

The Compassionate King

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

- [0 : 0 0] The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while.
- ! For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.
- When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things, and when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.
- Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. 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? And he said to them, How many loaves do you have? Go and see. And when they had found out, they said, Five and two fish.
- [1 : 0 9] Then he commanded them to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups by hundreds and fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.
- And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.
- And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Father, I ask you to take your word by the power of your spirit and open our hearts and minds to understand it and be changed by it.
- In Jesus' name, amen. I may cough a lot this morning. I was sick half the week, so I'll just kind of ignore it when I do it. Alright? This little recording might not make it to the internet.
- When I remember learning this particular story about the feeding of the five thousand several times when I was a kid in Sunday school. And so if you grew up going to church and you grew up in Sunday school, you're probably familiar with the basic details of this story.
- [2 : 2 2] And some of the ways in which this story was generally taught to me I think were right and hit on some of the right elements in this story. Like the power of Jesus on display.
- And so I was taught as a kid that Jesus is powerful enough to multiply the loaves and the fishes. And that's right. And that's an emphasis I think that Mark makes. But I remember also, especially when it came time in Sunday school class, for the teacher to show us how this applied to our lives and how this story affected us, it almost always boiled down to, do you remember the little boy who had the loaves and the fishes?
- And he shared them? And then the power of Jesus was able to work a miracle because this little boy shared what he had. And so if you want the power of Jesus to work in your life or if you want Him to do, you need to be kind and loving and sharing like that little boy.

And that's basically how the passage was primarily taught to me as a kid. But there are a couple of problems with that. Number one, the little boy is not found anywhere in the Gospel of Mark.

Do you notice that? You're going, little boy? What is he talking about? He's not in Mark? In fact, this is one of the few stories that all four Gospels record. There are only a handful of stories that are in all four Gospels.

[3 : 38] And this is one of them. And in only one Gospel is the little boy mentioned in the Gospel of John. And John doesn't highlight the little boy's willingness to share.

He just makes the note that that's where they got the bread and the fish. And he doesn't say anything else about the little boy. He doesn't praise the little boy. He doesn't tell us to imitate the little boy. The little boy is not the hero of the story.

He just happens to be there, happens to have these, and then he disappears from the scene and it's all over with. So that this story is not about kindness and sharing. It is about the power of Jesus, but it's not about kindness and sharing.

So that's one issue with it. But another issue with that is that it would lead us to believe that in this particular story, the power of Jesus at work to do this miracle hinges upon someone else's good deed.

someone else's act of holiness or righteousness. And while that is at times true in Scripture, there are times where God requires us to behave in certain ways, to walk in holiness, to live in certain ways in order for Him to bless us in certain ways.

[4 : 50] That is true at times in Scripture. So, for instance, James says that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Not the prayer of just anybody, but the prayer of a man who's righteous, who seeks the Lord, who lives in obedience.

His prayer is powerful and God will work in powerful ways in answer to that. In a very similar way, Peter warns husbands not to mistreat their wives so that their prayers may not be hindered.

So there is a sense in which the power of God that works in our lives through our prayers is in some way, at least at times, tied to our obedience to Him.

That is true. But it's not true all the time. And it's certainly not true in this particular story. The power of Jesus does not hinge upon anything else that anyone does in this story.

It's His power at work because He chooses to do this miracle. And we need to see that and we need to understand that. In fact, I see two main emphases in this passage.

[6 : 00] I see the power of Christ on display and I see the great love and compassion of Christ on display. And all I want to do is show you those two elements in the story and then show you where they meet and how they come together.

And then I want to show you exactly how they are tied to us. And how in this story, how is the power of Christ mediated and how are the disciples involved in this?

Before we do that, let's just take a look at a couple of the details of the story so that we'll understand exactly what's happening to Him. Now, if you were here last week, you remember last week there's a little bit of a detour in the middle of chapter 6.

Because earlier in the chapter, Jesus has sent out the twelve disciples to go out and do ministry on their own throughout Galilee. And we are told in fact, if you look in verse 12, it says that they went out and proclaimed that people should repent and they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

So they did it. He sends the twelve out in groups of two and they go out and they teach people. They proclaim a gospel of repentance. The same thing that Jesus has been proclaiming since at least chapter 2. And they do a lot of, they do powerful things.

