

INTRODUCTION

Let us think for a moment: what can't you live without? Practical people may answer: air, water and food. Some others may say: money, work and house. Young people may think their cellphones and friends are indispensable. This secular world always tries to confuse our needs with wants. A while back I was planning to buy a new car to replace my old car that has accumulated over 200,000 miles. My younger son persuaded me to buy a fancy sports car. I told him: "Sure! We can sell our house and sleep in the car." When one's target is clear then he will look for the possible means to accomplish that goal. In our story today Jesus performed a miracle to provide food for the crowd. The miracle of the 5 loaves and 2 fish is the only miracle Jesus did that is collected in all four gospels. The gospel writer Mark told us at the beginning of chapter 6 that Jesus sent His 12 disciples out to preach the gospel, heal people of their sickness and cast out demons. So when Mark began his recording of this miracle he gave us a brief report on the ministries of the disciples. Because of their work people from everywhere brought all their needs to them. Through this miracle Jesus taught His disciples and the crowd what was worth pursuing in life. Even today Jesus is saying to us that only He can satisfy our deepest need.

EXPLANATION

1. 耶穌讓我們休息 Jesus Gives Us Rest

As we study this passage, first of all, Jesus tells us that He can give us rest. When the disciples came back from their mission trip Jesus encouraged them to get some rest. **Verse 31** reads: Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Apparently, people who received help from the disciples spread the words about their power to cure diseases and drive out evil spirits. Thus, people from all over the places came and sought help from the disciples. The needs were so overwhelming that the disciples did not even have time to eat. More than likely they felt exhausted from the ministries too. Jesus was saying to His disciples: "People can wait. But I don't want you to burn out." Jesus did not ask the disciples to work over-time, or bestow more people with supernatural power to share the burden. What the disciples needed was to spend some time with Jesus in a quiet place. Jesus once said in **Matthew 11:28** that – "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Jesus can give us rest if we choose to come to Him. We live in a fast-pace world. We chase after deadlines. Every company wants to be the first to come up with new ideas and innovations to stay competitive in the market. Resting may be viewed as a waste of time. One of these days I may write a book titled "Theology of Rest." I go to sleep with my cell phone by the bedside. It is not unusual to receive WeChat messages after I go to bed, then the next morning the same people sent postings even before I get up. I wonder if these people get enough rest. When the secular world mentions rest it may be about meeting with friends, going to the movie or vacation. People may end up feeling more tired after spending time on things outside of their routine. Do they really get the rest they need? While there is nothing wrong with enjoying leisure activities that you like Jesus invites us to devote time to be alone with Him. It is not only rest from daily schedule but also rest in Him.

In the Bible, God ordained the Jews to observe the Sabbath. They rested one day in a week to dedicate to worship the Lord. Besides the Sabbath there were various festivals that the Jews observed. Someone estimated that altogether the Jews would rest about 70 days a year following the calendar. That surely beats the vacation benefit of any company! The Jews set aside those times to rejoice over God's provision in their harvest and to remember God's faithfulness in the past. When I first started pastoral ministries Pastor Manning gave me an advice to have personal Sabbath. I envy him that he often takes long walk in the park, or even uses personal vacation to have time of solitude. If you feel burdensome from your work, taking care of children or church ministries you should find time to rest in the Lord. You can spend some time alone in your bedroom, walk outside of your office building at lunch hour or walk around your neighborhood. When you drive to and from work you may turn the radio off. You can pray to the Lord by praising Him for who He is and thanking Him for His work in your life (don't close your eyes when you are walking or driving!), meditate on some familiar Scripture verses or softly sing some hymns.

In the passage Jesus did not only give rest to His disciples, He also gave rest to the crowd. Jesus did so by teaching the crowd. The disciples listened to their Master's advice to find rest, so they hopped on a boat and crossed the lake. The apostle John told us in his gospel that they were in the Lake of Galilee. Seeing Jesus and His disciples sailing away, the crowd chased after them on foot. They ran so fast that they even arrived before Jesus and His disciples! Just imagine how the disciples might feel when thousands of people were waiting at the shore. They were completely exhausted but now they still had to deal with the crowd. It is like when it is 4:30 in the afternoon; after laboring the whole day and you are about to leave the office. Suddenly your boss appears and tells you that he urgently needs a few reports from you before you go home. Or it may be a good friend knocking on your door unexpectedly. He is troubled by something and needs someone to talk to. You may feel irritated when your rest is disturbed. In comparison, how did Jesus deal with the crowd at a time when He needed rest the most? Look at [verse 34](#): When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. While the disciples might see the crowd as a nuisance to their rest, the Lord saw them as wandering sheep that needed a shepherd. The analogy is an allusion to [Ezekiel 34:23](#) when God foretold that He would establish a shepherd for Israel: "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd." When God said this through Ezekiel King David was long gone, and therefore this is a prophecy about Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who was a descendant of David. While a caring shepherd will lead his sheep to green pasture and still water, Jesus fed the crowd with His Word. Sometimes people may come to you with their urgent needs. Out of their restlessness they need your advice. The best advice you can give is to guide them to our Good Shepherd. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom in your advice and point them to relevant Scripture verses. People may think that all they need is a quick solution. But very often what they really need is a reassurance that the Lord is with them and He will continue to watch over them in their problems. After your encouragement, pray with them, commit their needs to the Lord and ask God to give them true rest.

