

In the preceding passages, Jesus had sent out His disciples two by two to heal the sick, cast out demons, and announce that the kingdom of God was at hand. During that time, John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, who had prepared the way for Jesus, was executed by Herod Antipas. The disciples came back rejoicing at the effects of their mission but were soon saddened by the news of John the Baptist having been executed. That overshadowed the rest of Jesus' ministry.

³⁰ *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.*
³¹ *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.* Mark 6:30,31 The disciples took no supplies with them on their mission trip but relied on the hospitality of those who hosted them. Now they have returned and are reporting what they had done and taught. It is similar to our missionaries who come by to share about what God is doing through them in the field where they serve.

Once the apostles had shared their accounts of what had happened, which must have been difficult to tell with all the people coming to be ministered to, they found themselves even busier than they had been on the road. Again, we see the intensity of the crowds continually coming to be healed in that Jesus and His disciples did not even have time to eat! It would be the same today if someone healed all who came to him.

Jesus told them to *come away* by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while. This wording takes us back to the Song of Songs sermons. Twice in the song the speaker invited the bride to *come away* with Him (Song of Songs 2:10ⁱ, 13ⁱⁱ). I used the expression for the title of the sermon from Mark 3 on the calling of the Apostles, because Jesus went up the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired (3:13ⁱⁱⁱ). "Come away" carries a sense of leaving the daily routines and being alone with Jesus, the lover of our souls. Jesus wanted to have them to Himself away from the pressing crowds. There He could minister to them and nourish them with the bread of life and living water (John 6:48-51^{iv}; 4:10^v).

After intense times of ministry, it is helpful to get away and let the Lord minister to us. People tell me I preach with freshness when I return from a week of vacation. Ministry can be emotionally draining. But as we are about to see, even Jesus' plan to get away was not what His Father had in store.

³² *And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.* ³³ *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 6:32,33 Luke tells us they sailed to the area of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10^{vi}). The location was only recently confirmed. It is not yet a tourist attraction and may never be because of the flood waters of the Jordan River tend to make the road impassable. My first attempts to get to the location failed for that very reason. The archeologists have to bury their work under sandbags and dig it out again each year. They discovered the Apostles Church which confirmed the location.

Above Bethsaida is a plain that extends to the base of the Golan Heights. That is where they were headed because it was an undeveloped quiet area, even as it is today. The problem was that it was only eight miles by land from Capernaum, and the boat could be seen from the shoreline. The people in Capernaum could see where the boat was

headed. Some people apparently ran ahead telling villages along the way where Jesus was headed, pointing to the boat on the lake, and arrived there before the boat. Mark, more than any other Gospel, gives us a sense of the intensity and persistence of the crowds.

³⁴ *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 There is an important lesson here. Even when we plan what we understand to be a good and even necessary thing, God may allow something even better to take place (Proverbs 16:9^{vii}). It may not look that way to us. The disciples were surely thinking, “Oh boy, we get to be alone with Jesus and learn more from Him.” But when they saw the crowds they probably thought, “Oh, well, here we go again.” But this is going to be different. Yes, Jesus will teach all day, but God has a great lesson in store for them and for the crowd.

Jesus’ compassion was greater than His desire for rest. *This was an intense word which had at its root in the ancient Greek the meaning of viscera, the stomach. The New Testament had this original sense, but added the idea of tender emotions—“tender mercy,” sympathetic emotion. Jesus felt this in the pit of his stomach, so deep was his tender compassion.*^{viii}

“...if you cannot imagine that Jesus has tender compassion for you, you simply do not know what he is like. Jesus “felt it,” and may we reverently understand that though he is glorified he still does” (Hebrews 4:15^{ix}).^x Kent Hughes

The people had come to hear the words of life, and He would not let these sheep go spiritually hungry. He taught all day. That would have been absolutely exhausting. Think of what a strain it would have been on His voice. Why would He do that? They were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep cannot survive without a shepherd. They do not know which plants are noxious. They are the one animal that cannot survive without man. They are dumb animals that need direction, protection, and care for their injuries. Spiritual sheep cannot survive without a shepherd, and Jesus is the Great Shepherd (John 10:11^{xi}). These human sheep needed to hear the Words of Life. They needed water for their thirsty souls.

Jesus’ teaching surely nourished the disciples as well. As sheep, we need to be taught, and the subject of the teaching is the Word of God which was manifested in Jesus (John 1:14^{xii}). The words *teach* or *taught* are used 97 times in connection with Jesus and the apostles including Paul. They are used more frequently than the words *preach* and *preaching*.

