

Jesus feeds the 4000

Mark 8:1-9 (also see Matthew 15:32-39) During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ²“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.” ⁴His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” ⁵“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied. ⁶He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. ⁷They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

CF Feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14).

CF Moses and Mannah (Exodus 16:11-20)

2 Kings 4:42-44 ⁴²A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said. ⁴³“How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, “Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’” ⁴⁴Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Insignificant?

How important do you feel? Do you feel special, or do you feel a bit insignificant? Do you compare yourself with others that you think are better than you? Do you feel that you have something to offer, but you keep getting overlooked? As a Christian, can I really make a difference in this world, or will my efforts come to nothing. At the end of the day, who am I, and what have I got to offer Jesus?

Today we are going to look at miracle which underlines, that we serve a God through which all things are possible. When the insignificant bring the insufficient to Jesus, then the skies the limit!

Back to the question of feeling undervalued, have anyone lived in the shadow of a brother or sister that always gets the attention, whilst you yourself get overlooked. This is true of this miracle. There are about 15 miracles Jesus did, that only appear in one of the four gospels, including turning water into wine and raising Lazarus from the dead. The feeding of the 4000 is a miracle that is included in both Matthew's and Mark's gospels, but it hardly gets a mention nowadays. When it does, it's usually as a side note to a talk on its 'bigger brother', the feeding of the 5000. Yet whilst there are similarities, it is a distinct miracle, with its own character and message. So today we will follow the first century Jesus from miraculously feeding the first big crowd to this miracle of feeding 4000, whilst asking what can God do today when the insignificant bring the insufficient and place it in his hands?

Jesus withdraws

Like all of us, Jesus needed down time, but he often seemed to struggle to get away from the crowds. One day, he wanted to withdraw for a while from his ministry in Galilee, when he heard that John the Baptist had been murdered by King Herod. He found a remote place, which he went to with his disciples, but the crowds tracked him down. On this occasion Jesus performed a miracle, by feeding a minimum of 5000 Jews from a boys small lunch box of five bread rolls and 2 fishes. The crowd that had travelled out for the day, most without food, were from the region, but may have included other Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a festival. They were now convinced that Jesus, who had done many miracles amongst them, was the Messiah-King that they had been long waiting for. So they tried to force him on the spot to be their king. But Jesus rejects this and sends them away. Many there took this to mean that because he did not want to become the actual King of the Jews then he could also not be the Messiah, and because of this he lost many of his Jewish followers.

He retreated with his disciples, to the Northern territories of Tyre and Sidon where he then had an encounter with a foreign lady (a Syro-Phonician) who persuades him to heal her demonised daughter, and news of then spread quickly there, so he set off again with his disciples. This time a longer journey,

crossing over from Sidon into another large non-Jewish territory, which was known as the Decapolis. This is Greek for ten cities, although the number did vary.

The **Decapolis** was on the very eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, and could be reached by crossing Lake Galilee to its Eastern shore. The cities formed a group because of their language, culture, location, and political status, with each functioning as an autonomous city-state dependent on Rome. Most of it is now in modern day Jordan. There were some Jews living in these cities but it was mostly a Gentile population, predominantly Greek in culture.

Success outside the comfort zone

The disciples did not like leaving Jewish soil. They didn't want to go to Tyre and Sidon, and had done their best to prevent the Syro-Phoenician woman bothering Jesus, and now they were going to the Decapolis. It was outside their comfort zone. They remembered well their first venture across the lake to this region where they were met with a super-strong naked mad man who ran at them. Then Jesus cast the demons out of them in to pigs that ran off a cliff, and every-one begged them to leave. Now they were going back !

Jesus purposefully takes his disciples outside of their comfort zone, and will want that for us too. We may have to go to places we don't want to, and perhaps at times that are inconvenient. But the blessings come, when you are in the very place at the very time that Jesus purposes for you.

