

¹ *In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them,* ² *“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³ And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.”* Mark 8:1-3 Jesus had gone out of the Jewish area to the coastal city of Sidon where he met the Syrophoenician woman and delivered her daughter from demonic oppression. They traveled up to Tyre and then around the Decapolis to somewhere north of the southernmost port of Hippos. There a deaf and mute man was healed. I think this is where today’s passage took place. Why did Mark not tell us the location? I would guess that as the early church was mostly Jewish, the focus on Gentiles may still have been offensive at the time he wrote his Gospel. Hippos did have a Jewish community but was mostly Gentile.

While Mark focusses on the one deaf man, Matthew tells us that he was just one of many who sought healing there. Here is the Matthew account: ²⁹ *Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. ³⁰ And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, ³¹ so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.* Matthew 15:29-31 Recognizing Jesus was an observant Jew, he gave glory to the God of Israel. We see the same focus on one individual to the exclusion of others in many passages. Skeptics point to it as a contradiction, not understanding that it was a common writing method of the time to focus on a main character as an example.

The fact that some have come from far away and that Jesus came to the lake from the Decapolis points to the proximity of a junction of three roads on the southeastern side of the lake. One of the roads ran north to south and the other two branched off to the northeast. The man delivered from the demons named Legion had done a great job spreading the Word in that area (5:19ⁱ). Now the multitude has seen for themselves, and they are clinging to Jesus’ words. They have been listening to Him for three days. Like the group at the feeding of the 5000, they are getting famished and needed nourishment to return to their homes. Perhaps some of them had followed Jesus as He went through the Decapolis. If so, they would be a long way from their homes.

Jesus has compassion on these Gentiles in the same way He had compassion on the Jews. The only difference is these Gentiles have heard three days of teaching. Perhaps that is because they did not have the Old Testament background and Jesus needed to explain more to them. He hinted at this receptivity of the Gentiles in His message at Nazareth, pointing to God sending prophets to those outside Israel. That was the reason they tried to stone Him (Luke 4:25-30ⁱⁱ).

⁴ *And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”* Mark 8:4 Surely they did not forget the feeding of the 5000, but remember that the passage said they still did not understand about the loaves (6:52ⁱⁱⁱ). What is it they did not understand? I would suggest that it is the fact that Jesus is our provider, YHWH Jireh, the creator and sustainer of life (Hebrews 1:3^{iv}).

This event sounds so similar to the feeding of the 5000 that some liberal commentators think it is a retelling of the same story. But the numbers and location are different, as well as the description of the food and the leftovers. My opinion is that it is a whole different people group as well. In Matthew the stories are in adjacent chapters.

⁵ And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Mark 8:5 Like the previous miraculous feeding, Jesus asks what they have (6:38^v). This time instead of five loaves and two fish, it is seven loaves and a few small fish.

Why does Jesus ask what we have? I think it is to remind us of our insufficiency. **When we realize how little we have to work with it emphasizes the impossibility of our task. That means all the glory goes to God.** If you think you can do it, you already blew it. So many programs come out of churches and people with great ideas, and the result is a lot of money spent and almost nothing to show for it. Sometimes the result is even detrimental.

It reminds me of the turn of the century when so many churches were excited about Purpose Driven Church. Pastor Rick Warren had a vision inspired by the Holy Spirit and the little church that started in his house grew into an international movement. But then he wrote a book on how it happened and churches everywhere tried to imitate the method minus the very first step which was getting God's direction. Instead the process became a formula. Churches split over trying to do the same. Some people went broke trying to build a mega-church. Here at this church, they hired a pastor from a much larger church who tried to implement it and one year later the church fired him and then split. Sedona is not a city surrounded by a million residents. It is a tourist destination. God does not operate by formulas. Every church is unique and has its own calling.

How many loaves do we have to meet the need around us? We know that in ourselves we do not have nearly enough to meet the need. But never forget that we have JHWH Jireh, or I should say that it is He who has us! This little church has sent out five missionaries, shared the Gospels of John with thousands who walk by our door, fed the homeless, seen wandering young New Age people turn to Christ and find work, marriage, and a home, and every day thousands of people read our devotional. We are still a tiny church with just one or two loaves, but we have YHWH Jireh with us! He is all we need.

How many loaves do you have? You say, just a mere slice of bread? But do you have JHWH Jireh? Then you have all you need to be effective for the kingdom of God! You can share your testimony. You can help the sick or poor in Jesus' name. The little seeds you sow can become great trees. Do not underestimate what God can do through you. Do not hesitate to act when He prompts you (Zechariah 4:6^{vi}).

