

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

Mark 8:1-9

Intro: This miracle is found also in the Gospel of Matthew (15:32-39). It is commonly referred to as *the feeding of the four thousand*. We had a similar miracle back in Mark 6, verses 32-44. At that time the Lord performed a similar miracle on a slightly larger group. That incident is called *the feeding of the five thousand*. In both of these miracles Matthew mentioned that the number given applied to the men only, but that, in addition, in both instances, there were also women and children. So the number in both cases probably were double the number of men, and maybe even more than double. All four of the Gospel writers recorded the feeding of the five thousand, but only Matthew and Mark recorded the feeding of the four thousand. In both instances there was a surplus left over after everyone had eaten and was satisfied. In the feeding of the five thousand there were twelve baskets of food left over; in the feeding of the four thousand, seven baskets full remained.

Since these two stories are so very similar, why would Matthew and Mark record both of them? Well, I think that there are several reasons.

I. THE SPECTACULAR NATURE OF THESE MIRACLES.

Regardless of how many times a person might observe miracles like this, it would always be most amazing to see it performed again and again. I have no proof for what I am about to say, but it would not surprise me to learn that the Lord did something like this more than just two times. And then there is the possibility that Matthew and Mark told about the feeding of the four thousand because these were the only two times that the Lord did anything like this. After all, none of us here today have ever seen anything like this. With all of the so-called miracle workers that I have heard of during my lifetime, I have never known of even one who tried to do anything like the Lord did in feeding thousands of people, using only what would generally be one man's lunch, or a little boy's lunch. And yet our Lord was known to have done it twice. It couldn't have been some kind of a magic trick because all twelve of the apostles, and probably many other people were present and knew exactly what the Lord did. It was a simple thing for the Lord to do. For the Creator of the heaven and the earth, feeding thousands of people with a few loaves and a few fish was nothing. If the Lord had chosen to do so, He could have created the loaves and the fish out of nothing. But what He did do, was far beyond

the capability of any person then, and it would still be beyond the ability of anybody even in this sophisticated age in which we live. Have you ever tried to visualize how it all happened? Apparently the Lord would break a piece off of the loaves He had, and when He handed it to His disciples it was a full loaf – not like one of the loaves we have today, but probably more like a bun which a wife would use to make a lunch for her husband or son, or for herself.

The disciples knew that it was a miracle which the Lord performed. There were no places where they could go to buy food to feed such a crowd. And if there were, the disciples and the Lord Jesus Christ were poor, and together they would not have had enough money to buy food to feed such a crowd. Even if the people had used their own money, there were no stores nearby where food was available. What did the Lord do? He just took the little that they had, and under the blessing of the Lord, it was multiplied over and over until everyone had eaten all that he could eat. And what He did on the first occasion, He did a second time when the need arose. So anyone who may have been skeptical about what the Lord did the first time, would have been silenced when the Lord did it again.

But be sure to notice that the Lord did what He did on this occasion, not to make people marvel at what He could do, but He did it to meet a real need. The more you think about it, the more you realize what a truly amazing work this was that the Lord did.

The people followed the Lord mainly for two reasons. Probably the majority came because either they were sick, or they had a relative or friend who was sick. And it was well-known that the Lord could heal the sick, all kinds of sickness. He could drive out evil spirits. He could make people see or walk who had never seen or walked before. He even raised the dead. But there is no indication that anybody came, even on the second occasion because they were hungry and wanted something to eat.

The other reason that people came to the Lord was that they wanted to hear Him teach. None of the Jewish leaders taught like the Lord did. He taught with authority. And the people came by the hundreds and thousands to hear Him. This was the main reason that the scribes and Pharisees hated the Lord. They were jealous of His popularity with the people. But this miracle was not like anything that the Jews professed to be able to do. There was indisputable evidence that this preacher and

miracle worker was capable of doing what no other man had ever been able to do. When we have a potluck dinner for our annual meeting, or when food is prepared for the bike trip, or for family camp, a lot of people spend a lot of time, spending a lot of money, to get the food ready. Not so with the Lord. No preparation was made ahead of time. The disciples had not been told to prepare to feed the people before they left to go home. The Lord initiated the whole thing. All that the disciples had to do was to serve what the Lord gave them from a few loaves of bread and a few fish.

Don't you wish that we had recorded in our Bibles some of the comments that must have been made by the people after they had eaten and were on their way home? Wouldn't you love to have been there? It is very likely that many didn't really know where the food had come from.

The Apostle John wrote His Gospel to prove that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, so that people would believe in Him and be saved. Only the Son of God could do on these two occasions. The performing of these two miracles was proof of His Deity.

But let me point out another reason I believe that Matthew and Mark told about this second feeding of thousands of people.