The disciples don't really want to be there, but when they arrive in the Decapolis, they see amazing things happen. Bear in mind Jesus is seen as a Jewish teacher for Jewish people so why would the Gentiles be interested in him? But with the reputation as a healer, at a time and place when so many people died early of poor health, a healer was worth his weight in gold, and the response to Jesus was astonishing.

In one of these 10 'cities' Gennesaret, we hear that they recognised who Jesus was, and brought all their sick people to him and they all got healed. He goes to the market place in other villages and towns and the people bring the sick on their mats and beg Jesus to at least let them touch his cloak, and everyone that did so was healed (Mk 6v53-56). The desperation of these poor people for what Jesus had, was so great that the scenes surpassed what they had experienced back in Galilee. If the disciples had stayed in their comfort zone, they would have missed out on these amazing scenes.

A hungry crowd

So despite being in foreign territory, this Jewish teacher, is attracting another great following. Again he tries to retreat for some down time with his disciples and goes to a remote place within the Decapolis. A large crowd track him down. These people were most likely expecting to be away for a while and no doubt take food with them. They were committed to spending significant time in the presence of Jesus. The disciples too have food which they carried around in large reed baskets at least enough for a couple of days.

They find Jesus, and of course he gives in and starts to teach them. However the crowds are so hungry for his teaching that they do not want to leave and they sleep out in the remote place with Jesus and his disciples for 2 nights.

Thousands of them are gathered. 4000 men are counted, but some believe that you could quadruple this number if you include the women and children. Our local premiership Rugby team Gloucester's Kingsholm stadium has a capacity of 16000. So imagine a full stadium. It would have been quite some feat to teach and control such a large crowd. It must have looked liked one of our big summer weekend festivals with everyone camping out together, but the only entertainment here was Jesus. They stayed so long that they had eaten up the food they had brought with them. Jesus can see a problem developing and talks to his disciples.

When Jesus had fed the 5000 Jews, it was in the evening after a long days teaching in a remote place, and for people who had come out for the day without much provision. This crowd of gentiles though may have travelled much further to find him, and to some extent were prepared, but not for such a long period.

²“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.
³If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

So often when Jesus sees a crowd, his heart fills with compassion. This word for compassion, is something you feel deep in your stomach. It's no light emotion. In Marks Gospel, he records 9 times Jesus having compassion for people .Why because he saw them as sheep without a shepherd, and sheep soon get lost and hurt without a shepherd.

This time he is once again denied the private space he wanted as he is swamped by this gentile crowd that won't leave him, and his heart his still full of compassion for them. Whilst we might enjoy a big occasion, so often we can get frustrated and impatient with crowds, such as when we are trying to do our Christmas shopping along with everyone else. Jesus poses a question to his disciples, in the form of two statements. i) These people who I care about are hungry and have nothing to eat. ii) If I send them away without feeding them, they may collapse on the way home. In other words, here is a dilemma for you, we need to feed the people so how are we going to do it? In their regular travels, the disciples would have often needed to go and find food for those following Jesus at that time. But this was different. There is no Starbucks or McDonalds anywhere need this wilderness place.

How do we feed them?

⁴His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

The disciples knew that there were no nearby villages, and there were so many people to feed, and concluded that this was mission impossible. Wrong. Yes, the task was impossible for them, but they had forgotten to calculate in Jesus. It was meant to be. Impossible for them, so that they would realise this and that they depended on Jesus. Often the tasks that Jesus gives us is intentionally impossible for us, unless we rely on Jesus to accomplish it through us.

They could of said, ‘Hey Jesus, you already know this is an impossible job for us But we have been with you for over two years now, we have you seen you do many miracles. You have even raised the dead. What have you got in mind for this situation. Show us your power again Lord’. That would have been the ‘gold star’ answer from his apprentices, but instead they have got their mental calculators. There are so many people, the villages are ages away, and even if we could get the food it would cost at least 6 months wages, and even then we would have to find some way of transporting it all. Problem. Problem. Problem. Unless you calculate Jesus into the equation.

