

The Filled and the Famished

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Date: 11 June 2023

Preacher: Hunter Nicholson

- [0 : 00] We're going through a series in the Book of Mark where we're looking at different passages consecutively through this gospel. Just before I came up to the podium, someone asked me, what are you preaching on this morning?
- I said, it's when Jesus feeds the 4,000. She said, you mean as opposed to the 5,000? If you've been with us through this series, this may be the week where you say to yourself at the outset, I think we've been in the Book of Mark too long.
- Because just a month ago, we were looking at a story where Jesus met with a crowd in a deserted place. He miraculously fed them with bread and fish. This morning, we're going to talk about a story where Jesus meets with a crowd in a deserted place and he miraculously feeds them with bread and fish.
- There's even more commonalities between the two stories than that. In both stories, Jesus has compassion on the crowd, it says. In both stories, the disciples say that the feeding is impossible.
- In both stories, Jesus says, how many loaves do you have? At the end of both stories, Jesus gets in a boat and he leaves the people that he just fed. If anything, the feeding of the 4,000 seems less spectacular, right?
- [1 : 15] Because once you've seen a man feed 5,000, what's 4,000? And yet, Mark, the author of this Gospel, this being the shortest Gospel that there is in the New Testament, he sat down and he said to himself, he must have said to himself, of all the stories that I could tell about Jesus, they need to know about the second feeding.
- And the question that you need to ask is why? There must be a reason. And the truth is, the feeding of the 4,000 is a different story and it does matter. And Mark chose to put it in there for a reason.
- But to get that reason, you have to look closely at the text. And you also have to see the bigger picture of what's going on in the life of Jesus during that time period. And so that's what we're going to be looking at this morning.
- For Mark, the feeding of the 4,000 is not just to show Jesus' capacity to spontaneously produce bread. It's more than that. And it's even more than what he was showing us in the feeding of the 5,000.
- Jesus in this passage is sending a message about himself. And the easiest way to get at that message, and what we're going to look at this morning, what I want us to focus on, the easiest way to get at what makes the feeding of the 4,000 special is to look at who is being fed.
- [2 : 32] Who is being fed? So what we're going to ask two questions this morning. Number one, who is being fed when Jesus feeds the 4,000? And number two is he saw the passage goes on and it ends actually in kind of a tragedy because you have these people who were there at the feeding of the 4,000 and who don't get it.
- And the last words of our passage are those words of Jesus where he says, do you not yet understand? So the second question we're going to ask this morning is who are the fools in this passage?

And we know it's the disciples, right? But what does it mean for them to be foolish in this passage? So who does Jesus feed? Who is filled? And who are the fools? Okay.

So first, who are the filled? And it's not obvious and you can read right over the passage, but the best answer you can get actually comes from the very first three words in verse one. Do you see it?

In those days, three little words and Mark wants you to read everything into that because what Mark is doing is he's saying you have to read the feeding of the 4,000 in light of what has just happened.

[3 : 41] Where is Jesus? Jesus is wandering through a place that is not so familiar with him. It says that he's wandering through the region of Tyre and Sidon. And we looked at this last week.

Jesus came out to Tyre and Sidon to get away. As Corey put it, he was looking for a holiday. And he went to a place where he thought that no one would recognize him. And they may not have known who he was, but what happens?

Immediately when he gets there, he's surrounded again because there's something about Jesus that is to the outside world irresistible and people keep being drawn to him for all kinds of different reasons.

Now there's more about this place than just the names. It's not just a place called Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis. What matters is what these places represent.

And Corey talked about this last week. Tyre and Sidon and Decapolis are places they're known for being Gentile lands. And the Jewish mind, these are places that are very un-Jewish places.

[4 : 40] And if you were to imagine the Jewish Messiah going somewhere and receiving a bad reception, this is where you would expect him to go. A Jewish religious person during this day would have imagined the Jewish Messiah going into Gentile lands and finding the strongest antagonism.

And what did we find last week? Actually, when he goes out to Tyre and Sidon, these places that are so historically antagonistic, to the Jewish faith that Jesus is a part of, it's here out in the middle of nowhere.

