

Jason Upchurch - Mark 6:35-52 - The Good News of Jesus's Compassion - Part 2

Our passage this morning gets to one of the biggest struggles people down through the ages and around the world have had: trusting that God will provide for them. And that provision specifically relates to 2 issues: food and clothing.

Will God keep me fed and will God keep me clothed?

Now, the answer to that question seems obvious: of course God will feed us. Of course God will give us what we need. But the problem is that functionally we don't really believe that. Or we struggle to believe that.

Everything from kids coming into the house about 5pm screaming that they're going to starve to death, to when we look at the grocery bill and wonder how we're going to afford a gallon of milk in a month based on the way things are going.

This gets to one of the fundamental issues of trusting God: do we actually trust God for our very lives. We trust him for our eternal lives. But do we trust that he actually cares about what's going into my body through my mouth and what's hanging on my body via my clothes?

Does he care? And if he cares is he going to do anything about it?

Now, this issue goes all the way back to creation. You look at the Garden of Eden and you step back and you see that God planted this amazingly lavish Garden for Adam and Eve. Every tree that was good for food - all the delicacies, all the ripest and choicest fruit. No rot, no GMOs, no green bananas flown in overnight from some weird 3rd world country with child labor violations. God provided a massive spread in the Garden of Eden. God was not stingy in the Garden, God was absolutely lavish.

There was one exception: the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Can't eat that.

And what plunges humanity into sin and death and hell? A battle over food. Adam and Eve, through the tempting of Satan were basically saying "God is not providing us the food we need! It's good food; it's pleasant and God is withholding it from us!"

Gen 3:6: So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

The battle over trusting God for food has been going on since the earliest days of creation.

Humanity continues to fight the battle over food. Famine is mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. Abraham dealt with famine. Isaac dealt with famine. Jacob dealt with famine. I mean, what made Jacob send his sons down to Egypt where they found out that Joseph was still alive and in charge of all Egypt? Famine.

One of the blessings of God gave to Israel when he brought them out of Egypt was food. He fed them in the wilderness with manna for 40 years. And, if you remember, he also made sure their clothes didn't wear out. And although the manna stopped appearing when they crossed the Jordan river into the Promised Land, God's provision didn't stop.

The Israelites go into the Promised Land and God hands them completely cultivated cities. This is a turnkey operation.

Deut. 6:10-12: [God said he would bless them] with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

God said to Israel “not only will I feed you, I’ll provide you everything you need to survive that you didn’t build.” Just don’t forget about me. You know what they did? They forgot about him.

And one of the curses God laid down in the Law for disobedience was famine. He would curse their kneading bowl, their fruit, their herds, their flocks, their vineyards, they would carry much seed into the field and shall gather a little and the locust will consume the rest.

If you read through **Deut 28** the blessings and the cursings God would pour out on Israel for obedience or disobedience it’s amazing how many of the blessings and cursings deal specifically with food.

And Israel felt that cycle over and over. Almost every time you read that there is a famine in Israel, you can assume that they are in rampant sin and under the judgement of God.

And it happens all over. Ruth, David, Elijah, Elisha, Job, Paul, Luke, the Roman Empire - they all knew famine. And they knew how precious food was.

An interesting feature of the gospel of Luke many commentators have pointed out is that Jesus is either at a dinner party or going to a dinner party. Jesus is interested in food.

And this is an eternal feature of our Lord: he will eternally provide food for his people in the New Earth which is described as the new and better Garden of Eden with the Tree of Life giving its fruit in its seasons forever and ever and ever.

This whole thing that started in Genesis in a garden, ends in Revelation in a new and better Garden.

Let me ask you something: who’s in charge of food? God is in charge of food.

And I know you’re probably thinking that that’s a really long introduction about food and famine that has nothing to do with Jesus and the 25,000 people sitting on the mountain. But what they needed to know and what the disciples needed to know and what we need to know is that Jesus is in charge of all the food.

God is in charge of food. He’s in charge of every aspect of food.

He’s in charge of how much there is or how little there is: whether it’s feast or famine.

