

Understanding the Loaves

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[0 : 0 0] That is a magnificently prescient prayer, isn't it? From 1 Kings chapter 8. I wonder if we've ever prayed a prayer like that. Not necessarily dedicating the temple, but those kind of prayers.

That God would hear our pleas and hear our prayers and answer from heaven the things that we ask Him, knowing that when we sin, He will forgive and if we turn to Him, He will deliver.

It's an incredible prayer. So, let's pray now as we come to God's Word, then I'll read it. But before we do that, I do want to welcome back Raj and Irene and Jemima.

So, we should give them a clap. Welcome back. They've been back in India for nine months and they couldn't come last week because someone put a storm on, but they're here this week. So, it's good to see you.

Welcome back. Okay, let's pray and present to God's Word. Our Father in heaven, thank you for your life-giving Word. Thank you that you speak to us and that we can bring our prayers and our pleas to you.

[1 : 0 3] Our plea is this morning that we would hear from your Word and having heard from your Word, be encouraged and nurtured that we might live to your praise and glory. Where we need to repent, please help us to do that.

Where we need to rejoice, help us to do that. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Mark chapter 8 verse 1. In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away. And his disciples answered him, How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?

And he asked them, How many loaves do you have? They said, seven. And he directed the crowd to sit on the ground.

And he took the seven loaves and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. And they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish.

[2 : 2 1] And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got in the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Now, the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. He sighed deeply in his spirit and said, Why does this generation seek a sign?

Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation. And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. Now, they'd forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.

And he cautioned them, saying, Watch out, beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

[3 : 29] And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?

Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?

When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, Twelve.

And the seven for the four thousand, 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?

And they came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village.

[4 : 40] And when he had spit on his eyes, and laid his hands on him, he asked him, Do you see anything? And he looked up and said, I see people, but they look like trees walking.

Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again. And he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

And he sent him to his home, saying, Do not even enter the village. Now my question to you is, how did you become a follower of Jesus?

That is, how did you come to recognise that Jesus is no ordinary man? That Jesus is truly the Son of God, that Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth, that Jesus is the King of the Kingdom, that Jesus is the Saviour of the world.

How did you come to become a follower of Jesus? So I'd like you to talk to the person next to you, to tell them, not a half hour story, but how is it that you became a follower of Jesus?

[5 : 51] And if you're not a follower of Jesus, that's okay, listen to the person next to you, they might tell you how they became a follower of Jesus. Just for 30 seconds, just talk to the person next to you, that'd be good. Okay, that's, you can continue that conversation over morning tea.

I hope you can, that'd be good. Now, as we looked at this passage this morning, I'm sure it raised some questions of whether there are miracles today as well.

I mean, this bloke's eyes are opened up and bread being split up. And if there are miracles today, I wonder where you might see them. Be a kind of question to think through.

Now, last week, we saw, we looked at Mark chapter 7, verses 24 to 37. Now, there was a storm on last week, so not everyone was online.

I know that. There's all good reasons for that. So let me give you a bit of a rundown. Not everyone made the Zoom meeting, and that's understandable. The big idea was that God is the one who's made the unclean outsider, the clean insider.

[6 : 58] That was the big picture from Mark chapter 7, verse 24 to 37. The big idea was that the unclean outsiders, those cut off from God, the Gentiles, and the Jews called the Gentiles dogs.

They were looked down upon by the Jews. The Jews consider themselves the children of God. And we saw a particularly unclean young girl, unclean Gentile, demon-possessed girl, particularly unclean spirit in her.

And these people were actually excluded from the people of God. And they became included into the family of faith, and became included as clean insiders.

All right? Simply because Jesus was particularly gracious and kind. Jesus had mercy upon them, cast out the evil spirit, and gave to the Gentiles, who were considered the dogs.

Incredible grace brought them into the family of God. And that's what God has done for all of us here, who are followers of Jesus, who are not Jews by birth.

