

0335

Mark 8:1-21

Feeding the multitudes

Sunday, June 4, 2023

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

<sup>11</sup>The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. <sup>12</sup>And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” <sup>13</sup>And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

<sup>14</sup>Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup>And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” <sup>16</sup>And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

<sup>17</sup>And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? <sup>18</sup>Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? <sup>19</sup>When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets

**full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, “Twelve.” <sup>20</sup> “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.” <sup>21</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”**

## Prayer

## Introduction

Last Monday was Memorial Day. It's a day that's set aside to remember the fallen, the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our nation and the freedoms we enjoy.

In November, we observe Veterans Day when we remember all of the men and women who have served.

Every September 11th, we remember that fateful day. A common saying that I hear about 9/11 is “never forget.”

There are other days where remembrance is important. Some of those days might be meaningful to us personally. It might be our birthday, or our anniversary, or a sad day like the anniversary of the passing of a loved one.

We remember those days.

We have all sorts of days on our calendar which revolve around remembrance.

We mention this every time when we do communion. The words of institution that our Lord gave to his disciples. Do this in remembrance of me.

Christmas is the day when we remember the birth of Jesus.

Good Friday is the day we remember the cross and the cost that Jesus bore for our sins.

Easter is the day we remember the resurrection and that the savior who died has risen.

And really, every Sunday should really be a mini-Easter. Every Sunday should be a celebration that we worship a living savior.

Remembering is important.

In part, because it's so easy to forget.

Over the last couple of years, I've learned something about myself. If there's something I need to do, or something someone asks if I can do, or there's an appointment that I have, I've just learned that if I don't write it down immediately, there's about a 99 percent chance I'm going to totally forget about it.

It's easy to forget. And in this week's passage, we see the disciples continually forgetting what the Lord has done and can do.

### Bridge

And so our main idea this morning is to remember Jesus in a forgetful world.

And we'll look at this passage in three scenes.

Feeding seekers and believers  
Disbelieving unbelievers  
Unbelieving disbelievers

#### I. Feeding seekers and believers

At the beginning of the passage, Jesus has been teaching and crowds are following him. And they're out for a few days and they have nothing to eat.

Jesus isn't oblivious to this fact. Jesus always knows what we need. And he knows what this crowd needs as well. This passage will tell us that there are 4,000 people in the crowd.

And so, at the beginning of the passage it says in verses 1-4:

**“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,<sup>2</sup> “I have**

**compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”**

They're in a remote area.

The disciples know what Jesus wants to do. But they can't see how he's going to do it.

But here's what's interesting.

At this point in Mark, Jesus has already done ANOTHER miracle where he fed a large crowd. In Mark 6, Jesus has sent the apostles out to teach and to heal. It's a group of 5,000 men, plus their families. And Jesus takes 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish and he feeds the people. The disciples JUST SAW Jesus do this!

But in spite of this, the disciples doubt his ability. They're left questioning. They doubt he could do what he's already done.

Perhaps you can relate. Have you ever seen God provide, and then the next time you faced uncertainty, or didn't know how things would work, found yourself doubting or questioning?

Remember Jesus in a forgetful world.

It can be so easy to forget the ways the Lord has blessed us.

It's important to remember what God has already done for us. The goodness he has already shown in our lives.

I think of so many people's lives where God has worked through situations. He's worked through events that were challenging, or where people didn't know how things were going to work. It can be a difficult work situation, or living situation, or family situation.

Take a look at your own life, your own story. And really think about the graces that God has shown. The times that he saved you or spared you. The times that looked so bleak or desolate.

God is good. He continues to work in our lives and our circumstances. Let us be people who remember the goodness God has shown us and who live in faith and confidence.

That's not to say God is our genie or does whatever we want him to do. But God provides. And he gives us what we need.

### Roommates

I remember when I was in seminary. My last year, I had two roommates who were both from Nigeria. And one of them had a funding issue at the beginning of the semester. Something hadn't gone to plan. It was his first semester and he was half a world away from home.

He said "the Lord will provide."