He’s in charge of how much food costs. That’s not to lessen the blame of other human factors, but God is sovereign even over food prices. There have been times in history where food is astronomically more expensive than what we’re paying now for groceries. And what we’re paying for groceries is ridiculous.

He’s in charge of what you can and cannot put into your body. And he always has been. Even before the flood there was a distinction between clean and unclean animals. God had differentiated what his people could eat. No pork chops, no eel, no eagle.

And in a way, he still does this. Some of you are allergic or intolerant or affected by food in various ways. When I struggled with intestinal stuff for years I came across a verse that gave me encouragement. It’s when the Israelites were camped out in the wilderness for 40 years and only ate water, manna and occasionally quail:

Deut. 29:6: You have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.

God withheld bread and beer and wine so that Israel would know who their provision came from. See it’s usually only when it’s hard to eat or food is scarce that we look to the Lord.

Let’s be honest, food is not scarce in our society and really hasn’t been for a long time. Even in Covid people could get food - no one was wasting away.

I wrote some of this sermon on the upper sitting area at Yokes and looking around at a grocery store it really is a veritable Garden of Eden in modern day.

No one even 150 years ago could imagine the variety and types of food available. In our day, the problem is that we're so used to prosperity that we can't even imagine what it's like to not take some frozen chicken nuggets out of the freezer, pop them in the microwave, 4 minutes later plunge them into ranch dressing we just got out of the fridge 2 minutes ago.

We can debate health, food supply, so on. But the point is that it is God who gives food. And he gives us this food as an act of sovereign compassion toward us.

And this event shows that in several phases.

1) The problem of food. Mark paints for us a rather bleak picture of what's happening as these people long to follow Jesus. **Read 35-38**

So the situation changes from needing rest and truth to a more immediate physical need which is food. These thousands of people have followed Jesus around the lake and out into the middle of nowhere and now they're hungry.

And it's already been a long day. The day started out with a report of the disciples about their preaching journey. They wanted to eat and rest but people continually came up to them asking for more healings and exorcisms and teaching. They couldn't even eat so Jesus decided to gather the 12 in the boat and sail down the lake to a desolate place. People chased them, Jesus taught them. It's evening time.

It's too late for them to turn back and go home. They probably spend hours racing around the lake and even more time wandering out into the desert.

By the way: you probably caught this - but this is a reenactment of the Israelites wandering in the desert with no food. They are following the new and greater Moses across the water out into the wilderness and just like Moses gave them food, so too Jesus gives them food.

The imagery is purposeful.

It's too late to go home. And Jesus uses this as an opportunity to test the disciples. "Give them something to eat." "Jesus are you crazy? We don't have the money to buy this kind of food. 200 denarii is 200 days' wages. It's hard to convert ancient ideas of money into modern ones, but 200 days wages in modern money is something like \$30,000.

They don't have that kind of money, and even if they did where in the world would they buy that kind of bread? This is 5,000 men plus women plus children, you're talking feeding a baseball stadium full of people out in the middle of nowhere with no money and it's late.

And the next element is just sort of comical. It shows how dire the situation is but it's almost cast in a ridiculous light. **Read 38**

Let me get this straight, 25,000 people follow Jesus for hours away from their home, around the sea, out into the wilderness and all they can come up with is 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish? Are you kidding me.

I sneak more than that into the movie theatre when I go see a movie.

This bread would have been something like a pita bread - a small flat bread and the fish were probably tilapia caught in the lake. The lack of food is almost unbelievably ridiculous.

Don't get me wrong, I really think this is all they had. I just think they were so ridiculously short sighted they didn't think past the next meal.

Now, before we go on I want to say just a little more about the disciples. The lack of food and Jesus telling the disciples to give the crowd something to eat is important. Because what it does is highlight the disciples' continual lack of faith in Jesus.

They've been with him this long and seen so many amazing things. They've seen demons cast out, the dead raised, people healed, storms calmed - they've had a front row seat to all of this.

And they've even participated in it. He just sent them out to go do amazing things on a preaching tour and they had just got done telling him how many amazing things they'd done.

And yet when Jesus says go do something more amazing, their response how are we going to do amazing things? What possible way will that be accomplished? And even after the feeding they still don't fully understand what happened. **Read 48-52**

So here's Jesus doing another amazing thing and they don't get it and Mark gives us some insight: their hearts are still hard. They are slow to understand. Jesus doesn't give up on them, he's gracious to them, but they're slow.

