

Mark 8:1–10 — Jesus Full Of Compassion

June 9, 2019

If you are visitor, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, we are working our way through the Gospel of Mark. Take your Bibles and turn to Mark 8:1. Feel free to use a paper Bible or the electronic Bible. It doesn't matter to me which one you use.

For the last few weeks in this Gospel, we have followed Jesus as he traveled outside of the land of Israel away from the Sea of Galilee. First, he moved north to the Phoenician city of Tyre.

This was a hardcore pagan city with people that were far from God. In that city, while he was trying to stay undercover and not draw the attention of a crowd, some people recognized him. One woman in particular



recognized him. She came and knelt before Jesus on her knees, begging Jesus to cast a demon out of her little girl.

Earlier, we learned the Jews had great disdain for Gentiles. In that story, we had a graphic example of just how calloused Jews were to people of other races. Even though this pagan woman was on her knees with tears running down her face, begging Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, Jesus' apostles were cold-hearted snakes. They told Jesus to ignore her and send her away.

I told you Jews had little love for Gentiles. Thankfully Jesus' heart was not like his disciples. He was very compassionate toward this woman in her time of

desperate need. In response to that woman placing her faith in Christ, she received mercy from Christ. Jesus cast the demon out of her daughter.

That principle was not just true then. It is still true now. Anyone who places their faith in Christ, will receive mercy from Christ. It doesn't matter your background. It doesn't matter how far from God you started or how far from God you have wandered. Jesus is full of mercy for those who place their faith in him. That was true in that day and is still true today.

We also learned from that story that Jesus' mercy for this Gentile woman who placed her faith in him was a preview of what was to come. At the time Jesus was on Earth, he was offering salvation to the Jews. Later, after Pentecost, mercy from Jesus was extended to all people, not just Jewish people. At this time, Jesus was focused on extending the gospel to the Jewish world. Mercy from Jesus to this woman was a preview, a foretaste of what was to come.

As we learned in previous weeks, Jesus' trip outside of the land of Israel was not primarily to reach a destination. It was primarily to train his apostles. It was only a matter of months until Jesus would die on the cross. This is why he took a long road trip that lasted a few months. Jesus and his apostles walked 120-150 miles on this trip. After Tyre, they went north to Sidon. He eventually ended up on the southeast corner of the Sea of Galilee in the area of the Decapolis. This was an area that was part of a 10-city alliance. At this time, it was under the control of Syria.



Jesus was on the Sea of Galilee in that little piece of Decapolis real estate that touches the Sea of Galilee. People came to him like ants to sugar when he arrived up. Even though this area was wilderness, people wanted to have their sick healed by Jesus and to hear Jesus speak.

As we saw last week, he healed many people in those days. One man he healed was deaf and mute. When Jesus healed him, that miracle was especially noteworthy. Jesus didn't just give that man hearing and speech but he supernaturally implanted in his brain the ability to understand a language he never heard, and the ability to flawlessly speak a language he had never spoken. From that story, we learned Jesus does all things well. He created all things well in Genesis. His healing miracles in the Gospels were all well done. His best miracle of all was his saving miracle of you and me. That was the most well done thing he every did.

Last week, we also wrestled with an important question. While the woman who had a demon cast out of her daughter in Tyre was clearly a lost Gentile, were the hundreds of people Jesus healed last week in this corner of the Decapolis also exclusively Gentile? Are the 4,000 people Jesus will feed in our story today in this corner of the Decapolis exclusively Gentile? To be honest, it is hard to know that answer. Many Bible scholars have claimed for hundreds of years that the healings in the Decapolis we studied last week and the feeding of the 4,000 we will study this week are examples of Jesus' further ministry to the Gentiles. The belief that Jesus' healings last week and the feeding of the 4,000

Jesus will study this week were exclusively Gentile works has a long history. I was able to trace it back to the church father Augustine who first made that claim.

The problem is while Mark clearly tells us the Syrophoenician woman was a Gentile, he didn't tell us the ethnic backgrounds of the hundreds Jesus healed last week and the thousands we will see Jesus feed this week. Mark didn't tell us their ethnic backgrounds. He only told us the geographical location where things took place. He also told us people in both crowds came to Jesus from great distances. The crowd could have been made up of Gentiles. It could have been Jews. It could have been both Gentiles and Jews. We don't know. Mark didn't tell us.

Since we don't know if this was a Jewish or Gentile crowd, it is unwise for me to say the purpose on Jesus' healings in the Decapolis and the feeding of the 4,000 in the Decapolis was to give us another example of Jesus' compassion for the Gentiles. That was true of the Syrophoenician woman in Tyre because Mark told us she was a Gentile, but we don't know the ethnic background of the people Jesus healed and fed in the Decapolis. Since Mark didn't tell us they were exclusively Gentiles, it is unwise to claim the point of the story Jesus' ministry to exclusively Gentile people.

