

Feeding the five thousand

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[0 : 00] So please turn, if you have a Bible and you can manage to find the place, Mark chapter 6 verses 30 and onwards in which Jesus feeds the 5,000.

And I've got an ambition as to the time I'm going to finish, but I won't tell you what it is in case I don't make it. The point of this talk is very simple.

It is that we think highly of Jesus. That's the application, that we think highly of Jesus. This in Mark's gospel and in the other gospels is perhaps of all the signs that Jesus did the greatest, the most significant, the most revealing, the most breathtaking.

It's always in the gospels coupled with the walking on the water, which you can see is directly after this, verse 45 and onwards.

So the two go together. Please look at verse 51, where when Jesus had walked on the water, he climbed into the boat and the wind died down and they were completely amazed.

[1 : 29] They had no idea what on earth is going on. Our master fed 5,000 people. Now he's walking on water. We just got no idea about this.

And it says, They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. In other words, if they had understood the significance of Jesus and the loaves, they would not have been so totally confused by the walking on water.

They would have said, Well, this is amazing, but it all fits. But you see, it says they didn't. They were stupid. They were spiritually stupid.

In other places, Jesus says, Are you so dull? And they were dull. And we perhaps find that we're dull too. It's bracketed with another huge feeding miracle, the feeding of the 4,000, which is in chapter 8, verse 1.

And onwards. So you've got the feeding of the 5,000, and then you have quite a few things that happen in between them, the feeding of the 4,000. And all through this, the question is, Have they understood this?

[2 : 49] Have they got it? And the answer is a bit in the balance. Have you got it? Do you understand? Do you know what this is on about?

Have you got the point? And in verse 20, or verse 17 onwards, after the feeding of the 4,000, they're discussing with one another.

And Jesus says, You're talking about having no bread. Is that relevant to you? Do you not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but not see, and ears but fail to hear? Do you not remember? Let's do it all over again. Feeding of the 5,000. Loaves was five. Basketfuls of pieces left over. 12, they said, Well, at least they could remember that.

And then the 4,000. Look back on that. Guys, how many people were there? 4,000. How many basketfuls of pieces do you pick up? And they said, Seven. And he said, Have you got the point yet?

[3 : 51] Do you understand? And it's sort of not really answered, is it? But what this is telling us is, this is hugely significant. And our response to it is hugely significant.

And I'm going to ask that same question. Have you got the point? Do you see what it all means? Well, let's put it into a little bit of context.

There's a lovely play on words in verse 21, where Herod, when he had his banquet, which included as surprise last course, head of prophet on, served, drizzled with blood on a plate.

That was that banquet. And it was an opportune time, verse 21, and there's a play on words in verse 31, because it says, For Jesus and his disciples, people were coming and going, so they did not have opportunity to eat.

It's the same word, just in a slightly different form. So you've got one opportunity of this ridiculous and regrettable and appalling feast up in the palace, contrasted with what's going to be a most remarkable meal out there in the desert.

[5 : 12] Another thing that we should notice, so let's look at it. The apostles gathered around verse 30, reported to him all they had done and taught. Because there are so many people coming and going, they didn't have an opportunity to eat.

He said something to them. Now, there's people coming and going. One of the commentators links it with the apostles' circular journey.

They'd been out talking and going to different villages and so on. And I think there's some sense in that, that they've actually stirred up so much interest that people are saying, well, what are we doing this afternoon?

Not much. Why don't we go down and see this Jesus that they've been talking about? Or what are we doing today? You know, you're visiting your mother, so that leaves me free. So I could take the boys and we could go and find this Jesus that those guys came around talking about.

And there's so much of this going on. There's so many people coming and going. And could you tell us this? What do you think about, you know, the prophet Hosea? There's a difficult bit in that I've always wondered about.

[6 : 19] And there's so much of this going on. They don't, I'm just going to, oh, hang on a minute. Somebody else wants to ask a question. That Jesus says to them, come with me by yourselves.

That phrase is emphasized, by yourselves to a quiet place. An erimos topos.

