



Temple Baptist Church
Wilmington, North Carolina
Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, *Senior Pastor*
The Lord's Day, February 4, 2018

www.templebaptist.us

© 2018

More than a Meal
Mark 6:30-44

When is a meal more than just a meal?

Feasts like Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners come to mind, don't they? They're gatherings where so much more is going on than just stuffing ourselves on turkey and dressing, potato salad, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie. They're times when families come together to celebrate their relationships and history and heritage.

What about fellowship meals at church? There's a lot more going on around the table than just eating! We're catching up, enjoying each other's company and remembering that in Christ we share something far greater than food.

But it's not just these special suppers that are more than just a means of providing nourishment.

Do you remember from a few years ago a series of public service announcements that ran on TV urging families to sit down around the family table and have dinner together? Social science research has shown that when families eat together regularly around the family dinner table (defined as five or more times a week) teens are *less likely* to smoke cigarettes or marijuana or drink alcohol. Children show more growth in vocabulary and academic achievement. Regular family mealtimes help protect children against obesity and preteens against eating disorders. Small children tend to have fewer behavior problems. Even though the average regular family meal lasts only 18 to 20 minutes, and though it doesn't guarantee all these outcomes, it can potentially have this kind of positive impact.¹

So even the everyday family meal can be *more than a meal*.

Weary workers and hungry hearers . . .

It had been a long week. Jesus had sent His twelve disciples out in pairs on a preaching tour, instructing them to call on people to repent, giving them authority over evil spirits, and empowering them to heal the sick.

Things had gone well. They had come back to Jesus excited and with good news. When they made their report, He knew that despite their exhilaration, they needed some rest. So many people had been coming and going that they hadn't even had a chance to eat. So they set out in a boat across the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee for a remote place and some R & R.

But there was a problem. People were watching them. They recognized Jesus and His disciples. They managed to figure out where they were headed, and actually got there ahead of them on foot!

Well, you know Jesus. As soon as He got out and saw this huge crowd, He was deeply moved with compassion for them **because they were like sheep without a shepherd** (6:34)². So He began to teach them many things.

Now I can just imagine what the disciples were thinking right about now. “I thought he said we were going to get some rest! Don’t we ever get a break? I mean, I’m glad we were successful, and that more people are wanting to hear Jesus, but can’t we have just a little time for ourselves to recuperate?” You know—no rest for the weary. Been there, done that. Haven’t you?

Finally, late in the day, with their own stomachs growling, they saw the reality of the situation all too clearly. They politely interrupted Jesus as He was teaching, and said, “Uh, excuse us, Teacher. But You know, this is a remote place” (the Greek word actually means “wilderness” or even “desert,” but it can also be used to mean a remote or deserted place or uninhabited region³; the NIV translates it as **a quiet place** in 4:31, **a solitary place** in 4:32, and **a remote place** in 4:35). “Don’t you think You ought to send these folks away **so they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat?**” After all, there were about 5,000 *men* there, and Matthew tells us in his account that this was not counting the women and children! So there were actually many more people there!

Jesus’ reply must have blown their minds. **“You give them something to eat.”**

“But Lord, **that would take eight months’ of a man’s wages** to buy enough food to feed all these folks! You want us to spend that much to buy bread to feed them this one time?”

Then Jesus asked them, **“How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”** They came back and told Him they had five loaves and two fish.

Now understand that these were probably little barley loaves, maybe the size of our biscuits or a little bigger, only flatter. John tells us in his account of this miracle, after all, that these belonged to a boy. So they were enough for a lad’s lunch and maybe an afternoon snack. And as for the fish, well, John tells us they were small. They were probably salted fish since the boy was carrying them for his lunch.

Jesus ordered His disciples to have **the people sit down on the green grass** in groups of one hundred and groups of fifty. The Greek phrase that Mark uses to describe the arrangement was sometimes used for “garden plots.” Out in a deserted place!

Back in May 2014, Jo Ann and I had the opportunity to go to the Holy Land, and visited the area where tradition says Jesus performed this miracle. The Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes stands over the traditional site, and the mosaic you see on the screen and in your bulletin today is inlaid in the floor right in front of the altar. The current church building was built in 1982 over the remains of two earlier church buildings from the fourth and fifth centuries. The mosaic dates from the late fifth or early sixth century.

