

An Overflow of Grace

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[0 : 0 0] that famous, but the first two are very famous. The first one in particular is very, very famous, the feeding of the 5,000. And I think it suffers a little bit because we are overly familiar with it. It's a Sunday school kind of story, right? Like it's an easy one. It's an easy one to teach at Sunday school because it's like Jesus has a picnic and blankets and everyone's smiling and eating their fish sandwiches or whatever, but it's happy and three-legged races and stuff.

So we can have this kind of fairly sentimental version of a story in our minds and I would like you to resist that sentimental version because Mark's telling of the story resists that. Mark doesn't let us have this sentimental picture of the events. Mark's reading of it has an edge to it. And I just want to throw out just a few things to give you some examples here. Firstly, the contrast this clearly has with the immediate previous events, you remember, is Herod's banquet, right? So you've got Herod, the pretender to the throne, the Roman kind of like, the Roman installed guy who's sitting in his palace with all his yes men, gorging himself, winking at pretty girls, beheading prophets. You know, like this is this picture of this big meal banquet thing, right? And immediately following that travesty is the real king feeding the hungry and the harrowed. Another reason we can't view this story too sentimentally is the conflict in the story. Jesus gets right up in the faces of the disciples.

They say, Jesus, these guys are hungry. Why don't we send them away? And Jesus says, you do it. Why don't you do something about it? One more example. In verse 52, if you have your Bibles open, it's probably good to have your Bibles open for this sermon here, for all the sermons.

The narrator judges the attitude of the disciples. This is after the walking on the water bit, which is awesome. And the narrator pipes in and says, well, they didn't understand about the loaves.

Their hearts were hardened. And this verse particularly should jump out at us, verse 52. Because it's pretty clear there is something in this story that can be misunderstood. There's something in the story that we can not get, that we can easily miss. So verse 52 here is saying that the disciples didn't understand the significance of Jesus walking on the water because they didn't understand the feeding of the 5,000. We don't want to miss whatever this feeding of the 5,000 is about.

[2 : 5 5] And the lesson is far greater than just Jesus does this really cool thing for lots of hungry people, which would be cool. Like that's, you know, that would be great. But there's obviously a lot more going on here. So if you have the Sunday school story in your mind of the feeding of 5,000, put it aside, hear it afresh. Okay, let's get at it. Okay, verses 30 to 31.

So the disciples have returned from a mission that Christ has sent them on. And they're tired, but probably exhilarated. And they would have been huddled together, and they would have been talking it up, you know, all the stuff they'd done and preached and, you know, talking it up, telling all their adventures. Now the problem was that a whole lot of people that they preached to had followed them back to their little kind of like, you know, meeting with Jesus, right? And the disciples were pretty exhausted. So Jesus said, well, let's jump in a boat and get to a desolate place and have a rest. So they did. Jumped in a boat, went to a desolate place. Verses 32 to 34, we see here that they found the desolate place.

By the way, this is the second time that phrase desolate place is mentioned. Just, just, it's important. We'll come back to that. But here's the thing. All the people, it says, recognized or saw where they were going. Now, obviously just cutting across the harbour to somewhere. All the people just sort of figured out where they were going. And so they all just bolted over to where they were having their little, you know, desolate place retreat centre, wherever it was, right? And people in the town somehow heard about this. So they're all bolting over to where Jesus and the disciples are trying to hang out and have some, you know, some me time or some catch up time. And so they're all gathered around them and the disciples are here and everyone's gathered around, right? And there's this, there's this lovely line, Jesus saw the crowd and it says, he had compassion on them.

And he said, they were like sheep without a shepherd. And it's, it's not a, it's not a throwaway line here. It's not a throwaway line. It's, it's got something to do with desolate place. We'll come back to that. So Jesus has compassion. He's tired, but it says here in verse 34, he began to teach them.

He had compassion. They were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things, many things it says. I'm sure the disciples were thinking, Jesus, why don't you just get them in groups and give them some conversation starters, you know, some self-guided Bible studies or something.