The disciples had already witnessed the feeding of the 5000 Jews. He had shown them this similar miracle before, but clearly were not expecting a repeat performance of miraculous feeding every time there was a crowd, just like they didn't expect every jug of water to be turned into wine, following the miracle at Cana, or Jesus to be walking across Lake Galilee in a storm on a regular basis. In their mind, the feeding of the 5000 was another one off miracle. To us, we see the power of God being inherent in Jesus, consistently available to him. But the disciples don't yet really understand who he is. They may have seen this power as an intermittent force which came and went for their human teacher.

Blessing the Bread

⁵“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied. ⁶He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. ⁷They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them.

Bread and fish were the basic regulars of their diet, meat was more expensive and usually just eaten at festivals. So how much food **have** you got? asks Jesus to the disciples.

Last time out a small boy gave up his little picnic, 5 little flat pitta style bread loaves and couple of mushed up pickled sardines to spread on the bread and flavour it. The bread was made of barley which you would

normally feed to the animals unless you poor enough to need to eat it yourself. What he had was very little. He was insignificant and the food he had was grossly insufficient, but he gave it all over to the disciples to be put into the hands of Jesus. Jesus chooses to use what we place in to his hands. The insignificant, bring the insufficient, and they become significant and sufficient when they touch the hands of Jesus.

This time there is no small boy with a picnic hamper as the focus point. The disciples had to look in their own dwindling supplies, to look at the little they had. There was barely enough to give the disciples a decent snack - seven bread rolls and a few little fish between them, and they had been expecting to be out in the remote place for a while, unlike most of the crowd. Perhaps they were even reluctant to share the little they had left.

Several weeks had passed since feeding the 5000 in the springtime where they had the luxury of sitting down on some comfortable grass. Now in the East, the sun would have burnt up the grass and this hardy congregation of Gentiles were told to sit down on the hard ground to eat.

It was the custom for the head of a household to 'bless' or give thanks for food before a meal. It reminds the household that everything comes from God and thus is in a sense, holy. It is a way of thanking God for the meal. People often prayed looking towards heaven. This was normal, and the words spoke had no special magic in them, but in blessing the bread, Jesus is giving thanks to his Father, he is making the connection, and on this occasion he is trusting in Him for the miracle. Interesting on what is now the Golan Heights where the feeding of the 5000 took place, Jesus blessed just the bread which was the Jewish custom, but now amongst the Gentiles and free from that constraint, he blesses both the bread and then again the fishes.

So often, in the Gospels we see miracles happen, when Jesus speaks it out with a purpose. He tells the wind in the storm to be still, and it obeys (Mk 4v39). A centurion wants his son to be healed without Jesus going to him, just by saying the words. Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very moment. (Mt 8v13).

So Jesus speaks giving thanks for the bread and fish, and expecting the miracle, he divides up the 7 loaves and small fishes between the disciples, and sends them out to distribute the little they had to the huge crowd.

The miracle feeding

⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand were present.

As the food was distributed, it was miraculously multiplied and every one ate, but not just a light snack, they ate until their stomachs were full and bloated. They would have that feeling that some have after Christmas dinner, joyfully overeaten. No mince pies, I am completely done. They would have ate like this because this was free food, and these were poor people, with hungry tummies who had been sat around for 3 days on insufficient supplies. This is what Jesus does. He provides super-abundantly.

The disciples, would then have remembered, - oh yes of course, he's done this before !

It a good picture of Jesus, he speaks the word, the blessing, and then the people are satisfied. They had already been given food for their minds, and souls, and now had it for their bodies too. Its notable that this miracle comes after 3 days of teaching. There were others at the time of Jesus known as wonder-workers, but they did not like Jesus emphasis their teaching over their miracles.