⁶ And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. Mark 8:6 Like the previous feeding, there is the practical side along with the miraculous. Having them sit made the food distribution easier and less chaotic and would assure everyone would get some.

The traditional blessing over bread is as follows: "Blessed art Thou O Lord God, King of the universe who gives us bread from the earth." It is not a blessing of the bread but blessing God for His provision.

More importantly, He also gives us the bread that came down from heaven. Perhaps the whole reason for these miraculous feedings was to show in the physical that Jesus is enough for all our spiritual need. In John 6:32-35 ³² *Jesus then said to them,*

“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” ³³ *For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* ³⁴ *They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”* ³⁵ *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* The abundance of bread at the miraculous feedings illustrated that Jesus is enough to meet the need of the entire world.

⁷ *And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them.* Mark 8:7 The way the fish portion comes up later, it makes me wonder if the disciples were trying to save the fish for themselves. Did they still not understand? After seeing Jesus calm the storm they certainly should have (Matthew 14:33^{vii}). The English implies that Jesus blessed the fish, but the Greek word translated “them” (*auta*) is almost always a person or oneself. My understanding is that He again blessed God for the provision of the fish that God would multiply to set these before them all.^{viii}

It sounds to me like they did not try to hand each person some fish but instead set a pile before each group. I imagine them going to each group and pouring out a pile on the grass, then to the next group and the next, yet the basket never runs empty. Now do they understand? Do we? If we do, we will never fear not having enough. We know our Great Shepherd will always lead us to green pastures (Psalm 23:1,2^{ix}).

⁸ *And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.* Mark 8:8 Seven loaves resulting in seven large baskets left over. Everyone ate and was satisfied. **Seven is God’s number for completeness, perfection, and divine fullness.** This is another indication that the crowd included numerous nationalities and ethnicities. The spiritual implication is that Jesus, as the bread of life, is more than sufficient for the spiritual hunger of the entire world (Isaiah 49:6^x). Jesus said that those who come to Him will have living water springing up from within (John 4:13,14^{xi}). They would never spiritually thirst again.

In our first world culture we rarely hunger or thirst. In the first century, famines often caused great hunger. Lack of rain could mean travelling a distance to a reliable well. Food and water were the urgent necessities of life. Unless we realize how wicked our natural nature is and how we deserve the judgment of our holy Creator, we will not have a spiritual hunger or thirst. God often allows tragic situations in our lives to cause us to realize our soul’s need. Loneliness, loss, illness, betrayal, and other adverse effects of sin open our eyes to how needy we are. Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6^{xii}). How hungry are you for a relationship with God? Job said, *I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.* Job 23:12b

We were created with a God given hunger. We see it in religions in every culture. The most primitive people have a belief in some kind of god or power greater than themselves. We were created with space in our souls that we call our spirit. Until we recognize our need and invite God to fill that void, surrendering to His rightful place in our lives, we will be trying to fill that void with religion, or pleasure, or relationships, or created things. It is easy to spot what a person worships for satisfaction if you spend some time with them. For many people it is a variety of things, but an honest person will know the main thing they look to for satisfaction. **Jesus is saying He is the only thing that truly eternally satisfies.** He said it with this miracle. He said it to the woman at the well in

Samaria. No one else would dare to say that. We would rightly think they were insane to make such a declaration. The claim is so profound it deserves our contemplation. If we really take Him at His word, it will change the focus of our lives. We realize the insufficiency of our few loaves. That is when we surrender and ask Him to direct us. He becomes our provider and our director. Life becomes an adventure trusting in Jesus rather than ourselves.

⁹ *And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away.* Mark 8:9 The number here is in the masculine form, as was the case with the feeding of the 5000 indicating the numbers were probably just the number of men. There could have been 10,000 or more counting women and children. After feeding them He sent them back to the areas they had come from. They were to go and share what they had heard about the kingdom of God, which is often Jesus' topic when He preaches. It is not something we enter when we die. It is here right now. We enter it when we surrender our lives to Christ.

¹⁰ *And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.* Mark 8:10 After this mass feeding, Jesus does not walk on water as in the previous account. He joins the disciples in sailing to Dalmanutha. Some manuscripts say Magadan instead of Dalmanutha. Both were just north of Magdala. In Magdala there is a synagogue from Jesus' time recently excavated. The mosaic on the floor mirrors one in Jerusalem associated with a high priest. The Pharisees in the next chapter who come to argue with Jesus may have come from that synagogue. Jesus seems to be avoiding the northern most shores where the crowds hindered His movements.

