

Mark 6:33-44 The Feeding of the 5,000

33 The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.

Jesus and the disciples just want some solitude and rest, but it's not in God's plan for them at that time. The crowd, seeing Jesus and the Twelve set off by boat, hurries overland to intercept them, anticipating Jesus' movements and awaiting his arrival.

34 When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

Despite the fact that the crowd interrupts Jesus' much-needed rest and repose with the Twelve, Jesus looks upon the people with "compassion." The Greek word for "compassion," *spalangnizesthai*, is used in the NT only of Jesus, and here his compassion is expressed in **"teaching them many things."** These crowds had come out of the many Galilean villages to see Jesus, because the 12 had been preaching about Him. Just like they'd come out to see John, a Prophet from God, they were now coming to see Jesus. They were to Jesus, **"like sheep without a shepherd."** Jesus has compassion on the ordinary people of Galilee, caring for them because the Pharisees, Saducees, Priests, and Scribes had lead them away from God, and they were distressed, and spiritually wandering away from God. It was as in the time of Ezekial 34:2-6 **2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'This is what the Lord God says: "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should the shepherds not feed the flock?..." And Jesus helps the weak and helpless sheep. As the Good Shepherd of sheep, it was His role to lead them spiritually, like Moses had led Israel out of the wilderness of Sin. Continuing in Ezekiel 34:11-16 11 For the Lord God says this: "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them. 12 As a shepherd cares for his flock on a day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day... 15 I Myself will feed My flock and I Myself will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God.** This is what we see Jesus doing here—Shepherding the Sheep. In his compassion, Jesus sees a whole people without direction, without purpose, and without a leader, caught in their sins, without hope, so He has compassion on them and leads them to God through His teaching. We see this again in Matthew 9:36 **36 Seeing the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."**

35 And when it was already late, His disciples came up to Him and said, "This place is secluded and it is already late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

Since all of the people are out in the wilderness, away from their villages, and their bakeries, the disciples begin to wonder about how all of these people were going to eat. It must mean towards the end of the afternoon, when Jews would normally have their main meal. They say **36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."** Usually people didn't travel at night, because of bandits and wild animals, and so it looked like all of these people were either going to have to travel now to go and buy themselves something to eat, and come back tomorrow, or they were going to have to camp out, but there were no provisions for them, and so the disciples started to get uneasy about whether the crowd might get angry and turn on them. They'd recently learned in their missionary journey that not everyone was going to be overjoyed by the presentation of the Gospel, and they'd faced some hostility. They don't want that to happen now, as people became hungry, because of the lack of food. So, the disciples make what appears to be a reasonable suggestion: to dismiss the crowd and allow them

to disperse among the surrounding villages to buy food and provisions. Despite all of the miracles that they had seen, they weren't willing to believe that God would provide through Jesus whatever was needed. And, so while He was teaching the crowds, He decided to teach the disciples a lesson that they would not forget!

37 But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread, and give it to them to eat?"

Now, it's clear that the disciples hadn't even considered the possibility of addressing the crowd's hunger themselves, since this was 5,000 men, plus women and children. They probably barely have enough food to eat for themselves. And so, rather than relieving the crisis, Jesus intensifies it: **"You give them something to eat,"** The disciples are flabbergasted at this suggestion. To their minds that is an unreasonable, impossible, command. And so, they do what they've done so many times, and look to their flesh and respond, **"Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread, and give it to them to eat?"** To have the responsibility of feeding the crowd put upon themselves serves only to reveal their inability to cope with the situation. In any case, the disciples cannot see why they should accept this responsibility, and their question is a little sarcastic. They're not actually offering to do this...what they're saying would be like you or I saying "shall we now go and spend \$15,000 on bread for the crowd"? Even if they could, how would they transport like 5,000 loaves of bread! So, basically, their answer is disrespectful, and inconsiderate of Jesus, who has shown them that He has supernatural power so many times before. As in the case of all the Lord's commands, however, they will in the end do exactly what he says.

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

The small amount of basic Galilean rations which they find (the loaves were probably round, flat loaves, large enough at most for one person for a day) is remarkable, since Jesus and his disciples had set out might have been expected to take food with them for the length of their stay. At any rate, from the disciples' point of view the disappointing result of their search puts an end to any thought of their providing food for the crowd.

