules. Contrary to the teachings of the Pharisees, worship was about God and not about man—worship is from the heart. [Psalm 29:2](#) says, “**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.**” **Third**, the disciples began to comprehend the divine resources available to them. The disciples didn’t have the ability in themselves to feed the hungry crowds or to heal those in need, but Jesus did. His resources are infinite and His power limitless. By involving them in distributing the food, Jesus showed them that they could be the dispensers of His grace and mercy both for the physical needs and the spiritual needs of others. **Fourth**, by watching Jesus’ interaction with people whom 1st Century Jews treated with scorn and disdain, the disciples learned that Jesus had come for all people. It made sense that the Messiah would perform miracles for the people of Israel, but to do the same for Gentiles was outside the box. The disciples needed to learn that they were to share the Gospel with all people not just Jews.

V. Conclusion

[Hebrews 13:8](#) says, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**” The same Jesus who walked this earth with the disciples is with us today. Sometimes we are hard on the disciples and wonder how they could be so blind and hard to believe. *But are we any different?* We read of God’s power in the Bible; we experience God’s power in our lives and in our answered prayers. But when troubles come our way, instead of turning to God and saying along with Peter in [Matthew 14:30](#), “**Lord, Help me,**” how often do we try to handle out problems in our own strength? [James 1:5](#) says, “**If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**” Peter learned, [turn to 1 Peter 5:5b-7](#). Go to the Lord first, He is a compassionate and faithful God, He will be there for you.

But we aren’t just to sit back and rest in God’s power and protection; we need to go out into the world in God’s power. As Christians we have the Holy Spirit living in us—in [Acts 1:8](#) Jesus said, “**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” [Turn to Philippians 4:12-13](#). Paul learned to rest in the power of God. Let’s all learn from the Apostles and use the power of the

Holy Spirit to share God's love and compassion with the world—we can do everything through Him who gives us strength. With the compassion and power of God, we can “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything” Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

Finally, *how do you judge a “good” worship service?* Psalm 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise,” worship is giving God the glory that is due Him—it's not in making a worshipper feel good that he has followed a particular set of rules or traditions. If people leave a worship service feeling good in themselves, they haven't been at a worship service. Worship is recognizing who God is and what He has done for us and focusing on Him not on ourselves. When one leaves a worship service, it should be with a sense of awe of having been in the presence of God.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, as Christians, God needs to be our focus—when troubles come, we go to Him for help; when we go out into the world, we go in His power; when we worship—privately or together, He is to be the object of adoration. Let's learn from the disciples and be all we can be for God.