

Mark 6:30-56

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is on page 1008, Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, and I'm reading from verse 30 to verse 56.

Page 1008, verse 30 to verse 56. The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.

Then, because so many people were coming and going, that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

[1 : 14] By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. This is a remote place, they said, and it's already very late.

Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. But he answered, you give them something to eat.

They said to him, that would take more than half a year's wages. Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?

How many loaves do you have? He asked. Go and see. When they found out, they said five loaves and two fishes.

Then Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven.

[2 : 21] He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the fish among them all.

They all ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethshada. While he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on the land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them.

Shortly before dawn, he went out to them walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost.

[3 : 30] They cried out because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, Take courage. It is I.

Don't be afraid. Then he climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely amazed. For what they had not understood about the loaves, their hearts were hardened.

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, the people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried those who were ill on mats to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever he went into villages, towns or countryside, they placed those who were ill in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak.

And all who were touched were healed. And this is the word of the Lord. Mark chapter 6. Well, I wonder how many times in the last week you have longed.

[4 : 46] Longed for a different world. Longed for a world where it's not possible for a greedy tyrant to invade.

Longed for a world where people with power wielded power in the service of others rather than themselves. Longed for a world where our repeating thought was not, how on earth did that person get elected?

But rather, aren't our leaders wonderful? Closer to home, you might have longed for a world where you weren't anxious walking home in the dark.

Or a world where people didn't damage each other. This week I heard of good friends in ministry who are divorcing as a result of the conduct of one of the couple. It's just a tragic, terrible situation.

You might be dealing with similar tragedies in your own life. Or in those you know. Or perhaps you've longed for a world in which you were different. Was this a week when the prospect of sickness or death kept you awake at night?

[6 : 00] Was this one of those weeks where your own weaknesses have caught up with you? And you find yourself once again not the person you really long to be.

Well look, if any of those longings have been yours, what a great morning it is to be here. Because this morning we get a glimpse of how spectacularly different Jesus is from any other leader.

And how spectacularly brilliant are the things that he will do in the end. And how anyone who hangs on to him will never be disappointed.

So whether you've been a Christian for a long time. Or whether you're just having a look in for the very first time this morning. I think you'll find this glimpse of his brilliance. Confidence inspiring.

Now the feeding of the 5,000 is a very, very important miracle. It's the only miracle that makes it into all four gospels. And like all the miracles of Jesus, it's not just a demonstration of power.

[7 : 09] Have a look at verse 51, would you? Jesus climbs into the boat. The wind stops. His disciples are totally amazed.

But their amazement is clueless amazement. They haven't understood what's really important. You see, we're not meant to see these miracles and go, Whoa, he's impressive. Look at what he can do.

There's something much more important to learn than that Jesus can do big things. So with that in mind, let's set the scene a little bit. Look at chapter 6, verse 7.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus' disciples have been sent out by him to preach and have authority over evil spirits. Just the same sort of work that he's been doing.

And they do that, and it goes really well. Look at verse 12. They went out and preached that people should repent, and they drove out many demons, and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them.

[8 : 13] And in the first verse of our chapter today, they come back from that trip. Now, it must have been immensely exciting to do that, don't you think? Imagine the sense of power and encouragement and amazement.

But just notice that into that very successful trip, we looked at this last week. Mark has inserted a very dark story of the banquet on King Herod's birthday, when John the Baptist, the greatest of all preachers about Jesus, had his head cut off.

Though the disciples have been very successful preachers of Jesus, there are enemies of truth around. Just hold that thought in your head as we approach our own passage today.

Now, this is a passage full of surprises. A miraculous lunch for a vast crowd. A monster lunch. 5,000 men, so there may have been stacks of other women and children around as well.

And verse 42, we're told they all ate and were satisfied. 5,000 hungry men at the end of a long day. And no one is complaining that they didn't get enough sardines.

[9 : 27] And then, a spectacular water-crossing miracle. And then, just to put the icing on the cake, an uncountable number of healings just thrown in at the end.

And running through both of these stories, Jesus' disciples who don't have such a good day at the office today. It starts well for them. Verse 31, Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place to get some rest.

But it's not a restful day. There's a huge crowd. Verse 35, By the end of the day, everyone's tired. Please send them away to get some food.

Jesus says, You give them something to eat. And they go, What? Because they're tired. And that's a bewildering request. And then they get back in the boat.

And Jesus doesn't come with them. And there's a strong wind. And it's really hard work. And he comes walking across the water to them. And they think it's a ghost. Because, frankly, what else would you expect?