[7 : 14] The power of Christ is at work through them as they're traveling. And then there's, like I said, a bit of a detour and we are shown a flashback to John the Baptist's death at the hands of Herod.

And now here in verse 30, we're back to the main storyline. Because it says, the apostles returned to Jesus and told Him all that they had done and taught.

And then He said to them, come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while. because there were so many people at this point, there are so many people coming to Christ and not only coming to Him now, but also coming to His disciples because they've been out doing miracles and teaching and preaching.

There are so many people coming now that it says that they don't even have time to stop and eat. There's no time for anything at all. And so here Jesus is again for the third time in the Gospel of Mark, almost with His back pressed up against the lake.

and the crowds are too great. And He knows, He senses that His disciples need rest. They need a break. And so they get into a boat that's nearby.

[8 : 22] Maybe the same boat that they got in earlier, I don't know. But they get into a boat that's nearby and they decide that they're going to go somewhere else. And where they're going to go, they're now on the sort of northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

And they're going to go to really the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It's not a terribly long trip. It's only about a four mile boat trip. It's not a terribly long trip, but it will get them into a more secluded area.

They're here, they're probably near Capernaum, base of operations, near a large city. So now they're going to go away from the large cities and they're going to be in an area that's a little bit more desolate, a little bit more sparse in population so that they can have some time away to pray, to eat, to rest, and be refreshed.

That's the context in which this whole story takes place. The people, however, have other plans because we are told that when the people, it says in verse 32, or I'm sorry, verse 33, that many saw them going and recognized them and they ran there on foot from all the towns.

So here's the picture. Jesus and the disciples have a large crowd. They're teaching, preaching, they're tired, they're worn out. So Jesus says, guys, get in the boat, we're going to take off. We've got to take a break.

[9 : 40] These people see and notice what's happening and they run on, okay, and then there are others who catch on to where Jesus is headed because of the commotion. And so others come from other towns along the, I'm pretty sure, along the shore or near the Sea of Galilee and they join the crowd.

And so by the time that everybody gets to the northern shore of the Sea, you've got a pretty sizable crowd. We're told at the end of this story, verse 44, those who ate the loaves were 5,000 men.

That's a lot of people. But it was probably actually more than that. There are two distinct words, well, two primary words in the Greek of the New Testament that are translated man or men.

And one of them is a word that can mean man or it can just mean human being, mankind. All right? So it can cover males only or it can cover people in general.

All right? But there is another word in Greek that means male. It's specific to a man. You would never use that word to describe a woman. And that's exactly the word that we find here.

[10 : 50] Those that ate the loaves were 5,000 males. And so Mark is perhaps hinting that there may be more. Matthew, when he tells this story, doesn't hint at it. Matthew uses the same word and he says there were about 5,000 men besides the women and children.

So Matthew's specific. So you've got a lot of people here. I've seen scholars estimate upwards of 30,000 people. I think most scholars probably say there were 15,000 to 20,000 people there.

Who knows how many there were there. The point is there are a lot of people clamoring to see Jesus, to hear Jesus, to see the disciples and hear the disciples. And they get there and they don't have much time after they arrive.

They don't have much time to spend alone. And so it says in verse 34, when he went ashore, Jesus saw a great crowd. He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.

[11 : 59] Very simple. Jesus has compassion. He begins to teach them rather than sending them away. But it's near dinner time now. And remember, they're out in the wilderness a bit.

You know, they can't go to the market right there and get something to eat. And so his disciples, thinking about the health of the people, okay, they're concerned about the people, say to Jesus, Jesus, it's almost dinner time.

Do you think we should give these people time to get back to the various cities or at least to some nearby cities so that they can buy some food for themselves? Because if it gets much later out here, they're going to be walking in the dark and it's going to be dangerous for them.

They're being kind. They're trying to think of the needs of the people. And so they said, Jesus, shouldn't we send them away? Jesus answers, you give them something to eat.

Now the Gospel of John tells us specifically that Jesus was testing them. Jesus knew what he was going to do. You give them something to eat and they said, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?

[13 : 08] A denarius was a little coin, okay, in the Roman world and it was roughly equal to one day's wage for your average wage earner. Okay?