And in these people that are the enemies of the Jews, it's here that Jesus finds the first people that recognize him for who he truly is. So what you have last week is we saw there was this Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was demon-possessed.

And there's this tension because she comes to him with all this historical baggage about being a Gentile. And yet she recognizes Jesus for who he is. She falls at his feet and she, I don't know if demands is the right word, but she pleads with him, heal my daughter.

And it's a strange story because on the face of it, it looks like Jesus is calling her a dog. And I would encourage you, if you weren't here last week, go listen to this sermon last week. It's complicated. But the outcome of it is this woman, stranger though she is to the Jewish faith, sees Jesus for who he is, and recognizes his capacity to help her, to meet the deepest needs that she's facing in that moment.

[6 : 13] And the only thing that's more miraculous than that, the only thing more miraculous than what she can see is that Jesus doesn't turn her away, but he actually helps her and he heals her.

And what you have in that story is this, what I would call a hint of a hope. A hint of a hope that this Jewish Messiah, this person that for the Jews is so significant, that he might actually have something to say that goes beyond the nation of Israel.

And that even a Gentile, the person that you would think would be the least worthy of the Jewish Messiah's love, even a Gentile could come to him and find peace and find rest and find healing.

It's a hint of a hope that Jesus' mission is about something bigger than Israel. So when Mark says in Mark chapter 8 verse 1, in those days, he's giving us a flashing signal saying, the story I'm about to tell you needs to be read in light of what I've just told you about this hope that we've just exposed in the gospel, that Jesus may be willing to give something even to the Gentiles.

And what's even more interesting is, do you remember? The conversation that Jesus has with the woman, there's a metaphor that's used. He wants to see her daughter, excuse me, she wants to see her daughter healed from a demon possession, but the metaphor that they use to talk about the need that she has, do you remember what it was?

[7 : 47] It was food. So she says, and this is a strange language, but Jesus says to her, let the children be fed first for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Again, strange language. And she responds, yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. So she is saying to Jesus, maybe, maybe, I am not worthy to have all the rights of a Jew, but even I'm at least worthy to claim the crumbs from your table.

That's faith, right? And so the hope of the woman is this, the Gentiles metaphorically, this is all the food thing is a metaphor, right? The Gentiles metaphorically might receive just crumbs from the table of the Jewish Messiah, that he would at least do that.

Just give us the crumbs from your glory. And that hope carries over into our passage this morning. Can a Gentile, a Jewish stranger, a stranger of Israel, though he may be eat crumbs from the table of the Messiah, could the king of Israel stoop that low to help people that are that low?

[9 : 12] And what is Jesus' response to that question? Well, in the short term, he heals the girl, right? But then what does he do? He goes out into the middle of nowhere. Four thousand Jews surround him and he doesn't give them crumbs.

What does he do? He feeds them to the point where their bellies are so full that they can't eat anymore and there's leftovers. Jesus is sending a message that this woman said, please just, can you give crumbs to the Gentiles?

And Jesus says, I can satisfy the Gentiles. I can satisfy the people that are outside of Israel to the full. So what you have with the feeding of the 4,000 and the 5,000 is Jesus is showing his capacity to satisfy not just the Jews.

That was the feeding of the 5,000, but also the Gentiles, the feeding of the 4,000. And the meaning of that story, again, is not just Jesus' capacity to reproduce bread and fish.

Jesus is, it's a metaphor, right? Because for the woman, it was a metaphor. For her child being healed, but it's a metaphor saying Jesus has come to satisfy the deepest desires of the people that he's looking at, hearts.

[10 : 22] It's a sign and it's a statement about his identity. Not that he is a great chef, not that he's a miraculous chef, but he's one that's come to satisfy the nations, to feed people who are hungry in a way that goes far beyond physical hunger.

And that's why in the book of John, Jesus calls himself the bread of life. What does that even mean, right? He calls himself the bread of life because he's saying, what I have to offer you is a kind of bread.

It's like bread, but it's not bread because it's a satisfaction that goes far beyond that. And any definition we put on what that life is will fall short of what that definition should be, right?

Because if I said, what is the bread, I could say, well, it's eternal life. It's the fact that you'll live forever. But it's also the hope that Jesus can feed us in this moment, that he can provide us with our daily needs today.

