

Feeding the 4,000
Mark 8:1-10
ABC 5/21/23

How many of you like re-runs? With streaming services now we don't deal with them like we used to but most of us probably didn't like them. We're continuing in our series on Mark's gospel & today we come to a passage that seems like a rerun of an earlier passage. In chpt 6 we studied the feeding of the 5,000 & now we come to the feeding of the 4,000. Why did Jesus do this miracle twice? Why did God have Mark (& Mt) record both of them? If the whole point was that Jesus is able to feed thousands with a little bread, didn't He already make that clear with the 5,000? & besides, although feeding 4k is pretty good, it's not quite as impressive as feeding 5k. So what's the point? Those are some of the questions we'll explore this morning. Open to Mk 8.

If you had miraculous powers like Jesus, how would you use them? More importantly, why would you use them? Some of us might use them to show off. Most of us would use them to benefit ourselves in some way. I'd like to think we'd use them to help others as well. Why did Jesus perform miracles? Certainly not to show off. In fact, we've seen Him repeatedly telling people not to speak about His miracles. Jesus also never used His miracles to benefit Himself. Not even once. He refused to make bread when He was hungry in the wilderness. He refused to call on God's angels to rescue Him at the cross. He did miracles to help others. In fact, all that Jesus did, He did for others, even at great cost to Himself. As Jesus says, **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many** (Mk 10:45). Although Jesus did miracles out of love & compassion for others, that wasn't the only reason. His miracles demonstrated that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. His miracles were meant to teach spiritual truths. Jesus healed the deaf but He also spoke about hearing & believing God's Word. Jesus cured the blind but He also spoke about seeing the truth of God's revelation in His own Person & miracles. Jesus cleansed lepers, but He also spoke about spiritual, inner cleansing of the heart. Jesus raised people from the dead, but He also spoke about His own resurrection & the resurrection to come. When we look at a miracle like the feeding of the 4k, yes, we should be amazed at Jesus' power to perform such a miracle but we also want to look for what is being taught through the miracle. Why

does Jesus perform 2 feeding of thousands miracles? At one level, this question doesn't need to be answered. Jesus did many miracles over & over & over again that were very similar. There are only so many ways you can heal a person crippled or blind or deaf or demon-possessed. It often looked the same. Jesus' teachings were no different. He didn't come up with new content every day. He taught much the same things day after day. Of course, He did it in different ways at different times to different audiences. But much of what He said was similar. We're all prone to forget God's goodness to us in the past. In His amazing kindness, He patiently repeats lessons for us. It isn't that we hear it once & we've got it for life. It isn't true that once I make a mistake & learn from it, I never make that mistake again. No. I'm a slow learner & so are you. We need reminders & the disciples' continual forgetfulness represents us. They stand in our place & represent us. How do we look? Not great. They had to be told things again & again & still didn't get it. We are dull & slow to learn like they were. The Bible makes much of our need for being reminded. Jesus told His disciples again & again about His coming suffering & death & they didn't get it. Their hearts were hardened concerning the need of Jesus to go & die. The NT writers speak about our need for reminders, for repetition. Philippians is a good example: Phil 3:1 says, **Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, & it is a safeguard for you.** Paul says, **rejoice!** *I have to remind you again & again to keep you safe from your own sin.* Then in chpt 4 he says, **Rejoice in the Lord always.** *Paul, you already said that!* What's he say next? **Again I will say, rejoice!** (Phil 4:4). We have in one vs repeated, redundant repetition of the same thing. Peter talks about repetition in 2 Pt 1:12-13,

I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, & have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder.

Peter is saying, *It's part of my job to remind you of certain things again & again.* Repetition is good. This miracle parallels the earlier feeding of the 5k in Mk 6 & there are many similarities between them. Both begin with Jesus' compassion. Mk 6:34 tells us that Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Mk 8 shows Jesus' compassion as well. Both locations are described as deserted, isolated, & distant from a population center. The same