So if you worked all day and you had a decent job, you weren't wealthy, but you worked all day, you were a laborer, then you'd get paid a denarius at the end of the day or five or six or seven at the end of the week depending on how many days you worked.

And the disciples look at the size of the crowd and they estimate and they say, it's going to take 200 days worth of wages. That's almost two-thirds of the year.

So, if you make, say, \$60,000 a year, you're looking at probably, gosh, probably \$35,000 to \$40,000 worth of that salary.

The disciples, they understand, you know, they're not saying, Jesus, we won't do it. They're saying, is this your plan? You want us to spend everything we've got in our little treasury here?

[14 : 13] to feed these people? They're not. They don't strike me. A lot of times the disciples are painted negatively in the Gospels and that's true. They can be thick-headed and dull and insensitive, but I don't think that's the case in this particular story.

They don't strike me here to be criticizing Jesus. They don't strike me here as being disobedient towards Him. They're simply saying, you mean you want us to spend 200 denarii to buy enough food to feed all of these people?

Is that what you want us to do? I don't think it's a lack of obedience that we're seeing here at all. He says to them, how many loaves do you have? Go and see.

And they go, they got five loaves, two fish. Verse 39, he commanded the people to all sit down in groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. So put them in rows, they put them in lines.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, set a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.

[15 : 19] Now here's the miracle of the story. And they all ate and were satisfied and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.

Twelve loaves and thousands of people are satisfied? Two fish and thousands of people are not only satisfied but there's so much left over. Remember, this story begins by telling us about how the disciples didn't have time to eat.

How many baskets are left over at the end? A whole basket of bread for each disciple to eat now. Jesus has not only provided for these people, he's provided for his disciples.

This is an incredible miracle. Now, when I was an undergraduate, when I was in college, I was studying in religion, getting my degree there, planning to go to seminary, which I did.

But I was in a more liberal school. So I was getting a degree in theology but at a more liberal school. And when we came to this particular story, my professor, who didn't actually believe in miracles, told us that, well, what really happened here was that the people were inspired to share.

[16 : 35] And so then they began to dig out of all of their bags and things, all the food that they had. And this is a miracle of sharing. Well, all right, but it's not there in the text, okay?

This seems to me to be Jesus takes loaves, blesses them, and all of a sudden 12 loaves feed thousands. That seems pretty simple to me. This is not complicated. And if you read the Gospel of John, the people who were there, apparently, they didn't think of it as a miracle of sharing because the people to whom Jesus gave the food, to whom He gave nourishment.

At the end of it all, they saw how great His power was and they wanted to take Him away and make Him a king. They didn't pat themselves on the back and say, man, we sure shared here.

Wow, thanks for sharing. I'm glad you brought that extra jerky with you. That was good too. That's not at all what's happened. This is an unprecedented miracle. The disciples, I don't think, were prepared for this particular kind of miracle.

That's not to say anything negative about the disciples. Remember, they just come back from their own miracle working crusade. They have cast out demons. They have healed various diseases.

[17 : 54] They themselves have put their hands on crippled people and made them walk. They have, I don't think at this point that they doubt or deny the power of Christ. It's just that they've never seen anything quite like this.

And that's where we begin to understand this first major theme in this story of the incredible power of Jesus. Jesus, as the sovereign, reigning king of the universe, has the power to do anything he wants to do.

And we have to understand that. We have to be careful that we don't place Jesus in a box and say, I've seen you work in these kinds of ways and these are the things that I expect of you and I don't really think you're going to go outside of that and do something over here.

So this is what I know you do. I think if the disciples are guilty of anything in this passage, it's that they trust in the power of Jesus to work in the ways they've seen him work.

They've seen him cast out demons. They've seen him heal people. They've done those things now themselves, but they've never seen him multiply bread. Never seen it. So they just don't expect it.

[19 : 13] But if we rightly understand the power of Christ, what we begin to understand is that he can do anything that he wants to do. That's called omnipotence.

But one of the keys to understanding that phrase is he can do anything that he wants to do. Now, some of you might possibly with your kids have started using the catechisms that we have.

If you haven't started using one of those and you have kids, they're out here on the table. They're all printed out. You can get it off the internet as well. But the catechism is basically a question and answer format for teaching your kids theology.

