

Understanding the Loaves

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Date: 23 February 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's pick up where we're up to in Mark chapter 6. So last week we were back in chapter 6, verse 1, and today we're up to Mark chapter 6, we're up to verse 30. So let me read to you from Mark chapter 6, picking up at verse 30.

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 a while.

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. They went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognised 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 he grew late, his disciples came to him and he said, This is a desolate place, and the hour is 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.

[1 : 1 1] 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. Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups by hundreds and by 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 sit before the people.

And he divided the two fish among them all. 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. Immediately, he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he'd taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

[2 : 2 8] And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased, and they were utterly astounded.

For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, and moored on the shore.

And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him, and ran around the whole region, and began to bring the sick people on their beds, to whoever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment.

And as many as touched it, were made well. Well, let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for your life-giving word, and thank you for our time together in your word this morning.

[3 : 5 4] Please help us to understand it well, and respond appropriately, as your word and your spirit are working us. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, remember, we're still in the first half of Mark's Gospel.

I really detailed outline your bulletins this morning, but there's a bit of a sketch on the screen behind me. Remember, in the first half of Mark's Gospel, the first half is, who is Jesus?

Chapter 1 to 8. And then the second half, chapter 9 to 16, why did Jesus come? Okay, that's where we're up to. And we're told here, that the reason that they didn't understand who Jesus was yet, so they haven't got the picture of who Jesus is yet, is because they didn't understand the loaves.

Which means that we need to understand the loaves too, doesn't it? For we're not talking about how to make loaves of bread, we're not talking about how to make good seadot, we're talking about Jesus feeding people in the wilderness from five loaves of bread and two small fish.

So, let's get to it. They're in the wilderness, in verses 31 to 44. And Jesus and the 12 tribes, the 12 disciples, who we see are now also known as the apostles, that's the 12 disciples become the 12 apostles, have been working hard and long for the last few weeks.

[5 : 19] They've been out on a very successful mission tour, teaching about Jesus all around Galilee. You can see that's the region up there to the north, in that green section on the map there.

Teaching about Jesus all around Galilee, classing out unclean spirits. And they've come back to Jesus and things are frantic. It seems that the disciples are almost more famous than Jesus.

Things become so busy that they haven't even got time to eat there in verse 31. And so, Jesus wants to take some time out. So, they get in the boat, they cross the other side of the Lake Galilee to a desolate place, literally, literally desert or literally wilderness, really.

But this attempt to find solitude fails. The crowds recognise and the paparazzi follow and they run around and they get to where Jesus was going first.

Crowds from all the towns around Galilee come and find him in the wilderness. And notice what he says in verse 34. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

[6 : 36] Now, sheep and shepherds and wildernesses have got to start triggering things in our brains, right? When Moses was leading the Jews through the wilderness, through the desert, he had the same concern for his people.

In Numbers 27, he speaks about it. And he was worried that when he died, right, the people would be like a sheep without a shepherd. And so, he appoints Joshua, his successor, to be the shepherd of the sheep of God.

The precious people that God has rescued out of Egypt, led through the Red Sea, through the wilderness for 40 years, and then to the promised land, just about to enter.

And the shepherd is the leader of God's people. And remember, Joshua is Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, which means God saves.

And Jesus is the equivalent Greek name in the New Testament, which means God saves. Joshua, Jesus, God saves. All the same.

[7 : 52] A bit more background. 1100 years after, after Joshua was appointed, when Ezekiel was a prophet to Israel, he had the same concern.

Come to Ezekiel 34 with me, and read about it. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, keep going back to the Old Testament now. Ezekiel. So, you turn up to Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 34. Now, we've got to remember that the prophets refer to the kings of Israel as shepherds of Israel.

And Ezekiel 34 is a damning criticism of the shepherds of Israel, the kings, the rulers, those who are supposed to care for the people. And listen as I read it to you.

Come to Ezekiel 34. You can read 1 to 16, but I'll just pick it up at verse 11. Right? 34 verse 11. For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself, will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

[9 : 10] As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he's among these sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep. And I'll rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on the day of clouds and thick darkness.

And I'll bring out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel by the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I'll feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land.

There they shall lie down in good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. And I myself will make them lie down declares the Lord. I will seek the lost and I will bring back the stray and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak.

The fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. So here in Ezekiel 34 you see the big picture that the great shepherd of Israel caring for his people having compassion on them looking after them leading them teaching them God's ways the true king the true shepherd of God's people is God himself.

[10 : 36] And Jesus is doing exactly the same kind of thing in Mark chapter 6. Here is Jesus having a heart of a shepherd and Jesus seems to be the perfect shepherd of Israel.

Could he possibly be the good shepherd who is God himself? Well it's getting late in Mark chapter 6 now 35 to 42 it's getting late that we didn't plan on having this crowd coming in fact we didn't plan on coming at all.

