

[crowd patrol]

:: mark 8.1-10 ::

As I mentioned, this morning our text is the first 10 verses of Mark chapter 8. If you have a Bible, follow along as I read them aloud.

Mark 8.1-10- In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."

Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven."

So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

So there I was. Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, January of 2006. The church had sent a team down to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. We worked out of a Calvary Chapel base camp that fed local families, assisted in cleanup and rebuilding and offered a place of worship for anyone who wanted to attend.

On one particular day I found myself on the food service line. The lunch menu that afternoon was a regional favorite: catfish and collared greens. The hungry Mississippians were very excited, but unfortunately, I was assigned to the collared greens.

Now...I can not tell you a more objectionable smell than a huge vat of soggy, steaming collared greens. And that's coming from a man with an infant at home. I can still vividly remember what it was like each time I pulled the lid off that Cambro and plopped a big, sticky serving onto those plates. The people were quite excited, so apparently it's an acquired taste.

The trip was a great blessing, but I assure you, you won't be served any collared greens if you have a meal at the Pensiero house.

In Mark chapter 8 we have a remarkable story of a different meal service. It's a famous story, probably familiar to most of you, where Jesus miraculously feeds over 4,000 people with just 7 loaves and a few fish.

In this passage we are provided 3 characters, if you will. We have **Jesus**, the **disciples** and the **multitude**. Each can teach us this morning. Each can help us evaluate the condition of our hearts and the state of our lives. As we come to this familiar text, we must remember that God's word is delivered to us for continual application and instruction and that today, the Lord has a special message for us, if we're willing to receive it. That is the promise He has made, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

As we're learning from these 3 characters, I think we can look at them this way:

First, we have the crowd. The multitude that came to hear Jesus. They speak to us on a very base spiritual level. The crowd shows us our **mindset**. The crowd shows to us our hearts, whether we are Christians or if we are not Christians here this morning.

Second, we have the disciples. The 12 that followed after the Lord and lived with Him and partnered in His ministry on the earth. They are examples to us as Christians who have determined to follow Jesus Christ and who desire to serve Him. They show us our **mission** as disciples.

Third, we have our wonderful Jesus. God, come in human flesh, who set aside the independent use of His deity in order to live a life led perfectly by the Spirit. He shows us how to carry out the heart and the plan of God. He provides the wisdom and the understanding necessary, and He lived it all out for us to see. Therefore, He is our **measure**. He is the standard by which we live our lives on the earth.

And so as we go through our text, we will find much to learn either about our **mindset**, our **mission**, or our **measure**.

We begin in verse 1, where we read:

Mark 8.1-2 - In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat."

The passage opens with the phrase "in those days."

This event took place sometime in AD 29, probably after the Spring. It was about half-way through Jesus' 3 and 1/2 year ministry before His crucifixion and resurrection, and at this point He was just about at the peak of His popularity among the people. To give you a reference that we will return to in a moment, this is only a few months after Jesus fed the 5,000 with the 5 loaves and 2 fish.

He had been healing and teaching and performing tons of miracles. His fame had spread through the nation. And, once again, a crowd of thousands had come out to Him in the desert, to hear Him teach and to heal their sick and to just see what this Guy was all about. Some of this multitude would have come with the hope that Jesus would save them from some infirmity or sickness. Some of them would have come to hear His teachings from the Word. Some would have come just to see the miraculous happen, it was a very unique form of entertainment for them. Others perhaps didn't really know why they came, but found themselves there at the feet of Jesus.

What about us? What is our *mindset* when we come before the Lord?

As we gather together week by week, what is our individual motivation in our relationship with God? These people, though there for a variety of reasons, were hungry for Jesus.

We know that because they stayed even as the supplies ran out. After 3 days of continuous ministry, the people were out of food. They were out of provision. But they had such an appetite to be in the presence of the Messiah. When I look within myself, I hope that I would find this kind of appetite, this kind of desire to be before the Lord and to receive from Him the things that He is offering to me. That I would set aside earthly things and pursue the One who offers eternity to me.

And here we see Jesus, who has been pouring out His wisdom and His effort and the blessings of heaven, and though, in His humanity, He would have been exhausted, He still was mindful of the people. He was thinking about the multitude.

So He calls His disciples and starts explaining to them the situation.