In the first feeding miracles, the disciples had 12 hand baskets which they filled with left-overs, but this time they had 7 much bigger baskets, of a different type, two handled flexible woven reed baskets. One such basket was big enough to hide St. Paul in when he was lowered down out of a building through a gap in the Damascus city wall inside one of them, in order to avert a plot to kill him. [Acts 5v9]. The size of these reed baskets meant that quantity-wise there would have been more left-overs than last time !

When God provides his provision is always abundant. If he chooses, he can provide far more for each of us, than we could possibly need. The wedding of Cana was another example of this super-abundance of God turning 6 large stone jars of water into red wine. A servant provides water. The insignificant with the insufficient. But Jesus speaks and the miracle happens. So near the end of the wedding evening, when most had had a good fill, Jesus provides the equivalent of an extra 7 bottles of the finest wine for every guest at the wedding, far more than they could possibly have needed.

Lord of All (Moses and Elisha)

This miracle though was not just Jesus being compassionate to a hungry crowd, it had deeper meanings too. When Jesus fed the 5000, the Jewish crowd would have seen a strong comparison to the Exodus story. We see them both crossing water and going into a desert place, then providing a large number of people miraculously with enough bread to satisfy them.

There is another comparison story though in the Old Testament, which we read of in 2 Kings (4v42-44).

Elisha ran a school for prophets and their sons, in a place called Gilgal, in the hill country of Ephraim, but there was a famine in that region. One day, a man came from a town just a few miles north, Baal Shalishah, with a present of twenty barley-loaves and some ears of corn. A nice present at any time, but much more so during the famine. People owed God their *first-fruits* which would go to the priests (Levites), but as they were all in Jerusalem, and out of many peoples reach, the faithful took their first-fruits to the prophets instead to help maintain their schools. Elisha freely accepted this gift, then freely gave it all away to his students keeping nothing for himself. Each small loaf would probably be just enough for one man, and Elisha's servant thought that trying to sit down 100 students to feed off such a small amount would be a tease, and an insult. But Elisha, used to seeing Gods miraculous hand, had faith, and pronounced it to be a full meal for each of them. The bread miraculously multiplied so each one was satisfied tummies, with food left over that they couldn't manage, which in a time of famine was good going.

Taking the two stories together, of Moses and Elisha, we see that this is more than Jesus feeding hungry people because he has compassion for them, but they are signs to who he really is. If he is to be seen as the Jews saviour and messiah, then he needs to be seen as fulfilment of their Law and Prophets. Moses represents the Law, as he brought the 10 commandments etc to the people, and Elisha was one of their great prophets. The same point is made when Jesus in the Transfiguration story when Jesus is up a high mountain with 3 disciples, and images of Moses and Elijah, another great prophet, appear to be talking with him.

Teachers like Jesus were usually self-supporting, but it was honourable to invite teachers to dinner and show them the very best in hospitality. Jesus turns this round, and he becomes the provider.

The message comes through clear in the Gospels, Jesus is from God, he fulfils the scriptures, he is your salvation, and he is your provider. He is Lord of all.

Lord for all nations

The miracles are signs that Jesus is Lord of all, but this miraculous feedings also tell us that he is also Lord **for** all. The ministry of the Jesus is so closely linked to the Jews, it is assumed that it was Paul who first took the Good News to the Gentiles, but his time in the Decapolis tells us otherwise. Jesus performed many miracles in Galilee and elsewhere with the Jews attracting many followers, but we see that this is also true in the non-Jewish regions such as Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis. He went into these areas to bring their darkness the light of Gods love and salvation; to show up their sinful ways, and show them a better way through his teaching and example. The first miraculous feeding was for the Jews and the second was for the Gentiles.

Numbers were very symbolic to the Jews, and whether this was the original intent of the miracles or not, there is interesting meaning in these numbers. For the first miracle, the numbers 5 and 12 are those highlighted. For Jews, 5 represented the 5 books of the Law, the Pentateuch, whereas 12 represents the 12 tribes of Israel. This miracles was done for Jews, and points to clearly to them and their Law. In the

second miracle, the key numbers are 4 and 7. The number 4 recalls the 4 winds and the 4 corners of the earth (North, East, South and West), whereas 7 as well as being a number of perfection also had Gentile connotations, in that at the time 70 was taken as being the number of Gentile nations. However you look at it, Jesus is sending a clear message that he has come to fulfil Jewish Law and provide for the Jews, but he has come for the Gentiles too.