The people have been there all day and they must have been getting hungry in this remote wilderness place. There's been no registration for this conference there's been no caterers planned there's been no one bringing the water jugs there's no food or drink ordered Jesus just send the people home okay they can go and look after themselves but no Jesus I think he's trying to make them realise that this is an impossible task to feed these people in the wilderness I mean 200 denarii of food wouldn't be enough well they would just enough be required to that's 200 days wages right the apostles didn't have it on them and even if they did there's no McDonald's on earth I reckon that you could go to to provide for that dinner rush I mean last Sunday night we went to grill after the uni church and they only just barely cope with 30 or 40 of us 5,000 men right verse 44 not counting women and children so there's a huge crowd there but Jesus does the impossible breaking up five loaves of bread and two fish he feeds them all with plenty left over can you think of another occasion when people were fed in the wilderness well God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt provided Moses to bring them across the Red Sea and there God fed them provided for them God miraculously provided food for his people in the wilderness not for just one day but for 40 years the things that Jesus does keep screaming out that he must be God and that he loves and cares for his people he is the good shepherd he is God the shepherd who saves his people he is the God the good shepherd who cares for his precious sheep now that kind of day where Jesus had just fed 5,000 people would be a day you'd never forget I don't think I mean how did Jesus feed so many people in the wilderness but it's time to head home now back across the lake back to Bethsaida we're told there in verse 45 and it's all action with Jesus you get it immediately immediately immediately it's a fast-paced action going on now well here in chapter 6 verse 45 he's got the disciples back in the boat the disciples aren't making much progress against the wind it's been a long time when the sun went down they're in the middle of the lake and [14 : 45] Jesus is on the land wrapping up the day's work of teaching then finally he has to assign himself he goes and prays at 3am in the morning that's when the fourth watch of the night would begin the disciples are straining at the oars to get across the lake so that's a long time I mean if they went on the lake at sort of the first watch at 6pm it's now 3am it's been nine hours of rowing a boat and they still haven't got across the lake nine hours slogging away and if they were tired before they went out to have a break from the people back in the wilderness they'd be tired now and so Jesus walks out to them he comes to them and they see him and they're terrified by him they think he's a ghost reasonable thought after all who'd ever thought someone could walk on water and then

Jesus speaks to them to comfort them Jesus was going to pass by the disciples there's a whole lot of work you can do on passing by we'll let that go but Jesus is going to pass by the disciples and in reassuring them that he's not a ghost he calls out it is I don't be afraid now at one level it's just a way of saying okay it's alright guys it's me and don't worry it's alright but at another level it's far far deeper than that literally Jesus says I am now for those with ears to hear we'll have the Old Testament ringing loud and clear in our heads won't we listen to Exodus chapter 3 verse 13 to 14 when God speaks to Moses Exodus chapter 3 verse 13 Moses said to God if I come to the people of Israel and say to them the

God of your fathers has sent me to you and they asked me what is his name what shall I say to them God said to Moses I am who I am and he said say to the people of Israel I am has sent me to you so who is it that's walking on the water out to the disciples saying it's I am sounds like he is identifying himself pretty closely with none other than the Lord God of Israel the creator of heaven and earth so who is Jesus walking on the water he's doing something like God has done before and when Jesus gets in the boat the wind and the waves die down again have you ever read Psalm 107 I'll just read out to you Psalm 107 pick it up in verse 4 some wandered in the desert wastes finding no way to a city to dwell in hungry and thirsty their souls fainted within them and they cried out to

the Lord in the trouble and he delivered them from their distress he led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in let them thank the

Lord for his steadfast love for his wondrous works to the children of man for he satisfies the longing soul and the hungry souls he fills with good things then you come down to verse 23 of Psalm 107 some went down the sea in ships doing business on the great waters they saw the deeds of the Lord his wondrous works in the deep for he commanded and raised the stormy sea which lifted up the waves of the sea they mounted up to heaven they went down to the depths their courage melted away in their evil plight they reeled and staggered like drunken men and they were at their wits end then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress he made the storm still and the waves and the sea were hushed then they were glad that the waters were quiet and he brought them to their desired haven let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love for the wondrous works to the children of man there we see that it's

God who calms the seas and stops the winds blowing well the disciples then arrive safely at Bethsaida who is this Jesus in the boat with them they are utterly astounded he feeds 5,000 men in the wilderness now he walks on the water and calms the sea saying don't worry it's I who is this man well understand the loaves if they understood the loaves they wouldn't have been astounded and the reason they didn't understand the loaves is because they were hard-hearted so what is it they didn't understand about the loaves or couldn't understand about the loaves what should the loaves teach us this event what are we supposed to get about the loaves if their hearts weren't hardened and our hearts aren't hard it's at least this

[20 : 31] Jesus is truly God the good shepherd who loves and saves and cares for his people his sheep if we know our Old Testaments our hearts are not hard and we'll see crystal clear that Jesus truly is God for it's God who will be the shepherd and care for his sheep it's God who saves his people it's God who gathers those who have been scattered amongst the nations it's God is the one who feeds his people God is the one who calms the storm God is the great I am if we understand the lows rightly Jesus is God the shepherd who loves and saves and cares for his people and in his saving work is going to be revealed even more for us next week in chapter 7 when we see that

Jesus is the one who saves us from our sin but for now let's be encouraged knowing that Jesus is truly the good shepherd the one who cares for his people cares for you and me he knows us he knows what we're like he knows what we need I wonder if you know that he loves you and really loves me are you sure that he loves you that he loves me that he doesn't let us down that he provides everything we need can I encourage you to drink in the depths of how good Jesus is he only ever wants the best for us and he is the one who will bring us safely home to our eternal heavenly promised land let's pray our father in heaven thank you that we are in a far better situation than the apostles were thank you that we can see and understand the depths and the riches of scriptures and that as we see

Jesus we actually come face to face with you the one who gave his only son whose body was broken for us that we might have eternal life please help us to continue to feed on your word from the word that comes from your mouth and to continue to be nourished by you as we live this side of glory and help us to keep trusting you and your son thank you that he comes to us in your word please help us to continue to live for him as we wait for his return we pray in Jesus name amen