Eremos means, well, actually it means desert. And that's where we get the word hermit in English because a hermit is somebody who lives by himself in the desert.

An erimos topos. Topos from which we get topology means place. So a desert place. And this phrase is repeated. It is translated differently each time by the NIV.

So come with me by yourselves to an erimos topos, a desert place, and get rest.

[7 : 18] And verse 32, so they went away by themselves in a boat to an erimos topos, a desert place.

And they actually repeat this in verse 35. It was late in the day. And the disciples came to him, rather stating the obvious, Master, this is an erimos topos.

It's a desert place. Well, we knew that because we've already been told that twice. But it's significant. In case we missed it, it's said three times. It's an erimos topos.

It's a desert place. And I think there's great significance in these words that Jesus says, come with me to a desert place and rest.

It's easy to just whoosh past that and say, well, it's fairly obvious they needed rest. Anybody would.

[8 : 17] But think of what's happening. There is a significance to this. Look at Deuteronomy 12, 8 to 10. Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy.

Maybe somebody give us a page number in the blue. 191. So we're going back in the Old Testament. These are some of the foundational books of the Old Testament.

The books of Moses. So we've gone way back. And what we're looking at is what God did. What he said about what he was doing in the time of the Exodus.

Because time of the Exodus sort of sets an agenda for the sort of God God is and the sort of way he deals with people. What he has planned.

In Deuteronomy 12, verse 8, it says, you are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit. Since you have not yet reached the resting place.

[9 : 32] Deuteronomy 12, verse 8 and 9. You need to come a bit this way. I'll read on.

You have not yet reached the resting place, the inheritance the Lord your God has given you. But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. And he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. It's not just an accidental correspondence of words.

It's quite fundamental. What does the Lord God do for his people? He gives them rest. He takes them to a place of rest.

He promises them rest. And this promise sort of has a trajectory. It goes on through the Old Testament. It lands. And then when it lands, people say, well actually there's more to it than this.

[10 : 42] And the promise takes off again and lands somewhere else. And in Matthew chapter 11 verse 28, it lands, as it were, at the feet of Jesus who picks up the promise and says this in Matthew

11 verse 28.

So I'm sorry, I've whooshed on now to the New Testament. And this is Jesus himself saying, Matthew 11 verse 28, Come to me, all you who are wearied and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. You will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

It's not an accident of grammar or vocabulary. It's significant. The Lord is the rest giver, the rest promiser.

And Jesus picks up that promise and puts it into his own hands, as it were, and says, I'm the one who gives rest. Come to me, weary people, burdened people, and I will fulfill that promise.

[12:08] The promise that wasn't really fulfilled in having geography and the promise that wasn't really fulfilled in having military security, but the promise that still stands and is still there and is bigger than ever, I will give you rest.

And the promise is there in Hebrews 3. So this is, we've gone right almost to the far end of the Bible. This is after Jesus has gone into heaven and they're talking about how to be churches. Subsequently, Hebrews 3, verse 11, is the writer to Hebrews quoting. And he's saying, what did God say?

He said, I declared on oath in my anger, they'll never enter my rest. And then he picks it up in 4, verse 1, and he says, that promise still stands.

There is a promise of entering his rest. Make sure you've got it. Make sure you've got that promise because whose hand do you get it from?

[13:22] Will you get it from the hand of Jesus? And how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? He's going on to say. So I, this is my first stopping point in Mark.

I think there's a really significant statement. I take you to the desert place and I give you rest.

Let's move on. Now, so that, that, that's the promise, although it doesn't get fulfilled at this point because off they go in the boat by themselves to the Edimos, Topos, the desert place.

But, people are saying, oi, did you see where Jesus went? Did you see where he's going? I can see where he's going. Did you see what direction he's going? Yeah, he got in that boat with those blokes. Off he goes, he's over there.

I reckon we could run around there quicker than he could sail around there and they all get together and it's all, come on, we can do it. They ran on foot but many who saw them leaving, verse 38, recognized them or knew it and ran on foot from all the towns.