So what can we learn from this miracle, to help us today.

1. Jesus takes his light into the dark places.

Jesus will go into the darkness for anyone. He has compassion for all and He will seek you out, whatever dark place you are in.

The disciples did not like going into Gentile lands, they would not have wanted to go to the Decapolis. But that is where Jesus wanted them. He had new lessons and new experiences for them there. If they had not have gone, they would have missed so many amazing things.

It's the same for us as modern day followers of Jesus. There is not one person or one square inch of creation for which Jesus does not shout out 'Mine',

We carry the light of Jesus in us, and if that light is to shine into the darkness, then at some point or another, we will be called out of comfort zones. We'll have to go places where we feel uncomfortable. We'll be called to do ministry at times that are inconvenient. But if we listen to God, and go where he wants us to, when he wants us to, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us feel, then we won't miss out on the amazing things he has for us.

Don't let fear hold you back, trust that Jesus is with you, and in all ways, he is enough. He can both rescue you from any dark place you are stuck in, and will walk with you into a dark place that he calls you too.

2. Don't forget, what Jesus has already done.

The disciples looked at the crowd of 4000 men, plus the woman and children, and asked Jesus how they could possibly feed so many people, when only a few weeks earlier they had fed a slightly bigger crowd in similar circumstances. They immediately focussed on the problems, and came up with all the reasons it couldn't be done. They forgot to put Jesus in the equation. They forgot what he was capable of, and what he had already done.

Psalm 78 v11, says that the Gods people had '**forgotten what God had done, the miracles that he had performed**'.

Whatever our needs, we can be sure that God has met the same needs before. We may see that God has done this in the verses of the bible, we may see that he has done in lives of people we know, or we have read about. He may have already done it before in our own lives. If so, then he can do it again. If he has not done this particular miracle before he has probably done one like it. If he has not done anything like it before, which is unlikely, then he can still do it for the first time, because in Him all things are possible. If Jesus asks us to do something, then he will give us what we need to make it happen, even when it seems impossible. Its only impossible if you don't factor in Jesus.

You may be going through a really tough time. Don't lose faith in your current situation. Don't forget what Jesus has already done in your life and the lives of those you know. Nothing is impossible for Jesus. Perhaps you once knew that as a truth in your life, but have forgotton it.

Don't underestimate what Jesus can do you In your life, because you've forgotten what he can do.

3. The insufficient from the insignificant is enough in the hands of Jesus.

For the 4000, The disciples, looked into their reed baskets and just had the 7 little flat loaves and a few sardines. For the 5000, the little boy handed over his 5 little loaves and 2 sardines. To everyone in the crowd, he was no-one of importance, but Jesus used him in his plans. He didn't need to, but he wanted to.

In most people's eyes, you and I may look insignificant, no-one of particular interest or fame, nothing to write home about. But in the eyes of Jesus, we are his sons and daughters. He is the King of Kings so we inherit his nobility. We may have very little to offer, but if we are doing his will, and hand over what we have into his hands, then we can expect to witness amazing things, just like the little boy did, just like the disciples did. The insufficient from the insignificant, willingly placed in the Lords hands, is more than enough for Jesus.

Testimony

For me, I felt God say that he wanted me to go to other countries, preach the Gospel, and see people healed. It was hard to share with anyone, because it felt so arrogant to say it. Who am I? Nobody knows me. How could I possibly expect people to turn up to listen to me, and how could I be used to see healing abroad. In 2017, I was invited to go out on a mission trip to Macedonia, and speak along with two friends at a conference that we put on for the free churches. I prayed before going out, and felt that God wanted to heal some-one I would meet there, who was completely deaf in their left ear.