In good Bible study, the purpose of a Bible story should be found in what the writer actually says, not in something we assume might be true that the writer doesn't tell us. Simply put, since Mark did not tell us the ethnic background of these people, their ethnic background cannot be the point of the story.

If you think these were Jews or if you think these were Gentiles or if you think it was both Jews and Gentiles, any of those options are fine with me, but for our study, we will keep our fingers in the text and restrict ourselves to what the Bible does tell us.

Let's read the story and see if we can find what it tells us about Jesus that we need to know to see him better and love him more.

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 down 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. 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 into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. Mark 8:1–10 (ESV)

So what does this story tell us about Jesus that we haven't seen before? This text clearly shows us Jesus' compassion for those in need.

This is the only story in all the Gospels in which Jesus actually says with his own lips that he feels compassion. There are many other references to Jesus' compassion in the Gospels but the rest of them are all in the third person — someone saw Jesus' compassion and commented on it. This is the only story where Jesus tells us with his own lips that he has great compassion toward those who are suffering.

The saying, “I feel compassion” is three words in English but you can say the same thing in Greek in one word. It is the word *splagidzomai*. It is a great word. You have to spit when you say properly. All you the kids need to listen to me on this one. Have you ever been with your mother walking through a parking lot and you spit on the ground? Has your mother ever told you to stop spitting on the ground because it is gross? If you are younger than 10 and that has happened to you, this is what you need to do. The next time you spit on the ground and your mother tells you to stop doing that, you tell her you were just practicing your Greek. You were trying to properly say the Greek word *splagidzomai* and you need to spit when you say it for proper pronunciation. Your mother will be impressed you are learning Greek. She will brag about you to all the other parents and let you spit as much as you want. That is my helpful advice when it comes to learning to use this word to your advantage.

If you are going to spit to say this word, you need to know what the word means. It means to feel compassion for other people but to not just feel compassion emotionally but to feel compassion for others physically. It literally means to see someone suffering and feel a physical response to their pain in your bowels. Another way to say it is that when you see someone suffering, you have so much empathy with the pain they experience that it makes you literally sick to your stomach. This is not getting sick to your stomach because you are grossed out by a disgusting smell or blood and guts on the floor. It is feeling sick to your stomach because you feel such great empathy, pity, and care for

someone in need. It is seeing others suffering and you care so much you can't help but experience some of their suffering as you see them in pain.

Compassion to the point that you literally feel when you see others suffering is not something all people experience. The truth is some people see others suffering and could care less. We saw that earlier with the apostles and the way they treated the Syrophoenician woman. She was suffering but they didn't have any compassion for her in her time of need. They had zero *splagizomai*.

The good news is that while *splagizomai* may not always be felt by other people, it is an attribute of God. Great compassion is always felt by God toward us when we experience suffering or pain. God feels our pain. Jesus knows about our pain. Jesus has great compassion toward us. Satan has no compassion for people that are suffering. Demons have no compassion for people that are suffering. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit all have compassion toward us. God feels our pain. Let me show this to you from the Old Testament.

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22–23 (NIV)

He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate. Psalm 111:4 (NIV)

This morning, as we pick up the story, Jesus was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis. There were thousands of people who came to the desert to see, hear and be healed by Jesus. These people were without food, and there was no place to find food. Some had been without food

for three days. They were hungry and weak. Jesus felt their pain and did something about it.

Jesus had compassion on the hungry crowd.

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.” Mark 8:1–3 (ESV)

Some of you will remember this is very similar to what happened in Mark 6 when Jesus fed the 5,000. At that time, he was on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida. Now he was on the southeast shore. In the feeding of the 5,000 the people were in a desolate place and they missed food for one day because they came to hear Jesus and be healed by Jesus. This time people had been without food for three days. Jesus had compassion for people that were hungry for three days.



Has anyone gone without food for three days? I did once as part of a wilderness survival training program. It is hard to go without food that long. Hiking out of the woods after three days without food is no fun. I remember it well. I understand what these people were feeling. Later we will see they were in a desert area, so it was hot and dry. Some came a long distance. Jesus knew that if he dismissed the crowd, some of them would collapse on the way home.

As I thought about this, I kept wondering why these people didn't pack more food. Why didn't they leave for home when they realized they were out of supplies? They didn't plan to stay in the desert with Jesus for three days because

they didn't expect to stay with Jesus in the desert for three days. They found themselves listening to Jesus' teaching and they couldn't tear themselves away from him. They found themselves more famished for the spiritual food Jesus provided them in his teaching than the physical food they didn't have for their stomachs.

