

# Feeding the Multitude

Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-21

## Background

- **The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle which occurs in all four gospels, and in two of the gospels it's accompanied by the feeding of the four thousand.**
- **One denarius is a typical day's wage for a worker, so 200 denarii (6:37) indicates a very large sum.**
- **The verb for "had compassion" (6:34) is the same word as in the good Samaritan (Lk 10:33); it is only ever used to describe Jesus (Mk 8:2, Mt 9:36, 14:14, 15:32) or those in his parables who resemble him (Mt 18:27, Lk 10:33, 15:2; *The Message of Mark*, Donald English, IVP, 1992).**
- **Jesus' blessing of the bread before its distribution (6:41) fits the normal pattern of a father blessing a Jewish meal—breaking the bread and blessing God with eyes heavenward.**
- Some have suggested that the miraculous aspect of this passage was added by the early church. Arguments against this include:
  - The passage has a typical Marcan miracle structure of (1) presentation of the problem (6:35-40), (2) solution to the problem (41-42) and (3) evidence of the miracle (43-44).
  - The organizational details in the passage suggest an eye-witness account.
  - The need which is met is a concrete one—hunger—which would not have been met except by additional food, which was clearly not there.

## *Read 6:30-44*

1. According to Mark, the feeding of the multitude occurred despite Jesus' plan of *avoiding* the crowds in order to give his apostles some down time (6:31-33). Did Jesus not know that he would be unable to avoid the crowds?
2. In this case, an interruption to the plan became a key event in gospel history and revelation of God. On this subject, Henri Nouwen writes in *Reaching Out*:

But what if our interruptions are in fact our opportunities, if they are challenges to an inner response by which growth takes place and through which we come to the fullness of being? What if the events of our [personal] history are molding us as a sculptor molds his clay, and if it is only in a careful obedience to these molding hands that we can discover our real vocation and become mature people? What if all the unexpected interruptions are in fact invitations to give up old-fashioned and out-moded styles of living and are opening up new unexplored areas of experience? And finally: What if our [personal] history does not prove to a blind impersonal sequence of events over which we have no control, but rather reveals to us a guiding hand pointing to a personal encounter in which all our hopes and aspirations will reach their fulfillment?

Can you think of a time when God has used an interruption in your life? What makes you think so? How can you be more open to God's interruptions?

3. This event, God's feeding his people in a deserted place, is often seen as parallel to the manna given to Israel in the desert (Ex 16). Jesus refers to this by quoting Deut 8:3 when he himself is tempted in the wilderness (Mt 4:4+):

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

- a. How did the manna teach the Israelites that man doesn't live on bread alone?
  - b. Given Jesus' response to Satan, why does he choose here to do precisely what he was tempted to do in the desert? Was the disciples' solution (6:35-36) a bad one?
4. Why did Jesus perform this miracle? Why did Jesus ask the disciples to feed the multitude when it was clear they would require supernatural power to do so?

*Read 8:1-21*

5. From 8:14-21, what can you infer was the meaning or import of his miraculous feeding of the multitudes? **NIV note: yeast is often a symbol of corruption.** What was Jesus warning them against (8:15)? How did Jesus think the feeding of the multitude addressed the Pharisees' question? **He was warning them that even a small amount of the Pharisees' attitude—that they needed even more than what they had seen to believe Jesus was the Messiah—would ruin their faith, in the way that a small amount of yeast leavens a whole loaf.**
6. Jesus says in 8:12, "Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." Please explain what Jesus meant by this, especially given what has occurred already in Mark. **NIV note: the Pharisees, not believing the miracles they had already seen, wanted more.**
7. **The theory of quantum mechanics allows for tiny amounts of mass to be created out of "thin air" (or the energy present everywhere called by physicists "vacuum fluctuations"), though it says that such mass will have a vanishingly small probability of not turning back into energy again after a very short time. Do you think mass was created by Jesus to feed the multitudes? If so, out of what? What would it say about God if He were willing to do this?**
8. Three times in chapter 6 Mark refers to the location as a "lonely place" (6:31, 32, 35); for a writer of few words, this was clearly meant to drive the point home. In scripture God often reveals himself in lonely places, as on the mountain and in the desert God revealed himself to Moses. Ambrose wrote "The bread of life is most valued not by the idle, or those who live in crowded cities encompassed with the honors of the world. It is rather most cherished by those who seek Christ 'in a desert place'". Have you found this to be true in your life? On what occasions are you in a lonely place.