

41 Mark 8:1-10

Compassionate Gentile Inclusion

Text

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, 2 “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 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.” 4 And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” 5 And he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” 6 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. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Introduction

Participating in Compassion

Our text this morning finishes Jesus' Gentile tour. For many months he has been ministering here in Gentile territory.

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, 2 “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 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.”

This time it is Jesus, not the disciples who draw attention to the physical needs of the people. It is interesting that this time he feels the need to point it out to the disciples. Are the disciples learning? Last time they brought to Jesus' attention something that he was quite aware of. He knew the needs of the people. Are the disciples now waiting for him to make the move? That is possible, but I find another explanation more likely.

There was a wall of hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile. Paul informs of of that in Galatians. A couple of weeks ago we looked at Peter's struggle (even after the resurrection) with going to a Gentile's house. We are aware that even when Jew and Gentile were in a single church there were difficulties on account of this racial difference. This is no small thing. In the previous feeding account the disciples came to Jesus after a few hours suggesting that the people needed to be fed. Here it is now three days later and not so much as a word on their part. We know from the other accounts that we just mentioned that at least some of the disciples really struggled with

being among the Gentiles, so is it any wonder why Jesus has to bring it to their attention this time? He could have simply instructed the people to sit down and commence to feed them. But instead he calls the disciples to himself and basically puts the question to them.

In the previous account there were other towns that the people could go into if need be. Here in this region they are sufficiently far removed that there are not even any towns of which to speak. It is a more desolate region and the people have been there three days and even now if they were to be immediately released to go find food, some of them may faint before they even reached home. Yet the disciples are strangely silent about their condition when they were so eager to help the Jews that wanted to make Jesus king.

Jesus wants them to share in his compassion. He wants them to participate in this just as they participated last time. It is a bit reminiscent of Jonah who refused to go to the Gentile city of Nineveh until God made him go. And even when he did go, he was disappointed that these heathen actually repented. He cared more about the plant that was shading him than these people who were also God's image bearers. Jesus desires for them to have a heart for the nations just as he himself does.

A Feast for Gentiles

4 And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"

The response of the disciples is more toned down than it was in the previous feeding. They in turn put the question back to Jesus as if to say, "What are you going to do?"

5 And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven."

As with the previous feeding Jesus asks what provisions are on hand. Like the previous feeding it is a measly amount. It needs to be clear that this is not by human effort. The number seven is recorded in order to stand in sharp contrast to what the actual needs are. If Mark merely recorded that Jesus fed the 4000 we may not be surprised at all. We need to have a context to understand this miracle.

Incidentally, this is also why we need to preach the law before we preach the gospel. If we start off by telling self-loving, self-focused people that God loves them, their response will likely be, "And why shouldn't He?" Our task in evangelism often is to get people lost in order to get them found.

6 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. 7 And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. 8 And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

Many elements of this narrative are the same as the first feeding. In Both accounts Jesus had the people sit on the ground. The first story, however, emphasized the green grass. We have the loaves and the fish in both stories. The loaves are probably the same kind of loaf, but the fish are here described as little fish. I don't know that that is a big difference. Thanks is given both times, but Jesus' prayer differs slightly from the very Jewish prayer that Jesus prayed before. The term for thanks here is *eucharista* which is where we get the term Eucharist. Jesus breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples to hand out. Once again they ate, and they were satisfied. There was

no nibbling of the edge, they ate until they were full. And once again there was food left over. They took up twelve baskets before and seven baskets this time. Ironically there may have been more leftovers this time. The basket used in the first account were small baskets, kind of like picnic baskets of today. The baskets used in this account were large baskets, large enough for a person to fit inside of!

9 And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

This is a slightly lesser amount of people than before, but still a massive number. Matthew records that it was 4000 not counting women and children so again we can expect the actual number to be perhaps four times as much.

As before, but for different reasons, Jesus dismisses the crowd, and this time climbs into the boat with his disciples and heads across the lake.

There are more parallels than what we have pointed out which has led some people to think that this was actually just one story that sort of morphed into two stories by the time Mark heard it. I don't think that is sustainable for a number of reasons which I'll not get into at the moment. But still the question comes, why did Mark include this account? Of all the other things which Jesus did that was not recorded, why did Mark choose to include a second story that is so much like the first?

The audience is key. Mark, you'll remember, was writing to a Gentile audience. The first account was so rich in Messianic significance that the Gentiles may feel like second rate citizens, if they feel like citizens at all. There was a hint of hope with the Syrophenician woman that the Gentiles too could share in the bread of the children. Here we see them doing that quite literally. The messianic significance of that wilderness feeding is not limited to Jews only. Gentiles also will be included!