Now, as students looking back on this story and the rest of the Gospels, we might wonder why Jesus allowed the food to run out. He intended to provide for them. He had the power to do so. He did not desire that the multitude leave unnourished. So why not just multiply the food while it was still in their pockets over the 3 days of this retreat in the wilderness? Why allow the people to come to a place of hunger?

Several reasons. First, we must understand that sometimes God will allow us in the multitude to run out of something. The Bible does not teach a health and wealth doctrine of living. Instead, God, from time to time, will allow us to hunger in some way so that we can learn that sufficiency and satisfaction comes only from Him and from nowhere else.

Second, we must understand that as disciples, Christians who are living out our faith, the Lord desires to partner *with* us in His ministry. Jesus *could* have silently and continually multiplied the food over the course of these 3 days, but then the disciples would have had no part in this incredible miracle and this incredible ministry to these thousands.

Third, Jesus allowed the food to run out so He could teach everyone there, and everyone here, about the faithful, wonderful, marvelous compassion of God.

"I have compassion on the multitude," He said. This compassion is an important part of God's heart and His nature. The word used here in the Greek is in a form that is unique to the Gospels. It is an *active* compassion. A working compassion. A compassion that sees and then moves, because we serve a God of engaging grace.

This is the same compassion cited in the story the Good Samaritan, who stopped on the road to help the man who was naked and dying, who gave of his own time and his own effort and his own resources to minister to a stranger.

This is the same compassion of the Prodigal's father, who watched each day for his son to come home, and then, finally seeing him on the horizon, *ran* to him, threw his arms around his boy, and restored their relationship.

This is the same compassion of the Master who forgave his servant who owed him a great debt in Matthew chapter 18.

This is the compassion of Jesus and it is the same compassion by which we are called to live our lives. That is the measure by which we are to see the world and engage in God's grace. As we move about in the community and around the world, as we live out our lives, we are called to this active compassion as we are filled with God's engaging grace.

So Jesus, filled with this compassionate mercy, seeing the state of the multitude, calls His disciples and says in verse 3:

Mark 8.3 - "And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."

People had come from all over the region to meet with Jesus. If we are looking at this statement and applying it to ourselves then we could say that you are never too far off to come to God. You're never too far that His grace cannot save you. Whether you are a Christian here who is struggling or has backslidden, or whether you've never been born again, behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. You are not too far that the Lord's compassion does not extend to you.

The disciples respond in verse 4.

Mark 8.4 - Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

Now, we have to be a little disappointed here. I don't want to trash on these guys too much, but they had witnessed this exact scene only a few months before, where Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000 with only 5 loaves.

Specifically, they pointed to the hopelessness of the wilderness.

I sort of take that statement for granted until I pause to remember that God *loves* to satisfy in the wilderness. Think about it for a moment.

As the nation of Israel wandered through the wilderness, day by day God provided manna for their food. A never-ending supply of heavenly, nutritious pastries.

When Elijah, the great prophet, was hiding from Jezebel in the wilderness, God graciously and miraculously provided him food and water which satisfied him for 40 days.

When Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted by the Devil, after fasting for 40 days, angels came and ministered to Him there, that He might be strengthened.

The Psalmist says, *He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep and to Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endures forever.*

Perhaps you find yourself in some sort of wilderness today. Some struggle or some difficulty. Some problem that seems to have left you alone and overcome. Maybe in your heart you feel like a hurricane has come through. That your life is like the wreckage after Hurricane Katrina. If that is how you are feeling today, you can be confident that our God desires to help you and satisfy you. His desire is to give you the bread of life. He knows what you need. He knows exactly what is going on in your world right now, and His heart has compassion for you. His desire is to satisfy you in the wilderness.

Perhaps you don't feel like one of the hungry multitude. You're not in a time of terrible struggle. You're maybe more like one of the disciples, living life, trying to serve the Lord. If that is the case, then the application is that we be careful not to forget the power of God. To not forget all that God has done not only through history, but in our own lives as well. Because God is a God of action and movement, but if we forget that, then we're not only going to miss opportunities to minister, but we are going to miss out on who Jesus really is. We will be like the disciples, who in this moment had a pretty sorry view of the Lord and didn't really think He could take care of this situation. And if we forget the power of God, if we forget the nature of God, if we forget the urgency that God has to work on the earth, then we will find ourselves missing out on a dynamic Christian life. We will be living on a temporal level, when God so much wants us to live on the heavenly level, where He is always the answer, He is always the solution, and He is always sufficient.

