

Jason Upchurch - Mark 6:30-34 - The Good News of Jesus's Compassion - Part 1

We come this morning to one of the most well-known of Jesus's miracles: the feeding of the 5,000. And it's just an amazing portion of Jesus's ministry. Much like in chapter 5 where Jesus healed the woman hemorrhaging blood and raising the little girl, here we see Jesus as a kind and compassionate Messiah.

This is the second of Jesus's natural miracles in Mark's gospel where Mark records Jesus's power over nature; hence a natural miracle. The first was the calming of the stormy Lake of Galilee; he'll actually do that again later in this chapter and walk on the water.

This is also the first of the feeding miracles - he'll feed 4,000 men in just a couple of chapters. There are some Bible critics who believe that somehow Mark got confused and recorded the same event twice, but there are enough differences between the events that we know for sure it's 2 separate events. And **look at 8:18-21** for a minute. This is Jesus basically rebuking his disciples for their lack of understanding. **Read**

Here Jesus references both feedings. He started out with different amounts of loaves, fed different amounts of people, and there were different amounts left over that the disciples all confirmed. These were two separate amazing miracles.

Back in chapter 6 we're going to see so many amazing things to pull out of this section. One of the things I try to do as I preach give you the one big takeaway from each sermon. I almost always give that up front. And my goal is that if someone were to ask you on Tuesday, "Hey what did your pastor preach about?" That you would answer it with my big takeaway because that's what I want you to remember.

This morning it's hard because there's so many things going on. If I were to gel it all down though it's the good news of Jesus's compassion.

The compassion of Jesus over and over comes through this whole section. He is compassionate toward his disciples who need rest from a hard season of ministry. He's compassionate toward the crowd who is seeking him to learn more from him. Even the disciples telling Jesus to send the crowd away to buy food is an act of compassion they likely learned from Jesus. There were no Wal-Marts or restaurants in ancient times - they knew the crowd would be hungry. And Jesus shows compassion for the crowd again when he feeds them all.

So I think that's the central theme here: Jesus is compassionate.

So let's dive in.

1) Jesus gives compassionate rest. **Read 30-32**

So it's been a little while but this connects from the earlier section in chapter 6 where Jesus sent the disciples out in groups of 2 to go preach and do miracles. **Read 12-13**

The disciples wandered all over the hills of Israel, going from town to town preaching repentance. Turn from your sins because the Messiah is here. And they also cast out demons and healed people.

We don't know exactly how long they were gone. It was probably a couple of months because it had gone on long enough for Herod to hear about what was going on. The 6 preaching groups would have stayed in each town a few days and then walked to the next town and stayed there for a few days.

There are a lot of towns in Israel. This was a long time to be away from family and familiarity. They were relying on the hospitality of others. Remember Peter was married and so he had been away from his wife, and possibly kids, for some time.

I don't know about you, but even when I stay in comfortable situations where things are provided for me and even if I'm around good friends I get worn out. There's no place like home.

These guys came back to Jesus, somewhere along the shore of the Lake of Galilee, gave him a report and Jesus knew they needed rest.

And he says “Come away to a desolate place and rest a while.” The problem is that Jesus and the disciples are so famous they are being followed everywhere. Its like the ancient version of the paparazzi. You know how famous movie stars and singers can’t go anywhere in public because people will just flock to them? That’s what’s happening here.

They can’t even sit down and eat in privacy because people are crowding around. And let’s be honest: if we knew people who were in our town that were amazing preachers and doing miracles day and night we’d probably go bug them too.

But Jesus knows the disciples need rest. So he’s going to take them to a desolate place. The word for desolate place really means wilderness or desert. The wilderness in Israel is basically rocky cliffs covered in sand. Even after it rains, there is almost no vegetation. It is complete solitude away from the masses.

That’s what Jesus has in mind. And although I realize Jesus has specifically his disciples in mind, Jesus knows we need rest.

Six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall what? Rest.