³⁵ *And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”* Mark 6:35,36 Do the disciples ask this because they are still looking to have some private time with Jesus? Or are they really concerned about the crowd? Or maybe they are getting hungry. The crowd had left their homes in haste without packing any food. Now the sun is low on the horizon, and the disciples have a practical suggestion. The crowd is feasting on Jesus’ teaching, but there is the physical need as well. Getting back to the towns along the shoreline where they came from would take a while, so they needed to leave some time before nightfall.

³⁷ 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 6:37 Now the disciples are going to get that special instruction they have been longing for, but not in the way they expected. Jesus tells them, “*You give them something to eat.*” In Greek the word *you* is emphatic and imperative. Jesus was challenging them to act out their faith. They had just reported about the authority Jesus gave them and how it ministered to the towns where they went. Here is the next step. They saw a need. Where would they look to meet that need?

They answered from a practical worldly perspective. *Even if we had two hundred days wages, we could not buy enough food for this many people!* That is where we often turn first, money. We are all guilty of it. That is because it is our usual source of supply. We labor and receive wages, and we use the money to buy our needs. That is the way of everyday life. There is nothing wrong with it. But when the need is extraordinary where do we turn? Where is our trust placed? When there is a need beyond our capacity to meet, or the Holy Spirit is prompting us to do something greater than us, we must look beyond our physical resources.

³⁸ 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 Jesus asks what they have to give? A little boy had shared his lunch with them. It was merely five loaves which is like five dinner rolls, and two small, salted fish. Another Gospel has the disciples saying, “*What are they among so many?*” (John 6:9^{xiii}) That would not even feed the disciples. It was like telling Jesus to “get real.” Jesus was helping them to see that **our natural resources are only a tiny part of the answer to our need.** Jesus is Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides!

What are you facing? What has God called you to do? What do you have? Does it seem entirely insufficient? Well, this account is good news for all of us who realize we are insufficient for what we are facing, for what God has called us to do.

³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. Mark 6:39,40 Something supernatural is about to take place, but first there needed to be something practical. To keep from being swamped by people trying to get to the food, Jesus had them sit in groups. That will make the distribution more orderly. We must do the practical part, but even that is at the Lord’s direction.

Hughes explains: *Jesus’ direction that they all sit down in groups on the grass recalls the order of Moses’ camp in the wilderness. Interestingly, the almost contemporaneous Qumran documents used these subdivisions to describe how it was thought true Israel would assemble in the desert in the Last Days. The word for “groups of hundreds and fifties” literally means “garden plot.” This is a beautiful picture of clusters of colorfully clad people sitting in orderly groups like flower beds cut in a green lawn.*^{xiv}

⁴¹ 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. Mark 6:41 Now for the supernatural. Jesus takes the little that they have and says a blessing. The traditional blessing over the food would be, “Blessed art Thou O Lord God, King of the universe, who gives us bread from the

earth.” Jews do not ask God to bless the food. They bless God for giving us food that comes from His creation. Then Jesus starts breaking the little loaves and filling the baskets, and keeps breaking the bread, and keeps breaking the bread. In The Chosen the baskets are covered and when the lid is taken off the baskets are full. We are not sure how this went down, but personally I imagine the bread in Jesus’ hands multiplying. Perhaps it was an illustration of Isaiah 66:2a ^{2a} *All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.* Or perhaps the bread multiplied in the baskets as they passed it out. Whatever the case was, the disciples must have been truly awe struck.

They surely thought of the manna in the wilderness wandering and that the promised Messiah would be like Moses. Imagine the discussions going on in those groups of people. John tells us conversations were about Jesus being the Messiah and making Him a king. ¹⁴ *When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”* ¹⁵ *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.* John 6:14,15 The prophet referred to Moses’ prediction of the Messiah, that God would raise up from among them a prophet like himself, and to Him we must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15^{xv}).

Notice how this came about: There is a compassionate gut felt recognition of the need for spiritual food; later there is a recognition of the need for physical food and of their limited resources; the disciples turn to Jesus; He takes the little that they have and blesses God and multiplies it; and then the disciples distribute what Jesus has provided. Do you think this pattern may have spoken to their hearts? Does it speak to your heart? **What do you have? It does not have to be very much, for when you put it into Jesus’ hands, the Creator can multiply it.** That goes for our lives as well as our possessions. If God guides, then He provides. He will often stretch our faith by saying something like, “You feed them!” Then we recognize how little we bring to the table. That is when He stretches our faith in what He can do through us. Every Sunday He tells me, “You feed them.” My response is, “You know what little I have. Please multiply it for your glory.”