Everything now depends on Jesus. **"How many loaves do you have?"** he asks. The disciples complain about what they lack; Jesus focuses on what they possess. Just like with Moses at the burning bush, who thought that he, the poor shepherd from Midian, chased out of Egypt for murder, had nothing to offer God's People Israel, and God said "look at the staff in your hand"...you have something. We all have something to offer, and the important thing isn't what we think of what we have to offer, the important thing is that we offer it to God in trust! Jesus sees possibilities where his disciples see only impossibilities, for God can multiply even the smallest gifts if they are made available to him. Despite the pitiful resources, Jesus has faith in God's provision.

Jesus is going to teach them the lesson that **nothing is impossible with God**. When they face a problem that seems impossible, and they have a word from God to step out into it, as Jesus has just given them, by giving them the command to **you give [the crowd] something to eat**, then they can expect the power from God to carry out the command that Jesus has given them. They have to learn that everything depends on Jesus, and the practicalities of the situation just don't matter when He is involved! We all have to learn, and re-learn this lesson in our Christian walk. In Luke 1:37, where the angel Gabriel tells Mary: **"For with God nothing will be impossible."** This was said in the context of Mary's miraculous conception of Jesus while being a virgin, and the angel pointed to Elizabeth's pregnancy in old age as proof of God's power—He gave Mary evidence, just as Jesus has given the disciples, and will give us, so that we may believe still bigger promises. Similar truths are found in Genesis 18:14 (**"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"**) and Jeremiah 32:17, affirming **that no promise of God will fail**. This makes sense, because of God's Omnipotence – He is not bound by natural laws or human limits; His power can accomplish what seems impossible. God's

Faithfulness – Whatever He declares and promises will be fulfilled; His word never fails. **His promises are yea and amen**—when He speaks them, they are already fulfilled, just waiting for the right time to become apparent to the rest of us. God’s Sovereignty – All events occur within His will, and He can work through or beyond human circumstances. And this means that we can have Faith in His promises, trusting for His miraculous intervention, even in unlikely situations—if it is according to His Will. This is what He is teaching His disciples.

39 And He ordered them all to recline by groups on the green grass. 40 They reclined in groups of hundreds and fifties.--Jesus orders the crowd to sit in groups **“of hundreds and fifties.”**

Groups of such size made the crowd manageable enough to serve, but they may have had more than a utilitarian function. Moses had arranged the Israelites in groups of 1,000, 500, 100, and 10 under their respective leaders (Exod 18:25; Num 31:14), and just like with the Israelites then, they are going to see God’s miraculous provision for them in the wilderness. Jesus presides over the multitude like a Jewish father over the family meal.

41 And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He gave them to the disciples again and again to set before them; and He divided the two fish among them all.--We are not told the content of his prayer, but we can imagine Jesus beginning with the words of the table prayer common to Judaism: “Praise be to you, O Lord our God, king of the world, who makes bread to come forth from the earth, and who provides for all that you have created.” These are the normal actions of the Jewish head of the family at a meal, taking bread, pronouncing the blessing, breaking it, and distributing it. Not surprisingly, the early church saw a parallel between the feeding of the five thousand and the Last Supper, both accounts of which contain the sequence of “taking bread ... blessing ... breaking ... giving to the disciples” (cf. 14:22). The inability of the disciples to understand (6:52) does not prevent their acting on the command of Jesus, which is signified here in their mediating between Jesus and the crowd.

42 And they all ate and were satisfied; 43 and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces of bread, and of the fish--No room is left for doubt over the scale of the miracle: all ate, all were full, and even the leftovers were vastly more than the original supply of food. The baskets described are ‘a large, heavy basket for carrying things’, “They all ate and were satisfied.” The meal provided by Jesus does not tide them over until something more substantial can be had. The bread of Jesus satisfies because it is an expression of his compassion, and it is given in such measure, is that it is **pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing**, like His blessings always are

44 There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.--Mark notes that those who ate were “five thousand men.” All four gospels agree. Jesus made an impression on the disciples with this lesson. Like so many times in our lives, the story of the feeding of the 5,000 starts out like it’s going to be a tragedy. The lament over the lack of food, and the inability to easily get more, the need of the crowd, their potential hostility as they become “hangry”, all point to something going wrong. But, as with so many of the Psalms, they start out with **“God, where are you”?** but, when God shows up, He shows up with His provision. God wills to fill his creatures with himself, to meet their needs with his surplus, to expand their smallness by his greatness, and to transform mundane life into abundant life (John 10:10b **I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.** The turning point in the story is traceable to the moment when Jesus looks on the crowd with compassion, desiring to fill it with the abundance of grace within himself. John 1:16 **For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.**