

Take Heart; I AM

Westview Church | Mark 6:30-56 | Pastor Brett Toney | November 8, 2020

Forgetful Gratitude

A few years ago, a church produced a video you may remember seeing. A guy wakes up, wrapped in Christmas paper and gratefully exclaims, "I'm alive!" He proceeds to get ready for the day, finding wrapped "gifts" along the way: a light switch to turn the power on; clean, running water; a hot shower; breakfast; a job to work at; his wife and kids; a car. There are so many incredible things we can be grateful for that we so readily take for granted.

God's people having been doing this our whole history. Weeks after walking out on a dry seabed from centuries of slavery, Israel groaned for lack of meat and water (cf. Exodus 16). Hello?! A few weeks ago, you were slaves, and God miraculously delivered you! And here Mark records how God miraculously provides for thousands, yet his closest followers don't understand and have hardened hearts. Even when God compassionately provides, we are—I am—still slow to acknowledge and trust him. We must take stock of the cost of following Christ, seeing him for who he is and follow him with unwavering faith.

Behold the Compassion of the King (v.31-34)

This Jesus is preeminently worthy of following. There is a great cost to being one of his disciples, however. We've seen the last two weeks how those who follow Jesus should expect to be rejected and even lose their lives for following him in faithfulness. Yet Jesus knows our frame. He knows we are not robotic

automatons. Our bodies grow weary. Our emotions run raw. Our souls get depleted. So, in v.31 he summons the Twelve to rest, to enjoy a sabbatical.

While that respite doesn't happen because of the crowds who chase after them, Jesus' inclination towards his own is one of compassion. His soul is stirred up in care and concern for his followers. And that compassion overflows to this disrupting crowd. Christian, this compassion of Jesus has not diminished nor changed in the slightest since he has ascended to the right hand of the Father. This care and concern for his own is his care and concern for *you*. We know this to be true because he has given his Spirit in his indwelling presence. In the long nights, whether with newborns or teenagers, whether in depression or anxiety, may you be consoled in your soul knowing this compassion of Jesus is directed to *you*.

Mark's statement about Jesus' compassion being like that of a shepherd for his sheep in v.34 is not just a pastoral concern. This is a loaded statement. This very phrasing of God's people being like sheep without shepherd is used often in the Old Testament to refer to leadership, to kingship. Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses so that Israel would not be without a shepherd (cf. Number 27). King Ahab would die in battle, leaving Israel without a shepherd (cf. 1 Kings 22). And perhaps most significantly, Ezekiel criticized Israel's leaders for being neglectful, selfish shepherds such that God himself promised, "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ezekiel 34:15). So, Mark is making an allusion, if not an

outright assertion, that Jesus is this Shepherd-King ... to all who would have ears to hear.

Believe the New Work of the Kingdom (v.35-44)

This Shepherd-King moved to provide for this people in the wilderness. Seeing these sheep in a desolate place, he first gives what they need most. Verse 34, "He began to *teach* them many things." Having been filled by his word, he moves to provide for their stomachs.

Kids, have you heard this story before about Jesus feeding 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish? Perhaps you've been told how this story shows how important it is to share. The person who had the bread and fish shared his food with others. Everyone gathered shared. Sharing is important—that is one way we love our neighbor (Matthew 22:39), one way we treat others the way we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). But I want you to remember: Why does Jesus feed the 5,000? Because the kingdom of God is at hand.

This is a massive crowd—one that would've surpassed the population of any one of the surrounding towns. In Matthew's Gospel, it's indicated that women and children aren't even included in the count of 5,000. So, it would surely be a massive sum of money to cater a meal on the spot. Especially a meal where everyone eats and is *satisfied*. This isn't a stingy meal or appetizer just to hold everyone over. That same word for "satisfied" in v.42 is translated in Revelation 19:21 as "gorged." They ate well. They were stuffed. They did not need to see the dessert menu.

Now the Shepherd-King called for the masses to be seated by hundreds and fifties. I think this is an intentional reference to the exodus where God's people are similarly divided (cf. Exodus 18). And the twelve baskets of leftovers, like most references to a grouping of twelve in the Bible, is symbolic of God's people. So here you have a Moses-like Shepherd-King leading an exodus-like crowd to miraculously provide for them a manna-like meal. Do you have eyes to see? Believe that Jesus is doing a new work, ushering in a new kind of kingdom. This is not merely about sharing a meal but seeing King Jesus is forming a new people of God, delivering them to a greater Promised Land.

Be in Awe of the One Who Is (v.45-52)

The crowd grasped this to some measure—or they at least liked the handout of a free meal. One commentator suggests that is why in v.45 Jesus rushes the disciples into the boat and dismisses the crowd on his own. John tells us in his Gospel that the crowd was ready to force Jesus to be their king (cf. John 6:15). The Twelve already had a bent toward such an earthly kingdom, and Jesus doesn't want them further swayed. So, he sends them off, disperses the crowd, and retreats in solitude to pray.

In the wee hours of the morning, Jesus sees his followers have been struggling hard. You know this is a strong wind when seasoned fishermen who grew up on this body of water are having a hard go. So, Jesus moves to pass by them, walking on the waves, and says, "Take heart; it is I" (v.50). We've got Exodus on the brain from the wilderness banquet, and now this. Passing by, Jesus

declares not merely, "It is I," but "I AM." Exodus 34:6, "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'I AM.'"

And getting in the boat, all is still, and "they were utterly astounded" (v.51). This is not an astonishment of faith-filled worship. Verse 52, they were perplexed "[because] they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." If they only understood about the loaves, they'd see the revelation of God here. What a fearful thing it is to be commissioned in the name of Jesus to preach the gospel, to cast out demons, to heal sicknesses, to do miracles, to see thousands miraculously fed, to see a man walk on water, to see that man calm a storm ... and then have it said of you that you were astounded at these things because of your hardness of heart.

Following Christ in all of life is not for the faint of heart. It is not something you take up as a hobby. It is not something you do casually. Consider what these men saw with their very eyes! Yet they did not believe. There was a faithless refusal of the person and work of Jesus. How much exceedingly *less* have we witnessed, and therefore how much all the more dangerous is the hardness of our own rebellious, wicked, and sinful heart. It is imperative for the gift of the mystery of the kingdom to be given (Mark 4:11). God *must* give the growth (Mark 4:26-29). He must give us nerves of steel to face even death (Mark 6:1-30).

Information alone is deadly. We cannot just *know* things. We need our lives transformed. We need our souls stirred to new life. They did not understand

about the loaves so that when I AM showed up, their hearts were hardened and they did not believe. They didn't grasp that God was doing a new thing. This is a new exodus, a new people, a new nation, a new kingdom. This is a new work. We must take stock of the cost of following Christ—see him for who he is and follow him in unwavering faith.

The Lord's Table

We come now to this table recognizing the Shepherd-King ushered in his kingdom not through political or military means but by his own death and resurrection. The Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. And he has provided for us a meal far greater than the 5,000 ate.