[5 : 35] And so we can have a little meeting, but no, no, Jesus gives them the good stuff. All right. What are you supposed to remember? Sheep, shepherd, desolate place. Those are important. We'll come back. Okay. Verses 35 to 36. So it's getting a bit later on, says there, and it grew late. And the disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place again, right? The hour is late. Send them away to go to the surrounding countryside and villages to buy something for themselves to eat. So it's getting late. Jesus sent them away for food. Verse 37. Here's where Jesus sort of gets up in their face a little bit. But he answered them, you give them something to eat. And they said to him, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat, et cetera, et cetera. So Jesus is saying, well, if you're really worried about them, do something about it. Go and sort it out.

Solve the problem. Because, you know, Jesus is clearly not going to send the people away. And the grammar of the sentence, the emphasis of it here is really, you do this, disciples.

You sort this out. And Jesus gives them a chance to do something. And they're like, no, no, it's too hard. It costs too much money. I'm tired, you know. It's impossible, basically.

I can't do this. It's impossible to do this thing that you're asking us to do. Verse 38 to 44. Jesus ignores their disinterest and sends the disciples off to find out how much food there is.

And it's not much. Then he gets the crowds to sit in groups of hundreds and fifties. This is Jesus. Remember that. That's important. We're going to come back to that. He blesses the meal and the disciples hand out the food.

[7 : 20] And the food is, there's this miraculous provision of food for everyone. That's important. We're going to come back to that. All right. And very shortly, actually.

Okay. And so everyone was satisfied. And as I said earlier, verse 52, it says the disciples did not know what was going on that whole time. Really. They kind of missed something really big about this.

So, there was a lot we were going to go back and have a look at. All right. So, the desolate place, sheep without a shepherd, organized in groups of 50 and 100, miraculous feeding of an enormous group of people.

This is all Old Testament imagery, specifically relating to God's people having escaped from slavery in Egypt.

And they're in the desert for ages being led by Moses. I'm sure most of you guys probably know this story, right? And so they're in there. And so you've got this desolate place idea.

[8 : 23] The mirror image in the story is the wilderness. Okay. It's a wilderness, desolate place, right? Then you've got this miraculous feeding.

That's the manna. You know, the manna from heaven that God supplied. God fed the Israelites in the waters when there was no resources to eat. He bred from heaven, stuff, right? Right? Moses in Exodus 18 organizes people into groups of 50 and 100.

Read that yourself, Exodus 18. Numbers 27, Moses nearing the end of his life. It's still kind of, it's still like trying to be sorted. This whole thing is being sorted out. And he prays to God, don't raise up a new leader.

Don't leave my people to be like sheep without a shepherd. So, there's all of these things pointing back to this Exodus story about God's provision for people. And Mark isn't trying to be clever here.

He's not showing off. He's not being sophisticated for the sake of being sophisticated in his writing. He's saying, this crowd, this crowd of people around me, this is, these are like my people who were in the wilderness.

[9 : 33] A lost people in the wilderness. And I am Jesus and I'm going to be their shepherd and I'm going to provide for them. I'm going to care for them. I'm going to rescue them. Now, I don't think you have trouble getting that.

I think that's kind of like, yep, makes sense. Imagery, pointing back to the story, makes sense. Here we go. It is not just about Jesus being the shepherd to the flock.

I think there is something bigger going on here. I think it's got something to do with the disciples. Well, it has. It has. The story is about the disciples.

I say that because there is this extended interaction between Jesus and the disciples at the start. When Jesus looks out and when the disciples say these guys are hungry, Jesus doesn't just go, good, right.

And do like a, what is it, an Albus Dumbledore kind of in the Great Hall if you read Harry Potter. You know, snap his fingers and plates just fall from the ceiling of the Great Hall, right.

[10 : 43] No, he involves the disciples. He involves the disciples the whole time, even though they kind of push back on him and go, we can't feed the people, right. And he's doing that because he is teaching them something about mission.

About the mission of God in the world. So when the disciples say these people are hungry, you know, they have this practical need. Jesus uses this, as he does a lot, as an opportunity to teach the disciples something about God's desire and God's ability to satisfy people's spiritual hunger.