Mark 8.5 - [Jesus] asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven."

Bible commentator HA Ironside points out that *this* time they were to give of their own supply. The first feeding they received loaves and fish from a small boy, but now the task was put to them personally.

As we see our *mission* in the example of the disciples, we learn again that God's desire is to use us to further His work in the world. He could speak a word and solve this problem, but instead the Lord determined to share this moment with His disciples and He gave them an opportunity to personally invest themselves into the Kingdom of God.

That opportunity continues today. God places on each of us a calling that we are free to either accept or reject. *If* we are willing to receive the call of God, then He is able to work in us and through us His amazing plan for the world. And if we are willing to invest our lives in His service, then He makes us partners in His work of redemption. That is an amazing thought. That is the life Christ sets before us.

Mark 8.6-7 - So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them.

Again, as Christians we must see what it is God is trying to do in our lives. This is how He has set up the work of the Gospel: That we as individuals, having received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, having been filled with His Spirit, would then go and set that bread of life before the multitudes of the world. That we would present to the people around us this compassionate Jesus, who desires to satisfy and save.

Notice that they were simply to set the food before the people, not force them to eat. It was up to the individual whether or not they wanted to eat. The same is true for us. It's a *mindset* issue. It is up to us whether we will receive the truth of God or not. Whether we will receive the call of God or not.

Whether we will receive the correction of God or not. Will I receive what God is speaking to me, or will I ignore it?

As disciples, our **mission** is to set God's word before the people, not force it down. There are always people who are trying to force a message down the throats of others. Sometimes they do so in the name of Jesus Christ. That is not what we're called to. Instead, we see here, that our calling, our **mission**, is to personally serve, personally go from person to person, offering them the Bread of Life, who is Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God. And as we do so, we are continually going out to minister then returning to Jesus for supply. Going out to distribute, coming back for filling. And whatever the Lord has given to us in this life is enough. 7 loaves were sufficient. It may have seemed meager to them, but it was enough for God to do this incredible miracle.

Your life, as a disciple, may seem small at times. You may feel insignificant or that you don't have much to offer, but in the Lord's service, every servant is important. Every disciple is significant, because God is the only Person who can make something out of nothing. And if we are willing to present ourselves before Him and actively follow Him, then we can do all things through Christ, who cares for each one of us dearly and personally and passionately.

Mark 8.8-10 - So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

Matthew's account of this story points out that the 4,000 counted were only the men of the crowd, as was customary in that time and in many of the numberings of the Bible. The actual number could have been more than double that.

The people ate and were filled. Then the disciples gathered up seven large hampers full of leftovers, then it was immediately off to the next place to do more ministry for a new multitude.

Are you satisfied?

The crowd can speak to us of our **mindset**. They had come out to see Jesus, had received healing and teaching from Him, then, in their hunger, He gave them a full meal so that they would not faint in the wilderness.

As Christians, it is important that we recognize that the things of God are the only things that truly satisfy. The human heart, apart from God, is *never* satisfied. The pursuits of humanity cannot fill us ultimately.

John D. Rockefeller once said: *"If your only goal is to become rich, you will never achieve it."*

In fact, when Rockefeller was listed as the richest man in the world, he was asked, *"how much money is enough?"* His response? *"Just a little more."*

The question each of us must ask ourselves before our God is: **What am I pursuing to satisfy my life?**

Jesus offers us the only life that is full and complete and purposeful and forgiven. The only life of real fullness and meaning.

Are you satisfied? To every person here: Jesus is offering you satisfaction.

What about the disciples? At the end of this story they are standing with bushels full of fragments. Leftovers. The broken pieces that the people had dropped on the ground.

It's an interesting visual really. Because in this life of discipleship, we are asked to sacrifice. We're given the difficult choice of taking up a cross each day and crucifying self. God calls us to lose our lives. Now, that all seems confusing and negative until we realize that all we are forfeiting is control over our future for the perfect plan of God. All we are leaving is the emptiness of a life in the world for the fullness of the Spirit. All we are missing out on is the futility of temporal, earthly pursuits that end in death and destruction.

