

Session 6

January 7, 2018

JESUS PROVIDES

Mark 6:34-44

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is a miracle story filled with lessons about Jesus' compassion for people, the mentoring of His disciples, His authority over the natural world, and God's bountiful provision, meeting both physical as well as spiritual needs. The richness of the story may be the reason it's the only miracle that is recorded in all four of the Gospels. This week, we will focus on the *ministry* aspect of the story. Of the five functions of the church (worship, evangelism/missions, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry), ministry is one of the most mentioned, but perhaps the least defined. Pastors "minister" to their congregations. Missionaries "minister" among their people group. Chaplains "minister" to those in their charge. But what does ministry actually mean? Simply put, *ministry* means *servicing people and meeting needs*. In this story, three ministry principles stand out.

Meeting needs begins with compassion (v. 34). It was a busy time in the life of Jesus and His disciples. The crowds were always present and demanding. The disciples were stretched so thin they barely had time to eat (Mark 6:31). Adding to their stress was the news of John the Baptist's execution. Recognizing they all needed some "down time," Jesus suggested they take a boat to a quiet place to rest. The crowds had other ideas, however, and the people quickly made their way by land. When Jesus and the disciples arrived at the "remote place," it wasn't very remote after all! What must have surely frustrated—and likely angered—the disciples, instead moved Jesus to compassion. What the disciples no doubt saw as a hindrance, Jesus saw as an opportunity. What they most certainly viewed as a demanding "mob," Jesus saw as a needy flock. Their greatest need became His greatest concern: they lacked direction. So "He began to teach them many things." Meeting their needs began with seeing their needs...and responding with compassion.

Meeting needs overrules selfishness (vv. 35-38). I don't think the disciples are mean-spirited in these next verses, but they certainly are selfish! An already long day had drug well into the evening. It was now dinner time, and their normal, natural response (just like ours?) was to wrap things up and send the people away. Jesus had spent the afternoon teaching the multitude; now it was time to teach the twelve. In a few short sentences, Jesus challenged them to focus outward, rather than inward; to look for ways *they* could serve the people. Two commands were given in verses 37 and 38: "you give them something" followed by "go look." Later, He would have them divide the crowd (v. 39), serve the meal (v. 41), and pick up the fragments left over (v. 43). The Lord's declaration that He had not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45) was now being passed to the twelve. Meeting others' needs means putting them first...and yourself second.

Meeting needs brings other blessings (vv. 39-43). Obviously, serving others benefits those on the receiving end. But blessings abound to those who put others first. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (see Acts 20:35). This includes service as much as support. That those who give receive back from God is mentioned by Jesus specifically in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap..." Had the disciples successfully sent the crowds away, they would have missed witnessing the Lord's miraculous division of bread and fishes, the blessing of actively serving the multitude, and even the benefit of God's leftovers! It's no accident that when the multitude had eaten until filled, twelve baskets of bread and fish were left over...one for each of the disciples who learned the lesson of serving others.