[10 : 31] And he gets into the boat. And suddenly the wind is calm. And they're all absolutely amazed. And then Mark says the most surprising thing of all. Verse 52, For they'd not understood about the loaves.

Their hearts were hardened. In the previous episode, the disciples are successful. In this episode, they are absolutely clueless.

And says Mark, If they'd understood the bread thing that's just happened, They'd have looked at Jesus walking across the sea and gone, Huh, well, what else would you expect?

There must be a connection between these two miracles. If you'd understood that one, This one wouldn't have surprised you. So what's the connection? And what are we supposed to learn about Jesus From these dramatic episodes?

Well, I'm going to look at the rest of this passage under two headings. Both of them pointing to brilliant things these miracles teach us About Jesus himself. Two Old Testament echoes That tell us what the significance of these miracles is.

[11 : 43] So, here's number one. Here we meet a rescuer greater than Moses. He's going to make everything new.

Look at verse 31. Come with me to a quiet place. It's literally a wilderness place. And look at verse 32.

Originally, the word is the same word. It's a wilderness place. And verse 35. This is a wilderness place. Same word in each situation.

Three times. Wilderness, wilderness, wilderness. Put these things together. Wilderness. Huge crowd.

Miraculous provision of bread. What's it meant to remind you of? Well, the answer is it's meant to remind you of the Exodus. We saw that picture of Moses and the Exodus earlier on.

[12 : 48] The Exodus in the Old Testament story. When 1400 years earlier on, God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. Took them across the Red Sea.

And fed them in the wilderness. Incidentally, I think the biggest link between these two miracles is that you get a big bread thing. And then a big water thing. It's meant to remind you of those big bread and water things back there.

Back then, Moses was the one that God used to rescue his people. But God was the one who fed them.

Every morning, manna from heaven was there on the ground. Every day, a quail blew in on the wind. God fed them miraculously.

Back then, Moses was the human agent. But God did the feeding. Who's doing the feeding here? Verse 41.

[13 : 49] Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples. I wonder what it was like to watch him do that.

Five small pieces of bread. Couple of fish. And he breaks a bit off. And he gives it to them. And he breaks a bit off.

And he gives it to them. And he breaks a bit of fish off. And he gives it to them. And he just keeps doing it. For 5,000 plus people.

Now, I imagine the people don't see much of that. They're all sitting down waiting to be served. But the disciples. What do you think the impression of that would be on them?

You see, it reminds of the exodus in the past. But here, a person is doing it. Now, why is that so important? Well, we need a little bit more of the history here.

[14 : 58] You see, the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt was a wonderful work of rescue. They've been slaves there for 400 years. They were rescued to belong to God. To be taken to the land that God would give them.

To be his special people. Everything changed for them then. It was a whole new world. But there's one thing that didn't change. And the thing that didn't change was human nature.

For the Old Testament story as a whole was not a story of human success. Israel, their circumstances were changed.

But they were not changed. And Israel's leaders, the kings, often referred to as the shepherds of Israel. They were just like human leaders in every age.

Self-interested. Greedy. Not concerned for truth. Not concerned for the good of their people. And in the end, Israel was thrown out of the land that God had given to her.

[15 : 57] However, at the point that they're being thrown out of that land, the prophets in the Old Testament, God gives to the prophets great promises about a new rescue.

A rescue like the Exodus back then, but bigger and better. But this time, the rescue would not just change their circumstances.

It would change them and their world. And God would provide for them a magnificent shepherd king. Even better than David.

The very best of the shepherd kings in the Old Testament. To lead them perfectly. An Exodus type rescue. But bigger and better. Now that promise is fleshed out all over the Old Testament prophets.

And it's just huge and it's everywhere. But putting it together, it's going to bring about an entirely new world. Completely recreated by God.

[16 : 58] So that nothing will ever be wrong there again. Ever. And a perfect people. And a perfect king. A world that's shot through at every point.

With the experience of God's loving rule and spreading goodness. That's what God had promised. And right here in the desert.

At the end of a long tiring day. Is a person who has compassion. On these shepherdless people.

And he does two things. Unlike Herod. An enemy of truth. This king. Teaches his people. And when they're hungry.

He just. Breaks bits off. Endlessly. And gives it to them.

[18 : 02] It's so easy for him. It's effortless isn't it? He's a rescuer like Moses. But creator. This is the power of the creator at work. In human flesh.

And like God in the Old Testament. He feeds this huge crowd. And it's so easy for him. This is just a little glimpse of his power.

We get another one later on in the chapter. A tantalizing glimpse. Look at verse 56. Wherever he went. Wherever he went. Into villages.

Towns. Or countryside. They placed those who were ill. In the marketplaces. And they begged him. To let them even touch the edge of his cloak. And all who touched it were healed.

