**Understanding Jesus, The Bread of Life**

Text: Mark 8:1-10

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**Scriptures:** Deuteronomy 8:1-3; John 6:31-35; Mark 8:1-21

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 107, 183, 378, 383, 365

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#22)

**Occasion:** Lord’s Supper

**Theme:** Jesus miraculously feeds 4000 people in the region of the Decapolis, yet the disciples do not yet understand who He is.

**Proposition:** Understand that Jesus is the life-giving Bread you need most.

**Introduction**

You have probably heard the phrase ‘Chinese whispers’ and you likely already know that this has nothing to do with people from the nation of China. Chinese Whispers is a game where a piece of information is passed from one person to the next and is changed slightly each time it is told. As a result of the common phenomenon of ‘Chinese whispers’ when stories are transmitted by word of mouth from one person to another, errors can creep into historical accounts.

Some people have suggested that this is what happened with our text in Mark’s gospel. Mark, they say, has got mixed up and has inadvertently repeated Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the multitudes in his gospel; once in chapter 6 (vv30-44) and then again here in chapter 8 (1-10). This, some have said, is clear evidence that the Bible contains errors. It is certainly true that there are some similarities between the two accounts, both of which involve the miraculous provision of bread and fish for a large number of hungry people. However, there are also differences:

* There were 5,000 men in the first account, 4,000 people in the second.
* The first feeding came at the end of one day of Jesus’ teaching, the second after three days.
* There were five loaves and two fish in the first, seven loaves and a few small fish in the second
* There were twelve full baskets of leftovers in the first, seven in the second
* There were Jews at the first feeding (they had travelled round the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee from the region of Capernaum) whereas the second feeding took place in the predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis. There would have been many Gentiles as well as some Jews at the second feeding.
* Mark clearly understood that there were two separate occasions when Jesus fed a multitude.
* More conclusive even than this are the words of Christ to His disciples recorded in Mark 8:19-20: ‘*When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, “Twelve.” And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, “Seven.”’*

It is plainly clear that Jesus repeated the same miracle on at least two separate occasions. Why? Whilst the Scriptures do not directly answer this question, here are some plausible reasons:

* In both cases He had compassion for the hungry people who had gathered to hear Him.
* In both cases He performed a supernatural sign that pointed to His identity as the promised Messiah, the New Moses.
* He performed the miracle, not only for the physical benefit of the crowds, but for the spiritual training of His disciples

This third possible reason is supported by the clear lack of understanding of the disciples, and it is this that we will focus on in our sermon today under three headings:

1. Jesus provides for all our needs
2. Jesus provides super-abundantly
3. Jesus provides Himself for life
4. **Jesus provides for all our needs**

So what did the disciples not yet understand? (8:21) Jesus was providing for the needs of the gathered crowd, firstly their spiritual need through His teaching. They had been listening to Him for three days (8:2). Whatever food they might have brought with them had been consumed. They were hungry. Jesus ‘called his disciples to him’ (v1). He had a particular lesson for them, explaining: "*I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 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*" (v2-3).

As with the previous occasion when He fed the 5,000, Jesus involved His disciples in what He did. It is clear from the questions that Jesus asked His disciples after the miracle that their understanding of His work here was essential for their understanding of His identity. Listen to His words in verses 17-18: "*Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?*”.

Jesus is the New Moses who has been appointed by God the Father to set His children free from bondage to sin and death. **Just as** God provided for the physical needs of His people in the wilderness by miraculously supplying manna – bread from heaven, **So**, Jesus provides for the multitudes by miraculously multiplying a few loaves to feed a huge congregation of hungry people who had been following Him. **Just as** God provided His Law through Moses at Mt Sinai; giving Israel His spiritual commandments, **So**, Jesus taught the crowd His Word in the region of the Decapolis, providing the people with the spiritual food they needed.

God reveals in Deuteronomy 8:3 that He fed Israel with manna to humble them and to make them know that ‘*man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*’. In the world today many people are physically hungry. The war in Ukraine, increased pollution of land and waterways, and changing weather patterns have contributed to the current food crisis. It is estimated that about 850 million people are undernourished – that’s over 10% of the global population. We all need nutrition to sustain our bodies.

However, even when we do have sufficient to eat, ultimately this is not enough. We are not just material creatures, we are spiritual beings, made in the image of God. Our souls need God’s Word to live. Jesus is the Saviour who provides for all our needs. He is the Good Shepherd who ‘*makes His dependent sheep lie down in green pastures*’ (Ps 23:2). When Christ fed about 4,000 people in the region of the Decapolis, the disciples did not yet understand this. Do you? If so, how does this understanding affect how you live your life? Do you live confidently and securely knowing that Jesus provides for all your needs, body and soul?