I wasn't quite as sanctified back in those days, because I was thinking "I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be able to sleep if I was in your predicament."

I don't know exactly how it worked out. I know he went on to finish the program!

But many of us, maybe most of us, have had a time in our lives with a lot of uncertainty and where God did provide.

Where we've experienced it ourselves.

And then we forget.

I think that happens because we tend to give ourselves too much credit. When things work out, when things go well for us, we think that's because of us. We're so good, or smart, or talented.

### Monopoly study

There was a study done at UC Irvine. A social psychologist had strangers play the board game Monopoly.

One player would be given twice as much money and be able to roll twice as many dice so that they could move around the board faster.

Those were obvious advantages, and not surprisingly, the players with more, would win the game.

Did they think they won because of what they'd been given to start?

No! They left thinking "Wow, I'm like the best Monopoly player ever. I'm so good at this game."

When things go good, we tend to think it's because of us. When things do not go well, we tend to think it's because of God,

The danger when we want to give ourselves all of the credit is that it makes it hard to see the ways the Lord has blessed us when we're focused on ourselves and what we can do, rather than looking to God and what he has done and what he will do.

Because every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17). Even our talent, our giftedness, those are gifts from God.

In our passage, when the disciples ask where the food will come from, Jesus doesn't even give an answer. He just goes and gets a sense of what all they have:

Mark 8:5-8

**<sup>5</sup> And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven."<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them.<sup>8</sup> And they ate and were satisfied.**

The disciples didn't have much to offer. They didn't have much to bring to the table. But it's not about what we have to offer that ultimately matters. It's what God can do. We don't have enough on our own. But God blesses, he provides.

And so, let us trust in him to accomplish his purposes through us, imperfect as we are. Let us serve the Lord and bring what we have before him, to use to bring him glory and to serve him.

Jesus takes the small amount of food the disciples have given, and he's able to feed 4,000.

The passage tells us that “the people ate and were satisfied.”

It's not like he got the world's sharpest knife and cut everything into really small pieces. And that everyone got a grain of bread.

Everyone is satisfied with what they have. Jesus was able to feed people who hadn't eaten in days.

### College story

When I was in college, I was the president of one of the student organizations on campus. And there were these monthly presidents "dinners."

Which to me, I hear dinner, and I think...ya know, dinner. But these were really more like hors d'oeuvres.

And even that's probably a stretch.

They'd have like a bowl of triscuits to feed 40 people.

Or like when we do communion. The point of communion isn't so we can skip breakfast...

But with this event in the ministry of Jesus, everyone ate and was satisfied.

In fact, the text tells us there are leftovers.  
Continuing in Mark 8:8

**“And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.”**

The tremendous abundance with which Jesus blesses.

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

The text doesn't say very much about the crowd. The focus is on Jesus and on the disciple's disbelief he could feed the people, despite the fact that Jesus had already done it before.

I think we can so often just focus on what's in front of us and lose sight of what God can do. We put so much pressure on ourselves to make things happen, to get things done, that we can lose sight of the fact that God is at work.

We come to our second scene.

## II. Disbelieving unbelievers

Verse 11

**"The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him."**

The Pharisees are less than impressed by what Jesus has done.

We don't know if they personally witnessed this.

Jesus has already done miracles of feeding multitudes.

But those aren't even the only miracles Jesus has done in Mark.

He shows dominion over weather by calming a storm in chapter 4. He heals a demon possessed man and raises a girl from the dead in chapter 5. He walks on water in chapter 6.

Yet the Pharisees still oppose Jesus.

Thousands of people just had a meal that was miraculously provided.

Jesus has been doing miracles, but the Pharisees come to TEST him.

Demanding signs. I think this can be a temptation for many.

I think sometimes we can read Bible stories of God appearing or revealing himself, like he did to Moses through a burning bush, or through the signs

that he showed, and think "well yeah, if he did that, it would be easy to believe."

The Pharisees had God on earth with them, and didn't believe. They saw miracles, and didn't believe. They heard about the things Jesus was doing and didn't believe.