Does it look as though it's difficult for him to do that? The life just pours out of him. Doesn't it? Just think what he might do in the end.

[19 : 03] A rescuer greater than Moses. He's going to make everything new. Secondly. A ruler greater than David. He'll protect you forever.

Let's put a few more of the details. Into the mixer. And see what comes out. First half of chapter 6. We get a great enemy of truth. Herod. Second half of chapter 6.

A really good shepherd. Who has compassion on his people. Come and get some rest. He says to his disciples. Look at verse 39. Get everyone sitting on the green grass.

That's a funny detail that. Isn't it? I mean. What other color would you expect grass to be than green? It's always green. And he feeds them. Until they're completely satisfied.

And at the end of the meal. No one is complaining. And when he gets into the boat. The wind disappears. And it's all calm.

[20 : 06] Ring any bells? A good shepherd. Green grass. Still water. Great banquet.

Ring any bells? In the church. In the church. Well turn to Psalm 23 please. It's page 555. In the church bibles.

Here is David. The greatest of Israel's human shepherds. Speaking of another shepherd. Let me read these words.

And just feel how it resonates with Mark chapter 6. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul.

[21 : 11] He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For you are with me.

Your rod and your staff. They comfort me. You prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love. Will follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Ideas from this psalm.

Are woven all the way through Mark chapter 6. And the overwhelming note in this psalm. Is of kind. And powerful protection.

Fierce enemies. Even death itself. Cannot threaten David's security. Because the Lord is his shepherd. So. With that in mind.

[22 : 09] Turn back to Mark 6 please. Who is this compassionate shepherd. In the desert. Teaching his people truth.

Sitting them down on the green grass. Feeding them until they're satisfied. Stilling the water for his disciples. He's greater than David.

He's David's Lord. God himself. In the flesh. Come to rescue his people. Immense power. Beautifully wielded.

Don't you think? Compassionate. Even when tired. Patiently teaching. Generously feeding. Absolute mastery over the inanimate world.

Truly human. But not merely human. Think of what his rule will be like in the end. When it's all rolled out.

[23 : 11] Just think about it. These are amazing miracles aren't they? Amazing miracles. They're big enough on their own. But what they represent is just massive.

For in these powerful actions. We get clear pointers. To who Jesus is. And a little foretaste.

Of all that he would do in the end. As the Bible has promised. A rescuer. Greater than Moses. He's going to make everything new. A ruler.

Greater than David. He'll protect you forever. If you belong to him. That's who he is. And that is what he's going to do. Back to the disciples.

Why do you think Jesus tells his disciples to feed the crowd? You give them something to eat. He says. And they go. No. You've got to be joking. Well I think there are two things here.

[24 : 13] First. They've just had this very successful preaching trip. And they need to know. That they are not like him. There are some things that only he can do.

Only Jesus can do. Those things that we all desperately long for. Only he can do those things. They cannot be humanly engineered.

A safe world. With no threats. Where kindness reigns. Only Jesus can make that happen. And secondly.

I think there's a big cost thing. Look at verse 37. They go. Come off it. That would take more than half a year's wages. It's miles too expensive.

For us to do. Now of course for Jesus. Making bread is easy. Not for disciples. But making everything new.

[25 : 12] That is going to be costly for him. Later on in the story. He's going to break bread again. At the Passover meal.

The high point of the Exodus remembering festival in Israel. He breaks the bread. This is my body. It's through my death.

That all this wonderful newness. Is going to emerge in the end. And that was very costly for him to do. Bearing the sins of the world.

So that the world could be made new. But for the moment. Here in these miracles. We get clear pointers to who he is.

And a tiny glimpse. Of just how brilliant the outcome is going to be. So. Whatever. Whatever our longings.

[26 : 14] Whether we long for just and righteous leadership. Whether we long for the renewal of creation. Whether we long for human flourishing.

Or personal safety. For absence of fear. Or just to be the people that we know we ought to be. Jesus is the only place to find those things.

The only place. He alone has the power to bring those things about. It was very costly for him to do that. But he will make everything new in the end.

And now while there's time. Now. Is. The time to trust him. Let's pray together shall we. Just a moment to reflect.

In the quiet on what we've learned. And then I'll lead us in prayer. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Gracious God.

[27 : 30] We thank you so much. For sending your son into the world. And we thank you for these amazing miracles. That point beyond themselves. To who Jesus is.

And to the amazing work. That he will in the end. Bring about. Help us to see him clearly. For who he is.

To love him. To trust his words. Even in difficulty. May he give us courage in life.

And strong hope for the future. We ask these things. In his name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.