2. 耶穌賜我們糧食 Jesus Gives Us Food

Only Jesus can satisfy our deepest need. Our Lord does not only give us rest, He also gives us food. At the end of Jesus' teaching it was late in the day. The disciples made a reasonable request to their Master in **verse 36**: "Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." Even though their suggestion may look reasonable it is impractical. The passage tells us that they were in the wilderness. A nearby village might be far away. There was no McDonald's or corner store. At that time, the 5,000 men in the multitude, plus women and children were way beyond any town could cater for. The disciples thought that they had served the crowd the best they could by healing the sick and driving out demons. Their Master also gave some bonus lectures outside of His schedule. When it was time for dinner people should take care of themselves. Therefore, the disciples protested about Jesus' proposed solution in the **next verse**: But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" Even if the disciples had that huge sum of money it would have required a commercial size bakery to produce enough bread in time for everyone. In **John 6:7** the apostle John helped us put things in perspective how much bread eight months of wages could buy: "...Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" The conclusion from the disciples was that what Jesus asked for was mission impossible and it would not solve the problem at all. Next Jesus asked the disciples to check how much bread they had. You know the progress of the story. They only had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. Jesus then asked the disciples to arrange the crowd to sit on the grass in an orderly manner. Continue to read **verse 41** of Mark's gospel: Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Jesus gave thanks for the food just like a Jewish father leads his family to say grace at a meal. Jesus performed a miracle to give food to the crowd. **John 6:11** describes that the food was ...distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. It was not that they only had barely enough to eat. It was an all-you-can-eat feast! God's grace was more than sufficient for their needs. Jesus' provision was so abundant that the disciples collected 12 basketful of leftover; that was even more than the 5 loaves they had contributed at the beginning. Our Lord did not need any prop to perform His miracle. He could have supplied the food out of nothing. One conventional application you might have heard before based on this observation is that we should learn from the disciples' example of contributing the 5 loaves and 2 fish they had, so that our Lord could exponentially multiply His blessing. That is surely one important lesson we can derive from the passage. No matter what we have, whether it is time, talent or money, if we willingly offer it for the Lord's service He can work out wonders from our limited resource. Besides that, what else can we learn from the story? It is interesting that even though this incident is recorded in all four gospels only John told us the spiritual significance behind the miracle. From Mark's gospel let us switch our focus to John chapter 6.

John recorded that after the miracle the crowd kept chasing after Jesus. In **John 6:26-27** Jesus pointed out their incorrect motive: 26 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." The crowd saw Jesus as a free and unlimited meal voucher. However, Jesus' intent was to use the miracle to teach them about the real spiritual food they should seek after. Jesus testified in **verse 35**: Then Jesus

declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Through the miracle Jesus relieved people from their temporary hunger and drew their attention to Himself who could relieve their eternal hunger. Jesus then referenced to how God provided manna to the Israelites when they were wandering in the wilderness. He stated in **verse 49**: “Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.” Then skip to **verse 51**: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” At that time Moses led the Israelites out from Egypt, but they soon grumbled about the lack of food after they arrived in the wilderness. God thus dropped manna from the sky to fulfill their physical need. This food that satisfied people’s temporary hunger was a prophecy that when Jesus came He would satisfy the eternal hunger of mankind. Therefore, both the 5 loaves and 2 fish miracle and the manna in the wilderness point to Jesus. Only Jesus can satisfy our deepest need. What are you pursuing after in life? It may be an education degree, a better career, a future spouse, good health, etc. While those items may be reasonable goals for us all only Jesus can meet our eternal need. The Bible tells us that we are born sinners. Sin separation us from God. Jesus came some 2,000 years ago to die on the cross and to reconcile us to the Father. When Jesus invites us to consume Him as the Bread of Life He is asking us to receive Him by faith into our lives as our Lord and Savior.

CONCLUSION

Only Jesus can satisfy our deepest need. One day the knowledge you have will be outdated. You will eventually stop climbing the career ladder after you retire. You may earn more money. But you may never be satisfied because you want to earn even more. Your spouse will grow old (though she is still attractive in your eyes). Your health will deteriorate. What you can’t live without is not something momentary. What we can’t live without is something eternal. Only God is eternal. Jesus has come and He wants to build an eternal relationship with you.