[8 : 06] We are the outsider, the Gentile, the unclean, brought inside, into the family of God. That's the big picture from last week. Now, chapter 8, verse 1, picks up where we left off last week.

And so, we saw, there's a bit of a map I'll show you on the screen here. He's in the region of the Decapolis. It's a ritualistic, unclean place, a Gentile region. But it would have been a place where there were Jews knocking around there as well.

And so, to get our bearings to today's passage, look at the map. There's a picture there, the region of Decapolis, literally the region of the Ten Cities. Right? Not sure exactly where Jesus is, in this region of the Ten Cities, but somewhere by the Sea of Galilee.

That's where he is. Right? That's the red dot. That's where he was. And then great crowds have come to Jesus. And Jesus is there teaching them for three days now, you see there in verse 2.

And this time, Jesus tells the disciples, that the people are going to be hungry. I mean, it's been three days. He's concerned that if he sends them away home empty, they'll faint on the way home.

[9 : 17] And again, there's no conference registration. There's been no men's dinner boxed up for us to just grab on the way out from the dinner. It's not waiting for them. No food trucks, no coffee carts, no nothing.

And some have come from a great distance, you see there in verse 3. They're in a remote place, literally a desolate place, a wilderness, there in verse 4, you see. And it's remarkably similar to Mark chapter 6, isn't it?

Mark 6 is very similar. And Jesus feeds the crowd again from seven loaves and a few small fish, we read there in verse 7, the small fish.

And the people are fed, they're completely satisfied, and there's leftovers collected up, and there's a surplus, seven baskets full even. It's a very memorable occasion.

4,000 fed in a miraculous way, people are sent home, and Jesus and his disciples get in the boat and cross the lake for the region of Dalmanutha.

[10 : 19] Now, we don't exactly know where Dalmanutha is, but Mark certainly did. There's a region there, a bit of a map there you'll see again, slide there. So they've gone across now from where they've fed the people in the wilderness, they've crossed the lake across over to Dalmanutha.

Okay. And Jesus has had great compassion on the crowds, teaching them the things of heaven, the kingdom, and feeding with the bread of heaven, basically.

Could he possibly be the prophet like Moses? Could he be possibly a prophet like Moses? Had promised to come. And now in Dalmanutha, he has an encounter with a smaller crowd, a crowd of Pharisees.

Now, remember what a Pharisee is. A Pharisee is someone who is living in strict tolerance to the law. They know their Old Testament. They are particularly particular about obeying the commandments of God.

They've got rules about keeping the rules to help them not to break the commandments. That's how strict they are. They've got the law, then they've got a fence around the law so that you don't come close to breaking the law.

[11 : 33] They are the faction of the Jews who sought to be righteous, holy, morally pure. in all that they did. They are the significant minority group of influential Jews.

They believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee, a Pharisees, a particularly good Jew. And by 2000 AD, Judaism and Phariseeism had become sort of synonymous.

The teaching was one and the same. At one level, the Pharisee is almost, almost the evangelical Christian of today.

Not quite, but almost. In fact, probably far, far, far away what we should be. There you go. And so the Pharisees want confirmation, in verses 11 to 13, of who Jesus is.

I mean, sure, Jesus has done miracles. Yeah, we can't deny that's happened. He's fed the crowd with almost nothing. Sure, he's healed people of their sickness and their blindness.

[12 : 43] Yeah, that's, yeah, I've seen that happen. But by what authority does he do that? I mean, Satan can do miracles.

And they've accused him of being of Satan, back in Mark chapter 3. We read in the book of Exodus, that the magicians of Pharaoh could do the very things that Moses could do, the miracles there.

By the power of Satan, Jesus is doing these miracles, they are thinking, and they're concluding. Jesus is an agent of the devil. And they ask him for a sign, not necessarily to do another miraculous miracle, but a sign to signify by what authority he does the miracles.