See a lot of times we're slow to understand Jesus. And we're slow to understand what God is doing in our lives too. We go through a season where God does amazing thing after amazing thing and then something big comes at us and we think "how in the world is the omnipotent God of all creation going to take care of this problem?" And we forget because our hearts are often hard.

We're like Elijah having just defeated the 400 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel running into the wilderness because Jezebel is threatening us. Didn't you see what just happened?

Our lives are often surrounded by blessing after blessing and providence after providence and then we struggle to see past the next hurdle. God wants us to be soft-hearted: he's going to lead us exactly where he wants us to go. We can trust him.

And not only can we trust him but we should expect that he's going to do something that brings him glory.

2) The provision of food. **Read 39-44**

Amazing. Jesus performs the miracle. He feeds 5,000 men. As I've mentioned before, the men are mentioned. That's actually how Israel performed its census: they would count the men, and actually only the men who were of fighting age, so 20 years to about 50 years old. So add to this number all the wives and children and elderly folks who would have come along and most people suspect the crowd was somewhere in the neighborhood of 20,000 to 25,000 people. A stadium full of people.

Side: your friendly neighborhood pagan liberal German scholars will try to convince you that no miracle actually took place here. They'll say that what Jesus actually did was divide up the 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Like into the tiniest pieces and so everyone got a little pinch of bread and a little pinch of fish and that's what everyone passed around.

And that the moral of the story is not that Jesus is God, the New Moses in the flesh to lead the people of God out of slavery of sin and into the true Promised Land. No, that's not what this is about. What they'll say this is about is sharing. We should learn to share food with one another and be content with the little bit God has given us.

See, if Jesus just gives us a little pinch, we can share that and be content with what we have. I mean those are biblical principles, right? Sharing and being content. Well, yes they are they're just not the principles we were supposed to learn here.

Here we're supposed to learn that because Jesus is God he can feed a stadium full of people by multiplying a few loaves of bread and a couple fish.

By the way, look at **Vs. 43. Read**

If all anyone did was take a little pinch of bread and fish and pass it around how is it possible that there were 12 basket fulls of bread left over? Five loaves and 2 fish don't even fit in 12 baskets. There'd be nothing left.

No, Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish and compassionately provided for the thousands and thousands of people. The seating arrangement are interesting in 2 ways. First, the numbers is usually how you would seat a large banquet. Hundreds and fifties. These aren't just random numbers that Jesus came up with. What Jesus seems to be doing is seating people like they would be in a great lavish banquet hall. Just like Jesus wasn't stingy providing for Adam and Even in the Garden, he's not stingy here on the mountain side. He's going to provide lavishly for these people even when things seem impossible.

The seating is also interesting in another way. The theme of shepherd is really prominent. **Read 34, 39**

Now turn to **Psalm 23**. John's gospel makes this connection a little more clearly, but I think Mark highlights that Jesus really is the shepherd of **Psalm 23. Read Psalm 23**

Yahweh is my shepherd: who's the shepherd in Mark? Jesus who is Yahweh in the flesh.

I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. What did Jesus do? He commanded them to sit in what kind of grass? Green grass. Why does Mark say green grass? We all know grass is green.

He restores my soul: he was preaching truth to them.

He prepares a table.

I've mentioned before that the NT writers quote the OT in a variety of ways. Sometimes it's a direct quotation: Isaiah said this and thus it is fulfilled.

Sometimes it's a passing quote. Sometimes it's more like an allusion or an echo. Like quoting a line from a favorite movie to your friends and maybe changing up the meaning just a little to fit your context. That happens a lot.

Turn to Matthew 6. What do we do with this truth that Jesus multiplied the loaves? He's God - he can do all things. We are often stubborn of heart to see. Be patient, trust in God to provide.

It's interesting that twice in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus references feeding. **Read 9-13**

Give us this day our daily bread.

Read 25-34

Anxiety stems from provisions. Will God really provide for me. What's the answer? Yes! Trust him. For everything you need.

Pray