

Mark 8:1-9**“Food for thought”**

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I. Introduction

The 8th chapter is a continuation of Jesus’ ministry among the gentiles as the words “*In those days*” are meant to tell us not a specific date but that they were still in the Decapolis region. But where had such a crowd come from here among the gentiles? There is little doubt that Jesus’ ministry with the deaf and mute man had an immediate impact but I can’t help but wonder if there was a front man in the healed demoniac of chapter five. This man was from this very area and after being delivered from the legion of demons begged Jesus that he might be with Him but instead Jesus told him to “*Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.*” That day I believe Jesus had 4000 friends of the healed demoniac who had been told the story of what great things Jesus had done for him. There is another interesting reality in the setting of circumstances of this story as the immediate need was set in motion because of Jesus’ priority to teach. Here He was among the gentiles teaching them the things of the kingdom and apparently they stayed with Him hanging on His every word for three days. These gentiles choose not to leave and seek food for their physical need because they were receiving food for their their souls. And after three days of this these folks had a strong physical need to eat and many wouldn’t have made it back home to get food with out fainting and this becomes the reason for the miracle.

II. Vs. 1-3 Loving your enemy

Vs. 1 As we mentioned in chapter 6, though similar the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000 are different not only in when the events took place but where they took place. The feeding of the 5000 took place months earlier in the Jewish area of the Sea of Galilee while the feeding of the 4000 took place in the gentile area of the Sea of Galilee.

Though two separate accounts they do have things in common: In both cases the food divided was the same bread and fish, and in both cases Jesus multiplied that which was brought to Him. The repetition of this miracle so close to the time and area of the first has caused people to wonder; why Jesus did this miracle twice? The answer is found in both Matthew and Mark's accounts as we are told that Jesus was "*moved with compassion as they had been with Him 3 days without food*". No doubt this was a further illustration aimed at His disciples with regards to the heart of God towards lost humanity. God possesses no prejudices when it comes to showering his love and compassion upon humanity. Here were 4000 gentiles as there had been 5000 Jew's. Yet neither situation hindered Jesus heart to meet their needs.

Vs. 2-3 The Greek phrase "*I have compassion on the multitudes*" is a phrase that today we would say "*we have a heart for them*" and in reference to the gentiles must have been a remarkable statement coming from Jesus in the ears of the disciples. Jesus elaborates by saying that the 4000 have "*continues with me three days.*" The phrase means more than merely being in the same general proximity as Jesus as in the Greek it means that they *continued to abide with Him in fellowship.*

Jesus engaged His disciples as he had previously months earlier at the feeding of the 5000. There the reluctance of the disciples had been due to a different kind of prejudice, one that was predicated not upon differences in culture but rather in a difference in need as they saw their need for rest of greater need than that of missing a meal. Now some 8 months later these same fellows after having spent 8 months among their enemy see a similar situation occur. Though the numbers were less, those facing the hunger were in far greater peril as these 4000 have been with Jesus 3 days without food and there is a real possibility that some may faint on the way back to their homes. But with the greater need there was also a greater prejudice as they were gentiles. Notice that Jesus eliminates the option of sending them back home which suggests to me that Jesus was anticipating multiple excuses from His disciples. When I factor in that Jesus had been directly dealing with the prejudices of His disciples for around 8 months it reveals that within our fallen flesh such prejudices are very difficult to overcome. Peter who gave this information to Mark will face this same issue for much of his life as he will deal with it again when he deals with Cornelius the Roman centurion than many years later Peter is still struggling as he tries to keep up appearances by not eating with gentile believers when his Jewish friends were in town and is called on it by Paul.