¹¹ *The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.* Mark 8:11 Jesus is in the last year of His ministry. By that time, people were clearly excited about Him being the Messiah. The Pharisees were trying to prove that He was not the one. Because Moses had said that the One we should listen to would be a prophet that would be like Him and arise from their people, they thought the Messiah should do signs like Moses did (Deuteronomy 18:15^{xiii}). If you recall, when God spoke with Moses, Moses doubted the people would accept Him as a leader. God gave Moses three signs. He could put his hand in his cloak and bring it out and it would be leprous. He could put it in and out again and it would be clean.

The second sign had to do with Moses' staff. He could throw it on the ground and it would become a serpent. He could pick it up and it would return to being a staff. The third sign was that pouring water on the ground and it became blood. It sounds like magic tricks, but I think the point is that Moses was previously one way as a prince in Egypt and trying in his own strength to save them. That was the leprous and snake like condition, but now he is clean and can handle the leadership staff. (See Exodus 4:1-9.)

The Pharisees were asking for a sign like Moses gave. But Jesus had given so many signs already, fulfilling prophecies about what the Messiah would do and where He would minister and to whom, things no one else could possibly do. He had just fed the multitude, which is what God did through Moses with manna. He just healed the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the mute fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 35:5,6^{xiv}).

¹² *And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."* Mark 8:12 Jesus had given them so many signs, the lame walked, the blind see, the deaf hear, the dead were raised, many prophecies in detail were fulfilled (Matthew 15:29,30). No wonder Jesus sighed deeply in His spirit. Indeed, why should they seek a sign when so many were

already given. If their hearts were seeking God they would have recognized those signs and considered themselves blessed to be in the company of the Messiah. Matthew records Jesus saying, ³⁹ *But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.* Matthew 12:39 A generation that only trusts what they can see is a generation without faith (Hebrews 11:1^{xv}). People of faith would hear His teaching, and it would resonate in their hearts. That was the case with the disciples and with many who heard Jesus preach. A heart that seeks God will recognize truth when they hear it and live according to it (John 7:17^{xvi}).

The same thing happens today. People ask God to show them a sign that He is real. Can we look at DNA, the night sky, the intricate symbiotic relationships of plants, animals, insects, and microorganisms and say it all just happened? Some people call it an accident of nature. They have more faith than I have. The evidence for God is in our face every day all day. Those who seek some miracle to prove God exists will explain away anything God does to convince them. The hungry heart just needs to hear Him speak to them and they know it is the voice of God (John 10:3^{xvii}).

In this verse Jesus said no sign would be given to them. During Jesus' ministry He gave them no sign in the manner they were suggesting, but as Matthew records, they would get the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39), His resurrection. Even then most of the people would refuse to believe. Our sinful nature can come up with excuses to not believe because it wants to continue to reign over our life. If we are not seeking the truth, we will cling to our excuses no matter how irrational they are.

The God who fed the 5000 Jews and the 4000 Gentiles is more than sufficient to meet the hunger of your heart. **He is our all-sufficient Savior.** His Word will speak to your heart if you are willing to hear. He is pleased with faith that does not see but still believes (Hebrews 11:6^{xviii}; John 20:29^{xix}).

¹³ *And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.* Mark 8:13 Jesus and His disciples sailed to Bethsaida, probably so the disciples could visit their families one more time. They will go for a final visit to Capernaum, but secretly. Then Jesus will leave to the south and never to return. He is headed to the cross for you and me. Jesus is all we need for salvation, for sanctification, for every need. He alone can satisfy the longing in our hearts for love and peace. He invites us to come to Him to find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30^{xx}).

Questions:

- 1 Where did this take place?
- 2 What people make up this crowd of thousands?
- 3 When did Jesus previously mention going to the Gentiles?
- 4 Why does Jesus ask what we have?
- 5 What is more important than earthly bread?
- 6 How much did they eat? Implication?
- 7 When do we enter the kingdom of God?
- 8 Why did the people want a sign?
- 9 What had the sign seekers missed and why?
- 10 Where were did they go next? Why?

i Mark 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

ii Luke 4:25-30 (ESV)

²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.

iii Mark 6:52 (ESV)

⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

iv Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

v Mark 6:38 (ESV)

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.”

vi Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

vii Matthew 14:33 (ESV)

³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

^{viii} The Greek is literally, “These are to be served also.”

ix Psalm 23:1-2 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

x Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

xi John 4:13-14 (ESV)

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.”

xii Matthew 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

xiii 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—

xiv Isaiah 35:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

xv Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

xvi John 7:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

xvii John 10:3 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

^{xviii} **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

^{xix} **John 20:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

^{xx} **Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)**

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”