Like nobody else can. Like nothing else can. And you'll know that the Bible uses the metaphor of food and eating and meals a lot as a picture of what it means for God to meet our sort of spiritual needs.

So the disciples say these people are hungry. There is nothing we can do about it. Jesus, send them away. And Jesus' mind, yes, they are hungry.

These are my people in the wilderness. They're leaderless. They're wandering, etc. As a shepherd, I will lead them to green pasture. I will have compassion on them. So Jesus is thinking, this is my mission field.

[11 : 59] These guys are my mission to reach out to these people. And the disciples go. And so he says to the disciples, you guys do it. Do the mission of God. Feed these people, he says.

It's a teaching moment. You do it. You do it. You do it. And why does Jesus say, you do it so emphatically? Three reasons.

One, it's a revealing question. It exposes the disciples' lack of belief. They say it's impossible. We don't have the resources. We can't pull this off.

Jesus says, you do it. Can't do it. Too difficult. Too hard. To the man who has released the demoniac, who has raised a little girl from the dead, who has calmed a storm.

Nah, too hard. We can't do it. We can't do it. So first, it's a revealing question, their lack of belief. Secondly, it's a calling. Jesus is calling his disciples to feed this wandering mass of leaderless people.

[13 : 02] He's saying, do the mission. Do the mission of God. And thirdly, he's teaching them about his grace for the mission. You do it. You do it.

You do it. They should have said, yes, Lord. We'll totally do it. Abs, of course. Tell us what to do.

Show us what to do. Now, that wasn't happening. That didn't happen. They pushed back. But here's the really cool thing. Jesus put them to work anyway. He said to them, go and see how much food we have.

He didn't, like, cast them aside, all this Dumbledore, you know. Like, he said, okay, guys, go and find out how much food we have. Five loaves, two fishes. Then he gets the disciples to hand out this food, which miraculously multiplies.

And then Jesus gets the disciples to collect the 12 baskets of leftovers together. I know I'm laboring this a bit here. So these disciples, who didn't get what Jesus was about, who thought the feeding of 5,000 was impossible, who should have known better given their history with Jesus, these people, Jesus, still used them.

[14 : 11] Despite their lack of faith, he still uses them in a profound way in getting the food out there, in feeding his people. They played a significant role in the feeding.

This, my friends, is amazing grace right here. An example of amazing grace. And you might be thinking, Aaron, that feels more like a theory of the passage.

It feels more like a bit of a theory and not really the heart of it. You might think, no, it really is about, you're probably thinking, no, it really is about Jesus feeding a whole lot of people and showing, you know, 5,000 people men, so it's probably 20,000 people all up, 20,000 people this amazing miracle.

Folks, I don't think the crowd knew that this happened. I don't think the crowd knew this was going on. In their mind, they just got a whole lot of food.

They're not kind of thinking where it came from. All of this miracle stuff happened internally with the disciples. I think the whole thing was for the disciples. The whole thing was to teach the disciples something and, of course, now teach us about it.

[15 : 22] Here's a few take-homes from this first story. God calls his disciples to mission. Fair enough, right? God calls us to mission, to look out beyond our church, to look at the world around us, to reach out to them.

And the right response is not, it's too hard, it's impossible. The right response is, God help us. And that's the right response because mission is hard.

It's impossible almost. Think about Vancouver. I think being a Christian in Vancouver and wanting to reach out to Vancouverites can feel impossible. It can feel like Jesus telling the disciples to feed 20,000 people with five loaves and two fishes.

God is calling us to reach out to a post-modern, tolerant, sophisticated people who are angry at us for what we believe. It doesn't sound like fun.

It doesn't sound very possible either, does it? Except, except for Jesus. Except for Jesus. Remember, God's grace for the task is not just sufficient.

[16 : 35] It's overflowing. It's abundant. That's why there's this detail about 12 baskets of loaves at the end, right? It's kind of random, you know? 12 bits of fish and stuff.

It's a bit random, right? Why put in that detail? Why bother with that? Because when Jesus said, let's feed these guys, they didn't just get by or scrape through.