The Pharisees problem is that they're not asking for signs out of a sincere desire to believe. They're testing Jesus. Could Jesus have shown such signs? Yes, he COULD have done that. But Jesus doesn't come to us on our own terms.

Jesus does do miracles. In this passage, he did it out of his concern for the needs of those who were listening to his teaching. Jesus always does his miracles for a reason. They're not magic tricks. And he doesn't do them on command.

It's our job to believe in the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. It's not Jesus' job to jump through hoops of our own making to satisfy our standards for what we say we can believe.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell was an atheist, who said that if he were to encounter God and be asked about his lack of faith, he would say "not enough evidence."

It's a similar mindset to the Pharisees in this story. And in America, atheism is becoming more common.

Romans 1:18-20 tells us the created order of the world points us to a creator and his divine nature.

**<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**

There is no excuse to not seek the Lord.

It's not about a lack of evidence.

Part of the problem with the Pharisees is that by saying they need a sign to believe: it's putting faith in themselves. When a person who's an atheist or agnostic says that they need x, y, or z in order to believe in God, it's saying "there is a way in which God must reveal himself. I know what the best way is. If he doesn't do it how I see fit, I'm not going to believe."

To only believe in God if he gives you a sign, or reveals himself exactly how you decree for it to happen, that isn't faith. And a God who has to answer to us is not worthy of our worship.

God's desire is for us to have faith, to trust in him.

Hebrews 11:1 says

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen**

A person will find God when he has a sincere desire. Proverbs 8:17 says:

**<sup>17</sup> I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.**

Back in our passage. In verses 12-13, we have Jesus responding to the Pharisees:

**<sup>12</sup> And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."<sup>13</sup> And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.**

It's interesting that the Pharisees were the religious leaders, the religious scholars, the one's best educated in the scripture, and they wanted a sign.

But signs can be faked.

I've seen videos of "faith healers."

Some of these guys are just second rate magicians.

Some of you might know the name Peter Popoff. He claimed to have supernatural healing abilities in the 1980s.

Now Popoff wore an ear piece that people thought was a hearing aid.

Already a bad sign for a man who claims to be a faith healer.

But it was actually a transmitter. A man named James Randi was able to intercept the signal that was being transmitted to his ear piece. He was being given information about people.

Signs can be faked.

It's great when signs are given. And the ministry of Jesus does include signs and miracles.

But I would argue, in the Bible, the greater authenticator of something being from God is the fulfillment of prophecies.

Deuteronomy 18:22 says:

**when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.**

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is both fulfilling prophecy and also speaking of what will happen to him and to his disciples, and he speaks with authority. What Jesus says will happen, happens. In this same chapter, Mark 8, Jesus predicts his death:

Mark 8:31:

**“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”**

That's a pretty hard sign to fake.  
His disciples don't believe it. But then it happens.

Jesus also predicts that his disciples would turn away from him. Peter arrogantly disputes this. But then it happens.

For us today, in this church, while God might not part the clouds and talk to us, it doesn't mean he's distant, it doesn't mean he's any less involved or concerned for us than how he is revealed in the Bible.

So Jesus departs from the Pharisees, and his disciples accompany him on the boat.

And that brings us to our third scene.

### III. Unbelieving believers

**<sup>14</sup> Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.**

So now it's Jesus on a boat with his disciples and they only have one loaf of bread.

Jesus gives a somewhat cryptic response:  
8:15

**And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”**

This is an interesting phrase. The leaven, or the yeast, of the Pharisees and that of Herod. Leavening agents are what are put in bread to make the dough rise. Most commonly in bread we eat would be yeast.

And so here Jesus is making a metaphorical reference to leaven.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

The Pharisees and Herod didn't have much in common. Pharisees were Jewish and were religious teachers. Herod was the political leader. One commonality was their opposition to Jesus, and the other, was their all-around disbelief in who Jesus was as God on earth.

The Pharisees had no real interest in knowing Jesus or serving God.

There are people and teachings and movements which can distract us from Jesus. It's typically not something totally overt and evil, but there are things that compete for our attention, there are things that take our eyes off of God. There are things that the world tells about God that are contrary to how he has revealed himself in scripture. Watch out for the leaven of doubt, the leaven of apathy, the leaven of self-justification. Because the leaven spreads and grows.