See, God designed primarily to work. We are to be working. We are to be laboring and toiling and creating. That’s what God designed us for as image bearers: to tend his Garden, the earth.

2 Thes. 3:10: If any man will not work, let him not what? Eat.

2 Thess. 3:11: For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work but busybodies. Now such persons we command in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living...if anyone does not obey what we say in this letter take note of him and have nothing to do with him that he may be ashamed.

We’re called to work. Men, women, children - everyone. Obviously not in the same capacity, not in the exact same way.

Work is intrinsically good. Whether it’s physical work, mental labor at a desk job, working in the home, here the work these guys are doing is specifically ministry. God designed us on purpose to labor and work - both before the Fall and after the Fall. All work is good because it imitates God who works. And all work takes a toll.

And so God in his mercy also calls us to rest. And as much as we’re bad at working sometimes, we’re also bad at resting.

I think a lot of times when we think of resting we think of vacation. And we plan these elaborate vacations because we only get a couple weeks off a year and it’s so expensive and so we’ve got to pack absolutely everything in we possibly can so our 2 weeks was worth it.

And by the time we get done with our vacation, the old adage is we need a vacation from our vacation. We’re worn out, have less money, had a few arguments but we got a couple of good group photos.

That’s not the rest that Jesus has in mind. The concept of vacation in the history of the world is actually very new. Most ancient people didn’t go on vacation. They couldn’t go on vacation, not only couldn’t they afford to, but they had no means of transporting all their stuff in a reasonable way. It’s only since the invention of modern transportation and modern wealth that vacation has really become a thing.

God didn’t have in mind the modern version of packing up all our stuff and traveling to wherever and exhausting ourselves trying to have the time of our lives. That’s not necessary sinful - don’t hear me saying your family vacations are sinful.

But do hear me saying clearly: vacations are not usually rest. They're not usually designed to give us spiritual and physical and mental refreshment. And I think they should be.

Because God did give rest. He gave 1 day a week, one year every 7 years. And an additional year every 49 years - the year of Jubilee. He also gave plenty of other days throughout the year to celebrate feasts that reminded the people that provision comes from him.

But listen, to it was so they could get some rest. Physical, mental, spiritual rest.

And here I think Jesus gives us some principles for resting.

First of all the word rest is helpful. Anapauo - it means to gain relief from toil. To refresh or revive.

Jesus uses it of salvation in **Matt 11:28**: come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you what? Rest.

Just like someone who is burdened down trying to earn their salvation wants eternal rest in Jesus, so too when we do physical rest God wants us to rest.

Are you getting physical and spiritual rest? Rejuvenation and revival on a regular basis?

Now, I'm not a sabbatarian - I don't think Sunday is the new Sabbath or Saturday is the new Sabbath. But we are fundamentally the same people physically and spiritually in the NC covenant that the people of God were in the OT. And Jesus says God made the Sabbath for man. He made it for us. He built in rest for us because he knew we might not rest on our own.

And I'm bad at this - it's really hard for me to sit still and rest. But we need to have regular down time in our lives where we are refreshed, rejuvenated. That's what the disciples needed.

I also don't think it needs to be really, really long. The disciples were going into the wilderness. There was zero food out there, probably very little water. No stores, and they couldn't actually take that much food with them because ancient food went bad rather quickly. So this was probably only a few days or so. Maybe a week at the most.

But it's a very short season of silence and solitude away from the masses, and the difficulties and rigors of ministry and life. It wasn't complete isolation - Jesus was there and the other disciples were there. But it was a welcome change from what they had experienced over the past weeks and months.

I think we could learn a lot this model of refreshment that Jesus offers his disciples.

So it's rest, it's not a real long time. It's also desolate. They're in the wilderness. This is away from people and busyness and things that could pull them back into work and drain them more. When we're resting we need to dedicate ourselves to actually resting.

I mean, think about the Sabbath laws of the OT. No cooking, no carrying loads of goods anywhere, no buying, no selling, no tending your garden, no picking any food, if you have people over from out of town they can't do anything.