Now, the test works at two levels, right? One was to prove he was actually, legitimately from God, right?

Not Satan. That's what the kind of thing they're asking. But the testing of Jesus could also be a trapping of Jesus. For they could use the very word of God in Deuteronomy chapter 13, against Jesus, right?

[14 : 04] For they'd already decided in their heart, that he's an agent of the devil, the evil one, leading people astray. And if that's the case, Deuteronomy chapter 13, verse 5 says, they should actually not follow this man, they should kill him.

That's what Deuteronomy chapter 13 is talking about. And so they're really out to test him, and to tempt him, and to test him, and to trap him, in his words. And so Jesus sighs.

He's exhausted by their hardness of heart, by their failing to recognise who he is, by their blindness to who clearly he is, their deafness to hear him, his word, to perceive who he is, that he's their long-awaited Messiah.

And so he refuses to give them a sign, to be caught up in their trap. He doesn't want to give them any ammunition, to confirm who he is, or who he isn't.

They've actually made up their minds, who he is. They've made up their mind, that does not do the things, by the power of heaven. On the other hand, though the miracles themselves, contain the sign, if only you can see it.

[15 : 19] Right? For the miracles are more than miracles. They are something loaded with significance. They're not just done, just by the whim of a desire, to do something nice for people, that they are.

Right? They have a significance beyond the effect, that can be immediately seen. And after the encounter, with the crowd of the Pharisees, we're in that boat again, and we're off to Bethsaida.

So we take off now, from Dalmanutha, cross to Bethsaida. There's a bit of a map there, hopefully you can see that. And we see, that there's some bread, on close discussion here.

On the way, we see that they only have, one loaf of bread with them. Thirteen men, right? One loaf of bread, what are we going to do to eat? We're famished, we're going to get hungry, all this rowing this boat. Verse 14, one bloke's brought some bread, the rest have come empty handed, useless bunch they are.

[16 : 28] Seems like they might have, been concerned, that there's this lack of bread, someone's going to miss out. No, we should have picked up something, from the shop, before we got on this boat again, Jesus.

And Jesus says them, a strange thing, doesn't he? It's very left field, doesn't it? I mean, what do you expect Jesus to say? Don't worry, I can get you some more.

Verse 15, he cautioned them saying, watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of heaven. Now, what on earth, can that mean?

I mean, leaven is the stuff, that you put in your bread, you mix it in it, and it rises, that's the idea. You don't need much, you just need a little bit, and it travels through the whole batch.

Just ask Jen Fu, the queen of, of sourdough bread making, right? She knows all about this. It makes it rise. Leaven or yeast, the same thing, works its way through.

[17 : 33] Now, in the Old Testament, you had to get rid of the yeast, out of your house, before the Passover. You couldn't have any in your place. There's to be no leaven, in Israel, during the time of the Passover.

It's kind of unclean stuff. It gets infested, it's mold, it's that kind of stuff. The leaven of the Pharisees, is hard-hearted blindness, to the very words, and deeds of Jesus.

They fail to recognize, who Jesus is, and where he's from, his authority coming from heaven, even though he's there, right in their presence. That's the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod, well, wanting to be entertained, by a prophet of God, but failing to tremble, at his God's word.

That's what Herod, was guilty of. Remember how he treated John the Baptist? Remember that? Back in chapter 6, I think it was. He feared John, knowing that he's a righteous, and holy man. Yeah?

And, when he heard him, he was greatly perplexed. Yeah? He got him to come, and have a yarn to him often. And yet, for expediency's sake, cut off his head.

[18 : 49] Herod's heart was hard, and he did not repent, and believe, when he heard the word of God, confronting his very selfishness, and sinfulness.

That's Mark chapter 6. So, Jesus, in no uncertain terms, warns the disciples, don't harden your hearts, by failing to see, who Jesus is, right?