You see, if the feeding of the 5,000 shows the fact of Jesus' mission, the feeding of the 4,000 shows the scope of it. And it extends to those who the Jews would have said would be the least likely to be worthy of that feeding, to be the least likely, to be worthy of that satisfaction.

[11 : 34] And what you see in this story is by seeing who Jesus is feeding, you learn something about who Jesus is. He's the one that claims to satisfy in the wilderness. And what I love is the disciples ask this question in their unbelief.

They say, how can these people be fed? And you realize they're asking the wrong question. The question is who can feed these people? In the middle of nowhere where there's no food, only Jesus can satisfy.

And what I love about Jesus in this story, because you do get a picture of who Jesus is, for Jesus' mission and his heart in this story are perfectly aligned.

Jesus doesn't just come to help these people because it's his job. He doesn't just come to help these people because he's been sent to help them. He also helps them because he has compassion on them, because he loves them.

I don't know if you've ever had to ask someone for a favor, and they make you feel like you've had to ask for a favor. And you say, hey, can you give me a ride?

[12 : 37] And they'll say, oh, sure. I can give you a ride. Let me just drop everything I'm doing so I can get up and help you because you don't have a car. I'm not saying I don't have a car, so I'm not accusing anyone in this church of having done that to me.

But sometimes that's us, right? People ask us for a favor, and we know we're kind of obligated to help them because we've got nothing better to do. And yet we find ways to give a little jab and to let them know, you know, this is really costing me to help you like this.

Jesus is not like that. Jesus comes on this mission, and if he reminds the people of the cost to him, it's only so that they'll be convinced of his love because that's what they're tempted not to believe.

Jesus, what does it say in the story? It says in chapter eight, it says in verse two, Jesus, look at the people, and he said, I have compassion on the crowd because they've been with me for three days.

This is a Greek word, and it's my favorite Greek word because it sounds like what it is. It's from the Greek word for your guts, and the Greek word is splags.

[13 : 56] And what it's saying is that when Jesus felt this compassion on these people, he felt it down here, that it wasn't like he knew that he was supposed to feel sympathy, and so he did.

It's saying Jesus, when he saw these people suffering, he had a visceral reaction to what they were going through, and it was out of that heart that he had for them that he helped them. So, Jesus' mission and his heart go hand in hand, and that means that when we pray to God, sometimes we can be tempted to think, the last thing Jesus wants to hear is from me because of all the times that I've failed him and let him down.

But Jesus, I know Jesus must be busy. The last thing he needs is to hear from me, and yet this passage gives us a picture of people who are in the eyes of everyone else in the world unworthy, and yet Jesus' heart is turned within him when he considers these people, and he loves them, and he helps them because of that.

Now, there's more than we can say about who these people are than just that they're Gentiles, and it's so obvious that you can read right past it. What else can we say about these people who Jesus feeds?

Why does Jesus feed these 4,000 Gentiles? Because they've come to him, and that's such an easy thing to miss, right? But these 4,000 Gentiles, and it actually, the text exaggerates, well, it doesn't exaggerate, it emphasizes what it means that they've come to him.

[15 : 20] Jesus looks at them and he says, well, they've come from afar, we know that about them. And he also says they've been three days with no food. In the feeding of the 5,000, you have 5,000 people who come, and Jesus and the disciples recognize that if they needed to, they could send them to the next town, basically that evening and they could be fed.

But these people, they've come so far out to be with Jesus that they can't go anywhere for food. And what you have is this picture again, like the Syrophoenician woman, these Gentiles are exemplary in their desperation that they have followed Jesus to the point of not having food for three days because they just want to be with him.

And it's just, it's a historical story, right? It's a true narrative, and in that sense, we can just read this for what it is as something that actually happened long ago, but there's a universal message that Jesus is meaning to go out into the world because of this.

And what he's saying is, it's what we sang in the song just a few minutes ago. Who has the right, who has the right to come to Jesus? Who ought to come to Jesus?

And what are we seeing here? Sinners. Yeah, I was trying to think of the exact line. He says, if you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all.