⁴² *And they all ate and were satisfied.* ⁴³ *And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.* ⁴⁴ *And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.* Mark 6:42-44 Five thousand men plus women and children. There could have easily been 10,000 or more who ate their fill. At Jesus’ command, the disciples filled twelve baskets of scraps. Jesus did not want anything to be wasted (John 6:12^{xvi}). Jews understood the physical to represent the spiritual, so, what was Jesus’ teaching? He is the source of the bread of life. Unlike this temporal bread, He satisfies our souls. He is more than enough. But do not waste what He gives. There are plenty of hungry souls with whom to share it.

The people were excited to make Jesus a king. Jesus sent the disciples ahead in the boat while He went on up the mountain to avoid the crowds’ desire for a coronation (John 6:15^{xvii}). Next week we will see what happens on the lake.

John tells us about their arrival at the other side of the lake. The people who had been fed went back around the lake to meet Him there. Only this time, Jesus addressed their misunderstanding and misdirected desires. ²⁶ *Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.* ²⁷ *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his*

seal.” John 6:26,27 Their forefathers ate the manna God sent down from heaven, but they died in the wilderness. Jesus is the bread that gives eternal life to our soul so that we do not die the second death (John 6:49,50^{xviii}).

The crowd did not like this teaching. They wanted the physical more than the spiritual. The signs that He was the Messiah were not as important to them as the thought of abundant food. They were offended when He gave them the hard saying, to eat His flesh and drink His blood to have life (John 6:54^{xix}). This was another spiritual analogy. He is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14^{xx}). He wanted them to receive His teaching. His blood is His life; He wanted them to drink in His life. The crowds disbursed, because they were looking for satisfaction from this world, the creation rather than the Creator. (John 6:66^{xxi}). This is the reason so many turn back from following Jesus. They believe the lie that somehow somehow this world can satisfy.

Satisfaction is a driving force in our lives. Where can we find it? We try all kinds of things, activities, fame, money, food, travel, relationships and on and on. Our hearts will never be satisfied with created things, which is as Jesus said, “working for the food that perishes.” Things will temporarily make us happy, but that soon passes (1 John 2:17^{xxii}). When Jesus was with the woman at the well, ¹³ *Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* John 4:13,14 Jesus was inviting her, and all who will hear, to find satisfaction in a relationship with Him, to drink in His Words and find life in Him.

Where are you looking for satisfaction? Which bread are you seeking, the kind that perishes or the bread which is eternal? If it is in anything other than Jesus you will find the happiness is fleeting (Ephesians 4:19^{xxiii}). **You were made for more. You were made to be the bride of Christ, to know Him and the power of His love** (Isaiah 43:7^{xxiv}; Ephesians 5:31,32^{xxv}). The joy He gives us endures forever. Until you surrender to His love, you will search in vain. Like the prodigal’s father, God is waiting and watching for you to turn to Him (Luke 15:20^{xxvi}). When you do, He will run to meet you. Heaven will be rejoicing. Do not wait any longer. Come away to Jesus. Put your life in His hands and let Him work in and through you for His glory.

Questions:

- 1 Why did they want to get away?
- 2 What lesson can we learn from the change of plans?
- 3 How did Jesus feel about them? About you?
- 4 What did Jesus do all day?
- 5 What did the disciples suggest and why?
- 6 What did Jesus tell them to do and why?
- 7 What did they have? What is the lesson?
- 8 How did the miracle take place?
- 9 How did they respond? What did Jesus do?
- 10 When Jesus saw them again what did He say?

i Song of Songs 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,

ii Song of Songs 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

iii Mark 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.

iv John 6:48-51 (ESV)

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

v John 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

vi Mark 9:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

vii Proverbs 16:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

^{viii} R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word here quoting Nigel Turner (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 148–149

ix Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

^{x 1} R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 149.

xi John 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

xii John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

xiii John 6:9 (ESV)

⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

^{xiv} R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 150.

xv Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

xvi John 6:12 (ESV)

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.”

xvii John 6:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

xviii John 6:49-50 (ESV)

⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

xix John 6:54 (ESV)

⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

xx John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

xxi John 6:66 (ESV)

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

^{xxii} **1 John 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

^{xxiii} **Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)**

¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

^{xxiv} **Isaiah 43:7 (ESV)**

⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

^{xxv} **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^{xxvi} **Luke 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.