It's not an un-Baptist thing to do. It's just not been very Baptist for the last hundred years. But it's just you ask them a question and they respond with a memorized answer. And one of the questions actually that Calvin has just learned in the last two weeks, they learned it a while ago, but is, can God do all things?

Now, it would be fine to answer that and say yes. And that's a nice short answer to memorize. But that's not what the catechism says. The catechism says, yes, God can do all His holy will.

[20 : 25] All His holy will. So never mind those questions about can God create a rock that's so big that He can't lift it. Alright? He can do all His holy will.

Anything God determines to do, He can do. Jesus determines to feed these people. nothing can prevent Him from feeding these people.

That's the power of Christ on display here. But the power of Christ is on display in this particular way, we are told by Mark, because of the compassion of Jesus.

He's not just a sovereign king, He is a compassionate king. Take a look at verse 34. It says, When He went ashore, He saw a great crowd and He had compassion on them.

He cared about them. It mattered to Jesus what was happening in the lives of these people. It matters to Him what happens in our lives.

[21 : 30] It matters to Him that we need certain things, that we have certain troubles and certain difficulties and certain problems. It matters to Jesus that we have those issues come up.

I know that sometimes we begin to ponder the great power of Christ and we rightly begin to see ourselves as small in comparison to the great power of Christ.

But what we fail to remember at times is that Christ has a kind of vision that we don't have. In other words, we see big things pretty well.

Right? I can look through these windows. I can see the trees outside very well because they're very big. Alright? I know that there are probably thousands of tiny little bugs down at the base of some of these trees.

Probably some ant piles or some roly-polies and various things. There's probably a whole lot of those but I can't see them. All I can see is the tree. All I can see is the big object.

[22 : 34] And sometimes we act as if the vision of Christ, what Christ is able to see or what he chooses to see is comparable to ours. But what we need to remember is that he sees simultaneously the largest galaxies and the smallest, tiniest particles in the universe and he sees them with equal clarity.

Which means for us that he sees our problems and he sees our circumstances as clearly as he sees events in world history. And he cares just as much about them.

So, I'm laying in bed this week frustrated because I have a fever and my back hurts and I'm nauseous and there's a part of me that's saying, God, just let me get better.

And there's a part of me thinking, ah, this is nothing big. It doesn't really matter. But the reality is that in the midst of even a small little thing like that, he cares.

He cares when you have difficulties at work. He cares when you're having troubles with your children. He cares when you're having an argument at home. All these things that we sometimes have a tendency to say, that's small.

[23 : 46] It's not that big a deal to him. There's bigger things happening for God. But if you're infinite, nothing's big to you, right? Is that not true?

If you're infinite and you have no limits, there's nothing big happening to you, which means everything is equal to you. He sees it all the same. So that your little minuscule problems elicit, I believe, the compassion of Jesus.

And that great compassion of Jesus that eventually would drive him to the cross for our sins, that great compassion of Jesus in the second half of this verse comes together with that great power of Jesus to give us hope.

Look what it says in the second half of verse 34. This is why he had compassion on them. Because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Now that phrase, that phrase is loaded with Old Testament meaning. Over and over in the Old Testament, God and the kings that God chooses to put in place they are pictured as shepherds.

[24 : 59] In fact, the king from whose line Jesus would come, David, was nothing other than a shepherd. Now in the Greco-Roman world, a shepherd was looked down upon, was considered dirty, was considered an outcast.

But in the Jewish world, they recognized that he was a laborer. They recognized that ordinary, he doesn't have status ordinarily in the community, but a shepherd garnered a certain amount of respect because God himself chooses over and over in the Old Testament to identify himself as the shepherd of Israel.

He chooses a shepherd to be his king and he doesn't let the shepherding in there. The prophet Jeremiah, when he looks back at the failures of the kings of Israel, he says that they were poor shepherds.

They didn't lead the people of God. In the shepherd of the Old Testament, we see the great power of a leader, a leader who is able to protect the sheep from harm, who's able to keep them in the good green pastures and lead them to the streams of water.

we see the power, the leadership of that shepherd. We see it coupled with a great concern for his sheep, a great, deep concern for them because they are his livelihood.

[26 : 31] He has devoted himself to caring for them so that he makes sure that he keeps them away from the dangerous cliffs. He makes sure that he gets them to the green pastures and sometimes that requires the shepherd to go a long way and to travel long distances and to endure great hardship and he sleeps outside and he sacrifices greatly for the sheep.

