

Feeding and understanding

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[0 : 00] So let's again pray. Lord help us that as we are gathered together this evening that you wouldn't end up saying to us that you'd shown us so much but we still had failed to understand.

So come and be amongst us we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. So what we're going to do this evening is very simple really. We're just going to go through the text, through the words, see what it says and try and think about it, explain it a little bit, ponder on it a little bit.

So what do we have here? Now if you've got your Bible there and you've still got the place, we were in Mark chapter 8, the feeding of the 4,000.

If you flip back just about a page or so you'll find chapter 6 verses 30 to 44 which is the feeding of the 5,000.

And these are sort of twins. They're very like each other. Not exactly the same but very, very like each other.

[1 : 21] So Jesus has done more or less the same thing on two separate occasions. And in between times Jesus is expecting the disciples to learn and think of the implications of what he's done.

The feeding of the 5,000 was in a way a quiet thunderbolt because there were 5,000 people, at least 5,000 people in a remote place, in a desert place and Jesus just fed them.

You see it in chapter 6,000 people in a desert place and you see it in chapter 6 verse 38 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes, 2 fish. And it really, I suppose in a quiet sort of a quiet sort of a quiet sort of a miracle.

It doesn't make a lot of noise, does it? Jesus took this small amount of food and distributed it and in the end everybody had enough to eat. And the crowd was thinking, what just happened?

What just happened? And then they begin to think, who is Jesus? Who can do this? And all sorts of reactions and responses.

[2 : 49] In John's Gospel we're told that they were so impressed that some of them said, we want to make Jesus king by force. And they were going to go up to the front and grab him and say, he's going to be our king.

Lift him shoulder high. Look what he can do. If he can do this with bread and fish, goodness knows what he could do with spears and swords and the Roman army and everything like that. They wanted to make him king by force.

Very dangerous situation. And Jesus responded to it by sending his disciples away very quickly. Because it has explosive possibilities.

But did the disciples or did anybody understand about it? If you look at chapter 6 verse 52. If you look at chapter 6 verse 52. Jesus walked on water coupled with the feeding miracle.

And the disciples were absolutely terrified and absolutely amazed. 6.52. And it says they had not understood about the loaves.

[3 : 58] They hadn't seen the point. And tellingly it says their hearts were hardened. They had hard hearts.

And didn't understand. Didn't take it in. It didn't go in. Their hearts were hardened. Please can you find.

Don't lose the other places. But Isaiah chapter 6. Okay. If it's too difficult to find Isaiah 6. Don't worry. But if you know where it is.

Might be worth looking at it with your own eyes. Isaiah chapter 6. So going way back in the Old Testament now. To the ministry of the prophet Isaiah.

And he was sent to the nation of Israel. God's favorite family. If you like. And Isaiah was told.

[4 : 56] This is what you're going to do. You're going to speak to the nation of Israel. And you're going to sincerely teach them. And engage with them.

And plead with them. To come back to God. And this is what's going to happen. This is Isaiah 6 verse 9. Notice the words. Go and tell this people.

Be ever hearing. But never understanding. Be ever seeing. But never perceiving.

Make the heart of this people calloused. Hard in other words. Make their ears dull.

Close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes. And hear with their ears. And understand with their hearts. And turn and be healed.

[5 : 57] It's a very mysterious thing to say. Isn't it? But I mean. How does that all work out? But we can see what's happening. If you like. From on the surface point of view.

Isaiah goes and speaks to these people. With all his heart. And the end result is. That at the end of his ministry. That at the end of his ministry. Fewer people believe. Than did at the beginning.

And the effect of what he's done. Is that people get hard. Resistant. Their eyes don't work. Their ears don't work.

Their hearts don't work. And they don't turn to God. To be healed. It's an awful situation. It's an awful situation. But you can.

You can get the point. Can't you? That God goes out of his way. To speak to these people. And even. Though God goes out of his way.

[6 : 54] And is so patient. They're still resistant. And they get harder. And harder. And harder. And. You know. Somebody's got to do it. And Isaiah. Was the man.

Through whom. That ministry happened. So that's way back. In the Old Testament. Keep those thoughts. In your mind. Because. Excuse me.

Sorry. As Jesus. Is. Teaching people. Walking around. Talking to people. Doing miracles. This.

Same. Question. Hangs over. The response. To Jesus. Did you notice then. In chapter 8. Verse 17. He talks to his disciples.