II. IT WAS A TEST OF WHAT THE DISCIPLES WERE LEARNING.

Aren't you amazed at the response of the disciples when the Lord expressed His concern about letting the people leave to go home without eating something before they left?

Read the Lord's word in verses 2 and 3, and then notice how the disciples responded to Him in verse 4.

Doesn't their response seem very strange to you? You would think that this was the first time that the Lord and His disciples had been in a situation like this. I don't know how long it had been since those very disciples had been in a similar situation, and they had seen the Lord feed five thousand men, plus women and children, totaling probably ten thousand people in all. And yet not one of them mentioned what the Lord had done before in a situation almost identical to this. Look again at verse 4. Isn't there comment pathetic? Not one said, "Lord, we have seen you

feed a larger crowd than this, and we are ready to see you do it again.” Or having heard what the Lord said, one of them at least should have said, “Who has a lunch? That’s all we need. The Lord will do the rest.” They were not thinking in terms of what the Lord could do; they were just thinking about what they could do. To them it was a hopeless situation. Talk about slow learners! But, as the Lord said on another occasion, before we get ready to throw our stones at the disciples, let’s remember how in our minds we have forgotten the wonderful works of the Lord.

Yesterday my Bible reading in the Psalms took me to Psalm 77. You will notice that this is a Psalm of Asaph. Asaph was of the tribe of Levi. He was a musician, and he was one who led David’s choirs. So it is to be expected that he would write a Psalm. The children of Israel sang his psalms we learn from 2 Chronicles 29:30 where he is even called a seer, or a prophet. This means that his psalms which are in the book of psalms were written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. That is why they are in our Bibles. In Psalm 77 it is very apparent that Asaph was under a great cloud. He was in big trouble. Prayer was not being answered. It even troubled him to think about God. He asked a series of questions in verses 7, 8, and 9 which may have occurred to you during your journey through this world. But look what he said which eventually got him out of trouble. Read beginning with verse 10 and notice the times he used the word “remember” and “meditate.” When you meditate you are remembering! When the present is dark and looks hopeless, we need to get our minds focused on what God has done in the past, even upon what He has done in our lives.

What did the disciples need to do when the Lord made His comment to them? They needed to remember, to remember what the Lord had done in their presence just a very short time ago. How gracious the Lord was in dealing with them! That’s the way He is with us over and over and over again! Isn’t it amazing that not even one said, “Lord, we don’t have a problem. Why don’t you just do what you did a short time ago when from a little boy’s lunch you fed five thousand men and their families?”

What did the Lord say? Read verse 5. And still it seems that none of the disciples got the point. Or maybe they were just too ashamed to say anything.

But then the Lord went ahead and did what He had done before. He started out with seven loaves and “a few small fish,” but when it was all

over there were seven baskets of food which had not been eaten. But not a person in that whole crowd went home hungry. What an amazing God we have in our Lord Jesus Christ! I doubt if the Lord ever gets discouraged, but He must be disappointed at times, disappointed that we are so slow to learn, and so slow to remember the lessons God has taught us before. But the Lord went on determined that He would transform those forgetful disciples into faithful servants who, when troubles arose, would strengthen their souls by remembering God's perfect record in the past, and that He cannot fail in the future because He is God.

But I have one more point to emphasize before I close. I want to call your attention to:

III. THE ONE WHO INITIATED THIS EVENT, AND WHY?

God back to the first three verses of our text.

You can quickly see that it was not the disciples, but it was the Lord Who expressed His concern for the people. And why? You find the reason in the first words that our Lord spoke: "I have compassion on the multitude." The Lord Jesus is a God of compassion. He is like His Father Who is also a God of compassion. And you find the same attribute in the Holy Spirit Who is also a God of compassion. What you find in one member of the Godhead, you find in them all.

What is compassion? The dictionary defines compassion as "sorrow or pity excited by the distress or misfortune of another." It is sympathy, pity, tenderness, mercy.

After reading Psalm 77 yesterday morning, I went on to read Psalm 78. It is a running history of God's dealings with the people of Israel, how they were continually rebelling against God. Yet Asaph said,

38 But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.

39 For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again (Psa. 78:38-39).

Our God is a holy God Who cannot tolerate sin, but He is a God of compassion or you and I would not be here today. It is because God the Father is a God of compassion that He sent His Son to be the Savior of

sinners. It is because the Lord Jesus is “full of compassion” that He came to do the Father’s will by suffering and dying for our sins that we might have life forevermore. And it is because the Holy Spirit is a compassionate God that He sought us, and brought us to Christ that we might become new creatures in Him.

Concl: How thankful we all can be that God is a God of compassion.

And just as the Lord Jesus took the initiative in feeding those hungry crowds so that they would not faint on the way home, so in a much greater way He came into this world as the Bread of eternal life, giving Himself for us and to us, that we might have eternal life