I mean it's so comprehensive that if you remember in **Num 5:12-14** there was a man who was picking up sticks to start a fire on the Sabbath. The leaders of Israel didn't know what to do with him. So they asked the Lord: how do we handle this? You remember what God said to do? Stone him to death with stones.

It was a deliberate violation of the Sabbath in front of everyone. It was deliberate, hard hearted disobedience. So the next time you're thinking about putting some hours in the garden on a Sunday afternoon...

Again, I don't think Sunday is the new Sabbath. Hebrews says that Jesus himself is our Sabbath rest and the Sabbath rest we truly look forward to is heaven. However, I think it's clear that God is serious about us getting rest.

And he's not mean about it. He's not trying to keep us from doing something good. That's how Israel viewed the Sabbath - as a burden on them. But that's not the intention of God. God commands us to get some rest because he is compassionate towards us.

He's saying, "Listen, I will take care of your needs. I will make sure you're fed. I will make sure you won't die. I will make sure you are taken care of."

I don't know how many times I've seen people go off the rails because they never actually get rest. Whether they think they have to work non-stop forever in order to provide or pursue some dream or climb the corporate ladder or have a certain amount in retirement or have a certain lifestyle.

Listen, the Bible is pretty clear about our mission here on earth. It's to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and strength. For most of us it's to follow Jesus, get a job, get married, have kids and teach them to love Jesus, get a job, get married, have kids who teach their kids to do the same. That's God's grand plan for humanity. There's some exceptions in there but for the most part that's the plan.

And so resting in the Lord is trusting him and trusting that plan. Trusting that he will provide for us. Trusting that he will protect us. Trusting that the million things going on in our lives will be okay if we wait one day.

And trusting that he knows what we need more than we do. "When we say I don't need rest, I'm fine." What we're saying is that I know me better than God knows me. I know my heart and my life better than God knows my heart and life. That's pride.

I think we should incorporate regular rest from work and activity. Rest that is actually rest, not just work of a different kind. Rest that rejuvenates us in the Lord.

2) Jesus gives compassionate teaching. Read 33-34

So the crowds are so intense that the disciples can't even eat. And at some point it seems as though Jesus decides the disciples need some rest so they sneaks away, hop into a boat and sail down the Lake of Galilee.

But the people see them and literally start chasing them down the beach. They realized this was Jesus and the 12 and so they run after them. John's gospel tells us that they actually beat the crowd to the location, went up on a mountain and the crowd chased them up a mountain into the wilderness.

Think about that. That's how intense these Jews were. They're leaving everything and following Jesus out into the middle of nowhere with no thought of food or drink or well-being.

And I don't know about you but I often lose patience with people when I'm worn out and tired and want to be alone. What's Jesus's response? It's compassion. *Splanchnizomai*. What is that?

It's a genuine, internal compassion for others. Part of the word is actually derived from the word for bowels - like your guts. Ancient people knew that the emotions were often felt in our stomachs. You know when you see a little child in pain or a loved one suffering greatly and your tummy is turning and you can't eat and you just kind of ache for them.

That's Jesus for these people. He has compassion on them because they have no shepherd. They have no real leaders. Their leaders, for the most part, are absolutely corrupt and rather than providing rest for these people they add law on law on law.

Look at Matt 23. This is one of the most damning indictments of Israel's leaders in all the gospels. The leaders in Israel were atrocious on every level and Matthew dedicates a whole chapter to Jesus's stinging rebuke of them.

You'll see here pronouncements of woe by Jesus. Woe is basically a term of condemnation, of damning judgment. Notice just the first section here. **Read 1-12**

The religious leaders preach Moses, but they don't actually follow Moses. Instead of giving people rest they make life hard for them. They add man made law to man made law and make life for the average person unbearable.

