

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost; July 23, 2023

+ Mark 8:1-9 +

“Jesus Gives All You Need and More than All You Want”

**In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “I feel compassion for the crowd because they have already stayed with me three days and do not have anything to eat. If I send them away hungry, they will faint on the way. Some of them have come from a long distance.”**

**His disciples replied, “Where can anyone get enough bread to feed these people here in this deserted place?”**

**He said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”**

**“Seven,” they said.**

**He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks, and broke them. He gave the pieces to his disciples to distribute to the crowd, and they did so. They also had a few small fish. He blessed them and said that these should be distributed as well. The people ate and were satisfied. They picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were there. Then he sent them away.**

There are things the crowd four thousand – and that’s just the men – need. They need Jesus, and they know it. So they come to him from far and wide and spend three straight days listening to him. They need to hear the truth of God from his Son, so they come to him and stay with him.

By the time the three days are over, there is something else they need from him too. Now they need food for their bodies. Because, as Jesus says, without food those who have come from far away might not make it home from this remote place.

They need from Jesus food for their souls – the truth of God – and also food for their bodies. And Jesus gives them all they need. They stay with him for three days; he stays with them for three days and feeds them God’s Word. Then he gives them what they need for their bodies, so they can make the trip home with the gospel in their hearts.

The four thousand-plus in the crowd aren’t the only ones who need something from Jesus. His disciples do, too. When Jesus tells them, **“If I send them away hungry, they will faint on the way. Some of them have come from a long distance,”** the disciples know what this means. Jesus is challenging them to come up with a solution to this problem. And the disciples do not see it. They ask, **“Where can anyone get enough bread to feed these people here in this deserted place?”** They need an answer to that question and a solution to the problem.

And Jesus gives them what they need, too. He shows them the answer to their question. **“How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they said.** Clearly, the answer to the disciples’ question of where all these people will get food in such a remote place is not “from them.” But there is an answer and a solution to the problem. **[Jesus] commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks, and broke them. He gave the pieces to his disciples to distribute to the crowd, and they did so. They had a few small fish. He blessed them and said these should be distributed as well.**

Jesus is busy giving everyone what they need. To the people in the crowd: food for their souls and their bodies; to the disciples: a source of food and solution to the need of hunger.

And then, finally, after giving them so much of what they need, Jesus finally sends the crowd away. It is a small sentence at the end of the story that may make us wonder, “Why even tell us this detail?” Why does Jesus send the crowd away? Because he has more work to do for them. In order to open up the kingdom of heaven that he has been preaching and teaching for three years, Jesus and his disciples must keep moving. In order to seal a place in heaven for everyone in that crowd, Jesus must move on. By the end of this chapter in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus will tell his disciples why: **Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priest, and the experts in the law; be killed, and after three days rise again. He was speaking plainly to them.**

Jesus will now go to Jerusalem to give the people in that crowd and his disciples even more of what they need: his suffering and death, to pay for their sins; his resurrection, to guarantee their own. This is what they need for eternity: a holy substitute to suffer God’s wrath for their sin, a Savior with the power to break through death and rise, so that one day they can follow him out of the grave.

All they need, he gives them. And, it’s worth noting, he gives them more than they need. When he feeds the crowd, Jesus does more than take the edge off their hunger and give them just enough energy to stumble on home. **They ate and were satisfied.** “Satisfied” may leave us with the picture of simply having enough to eat. But it means to be filled to the point of discomfort. The people ate and ate and ate until they could eat no more. **[The disciples] picked up seven basketfuls of pieces that were left over.** Leftovers are not generally considered good news. When you open the fridge and find the casserole from Thursday night staring you down and guiltily remember that it’s wrong to waste food, you sigh and think, “Well, I suppose. Leftovers. Great.” But in Israel at Jesus’ time, it was rare for common people to eat all they could handle; it was even rarer for them to have leftovers.

So we see Jesus give people all they need and even what they want.

What we need, Jesus gives us. He still speaks God’s truth to us in the Bible. Everything God wants us to know about him and his ways is recorded for us to read and hear. We have unlimited access to God’s entire revelation. Jesus is still working to proclaim the truth of God to us today, through the Word.

And there we see that Jesus gives us the salvation we need. He finally sent the crowd away after three days because he had to complete his saving work for them. But he did it also for you and me and the whole world. He had already lived over three decades under the law of God in the place of every sinner, living perfectly for them. And in a matter of weeks he would suffer and die for your sins and mine too, to pay for them all. And only three days after that, he would conquer death for all humanity, including us.