Jesus must have been a great preacher to get people to stay for three days without food in the desert because they didn't want to stop listening to what he had to say. When the average pastor is 10 minutes over in his sermon he hears about it on Monday morning because his congregation ended up at the back of the buffet line in the restaurant.

It appears these people made a choice to stay three days without food because the spiritual food they were getting from Jesus was more important than the physical food they were lacking.

Our memory verse this morning is Mathew 6:33.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

I first learned that verse at summer camp. My mother gave me a bookmark for my Bible with that verse so I read it from the bookmark every time I opened my Bible. This verse tells us to place first in our lives walking Christ and obeying Christ. When we do that, God promises to take care of the rest of our lives and put all the details into place.

We don't have to worry about providing for ourselves financially and worry about the future. We simply need to focus on walking with and obeying Christ. After that, God will take care of the rest of our needs. We don't need to worry

about providing for ourselves and our families. Just focus on Jesus, and God will take care of everything else.

Young adults, I recommend that to you. More important than finding the right job for your life is walking with Christ in your life. If you walk with and obey Christ, he will bring you to the right job. He will also bring you the right spouse. Focus on knowing and obeying Jesus and God will take care of providing for the rest of your needs.

We see that happening in this story. We have a crowd that stayed with Jesus for three days in the desert because the people were more interested in Jesus feeding them spiritually even when they ran short of food physically. As a result of their desire to sit at the feet of Jesus even to the point of facing great hunger to do it, Jesus took care of providing for their other needs.

Jesus used the apostle's meager resources to feed the crowd.

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 down 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. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. Mark 8:4–7 (ESV)

Jesus had compassion on the hungry crowd but the disciples answered him with a strange question, "How can anyone feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" The apostles were stating the obvious. They were in the desert. There were no options. Jimmy John's does not deliver that far.

To me, I was wondering why they were even asking this question. It was only a few months ago Jesus created food for the 5,000 in Bethsaida. Why didn't they just ask Jesus to put his chef hat on and make more food? I think the reason

this question sounds weird is because it was intended to be a rhetorical question. They weren't dumb. They hadn't forgotten about the feeding of the 5,000 a few months before. It was more of a prompting question. "Jesus, what are we going to do about this problem because there is no human way to solve this problem?"

I love what Jesus said at this point, "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus knew there was not enough food to feed everyone, but he said to the apostles, "Let's start to feed them by you giving up your lunch. I want you to give up your food to meet their need."

One thing that I wrote in my notes that stuck out to me is, in the feeding of the 5,000, it was a little boy that gave up his lunch. Jesus took that little lunch and multiplied it to be more than enough to meet everyone's needs. Here, Jesus wanted to begin with the apostles' lunches. They needed to trust Jesus to multiply their lunches and make them more than enough to meet everyone else's needs.

From the perspective of the apostles, they only had meager resources. They had seven loaves of bread. When we studied the feeding of the 5,000, we learned these loaves of bread were not large. They were similar to pita breads. Seven pita breads is not enough to feed 12 hungry disciples. It wouldn't have even made a dent when it came to feeding a crowd of thousands. Yet, Jesus called the apostles to give up their meager resources even though it wasn't even close to meeting the tremendous need of the people.

When it comes to the fish, it was not much better. It tells us they only had a few small fish. The word for fish here is in the diminutive. Think of sardines. All

they had was a few leftover sardines at the bottom of the can. It would seem pointless to place them in the hands of Jesus to help feed a crowd of thousands, yet that is what Jesus asked them to give.

Jesus directed everyone to sit on the ground, like he did with the feeding of the 5,000. He took the seven loaves of bread, gave thanks and started breaking them. He gave the broken pieces to the apostles to serve the people. As he broke the bread, he started creating bread in the palms of his hands. He created bread from grain that never grew. As he broke the fish, he created more little fish in the palms of his hands. He created fish that were fully formed. He created fish that were wet but they were fish that never died because they never lived. They were created dead and edible, just like the gain in the bread was created cooked even though it had never grown. The food just kept coming out of the hands of Jesus.

This was a creative miracle. Just as Jesus created everything in the universe in only six days and made everything from nothing, now Jesus was creating bread and fish for food from absolutely nothing.

The apostles and the crowd were given more than enough.

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 into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. Mark 8:8–10 (ESV)

It says there were about 4,000 people. We learned in the feeding of the 5,000 there was actually around 20,000 because 5,000 only counted the men. There were also women and children. The same was true here. It says there were 4,000 people. When we look at the parallel account of this feeding in the

Gospel of Matthew, we learn that number also did not include women and children.

Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. Matthew 15:38 (ESV)

This means Jesus created enough food to feed 15,000-17,000 people all by multiplying the little bit of food his apostles could place in the palms of his hands.