question is raised by the disciples as to how they're going to feed such a large crowd. Jesus asks the same question about what food is available. In both accounts there's the order to have the people sit on the ground. In both, Jesus takes the loaves, gives thanks, breaks the bread, & gives it to the disciples to give to the people. Both times there's a separate mention of the fish being dealt with & eaten. Also, in both we're told everyone ate their fill & of the leftovers being collected in baskets, although the baskets were different. Both accounts give the number of men who are fed & both finish with the crowd being dismissed & Jesus & His disciples moving on to another place along the Sea of Galilee. Their similarities have led critics to point to this as an example of the sloppy work done by the NT writers. Of course, the critics don't believe these events even happened but were fabricated to make the *myth* of Jesus. They think the gospels were thrown together without any careful thought & these 2 feedings are cited as proof of this. *Mark wasn't very smart & included the same story in his gospel twice. Obviously, Mark must be an idiot!* Don't believe them. While there are similarities, there are also some key differences between these 2 accounts. 4,000 people fed as opposed to 5,000, 7 loaves as opposed to 5, a few fish as opposed to 2 fish, 7 basketfuls gathered instead of 12. In the 1st feeding, the word means a smaller **basket** or container, like a day pack. Here the word means a big hamper, the word used when Paul was lowered in a basket (Acts 9:25). Jesus Himself says there were 2 feedings. Later in this chpt the disciples are going to bicker among themselves about having forgotten to bring bread on the boat with them. **Mk 8:14-21**

By performing this 2nd feeding in the Decapolis & placing it in the context of Jesus' interaction with Gentiles, Mark seems to affirm that the Messiah isn't for Jews alone, but for all people everywhere, even Gentile dogs. This feeding occurs immediately after Mark has recorded how Jesus crossed purity boundaries & social barriers. The healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter opened the door to the possibility that Gentiles might also be fed without stealing bread from the children (7:24–30). The context suggests that Jesus is now offering a predominantly Gentile crowd the same opportunity to be fed by His teaching & by His miraculous power that He offered to the Jewish crowds. It signifies that Jesus isn't simply *A Redeemer, A Messiah like Moses & David; He is THE*

Redeemer, *THE* Messiah, offering redemption to more than just the Jews. Jesus in His kindness & compassion does this miracle twice & the Holy Spirit in His kindness & compassion has it recorded both in Matthew & in Mark. That's why the repetition.

1. The Setting (1a) The general time reference in vs 1, **in those days**, links this episode loosely to the previous one & thus probably to the region of the Decapolis (7:31). Because there are no other indicators, we can assume this happened in a predominately-Gentile area. The reference to a **large crowd** last occurred in the feeding of the 5k (6:34), so the word **again** points back to that previous miraculous feeding. Jesus is once again in a teaching situation, though, as is typical of Mark, no record of the content of His teachings is given.

2. The Problem (1b-4) It starts with Jesus' compassion. **1-3**

As noted before, Jesus' compassion is mentioned the most of all His emotions. But here it's unique. In Mt & Mk both, at this 2nd feeding, Jesus speaks about His compassion Himself. Everywhere else we're told Jesus had compassion on the leper or the crowd. Here He says it about Himself. **I feel compassion for the people** (2). Jesus is moved with **compassion** for suffering people. He's the perfect display of God's compassion. Our word **compassion** comes from a Latin word meaning *to suffer with* & conveys feelings of sympathy, pity, & kindness toward those who're suffering. All too often people think of the God of the OT as grumpy, mean, & vengeful while the God of the NT is loving & kind. We should never think the God of the OT is the God of wrath & judgment & Jesus is the kind & compassionate one that talks God the Father into being kind. No! The God of the Bible, the God of the Old & NTs is moved with compassion continuously. God doesn't change. In Ex 2 as God looks down on Israel in their slavery & sees their suffering, He was concerned **& took notice of them** (Ex 2:25). When Moses says, **show me Your glory** (Ex 33:18), how does God answer? **I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, & will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; & I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, & will show compassion on whom I will show compassion** (Ex 33:19). God tells Moses about Himself by saying He is good, gracious, & compassionate. Even in the book of Judges, with the cycle of sin where God sends judgment & then they cry out to God, how does God respond? He is moved with compassion for them. It says in Judges 2:18, **the**

LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed & afflicted them. Perhaps one of the most striking descriptions of this is in Judges 10 where the people have again fallen away. God gave them over & said, **Go & cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress** (14). Then it says,

The sons of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day." So they put away the foreign gods from among them & served the LORD; & He could bear the misery of Israel no longer (15-16).