Now the church is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, so it’s certainly not a desert, as in Judea. But in that day it was out a little way from the villages in the area, and so it was certainly a remote place.

Out in this “remote place” where all these thousands of people had gathered to listen to Him, Jesus took those five little loaves and two little fish. He looked up to heaven and **gave thanks**. Then He **broke the loaves** of bread and **gave them to his disciples to set before the people**. He also **divided the two fish among them all**. Everybody ate. Everybody was satisfied. And when they gathered up the fragments of the bread and the fish that were left over, they had **twelve basketfuls**.

Twelve basketfuls! I can just see the twelve disciples sitting there, exhausted, looking at those twelve basketfuls that were left over from five loaves and two fish after more than 5,000 people had eaten from them. I wonder what they were thinking.

A miraculous meal . . .

Apparently, the Holy Spirit and the early Christians thought this “feeding of the five thousand” was an extremely important miracle. It’s the only one that’s recorded in all four Gospel accounts, and it’s given a prominent place in the plot of each. Like Matthew and Luke, Mark simply tells the story—he doesn’t divulge the meaning, at least not directly.

He also makes it clear that the disciples just didn’t get it! In the very next story about Jesus walking on the water, he says that the disciples were completely amazed by that miracle, because **they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened**” (6:51-52). But you know, if we’re not careful, it’s easy for us to miss the real significance of it with them.

What is this miracle really about? Is it about Jesus’ incredible compassion for those whom He saw as sheep without a shepherd? Well, yes; but there’s more.

Is it about Jesus’ testing the Twelve to see how they would respond when He told them to give the people something to eat? That may be part of it, but there’s much more to it than that.

So is it about Jesus’ incredible and awesome power, that He could take this little bit of food and feed so many? Yes, but there’s still more, isn’t there?

Is it about a foretaste of that great future banquet of the kingdom of God when it comes in its fullness? Yes, but isn’t there still more to it?

Did the early Christians somehow connect this miracle with Holy Communion? Well, archeological evidence and ancient sermons and commentaries indicate that, and artwork from the early church sometimes includes fish in the Communion scenes. And Mark’s description of how Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples is repeated almost verbatim in Mark 14:22 as He instituted the Lord’s Supper. But doesn’t it go beyond even that?

Much more than a meal . . .

The Twelve had seen all these things as the day had worn on. No doubt at least some of them ran through their minds as they sat there exhausted, looking in amazement at those twelve basketfuls of bread and fish—*twelve baskets*, mind you, leftovers from *five loaves* plus *two fish*, or *seven* items of food in all, some from the land, the rest from the sea.

Given the significance of the numbers seven and twelve in the Bible, in terms of perfection and fullness, respectively, I wonder . . .

And given the fact that three times, Mark calls the location of the miracle “a wilderness place,” where now there were orderly garden plots of people on green grass, I wonder . . .

And given the fact that Jesus saw the people as sheep without a shepherd and began teaching them, and then provided food for them in the wilderness, I wonder . . .

Is the Twenty-third Psalm ringing a bell here?

It was a meal, alright. They ate the bread and the fish. They were all full and satisfied, and there was enough left over for the twelve disciples!

But it was *so much more than a meal!*

You see, the real meaning of this incredible miracle goes beyond Jesus’ compassion and His power to point to something even greater—to the awesome reality that *Jesus is God’s promised Messiah, the true Shepherd*, who in this remote place was leading His people like sheep to green pastures, guiding them in paths of righteousness, providing a satisfying feast for them in the wilderness!⁴

And here's the really good news, the *gospel*.

He is *still* God's promised Messiah, the true Shepherd, who in *our* wilderness places *still* leads His people like sheep to green pastures, guiding *us* in paths of righteousness, providing a satisfying feast for *us* in the wilderness—the bread of life that is *so much more than a meal!*

Have *you* put your faith in Him?

†MEG

¹ “The Family Dinner Table: Implications for Children’s Health and Wellbeing,” *Social Policy Report Brief: Research on Social Policy Topics Concerning Children and Families*, Volume 22, Issue 4, 2008. Available at http://www.srcd.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=229&Itemid=524, accessed 2/3/2012.

² Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® (1984 edition).

³ Barclay Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1971), 72.

⁴ These commentaries were helpful in my interpretation of this text: James A. Brooks, “Mark,” in *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991); Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000); and Henry E. Turlington, “Mark,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman, 1969).