But he has the authority of heaven, to do the very things, that he does. In fact, the very things that he does, demonstrate that he's not an agent, of the evil one, but is actually, someone, who is even greater.

Jesus is, God, who gives, bread, from heaven, as he did for these people, long ago, in the wilderness.

And he is in the boat, with them. Now the disciples, have failed to perceive this, have failed to recognise this. The leaven of the Pharisees, has sort of had a bit of an infestation in them.

[20 : 06] And at one level, the disciples are no better off, than the Pharisees. The leaven of blindness, and hardness of heart, is kind of at work in them.

Master Jesus, questions their insight, questions their hearing. Have they not been with him, for three days, hearing him teach? Have they not recently, been with him, when he fed crowds, in the wilderness, not once, but twice now?

Have they not just seen, that he'd fed, 4,000 people, when previously, he'd fed, 5,000 people? In the wilderness? And he'd, healed a deaf man, and they, they didn't understand.

Jesus could make, the loaf of bread, in the boat, enough to feed, 10,000 people, if he wanted to. Jesus is the prophet, like Moses, who speaks, the very word of God, leads the people, in a new exodus, across the sea, and feeds the people, in the wilderness, like Israel of old.

They don't understand, what's going on. Like Israel of old, the Pharisees, have put Jesus, to the test. Listen to Psalm 95, Peter, verse 6.

[21 : 26] O come, let us worship, and bow down, let us kneel, before the Lord, our maker, for he is our God, and we are the people, of his pasture, and the sheep, of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day, at Massah, in the wilderness, when your fathers, put me to the test, and put me to the proof, though they had seen, my work.

The Pharisees, have put God, to the test. They put Jesus, to the test, to prove he's from God, with the authority, from heaven, though they had, seen his work.

Don't you get it? Don't you see? Don't you hear? Don't you perceive? Are your hearts, hardened too? Jesus is saying, to these disciples. I think, we can start, to get the picture here, right?

Unless something, astounding happens, no one, is going to recognize, who Jesus is. No one is going to see, that Jesus, is the Messiah, Jesus, is Lord, Jesus, is King of the Kingdom, Jesus, is Saviour, of the world.

No one's going to see that, unless something, extraordinary happens, to open eyes, and change hearts. By ourselves, we're just not going to see.

[22 : 51] Left to ourselves, our hearts are going to be hard. Well, finally, we come to Bethsaida, in verses 22 to 24, and we meet, a blind man this time, and, people beg, Jesus, that he might touch him.

As a Syrophenician woman, begged Jesus, to heal her daughter, so, Jesus then, leads this bloke out by hand, I guess he does touch him then, but not in the way to, touch him, to heal him, and outside the village, away from the crowd, he graciously, kindly, powerfully, heals him, graciously, kindly, heals him.

He heals him, but he doesn't quite yet see the first time, does he? And this is the one miracle in the, in the Bible, that is sort of a two-stage miracle.

All the other miracles are complete, there and then, straight away, finished, done. But this one's in stages, first stage, he sees, but not completely clearly, he needs glasses, to actually, bring this thing to focus, no glasses around though.

Like the disciples, I think, they see Jesus, but don't, actually, perceive, who he is. And then, Jesus, lays his hands, on his eyes again, and this time, his sight is restored, completely.

[24 : 35] He sees, absolutely clearly. And then he's told, not to even enter the village, he came from, but rather to go straight home. Why? Not sure.

Not quite sure why, so it's not, maybe not to disrupt, what Jesus has come to do. Maybe because people, will come to Jesus, to be healed of their ailments, seeing Jesus, is the dispatcher, of magical cures, rather than, perceiving, that he is, God's anointed Messiah, coming about, to bring the kingdom of God.

Whatever the reason, it's clear that, this event is recorded, with extraordinary accuracy, by the eyewitness, Mark, who sees him. And by giving, the blind man's sight, we see, the kingdom of God, becoming, imminent.