Did you catch that? God **could bear the misery of Israel no longer**. It was harder on God than it was on them. He doesn't take delight in people suffering. He has compassion. We have these statements of God's compassion throughout the Bible. Ps 103:13, **Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him**. He's compassionate. He knows what you need before you ask. Is 49:15-16, **Can a woman forget her nursing child & have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands...** Or again in Hosea 11:8, **How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? ... My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled**. It was compassion that caused God to send His only begotten Son into the world. Jesus spoke powerfully of God's compassion toward sinners in the Parable of the Prodigal Son when we read, **while he was still a long way off, his father saw him & felt compassion for him, & ran & embraced him & kissed him** (Lk 15:20). That's the compassion of God toward sinners. That's why Paul writes, **Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies & God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...** (2 Cor 1:3-4a). Jesus is the incarnation of God's compassion. He's moved with feeling over other people's suffering. Jesus is the good Shepherd who has compassion on the sheep & has the spiritual & physical resources to meet their needs. God's people can rest assured He will provide for them. Look at **1-3** again.

We have this huge crowd from all over the Decapolis, a predominantly Gentile area. They'd never seen anything like what Jesus was doing. He was healing every disease & sickness effortlessly (Mt 15:30-31). He was teaching in a way they'd never heard before. They stayed hour after hour, day after day, for 3 days. Clearly, Jesus isn't feeding them every day. He could have but it's not until

the 3rd day that He addresses this need. The reference to **3 days** is intended to show the severity of the problem & the pressing need for food. Some find some symbolic meaning behind **3 days** but sometimes a time reference is simply a time reference. Such seems to be the case here. Clearly, people flock to Him in a desert place & are willing to go hungry to listen to & watch Him perform miracles. But He says, **I feel compassion for the people**. He knows their physical condition. Jesus doesn't want to send the people home hungry, since some have come **from a great distance**. Again, this may hint at a predominantly Gentile crowd. The LXX commonly uses this word with reference to Gentile lands (Dt 28:49; 29:22; Josh 9:6; 9:9; cf 1 Kgs 8:41) & similar language appears in the NT. Peter tells the Jews in Jerusalem that **the promise is for you & your children & for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself** (Acts 2:39). Paul, too, says Jesus **came & preached peace to you who were far away...** (Eph 2:17), again a reference to the Gentiles (11–13). If they're not fed they'll collapse on the way home. The word for **faint** was used of a bow string coming loose & falling to the ground. These people will collapse if they don't get food. That's compassion. Jesus is stepping into their situation, thinking about their circumstance & what they need. That's the nature of Jesus' compassion & He involves His disciples. He expresses His compassion for the crowd to them. He wants them to know His concerns & He wants to teach them to imitate His compassion. Look at their response. **4**

The disciples' question, which was understandable in the context of the 1st feeding miracle (6:37), seems strange now. How could they have forgotten so quickly what Jesus did before? Have they learned nothing? Can't they remember? & yet they're just like us. They hadn't learned the lesson of the loaves & they prove it a little later in this chpt. They don't get it. They're slow to understand. They're not hearing well. The disciples show their forgetfulness & lack of faith. As with the 1st feeding miracle, Jesus provides bread in the wilderness in the same way God provided manna to the Israelites. The disciples' question, *Who could provide food for this crowd?* is resoundingly answered with, *Jesus the Messiah can!* The disciples' question develops the theme of their spiritual dullness. Throughout this part of the gospel, Mark presents the disciples in an increasingly negative light. In 6:52, after Jesus walks on water, Mark points out that their hearts were hard so that they

couldn't understand the 1st miracle of the loaves. Throughout chapters 8–10 they'll repeatedly misunderstand Jesus' suffering role & repeatedly demonstrate pride & self-centeredness. The question here fits this pattern of spiritual denseness to God's purposes.¹ While in the 1st miracle the disciples' failure to anticipate Jesus' provision was understandable, here it seems inexcusable. But we shouldn't be too hard on them. How many times has God provided for us in the past & we still have trouble trusting Him for whatever we're going through in the present? The disciples are on the verge of spiritual blindness & deafness (8:17–21). They're slow on the uptake & grope for answers, expecting nothing miraculous from Jesus. Again, Jesus patiently has the disciples go through their inventory of provisions. They don't yet realize that even with their scanty supplies, they have in Jesus enough to feed the entire world.²