The next verse will show that the disciples still don't really understand what Jesus is saying.

**<sup>16</sup> And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.**

They've. Just. had. Jesus. Intervene in this same situation.

**<sup>17</sup> And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"<sup>18</sup> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"**

Do you not remember a few hours ago?

Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not see or understand? He asks. Do they not perceive what God is doing? The works of Jesus, his miracles, his teaching, his character, his fulfillment of prophecies, it should all validate that there is nothing to fear.

Don't you remember? Don't you remember God's goodness in your life? Don't you remember the times he's provided? How many times does God work in our lives when we turn around and still show doubt? Is it that we question his ability to provide? I think we probably KNOW he can provide. But I think we can question just how good he truly is. How aware of our lives he truly is.

God is faithful. Remembering Jesus in a forgetful world.

See what he's doing. Hear what he's doing. God is working all around you.

I know some of us are in tough times. Let me challenge you to think of the good things in your life.

What we focus on is a choice. Looking at the good ways how God has blessed you is a choice. And too many people choose not to do that.

What's the thing that you look around, you see what you have, and you begin to question God? Or question his goodness? Do you have something like that right now? What's the area where God has continued to show you faithfulness, but you look and say "there's not enough bread?"

Jesus continues:

**<sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve."<sup>20</sup> "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven."<sup>21</sup> And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"**

He points out what he has already done. He fed thousands of people twice, and there was a surplus.

Do you not yet understand?

This question goes unanswered.

The disciples are following Jesus. But they're still stumbling through things. Perhaps you can relate. They hear the teachings and see the things he's doing, but they still don't truly grasp who he is.

Do you not yet understand? Jesus asks.

At this point, they're still figuring this out. But they are following.

## Conclusion

Do you not yet understand?

And really, that question is as much for the reader as it is for the disciples.

Many of you do understand. I know this. Many of you do know Jesus.

But what about you?

Are you fearful because you don't think you have enough bread to get by?  
Or when it seems crazy to walk in faith, do you press on?

What is your response? The disciples are walking with Jesus. As much as they may mess up, Jesus is still faithful to them. But their responses of doubt are not what the Lord desires from us.

Faith is complicated. It's not equal for all people. But it's also not a competition. Jesus talks about the power of faith which is as small as a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20).

Faith can start out small but it grows.

Faith in certain situations might be easier for some of us than others. While in another situation, we might struggle.

Faith has been compared to a muscle. Through the tensions of struggles, it gets stronger. It's part of the reason why struggles and adversity work for our good. They produce a faith which is stronger.

Some of us have faith strengthened through healing from an illness, or through a broken relationship being reconciled, or through overcoming an area of sin.

The way we grow in faith, like the way how we grow in holiness, ebbs and flows. We might have a long season of stagnation. And perhaps you've known someone who faced a really difficult struggle, or illness, and they had, what the Bible calls "a **peace that surpasses all understanding**. (Philippians 4:7).

God does want us to trust in him. In this passage today, Pharisees don't believe in who Jesus is because they don't want to.

But God has provided the bread. Beware of the leaven of doubt, beware the leaven of self-reliance that grows and makes us cold to God.

Do you still not understand?

Do you not understand who Jesus is? What he means to life? He is God on earth. He is the Lord who takes away the penalty of sins.

He died so you could live. We're sinful people in need of grace and Jesus is the one who forgives.

Do you still not understand?

He came in fulfillment of dozens of prophecies from the Old Testament: who his family would be, where he'd be born, the things he'd do, the type of ministry he would have, the fact that he would die for his people. He performed miracles. He performed the greatest miracle in dying and raising from the dead to authenticate his divinity, and to fulfill what had been prophesied about him.

Do you not yet understand?

God has provided the bread again and again, he's provided, he's taken care of us, and then we get into another situation, and say "but we don't have enough now."

Do you not yet understand?

Or do you know that Jesus is the Lord who we are to remember in a forgetful world?