Isaiah the prophet, in Isaiah 35, verse 3 to 5, tells us, listen up with me, strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees, say to those with anxious heart, be strong, fear not, behold your God, will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God, he will come, and save you.

Then the eyes of the blind, shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf, unstopped. Then shall the lame man, leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute, sing for joy.

[26 : 00] For waters break forth, in the wilderness, and streams in the desert, and burning sand, shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground, springs of water, the haunts of jackals, where they lie down, the grass, shall become reeds, and rushes, and a highway, shall be there, and shall be called, the way of righteousness, the unclean, shall not pass over it, it shall belong, to those who walk, on the way, even if they are fools, they shall not go astray, no lion, shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast, come upon it, they shall not be found there, but the redeemed, shall walk there, and the ransom, to the Lord, shall return, and come to Zion, with singing, everlasting joy, shall be upon the heads, they shall obtain, gladness and joy, and sorrow, and sighing, shall flee away, the perfect kingdom of God, is breaking in, is getting perfect joy, and gladness, and happiness, is coming, in Jesus, and both Jew, and Gentile, are going to be, able to enter it, the same way, by faith, in Jesus, who is the bread, from heaven, who has come, the blind, are seeing, the deaf, are hearing, everlasting joy, is coming, so let me ask you, the question, how did you become, a Christian, how is it, that we came, to see, that Jesus, is really, who he is, how is it, that we came, to hear, and believe, that Jesus, is truly, the king, of the kingdom, of God, that Jesus, truly is Lord, how did you come, to that point, in your life, well let me tell you, it's the same, for every one of us, he, did a miracle, in our lives, peace, he, he, he, he, softened, our hearts, he, opened, our eyes, he, unstopped, our ears, he, gave us, insight, and understanding, we were blind, but now we see, so that we would perceive, so that we would hear, that we would understand the loaves that Jesus is the prophet greater than Moses that Jesus is the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world each one of us who has submitted who has bent the knee to Jesus as Lord and Savior is a walking talking miracle of God you want to see a miracle look at the person next to you who loves Jesus you want to see a miracle look in the mirror

Jesus is the one who has unstopped our ears and opened our eyes to see and it's only by grace that he's done that by nature we would never have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ well it may be today that there are people here this morning who have actually by God's kindness and mercy opened your eyes and opened and softened your heart to see who Jesus is the King of the Kingdom Lord and Savior and so maybe today what was once a foggy picture of Jesus like seeing people seeing him like a tree but not quite certain of who he was or what he was on about and that kind of stuff maybe today there's some people in this room who have perceived who Jesus is recognize that Jesus truly is the King of the Kingdom maybe it's time to stop arguing with Jesus wrestling with him having the armless saying maybe it's time to stop arguing and humbly take him at his word now there's a prayer in the bulletin every week that little white sheet every week is there you can pray that prayer any time of the week if you like but and that's the way to begin your walk with Jesus if not today any time is fine but let me point out to you get your bulletin if you've got it there there's a bulletin there you'll see that there's a prayer in there and it goes something like this dear God

I know that I'm not worthy to be accepted by you I don't deserve your gift of eternal life I'm guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you I need forgiveness thank you for sending your son to die for me that I might be forgiven thank you that he rose from the dead to give me new life please forgive me and change me that I might live with Jesus my Lord and my ruler that's the kind of prayer you could pray I'm going to pray it now just in case there's someone here this morning who'd like to pray that prayer and start walking with Jesus now it's not someone who's distant unclear foggy mess but someone who has come to see that he's done a miracle in my life and I've come to know Jesus now he's truly God Lord and Saviour let's pray dear God I know that I'm not worthy of accepted by you I don't deserve your gift of eternal life I'm guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you

I need forgiveness thank you for sending your son to die for me that I might be forgiven thank you that you rose from the dead to give me new life please forgive me and change me that I might live with Jesus as my ruler Amen thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me thank you for joining me