3. The Miracle They take inventory of what's available & by Jesus' values it's more than enough. **5** Like last time, Jesus wants the disciples to provide what they have. Jesus clearly doesn't need it. He created the universe out of nothing. He doesn't need something to prime the pump of His own power but uses what is available. Then Jesus works out the logistics. **6**

By giving thanks to the Father, Jesus not only modeled what it means to depend on God for daily provisions (Mt 6:11), He also signified to the crowd that the power behind the miracle was divine. Everything comes from God. Every good & perfect gift comes from the Father (Js 1:17). Somewhere in the middle of vs 6 comes the miracle. Do you see it? He broke the loaves & gave them to the disciples to set before the people & they did so. Jesus involved His disciples in order to allow them to participate in the expression of His compassion. Their involvement also symbolized their future role as soul-feeding messengers of the life-giving gospel. Soon, they'd distribute the message of the bread of life to the whole world.³ So where is the miracle? Someplace in there. Grain that never grew, never harvested, never ground, & never cooked appears miraculously ready to eat. **7** Again, the fish flesh that Jesus created never grew or swam in the water. They were never caught by hook or by net. They were never cleaned & grilled or smoked or anything else. They were

¹ Strauss, *Mark*, p 332

² David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 307

³ John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8*, p 389

created dead & ready to eat. Have you thought about that? The fish were created dead but not spoiled, right? Ready to eat.

4. The Result 8

They ate until they couldn't eat another bite. For people who lived daily with hunger pains, never eating their fill, this was a wonderful thing. They're full. Though the 12 baskets of leftovers at the 1st feeding may symbolize Israel, there's no clear symbolism related to the #7 here. None of the theories of what it stands for makes much sense. It seems best to just accept the number at face value. It's abundance. The left-overs are collected. The word for **baskets** here is hamper-sized. Even though there's fewer numbers of baskets, there might have been more leftovers this time. Just as God fed Israel in the wilderness with manna, so now Jesus feeds the people. As we saw in the feeding of the 5k, it also points forward to God's future banquet & its preview in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. While these themes are alluded to in Mark, they become clear in John's account of the 1st feeding. When the people remind Jesus that **Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness** (Jn 6:31), Jesus tells them that He is the **true bread from heaven** that **gives life to the world** (6:32–33; cf 41–51). This life is received by eating His flesh & drinking His blood (53–58), that is by appropriating His atoning, sacrificial death, symbolized in communion, & receiving His resurrection life. Communion isn't just a remembrance of things past. It's also an anticipation of the consummation of salvation when Christ returns, as we **proclaim the Lord's death until He comes** (1 Cor 11:26) when He will eat & drink with us in His Father's kingdom (Mt 26:29). This miracle points us to the heavenly banquet that symbolizes God's final salvation, the restoration of creation & eternal fellowship with our Creator God. When, as Isaiah says,

the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, & refined, aged wine. & on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, & the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, & He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken (25:6-8).

Then we have the count in **vs 9**.

We have 4,000 in Mark & Mt (15:38) tells us it was 4k men along with women & children. This is another amazing miracle. A smaller crowd fed with more loaves than the prior feeding, but still

miraculous. **& He sent them away** (9b) functions as the conclusion to this event & the introduction to the next. **10**

Both miraculous feedings end with Jesus dismissing the crowd (6:45; 8:9) & a boat journey (6:45; 8:10). After the 1st, Jesus sent the disciples away & then came to them walking on water (6:45, 48). Here, Jesus leaves with them by boat to **the district of Dalmanutha**. No location with that name is known from ancient sources,⁴ but it was apparently located on the western shore, the Jewish side of the lake, since Jesus is met there by Pharisees (8:11). The unknown location accounts for a variety of textual variants, including **Magadan** (Mt 15:39), also an unknown location but possibly a village located about 3 miles north of Tiberias, the possible hometown of Mary Magdalene. Jesus' return to Galilee brought His journey into Gentile territory full circle, from Tyre to Sidon to Decapolis & back to Galilee. The cross is now less than a year away & it wouldn't be long before Jesus shifted His time & ministry to Judea & Jerusalem.

5. Lessons What lessons can we take from this 2nd feeding? Many are the same as the feeding of the 5k. 1) What does this miracle tell us about Jesus? It's simple. Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Trust in Him for the salvation of your souls. That's what this miracle says. It's the same as all the miracles.

Many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; & that believing you may have life in His name (Jn 20:30-31).