[16 : 51] These people, we know nothing about their character. All we know about them are things that should make us not like them, their history, the baggage they bring with them.

And yet, simply because they've come to Jesus and they've fallen at His feet, He feeds them, and He helps them, and He loves them. And at St. Columbus, we always have people who are coming in out of our doors, people who are at various stages of learning even what it means to be a Christian.

And if you're someone who would say right now that you're not a Christian, and that the idea of becoming a Christian sounds like this leap that you don't even know logically what it would look like to take.

What kind of righteousness do you need to have? How long do you have to live a good life before you can come to Jesus? And this story is making this audacious claim that the holy God of the universe feeds people that come to Him with nothing in their hands but hunger.

And so the first question that you should ask yourself, if you're not a Christian and yet you're interested in the gospel, and you wonder what does it mean to be a Christian? Do you find Jesus Christ stunning?

[18 : 05] When you read about Him in the gospels, are you drawn to Him? Do you sense in your own self a sense of lacking, what we might call sin?

It can come in all kinds of different forms. For the Syrophoenician woman, it was the fact that she had a sick daughter. Can you sense that Jesus can satisfy in a way that no one else can?

And there's all kinds of questions that you have to ask along that path. But the first step is to come to Him, hungry, and believe that He won't turn you away at the door.

Now what does that mean to us this morning, to be fed by Jesus? In one sense, again, it's that hope of eternal life that Jesus can give us a bread that can sustain us beyond a day.

But it's also this hope that as Christians we have this day in, day out, ordinary prayer that we have in the morning that Jesus would give us our daily bread.

[19 : 03] And to be a Christian means to go to Jesus Christ every day and say, Lord, Cheerios are great, but I need to be fed by you today. I need a kind of sustenance that you can't purchase at a grocery store.

I need a spiritual help to help me fight the battles that I have in my heart, to wrestle with sin, and to get me through the trials, the real, legitimate, painful trials that the Bible never washes over and says are real.

We need spiritual help for that. We need food. And so we come to Jesus this morning and what we do, we read our Bibles and we hold up the Word and we say, we need this God. We need to feed on Jesus Christ. And we'll do that tonight when we have our Lord separate.

I'm running out of time. So that's who the field are, people who recognize their need to Jesus and they run to Him. But I want to look at who are the foolish in this passage, because there is a tragedy here, right?

The saddest, the happiest, the feeding of the 4,000 is, the passage ends poorly. So at the end of our passage, Jesus looks at His disciples with, I don't know, a tragic look of sadness.

[20 : 15] And He says to them, do you not yet understand? And what you see in the verses just before that is He's referencing the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000.

And He's saying there was something about those events that they were meant to get and they haven't gotten. And we've already talked about what this event means. We've already talked about what it means for Jesus to feed 5,000 and 4,000.

It's more than just bread, right? It's a metaphor. And so the mystery of the end of our passage today is not what does it mean for Jesus to satisfy the nations.

It's how can the disciples not have gotten that? The mystery is how can these people be so foolish? And Jesus explains in a way why they were so foolish.

And He uses it with this really strange illustration, the strange parable that He mentions. He says in verse 15, it says, He cautioned them saying, beware the leaven, the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

[21 : 20] And what is He talking about? Well, He's pointing back to a very short event that we read in the middle of our passage today where the Pharisees come out and they confront Jesus.

And all of the language in that passage is confrontational. It says that they came out to test Him, looking for a sign. And the word for test in this passage is one that is only ever used to describe something that Satan does and something that the Pharisees does.

Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. And then three other times in Mark, you have the Pharisees who test Jesus. I love to test things, right?

If you buy a car, you want to test drive it, you want to make sure it works before you buy it. This is a different kind of test. The kind of test that the Pharisees give, and this is built into the word, is not to find out whether something is true.

That's not what test is in the sense. When the Pharisees test Jesus, they're looking to prove that He's not who He says He is. They're looking to discredit Him.

[22 : 28] And it says they ask for a sign. What they're looking for is something, maybe a miracle, but also something more than a miracle, something that they can look at and say, this finally is the proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

Because for all we know, the Pharisees could have accepted some of the miracles that Jesus performed and yet not believed that those miracles pointed to the fact that He was actually the Son of God.