And he says. Guys. I'm really worried about you. Do you. Look at this. 8.17. Do you. Still not see.

[7 : 55] Or understand. Are your hearts. Your hearts. Hardened. Do you. Have eyes. But fail to see. And ears. But fail to hear.

And don't you. Remember. Do you see. He's picking up. That exact. Same thought. That exact. Language. Of the heart. And the ears. And the eyes.

And he says. You guys. Of all people. Are you. Hard. Like this. So that's the question.

That hangs over. This. These passages. It hangs over. The whole thing. What's going to happen.

To the disciples. It's probably. Perhaps a question. That God.

Might ask us. I don't know. Everybody's situation. But perhaps. Let's not. Assume. That he. He's not saying it.

[8 : 49] I've shown you so much. You've had so much. Background. You've. People have spoken to you. And. And so on. Have you got the point.

Or is it just all. Washed over you. Has it all gone past you. Have you seen. But not. Not seen. Have you heard. But never taken it in. Do you know. I would imagine.

That there are churches. All over the world. Filled with people. To whom Jesus says. You're sitting there. But you have never. Ever got the point. You've seen so much.

But you haven't taken it in. You've heard so much. But you haven't. Absorbed it. The question for those disciples. Are your hearts hardened?

It's rather. Uncomfortable. Isn't it? Let's look at. The. The. The action. Then. In chapter. Eight. The five thousand.

[9 : 50] And the four thousand. It's worth comparing them. Because they are twins. They're. Not completely identical. Twins. The five thousand. Was on home ground.

Home territory. The four thousand. Well. We know. From the geography. What's happened before. That Jesus is up in the north. And that's. Sort of. Mixed.

Territory. Gentile. Territory. The. Five thousand. If you look. At the text. It says. In chapter. Six.

That they were. Trying to go. To a quiet place. And get some rest. Six thirty. One. Chapter. Eight.

Well. We don't. Know. Really. Why.

Jesus. Was in that area. He just. Seemed to be. In that area. He wasn't. Really. Trying to get rest.

So. That's a bit different. Here's a striking. Similarity. Chapter. Six.

involved.

They're not left while Jesus does all the running. They're involved in this, because Jesus likes to involve his disciples in things. And we have this divine act of feeding. Verse 8, the people ate and were satisfied. The word satisfied is significant. It's in both cases. It's also the word that was used by the Syrophenician woman for, I can't actually remember which bit it was for.

First, let the children be satisfied, Jesus told her. It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs, remember? So the miracle is a divine act of feeding. It's God seeing people who need stuff and are empty and are about to die. And God saying, I can see what they need and I will provide it and giving it sort of person by person, mouth by mouth to these people so that they live. And that's a wonderful demonstration, isn't it? The God who feeds people who would otherwise die. [17:40] And of course, part of the thing we're supposed to remember is that's exactly what Jehovah, the Lord, did in the Old Testament when the people were in the desert and they would have died.

They knew that and God knew that and they said, God, you don't care about us. You're not going to do anything for us. And God said, don't be silly. Who do you think I am? You just wait and I will provide.

And he provided the manna, didn't he? This mysterious food that was given every day to the people who needed it. And really Jesus is reenacting that with all the implications for who Jesus is. It's a feeding miracle. And one of the things that we will think about when we come around the Lord's table is, of course, that that's exactly a right way to understand what Jesus did on the cross. That he provided a meal for people who would die otherwise. And the meal is really himself. I am the living bread who comes down from heaven, says Jesus.

[18:59] Whoever eats of me will never die. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert, but they died. Whoever eats this bread will never die. Now, is that what he says? Will rise again. He's talking about the resurrection, really. He's talking about eternal life.

The manna just delayed death. The bread, which is Jesus, defeats death. And of course, bread isn't a completely adequate idea. And in John's gospel, Jesus says, I am the bread of life. And then he goes on to say, you have to drink my blood and eat my flesh. And the blood bit of it, the Pharisees, the Jews can't take that. Of course, that's to do with death. It's not, it's, we've moved from the bakery to the butchery, haven't we? From the baker's shop who makes bread to the butcher's shop where you have blood. And of course, Jesus is saying in John's gospel, what you have to get in mind is that you can't have this food without the blood part of it. If I hadn't died, there would be no meal. If I hadn't taken God's wrath upon myself to the point of death, then there'd be no meal. Anyway, that's, that's taking a little bit further than Mark takes it. He feeds his people. And the people are satisfied, that comes in both of them. And there's a leftover, there are seven baskets full with the feeding of 5,000. There were 12 baskets full with the, this one, the seven. And then they leave. So there's similarities and differences.