All we need for our souls, Jesus gives us. And, as he did for the disciples and the crowd, he also gives us what we need for our bodies. Jesus controls all creation to bring us food and water, house and clothes, family and friends and government. It may not strike us the way it did when he made seven loaves and some small fish feed four thousand. Instead of miracles he uses the natural system of creation that he put in place to provide for us. The way he gives us what we need for our bodies may not be miraculous, but the creation he maintains to provide all we need is still amazing.

Jesus gave the crowd and his disciples all they needed: soul and body. And he even gave them what they wanted. He does that for us, too. It’s worth considering what percentage of our physical blessings are

actually needs, and what percentage are wants. What do I need, truly, besides a few thousand calories, clean water, a good government, a couple pairs of clothes and shoes, a roof over my head, and a few friends and family? Just about everything else is wants. And he gives us so many of those too. To eat to satisfaction and stand with leftovers. For us, that's standing in front of stuffed pantries and nice cars and lots of friends and family. We don't need that. But he gives it to us anyway.

Why? **Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the crowd..."** Jesus loves people and feels for them. We normally speak of compassion as a feeling of the heart. We say, "That guy has a big heart!" And we mean he cares about other people and feels for them when they're in need. The Greeks (and the New Testament is written in basic Greek) thought of compassion sitting down here, more in the belly. So, the word Jesus uses here means that he turns on the inside. The level of compassion Jesus feels for the crowd moves him.

He feels for us, and it moves him. To feed us with God's truth, to live and die and rise for us, to give us all we need for our souls. And because he feels for us, he even gives us all we need for our bodies, and even what we want.

But I know what you're thinking, if you're listening carefully: there I plenty of things I want that Jesus hasn't given me. I think that sometimes, too. And what a sinful heart reveals itself when we hear that Jesus gives us all we need for soul and body, and what we want, and we think, "Yeah, but not *all* I want!"

There are three sinful mistakes that lead to such ingratitude and lack of contentment. The first sinful mistake is having wrong priorities, thinking that what God gives me for my body and my life in this world is more important than what he gives me for my soul and for eternity. Because our eyes and ears and hands sense what is here and now, we often rank our wants in this world as more important than God's eternal blessings of forgiveness, salvation, and a resurrection to eternal life. We rank what lasts for a little while and then goes away as more important than what lasts forever. And then when God chooses to withhold just a few things we want for our lives in this world, we accuse him of not giving us enough.

The second sinful mistake that leads to that kind of thanklessness and dissatisfaction is confusing needs and wants. We call things that are actually wants "needs." And when we do that, we don't appreciate just how many wants God does give us. We think, "Yeah, I have a huge TV, but I need a better sound system. I'm not so blessed." Of course you are! You don't even need the TV, let alone the sound system! They're both wants, and God has given you one of them.

The third sinful mistake that leads to lack of gratitude and contentment is connected to the first. We forget that this world is not all there is, and that there's an eternity to come. When that happens, we not only rank worldly gifts as more important than spiritual needs, but we make this mistake, too: We look around at other people who have more than we do and accuse God of unfairness (as if he ever claimed to distribute his gifts fairly), and we lose our thanksgiving and satisfaction.

Here's how to avoid those sinful attitudes. First, remember Jesus lived a life of perfect contentment and thanksgiving in your place. Jesus ranked spiritual blessings and priorities properly, and remained thankful no matter what the Father gave him. He even remains thankful in this story, turning his eyes to heaven in thanks for a few loaves and small fish. When God looks at you, he sees the perfect thanks and satisfaction of his Son.

And here is how to live in it: Understand that because God has blessed your soul with his Word, with the forgiveness of sins and life in heaven, you will not only have all you need and much of what you want for your life in this world, but you will have more than you want. That's right! You will have things so amazingly good that you cannot even imagine them now, and when you receive them, you will forget all about any unfulfilled wants you have now. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:9 promises: **What no eye has seen and no ear has heard and no human mind has conceived – that is what God has prepared for those who love him.**

Because God has blessed your soul with Jesus' salvation, there are blessings waiting for you beyond your imagination. When you reach them, you'll say, "Forget the Mustang! Forget the summer house! Why did I ever care about that stuff anyway! I never even imagined this! And it's mine forever!"

Remember what's coming because of how Jesus has blessed your soul with salvation. You are blessed now with the promise of heaven in him. You are blessed now with all you need for your body, and many wants. And once you reach the kingdom of heaven, because of what Jesus has done for you, wants that you cannot even imagine now will be yours.

When we remember what's coming, we will trust our Father the way Jesus did. And like our Savior, we will receive all he gives with thanks. Amen.