Why? Because he cares for the sheep. And over and over the Bible describes Christ as our shepherd. He says, I am the good shepherd.

Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. None of that means that the problems don't come.

None of that means that we won't be beset by hunger the way that the disciples were, the way that the crowd was. None of it means that the troubles won't come because he says next, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you're with me.

The shepherd takes the sheep through the dark places and protects them in the midst of the dark places. Whether that is an argument with your spouse, whether your marriage is about to completely fall apart, whether or not you're just frustrated with your kid or they're in open rebellion, whatever the case might be, he doesn't always remove those completely.

[27 : 55] He takes us through those. Jesus intentionally goes to a desolate place knowing that people will follow him, knowing that he will feed them in a desolate place where there's no other food to be had. and he will at times do the same for us because he is a great and powerful king who loves to display his power in meeting our needs and he is a kind and compassionate king who simply loves to meet our needs.

And preeminently he has done that on the cross, hasn't he? That the great shepherd should go and walk through death for us, not the valley of the, walk through death in our place, endure the wrath of his father in our place.

Why? So that someday we don't get bread on a hillside in the wilderness so that someday we sit at the great wedding feast of the lamb because we've trusted in him.

Which brings me to the last thing that I want us to see in this text and that is that if there is anything in this passage that I would say involves the disciples in some way, that it calls upon them to do something, I would say that it's through their faith.

Because remember these are disciples who have seen the power of Christ at work, they are disciples in whom the power of Christ has been working working personally. And it's important to note that at the very beginning in verse 30, he calls them the apostles.

[29 : 40] You see that? The apostles returned to Jesus. Everywhere else in the gospel of Mark, they're called the disciples. Now sometimes we think like the word apostle and disciple is kind of interchangeable.

But technically they're not. generally speaking in the New Testament, the word apostle is reserved, now not 100% of the time, but generally speaking, the word apostle is reserved for them after, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Generally speaking, that's when apostle is reserved. But here they're called apostles because they have been given a foretaste of the ministry they're going to have in the future. Alright? So these are men who are working in the power of the Spirit in a way in which they will work later on in a more permanent fashion after the day of Pentecost.

But now they get a taste of it and they've come back and they are full of excitement to tell Jesus about everything that has happened and then they go on a journey.

They're confused by Him telling them to give them something to eat, but never one time in this passage do we catch a hint that they doubt Him. Feed them.

[31 : 01] Okay, do you want us to spend all our money on that? Because we can do that. No, no. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to get to what you have and I want you to start breaking it up. Now a normal person would say, listen, here's the thing Jesus, it's only 12 loaves.

I get, I get that I don't know we can break it into little bitty pieces, I don't know what's happening, there's 12 loaves here. They never do that. These men, these apostles, they just trust Him.

They just trust Him and act and they break the bread and they begin to distribute the bread. Can you imagine being one of these men? Here's Jesus, He's got some bread, He blesses it and He begins to hand it to them and they're taking it.

I'm guessing, I mean there's 12 disciples, right? So you get your loaf that Jesus has broken and you take it and maybe you get a third of the way down this first row of 100 people, you're giving out little pieces and you, I don't know, He said distribute bread, I'll go back and get some more.

Why would there be any more? Why would, you get the picture of these disciples just kind of moment by moment in the midst of it, just trusting, He's going to, I don't know what He's going to do, He's going to do something. They go back, they get more bread, they take it, they keep coming back for more bread and more bread and distributing it to the people.

[32 : 21] Why? I think their experience of the power of the Spirit at work, giving them a foretaste of what they will have in the future, I think that has built up in them a kind of faith in Jesus that makes them willing to do ridiculous things, like spend all their money to feed people out in the middle of nowhere when they're starving or continue to come back and get more bread when there should be no bread after the first trip.

So that if we're to try to identify with anyone in this story and say, how do I respond here? I would say identify first with the crowd and understand the compassionate power of Jesus and then secondly, I would say identify with the disciples and trust in that compassionate power when it doesn't make sense to.

Understand that He has the power to meet you where you are, He has the desire to meet you where you are, and then believe, believe that He will do it even if you have no idea how it's going to happen.

Let's pray. Let's pray.