But I do notice that Jesus is prepared to teach the same lesson twice. Now, if you're a school teacher or a teacher, you know that it's a great thing to have a store of lessons that you can teach multiple times. Isn't that right, Mark? Yeah. That's part of, that's part of the professionalism. But I don't think Jesus had to teach the same lesson. He didn't have to teach the same lesson twice. He's lots of, but he was prepared to teach the same lesson twice. I think that's rather encouraging because the disciples didn't get the idea the first time. And you could sort of think of Jesus saying, well, if you haven't got this the first time, then I'm just going to, I'm fed up with you. But Jesus is actually prepared to say, okay, you didn't get it. Let's do the whole thing all over again. So let's go right back to where you were to do the whole thing all over again. And I'm, I'm rather encouraged that Jesus is prepared to do that because I think that shows his, his patience and I need his patience.

I don't know about you. So let's look at the reactions that come next. And the reaction in verse 11, the Pharisees, now we've moved away to another region, but the, the two bits are connected. the Pharisees came and began to question Jesus to test him. They asked him for a sign from heaven. And this is where Jesus sighs deeply. Now just bear with me for one moment while I look this up.

[22:41] Yeah. Do you not think that's a strange thing for the disciple, for the Pharisees to ask? Do you not think that's a strange thing? Because Jesus has just fed 4,000 people. They must have heard about it. They weren't completely ignorant. But they come to Jesus and say, you just fed

5,000 people, you just fed 4,000 people, plus, plus, plus, all other things. Could you give us a sign from heaven? Could you do something? You know? I think that's a very odd question.

It's exactly the same in John's gospel, where you have the feeding of the 5,000 and the Pharisees turn up. Could we have a sign, please? Well, what do you think just happened? What do you think just happened? The Pharisees' reaction, they ask for a sign from heaven. And what is it that makes them say that? What is it that makes them say, we're still not convinced? I mean, they're not even saying that, are they? They're saying, we don't think we've seen anything yet. I mean, what sort of stupidity is this? What sort of hardness of heart? What sort of ignorance? What sort of spiritual blindness is there that these people should say, oh, we haven't seen a sign?

And the reaction of Jesus is this sigh, which we looked at last week.

It's a very interesting reaction, isn't it, this sigh. He doesn't lose his temper. He doesn't get angry with them, but he does sigh. And I think there's a world of implication in that sigh. It's certainly not approval, is it? But there's something, oh, you know, oh, these people.

But he is, but he does say to them, well, he asks the question, why? Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? It's worth listening to that question, isn't it? You know, if you were worried that that was you, Jesus is saying, well, why are you asking that? What is it that's going on inside you that's making you say that? And then Jesus rather solemnly says, I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it. Now, I don't think he's meaning he won't do any more miracles, because he certainly does. And I don't think he's saying, I mean, the resurrection is a sign, and that definitely happens.

[25 : 59] But I think he is saying, there is such a thing as a window of opportunity, and a window of opportunity opens, and a window of opportunity closes. And again, I'm thinking of John's gospel, where in the same sort of situation, let me just read you what he says in a similar situation in John's gospel.

He says to them, it's, what have I got, 1235, he says, you are going to have the light just a little while longer, walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he's going. Put your trust in the light. He's saying, while you've got, while the light's still shining, have you ever been in those places where you walk down the stairs, walk down the, yeah, staircase, and you have to push a button at the top to put the light on?

Have you ever been in one of those things that's worked on a sucker? You push it, and it goes, and you run down the stairs before it goes, and it switches off again. You know what I mean? And Jesus is saying, while he's here on earth, the light is shining. Now make the most of it before the light goes out again. I'll read you what it says in John's gospel a little bit further.

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet. Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this reason, they could not believe, as Isaiah says elsewhere, he has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, though they neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn, and I would heal them. Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. Do you see that same connection? Same connection.