So, for the Pharisees, it's always one more test to show, and it's always to discredit, right? When I was an undergrad, I had a very wise person say to me once, what miracle, in your doubt, what miracle would you need to see for you to never doubt again, Jesus, for you to never doubt Jesus again?

And the point that He was making is a point that is at least proven out in the New Testament, which is that all of us could set a threshold. All of us could say, if I saw this, I would never doubt Jesus again.

And what you see over and over again in the New Testament is the disciples and all the other people who are surrounded by Jesus, they see the very kind of things that I would say would be my threshold, and yet what happens?

[23 : 49] A week later, they don't believe anymore. They grow cold, they forget. And that's the problem of the Pharisees, that they're always looking for one more thing.

And if that's your thing, if that's your relationship to Christianity is, if He just gives me one more miracle, and then I'll believe, always one more miracle, then what you're really doing is you're giving excuses for avoiding a possibility that you were never prepared to accept in the first place.

And that's the position of the Pharisees. And Jesus' response, interestingly enough, is not rage, it's sorrow, it's deep sorrow.

And it says the words that it uses, it says here in verse 12, and he sighed deeply in his spirit.

And scholars will say that what that phrase means is something that's so significant and something so low that this is actually pointing to one of the lowest points of the New Testament, of Jesus' life.

[24 : 55] He sees these Pharisees' unbelief and it breaks his heart. He is, as one writer put it, what this verb means is it's used to describe persons who find themselves in situations where they are pushed to the limit of faithfulness.

And that's where Jesus is at this moment. Because what Jesus can see in the eyes of the Pharisees is something that's so much bigger than the Pharisees.

And that's why he uses the word this generation. The New Testament is a part of a story that goes back thousands of years. And often when you hear that word, this generation used it in a negative sense, that's a trigger for, especially for a Jewish mind, of all of the times in the Old Testament where Jesus did wonderful acts of redemption, excuse me, where God did wonderful acts of redemption, like rescuing the Hebrews from Egypt.

And inevitably, after all these great miracles, often the nation would grow cold and they would look up at God and say, why have you brought us here?

Why have you left us? And they couldn't believe God's faithfulness in the present because they'd forgotten His faithfulness in the past. And Jesus is looking at these Pharisees and implicit, but he'll make this explicit in other places.

[26 : 14] He's saying, you're just like your fathers. You're just like all the generations before you who saw God's mighty acts and wonders, and you walked away from it unconvinced of God's goodness and of His glory and of His truth.

For example, Psalm 95 says, for 40 years, this is God speaking, for 40 years I was angry with that generation. I said, they are a people whose hearts go astray.

They have not known my ways. So Jesus, it breaks his heart because he sees this is bigger than these guys. This is the same thing that bothered Moses, the same thing that Moses had to put up with, Jesus is facing once again.

So what can we call the Pharisees? And we don't want to speak ill of our neighbors, but I think it's fair to say the Pharisees by definition are fools.

The Old Testament gives us a really clear picture of what it means to be wise and what it means to be a fool. The Bible says the wise man is the one who says, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[27 : 21] And then in the Psalms, who is the fool? The fool is the man who says in his heart, there is no God. And of course the Pharisees would, they believed in a God, hypothetically, but the problem is they come face to face with the living God and they can't see it.

They're blind to it. They look at God, they look at God himself and they say, not God. That's the problem of the Pharisees. Now what we're talking about is really the disciples.

So we fast forward to this moment when Jesus is in a boat with the disciples and he looks at the disciples and he says, beware the leaven, leaven. My wife would be so sad that I don't know whether it's leaven or leaven.

I'm not a cook. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees. And what is he talking about? Leaven is this thing that you put in bread and it's so insignificant materially, but when you put it in the bread, it has this powerful effect on the rest of the loaf.

As I understand, I'm not a cook. And Jesus is saying what the Pharisees have is unbelief. What Herod had was unbelief.

[28 : 25] And he's looking at the disciples saying, don't let that into you, because if a little bit of that gets into you, it has this powerful effect and it can overcome you.