[14:34] They run around the coast and they must have been in, you know, sweaty and out of breath and, but they got there ahead of Jesus.

So, there they get and Jesus lands and I invite you to put yourself in the position of Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus has just said, you've had a really stressful time doing this preaching ministry. You've been out round and I'd like to give you rest.

We need some time together. We need some rest and I expect Jesus could do with a rest day too.

So, there they are looking forward to a little bit of a seaside break, you know, picnic, sitting under the trees, whatever like that and they get to the other end and, hello, Jesus, we saw you, we saw you, we saw you, we got here before you and, well, what would you say?

Because, and he had something. So, I'll give you A, B or C. He had stern words. Well, excuse me, I have planned a quiet retreat. Would you mind? Or a rebuke?

[15:47] Do you not think it's awfully rude to come bursting in? I'm trying to have a little bit of private time here with my disciples. Or indignation. You know, I plan things and I really need this rest and these stupid people come around and muck it all up.

I could imagine myself responding in any, if not all, of those ways. This crowd, and characteristically, the crowd are so rude and so unappreciative and so on.

But here they all are all over again. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had, what's the next word? Compassion on them. He had compassion on them.

These poor folks, look at them, all sweaty and full of excitement. They don't know whether they're coming or going actually.

He had compassion on them and there's not a lot of words that describe Jesus in an emotional life. But there are a few and this one is a strong word.

[16:58] I don't think I can pronounce it in Greek but it's to do with your guts. It's to do with this part of you. So, it's this sort of digestive part.

If it's a woman, it's sort of your womb part and it's saying that Jesus felt it there. So, what was it that William Taylor said?

Gut-wrenching compassion. Jesus looked at them and he thought, oh, these, these people, they need.

and he looked at them with gut-wrenching compassion. That's a good question how we look out on the world with all its mix-ups and its blasphemies and it's, I don't know, the things that we disapprove of and whether we look out and say, well, we're so much better than they are.

We've got no time for them. Let's get as far away from them as possible. But Jesus' reaction was, he was, I've made up that word. It's not a real word.

[18:17] He was, I've made up that word, compassionated. In his guts, he felt, I need to give to these people. And interestingly, it says that he began teaching them many things.

The quote is, they were like sheep without a shepherd. And that is not a random quote. It's said a small number of times in the Old Testament.

Now don't bother getting in a muddle if you're not going to find this easily. I'll read it. It's not a problem. This is back in the Old Testament.

And I do hope I've got the right one. Yes, I have. Moses said to the Lord, may the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the Lord's people will not be like a sheep without a shepherd.

Don't let them be just wandering all over the place, not knowing whether they're coming or going.

No idea. They need somebody. And Moses says they need a leader.

[19:26] They need a national leader. And that idea is picked up in places. The 1 Kings 22, I think, is also echoed in another quote.

But let's just take this one, which is of the disaster of the nation envisaged as being attacked and routed with their leader killed.

And Micaiah the prophet sees this. He says, I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, these people have no master.

Let each one go home in peace. It's a picture of a nation without leadership. A huge number of people just going awful in all directions. And the same thing you get in Ezekiel 34 where the Lord says, I'll be their shepherd.

I'll send David to be their shepherd, he says. And he says, I'll be their shepherd. And Jesus sees these people like sheep without a shepherd. And he has compassion on them.

[20:42] So he taught them many things. Now what happens next? By this time it was late in the day. So the disciples come to him. Now they're ever pragmatists, aren't they, the disciples?

Master, in case you hadn't noticed, this is an erimos topos. It's a desert place. I think Jesus probably knew that. It's already very late. I think Jesus probably knew that as well.

And they're saying, enough's enough, master. You've given them. You've been very patient with them. They're a scruffy lot.

Isn't it about time they took a bit of responsibility for their own welfare? You send them off so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and they buy themselves something to eat. You know, they're not, they must have a few pennies in their pocket. You're going to send them off to buy stuff. Buy something to eat. And Jesus, it's interesting that the disciples say, well, you know, they buy it.

