

Trinity VII

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[0 : 00] The feeding of the 5,000 recorded in St. Mark's Gospel in chapter 6 talks about Jesus primarily in relationship to the Israelites or to the Jews.

But now we are given the feeding of the 4,000 here in Mark chapter 8. Why two stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes?

Well, we can't spend a lot of time discussing this question. I would love to. But the main point has to do with the portrayal of the love of Christ for the Gentiles here in chapter 8.

And there are three words or three phrases from our Gospel text that provide the interpretive key on how to understand what is happening here in Mark chapter 8.

And these three words or phrases are the following. Mercy from afar and wilderness. Mercy from afar and wilderness.

[1 : 12] Mercy from afar and wilderness.

Mercy from afar and wilderness. And he saw the people and he was moved with great pity and compassion. Back in Mark chapter 6 in the feeding of the 5,000, these people that Jesus fed, again, were Jewish folks.

And our Lord was described as looking upon them as people who were like sheep without a shepherd. Here in Mark chapter 8 verse 2 we read, That term compassion carries more of a punch in the Greek language than what we get in our English translation.

Our Lord was moved with great pity and he desired to bestow mercy upon these people who were hungry. And that mercy led him to act on their behalf and for their own good.

So who were these people? Well in verse 3 we read, For some of them have come from afar. The language of being far off or coming from afar often describes the Gentiles.

[3 : 06] And what we read is that Jesus now has compassion on these people who were outside of the covenant community of Israel. He is moved and he has pity on all people and he longs to feed everyone with the food that has come down from heaven, which ultimately is his own body and blood.

Numbers, not the book of Numbers, but numbers in scripture often have a deeper meaning.

Number 6. We know that 6 often represents evil and the reign of sinful man.

7 represents wholeness or completion, like when God rested on the seventh day from creating. The number 8 represents transformation, resurrection, and new creation.

4 is the number given to represent the earth. Like when we talk about the four corners of the earth. We don't believe the earth is actually flat, but it's a form of speaking. The four corners of the earth.

As a matter of fact, the number 4 is repeated time and time again in Revelation chapter 7, describing that very thing.

[4 : 26] The number 1,000 often represents a very lengthy and indefinite amount of time. That's why St. Peter says in his epistle of 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 8, that because the Lord is not bound by time, then with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.

And here's the point. When it talks about the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus has pity on people who are far off like the Gentiles from the four corners of the earth.

And his compassion has no limits. His compassion is ongoing for all eternity. Now, let me give you one more piece of important, very important background information that helps provide context to what we are discussing.

St. Mark's Gospel was written to Christians living in Rome during the great persecutions happening under the Emperor Nero, who was a madman.

Christians were suffering. They were facing the threat of death under this wicked tyrant. And St.

Mark is conveying that the God to whom they worship is the opposite, one of great mercy, not some

tyrannical leader like Nero.

[5 : 55] He is kind. He is compassionate beyond what we can fully grasp and understand. And he is moved to act, to deliver his people.

God came to his people in order to feed them and to give them life. And his people are made up from all nations, all tribes, from all four corners of the earth who are starving.

Who are starving for life and meaning in a wayward world. Therefore, we've looked at the word mercy, describing as Jesus looks out upon these people who are hungry.

We looked at the phrase, a far off or to be far off. And now we look at the term wilderness. You see, St. Mark is speaking to faithful people who often encounter the oppression from rulers who want nothing more than raw power.

Christians are often the target because historically, Christians don't always go with the flow of society. Now, although Christians are not active revolutionaries seeking to overthrow governments or seeking to create chaos in the culture, they are people who give their ultimate allegiance, not to the emperor, not to the president, not to the state, but to Jesus, the king of all kings.

[7 : 31] And therefore, they are often persecuted or they're sent packing into exile. They are often canceled or muzzled by the tyranny of the masses.

We are exiled by the world because our home is with Christ and his saints. We are people who do not belong. We don't intentionally try to be odd, or at least we shouldn't, but we don't fit the paradigm of wanting power, or at least we better not because that's not Christian.

We are in the wilderness making our way in this life in a grand procession of people from all corners of the earth who receive the bread of life, Jesus the Christ.

And our destiny, our destiny is eternity with our God. we are like the Israelites as they made their way out of Egypt and as they wandered in the wilderness.

This is our wilderness. But we are not alone. People from all nationalities join us now in giving homage, adoration, and worship to Jesus Christ.

[8 : 55] We are making our way as pilgrims who were once far off, aliens to God, but who have been brought into full communion with our God through the blood of Jesus the Christ.

And our Lord feeds us with the bread from heaven, which is his very own body and blood. And even though we are often hungry, exhausted from our journey in the wilderness, God continues to look out with compassion and pity and he continues to feed us out of his sheer mercy and grace.

And our final destination is that eternal promised land where people from all tribes, all nations will gather under the merciful reign of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Those words had to be a tremendous comfort to those Christians suffering, living in Rome and suffering persecution under Nero.

And these words should be a great comfort for all of us as well. Therefore, we are called now to imitate the God who had mercy on us by being merciful to others who may still be far off.

[10 : 30] Just like our Lord welcomed us, we are to extend hospitality and welcome to others. And we are to make our way in the wilderness of this life, praying and following our King despite all the noise and even maybe the threats as we feed on Christ on the difficult journey in the wilderness of this life.

because at the end we are brought in with all the saints in that grand procession and celebration where rejoicing will not end.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.