

26. Jesus Fed the Four Thousand

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children develop a great concern for the spiritual needs of people, in other areas of the world, who do not know Christ. We will do that as we provide an example by our concern. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus showed His compassion to a large crowd who had not had anything to eat for three days.

Mark 8:1-3 says, “In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples *to Him* and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.’” We saw, in our last topic, that a large number of people brought people to Jesus to heal. These people, which included many Gentiles, had many different physical problems. As we begin this chapter, we see that many of these people also wanted to learn what Jesus taught. They apparently had not planned to stay and hear Jesus teach, so they had not brought anything with them to eat. We see that they had stayed to listen to Jesus teach for three days, even though they did not have food.

Jesus understood what hunger was like, because Matthew 4:2 says, “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” As a result, Jesus called the disciples to Him and said, “I have compassion on the multitude.” Throughout His ministry, we see that Jesus had compassion for the people. Sometimes, this compassion was for their physical needs, and sometimes for their spiritual needs. Matthew 9:36 says, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” That verse speaks of His compassion for the spiritual needs of the people. Here, it was the physical need of hunger that caused Jesus to have compassion on the people.

Jesus then explained the reason why He did not want to send the people home hungry. He said that some would faint on the way home. The word translated “faint” means *to grow weak, to grow weary or to become tired*. This word is translated “weary”, in Matthew 9:36, as seen in the previous paragraph. Here, we see that Jesus did not want the people to become exhausted before they reached their homes. The second reason Jesus did not want to send the people away hungry was due to the fact that part of the people had traveled a long distance to come hear Jesus teach. He knew they had to travel that same long distance to return to their homes. Both reasons show that Jesus had a great concern for the physical needs of the people.

The disciples agreed with Jesus that the people had a need, but the disciples had one question. Mark 8:4-5 says, “Then His disciples answered Him, ‘How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?’ He asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ And they said, ‘Seven.’” When Jesus fed the five thousand, Philip had answered the question of Jesus about where to buy bread by saying, in John 6:7, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” In this verse, we see that Philip said they did not have enough money to buy even a little bit of food for such a large crowd.

Mark 6:35-36 tells us what had happened before Jesus asked that question. Those verses say,

“When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and already the hour *is* late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.’” We see that the disciples had told Jesus to send the people to the surrounding villages so they could buy food for themselves. Here, their question shows that the disciples saw a different problem, when they asked, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” The word translated “wilderness” means *a deserted region where no one lives*. This time, there were no surrounding villages where the people would even be able to buy bread.

This caused the disciples to ask Jesus a second question. It was a very different question. Matthew 15:33 says, “Then His disciples said to Him, ‘Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?’” The disciples knew that there were no nearby villages where they could buy food for the people. The disciples were willing to go buy food if that was what Jesus wanted, but they did not know where to go to get that food.

Instead of rebuking the disciples for failing to remember how Jesus had fed the five thousand, Jesus just asked one question. He just asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” Here, we see that the disciples had come prepared. They had some bread for themselves, so they did not have to worry about becoming weak before they got to a village where they could buy some bread. Jesus wanted to teach them to share what they had with others. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” This verse points out the fact that Christians are to be concerned about one another. However, it also makes it clear that we are to have this same concern for others who are not yet Christians. Christ wanted to help the disciples develop that concern.

Once the disciples had told Jesus how much bread they had, we see that Jesus then gave further instructions. Mark 8:6-9 says, “So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples to set before *them*; and they set *them* before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away.” In these verses, we see that in addition to the bread, the disciples also had a few small fish.

Jesus commanded all of the people to sit down on the ground. Jesus then gave thanks to the Father for the food and began to break the bread into pieces. Jesus gave the disciples the opportunity to participate. He gave the food to the disciples, and told the disciples to take the food to the people. This reminds us of the fact that Jesus does the things that are impossible for us, but then, He gives us the privilege of having a part in His ministry by doing the things He has equipped us to do. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” We have each been given a spiritual gift. If we have a serving gift, we are to use that gift

to serve others with the ability God supplies.

After Jesus blessed and broke the food, the disciples began distributing the food to the people. They continued to carry bread and fish to the people until everyone was satisfied. In fact, we see that all of the people were filled. Then, the disciples gathered the food that remained and found they had enough food to fill seven large baskets. The word translated “large baskets” meant *very large baskets*. That is the word used in Acts 9:25, where we read, “Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” In this verse, we see that the baskets were large enough to hold Saul and make it possible for him to get out of Damascus, when the disciples let him down in a basket to escape those who wanted to kill him.

We see that Mark mentioned there were four thousand who had eaten that day. Matthew 15:38 adds one other small detail. That verse says, “Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.” Here, we see that there were four thousand men, in addition to the women and children, who were present there that day. This meant there were actually four thousand families that were fed. If there were about the same number of women as men, there were approximately four thousand women. If the families averaged two children per family, that would add about eight thousand more. As a result, the crowd that was present that day could easily have been sixteen thousand or more. It did not matter to Jesus how many people were there that day, because He was able to feed all of them with the seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Christ can choose to meet any need and have enough to do it. By such miracles, Jesus was showing His disciples that He would meet their needs as they followed Him.

Jesus then sent the people away. This large group of people had been with Jesus for three days. That would have given Him time to teach them many things. Now, the time had come for the people to go home and think about the things they had heard and seen, not to stay around and hope that Jesus would give them more food. Jesus then left that area by boat and went to another area. Matthew 15:39 says, “And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.” This area (also called the region of Dalmanutha) was several miles south of Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that Jesus will supply their needs as they follow and serve Him. He is able to provide today, just as He was able to provide during the time He was here on this earth. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this lesson.