We must trust & believe & worship Him. Jesus created all things out of nothing. Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made (Jn 1:3). Jesus is God & created all things. We should stand in awe & worship Jesus as they did at the end of Mk 7 when Jesus healed the deaf-mute & they said of Jesus, **He has done all things well** (37). Beyond that, in the 1st feeding miracle, Jesus links the people's need for physical nourishment to His death on the cross (Jn 6:47-51). Jesus calls all sinners to come to Him & feed on Him for life. That's not a one & done thing. Yes, it's instantaneous. The moment you trust in Him, you'll be born again & all your sins will be forgiven,

⁴ In 2013, *Dalmanutha*, a Biblical town described briefly in the Gospel of Mark may have been discovered by UK archaeologists. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dalmanutha-biblical-town-referred-to-in-the-gospel-of-mark-may-have-been-discovered-by-archaeologists-8823956.html

past, present, & future. But that just begins a lifetime of feeding on Jesus. **Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God** (Mt 5:4). All of those words ultimately lead to Jesus as the bread from heaven. Feed on Him.

2) Our Savior is compassionate toward us. As our Shepherd He cares for us & provides for us. God the Son not only has the power to meet our needs, He also has the desire to do so. He is Jehovah-jireh the Lord who provides (Gen 22:14). Jesus put God's compassion on display. That compassion reached its highest point at the cross. As Jesus said on the night before His death, **Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends** (Jn 15:13). To satisfy the crowd's physical hunger required compassion & supernatural power, but to save their souls for eternity required something far more, a supernatural sacrifice. Jesus willingly went to the cross to bear the full weight of divine punishment for the sins of all who would believe in Him (2 Cor 5:21). We must develop a heart of compassion like Jesus. We all tend to be like the priest or Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We see hurting people & just walk by. Don't be like that. Say, *Father, I confess I'm not as compassionate as I should be. Grow in me Your compassion. Give me the opportunities to show that compassion in concrete ways.* Obviously, we can't meet every need but we can meet some needs. Pray for wisdom & discernment but be compassionate. We know that people's spiritual needs are far greater because eternal suffering is far weightier than temporal suffering. We're told in Scripture that many are traveling the road toward eternal torment. We must have compassion on them because they're like sheep without a shepherd. We need to speak the words of life to them. 3) Jesus was preparing His disciples for their mission to the world. It was crucial for the disciples to understand that the gospel was a message for the whole world. This is a Gentile area. Jesus began, with the Syrophenician woman's demon-possessed daughter & said He was sent 1st to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 15:24; Mk 7:27). The disciples witnessed Jesus' compassion dramatically displayed toward people whom 1st-century Jews treated with contempt. It made sense to them that the Messiah would perform miracles for Jews. But to think He'd also cast out demons, heal diseases, & create meals for Gentiles represented a major shift. Yet, it was a lesson the disciples desperately needed to learn as Jesus prepared them to take the message of

salvation to the ends of the world after His death & resurrection. Unlike the prior feeding, in this one we see an expansion of the blessings of salvation, not just to Jews, but also to Gentiles. Mark's favorite prophet, Isaiah, envisioned the day when the nations would stream to the mountain of the Lord to learn His ways & to worship Him (Is 2:2-3; cf Mic 4:1-2); the messianic banquet isn't for Israel alone, but for all God's people (Is 25:6). God's salvation is destined to go forth to the ends of the earth (49:6; Acts 1:8), to those who are near as well as those who are *far off* (Acts 2:39). Jesus cares about all peoples. In Mk 16:15 Jesus says, **Go into all the world & preach the gospel to all creation**. Again, in Lk 24, **Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer & rise again from the dead the third day, & that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem** (46-47).

Regardless of whether you're a believer or not, if you don't believe that Jesus has tender compassion for you, you simply don't know what He is like. We read frequently of Jesus having this deep compassion. Sometimes it was when He saw someone ill & at others because of the effects of sin. Jesus has merciful compassion toward you & toward the needy world, just as He did toward the 5,000 & 4,000. Jesus' deep-felt compassion propelled Him among all people & He labored long & intensely among them in self-giving ministry. Nothing is impossible physically or spiritually for Jesus Christ. No one is beyond His redemption, not even you. If you're willing, there is no sin flaw in your life which God cannot heal,⁵ no wickedness which He can't forgive if you come to Him by faith.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark*, p 149