Okay, let's, there's a door of opportunity, and there's a warning. I think that's a warning. Now maybe you're in the situation where you're just entering that window of opportunity, and you're thinking, there's so much that I've got to find out. There's so much I need to learn, and I want to urge you to put your, don't take your foot off the accelerator. The stuff to learn, well, learn it. Don't postpone it. Don't say, well, I might try and learn this maybe next year, you know, or the year after. Now's a good time. Don't let the time go by. Don't let that window of opportunity close. Make the most of it. And actually, Jesus makes it into a warning, doesn't he? In the next, the next sentence he says, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Don't let yourself get hard. Don't let yourself get blind, but instead respond to what God's showing you.

[29 : 13] Ask him to make, that you can use every bit that he gives you. Let's look at the disciples' reaction.

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring bread. This is verse 14, except for one loaf which they had with them in the boat. Be careful, Jesus warned them. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. Now when he says yeast, we know he doesn't mean bread. He doesn't mean stuff you bake bread with.

He means, he actually means the mindset, the thinking, the attitude, the teaching of the Pharisees and of Herod. He says, watch out for that attitude because if you pick that up, you'll be hard like them and you'll be saying stupid things like, show us a sign when I've already shown you a million signs.

He says, watch out for that. And the disciples in their blissful ignorance say, oh, he's saying that because we forgot to pack the sandwiches this morning. Who was going to do the sandwiches? Weren't you going to get some bread? You were going to get some cheese. Well, why didn't you do it? We haven't got anything. That's what Jesus is. And Jesus is saying, you ignorant twits. What are you talking about sandwiches for? I'm not talking about sandwiches. They've completely missed the point.

[30 : 43] Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see? It's quite penetrating questions, aren't they? Guys, you're not going to be like the Pharisees, are you? You're not going to end up like the people that Isaiah prophesied about, are you? You're not going to have eyes which don't see and ears which don't hear and things that you forget? Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

Don't you remember? Do you not remember what I said? Do you not remember what just happened the day before yesterday and then a couple of weeks previously? Don't you remember?

Remember? And of course, the sad fact is we don't remember, do we? Have you learnt that about yourself? That God can do something for you, teach you something and at the moment you think, wow, that's just going to, I'm going to never forget that and the following day you've completely forgotten it.

Have you never noticed yourself doing that? And he says here there's a spiritual necessity of using the memory.

Use your eyes, what do you see? Use your ears, what do you hear? And use your memory. When you've heard it and seen it, don't forget it but remember it, go back over it.

[32 : 28] It's one good reason for trying to get scripture into your memory. One good way of doing that is reading it actually and then reading it again and reading it again and some of it will stick and you remember it. It's worth remembering. Another good exercise is having sufficient of a diary that you can remember the good things that God has done because I can tell, because I, some years ago I decided that I would keep a diary of the things I was thankful for and you'd be surprised how, this is my testimony, I think God hasn't done anything for me in the last month. Hang on a minute, look back in the diary.

Actually it was only last week you prayed about something, you thought, oh I really need God for this and look, God answered that prayer and of course that, you'd forgotten that and that, you'd forgotten that and the value of having a way of remembering what God has done, well this is what he says here.

They'd forgotten the five, well I don't know what that stands for, five loaves, 5,000 people, 12 baskets left over, seven loaves, 4,000 people, seem to have lost a zero in there, don't I?

Seven baskets left over, but he says there are some statistics, which I failed to copy properly, but there are some statistics to help you spiritually. It's interesting, isn't it?

Remembering those numbers is meant to help them spiritually and he says, so he reminds them, there's hard facts that you could look back on that would help you.

[34 : 24] And so I put the value of, I don't know, what do you think is valuable in helping us to keep, to keep sensitive to God, to not be hard, to not be ungrateful.

Anybody here keep any sort of diary like that? Off and on, yeah.

Yeah, off and on. Anybody else? Got one off and on? One sort of? That's what it's certainly worth thinking about.

Maybe you've got much better memories than our summer and me, and you could remember anyway. I remember, you know, some people do have very good memories. Probably doesn't include me. But the value of calling to mind, making a deliberate effort to think, you know, to say, this is how I feel.

Okay, that's how I feel. I don't put too much store on how I feel. Let's actually think about what God has done. Let's think about what God has said. Let's remember those things. And then I'll think how I feel when I've contemplated the facts, like the hard facts, the statistics, the realities of who God is and what he's done.

[35 : 43] And then that puts a different light on things. Well, the section that we're looking at ends with an unresolved question.

Do you still not understand? And as we go further on, we will find out whether they did or didn't. Let's sing together.