Actually what they're concerned about is their own appearance of piety. Their phylacteries - little boxes with scriptures written inside of them and tied around their heads and hands - are big and the strings are elaborate. They have beautiful Bibles and nice Bible covers but they don't actually live according to the Bible. They're proud. **Read 13-15, 23-28.**

I'll let you read the whole chapter but look at the contrast Jesus makes. **Read 37-39**

Jerusalem - specifically the leaders - kill all the people who want to gather the people. Jesus has this gentle desire to protect and care for the people of Israel but it's the religious leaders who will have nothing to do with it and who will eventually cry for his crucifixion.

That's been going on for time immemorial- it's the city that kills the prophets. That's just what they do.

And so back in **Mark 6** when Jesus sees these people who have no real shepherd chasing him all around the lake just to be with him he's not upset. He has deep heartfelt compassion.

They are like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep and shepherding has always been a metaphor of the love of God toward his people. **Psalm 23:** The Lord is my shepherd - Yahweh is my shepherd - I shall not want.

David was called to shepherd the people Israel. All of the patriarchs were shepherds of some kind. Sheep without a shepherd don't have a chance.

If you want a great little video on shepherding in Israel go to YouTube and watch Joel Kramer's video called the soul shepherd where he explains the life of a shepherd.

Sheep are relatively defenseless and helpless. On their own their just walking bbq fodder. And so Jesus has compassion on them. And this is maybe different than what we'd expect: notice what Jesus does in his compassion. **Read 33-34**

How does Jesus express compassion to the crowds? He teaches them. The food comes later - that's also compassion. But these people need a real shepherd. They need teaching. They need doctrine. They need to know what the Word of God says and the Word of God is standing right there and so he teaches them.

What does he teach them? We don't know. Mark doesn't record that for us. There's probably elements of the Sermon on the Mount in there - we know that was something Jesus taught regularly. Maybe some parables.

In Luke's gospel it says he taught them about the Kingdom of God. The truths about how life works as a follower of Jesus. That's almost certainly a reference to the Sermon on the Mount. But he probably taught about other things.

Can I show you something interesting? **Turn to John 6.** This isn't what Jesus taught that day. This is what he taught the next day. It's the same crowd. And what I want to show you is that Jesus taught this same crowd hard truths.

A lot of times when we see people beat down and struggling through life we want to give them softballs. We want to make things easy for them. Jesus doesn't do that. He has compassion on them and so he tells them the difficult truths about life.

What difficult truths?

The difficult truths that this crowd follows their own appetites. **Read 26-35**

He calls them out for their sin. They just want a snack, they're caught up in the craziness of it all. They don't really want what Jesus has to offer.

Jesus tells them the hard truth about those who truly follow him are given to him by the Father. **Read 36-44**

Those are some hard truths for harassed people. But remember, this is the same crowd. Jesus is telling them these things in compassion. He'll go on to say that unless people drink his blood and eat his flesh they can have nothing to do with him.

They think it's literal, it's really a figure of speech talking about believing in Jesus. But they're choking on this metaphor. And here's the conclusion. **Read 60-71**

We would probably think Jesus's sermons were a failure. Some compassion, Jesus. Some rest you're giving people.

No, they need to hear this. They need to hear hard truths. They need their sin exposed to them. It's no good to go from one bad shepherd who lays heavy burdens on them to go to another bad shepherd who pats their bottoms into hell by giving no truth.

No the compassion Jesus has is one of compassionate truth. There are a lot of people who claim Christ who say that we should tell people hard truths because it will send them away. It will offend people and they won't come to faith.

No. Jesus says the hardest truths imaginable in a posture of compassion knowing that his sheep will hear his voice. And even if all the crowds disappear - like they did here - the true sheep will long for the truth. The true sheep will be sorted out from the goats.

And we are called to do the same. We are called to tell people hard truths about sin and the gospel and the Word of God. Not because we want people to walk away, but because it is an act of compassion on them to proclaim the truth.

We have the truth that is more precious than gold, more to be desired than rare jewels. We compassionately give it to people that they might live.

Pray