This story gives us a snapshot of discipleship. We *are* called to sacrifice. We *are* called to service. We are called to give our lives over to God and to turn away from the things of the world. But, we look here and we should marvel at what the disciples receive. They were left with fragments of bread and fish, but do you think they would trade their lives with Jesus, their years in His very presence and their years of service after His resurrection for a steak dinner back at home?

Sometimes we decide that we don't want to serve others. Sometimes we convince ourselves that Christianity is *ALL* sacrifice and *NO* benefit. Sometimes our hearts say, "Why do I have to sacrifice and get leftovers?" Sometimes we think, "Yeah, Lord, thanks for delivering me from Egypt. Thanks for freeing me from slavery to sin and death, thanks for promising me a new, eternal life, thanks for preparing me a place to spend eternity with you, but I'm really dying for some leeks and garlic right now. I'd rather trade in all that You've prepared for me, for onions." This is the inclination of our old, sinful nature. That is the lie that we buy into if we lose focus on what it means to be a disciple in the presence of God, who supplies all of our need in abundance.

The crowd shows us our **mindset**. Today we must each evaluate ourselves to see if there is a hunger for Jesus. Do we have a desire to be in His presence? If we do, then the next step is to become a disciple, who follows after the Lord. If we don't, then we need to find out why we don't, because only a life in Christ matters. Each of us needs to check our **mindset** today.

Jesus is our **measure**. He shows us God's heart. He shows us God's methods in ministry. He shows us what it means to have a compassion that acts and moves. He shows us how he desires to partner with us in His work on the earth. He shows us that He has a great love for the people of the world and wants to satisfy them if they are willing to receive His bread of life.

The disciples show us our **mission**. That we have the opportunity to personally invest, personally serve in God's Kingdom, today. Their example warns us to not forget who Jesus is and what God has done throughout history and in our own lives, but instead to trust in He who is faithful. As disciples, we find that there is no shortage of multitudes, no shortage of opportunity, no shortage of provision.

May we be people who recognize those things and present ourselves to the Lord for service, for reliance, for satisfaction and may we be filled with the grace and compassion that engages the people around us, that they might not faint in the wilderness.

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In fact, as we close, I'd like to speak to anyone here who is not yet a Christian. You've never asked Christ to come into your heart, to forgive you of your sins.

Perhaps there is one or two here today who have come in need of a Savior. If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, then you are in trouble. You are like one of the multitude in our text who needed food. Jesus said, "If I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way." What that means to you is this: If you die without the salvation of Jesus Christ, you will enter into an eternity in hell.

Hell is a real place, but you don't have to go there. Jesus doesn't want you to go there. He has compassion on you and wants to offer you His life and His salvation and His satisfaction.

We're going to give you a chance to receive that salvation right now.

Let's pray.

The Bible says that all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. None of us are perfect, and all of us have sinned in one way or another. Therefore we are disqualified from going to heaven after we die.

The good news is this: God is not willing that any should perish, but that all of us should come to repentance. He so loves this world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever would believe in Him would *NOT* perish but have everlasting life.

If you are not a Christian here this morning, I'm speaking to you. You've come here. You've heard about this Jesus. You've seen that He loves you and cares about your life. You've seen that He is offering you forgiveness for your sin and then a life that is full and meaningful and transformed through His grace.

If you want that life, if you want forgiveness for your sins, then all you have to do is receive it.

The Bible says, ***if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

With every head bowed, every eye closed, if you want to be saved this morning, then we just want you to do something simple. Just raise your hand. Reach out to God, who is reaching out to you. Raise up your hand and then we're going to say a prayer.

If you raised your hand, repeat this prayer after me. There's nothing magical about the prayer, it's simply inviting God to come and live in your heart. It's a moment that you can look back to and say, "THAT was the minute that I turned away from my sin and asked God to forgive me and save me." If you raised your hand this morning, repeat this prayer after me:

Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm not worthy to enter into heaven. But I know that you came to earth, and died on the Cross, for every sin I've ever committed. Forgive me for the wrong things I've done. I want to follow You. I want to love You, even as You have loved me. Jesus I pray that you would come into my life. Be my Savior, be my Friend, be my King. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to spend all of my days, following after You. Thank You for Your love. In Jesus' Name I pray, amen.