Mark said they all ate and were satisfied. The word satisfied means they were stuffed. People couldn't eat a bite more or they would have exploded. Remember they had not eaten for three days prior to this. Now they could not even put more food in their mouths because they were so full. Remember what we learned last week. Jesus does all things well. I am sure this was the best tasting fish and chips that anyone has ever eaten.

There is an interesting difference between between the feeding of the 5,000 and the feed of the 4,000. I am not sure I know the reason why but I will show it to you so you can talk about it over lunch. Maybe you will see something I missed.

In the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus took a little boy's Lunchable that was placed into his hands, then multiplied it to feed 20,000. At the end, there was only a few leftovers. The Scriptures says Jesus' apostles picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. The Greek word for baskets in that story is the word *kophinos*. It is where where our word for coffin. A *kophinos* was a small basket, a day pack. It was only big enough to hold one meal. As a result, the apostles were given enough leftovers to have lunch the next day. In this case, the word for basket is

different. It is the Greek word *spuridas*. That is a large rope basket. It is the size of a clothes hamper. This word for basket was used in Acts 9:25 to describe the kind of basket Paul was put in when they let him down the side of the wall in Damascus. This basket was so big you could put a person inside of it.

Interestingly, in this story, the disciples began with seven small loaves of bread that weren't enough for all of them to have their own lunch. Jesus took what little they could give, and he multiplied it to feed a massive crowd. At the end, he gave them seven laundry baskets full of bread and fish. Why did he give them so much extra food? Was it so they could hoard it? No. It was so they could have compassion on others and give it away to people in need, just like Jesus. This reminds me about the parable of the talents.

...You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much... Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

They learned to give what little they had to meet the needs of others. Now Jesus was going to entrust them with even more to give away and meet the needs of others.

After this, it says Jesus sent them away. He was not going to hang around and let them try to make him king like the Jews did in Bethsaida after the feeding of the 5,000. One free meal was enough.

It also says he and the apostles got into a boat and sailed to the district of Dalmanutha. That was back to the northwest shore by the town of Genessaret, just south of Capernaum. Matthew, in his account, said they sailed to



Magdala. Mark called this the district of Dalmanutha. One is a district, the other is a town. Why did these Gospel writers use different names? I think it is simply that Mark was writing for Gentiles. They were more familiar with the location of the district of Dalmanutha. Matthew was writing for Jews. They were more familiar with the small city of Magdala.

What can we learn from this?

Application

Jesus is full of compassion. Jesus feels our pain. He cries when we cry. He hurts when we hurt. Jesus knows how we feel, and he cares how we feel. When we are suffering, we want to talk to somebody who genuinely cares about us and has compassion for us. Unfortunately, many people in this world are as uncaring as the apostles were toward the Syrophoenician woman. The good news is we have Jesus. He loves us. We can pour our hearts out to him. He genuinely cares about us and has so much compassion for us he feels our pain. There is no more caring or compassionate person to go to in our times of need than Jesus. The best news is Jesus doesn't just have compassion for us but he is also the one who can do something for us to rescue us and help us in our times of need.

Jesus calls us to have compassion toward others and offer what little we have to meet their needs. In both the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus didn't start by creating food out of nothing. He started with the meager resources that someone else could give. Jesus then took what was given and multiplied it to turn it into enough. From this we learn that we are to have compassion for others in need, just like Jesus. We are to offer what little

we have to meet their needs. It is Jesus' job to multiply it and make it enough to meet the need. Let me say that again. Our job is to offer what little we can to meet the needs of others. Jesus' job is to multiply what we give and turn it into enough. This is an incredibly important principle. We see so many needs in the world around us. Many times we are tempted to think there is no point in showing compassion and giving what little we can to help because our gift would be so small we wouldn't be able to make a dent in the need. That is ok. Remember our job is to have compassion and give what little we can. Jesus' job is to multiply it and turn it into enough.

The compassion Jesus felt to provide food for hungry people was nothing compared to his compassion to supply salvation for sin tormented people. Jesus' compassion to meet the need of those suffering from physical hunger was nothing compared to the compassion Jesus has toward people suffering from a much greater pain, the pain of sin. Jesus felt so much compassion for us and the suffering we experience from sin in this life and the suffering we were slated to endure for eternity that he went to the cross to become sin for us. He died in our places to suffer for our sin. The work of creating fish and chips to feed a crowd of 15,000 was child's play compared to the work Jesus undertook on the cross. That was the hardest work that was ever done. Jesus suffered more agony on the cross than anyone or anything in the universe will ever experience. He did it all because of his great compassion for you and for me. He did it all because he is full of compassion to save us from the suffering of sin we deserve. We are so blessed to have a savior full of

compassion toward us in our times of need. He doesn't just meet our needs in times of physical suffering by providing food but he has so much compassion that he meets our greatest need of all, freedom from the suffering we deserve for our sin.

Jesus is full of compassion for you and for me.



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