As with the first story, this one prefigures the Lord's supper. At the Passover meal, Jesus "took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."" Paul adds, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Jesus, the bread of life was broken for us. The Lord's Supper looks backward to his work, and forward to his second coming.

Application

As I was thinking about what application to draw from this account, I really struggled to find one. I heard a story about Abraham Lincoln visiting a church with an aide. After the service was over his aide asked him how he liked it. Lincoln responded that ""The content was excellent; he delivered with eloquence; he had put work into the message." "Then you thought it was an excellent sermon?" his aide asked."No," Lincoln replied. The aide asked further, "But you said that the content was excellent, it was delivered with eloquence and it showed much work." "That's true," Lincoln said. "But Dr. Gurley forgot the most important ingredient. He forgot to ask us to do something great."

I regularly try to challenge us. I want to push us. I want us to strive for great things. By and large, our problem today is not that we are too studious, too pious, too active in kingdom work.

There is always something for us to work on. There is always something we can improve on. Our goal is nothing less than perfect conformity to the image of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13 says:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Absolute unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. That is our standard. Growth to mature manhood, that is our standard. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" notice the piling on of prepositional phrases! That is our standard. That is why he gave teachers and preachers to us. That is why I am here doing what I am doing to try to spur us on to that level of excellence. Life is short and we have little time! You can see this is a passion of mine.

However, as I surveyed this text for application, I was having difficulty finding a challenge to us. I suppose I could exhort you to stay close to Christ as these people did. Three days in the wilderness with little provisions is certainly a wonderful display of dedication. The feeding seems to point toward the Lord's supper which itself looks to a time when we will once again sit with Christ to eat in the new earth - that great wedding feast! From here I could draw some implications for us in what it means to be the bride of Christ. But all of it seemed just too artificial and did not flow as nicely from the text as I would have liked. There is a reason, after all, why observation and interpretation precede application.

There were certainly theological implications for Gentiles. That much is quite clear. Some people try to downplay the significance saying things like, "there may have been Jews there so this is not necessarily a Gentile thing." Well, there may have been Gentiles in the rest of Jesus' ministry so does that mean there was no Jewish significance to it? Certainly not. Everything in the last few accounts has been Gentile oriented. From the clear Gentile geography to the mentioning of Gentile culture and Syrophenecian ethnicity to the kind of baskets used and the less Jewish and more Gentile phraseology, it has Gentile written all over it. There is significance here for the original readers of Mark and there is significance here for us.

Whereas in the first feeding account Jesus was passive (he was active in life but Mark told the story with Jesus in the passive voice.) This time around Jesus is front and center. He is in the active voice.

Jesus sees the crowds and has compassion on them. He has them sit down and he feeds them. So while we must continue to press on to great things, we must not neglect time with our Lord. He knows our needs. He knows them and he is pleased to meet them. This lesson flows more naturally from the text. Dear Christian, if you are weary and about to faint, rest on him. He knows our sorrows and our infirmities. He knows our weaknesses. He knows when our hearts are depressed and when we are physically spent. He knows when our spirit troubles us and when doubts assail us. He knows when we are attacked by Satan and by the world and by our own flesh. He knows dear Christian and he is not far!

He is not the God of the Deist who knows but sits back and does nothing. He is not a cold and distant god who could care less of humanity. He is not the God of the Greeks and Romans that even delights in tormenting humanity. No! Ours is a God of compassion who knows our needs, feels our needs and is pleased to help us. For all the abuses that these attributes of God receive nowadays, He still is, biblically a God of love, a God of grace, a God of mercy and compassion; grieving with us when we grieve and rejoicing when we rejoice. All the good that we have ever

felt from humans, whether it be the tender touch of your mothers hand or the strong embrace of your father's arms or the shoulder of a faithful friend on which to cry or the joyful embrace of and adoring child, all these good gifts come down from the Father of lights above. All these are but poor reflections of his character. All these are but a meager replication of the depths of the character of our Great God.

He not only knows and cares and delights in meeting our needs, but he does so in abundance! Exceedingly and abundantly above and beyond all that we could ever hope or imagine. He supplies not just a bite, but all that we can eat. We may come to him and eat until we are satisfied. After we have eaten our fill, after your friends have eaten their fill, after thousands of people have eaten their fill, there will be more left over than what was first set before us. The more we eat the more blessings there are. So eat dear Christian! Consume this bread of life which will sustain you. Eat and be satisfied! Find your strength in the nourishment he provides! We will eat today and come again tomorrow and so we will feast on that which our Lord sets before us. We will so continue until this age passes away and we are brought to partake in the great wedding feast with all the saints who have gone before us and all the saints that may come after us! This one people gathered from every tribe, nation and tongue, a number that no man can number. This group will