III. Vs. 4-9 Show them what they have won

Vs. 4 We get a better understanding of the disciple's disdain for the hungry gentile multitudes when in the Greek they say, "*How can one **SATISFY these people** with bread here in the wilderness.*" The word "*satisfy*" is a word used for feeding animals and when used in classical Greek, people like Plato do so as a way of showing contempt making it a derogatory statement. It tells us that the primary problem with the disciples was not that

they had forgotten the feeding of the 5000 8 months ago, but they had questioned why feed these animals at all. While in the Decapolis reign the disciples regard the 4000 as “**THESE PEOPLE**”. After all they were gentiles who had their own form of government, had adopted the Greek culture and Roman style of living. **In essence the question the disciples asked of Jesus with regards to the need of these gentiles is that you can never satisfy this kind of people, they have no interest in truth, they are complete reprobates. Yet they had been with Jesus 3 full days devouring the word of God as He spoke it too them.**

Vs. 5-9 After reading these verses I wonder if these fellows had a case of déjà vu. There is little doubt that Jesus was trying to teach them basic principals of ministry things such as:

- **Begin with what you have**: The very first words out of the mouths of the disciples were “HOW” which then were followed by their estimation of what needed to be provided that would “SATISFY these people”. Jesus said to feed the people they asked HOW and Jesus asks them HOW much has he provided? They reply seven loaves and Jesus responded with actions that said, “*That will do*”! Much of our excuses and procrastination in ministry is because we have grandiose ideas and expectations and we won’t start until our preconceived ideals are met. It is clear to me that **human need, must not suffer delay do to my expectation!** God does not ask us to give what He has not provided but He does call us to give what He has given us and we can trust Him for the rest. It is right that we ask God to work but He works with what He has given us, so take the bread that He has supplied and give it back to Him to bless it and multiply it so that you can distribute it.

- **Supply will always equal the demand**: The 2nd principal in ministry is that the Lord wanted to show us that God will never quit giving as long as the need remains. In the Greek the words in verse 6 in English says, *“He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, **BROKE THEM** gave them to His disciples.”* But in the Greek it is *“kept on **BREAKING THEM**”* and the disciples *“**KEPT ON GIVING**”* the seven loaves until the need was gone. Jesus did not gather store houses of bread before he distributed it, no He took what he had and kept on breaking it with nothing visible as a resource from which to continue the distribution. This is always true; we are the supply that Jesus breaks to distribute to others need. We always seem to come back to Him and say, *“I don’t have enough”* to which He responds *“Given them all of you and I will keep on breaking you until the need is met!”* In Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthians he describes the marks of authentic Christianity and follows these ideals up with a question *“Who is sufficient for these things?”* Paul doesn’t immediately answer that question until a few verses later when He writes, *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”*
- **Sustenance comes from what you give of your supply**: In both of these miracles of feeding the multitudes the disciples found a surplus that more than met their own personal needs. Here in the feeding of the 4000 we see that the fragments were seven baskets and the word for basket here is different as it is not a lunch pail but a hamper in size. Seven is a number in scripture that always symbolizes completion and the fullness of God. So these disciples gathered up a larger amount of left overs to a people who were in far greater need of the bread of life. The principal is this the

greater the need, the greater our own revelation of the person and work of God. As we give out to reach those that are starving for the Him we will always find that we will gain far more of Him ourselves.

There are two things that I believe that Jesus continues to challenge His Church with today:

1. **Compassion:** Jesus never looked at a person or a crowd that He hasn't cared about. His first reaction to any person friend or foe is always the same, compassion. He was never tired or fed up with a person to not desire to reach them with His love. He was never unaware of their need or heart ache. It flies in the face of humanity even the church whose often first response is how we can not get involved or help. I for one need to be continually reminded of this lesson from Jesus to be "*moved with compassion*".
2. **Action:** I believe the 2nd challenge is to move beyond sympathy and empathy to taking what He has given us and give it back to Him to bless and break that we can distribute it to others. So often my lack becomes my excuse, "*Oh I like to help but I don't have....*" God never asks us to give what we don't have; He only asks us to give what He has given us. It was a principal that God tried to imprint upon the Jews as well. At the Feast of Purim in March is a feast that was to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews by the Lord through Esther. It is during this season that every Jew no matter how poor they are and in need themselves they are to seek out someone with worse circumstances than themselves and give that person a gift. There is far too much of our time devoted to us waiting until the betterment of our circumstances to help others instead of taking what we have at that moment and looking to give it away.