1. **Jesus provides super-abundantly**

If Jenny and I have left-over food from dinner, we generally put it in a container and then have it for lunch the next day. If we have leftovers after a meal, that means we had every opportunity to eat until we didn’t want any more.

The same principle applied 2000 years ago. It is significant in both the account of the feeding of the 5,000 men and the 4,000 people that there were substantial leftovers. Mark records “*And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full*” (8:8). The Greek word translated ‘basket’ here indicates a very large container. When the Apostle Paul was lowered down the wall surrounding Damascus, it was in this type of basket (Acts 9:25). It is clear that all the people had plenty to eat and that there were lots of leftovers.

It might be tempting to read additional significance into the number of baskets for example: That seven is the number of completeness. Or even that these baskets prefigure the seven leaders of the Hellenistic Church in Jerusalem. There is nothing in the text to suggest that Mark intended any meaning other than that there were seven large baskets of leftovers after everyone had eaten their fill.

We could summarise it like this: Jesus is very generous. We should not be surprised at this, because Jesus is the Son of God, the Image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). He provides abundantly (Ps 36:7). He declared to Old Testament Israel “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*” (Ps 81:10).

Brothers and sisters in our Lord “*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). Our “*God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 4:19).

Are you content today? If not, then it must be that you do not believe that God has supplied you with sufficient blessings to meet your needs. Are you thankful for the gifts that the Lord has granted to you? Or, do you think that you deserve more money, better health, closer friends, more enjoyable work, or less difficulty in your life? Ultimately, none of the things of this world lastingly satisfy. Within a day of being satisfied with the food that Jesus had provided, the 4,000 people would be hungry again and looking for their next meal. The super-abundant giving of Christ to physically feed the multitude points to His offering up of Himself, which brings us to our third point.

1. **Jesus provides Himself for life**

You might already have heard the story about a church looking for a pastor. After a few candidates had been vetted and interviewed, one man preached, wowed the church, was called and ordained. On the very first Sunday of this new pastor’s ministry, he walked to the pulpit, opened up his Bible, and preached a powerful sermon that was Biblically sound, theologically accurate, and was applicable to the congregation’s everyday life. People in the pew nudged each other and said, “This is just the man we need!”

On the second Sunday, he walked to the pulpit, opened up his Bible and preached a powerful sermon that was Biblically sound, theologically accurate, and was applicable to the congregation’s everyday life. Yet, it was the same sermon from the week before. Though a little strange the congregation did not mind much. Each person remarked about the depth of Scripture and how they learned something new in the second hearing of the same sermon.

On the third Sunday, the pastor walked to the pulpit, read the same passage and preached the same sermon. While the congregation was confident that this man was the preacher God had called to their church, they grew a little concerned. A few church members approached the Elders and said, “*If he has the cheek to preach that sermon one more time – you’ll need to have a talk with him!*”.

On the fourth Sunday, the pastor walked to the pulpit, read the same passage and preached the same sermon. After the service, the Elders requested a few moments of the Pastor’s time. He invited them into his office and asked, “*What can I do for you brothers?*” They answered, “*We are a bit concerned that you keep preaching the same sermon every Sunday. Our question is: Do you have another sermon?*” The preacher took off his glasses, folded his arms and responded, “*I do have another sermon. But this church hasn’t understood and obeyed the first one yet.*”

Repetition helps us to learn. Sometimes we don’t ‘get it’ first time, round. The disciples were like that. Twice they had been involved in Jesus miraculously satisfying many people with the food that they needed, yet they still didn’t understand who Jesus is. Later in this chapter, Mark will record the confession of Peter, on behalf of all the disciples, when he says, “*You are the Christ*” (Mark 8:29). Finally they ‘got it’ – they understood who Jesus is.

We read earlier in John’s gospel how Jesus explained the spiritual meaning of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. "*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. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*." (John 6:32-33). Jesus identified Himself as the Spiritual Bread that gives life. Then He explains "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst*” (John 6:35). This ‘I am’ statement (cf. Ex 3:14) identifies Jesus as being divine. He is the God-man who gives life to all who ‘*hunger and thirst for righteousness*’ (Matt 5:6). Jesus is the source of righteousness for all who come to Him in faith trusting that He died in their place for their sin.

As we eat the bread and drink the wine at the Lord’s Supper table, we remember His sacrificial death and our faith is spiritually nourished. Brothers and sisters, worship the Lord this day because:

1. Jesus provides for all our needs
2. Jesus provides super-abundantly
3. Jesus provides Himself for life

AMEN.