[21:50] And Jesus says, no, we're going to give it. But Jesus says, you give them something to eat. The disciples are a little bit flummoxed by this.

It's completely unrealistic. It would take 200 denarii. Are we going to spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat? So Jesus says, well, what have you got? Go and find out.

And the answer is that we've got five loaves and two fish. So that's, I mean, we could take the thoughts off in the direction of how God does things, how he expects us to do things, to, you know, to bring our slender resources to him and what he can make of it.

And I'm sure that's in there, but I'm going to, for the sake of time, go, sort of skip over that thought. And move on to what Jesus does.

I find this interesting, that in the midst of something very supernatural, there is also a considerable amount of organization. Jesus directed them.

[22 : 57] He organized them. Epitasso means to put people in place, in position. So just as Chris is going mentally through how you do right angles and various degrees and millimeters and things, Jesus here, he organizes them and he gets them to sit down.

It has two different words to say. It's group by group. It's almost like table by table. It's like at John and Lindsay's wedding where they had different tables and presumably they counted out how many tables and chairs you'd need.

And so they're organized group by group, party by party in hundreds and fifties. I haven't got anything more to say on that but I just noticed it's quite a feature, isn't it?

There's an interesting mixture of miracle and organization. And then Jesus looks up to heaven. Sorry. He takes the loaves and fish. He looks up to heaven. He gives thanks to God. He breaks the loaves. He gives them to the twelve disciples who they in their turn go to the fifties and hundreds group by group, party by party, table by table.

[24 : 24] And it says they all ate and were satisfied. I think I'm correct in saying it's a word that you would that comes from the idea of feeding animals.

You know, they're all nicely provided. They're all fed. They all ate. They all ate and were satisfied. You could almost count them, can't you, if they're in fifties and hundreds.

Sort of count them out. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of people. They all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples pick up twelve baskets of broken pieces.

So presumably their meal tomorrow won't be miraculous. It will be a little bit stale. But you don't waste provision like that. And the number of men, that's not including the women and children, the number was five thousand.

Five thousand. End of story.

[25 : 38] immediately, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat. Off you go. Off you go. Off you go. Go, go, go. No, go. And he dismissed the crowd.

The disciples had said to him, dismiss the crowd before. Send them away. And Jesus says, right, it's not time to go. You go. No, I'm not having any of you badgering me with questions this time.

You go. So off they go. And Jesus immediately goes up a mountainside to pray. Excuse me.

What just happened? What did we just see? What was that? They were all sitting around.

Jesus had been teaching. It was getting late. He made us sit down in groups. I counted them. There was loads of them. There were about five thousand of us. He took about this much food.

[26 : 47] We saw him and heard him give thanks. He took it and he broke it. He gave it out. And we all ate. And we all had enough.

What just happened? And you see, Jesus knows there are implications to this.

And he knows there are very big implications. But, the other gospels sort of spell this out a little bit. He wants them not to rush to the wrong conclusion.

He doesn't want them to, hang on a minute. He sends them away. That's enough. You digest what you've just seen and eaten.

Go. And you disciples, not having you, you know, there's something very intoxicating that's just happened here. Something very, you know, wild almost.

[27 : 50] You get in the boat and go, go on. And Jesus himself, something has happened here which Jesus himself needs to pray over.

Jesus himself has to go and pray that the implications of this will be controlled, will be fruitful, won't just go off in all directions. what did just happen?

Do you understand about the loaves? Do you understand about the loaves? Let me give you a clue. Who does this sort of thing?

Who promises rest? Who takes his people into the desert and feeds them?

Who does that? Who as we shall see miraculously crosses water? Who is it?

[28 : 57] What is it saying about Jesus? So I'm not going to answer that question but I will ask, do you think you have the answer?

Do you understand? what's just happened? Do you understand what this has just shown us? And the only answer I'm going to give is that we sing a song and then we're going to have communion. And I did finish within half an hour which is what I was planning to do. So that was good.