There was an abundance of grace for the task. So much that there was 12 baskets of stuff left over after feeding probably 20,000 people.

It is a picture of the grace that God has for us in mission as well. And we see this abundance in this last story. Jesus healing at Gennesaret, right?

So verse 56. And whenever he came in villages, cities, or countryside, he laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment, and as many touched it, were made well.

[17 : 39] This is kind of like this little bonus story at the end of it, and it links up with the rest of it because it's a great example of the excessive grace for mission. The overflow, right?

Even the fringe of his garment. I'd like to thank C3PO for joining us here in the service as well.

So great you could come. How I've prayed. So that, I don't know how, I don't know how to say this differently here.

There is so much Jesus. There is so much Jesus. Just touching his garment, it's all sorted. Everybody, right? What about this walking on the water business?

Is that just a cool trick? How does that relate to all of us? Well, it's the same themes. A call to mission, an overflowing grace for the task.

[18 : 44] So, verse 45. Immediately, he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side. So it's a picture of Jesus sending them out. And this, immediately, he made his disciples.

That made bit there. That's like he forced them. He strong-armed them to the boat. Get in the boat, man.

Get in the boat. Go out there. Let's get on with this. Get in the boat and let's get on with the task at hand. So he forces them in the boat. Verse 48.

It says that Jesus sees them struggling, so he heads out after them. Walking on the water. That's cool, right? And there's this kind of weird line. It says, he meant to pass by.

All right. He's clearly going towards the boat. You can read that and you can go, it sounds like Jesus is actually just going to walk past them. Oh, that doesn't look very nice.

[19 : 44] This is some Old Testament imagery here. This is big stuff right here. Do you remember this Exodus story, right? So Jesus is praying to God and one day he prays to God, let me see your glory.

And God says, well, there's this big rock. There's a cleft and a rock. Jump on the cleft of the rock. I'll walk past you. Oh, it says I'll pass by. But I put my hand over you so you can't see me. You might see a bit of my back or something.

But, you know. So it's this picture of God meeting Moses. Uses the language pass by. God passes by. That's about as good as you can get, right?

And that's what that's alluding to. So Jesus sends out his disciples. He sees them struggling. And he does a I am God kind of pass by kind of thing. And then he gets in the boat with them.

You're thinking, well, cool. Where's the I can see the mission part. Where's the where's the abundant grace kind of bit in all of the story? Well, these disciples who Jesus had to make go on a mission, who thought Jesus was a ghost, it says in the story.

[20 : 49] Who should have worked out this whole pass by thing but didn't. Who in verse 52 are described as having hard hearts. Who had no idea they were dealing with God in the flesh.

These guys. These guys. Useless guys here. Jesus still got in the boat with them. He still got in the boat with them. And he calmed the storm again.

This is abundant grace. Abundant grace here. And abundant grace is a hard thing for us to get our head around.

When we think about mission, I know. It's even hard to think about when we think about our own hearts and forgiveness, for example. You know, like I know a lot of you guys will pray this prayer of confession that we pray this beautiful prayer.

And then when the leader says, just announces, you know, God forgives you. You know, if you meet this, God forgives you. And I know a good chunk of you will think, wow.

[21 : 51] Yeah, I mean, kind of forgives me. Like, you know, kind of maybe. Maybe, maybe forgives me. This is, you know, what I did was pretty bad. There is abundant grace for the sin in your life.

Abundant grace. And there is abundant grace for the mission. For God. For what God would have us do in the world. Okay, 30 seconds.

Final words here. The mission of the church is difficult, right? It's difficult. Preach. Share your faith. Pray for your friends who aren't Christians. To seek reconciliation.

Reagitation. To make disciples. To evangelize. This is hard stuff. But Jesus is with you, friends. He's with you.

These disciples, right? Hard-hearted. Kind of stupid. God chose them. God used them. His grace was more than enough for these guys.

[22 : 51] And it is more than enough for you. Amen. Amen. Come and pray for us. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. 55. Amen. Okay. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.