And the tragedy is, he tells them that. He says, beware the leaven of the Pharisees. And their response is to continue to talk about material bread and about how they don't have any bread.

In Jesus's mind, what that shows is, you think Jesus is saying, you think I'm talking about literal leaven. You think I'm telling you not to actually receive the physical leaven that Pharisees have.

And the problem is, the problem with the disciples is they don't see the metaphor of bread for what it really is. And that applies to the miracle in the 4,000.

They don't see what's that actually pointing to. One time I was at a movie with some friends, and to me, it was the most spectacular movie I had ever seen.

[29 : 24] It did everything you want a movie to do for you. It broke my heart. It inspired me. At the end of it, I was in tears, and it had just a little bit of sci-fi, which was perfect.

But it was, and it was, what was one, it was also complex. There were so many layers to it that you could just sit there after the movie thinking about it. And I'll never forget that when the movie turned off, I was trying to hide my tears because I was so moved.

And the person next to me, who just saw the same thing I did, she looked up and she said, well, that was weird. And in that moment, I felt pretty smug and pretty self-righteous because I felt like I understood that movie.

And I think that that's actually exactly what the disciples are experiencing. They are looking at something breathtaking. They're in the presence of the living God, and he has given them a metaphor of bread and fish to recognize what he has on offer for them.

And they hear this statement about the Leaven of the Pharisees, and they just think to themselves, well, that's weird that Jesus would say that. And it's a tragedy.

[30 : 35] It's not like misunderstanding a movie because this is life and death. And Jesus actually, he asked them seven questions, which just shows the emphasis, the emphaticness of how tragic this is to him.

He says, do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see?

And having ears, do you not hear? Do you not remember when I broke the five loaves and the 5,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

And they said to him 12. And seven for the 4,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him seven. And he said to them, do you not yet understand?

It wasn't enough for them to recognize that he had done a miracle. What they needed to do was to see what the miracle pointed to, which was that he was the one that could satisfy them and they missed it.

[31 : 31] And like the scariest quote that Jesus gives them is in verse 18 where he says, having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? Because that's a direct quote from Jeremiah 521, where God is talking to wayward Israel, condemning them, saying, you do not see the living God.

You do not fear God. And Jesus is saying, can you believe that? There's a man sitting in a boat and he's saying, don't you see the living God in front of you?

Two quick applications before we close. Number one, I'll say this, a command and a hope. The command is this.

All of us in here are in different places as far as our faith, how willing we are to trust in Jesus Christ. Some of us still have doubts and we struggle with what it means to be a Christian, how to work through those doubts.

And I think at the very least what this passage leaves us with is this command that even in the midst of your doubts and all the questions you have unanswered, get in the boat.

[32 : 42] That's the difference between the Pharisee and the disciples. The disciples and the Pharisees in this moment are both fools, but the disciples at least see something in Jesus that they can't look away from and they get in the boat with them.

That's the command. And the hope is this. The hope is that Jesus can heal the blind.

The disciples get in the boat with all of their doubts and with all of their blindness. And rather than getting out of the boat, Jesus takes them somewhere else.

Where's the first place that he goes to after he's told them that they're blind? You see it, you just look at the heading in the next section. He takes them to a blind man and he gives that man sight.

And what is it? It's another metaphor. I hope these disciples appreciate metaphors because it's a true story, but Jesus in healing a physically blind man surely was looking back at his disciples saying, do you not now see who I am?

[33 : 52] So what we do this morning is we open our word and you may come with doubts, you may come with questions, but look at Jesus for who he claims to be. See the statements that he has made about himself.

And in what you may feel is your inadequacies, your struggle to trust Jesus, call out to heaven and say, Jesus, I know that you're the one who heals the blind and you feed the hungry and I come to you this morning hungry and blind needing something that only you can give me.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you have not left us. The greatest miracle in the greatest wonder of this passage is not that it's not just the feeding of the 5,000.

It's the fact that you've condescended, you've sent your son into this wayward and broken world and you've offered peace and hope to people who don't deserve it. And we stand as those people this morning praising you.

Lord renew us again today, helping us not to be blind like the disciples, but to see your goodness, to come to you starving because we know that you can fill us. And your sons, then we pray.