We hired an indoor football arena for the conference and several hundred people came and many responded to the Gospel message. Then we offered prayer for healing. A lot of people came forward. The first lady I prayed for told me that she was completely deaf in her left ear. I prayed healing in the name of Jesus, and to my own surprise, she was quickly healed, and her long lost hearing was restored. However a little later and a few yards from me, my friend was praying for another lady who also had no hearing in her left ear. But her case was different because she had been born without a part of her inner ear being there, which meant that she would never be able to hear. Unless of course, Jesus recreated that part of the ear, and gave her hearing back, which is what must have happened, as after prayer, she too could hear perfectly well from that ear. We saw people healed of many things that day.

It's a strong testimony, because although that missing part of the ear was tiny, it was still recreated from nothing. Through the power of Jesus' name, she got something from nothing, and that little something made a dramatic change to her life.

Richard or I could do nothing to bring the hearing to those ladies. It was an impossible task. Just like it was impossible for the disciples to feed the crowd. They gave Jesus the little they had, 7 loaves and a few small fish, but it was enough because the answer to the impossible was stood right in front of them, Jesus. We brought what we had to the table too, ourselves and some short prayers, and the answer was stood with us, Jesus and he did the impossible, and the ladies left the conference with their hearing restored. Praise God. He does it all. He rightfully takes all the glory.

But when we trust in him, and see him come through, we can say ' I was there when God did this amazing thing, I was part of what God was doing. So I begin to co-operate more with God and grow in faith because of that experience, even though it was all in his strength and not mine.

I might feel insignificant, and often do. What I have to offer may seem grossly insufficient, even inconsequential, but if I bring the little I have to Jesus, it is always enough. Jesus only uses one type of person, the available one. That's all he can use.

4. Freely receive and freely give.

Elisha is leading a prophet school in a time of famine. He freely received bread from one man, but then gave it all way to his students and as he did it was multiplied. The little boy and the disciples gave Jesus any bread rolls and fish they had left, but then he gave it away to the crowd and as he did it was multiplied.

We have a super-abundant God, so never be afraid to freely give away what you have freely received, for God always has more. He is super-abundant, his storehouse never runs out, and he loves a generous giver. The challenge we find hard, is for us to freely give of our money, our time, and our love. So often when we do this we actually receive more in return. Of course, that's not guaranteed, and that's not why we do it, but none the less it is a picture of Gods super-abundant love and provision for us.

Conclusions

You are not insignificant. You are deeply loved and valued by God, you are made to his design, and he has plans and purposes for you.

Is God calling you today to go outside your comfort zone, to your own Decapolis? Don't be afraid, because he is with you, and unless you go you won't see the amazing things that he has prepared for you. If the task set before you, seems impossible, then don't forget to put Jesus in the equation, and remember that what he has done before, he can do again for you in this day. Freely give the little or much that you have, and place it into his hands, and know that through him, all things are possible.

But perhaps you are not at that stage, where you can step out for Jesus. You may yourself be in a wilderness place yourself right now, you may be hungry for something or in need of something, just like the crowd in the Decapolis. If you look around you, then it may seem that you have a crowd of insurmountable problems pressing in on you. If that is you, then I have some good news for you today, because the truth is you are surrounded by Jesus, by his angels, by his love, by his care, by his security, by his provision. He is enough. He always has been. So hand your worries over to him. Jesus is with you, his store house is full, and there is a miracle on his lips.

So whether you are in a good place of stepping out for Jesus, or in the thick of the battle right now, then come to his table today, with praise and thanksgiving, whatever your situation. Come and receive from him, so that you are equipped to give out. Freely receive so you can freely give. Whatever you are facing, it is never too big, if you put Jesus into the equation. You may think the task is impossible like the disciples did when faced with this huge problem, but don't forget to put Jesus in your equation. He is with you and will never leave you

Even through me and you, the insignificant with the insufficient, he can do the impossible.

Amen.